

## Journos barred from covering talks at EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday did not allow journalists to cover dialogue with political parties on their registration.

It gave no explanations for imposing restrictions on journalists' presence at the talks that began at the EC Secretariat conference room.

Political leaders present there however said the EC told them that it wanted to discuss some issues 'frankly', and this is why it decided not to allow newsmen to be present there.

In the past, the EC always allowed journalists to cover talks with political parties and professional bodies on electoral reforms from September last year for what it said was to ensure transparency in the discussions.

In defence of allowing journalists to attend the talks, Chief

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## THIRD ELECTORAL TALKS

# EC to seek easing of emergency further

## JP agrees to all registration criteria but one

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday said it will ask the caretaker government to relax the state of emergency allowing political parties to hold national councils for amending their constitutions ahead of the parliamentary poll.

The EC made the promise to Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) on the first day of its third round of electoral talks with the parties.

The criteria for parliamentary parties' mandatory registration

with the commission, set by the new electoral law, demand the amendments to the constitutions.

Emerging from their talk with the commission, JP leaders disclosed the EC's promise and said their party agreed with all criteria for registration, except one that demands poll candidates must be nominated from panels prepared by grassroots level leaders.

The provision was laid down in the amended Representation of People's Order (RPO) in a bid to stop nomination business of politi-

cal parties during parliamentary polls.

The JP leaders however said the EC assured them of relaxing the criterion they objected to.

If the criterion is relaxed, central parliamentary boards of the parties will be able to nominate candidates from outside the panels prepared by grassroots level leaders.

On holding a national council to amend the party's constitution, JP Chairman HM Ershad said, "We must invite at least ten thousand

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## BNP may skip talks with EC today

Send letter stating dialogue only after Khaleda freed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP last night decided it would not join the Election Commission's (EC) dialogue today on registration of the political parties, said party leaders.

It however did not make a formal announcement to that effect.

Talking to The Daily Star at around 10:00pm, former BNP lawmaker Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal said they were sending a letter to the EC to explain their decision.

He said they would tell the EC that the party would participate in talks only after release of Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

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# Tk 396cr gobbled up thru' gas connections

## TIB report also reveals systems loss ate away Tk 1,646cr in 17 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Officials and contractors of the Bakhra Gas Systems Limited (BGS) pocketed about Tk 396 crore in bribe for providing gas connections since its start in 1980 till December 2007, a Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report yesterday said.

It said systems loss gobbled up about 5648.16 million cubic feet (mmcf) of gas worth Tk 1,646 crore during the same period.

The report on 'Corruption in Distribution and Marketing of

Natural Gas in Chittagong Region: A Special Study on Bakhra Gas Systems Limited' was based on information from 603 BGS clients who took out connections from December 2006 to August 2008.

Besides, present and former BGS staff, journalists and energy experts were interviewed for the report made public at a roundtable in Chittagong.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman moderated the discussion.

Criticising the government's 'hasty' decision to stop new con-

nections in Chittagong, Prof Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University said there is no reason for the country to face gas crisis at least before 2012.

A gas crisis has been created so new contracts could be signed in the interest of foreign energy companies, he alleged.

Presenting the report, Md Golam Mostafa, programme officer for TIB, said Tk 25.28 crore was exchanged in bribe in 2006-07 alone. He said 56 percent of the BGS clients reported they had to

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## Top AL leaders face iftar wrath

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior Awami League leaders came under fire from party leaders yesterday for attending an iftar party with Jamaat leaders at the residence of Saudi ambassador in Dhaka Friday evening.

Enraged party men staked out their disapproval to Acting AL President Zillur Rahman and Acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam, who both went to the party, over phone, party insiders said.

They said the picture of Zillur and Jamaat Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami shaking hands surprised them.

Ashrafur however defended himself, saying religion and politics should be kept apart.

AL presidium member Amir Hossain Amu, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain, among others, were present at the iftar party hosted by Saudi Ambassador Dr Abdullah Bin Naser Al-Busairi.

"We don't have any concrete policy on Jamaat. We are demanding their trial for war crimes and at the same time shaking hands with them," a senior AL leader told The Daily Star preferring anonymity.

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A woman stands near the broken part of a Padma embankment in Bhagyakul union of Srinagar upazila in Munshiganj yesterday. The swelling river has washed away a portion of the embankment.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Zardari sweeps to presidency

AFP, Islamabad

Asif Ali Zardari secured a large win in Pakistan's presidential elections yesterday, capping a remarkable rise from jail, exile and his wife Benazir Bhutto's assassination just nine months ago.

The controversial front-runner swept a poll among lawmakers to become the 14th president in Pakistan's short but turbulent history, taking power in the world's only nuclear-armed Islamic state and frontline "war on terror" ally.

