

AL starts talks

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"Awami League will take a firm stand on the issues of complete lifting of the state of emergency ahead of the local government elections, not holding upazila polls before the parliamentary elections and postponement of delimitation of electoral constituencies, among others," AL Acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said.

He was talking to the reporters after a meeting with Workers' Party of Bangladesh at party acting President Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence in the capital.

Ashraf said the two parties have reached a consensus that the upazila parishad elections will have to be held after the national election.

AL today sits with Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) at 11:00am, Samyabadi Dal at 12:00noon, and Ganotantri Party at 1:00pm.

Tomorrow, the party will hold meeting with National Awami Party (Mozaffar) at 11:00am, Gano Azadi League at 12:00noon and Communist Kendra at 1:00pm.

All the bilateral meetings will be held at Zillur Rahman's residence.

The government will have to face problems if it sticks to its decision to hold upazila polls before the national election, Workers' Party General Secretary Bimal Biswas told

reporters.

Ashraf said they will take part in the four city corporation and nine municipal elections as a test case to assess the government's performance and see how the national identity cards are used.

He also observed that holding elections to local government bodies and to 465 upazilas are not same.

AL will nominate candidates for the city corporation and municipal elections scheduled for August 4 from the components in the 14-party, all secular democratic political parties and pro-liberation war forces, solely on the recommendations of the party's grassroots level leaders, Ashraf said.

The central committee would intervene only if any dispute over the candidature arises and would select the best candidate through discussion and negotiation, he added.

Replying to a query, Ashraf categorically said that AL and its allies would not take part in the national and upazila elections if the state of emergency is not lifted.

Saying that the government has been moving away from its main goal of holding parliamentary polls first, Bimal Biswas observed that the national election would be hampered if the upazila elections are held before it.

Oil prices

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Pressure mounted Monday for a response to ease the pain of consumers suffering from high fuel costs and a general increase in the cost of living as crude prices breached 143 dollars a barrel for the first time.

One of the main points of contention is the role of speculators, blamed consistently by producer countries for the doubling of crude prices over the last 12 months.

Western oil chiefs, backing the view of governments in consumer countries, insisted on Monday that speculators were the wrong target and that the failure of supply to match rising demand was the real cause.

"This is a fundamental thing. It's not about speculation," the chief executive of British oil group BP, Tony Hayward, told delegates at the four-day gathering, adding that it was a "myth" that speculators were to blame.

"Investors is a better word than speculators. They are investing in the oil market because they believe prices will go up."

Jeroen van der Veer, head of British-Dutch oil group Shell, also said blaming speculators was wrong, adding that the role of the market was "the translation of things that might happen in the future into the price."

The four-day World Petroleum Congress runs from Monday to Thursday after an official opening reception on Sunday.

"There's probably no better time for the WPC to be meeting," said Hayward.

The president of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, the head of the International Energy Agency and ministers from Nigeria, Russia, Venezuela, India, France and the Netherlands are expected to be present.

Saudi Arabia held a hastily arranged meeting of consumers and producers in Jeddah eight days ago to tackle the problem of record oil prices, which were forecast by OPEC's president last week to touch 150-170 dollars per barrel in the coming months.

Most experts agreed afterwards that the only concrete result from the summit was Saudi Arabia's announcement that it would increase daily production by more than 200,000 barrels to 9.7 million.

The gathering pitted consumer nations, which are calling for an increase in production, against producers.

Most OPEC members remain firmly against any increase in their production and blame speculators and the fall in the dollar for the remarkable run up in prices, which have doubled in the last 12 months.

Western oil bosses are keen to pin the blame for high oil prices on a lack of supply. They are excluded from many countries by governments anxious to see their national oil companies retain a monopoly on oil and gas production.

CA calls

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innovative ideas in population control and holding international ulema conference on birth control were, among other matters, discussed in the meeting.

A multimedia presentation on Population Control in Bangladesh was made at the meeting, which showed country's current population growth at 1.41 percent.

The slogan of national population policy is 'Not more than two children and one is better'.

Fakhruddin said supply of contraceptives should be ensured in remote areas like chars, haors and other regions of the country where population growth is high.

Supply of birth-control materials should be ensured where users' demand prevails.

The chief adviser, who is the chairperson of the National Population Council, asked for enhanced cooperation between the health ministry and other ministries concerned for successful implementation of the programmes of health, nutrition and population sectors.

He also said, "Adjustment of manpower in health and population sectors should be made for successful implementation of various programmes, and all logical steps should be taken in a coordinated way."

Health and Family Welfare Adviser AMM Shavkat Ali made introductory speech at the meeting. Advisers, secretaries, physicians, NGO representatives, religious personalities, educationists and high officials were, among others, present at the meeting.

Morshed Khan

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comply with the court order, the trial would continue.

Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) Assistant Director Talabur Rahman, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet against the couple to the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court on June 24 showing 24 people as prosecution witnesses.

The IO prayed for issuing arrest warrants against them and the order to attach their properties as they have been absconding since the case was filed with the Gulshan Police Station on December 10 last year.

Morshed Khan had submitted his wealth statement to the ACC on July 10 last year saying that he has properties worth Tk 17.41 crore.

But in the probe it was found that the senior BNP leader had amassed wealth worth about Tk 1.67 crore illegally and concealed information about his wealth worth Tk 91 lakh in the statement.

Nasrin was accused in the case for abetting her husband.

Delwar asks govt

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while speaking at a discussion held at Diploma Engineers' Institution in the capital.

The BNP secretary general during the discussion also said the BNP-led four-party alliance will observe 'demand day' on July 9 to press home their demand of withdrawal of state of emergency and 'human rights day' on July 16.

Hinting at the activities of intelligence agencies, Delwar said, "Special agencies are now picking out candidates. But is it their duty? ... They are holding meetings. Who gave them the money? They are using the tax-payers' money."

Demanding the national elections ahead of any other polls, he said the government is not sincere in holding the national elections, but it wants to hold the local body polls -- which would be a violation of the constitution.

"Although holding the national elections within three months is a constitutional obligation, they [government] are trying to hold the local body elections," Delwar alleged saying that the government is only implementing a blue print to cling on to power for a longer period of time.

He blasted the government for its failure to control prices of essentials. "They have no idea. They do not even have the willingness to control the prices of essentials."

Among others, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) chairman Andaleeb Rahman Partho, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid, BNP leaders R Gani and Tanveer

Party politics

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commission to conduct the ninth parliamentary polls first.

Voter lists for around 200 upazilas are expected to be ready by the third week of July and that will help the EC's plan to announce schedule for the upazila polls next month.

If everything goes according to EC plan, around 200 upazilas might be going to polls in the first phase.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said the commission would finalise its decision on the upazila elections within the next two to four days.

The EC does not want to hold polls during the Ramadan that begins early September. It also does not want any local body polls in October since it will have to start preparations on full throttle for conducting the all-important parliamentary polls in the third week of December.

Young offenders

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gradual increase in the number of children confined in jails or child development centres in the first four months of the current year, suggesting an increase in offences committed by them.

These figures are of actual offenders since police are not arresting anyone on suspicion or until allegations against them are found to be true in primary investigations.

The number of children confined in 57 jails and three child development centres (Kishore Unnayan Kendro or KUKs) in January was 558 (313 in jails, 245 in development centres), increasing to 569 in February (319 in jails, 250 in development centres), 650 in March (380 in jails, 650 in development centres) and 662 in April (380 in jails, 282 in development centres).

However no other statistics are available to police in this regard as no records are kept separately of juvenile offenders.

Most of the young offenders are found to hail from extremely poor families, raised in streets or slums without proper care or guidance from parents. Offenders also include some from the middle and upper classes.

Prof. Abdul Hakim Sarkar of the Institute of Social Welfare of Dhaka University, who has worked on juveniles in conflict with the law, blames poverty and lack of parental guidance for the rise in delinquents.

Psychologists are also concerned about the growing cruelty among juveniles as is very evident from recent incidents. Such children do not show any repentance after committing serious offences.

Sometimes they even kill the victim to hide evidence of their crime.

Investigations into five murders in their capital city by juveniles, committed over six months from April last year, show the cruel nature of such offenders. The youngsters killed their victims over trivial matters like altercation during games, or snatching cell phones or disagreements over sharing of booty after selling stolen goods.

