

# Hold regular polls

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"We have to get to the root of the problem. Students alone are not responsible for the present crisis in student politics."

Prof Syed Anwar Hossain, a leading historian, said he shares the opinion that political parties must sever the relations with student bodies to bring about a qualitative change in politics.

But, he cautioned, cutting the links overnight might lead to members of the de-linked bodies getting involved in extortion and violence at an even more alarming rate.

Dr Anwar Hossain, a former general secretary of Dhaka University Teachers Association, said a consensus between the ruling and opposition parties is a must to bail student politics out of its sorry state.

Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh, said a key reason for decaying student movement is links between the student bodies and their parent-political parties.

He and the other speakers however said they are against banning student politics. They said they rather want efforts to free politics from money and muscle.

Students leading the leading role in all achievements of the nation--from Language Movement in 1952 to restoration of democracy after 1/11 political changeover in 2007, they observed.

Prof Siraj Uddin said, "Ban is not the solution. We have to work for restoring its past glory."

But student leaders and workers must not be allowed to get away with their involvement in tender manipulation, extortion, admission trade and other misdeeds.

Manna, a former VP of DU central student union, said, "Definitely, student politics could not be put on right track without the good will of the two leaders [Hasina and Khaleda]."

Muscle and money hold huge sway over student politics. To see off the menace, the chiefs of the two parties must reach a consensus, as "nothing happens without their consent," he observed.

A few speakers urged political parties to practise democracy within organisations to bring change in the political culture. They also wanted student politics to be about educational institutions.

They also said that student politics should be called "student movement".

"The political parties must practise democracy and sever links with student bodies, among other steps, to bring back the past glory of student politics," Asif Nazrul said. He pointed out 17 kinds of crimes that take place in the name of student politics. He said these crimes must be stopped.

He stressed the need for action against troublemakers on campuses as per law and proposed forming of a "Campus Crime Trial Act" for ensuring immediate punishment to the offenders.

The Daily Star Editor said the glorious past of student politics has to be restored. He identified two major reasons for the current dismal state of student politics: deterioration of the quality of student politics and money and muscle.

He said once student politics played a role in building bright future for students but now it is destroying their future.

The speakers said the nation would get its future leadership through elections to student unions. They said election would also help stop the criminalisation of student politics.

"We have been demanding elections to Ducus since the present government came to office but the university authorities have taken no effective steps so far," Bangladesh Chhatra League President Mahmud Hassan Ripon said.

Vowing to hold the 20-year-old elections to Ducus, the DU vice-chancellor said, "If Ducus election is held, it will help produce country's future leadership." He, however, said a congenial atmosphere and cooperation of all student bodies are a must for holding the election.

Prof Arefin said if the basic needs like accommodation of students can be fulfilled, the quality of student politics would improve gradually.

Menon, president of Workers Party of Bangladesh and a lawmaker, said student politics should be independent of influence.

Prof MM Akash placed a six-point recommendation to put student politics back on track including the involvement of students in development work and movements that concern students' problems, cultural activities, and distributing their subjects on merit.

The JU VC suggested that aged people be excluded from student politics and intruders be expelled from student bodies.

Akhtaruzzaman, a central leader of AL, said students act very nicely when the army rules this country but they cannot act as well when there is democracy.

Ranu, BNP lawmaker from women's reserved quota, said only students should get involved in student politics.

Ripon said everybody sees the negative role of student politics but just a few months ago during 1/11, students protested the emergency rules and helped restore democracy in the country.

Manobendra, president of Bangladesh Chhatra Union, alleged that the parent organisations of student bodies are exploiting student leaders in their own interest and backing them in tender manipulation and other illegal activities.

Bappadiya, president of Bangladesh Chhatra Moitree, blamed teachers' politics and politicised university administration for the deteriorating student politics.

Mamun, former president of DU JCD, expressed frustration over the fact that meritorious students prefer paying attention to their studies rather than joining student politics.

"Once they join student politics, the top positions will be filled by them."

Imran, an advocate of Supreme Court and former BCL leader, said student politics and units of student bodies should be centred in educational institutions rather than wards, unions, upazilas or districts.

Sonika Sharmin Swarna, a master's student of Fine Arts Institution of DU and a central BCL leader, said the power of the student bodies is concentrated in two or three leaders; it has to be decentralised.

Shanta, a student of DU linguistics department, said those who are involved in student politics rely on muscle power now.

Kaniz Fatema, DU student of computer science and engineering department, said key student bodies do not talk about the development of the university.

Kajal, a student of finance department of DU, said they are forced to get involved in student politics for a bed in any of the dormitories.

# EC to meet

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Daily Star yesterday.

Strict electoral code of conduct has already brought changes in the traditional culture of electioneering.

This time the atmosphere during filing of applications seeking candidacy with the returning officer was different than in the past as none was allowed to hold rallies or bring out processions.

The code of conduct will not even allow any contestant to hold rallies during the electoral campaign period.

The EC has also planned to reform recruitment of polling agents of candidates. Polling agents now must be voters of the areas concerned and they will have to carry their national identity cards with them.

Candidates will provide the polling agents with armband. No polling agent can leave polling stations without informing the presiding officers or other election officials the reason for this.

If they fail to do so, their allegations of being forced by opponents to leave the polling centres will not be taken into consideration after the polls, according to the EC decision.

"We want to change the culture of rejection of polls result by defeated candidates," Sakhawati said.

He also said he will hold a meeting with officials of law enforcement agencies during his visit to Chittagong. The meeting might be held on June 5.

# No confusion over war trial Says law minister

UNB, Dhaka

Law Minister Barrister Shafiq Ahmed yesterday reiterated the war criminals would be tried and there should no confusion about it.

"The government has already taken all necessary steps with special allocation of funds for the trial of war criminals," he said adding that none will be able to stop it by dishing out misleading statements against the trial.

He made the remarks while talking to journalists after a workshop on Sensitisation of Adolescent Issues held at BRAC Inn Centre yesterday.

Concerned Women for Family Development organised the workshop. Professor of Dhaka University Women and Gender Studies department Mahmuda Islam presided over the workshop.

Earlier, addressing the workshop as chief guest the law minister said the government will take necessary steps to ensure exemplary punishment for those who are responsible for early marriages.

"There are some limitations in the existing laws and it apparently remains ineffective as the punishment is inadequate. The government won't hesitate to enact tougher law to stop early marriages," Shafiq said urging all to assist the government with necessary suggestions.

Shafiq said birth registration would have to make mandatory to check the early marriage. "Poor financial state and illiteracy are the key causes behind the early marriages."

He hoped that the rate of early marriages would come down if financial solvency and light of education are ensured for all.

Termining early marriage a curse for society, Shafiq said country's population growth would also come down remarkably through preventing early marriage.

He said the government is women-friendly and it is determined to ensure empowerment of women.

# Rivals go out

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Mohiuddin Chowdhury had long-drawn conflicts with both Binod Bihari and Das Gupta over possession of a two-acre land known as "Poshu Shala".

The land was bought by non-Bangalee Hindu traders in 1951 to build a cattle farm and is now owned by the Animal Protection Society.

Rana Das Gupta told the Daily Star that Mohiuddin had made attempts to take possession of the land five months after his victory in the last CCC polls, held in 2005. He did so even after "we extended our support to him and played a role behind his victory in 2005 polls".

Manjur yesterday also visited Kadamtali residence of BNP Chittagong city unit Senior Vice-President Dastagir Chowdhury, who earlier strongly opposed the party decision of nominating him.

Meanwhile, in a masterly move to woo the apparent foes, Mohiuddin embraced his intra-party rival and local AL lawmaker Nurul Islam BSc at a condolence meeting at Chittagong Press Club at 5:00pm yesterday.

Both of them were attending the condolence meeting of Nilufer Kaiser, former president of Mohila Awami League Chittagong city unit and wife of AL presidium member Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser.

Standing up on the dais, Mohiuddin said he had one task to do and a moment later he pulled Nurul Islam up and embraced him and raised their hands up together much to the surprise of the audience, who are not familiar with such fraternity among AL ranks in Chittagong.

