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NDI hopes for quick solution to poll disputes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) yesterday hoped that the caretaker government and the political parties will be able to quickly resolve any outstanding issues in order to ensure a participatory general election.

It said if the elections fail to gain the confidence of the people, they could lead to a continued erosion of the nation's democratic institutions.

A three-member delegation of the US-based organisation read out the observations at a press conference at Hotel Westin in the city.

"The delegation recommends first and foremost that the state of emergency should be lifted as soon as possible and the military accept its proper role in a democratic society and refrain from intervening in the political and electoral process," the NDI

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Telcom watchdog denied 'financial freedom'

BTRC still smarting from ministry rejection, hopes for govt nod

MD HASAN

The Ministry of Finance has rejected the proposal of 'financial autonomy' for Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) saying such independence conflicts with the Constitution.

The BTRC had earlier proposed to amend the Telecommunication Act-2001 and sought to keep 5 percent of the total annual earnings for its expenditure.

The telecom watchdog also proposed that if it failed to spend the 5 percent earnings, it would keep the rest for its welfare and research.

The commission intends to amend the Act so that it can increase its salary structure and spend money as per its own plans.

Mentionable, BTRC's revenue shot up by three times in the last fiscal year from Tk 500 crore to Tk 1,500 crore thanks to operators' licence fees and administra-

tives.

Officials of the ministry say they rejected the BTRC proposal as no organisations in the country require such financial freedom. Besides, a regulator's job is to monitor whether any unlawful activities are occurring in the industry, it should not work as a revenue collector, they add.

The finance ministry says there is no means of spending surplus money for development of any government entity, each of which should be limited within its budgetary allocation.

The ministry sources say some other organisations such as the central bank had also sought such independence long ago. "But due to constitutional obligations that did not happen," comments a high official of the ministry.

The official adds the finance ministry rejected the proposal also because if one gets it, other regulators might seek such independence.

Besides financial autonomy, BTRC

also proposes to amend some other clauses of the Act including strengthening its judicial power.

The commission's final amendment proposal now awaits the cabinet nod. Sources say the proposal might be placed before any cabinet meeting for approval.

Telecom industry insiders fear if the amended Act empowers BTRC excess judiciary activities, it might appear as a 'revenue collector' rather than a regulator.

The telecom operators also criticise the BTRC proposal to build Bangladesh Universal Service Obligation Fund (BUSOF).

Usually, a regulator raises such fund taking money from telecom operators to execute mandatory network rollout of telecom services to the untapped areas, especially rural or geographically unfeasible areas, where operators are reluctant to go.

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JS Secretariat still living in the past

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Parliament Secretariat is still in the days of the BNP-led four-party alliance's rule even after over two years since the last parliament dissolved.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is still the prime minister and leader of parliament and Awami League President the leader of the opposition as per the interior decoration of the House.

The tables reserved for the top two leaders of the House still bear their names as do the tables for the lawmakers of the last parliament, thanks to the generosity of the Parliament Secretariat.

Khaleda was elected prime minister and leader of the House following a landslide victory of the four-party alliance in the general election held on October 1, 2001. Hasina was elected the opposition leader.

All of their tenure expired with the dissolution of the eighth parliament on October 27, 2006 after completion of its five-year term.

The Parliament Secretariat issued a notification in this regard the next day.

When contacted, officials at the Parliament Secretariat said the names were supposed to be removed from the tables after the dissolution of the eighth parliament.

"Maybe, nobody noticed it," a senior official said, adding, "We will remove the names of the former lawmakers when we get the list of lawmakers elected in the upcoming election."

The officials said they had however removed the nameplates

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Hasnat Abdullah gets 14yrs for corruption

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A Barisal court yesterday sentenced absconding Awami League (AL) leader and former chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah to 14 years' rigorous imprisonment in two cases filed on charges of corruption and abuse of power.

Barisal Divisional Special Tribunal Judge AKM Zulfikar Ali also fined Hasnat, cousin of AL President Sheikh Hasina, Tk 1,05,000, in default of which he has to spend 18 months more in prison.

Borhan Reza, sub-inspector of Barisal detective branch of police, filed both the cases with Barisal Kotwali Police Station against Hasnat also district AL secretary, after Tk 6, 13,275 and 355 blank certificates for freedom fighters were seized from Hasnat's residence in Barisal city on October 22, 2002 during anti-crime drive Operation Clean Heart.

Inspector Rafiqul Islam,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Special drive soon to net 2,847 outlaws

AMANUR AMAN, KUSTIA

A special drive will be launched soon by the law-enforcement agencies to arrest outlaws of different parties and groups in 10 southwestern districts in accordance with a fresh list before the forthcoming national election.

Police sources said they have taken the decision as the outlaws and criminals, who had fled after 1/11 political changeover, have started to return their localities and try to regroup under the shelter of their 'political godfathers' ahead of the polls.

They said law enforcement and other intelligence agencies have prepared the list of 2,847 criminals, including 73 top figures of different outlawed parties and gangs and 286 cadres, in May.

According to the sources, 845 of the listed cadres are from Khulna while 434 from Jhenidah, 363 from Bagerhat, 360 from Kustia, 284 from Jessore, 225 from Satkhira, 210 from Chuadanga, 47 each from Meherpur and Narail and 32 from Magura. Most of the criminals are accused in five to 25 criminal cases, including that of murder.

Police said the law enforcement agencies will give more priority to arrest 73 most wanted criminals of different outlawed parties and gangs and 286 cadres.

Decision of the drive has been taken to make the polls free from the influence of underground politics, which is long an important factor in the region, sources said.

