

Jamaat's registration

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They also complained that the very important public notice was published only in two newspapers allowing only 48 hours for filing objections. The notice had been issued on October 23, but was published on October 26.

WCFFC's formal objection is strongly worded, which the committee convener, Dr MA Hasan, submitted to the commission in the afternoon. He also handed over a copy to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda.

It said Jamaat has been in politics "illegally and unconstitutionally for a long period as a branch of a foreign party".

It claimed that the committee had earlier twice lodged complaints against the party on 14 counts with the EC.

"A number of major leaders of Jamaat were involved in war crimes and genocide during the liberation war as they were loyal to Pakistan," Dr Hasan told reporters after a meeting with the CEC.

"But they did not confess to their crimes and did not surrender to the Bangladesh government."

He said the party has taken a new name and has accepted the constitution of Bangladesh by changing a few words, but also pointed out that not a single member of Jamaat has yet expressed formal loyalty to the country's constitution.

Dr Hasan said, "They [Jamaat leaders] don't admit that they committed crimes by opposing the liberation war, and don't apologise for that."

He said including al-Badr chief Motiur Rahman Nizami are still among the top leadership of the party.

He alleged that the party established a huge set up in the country with foreign funds in an attempt to influence elections.

Jamaat could not be registered with the EC under the circumstances, he noted.

Dr Hasan also said his organisation prepared a list of about 1,500 war criminals. "We will submit the names of Jamaat leaders and workers to the EC along with evidence," he told reporters.

He also said his organisation is considering legal actions against war criminals.

WCFFC members are scheduled to meet the CEC again with

facts and specific proofs on Thursday.

Sector Commanders Forum said Jamaat is trying to deceive the people by changing its name to Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.

Jamaat changed its constitution in the face of pressure, but it still has a gulf of difference with the spirit of the country's constitution, the forum said in a statement.

It said, "Jamaat opposed our liberation war in collaboration with the Pakistani occupation forces. Leaders and workers of this party were directly involved in rapes, genocide, and plunder in the name of religion. So, we think the party cannot get registration with the EC."

Signed by the chief convener of the forum, Lt Gen M Harun-Rashid (ret), the statement urged the EC to publicise Jamaat's amended constitution, and to invite opinions from a cross-section of citizens.

Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee also expressed its astonishment at not finding the public notice about Jamaat in well circulated newspapers and on front-ranking electronic media.

"The notice was published in a little circulated daily of a certain quarter, and only 48 hours were allowed for submissions of objections," it said in a written complaint to the EC, urging the commission to extend the deadline for filing objections by seven days.

In a joint statement, Supreme Court Bar Association President Shafiq Ahmed, Justice AFM Mesbahuddin, President of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad Ayesha Khanom, Executive Director of Nari Progoti Sangha Rokeya Kabir, journalist Harun Habib and Mozammel Babu, President of Bangladesh Football Federation Kazi Salauddin, and Barrister Tania Amir also strongly objected to Jamaat's possible registration.

"Over the past 37 years, the party has been spreading venom against the liberation war and the freedom fighters. Recently, they also made derogatory remarks about the historic war," the statement said.

It also said Jamaat changed its constitution only to get registered with the EC. "Changes in its constitution will not change its fundamentals spirit," the statement read.

Govt trying

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presidium member Abdur Razzak told reporters yesterday that the government will be held responsible if the national election -- holding of which is the caretaker government's constitutional duty -- is hampered due to holding of upazila election at the same time.

Referring to the government's rigid position on holding upazila poll on the scheduled date, Razzak questioned the government's interest in wanting to do so.

During the latest round of talks with the government on October 23, the AL placed a nine-point demand including withdrawal of the state of emergency and deferment of upazila elections.

NDI discussion
Meanwhile, US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) held a round table discussion with leaders of Awami League (AL) and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) at a city hotel yesterday on the subject of making the parliament effective.

The discussants recommended that the speaker should leave his party position and act neutrally and also that boycott of the parliament by political parties should be stopped.

They also recommended that the deputy speaker of the House be elected or nominated from the opposition party, and that 40 to 50 percent of the total time of the parliament sessions be given to the opposition parties to take the floor.

AL presidium members Tofail Ahmed and Suranjit Sengupta, acting general secretary Syed Ashraful Islam, AL leaders Col Faruk Khan, Dr Abdur Razzak, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Mahamudur Rahman Manna and Abdul Mannan took part in the discussion.

LDP presidium members Redwan Ahmed and Syed Didar Bakht also participated in the discussions.