Before this, Mohiuddin also attended a mezbani (feast) at the Ladies Club yesterday afternoon where he met AL presidium member Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser, lawmaker from Chittagong-12 constituency Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu, also father of former Chittagong Chamber president Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed who also collected nomination form but didn't submit it.

He also joined a number of views exchange meetings of Nagorik Committee in different areas of the city including Bepari Para, Diamond Community Centre in Sarai Para and Gulshan Club in Kazir Dewry.

Meanwhile, BNP city unit president Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury sent a letter to the returning officer yesterday urging him to change the acting CCC Mayor Jahirul Alam Dobhash labelling him a member of AL city unit.

At a press conference Khasru expressed his fears the CCC poll might be influenced if Jahirul, who is also vying in the election for ward councillor post, performs the mayoral duty.

In the case of Japan Garden

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**MAJOR PROBE FINDINGS**

- No trained fire-fighting team in the complex.
- No practice of fire drills.
- Non-functional fire alarms.
- Approach roads to the building on fire were blocked by a wall and construction sheds.
- Staircase windows were sealed, preventing ventilation and trapping deadly smoke.

# Developer ignored

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were out of date, according to interviews and documents obtained by The Daily Star.

Now months after the blaze, three government investigations have found the developer failed to fix those defects, as well as other fire code violations that prevented the ventilation of poisonous smoke and kept a roof door locked.

"As a result, seven of the same family died a tragic death in suffocation," says a report by the Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD), "For this, Japan Garden City authorities are responsible."

Although the government has not taken action against the housing developer, two prominent Supreme Court lawyers say its failure to heed residents' warnings could warrant criminal charges.

"The developer committed a criminal negligence resulting in the loss of lives by not ensuring effective fire-fighting systems and by paying no heed to the residents' pleas," said Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud, a renowned Supreme Court lawyer.

He said the developer's negligence amounted to "manslaughter".

That view was shared by Dr Shahdeen Malik, a constitutional expert, human rights activist, and the director of BRAC University's Institute of Law.

"They [company officials] would definitely be liable for criminal prosecution for criminal negligence," he said.

Asaduzzaman Jamil, director of Japan Garden City Ltd which has built the complex on Mohammadpur Ring Road, said he did not know about the government probes.

Jamil said the company recently corrected the fire safety defects in 19 of the residential high rises, which are 16-storey each and home to at least 8,000 residents now. Four more are under construction, and three others are at the planning phase.

He however disputed the claim that the company's delay in fixing the problems amounted to criminal liability. "I do not agree that there was an act of negligence," said Jamil.

The lack of fire protection at Japan Garden City became an issue after seven family members perished during a February 12 blaze. The family, which lived on the 13th floor of one building, tried escaping to the roof but suffocated to death because the door leading outside was locked.

On the night of the fire, Jamil claimed all the fire-fighting equipment had been checked and was working.

Three subsequent government investigations found otherwise.

The investigations by FSCD, Rajdhanii Nnyan Kartripakha (Rajuk), and the housing ministry found that none of the fire hoses inspected in six of the buildings were connected to a water source.

And even if they were, there was still no pump or power generator to draw water from the reservoirs. The probes also found fire exits were narrower than required by law, fire doors were made of wood, and the fire alarms were not functional. (see sidebar).

"The Japan Garden City developer virtually did nothing to install a functional fire-fighting system at the sixteen-storey buildings," said Abdus Salam, FSCD deputy director who headed his agency's investigation.

"Definitely, the lives could have been saved," if the building's fire-fighting system had worked, Salam added. None of the investigations however have been made public.

The investigations not only revealed the absence of fire safeguards at Japan Garden City, but also the regulatory failures of FSCD, the agency responsible for conducting fire safety inspections before new buildings open.

The head of the agency views recently acknowledged that "lapses" by the agency have allowed Japan Garden City, and other new residential and commercial high rises like it to sprout throughout Dhaka City without either an inspection or occupancy clearance.

"We have not been able to keep an oversight on building occupancy, and enforce the fire law adequately due to a lack of manpower," said Brig Gen Abu Nayem Md Shahidullah, FSCD director general.

With only 15 inspectors to spare in Dhaka, he said, the agency is forced to rely on developers to ask for the final fire inspections and occupancy permits. None do.

In the case of Japan Garden

City, fire officials said the developer obtained prior approval for one residential building. That approval, they added, required the developer to come back and get a fire inspection done and obtain an occupancy permit when the construction was done.

Instead, the company completed and opened 19 high rises without informing FSCD, they said.

When first asked about not getting the inspections done, Jamil said he was not required to do so. Told his approval required him to get the inspection done, Jamil said he would have to review the certificate to check the wording.

Jamil also said he was not aware that the developer needed to install fireproof doors at the openings of the emergency exits. The exits are narrower in width than required by law, he admitted adding, "But no government authority has so far questioned us for it."

Records show that the residents did.

Leaders of the Japan Garden City Flat Owners Welfare Association said they long knew about the failings of the fire safety system.

"An effective fire-fighting system at each of the 19 buildings was incomplete from the very beginning," said SM Shahjahan Ali, the association president.

The association members discussed the matter at a February 2009 meeting of the Service Advisory Committee.

Jamil serves as the committee chair because, although his company has sold off most of the 1,600 flats in 19 high rises, it retains the responsibility for their service and maintenance.

Residents told Jamil that it was "vital and important" to fix the fire-fighting system, according to the minutes of the meeting.

"Fire-fighting is a very important issue," the minutes say, "In this regard, all the equipment already fitted at each building for fire-fighting, for example fire-fighting hose pipes and fire extinguishers, should be made operational immediately."

"At the same time, the residents and designated staff should be made aware of how to use them," the minutes add.

Jamil signed the minutes, both as the developer and the Service Advisory Committee chairman.

Still, the developer did not take action, said the association members.

"The developer did not pay heed to fix it, although we raised the matter with them on several occasions before the February fire occurred," said MA Salam, the association general secretary.

# Tongi

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great extent.

Roads and Highways Department sources said the construction of the flyover began on March 16, 2006, and it was to be completed in 2008 with an estimated cost of Tk 18.33 crore.

But Tongi people opposed the initial design, as there was no arrangement for people's movement under the flyover. In the face of their demand for changes in the design, the construction work stopped after seven to eight months.

In the preliminary design, the length of the flyover was 42.68 meters and the link roads on both sides were 450 meters.

Later in June 2007, the construction work resumed as per a revised design. In that design, its length was increased to 350 meters and the link roads reduced to 200 meters, while the cost increased to Tk 23.78 crore. The time set for its completion was March this year.

An additional amount of about Tk 5.50 crore was spent due to changes made in the design and the delay, sources said.

Using the flyover, vehicles of Dhaka and North Bengal can go to Narsingdi, Bhairab, Sylhet and Kishoreganj via Tongi avoiding severe traffic jam in Dhaka city and Kanchpur bridge.

The width of each lane of the two-lane flyover is 7.5 metres. The width of its footpath is six meters and the number of spans is 14.

Ahsanullah Master, who was elected from the area in 1996 and 2001, placed his demand at the Jatiya Sangsad on different occasions for constructing a flyover near Tongi Rail Station. In recognition of his contribution, the prime minister directed the authorities concerned to name the flyover after him.

# Hasina

FROM PAGE 1

In a message sent to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Hasina said the government and the people of Bangladesh are profoundly shocked at the huge loss of lives.

She expressed her deep sympathy to the members of the bereaved families and prayed for eternal peace of the departed souls.

The premier in her message hoped that the government of India and its people will soon be able to overcome their grief and continue their endeavour towards development and prosperity.

In a separate letter, Khaleda Zia, Chairperson of BNP and Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament also expressed her deep shock at the loss of lives in the plane crash.

In a message sent to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, she expressed her deep condolences to the members of the bereaved families and also prayed for eternal peace of the departed souls.

Khaleda in her message hoped that the survivors of the crash will soon be fully recovered.

