

Upazila, JS polls

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But that did not happen as the commission now seeks to discuss the issues with BNP before reaching any decisions. The change of plan follows the latest developments on the political front.

In the last two days, the polls chief met the CA twice—first on Saturday and then yesterday.

Talking about the meeting that took place yesterday afternoon, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hussain said they mainly discussed the upazila and parliamentary elections.

"We'll inform the government about our decisions on his (CA) return," Sakawat told The Daily Star.

He said the EC is weighing up two options—organising polls to some upazilas in October or to a large number of those after the general election as demanded by most of the political parties.

At yesterday's meeting, the EC told advisers that any local government polls after October will hamper the preparation for all-important ninth parliamentary election, meeting sources said.

With the national election planned for the third week of December approaching fast, the possibility of upazila polls being held first seems quite slim, said an EC Secretariat official requesting not be named.

CEC Huda yesterday said the EC wants to work out something acceptable all round.

Asked if the parliamentary polls

would be held first, he said, "You'll know very soon."

Meanwhile, sources in the EC said the commission is working to sit with BNP in a couple of days. It might contact the party today.

The BNP-led four-party alliance will meet tomorrow to discuss schedule and agenda for talks with the EC, according to party sources.

Before leaving his office for CA's, Huda said the EC will decide on the registration of parties, and upazila and parliamentary elections after the dialogue with BNP.

"We're waiting for communications from BNP," he told reporters at the EC Secretariat.

Earlier in the day, he met a delegation of some non-government organisations, and a group of journalists at the EC Secretariat's conference room.

The commission is ready to sit for dialogue with BNP anytime, he said replying to a query.

It will strive to have opinions of all political parties before making any decision on the elections, he continued. "It's necessary to listen to all. I've had a lot of flak for not having their (BNP's) views."

He maintained that the parties skipping registration with the EC will not be allowed to contest the upcoming general election.

Engineer blamed for LA rail crash

AP, Los Angeles

In a surprisingly swift assessment, the operators of the commuter train involved in the head-on crash that killed at least 25 people blamed its engineer for the horrific accident.

However, a National Transportation Safety Board member cautioned that it was too early to establish the cause of Friday's accident. Others, too, questioned the timing of the operator's move to affix culpability.

Rescuers were still carefully picking apart the twisted wreckage Saturday when Metrolink announced 19 hours after the crash that its preliminary investigation determined the engineer failed to heed a red signal light, leading to the collision with a Union Pacific freight train.

The Metrolink engineer was among the dead, the NTSB said. His name has not been released. A total of 135 people were injured.

The NTSB, which is leading the investigation, played down a local television station report that the engineer had exchanged a brief text message with a teenager shortly before the crash. KCBS said the teen was among a group of rail fans who befriended the engineer and asked him questions about his work.

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When locals chased the muggers, they spread money on the street in a bid to stop the people chasing them. They fled through Gulshan Niketan, ACI officials said.

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Amir Khasru

FROM PAGE 1
the same period, following writ petitions.

The bench issued separate rules on the government to explain in four weeks why the initiation and continuation of the case proceeded against Amir Khasru should not be declared illegal.

The ex-BNP minister was accused of helping arrange the sale of 18 abandoned government houses at much lower prices at a fake auction and award container-management work at inland container depots in Dhaka and Chittagong to unqualified firm Gato through corruption.

He secured the bail and the stay orders as the HC had earlier granted bail to the main accused in the two cases and stayed case proceedings against them, his counsel barrister Ruhul Quddus Kajal said.

Amir Khasru filed the writ petitions shortly after coming back home yesterday in the morning. He had been outside the country since August 14 last year.

He told reporters on the court premises that he did not come back earlier because there was no rule of law in the country.

Terming the two cases false, he said, "If I came back earlier, more such cases would have been filed against me."

The ACC filed the fake-auction case with Motiheel Police Station on March 29 last year. Former housing minister Mirza Abbas, ex-prime minister Khaleda Zia's political secretary Harris Chowdhury, three retired secretaries and high officials from the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha and Power Development Board were also accused in the case.