Emergency

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going to announce the electoral laws in early November.

In reply to a question, Sharma said, "Our role is to assist the intent of the government to have a transparent election."

Asked if the Commonwealth would take any actions as taken against Pakistan or Zimbabwe if elections are not held in Bangladesh, Sharma said any such action is taken by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group after scrutiny of the situation.

Welcoming the election roadmap, Sharma said, "The stage is set for the people of Bangladesh to decide once again who should govern them. This is a sacred trust that each voter must discharge."

He noted that the features of genuine democracy are about the institutions and processes of good governance. An independent election commission, a representative and effective parliament, an independent judiciary, an efficient executive and impartial national body to protect human rights.

Sharma said it is equally important to develop culture of democracy together with values of tolerance and respect for the opinions of others, transparency, integrity and accountability.

The secretary general welcomed the decision to create an Independent Human Rights Commission and said as soon as the human rights commissioners will be appointed, Commonwealth will share its experience with them.

He also praised the Right to Information Act and Local Government Commission.

Hasanul Haq Inu

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after obtaining bail in cases filed against them.

He alleged that the present government has a 'secret agenda', and the state of emergency might be used in implementing the agenda.

This government's stance on continuing the Emergency Powers Rules has given rise to 'doubts', Inu said without explaining. Emergency rules are 'anti-democratic' and 'anti-human' ones, he added.

On the issue of HM Ershad-led Jatuya Party's involvement with the Awami League-led 14-party coalition that includes JSD, Inu said they will consider an electoral grand alliance with Ershad's party in the greater interest of democracy and the country.

In reply to a question, the JSD chief said they are yet to discuss seat-sharing.

Terming 1/11 (proclamation of state of emergency) a 'great lesson' for all, he said it proved that even the most powerful persons like president, prime minister or general have to go to jail if they break the law.

The anti-corruption drive by the present government deviated from its main objectives and that is why it started to fail, he said.

Inu however lauded some initiatives of this government, especially reconstituting the Election Commission, Public Service Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission, and separation of the judiciary.

But he regretted that administrative reforms and reforms in police and other security forces have made little headway. These are very important for the next election, he added.

Recession worries

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British economy was on the brink of recession after negative growth in the third quarter.

In morning deals, London's FTSE 100 index of top shares plunged 5.62 percent but later pared losses to 1.83 percent.

Paris shares were down 3.79 percent in mid-afternoon trade while the DAX in Frankfurt shed 2.23 percent after steeper falls in earlier trading.

German business confidence dropped to its lowest point for more than five years in October, a key survey showed, as the economy reeled from the international financial crisis.

The monthly business climate index calculated by Munich-based economic research institute Ifo fell to 90.2 points in October from 92.9 points in September for its fifth straight drop and its lowest level since May 2003, when it reached 89.6 points.

"Germany is heading for a serious recession," warned Bank of America senior economist Holger Schmiedling in response to the Ifo data.

"With business confidence declining at a record pace, the economy looks set to shrink

noticeably in late 2008 and early 2009."

The Group of Seven nations -- comprising Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States -- sought to calm nerves by affirming their "shared interest in a strong and stable international financial system."

At the same time, they voiced concern about "excessive volatility" in the yen, which Friday soared to a 13-year high against the dollar as worried investors fled to the relative safety of the Japanese currency.

Japanese Prime Minister Tarō Aso announced fresh measures to support the ailing stock market, including a bigger government fund to pump capital into banks if needed.

The renewed stock market turmoil came as the International Monetary Fund moved to bail out Ukraine and Hungary which have suffered badly.

Markets expect fresh steps by global authorities this week to try to stabilise shaky markets, with the US Federal Reserve widely anticipated to cut interest rates on Wednesday, leading the way for others to follow.

Suspected US 296 local NGOs

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in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The militias, known as Lashkars, have been compared to the so-called awakening councils that have helped US forces turn the tables against al-Qaeda in Iraq.

"Our tribal brothers, those who are patriots, have broken with them [the militants], and Lashkars are fighting against those involved in terrorism," Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said today.

However, there are doubts that the ramshackle militias can face down heavily armed insurgents who have seized swathes of Pakistan's border belt, forged ties with al-Qaeda, and targeted pro-government elders with suicide bombings and kidnappings.

Officials have denied reports they are arming the militias, though observers suspect that they at least receive government funding.

Missile strikes into Pakistan's border region have escalated sharply amid complaints from American commanders that Pakistani forces are not putting enough pressure on militant strongholds on their territory.