"It is an historic win. It is a victory for democracy," said Sherry Rehman, the country's information minister and a close aide of Bhutto.

"This man suffered jail for more than 11 years for the sake of democracy and today he is elected as the president of the country and it is a sign of the strengthening of democracy."

Zardari secured 281 out of 426 parliamentary votes and won a thumping majority in three of the four provincial assemblies forming the presidential electoral college, officials said.



The 53-year-old defeated retired chief justice Saeed-uz-Zaman Siddiqui, who was backed by former premier Nawaz Sharif, and Mushahid Hussain, a close aide of Pervez Musharraf, whose August 18 resignation triggered the election.

Hundreds of supporters gathered outside parliament cheered "Long live Bhutto," and "Zardari is our leader," as soon as the result was announced.

Zardari had been the clear favourite in a three-way race to take

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## Change in presidency planned by Benazir

After becoming Prime Minister of Pakistan late Benazir Bhutto had decided that she would immediately try to remove Pervez Musharraf. Her 18-year-old daughter Bakhtawar claimed that change in the presidency was actually planned by her mother and Musharraf was removed exactly according to the plan.

Bakhtawar also said her father will try hard to implement all the other political plans written by Benazir on a piece of paper just a few days before her assassination. Bakhtawar is now waiting for the oath-taking ceremony of the new president where she will raise slogan "Jey Bhutto" and that will be her revenge from the enemies of her mother.

Bakhtawar says that the history of Pakistan could have been different today if Benazir had listened to Asif Ali Zardari exactly one year ago

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# Flood feared to worsen in country's central part

## Victims face shortage of food, drinking water

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Flood situation in the country's central part is likely to deteriorate further while thousands of marooned people in the flood-affected areas are suffering from a shortage of food and drinking water.

Crops on vast tracts of land were damaged and hundreds of educational institutions remain closed in the flood-hit districts. Besides, supply of relief materials at temporary shelters for flood-affected people is inadequate.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) forecast that water levels of big rivers are expected to fall in a day or two, which will help improve the present flood situation.

The water level of the Ganges has started falling and is likely to continue to drop for the next two or three days.

The flood situation in Bogra, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Tangail, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Rajbari, Faridpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Chandpur, Dohar, Nawabganj, Shibganj and Chapainawabganj is

likely to deteriorate slightly by a day or two. Then the situation might start improving.

Besides, the flood situation in low-lying areas in the capital's eastern part is likely to deteriorate slightly by the next 24-48 hours.

Our Sirajganj correspondent reports: About 20 more unions in the district have been affected by floods. Besides, vegetables and crops including transplanted (T) Aman on 1,350 hectares of land went under water in the last 24 hours.

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# Bail in last 2 cases to see Khaleda free

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will file two petitions with the High Court (HC) today for bail in Gatco and Niko graft cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

If she is granted bail in these two cases, there would be no legal bar to her release, her lawyer Nasiruddin Ahmed Asim told The Daily Star yesterday.

Khaleda, also former prime minister, stands accused in four cases. She has already secured bail in two--Barapukuria coalmine and

Zia Orphanage Trust graft cases.

Meanwhile, her lawyers Mahub Uddin Khokon and Naushad Jamir yesterday visited her at the sub-jail on Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex to discuss the bail issue.

Coming out of the jail, Khokon said it might take two to three days to complete the legal procedures for bail.

On September 2 last year, the ACC filed the first case against Khaleda on charges of graft in awarding Global Agro Trade (Pvt) Co Ltd (Gatco) a contract for

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## Tarique to apply for British, German visa

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The condition of BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, released from detention recently, is improving, his doctor and lawyer said yesterday.

Tarique, his wife Zubaida Rahman and daughter Zaima Rahman will apply to the embassies of the United Kingdom and Germany for visa today, said Tarique's family sources.

Meanwhile, apart from the police, leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and

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# Telenor warns Yunus over shareholder deal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Telenor, the Norwegian majority shareholder of Bangladeshi telecom giant Grameenphone (GP), has denied ever reaching an agreement with Grameen Telecom chair Prof Muhammad Yunus to sell its stakes to Bangladeshi management.

In a written statement released from Norway on Friday, Telenor, which has 62 percent shares in GP, also threatened to take Yunus to court if he continues to disagree over the shareholder agreement.

Meanwhile, Prof Yunus, whose Grameen Telecom has a 38 percent stake in GP, yesterday backed off from earlier suggestions that he

would take Telenor to court to force the deal.

He told a press conference in the Norwegian capital Oslo yesterday that it is unlikely he would take the matter to the court for arbitration.

"This is not an outcome that we think 'is necessary,'" Prof Yunus said, later adding that it is a "remote possibility". He said, "We are not the kind of people to rush to the courts."