"Cases filed against children for muggings, snatchings and thefts marked a slight increase recently," says Advocate Mahbubur Rahman, Legal Aid Officer of Aparajeyo-Bangladesh, a child rights NGO.

Mahbub, who distributes juvenile cases among a panel of lawyers

Ahmed Siddique took part in the discussion.

Meanwhile, a group of former student leaders yesterday formed a human chain near the sub-jail where BNP chief Khaleida Zia is being detained to demand the lifting of state of emergency, release of the BNP chairperson and sending her two sons abroad for treatment.

Shamsuzzaman Dudu, Asaduzzaman Ripon, Habibur Rahman Habib, Khairul Kabir Khokan, Nazimuddin Alam, Mostafizur Rahman Babul, Habibur-Nabi Sohel and Shahabuddin Laltu were present among others.

Grenade attack

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commissioner at the shrine of Hajrat Shahjalal (RA) in Sylhet.

Jubayer told The Daily Star yesterday that even though charge sheets in the cases were submitted earlier, further investigation was made based on confessional statement of Huji leader Mufti Abdul Hannan, prime accused in the cases.

Jubayer said during CID quizzing, Hannan divulged that Zandal supplied the grenades through Huji operatives Sharif Shahedul Alam Bipul and Delwar Hossain Ripon.

The murder case filed in this connection is under trial in the Sylhet Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal and depositions of 53 prosecution witnesses have already been recorded. In the case filed under Explosive Substances Act, six people have recorded their depositions.

The Bangladesh-born British high commissioner along with 70 others was hurt and three people were killed when grenades exploded at the shrine on May 21, 2004.

Assistant sub-inspector of special branch (SB) of police Kamal Uddin, Habibur Rahman Habib and college student Jubayer Ahmed Rubel were killed.

The district judge of Sylhet on July 12 acquitted 20 accused as their names were dropped from the charge sheet.

CID Senior ASP Munshi Atiqur Rahman on June 9, 2007 filed two charge sheets against Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan, his brother Mofizur Rahman and Huji operatives 'Delwar Hossain Ripon' and Sharif Shahedul Alam Bipul.

The CID started further investigations and submitted supplementary charge sheet later.

of the NGO to provide legal support to children in conflict with the law, says recent offenders are mostly from very poor families. They possibly turn to a criminal life as their parents fail to feed them, he says.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Naim Ahmed informs that in the recent city murders committed by juveniles, the young killers executed their crimes almost like professional criminals though it was a first time offence for most of them.

They even had the fore thought or planning to destroy evidences, drowning a victim's body and burning the faces of others so that the bodies cannot be identified easily.

Naim says the reason behind the killings by children and the way they were executed has become a matter of grave concern.

He calls for urgent research on the issue by social scientists and child psychologists to identify the reasons behind such behaviour and methods to mitigate them.

Dr Mehtab Khanam, professor of psychology department of Dhaka University, says lack of tolerance in the society where parents behave harshly with their young children can lead to cruelty in children.

"There is even a case of a 12-year old killing a girl after rape," Prof Khanam points out from case studies by Save the Children, UK.

Prof. Abdul Hakim claims that the number of juvenile crimes in the country has been on the rise since the year 2000.

Referring to one of his own studies conducted during the eighties, he says 90 per cent of the juveniles coming to the three child development centres in the city, then known as juvenile correction centres, were referred by their parents.

But now, the police send more than 90 per cent of children in these centres.

The superintendent of the child development centre at Tongi confirms this.

According to the book 'Juvenile Delinquency', authored by a superintendent of police BL Das, separate records of juvenile delinquency is not maintained in the country because of various reasons.

"The small number of cases recorded with police are alarming and the real picture is much more frightening," the book claims.

3 JMB cadres

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under Debiganj upazila in Panchagarh. Ashjad Hossain alias Awakat, son of late Fazlul Haque from Panditpara village under Dimla upazila in Nilphamari and Shafigul Islam, son of late Matiar Rahaman from Joyrampur village under Kaharol upazila in Dinajpur district.

The court also fined each of the JMB activists Tk 10,000 and in default of which each will have to serve an additional year in jail.

The fourth accused, Nur Alam, was relieved of the charges as the allegation against him was not proven.

According to the prosecution, the three activists of JMB were arrested on November 19, 2005 from a rental house at Notun Bosti under sadar upazila in Panchagarh with huge bomb making materials and explosives in their possession.

The same day, advocate Ershad Hossain Sarkar, the landlord, filed an explosives case with Panchagarh Police Station.

Police made the arrests following confessional statement of another JMB militant Abdul Awal, son-in-law of JMB chief Shaikh Abdul Rahman. Awal was arrested the day before from a Dinajpur-bound bus at Thakurgaon old bus stop.

Six top JMB militants including Awal and Shaikh Abdul Rahman were later executed on March 29, 2007.

On June 15, 2006, investigation officer of the case SI Siddhartha Shankar of Panchagarh Police Station submitted charge sheet before the court accusing four persons.

Abdul Awal was also accused in the case, but his name was dropped from the case following his execution.

In their confessional statements given to a magistrate, the accused admitted of possessing the materials for the purpose of making bombs that would be used to carry out attacks on different targets.

Public Prosecutor (PP) advocate Aminur Rahman and Additional Public Prosecutor (APP) advocate Md Jahangir Alam conducted the case for the state while advocate Shamsul Alam Prodhan and advocate Gholam Hafiz defended the accused.

700MW power

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remained shut for one reason or another while eight plants were affected by the gas crisis.

The Haripur 360 MW Independent Power Plant yesterday produced 260MW due to gas crisis. "This is the first time Haripur plant was given less gas," said a PDB official.

The other affected power plants include 'the Rabzan', 'Shakhabad', Ghorashal, and Mymensingh powerplants.

PDB needs 840 million cubic feet of gas per day to generate 4,000MW power but Petrobangla and its affiliates are supplying around 650 million cubic feet of gas per day.

Against a gas demand of 2,000 million cubic feet a day, Petrobangla is currently supplying 1,770 million cubic feet a day.

Muggers

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"We then left their bodies in the abandoned house and fled the area," he added.

Liton however told the media that they did not intend to murder the boys. He blamed the crime on the 'influence of cannabis they were smoking'.

"We did not know these boys personally and they did not know us. We did not want to kill them. But we had a knife in our possession at the time and carried out the crimes under the influence of cannabis," he said.

Tanna police recovered the decomposed bodies of Jewel, son of a rickshaw-puller Alauddin, and Biplob, son of a chauffeur Siddique Sheikh, three days after the killing.

Assistant Commissioner (AC) of DB Nasiruddin Khan, leader of the investigation team, told the media, "We were clueless about the motive behind the brutal killings and so started investigating the case. We talked to local residents and prepared a list of five suspected child abusers."

"We arrested three of them and based on information retrieved from them we arrested Ronju on June 25 and Liton on June 27 from Moghbazar area. Both were known in the area as muggers," he said.

During interrogation, both men admitted to the killings and also confessed that they were involved in other criminal activities in the area, including muggings.

Biplob's mother Bilkis Begum came to the DB office yesterday to see her son's killers.

Breaking down in tears, Bilkis told The Daily Star that she wanted exemplary punishment for her son's killers. She said she did not want any other mother to lose her innocent children to the hands of such cruel people.

Bilkis also told the media that the two murderers repeatedly threatened her and Jewel's parents over the phone, causing Jewel's parents to flee the area they lived in a month and a half ago.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Naim Ahmed also held the local people responsible for the brutal murders, saying, "Although the abandoned house was regularly used by the criminals, none of the local residents showed any social responsibility in informing the matter to police or to any other authority."

"Most of the slum children are always on the lookout for chances," the DMP commissioner said.

"Parents and guardians have to be more careful about the safety of their children," he said.

Zimbabwe vote

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election, saying he considered the results, giving President Robert Mugabe another term illegitimate.

Ban was in Tokyo on the first leg of an Asian tour in which he also discussed progress in an international drive to abolish North Korea's nuclear weapons and Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

His visit came as Mugabe was sworn in Sunday for another term in Zimbabwe, hours after the election commission declared he won more than 85 percent of the votes cast.

"The secretary general has said repeatedly that conditions were not in place for a free and fair election and observers have confirmed this from the deeply flawed process," Ban spokeswoman Marie Okabe said in a statement.

"The outcome did not reflect the true and genuine will of the Zimbabwean people or produce a legitimate result," the statement said.

Mugabe, who has ruled Zimbabwe since independence in 1980, narrowly lost the first round amid public criticism of the dire economic conditions and hyperinflation in the African nation.

Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai pulled out of the run-off election, citing a campaign of violence against his supporters.

Japan gave a full state welcome to Ban, who inspected an honour guard next to Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda before a ceremonial audience with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko.

"I appreciate Japan's significant support for the United Nations," the

2 outlaws

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meeting at about 12:35am.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the outlaws opened fire on them prompting the cops to retaliate.

Swapan and Johurul were killed on the spot while their associates managed to escape.

The law enforcers recovered a single-barrel gun, a 32 bore rifle and five rounds of bullet from the spot.

Swapan had been accused in nine cases including seven on charges of murder while Johurul was accused in seven cases, Rab said.

US-led forces kill 33

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Dastageer Azad told AFP.

"In the aerial bombing by the US troops 28 Taliban were killed and many others were wounded. The dead include three Taliban commanders," Azad said.

The Afghan interior ministry however put the death toll at 15.

The governor said locals had told him that eight civilians were also killed near the bombing area but he could not confirm the information.

A coalition statement said it killed "numerous" armed militants using small-arms fire and air strikes in an operation on Sunday targeting a Taliban leader known to facilitate bomb attacks, but did not give figures.

A Taliban spokesman, Yousuf Ahmadi, said that none of its fighters were killed in the bombing and that all those who died were civilians. Many of his previous claims have proved to be exaggerated.

Octane now Tk 90

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disproportionately, Dr Deb noted.

According to a government estimate, 35.7 lakh metric tons of petroleum products were used in Bangladesh in FY 2006-'07, 65 percent or 22 lakh metric tons of which was diesel.

Sixty percent of the diesel was used for transports, 32 percent for agriculture, and the rest was used for other purposes.

Meanwhile, soon after the announcement of the price hike of fuel oil, hundreds of motor vehicle owners thronged different filling stations in the capital with expectation to buy fuel oil at the old rate for the last time before the increased prices come into effect.

But most of the filling station owners kept their pumps closed so they do not have to sell the fuel at a lower rate while many others kept the pumps open but refused to pump at the earlier rate.

Many motor vehicle owners and chauffeurs got locked into altercations with filling station employees and managements and even got into clashes at different places in the city.

During random visits to different filling stations The Daily Star found that clients were staging a demonstration for over three hours at a filling station Shahjahan Enterprise at Shahbagh.

Witnesses said a large number of vehicles remained parked around many filling stations.

When vehicle owners and chauffeurs became fierce, Shahjahan Enterprise management tried to calm them down assuring them of supplying three litres of fuel per vehicle.

Mohamad Sujon, a conductor of a bus on Gullistan to Airport Road route said, "We went to at least five stations between Azampur in Uttara and Gullistan, but all the stations denied us fuel supply."

Upazila polls

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the general elections," he said.

Replying to another question, the CEC said, "It is not correct that the national elections will not be held if the local body polls are held first."

Election commissioners Sohel Hossain and Brig Gen (Retd) Shakhawat Hossain, among others, were present.

former South Korean diplomat said in Japanese as he greeted the emperor and empress, according to a palace official.

Japan hesitated to support Ban before he was selected for the UN top spot in 2006 as South Korea, where many remain bitter over Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule, did not back Tokyo's bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.

Foreign Minister Masahiko Kōmura pressed Japan's longstanding Security Council bid when he met with Ban.

"There is a consensus among member-countries that reforms are needed at the UN Security Council," Kōmura said, as quoted by an official. "We hope for the secretary general's active leadership."

Ban agreed that "there is a consensus that the Security Council should be changed," according to the official.

"I'm fully aware that Japan has the strongest enthusiasm about reforms," Ban was quoted as saying.

A joint bid by Brazil, Germany, India and Japan for Security Council seats fizzled out in 2005, in part because China accused Japan of insufficient regret over World War II.

Ban also discussed North Korea's past abductions of Japanese civilians to train the regime's spies -- a row that has kept Tokyo from contributing aid as part of a six-nation deal on ending Pyongyang's nuclear drive.

Noab asks govt

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Board Award announced recently has also put an additional financial burden on newspapers at a time when the overall volume of advertisement in print media has declined, Noab said.