US military and CIA drones that patrol the frontier region are believed to have carried out at least 15 strikes since August. The United States rarely confirms or denies involvement.

Two intelligence officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they are not authorised to speak to media on the record, said the targeted house in Mandata Raghza village belonged to a lieutenant of local Taliban chief Maulvi Nazir.

Re-demarcation

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without following the guidelines of the constitution.

He will make further submissions before the court today.

Earlier on Sunday, EC's counsel advocate Mahmudul Islam told the court that the commission put out the gazette as per Article 124 of the constitution.

He said as per Article 125 of the constitution, EC's action taken under Article 124 cannot be challenged in court, so the writ petitions challenging the said gazette notification cannot continue.

Earlier on August 7, the HC had stayed the gazette notifications for three months following the writ petitions and issued a rule on the government and the EC to show causes in two weeks as to why the July 10 gazette should not be declared unconstitutional and illegal.

The HC began final hearings on the writ petitions from October 22.

Regulatory body

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The government will also take measures to stop advertisements that seek to entice consumers by falsehoods and embellished accounts. The information ministry has already been contacted in this regard.

Shawkat said many experts have suggested setting up an agency modelled on the US Food and Drug Administration.

Asked if the drug administration would be merged with the new regulator, he said, "We have to work on it."

The decision came in light of the fact that it is difficult for Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) to ensure food safety, as it has to deal with a lot of non-food products as well.

Experts at a recent seminar said BSTI has little capacity in terms of manpower and logistics to handle so many food and non-food items.

Trust Bank

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This connection.

However, The Daily Star investigation found that inter-bank foreign exchange trading caused losses to at least eight banks around six years ago. The issue has suddenly been twisted and wrongly labelled as "money laundering" even though Bangladesh Bank had resolved them as transactional losses.

TRUST BANK COMPLAINT
SENT TO ACC
Amar Desh Publications Ltd Chairman Mahmudur Rahman yesterday sent a complaint to the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) accusing its Chairman Hasan Mashhudur Chowdhury of laundering Tk 22.41 crore from Trust Bank Ltd, and requested an investigation.

Mahmudur Rahman, who is also a former Board of Investment executive chairman, in a news release yesterday said he sent to the ACC the money laundering complaint along with all necessary papers and evidence for investigation.

He mentioned that he also sent copies of the complaint to the ACC chairman and ACC Director General (Admin) Col Hanif Iqbal.

Hanif Iqbal however said he did not receive any such complaint yesterday.

The complaint was sent to the ACC after its chairman on Sunday said if the allegation of money laundering against him was brought before the commission, it would look into the matter.

In a letter attached with the complaint, Mahmudur Rahman said according to the annual audit report prepared by Hoda Vasi Chowdhury & Co, the auditor of the bank, former chairman of Trust Bank Ltd, Hasan Mashhudur Chowdhury, 'misappropriated Tk 22.41 crore through money laundering'.

On Saturday, Mahmudur Rahman attempted to file a case against the ACC chief in connection with the allegation.

Ranna police refused to record the case, saying they are not the appropriate police station for filing the case with, while Motihheel police also refused to record the case saying recording of any money laundering case requires approval from the Bangladesh Bank.

In the complaint Mahmudur was trying to file with the police, he said as Trust Bank is owned by the Army Welfare Trust, Hasan Mashhudur Chowdhury was its chairman while he was the army chief, and he caused a loss of Tk 20.29 crore to the bank by 'misappropriating the amount for personal benefit through money laundering' in collusion with some bank officials, but 'showed it as a loss incurred in the foreign currency exchange sector'.

Mahmudur also mentioned that the Army Welfare Trust owns 3,49,992 of the bank's total 3,50,000 shares.

Barapukuria case
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the petitions.

They said the bench may pass an order in this regard today.

Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin assigned the bench to hear the petitions after another HC bench on October 26 felt embarrassed to hear five of the quashment applications, they said.

The Anti-corruption Commission filed the case for alleged corruption in awarding a Chinese company the operations of the coal mine.

Mong Raja

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Lusat, Lt Col Samad Chowdhury on behalf of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and CHT Chief Coordinator of UNDP Robert Stalman also set off firecrackers.

Superintendent of Police Mohammad Quaiumuzzaman Khan, Deputy Commissioner AKM Khairul Alam, Khagrachhari Municipality Mayor Joyal Abedin, and Bangladesh Marma Sanghati Oikya Parishad President Kongchari Master, among others, were present.

