

DIALOGUE WITH 4-PARTY ALLIANCE EC terms it satisfactory, talks with 14-party today

CEC for quick decision as time running out

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday sat with the BNP-led four-party alliance in fresh negotiations to reach a consensus over rescheduling of the parliamentary polls.

It might come up with a decision after talks with the Awami League-led alliance today.

Emerging from the two-hour talks with BNP at around 5:30pm, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said the discussion was satisfactory.

Asked whether the December 18 elec-

tion would be put back by 10 days as demanded by BNP and allies, he said, "We had earlier proposed holding the polls on December 28. Now you'd have to wait for some time to know the decision."

He said it is an issue of national interest. They are working to take a decision as early as possible.

The CEC said they would not disclose much at this moment 'for the sake of a fruitful dialogue'.

An election commissioner requesting not to be quoted told The Daily Star last night that they would talk with AL and the caretaker administration today.

On the other hand, AL spokesman

Syed Ashraf Islam yesterday told reporters that they would respond positively if the EC and the government call for another round of talks.

"We are waiting for their [EC and government] decisions. We'll give our opinion once they make up their mind," he added.

The EC will have to announce a decision by today or early tomorrow as the time for filing candidacy applications in the parliamentary and upazila elections expires tomorrow.

Both the four-party alliance and the EC appeared sparing with their words yesterday.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



The BNP-led alliance team, on the left, holds talks with the election commissioners, right, to settle their four-point demand at the EC Secretariat in the capital yesterday.

Lift restrictions on ex-officials, make room for bill defaulters

4-party tells EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led four-party alliance yesterday asked the Election Commission (EC) to allow all former government officials to contest the upcoming parliamentary polls, lifting the restrictions imposed on some of them.

The alliance also demanded that loan and utility service bill defaulters be allowed to contest the parliamentary election by rescheduling the loan and clearing the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

BNP makes list of 200 candidates, drops 'reformists'

Identifies 50 seats for partners

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN and RASHIDUL HASAN

BNP is revving up for the parliamentary polls now that its chairperson has formally announced the four-party alliance would join the election if it is held on December 28.

Its high-command has already prepared a list of prospective candidates for around 200 constituencies excluding those in Dhaka city. Many former lawmakers who

sided with the pro-reform faction have been dropped off the list, said party sources.

Speaking in return for anonymity, a BNP leader told The Daily Star that they would ask the grassroots level leaders to send their panels of candidates as soon as the election date is settled.

In picking candidates, its parliamentary board will however emphasise the survey reports prepared by its special teams, former student

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

37 parties eligible to contest election: EC

Number significantly drops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) has declared 37 registered political parties eligible for contesting the upcoming ninth parliamentary election.

The number is significantly less than the previous elections because of the strict provision for political parties' registering with the EC. Ninety-six parties took part in the 2001 parliamentary polls.

In a circular issued on November 20, the EC declared the names of the eligible political parties and their electoral symbols.

The parties are Bangladesh Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiya Party led by HM Ershad, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Party (JP) led by Anwar Hossain Manju, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP), Liberal Democratic Party, Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal (ML), Krishak

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Hasina, Khaleda exchange pleasantries

AGENCIES, Dhaka

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia exchanged greetings at a reception on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day at Senakunja in Dhaka cantonment yesterday evening.

The two, in smiles, enquired about each other's welfare standing on the lawn of the Senakunja at about 7:10pm. Guests attending the function cheered--some by clapping--at the sight of their exchanging pleasantries.

Flanked by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and chiefs of the three services, both Hasina and Khaleda looked quite cheerful.

Hasina, clad in a cream colour sari, arrived at Senakunja at 7:00am. After a while, Khaleda wearing an off-white siphon turned up.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5



PHOTO: TV GRAB

A RARE MOMENT: The Awami League and BNP chiefs exchange greetings at Senakunja in Dhaka Cantonment yesterday as they went there to attend the Armed Forces Day reception.

Khaleda for healthy poll atmosphere, Hasina for quick end to emergency

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said her party would take part in the national election if the government creates a congenial atmosphere for it by accepting their preconditions while Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina said the sooner the election is held, the sooner the state of emergency will go.

The two former prime ministers were talking to journalists after attending a

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

ARMED FORCES DAY

FFs are greatest sons of soil: President

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday emphasised preserving the glorious history of the Liberation War of 1971.

"Liberation War is the most significant event in our national history. Freedom fighters are the greatest sons of the soil," he said while addressing a reception accorded to the families of Bir Shresthas and other gallantry-award-winning freedom fighters at the Armed Forces Division at Dhaka Cantonment marking the Armed Forces Day.

Liberation War Affairs Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin, chiefs of the three

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

GOVT BID TO SIT WITH AL No need for talks now, settle issue with BNP: Hasina

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The caretaker government yesterday proposed a dialogue with Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina on its offer for holding the national election on December 28, deferring it by 10 days.

The AL chief however declined to sit with the government now, asking it to settle the matter first with BNP that agreed to participate in the polls if held on the changed date, highly placed sources said.

Commerce and Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman gave the talks proposal to Hasina over telephone.

The former prime minister told the adviser there is no need to discuss the matter with her now, the sources added.