The Gato case was filed on September 2 last year. Apart from Amir Khasru, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami and 20 others were sued for causing a loss of over Tk 1,000 crore to the state exchequer through the Gato deal.

Advocate Khondker Mahub Uddin Ahmed argued for the petitioner.

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Sea border talks

FROM PAGE 1
while our neighbours might get to enjoy it all as they have made good progress in their demarcation jobs," an energy expert notes.

India and Myanmar need to finish the maritime demarcation with Bangladesh shortly as they are set to file their claim to the UN on June 29 and May 21 next year respectively.

Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Bangladesh also has to file its claim within July 27, 2011.

Bangladesh has yet to make any progress in making its papers with proper boundary survey due to lack of experience, skilled manpower and equipment. The government is planning to take help from the US, the UK and Australia to do it, sources in the foreign ministry said.

In 2004, the foreign ministry formed a committee with members from Petrobangla, Geological Survey of Bangladesh, the Navy, Sparsco, Inland Water Transport Authority and Surveyor of Bangladesh. The purpose of this committee was to recommend how to mark the deep-sea territory fulfilling requirements of the UN and as per the law of the sea.

However, the committee became dysfunctional within a year, while its foreign ministry members were busy making foreign trips.

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delimitation of maritime boundary.

Earlier, foreign ministry officials held two rounds of talks in April and September with Myanmar and the discussions yielded 'good results' regarding common usage of the Naf river and estuary, official sources said.

But progress in resolving the sea boundary is still far to go as Myanmar is asking for eco-distance system in East to West boundary, while Bangladesh is asking to demarcate in equity basis North to South.

Another round of talks may take place with Myanmar in next November.

OIL AND GAS STAKES
Oil and gas exploration in the Bay is a very recent phenomenon. Both India and Myanmar discovered gas in the Bay between 2005 and 2007.

While Myanmar's activities were limited and resulted in a discovery of 7 trillion cubic feet of gas in 2006, India's activities were intensive resulting in a discovery of 100 tcf gas and two billion barrels of oil in place.

India has held off-shore block bids and has many oil companies working in the Bay.

The Indian press reports that two main basins in the Bay -- Krishna-Godavari and Mahanadi -- have shown a potential of nearly 18 billion barrels of oil equivalent gas in place. While official sources quote a figure of 100 tcf for gas reserves in the region, unofficial estimates peg the reserves at 200 TCF.

In Bangladesh on May 7, seven oil and gas companies submitted their bids in 15 offshore blocks out of a total of 28. The response was lukewarm as some international oil lobbies have reportedly campaigned against the Bangladesh bid.

With some offers overlapping different blocks, six oil companies proposed to invest \$1.6 billion. Each of the blocks has exploration area of between 3,000 square kilometres (sqkm) to 7,000 sqkm.

However, Bangladesh might ultimately sign a contract with only two companies.

By June, both India and Myanmar have raised objection about this bid.

Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Bangladesh also has to file its claim within July 27, 2011.

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Khaleda, Hasina

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"An elected government to represent all in January, which is better for democracy," he said.

Welcoming the release of BNP chief Khaleda Zia and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, he said they hope the major political parties including the two leaders will work together, which would be good for democracy.

He was talking to local journalists during his visit to Kumudini Hospital in Mirzapur upazila of Tangail yesterday.

USAID Mission Director Denise Rollins, Director of Kumudini Welfare Trust Protibha Mutsuddi and Managing Director of Kumudini Complex Rajib Prasad Saha were also there.

During his visit, the ambassador inaugurated a USAID-supported medical ward in Kumudini Hospital. The ward provides treatment and rehabilitation facilities to women with obstetric fistula.

The ambassador was highly impressed with the quality of service provided at the hospital. He also praised Kumudini's leadership in providing opportunities to girls in education, training and employment through Bharateswari