Paihala Prue Chowdhury was killed on October 22 in a road accident at Patachhara near Ramgarh in Khagrachhari.

All educational institutions in Khagrachhari remained closed yesterday to show respect to the deceased king.

Crown Prince Saching Prue Chowdhury delivered a speech prior to the cremation.

"The Raja had always worked for the welfare of the people and was concerned about their socio-economic development," he said adding that his father had repeatedly requested the government and various non-government organisations to take up development projects in the hill tracts.

Paihala Prue Chowdhury, who was the 7th Mong king, is survived by his wife, a son and two daughters. After the death of the then Mong king and his uncle Neuprue Sain Chowdhury in 1984, the government recognised Paihala Prue as Neuprue's nominee, local sources said.

Paihala was working as the district information officer at that time. He became the Mong Circle Chief, locally known as Mong Raja, in 1991. The government recognised him as the Mong Raja after he won a legal battle with Unika Devi, the step-daughter of Neuprue Sain, in 1998.

Stay orders

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Commission (ACC) had filed both the cases.

On October 16, the HC extended till October 28 the stay orders on Hasina's cases and directed the government not to harass or arrest her within that period.

On October 5, a vacation bench of the HC comprised of Justice Mohammad Anwarul Haque and Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury directed the government not to harass or arrest Hasina at home or abroad until October 20 in the two cases.

Shafiqe yesterday told The Daily Star that a regular appeal was filed on behalf of Hasina with the Supreme Court on October 26 against the HC order rejecting her bail petition in the extortion case lodged by businessman Noor Ali.

The hearing of this petition will be held this week, he said.

Aug 21 case
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discharge petitions the same day.

But Pintu's lawyers submitted a petition seeking adjournment of the charge hearing.

During yesterday's hearing, Pintu's lawyers told the court that their client was implicated in the case on the basis of confessional statements given by Hannan.

In the confessional statement, Hannan had told the magistrate that there was a meeting at Pintu's Dhanmondi government quarters residence before the grenade attack.

Pintu's lawyers argued that there was no legal basis of Hannan's confession and their client should be discharged from the case.

The court then asked the prosecution lawyers to explain on what legal basis charges would be framed against Pintu and others. The prosecution lawyers gave a short explanation on the issue but the court set a new date for an elaborate explanation on the issue.

The case was filed for a grenade attack on an AL rally on Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004, which left 24 people dead and 200 others injured.

Of the accused, Pintu, Mufti Hannan, his brother Mohibullah alias Mafizur Rahman, and 11 others are now in jail. They were produced in the court yesterday.

Pintu's brother Maulana Tajuddin, Liton, Anisul Mursalin, Mahibul Muttakin, Iqbal, Maulana Abu Bakar alias Selim Howlader, Jahangir Alam Badar and Khalilur Rahman have been on the run since the indictment.

On June 11 this year, Assistant Superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Fazlul Kabir, also the investigation officer of the case, submitted charge sheets to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, showing 412 people as prosecution witnesses.

US forces launch

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down and fired on workers inside, the statement said.

The government said civilians were among the dead, including four children.

A resident of the nearby village of Hwijeh said some of the helicopters landed and troops exited the aircraft and fired on a building. He said the aircraft flew along the Euphrates River into the area of farms and several brick factories. The witness spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the information.

Another witness said four helicopters were used in the attack.

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, there have been some instances in which American troops crossed areas of the 370-mile Syria-Iraq border in pursuit of militants, or warplanes violated Syria's airspace. But Sunday's raid was the first conducted by aircraft and on such a large scale. In May 2005, Syria said American fire killed a border guard.

Syria's Foreign Ministry said it summoned the US and Iraqi charges d'affaires to protest against the strike.

"Syria condemns this aggression and holds the American forces responsible for this aggression and all its repercussions. Syria also calls on the Iraqi government to shoul-

der its responsibilities and launch and immediate investigation into this serious violation and prevent the use of Iraqi territory for aggression against Syria," the government statement said.

Syria protested vehemently on Monday over what it said was a US attack on a border village, with the official press branding it a "war crime."

"The American forces from Iraq committed cold-blooded murder, the government newspaper Tishrin wrote. "They committed a war crime in killing eight Syrian civilians in a quiet village."

Syrian state television late Sunday aired footage that showed blood stains on the floor of a site under construction, with wooden beams used to mould concrete strewn on the ground. Akram Hameed, one of the injured, told the television he was fishing in the Euphrates and saw four helicopters coming from the border area under a heavy blanket of fire.