Acting Deputy Inspector General of Khulna range Asaduzzaman Miah said the drives would be conducted on the basis of the fresh list of the criminals and outlaws.

Police sources said some leaders of major political parties are directly involved with various criminal groups, including outlawed parties, in the region and they use criminals to establish supremacy in their areas and in vote rigging.

Of the top criminals, most of them are from outlawed parties, including four factions of Purbo Banglar Communist Party

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A mobile court in Chittagong dumps huge quantity of adulterated powdered turmeric and red chilli into the Chaktai canal, only to add to its pollution. Environmentalists in the city have long been demanding initiatives to save the canal from pollution and encroachment.

PHOTO STAR

Arab envoys meet Jamaat Hope for fair polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight Arab envoys in Dhaka yesterday hoped that the upcoming national elections in Bangladesh will be held in a free, fair and neutral manner with participation of all political parties.

"We hope for a good, just and peaceful election," Palestinian Ambassador Shaher Mohammad told reporters after a meeting with Jamaat-e-Islami leaders at the party's central office in the capital's Moghbarar.

Asked whether the war

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Actress Kabori divorced

UNB, Niganj

Famous actress Kabori has been divorced by her husband Shafuddin Sarwar, alias Babu Sarwar, ostensibly for political reasons.

Nominated by Awami League to contest the upcoming parliamentary election from Farullah-4 constituency, Kabori told newsmen that the divorce was part of a conspiracy. "Reason is I've got the AL nomination."

The 62-year-old legendary actress got AL nomination in preference to former

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Indian warship destroys pirate ship off Somalia

Saudi super-tanker held for ransom as 3 more vessels hijacked

AFP, AP, Mogadishu

An Indian warship opened fire at a Somali pirate "mother ship", the navy said yesterday, as bandits demanded a ransom for a Saudi super-tanker seized in the most daring sea raid yet.

The Indian frigate INS Tabar, one of dozens of warships from several countries protecting shipping lanes in the Gulf of Aden, attacked the pirate ship late Tuesday after coming under fire, navy spokesman Nirad Sinha said.

The incident came as shipping groups reported a new surge in hijackings off Somalia and the International Maritime Bureau said pirates based in the lawless African nation were now "out of control".

"The INS Tabar closed in on the mother vessel and asked her to stop for investigation," the New Delhi navy spokesman said.

"But on repeated calls, the vessel's threatening response was that she would blow up the naval warship" if it approached," he added.

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All accused acquitted 16yrs after murder of Titas employee

COURT CORRESPONDENT

All the 33 accused in Billal Hossain Bepary murder case, an employee of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd, were acquitted yesterday as the prosecution failed to prove the charges brought against them.

Judge KM Rasheduzzaman Raja of the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, gave the judgement.

Following an internal feud, a group of unruly officials and employees of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd threw Billal from the sixth floor of its principal office at Karwan Bazar in the city that resulted in his death on July 9, 1992.

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Bar Council polls today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The election to Bangladesh Bar Council, a statutory body regulating the lawyers, will be held today.

The polling will take place for a total of 14 posts of the executive members of the Bar Council. Of the total executive members, seven will be elected to general seats and one each to seven regional group seats.

The elected members in their first meeting will elect a vice-chairman for the Council

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Armed Forces get Int'l ID People Award

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Armed Forces have been awarded "International ID People Award-2008" for preparing more than eight crore voter ID cards with modern information technology within 11 months.

Major General Shafiqul Islam, military secretary of Bangladesh army and Chief of National ID Project, received the award from ID World International Congress on Tuesday at Milan, Italy, an ISPR press release said yesterday.

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Theatre group banned at RU under pressure

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University authorities yesterday banned a theatre group under pressure from Islamic Chhatra Shibir for staging a drama that Shibir claimed to be blasphemous.

RU Registrar Prof Muhammad Shafi issued a press release, banning Dhumketu Natya Sangsad and staging of its drama "Mandar" on the campus.

However, an RU committee formed to review the play did not find anything blasphemous in it.

Sources said although the authorities showed Dhumketu's being unregistered with the Teacher Student Culture Centre as the reason for the ban, it was banned for staging the play on November 3 in protest against removal of baul sculptures from the airport intersection in Dhaka.

Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, observed a strike on the campus demanding punishment to the Udichi activists who performed in the play and threatened to stop the ongoing

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

US missile strike kills 6 in Pakistan

Joint border operation with Pakistan launched

AP, AFP, Islamabad

A suspected US missile strike hit a village deep inside Pakistani territory yesterday, officials said, killing six alleged militants and indicating American willingness to pursue insurgents beyond Pakistan's lawless tribal regions. A major Al-Qaeda operative of Arab origin was among the six militants killed in the missile strike, a senior security official told AFP Wednesday.

Security sources identified the militant as

Abdullah Azam Al-Saudi, a senior member in Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

"He was a senior commander of al-Qaeda and was involved in recruiting and training of fighters," the senior official said.

He is the second high-profile al-Qaeda operative killed in recent US missile strikes in Pakistan's rugged tribal region bordering Afghanistan.

Egyptian al-Qaeda operative Abu Jihad al-Masri, described by the US as the terror

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POLL OBSERVERS

Hearing on objections Nov 23-24

UNB, Dhaka

The hearings on objections raised by some political parties against 25 domestic organisations of election observers will be held on November 23 and 24.

Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda and commissioners Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hussain and M Sohul Hussain will be present at the hearings to be held at the EC secretariat.

Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had earlier filed their objections with the Election

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Prayer Timing		
November 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-05	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-21	5-24
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation