

Indefinite strike

FROM PAGE 16 their interviews for freshmen and many departments could not publish their first year admission test result.

The agitating employees at around 7:00am locked the RU main gate and laid siege to the administrative building. They also went to science, arts and commerce faculty buildings, central library, deans' offices and RU transport office and locked them down in presence of a large number of policemen.

They gathered at different spots on campus and asked teachers, officers, employees and students to leave the campus. The university opened yesterday after 15 days of Eid holidays.

Most of the scheduled classes and exams could not be held. They also chased away university officers and employees when they tried to open their department offices.

Mahmudur Rahman, a teacher of business faculty, strongly criticised university authorities and the police for not taking any action against the unruly employees.

Around noon, the employees held a rally in front of the administrative building in presence of the police.

They chanted slogans against pro-Awami League teachers, the RU acting vice-chancellor and University Grants Commission (UGC) chairman for not confirming their jobs. They said they will continue the strike until their jobs are confirmed.

Jahangir Hossain, assistant commissioner of police Mother zone, told newsmen that the university authorities did not give them any direction on how to tackle the employees' agitation.

Denying the allegation that RU authorities were backing the agitating employees, Prof Mannunul Keramat said he

informed higher authorities about their agitation.

The agitating workers were employed during the BNP-led four-party alliances regime amid widespread allegations that they were employed disregarding rules of employment.

Duta elections

FROM PAGE 16 Akhtaruzzaman, Prof Momtaj Uddin Ahmed and Dr Zinat Huda Wahid of Blue Panel are vying for the posts of vice president, treasurer and joint secretary respectively.

White Panel nominees Dr Chowdhury Mahmud Hasan, Dr Jahangir Alam Chowdhury and Prof Muhammad Lutfur Rahman are also running for the respective posts.

Ten member candidates of Blue Panel are Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Prof Rim Aminur Rashid, Prof Kazi Shahidullah, Dr Zayed Ahmed, Prof Fakhrul Alam, Prof Mohammad Aminul Haq Bhuiyan, Dr Mohamamd Kamal Uddin, Prof Harun-or Rashid and Prof Syed Monjurul Islam.

Member candidates of White Panel are Prof Sadul Amin, the incumbent president of the association, Prof Tasmer SA Islam, Dr AKM Sirajul Islam Khan, Prof Abul Bashar, Prof Zahidul Islam, Prof Mozammel Haq, Dr Nevina Farida, Dr Laila Noor, Prof Shahjahan Miah and Prof Mohammad Abdus Sattar.

Election of the association for the year 2008 could not be held due to a stay order by a Dhaka court.

Polling would be held from 10:00am to 2:00pm at Duta office without any break.

Prof Fazole Elahi of Social Science department will function as election commissioner.

Last election of the association was held on December 31, 2006.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1 claimed that the Awami League is supporting the government activities.

"They [apparently the caretaker government] want to make the country a vassal state and a particular party assisted them to obtain power through the back door," Khaleda said in an election rally on Bashail Court premises.

She addressed at least 10 rallies yesterday and thousands of her supporters thronged the rallies in processions. Carrying the BNP electoral symbol, the enthusiastic men and women chanted slogans expressing their support for BNP candidates.

Many gathered on roadsides to have a glimpse of Khaleda on her way to the rallies.

Khaleda termed the December 29 elections very significant and urged people to vote for the BNP-led four-party alliance candidates. "The elections slated for December 29 is a momentous one for the people and the country."

The former premier said, "The country needs a government that can lead it forward and only BNP can ensure this and only the four-party alliance can bring prices of essentials within the reach of common people." She promised people three meals a day if voted to power.

"BNP is fundamentally different from other parties as it does not believe in the politics of terrorism, hartal, chaotic atmosphere and arson," she claimed.

Khaleda Zia said the BNP-led alliance will return to power with two-thirds majority as she sees a wave of public support in favour of sheaf of paddy, the election symbol of BNP.

"It is BNP that can protect and uphold Islamic values in Bangladesh," she said.

At the rallies she introduced to the people nominees of four-party alliance including Tanbir Ahmed Siddiqui for Gazipur-1, Lutfar Rahman Khan Azad for Tangail-3, Lutfar Rahman Matin for Tangail-4, Mahmudul Hasan for Tangail-5, advocate Ahmed Azam Khan for Tangail-8, Hasanuddin Sarker for Gazipur-2, Prof MA Mannan for Gazipur-3, Fakir Mahub Anam Swapan for Tangail-1, Sultan Salahuddin Tuku for Tangail-2, AKM Mosharraf Hossain for Mymensingh-4 and Mohammad Zakir Hossain for Tangail-5.

After the rally at Bhaluka, the BNP chief started for Dhaka at around 11.

Check further

FROM PAGE 1 a free, fair and acceptable election on December 29.

He asked the government officials to perform their election duties with utmost neutrality and sincerity and not to bow to any pressure.

The head of the caretaker government gave the directives during an opinion exchange meeting with the government officials of Barisal division at the local Circuit House in the afternoon as part of preparatory steps ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

This was the fourth of such meeting after the first one in Khulna divisional headquarters on December 1 followed by Rangpur and Sylhet.

Home Adviser Major Gen (ret'd) MA Matin, Cabinet Secretary M Abdul Aziz, Home Secretary Abdul Karim, DCs, SPs, UNOs, metropolitan police commissioner, DIG of police, Barisal region, senior officials of BDR, Ansar and intelligence agencies and election-related officials of the division were present.

Barisal Divisional Commissioner Mezbaul Alam made welcome address and conducted the meeting.

The CA asked for heightening intelligence vigilance so that the absconding terrorists cannot enter the country to create chaos (ahead of the polls).

He said the main objective of the present caretaker government is to hold two elections--parliament and upazila parishad elections--in a free, fair and credible manner.

The CA thanked the whole administration, the Election Commission and all concerned for carrying out relentless work to achieve the goal. The good ending of the journey of this government will take place through holding the election peacefully and keeping post-election situation peaceful, he said.

He forewarned that a little deviation or negligence could smash the achievements of the caretaker government. "And in this case the nation would not forgive us," he told the officials.

He gave a package of guidelines and decisions dividing those in three phases--before, during and after the polls.

'Dour' Salahuddin

FROM PAGE 16 is now divided into two camps, but some party men said they are working against party nominee Salahuddin and did not even attend Chairperson Khaleda Zia's rally for him on Friday.

On May 5, 2006, thousands of residents of Shanir Akhra in Demra chased Salahuddin as an extreme outburst of anger and resentment at the existing acute crisis of water and electricity. Salahuddin ran away in the face of people's demonstration and later came to be mockingly called "Dour Salahuddin".

The former lawmaker has served in jail for about two years over many charges including money laundering, arms cases and other criminal offences after the January 11 changeover.

Babla, who was the area's lawmaker during HM Ershad's regime, also faces allegations of criminal activities while supporters of Mollah, who is now behind bars facing many charges, is campaigning on his behalf with election symbol boat.

Dhaka-5 constituency presently consists of Demra, a part of Jatrabari and a part of Shyampur.

In the 2001 election, Salahuddin defeated AL's Mollah securing 1,51,244 votes, which is 52.05 percent of the total votes cast while Mollah got 1,23,020 votes (42.34 percent) and Babla got 15,133 votes (5.20 percent).

The total votes in the seat this time is 3,61,823.

Hasina

FROM PAGE 1 country's southwest part.

Hasina pledged to bring down the price of essentials, increase power generation, make education up to degree level free, set up more schools and colleges, give job to one of each family and ease traffic congestion in the capital.

Terming the AL-led grand alliance the 'deliverers' and the BNP-led coalition 'looters', the former premier alleged that the BNP-led coalition government looted crores of taka during its tenure and siphoned off the money abroad, he said.

"Now decide who you are going to elect," said the AL president urging the people to vote for boat.

Earlier, Hasina went to the Square Hospital to see her ailing husband Dr M Wazed Miah, who has been receiving treatment there since December 10.

The AL chief will address several election rallies in Tangail and Mymensingh today.

Be graceful losers

FROM PAGE 1 Bangladesh has a bright future provided the political parties are honest, prudent and have the attitude to learn from the past.

"It is necessary to look at what happened to the politics in Bangladesh since '91. The political parties should clearly admit to their faults and talk about what lessons they learned. If they fail to do so, the potential will not be materialised," he said.

Prof Riaz said the political parties pledged what they will do if they go to power, but did not pledge what they will do if they are in the opposition. "They should declare how they will treat the opposition if they are in the ruling seat," he added.

Emphasising on the need for an effective parliament, legal expert Dr M Zahir said arrangements should be there that members of parliament (MPs) will lose their jobs if they remain absent from the parliament for 90 consecutive days.

He said the article 70 of the constitution should be amended to ensure that all members of the parliament may speak freely. "Otherwise, the parliament becomes a dictatorship of the majority," he asserted.

Former adviser to a caretaker government Sultana Kamal said, "As a shadow government, the opposition must play its role to ensure checks and balances in the government."

She said the next government should continue some good initiatives of the present caretaker government including the drive against corruption, activate the Human Rights Commission, implement the Right to Information Act, and try to remove criminals.

Emphasising on improving the lives of the common people, economist Dr Atiur Rahman said corruption eats up a major share of the resources the poor are entitled to, therefore curbing corruption and reforming the administration is very important.

He suggested forming a high-level committee to address the impacts of the global financial crisis, saying that export income and remittance are likely to be affected by

Md Mahmudul Hasan, a resident of Bibir Bagicha of Jatrabari who is voting for the first time, told The Daily Star that the area has various problems but those are not addressed properly.

"I do not find any one in the area fit for representing us in parliament. So, I think many people may choose to cast 'no vote'," he said.

Ekrumul Haque Chowdhury a businessman of Jatrabari said Salahuddin, who is now trying to mend his bad image, might get some advantage as the grand alliance is divided into two camps as Mollah is now back in the poll race.

Meanwhile, JP leaders and activists think that their candidate has more chances to be elected as he is the official candidate of the grand alliance. They, however, want the confusion among party activists removed and AL candidate Mollah to be withdrawn.

Rafiqul finds

FROM PAGE 16 the ACC shouldn't have revealed this statement at this time as it has caused a colossal harm to BNP in the upcoming election," he said.

"About 88 percent cases of the ACC is politically motivated," Rafiqul Haque told reporters following a discussion on 'Tobacco Control Act and the National Parliament Election' in the National Press Club in the capital.

The Association for Prevention of Drug Abuse, Bangladesh organised the seminar urging the authorities concerned to keep polling centres smoking free during the national and local government polls.

Speaking as the chief guest, Rafiqul Haque urged the electronic and print media to focus on the Tobacco Control Act, to make people refrain from smoking in the polling centres.

Saying it is the proper time to implement the Tobacco Control Act, leaders of the association placed a set of proposals to the Election Commission including proposals for restricting smoking in the polling centres, restricting sale of tobacco products in polling areas, and for putting up 'smoke free zone' signs in the centres.

Law enforcing agencies also must enforce the law strictly, the proposal said.

With physician Maj Gen (ret'd) AR Khan in the chair, the discussion was also participated by Prof Arup Ratnan Chowdhury, founding president of the association, and actor Elias Kanchan.

Polls symbol

FROM PAGE 1 aspirants for Chandpur-1 and Comilla-10 constituencies to contest the election as independent candidates.

The RO of Comilla-10 constituency allocated BNP's electoral symbol 'sheaf of paddy' to Abdul Gafur Bhuiyan following a court order.

He also allocated 'deer' symbol to Mobashwer Alam Bhuiyan, who earlier got the BNP's electoral symbol, as an independent candidate.

RO Manzurur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday over telephone that he allocated the symbol to Mobashwer as per the EC directive.

"Initially, I did not allocate any symbol to Mobashwer Alam Bhuiyan. But later I did so after receiving the commission's directive," he said.

Another RO in Chandpur-1 constituency did not allocate any symbol to Mir Mohammad Iqbal Hossain, who earlier got AL's electoral symbol 'boat'.

The RO on Friday amended the candidate's list and allocated 'boat' symbol to Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, who got back candidacy following a court order. As per the electoral laws, an individual seeking to be an independent candidate must submit signatures of one percent voters in his constituency with the application for candidacy.

Talking to The Daily Star over the telephone yesterday, RO AKM Shahidur Rahman said he did not allocate electoral symbol to Iqbal as the electoral laws do not permit him to do so.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hussain, however, said they are bound to follow the court orders.

"We shall implement the court orders even if it is against the Representation of the People Order," Sakawat told reporters at his office yesterday.

Asked whether multiple candidates of a party will contest the election from a single constituency, the election commissioner said the parties will have to decide on it.

"If a party fails to do so, both of its nominees will contest the election," he said.

Meanwhile, Mobashwer Alam Bhuiyan, whose electoral symbol 'sheaf of paddy' was scrapped, filed a complaint with the EC yesterday claiming that the RO did not act in line with the court order.

The Appellate Division gave orders to accept Abdul Gafur Bhuiyan's nomination. But it did not give any directives to allocate 'sheaf of paddy' to him as electoral symbol, said Mobashwer's counsel and eminent jurist M Zahir in a written prayer to the EC.

Documents show that the RO cancelled Gafur Bhuiyan's nomination during scrutiny as he filed nomination paper as both a BNP and an independent candidate. The EC also rejected Gafur's appeal against the RO's decision.

Talking to reporters at the EC Secretariat yesterday, Mobashwer said he would go to the court to challenge the RO's decision of allocating 'sheaf of paddy' symbol to Gafur Bhuiyan if the EC does not take any action in this regard.

Shakhawat

FROM PAGE 1 This happens because the administration has not been made neutral, he said adding that the Election Commission (EC) requested the government to transfer officials in April so that the Commission could observe them.

Shakhawat said officials were then replaced but still there are allegations of partisanship against many of them. "This is injurious to a country. This must be changed as a democratic society can't be established without changing partisan administration."

He said the EC held meetings with deputy commissioners (DCs), returning officers and superintendents of police (SPs), but many of the officials are not active enough to work neutrally considering their future.

The Election Commissioner said widespread criticism about the democratic institutions may sometime create lack of credibility in public mind and so the criticism should be very constructive.

"The EC wanted to set up an internationally-recognised guidelines for media during the polls. But we finally gave it up as it was heavily protested," he said.

He said the EC has made many laws during a short period of time. There might be loopholes in the laws and those need to be amended later. Shakhawat said adding that he wanted cooperation of the MPs in this regard.

"There are 2,000 plus manpower in the EC and around 50 percent of them are unfit for various reasons," he said.

Internet services improve after cable cut

AFP, Paris

A French ship yesterday took experts to repair broken undersea Mediterranean cables that caused severe disruption to telephone and Internet services across the Middle East and Asia, France Telecom said.

But many operators said communications services had improved as alternative routes had been used to carry calls and Internet information.

The France Telecom cable ship Raymond Croze left Seyne-sur-Mer, southern France, on Friday night and was expected to be on the scene of the damage, between Sicily and Tunisia, on Monday, a spokesman said.

Egypt was one of countries worst affected by Friday's incident, but state news agency MENA reported that Internet communications there would be restored to more than half of normal capacity on Saturday.

Egypt announced on Friday that it was rerouting Internet services to back-up cables and satellite.

The disruption also affected countries as far away as Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, but most reported services returning to normal on Saturday.

The cables are jointly owned by several dozen different countries. One cable is 40,000 kilometres long and links 33 different countries while a second is 20,000 kilometres long and serves 14 states.

An official of Mumbai-based Reliance Communications blamed a ship's anchor dragging off the Egyptian port of Alexandria. France Telecom also said this was a "probable" cause of the disruption.

One cable appeared to be fully severed, while the other two seemed to be only partially cut, he added.

France Telecom said that temporary rerouting of communications had reduced the disruption for clients, especially as traffic was lower at the weekend. Business communication links between Europe and India had been diverted via the United States.

Hasina at terror risk

FROM PAGE 1 have warned Bangladesh that a six-member suicide squad of the banned Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji) has been trained to assassinate Hasina."

It added that an officer of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence operating under the name Ethesham has trained the Huji men for two months at Kaliganj in Sathkira.

Inspector General of Police Nur Muhammad and Additional Director General of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Col Gulzar Uddin Ahmed told The Daily Star that they did not have any reports in this regard.

"If we find it [the news] to be correct, we'll of course take necessary steps," said Gulzar.

SSF security for Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia was withdrawn on February 22 last year and given back on November 3.

Both the leaders are now campaigning across the country for the December 29 general election.

At the end of September, AL expressed fear of militant attacks in the run-up to the polls.

"We have information in this regard," AL acting general secretary Syed Ashraful Islam told reporters after a meeting with British envoy Duncan Norman who too spoke of similar fears.

Asked if they had already had the information and apprised Hasina of it, the DG of SSF said, "I brief the two leaders [Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina] about our threat assessment at times."

He however would not elaborate on the issue.

Sources said names of Huji and JMB were categorically mentioned to Hasina as sources of threats. While Huji had made attempts on her life before, JMB poses danger to everyone and everything standing up for secularism and progressive ideals.

Khaleda too has been alerted to dangers from Huji and JMB. She faces threats from the Islamist outfits as her government banned the groups following a series of countrywide blasts and killings in 2005.

Strong quake off Japan, no damage

AFP, Tokyo

A strong 6.5 magnitude earthquake struck yesterday off the east coast of Japan but there was no damage or injuries, officials said.

The quake hit 139 kilometres east-southeast of Iwaki in Fukushima prefecture in the north of Japan's main island of Honshu, meteorologists said.

A Fukushima police official said that there were no reports of damage or injuries.

The earthquake struck at 7:29 pm (10:29 GMT) and was a shallow 10 kilometres deep, the Japanese and US meteorological agencies said.

The Japan Meteorological Agency said there was no tsunami, although there might be "slight sea level changes" due to the earthquake.

The quake was followed by aftershocks of magnitude 5.1 and 5.5, the US Geological Survey said.

The SSF DG said they have further improved security of the leaders after the recent militant attacks in neighbouring India and Pakistan.

In response to yesterday's news, the security procedures for Hasina and Khaleda, who ruled the country alternately since restoration of democracy in 1990, have been tightened even more.

"We have beefed up security in the areas Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to visit next," Gen Ashraf said.

Protection layers surrounding her have been increased, keeping in mind the throwing-range of grenades.

One has to negotiate a number of counter-measures to launch an attack on her, he continued.

"While arranging security, we also have to make sure her campaigning is not hampered. Considering this, we are now trying to deal with the matter the way the developed countries usually do."

Sources said SSF personnel sometimes have to compromise on the safety checks because of over-zealous partymen.

AL presidium member Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "Party leaders should behave responsibly when it comes to her [Hasina's] security. Likewise, the government should work with greater responsibility."

Meanwhile, law enforcers posted along the border and in ports have been alerted as explosives used in the attempt on Hasina's life on August 21, 2004, Kibria killing on January 27, 2005, and the attack on British high commissioner in Sylhet on May 21, 2004 were found to have been smuggled in from abroad.

Unsubstantiated

FROM PAGE 1 political parties will participate in the election with a positive attitude to hold a free and fair election," said Lamsdroff.

He said he is convinced that the EC is working sincerely to have everything in order. It faces huge workload as it is taking preparations for both national and upazila elections.

Lamsdroff hailed lifting of the state of emergency and said deployment of army to help ensure a congenial atmosphere for polls is a constructive effort that does not contradict international norms.

"It is the responsibility of all sides to accept election result. The losing side has to accept it as in the next election they can be the winning side," he observed.

Replying to another question over violation of election code of conduct by candidates, he urged all concerned to substantiate such violations and to share the information with the EU mission.

"An atmosphere ensuring people's participation in election process without fear has been created," he said responding to a query.

A total of 150 EU observers will visit polling centres across the country on voting day.

They will strictly monitor whether minority communities, indigenous people and non-Muslims can cast votes freely.

The EU chief observer urged the authorities to take special measures to ensure a congenial atmosphere at the 950 vulnerable polling centres.

No easy going yet

FROM PAGE 1 The commission first planned to go to the apex court to appeal the latest rulings that have cleared candidacy of 21 individuals it ruled out. But it opted not to do that at this time as the move might hamper holding of the parliamentary election on scheduled sources said.

According to the EC and Bangladesh Bank (BB), around 80 individuals have obtained court orders in favour of their candidacy.

The EC has been made respondent in over 30 cases while the central bank in the rest.

For the commission, the courts issued direct orders and asked it to file regular appeal later. For BB, the rulings came as stay on their including certain candidates in the list of loan defaulters.

The candidates in question will have to go to the courts for hearing after expiry of the stays.

The commission will contest the cases if necessary in consultation with BB, sources in the EC said.

As per the electoral laws, if a polls winner is finally proved to have been disqualified by the EC justly, his parliamentary membership shall be revoked and a fresh election will be held.

At least 48 individuals obtained stay orders from the Supreme Court on operation of the central bank's decision to list them as loan defaulters and filed nominations to contest the parliamentary polls, said a senior BB official.

He said the bank has already assigned lawyers to contest the cases against its list of defaulters.

The official said the number might be even higher as some candidates obtained stay orders much before the announcement of the polls

50,000 army

FROM PAGE 16 yesterday. Earlier on December 17, they returned to barracks following withdrawal of the state of emergency by the caretaker government.

"Armed forces have been deployed. We have no plan yet to give them duty to recover arms. They will perform their duties as strike force," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) Sakawat Hossain told reporters yesterday.

The election commissioner urged all political parties and their candidates and supporters not to indulge in violence during election period. "We are inquiring into the reported pre-election violence at different places," Sakawat said, adding that punitive measures will be taken if anyone is found involved.

He said they have already asked the intelligence agencies to catch red-handed if anybody tries to buy votes.

One battalion of troops will remain stationed at each district. They will swing into action as soon as the returning officer seeks assistance.

schedule.

Besides, the EC earlier included 11 in the final list of candidates on court orders though it had screened them out for defaulting on loans and utility service bills and concealing information.

The commission on Thursday decided to allow 21 such candidates to be in the polls. The