AL insiders said the party has no 'major objection' to taking part in the parliamentary election on December 28 if the government and Election Commission (EC) formally announce the new date after ensuring participation of all major political parties, especially BNP-led four-party alliance. But the party would maintain its stance on holding the election on December 18

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

AL men in Ctg, Rajshahi call to review some nominations

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Leaders and supporters of Awami League (AL) here expressed mixed reaction over party nomination in some constituencies while a few of those nominated are still in doubt as heavyweight alliance leaders are seeking to get those.

A number of leaders and activists of AL Sandwip upazila at a press conference here yesterday (Friday) demanded that the AL central committee review the nomination for Chittagong-16 (Sandwip) seat. They urged the AL Parliamentary Board to nominate Mahfuzur Rahman Mita, son of former lawmaker Mostafizur Rahman, cancelling the present nomination.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

SERIES OF CRISES HIT INDUSTRY

Jute export prices lower than production cost

PORIMOL PALMA

Jute industry in the country is facing a crisis due to a fall in demand and prices of jute products because of the global financial recession, increase in production cost and devaluation of rupee in India, the main competitor of Bangladesh in the export market for jute goods.

Sources in the export-oriented industry said prices of jute products in international market have already decreased by about 15 percent. If the trend continues, most of the jute mills will have to suspend production, and this will threaten livelihoods of around 80 thousand workers in the industry comprising about 150 mills, they added.

"Production in many jute mills has already been suspended and many others are incurring huge losses as they are exporting their products at prices lower than production costs," said

Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association (BJS) Chairman Shabbir Yusuf.

He feared the situation will worsen if effective steps are not taken in this regard. "We have been urging the government to address our problems but it went unheeded."

He mentioned that their suggestions include reducing interest rate on running capital loaned by commercial banks, increasing export subsidy and creating a crisis fund for jute industry.

BJS Secretary Shahidul Karim said jute spinning mills are the worst affected now as yarn is used in preparing carpets but their sales in the Western countries have dropped significantly due to a slump in real estate business.

At least 51 spinning mills exported around three lakh tonnes of yarn out of the 5.84 lakh tonnes of jute products exported last fiscal year.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

PRE-POLLS DRIVE Steps taken to recover illegal arms, arrest criminals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin yesterday said the government has asked the law enforcement agencies to recover illegal firearms and arrest the criminals who might be a threat to holding a free, fair and peaceful general election.

Meanwhile, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Meghna bridge opens to ease traffic jam

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Thousands of passengers travelling on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway suffered a lot on both sides of Meghna bridge due to severe traffic jam caused by the repair works of the bridge.

Police sources said the Meghna bridge was opened for vehicular movement at 12:00 noon by stopping the repair work of expansion at the joints as over four-kilometre long traffic jam was created on the highway.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR

Locals throw water at burning shanties at a slum in the city's Hazaribagh area in desperate attempt to douse the flames that eventually gutted around 200 houses yesterday.

200 shanties gutted at Hazaribagh

20 injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 200 shanties were gutted and at least 20 people were injured in a devastating fire that broke out at Ganakuli Sweeper Colony in the city's Hazaribagh yesterday.

Sources said the fire originated from a kitchen in the colony around 11:00am and engulfed nearby houses rapidly.

On information, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel and 14 fire engines rushed to the spot and initially struggled to put the blaze out due to lack of water supply. It took them over two hours to bring the fire under control.

After the fire, several hundred people were seen staying under the open sky losing their homes.

Matin Miah, a Dhaka City Corporation sweeper who lost his home, said, "I was bathing in tap water when I heard cries for help. The fire spread to my neighbouring house."

"The fire broke out from a kitchen when a woman left the kitchen while food was being cooked," he added.

He said they were busy in rescuing his children and others during the fire but could not save their belongings.

Nurul Huq, assistant director of Fire Service and Civil

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Talking polls and beyond

Govt gave in to pressure from fundamentalists

Says Ayesha Khanam

SHAMIM ASHRAF

Women's rights activist Ayesha Khanam criticised the government for giving in to pressure from fundamentalists on the Women's Development Policy 2008.

"It's a setback for the government. They couldn't muster the courage to say no to a small group of people who violated the emergency rules," she told The Daily Star in an interview.

"It's a double standard; it's contrary to the government's past promises."

She said the fundamentalists took to the streets protesting equal rights for women and their access to resources though, interestingly, the two issues were not even included in the policy.

Ayesha hoped that political parties will field more women candidates in the next general election.

Women's organisations have already given a list of about 60 non-partisan women to the Awami League (AL) to consider them for the AL-led alliance ticket, she said.

They would hand in a similar list to the BNP-led combine, she said adding that the recommended women can



SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Muggers, police clash at Bhawal nat'l garden

A CORRESPONDENT

Muggers clashed with police in the deep forest of Bhawal National Garden at Nandua under Gazipur Sadar Friday morning.

Police opened 28 rounds of bullets during the clash at around 11:00 am. They arrested Monir Hossain, 32 and Rezaul Karim, 27. Both of them received bullets in the legs.

Police nayek Ripon Miah, 35, who was seriously injured by the muggers' sharp weapon has been admitted into Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Joydeipur thana second officer Nazmul Islam Khan said, many people coming to the National Garden on holiday with their families are becoming victims to muggers on Fridays. A plainclothes police team led by nayek Ripon Miah from police line took position in the Garden from morning.

At around 11:00 am police arrested one mugger with a

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1