Telenor dismissed Yunus' claims about the two sides agreeing on a deal in 1996 that within six years the joint company would be locally operated by Bangladeshi management with majority Bangladeshi ownership.

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1 Jungle cat



5 Civet

## Going, going, going, gone ....

INAM AHMED

These are some of the rarest animals and birds in Bangladesh -- slow loris, jungle cats, leopard cats, civets, badgers, hornbills and green pigeons. Once they were found frequently, if not in abundance, in the wild. But with systematic destruction of forests, they have now been pushed to the verge of extinction. These animals were captured from different parts of Sri Mongol and Sylhet as they foraged in locality.

According to the Red List of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the animals in the pictures are however not endangered worldwide.

Their capture also tells sorry tales of how our evergreen forests have depleted. Slow Loris locally known as *lazzabati banor* (Pic No 3) lived in the mixed evergreen forest of Sylhet. This nocturnal animal lived in the upper tier of the jungle in reclusive during the day, and would look for food at night. As the tall trees vanished because of illegal logging, they got exposed and could not escape humans because of their slow mobility.

Sitesh Ranjan Dev of Sri Mongol, who runs a private zoo there and is a controversial character for his alleged trade in wildlife, although there is no proof of it, claims he got these slow lorises from an indigenous Khasia person who had caught them in Lawachhera forest.

Badger (Pic No 4), is a very rare animal in Bangladesh, as

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Photo: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



2 Leopard cat



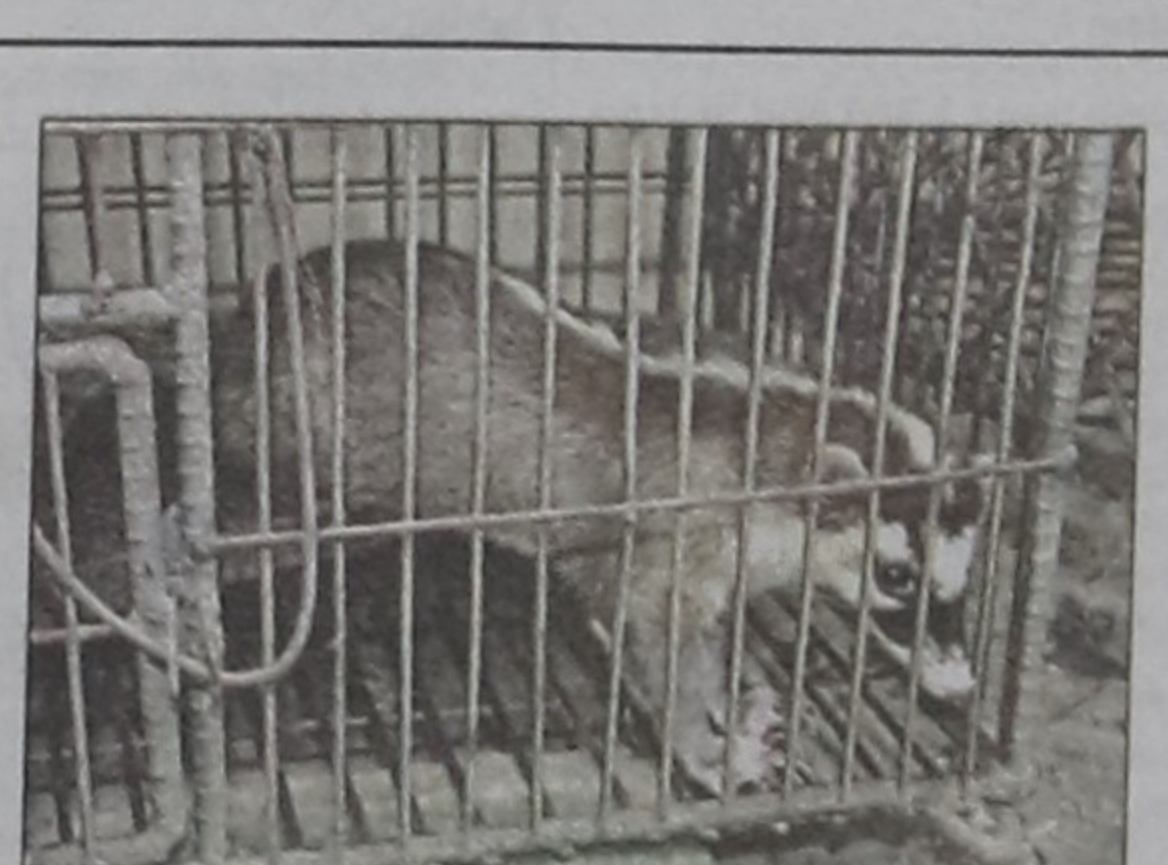
6 Civet



3 Slow lori



7 Green pigeon



4 Badger



8 Hornbill