"One of the helicopters landed in an agricultural area and eight members disembarked," the man in his 40s said. "The firing lasted about 15 minutes and when I tried to leave the area on my motorcycle, I was hit by a bullet in the right arm about 20 meters (yards) away," he said.

Obama moves

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rallies in Colorado, Obama was to give a "closing argument speech" in Canton, Ohio that would urge voters to choose "hope over fear, unity over division," aides said.

In his speech, Senator Obama will tell voters that after 21 months and three debates, Senator McCain still has not been able to tell the American people a single major thing he'd do differently from (President) George (W) Bush when it comes to the economy, a campaign statement said.

Obama, fired up by an astonishing prowess at fundraising, was to follow up his Ohio speech with a 30-minute advertisement airing on national networks at huge expense on Wednesday evening.

Republican National Committee spokesman Alex Conant said Obama's "closing argument" amounted to an appeal for voters to hand Washington over to one-party rule as the Democrats prepare to tighten their grip on Congress.

"Obama's latest speech is more of the same empty rhetoric repack-

aged with the urgency of tightening polls and still-undecided voters," he said, attacking the senator as "untested and inexperienced."

McCain's electoral map is shrinking as he battles to hold on to states won by Bush in 2004 such as Iowa, where Sunday he shrugged off national and pivotal state polls that suggest Obama will triumph on November 4.

An ABC News-Washington Post national poll gave Obama a 52-45 percent lead over McCain among likely voters, down from his 54-43 percent margin last week.

McCain will kick off the final full week of his campaign with an economic round table in Cleveland before holding rallies later Monday in Ohio and Pennsylvania, key states where the Republicans believe they can win.

McCain is expected to use the run-in to ram home his attempts to portray Obama as a left-wing close socialist who is secretly planning to raise taxes to pay for increased spending.

The former Navy pilot will also return to his theme of painting Obama as lacking the experience to be an effective commander-in-chief when American troops are embroiled in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Responding to Obama running-mate Joe Biden's remarks last week about the likelihood of a new president facing an international test in office, McCain has repeatedly reminded voters of his war-hero status.

"I've been tested," he told rallies at the weekend.

The White House contenders flew east after sparring in the western states of Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada, which could seal victory for Obama if he can win all the states that Democrat John Kerry captured against Bush in 2004.

But the Democrat is also pursuing a multi-pronged strategy to keep McCain on the ropes in Republican bastions out east including Virginia and North Carolina.

The strategy appears to be bearing fruit. A new Washington Post survey out Monday showed the Illinois senator now leads his Arizona counterpart in Virginia by 52 percent to 44 percent.

BNP ready

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Earlier, her aides requested journalists not to ask her any questions, saying it is just a courtesy meeting with them.

Asked about her enrolment as a voter, the BNP chief said, "Of course I will be listed as voter since I am a citizen of the country."

While in jail, she had refused to be enrolled as a voter despite repeated efforts by the Election Commission.

"Let us see," was her reply to a query on the number of constituencies she would contest from in the coming election.

On seat-sharing among components of the BNP-led four-party alliance, Khaleda said they are yet to decide on the matter but work is going on.

She reiterated the four-party stance on parliamentary election under the state of emergency, saying the alliance decision is in place.

Meanwhile, the alliance leaders had earlier demanded lifting the state of emergency, and repeatedly said they would not take part in election unless it is done.

"We will decide on launching election campaign in consultation with leaders of our party and the alliance following announcement of election schedule," she told a questioner.

On the election manifesto of BNP, she said it is being prepared but it will take more time due to the changed situation. The party seeks to address different issues including terrorism and corruption, she added.

A cheerful Khaleda exchanged greetings with journalists and enquired about the situation in the media. She also thanked them for their role when she was behind bars.

Adviser Iftakhar

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Iftakhar, one of the five-member government panel, which negotiated with the parties, said the emergency rules will be relaxed in phases and a situation created so the emergency does not cause any impediment to free, fair and credible election.

Explaining, he said the first step of relaxation will allow parties to hold meetings and assembly for election campaign. "We'll remove any obstacles felt by the political parties," he said, adding that the relaxation process will start immediately after the announcement of the election schedule on November 2.

Iftakhar hoped the December 18 parliamentary elections will help ensure a very sustainable and stable democracy in Bangladesh.

The adviser said Bangladesh and Commonwealth countries have deep relations