# Life chokes

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Rajuk, as the planning authority, permitted the project as per building construction rules of 1996 and approved revision three times, said Rajuk officials.

Rajuk Chairman Md Nurul Huda said Rajuk is responsible for any dubious approval process of the project in a densely populated area and surely there had been hectic lobbying for it.

Asaduzzaman Jamil, director of Japan Garden City Limited, said the layout plan was revised in 2005 and the mosque was relocated to a bigger plot.

Joint-Secretary Shirin Akhtar of public works ministry said, "The complex doesn't have as much open space as the company claims in advertisements. We termed it a fraudulent attempt to lure the customers."

Shirin led a ministerial investigation into the housing project following the February 12 fire incident that claimed seven lives.

Jamil said the project has enough open space including the internal circular roads.

"We will set up a fountain in the middle of the complex and children corners somewhere," he said, "There is no provision for a school in the project as per Rajuk approved layout plan."

The landscaping with fountain and greenery will take at least a year, he said.

Mahbub Ul Alam, a Rajuk member who was on the ministerial probe body, said the developer has narrowed the entryway to the complex and extended cantilever of the balconies by two feet.

# Highway

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Accompanied by locals, they barricaded the highway near Baroicha bus stop around 11:00am causing severe tailbacks on both sides.

The protesters withdrew their blockade around 1:00pm after legislator Nurul Mazid Mahmud Humayun reached the spot and assured them of meeting their demand.

Principal of the college Ekramul Haque Khan said the college has been running for the last 10 years with an average pass percentage of 83 in the last four years.

# It's all

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Injured policemen Assistant Sub-Inspector Yunus Ali, constables Shafi, Atik and Mostafa took treatment at Bera Upazila Health Complex, police sources said.

Police arrested Md Asadul Islam from Sheikhpara in this connection. Additional police force have been deployed there to avert any untoward situation, the OC said.

Among the injured, Alim, 35, Rantu, 40, Gulzar, 30, Azizul, 35, Munnu Sheikh, 18, Abul Hasem, 21, Nazmul, 22, Jilur, 25, Saiful, 18, Rabiul Islam, 20 and Rana, 25, were admitted to the upazila health complex.

The OC said the situation is now under control and police are investigating the matter.

# Rab team

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Rab-police joint force, Maj Kamruzzaman came out of the house and reportedly regretted the raid and misunderstanding.

At around 8:00 in the morning the protesters lifted the siege and allowed the Rab men to leave the place.

Kamruzzaman told reporters they conducted the raid acting on a tip off and recovered three arms from the house.

On the other hand, Shafiq said he had seen some unknown people enter the balcony with the Rab men and leave the arms there.

Deputy Assistant Director of Rab-6 Delwar Hossain filed a general diary with Sadar police regarding the "arms recovery". OC Hashem Khan said they would investigate the matter and take proper action against those involved.

# AL activities

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matter urgently to bring coordination at the party's grassroots level.

The premier also ordered the authorities concerned to take immediate action against wrongdoers whoever they are -- Bangladesh Chhatra League, Jubo League or AL men. And she asked the party central leaders to keep an eye on this, said the sources.

Raising a question about the newly formed BCL committee at Islami University, one leader told the meeting that an expelled BCL leader and a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal member have been made its leaders. The AL chief asked him to convey to the BCL leadership the decision to dissolve the committee and form a new one properly.

Briefing newsmen after the five-hour meeting that started at 5:00pm, AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said the prime minister has urged opposition leader

# Indian militant outfit says Pakistan's ISI offered help

INDO-ASIAN News Service

The Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA), a militant outfit in Meghalaya, said that Pakistan's main intelligence agency and jihadi groups offered it help to fight the Indian state.

"The ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) and several jihadi groups extended help to the GNLA but I refused," GNLA chairman Champion R Sangma said over telephone from an undisclosed location.

Sangma, a former Deputy Superintendent of Police, deserted the Meghalaya Police and floated the GNLA due to alleged harassment by his seniors.

The outfit's cadres are deserters, mostly from the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC) and the Liberation of Achik Elite Force (LAEF).

# 158 killed

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officials said. One TV report said the plane hit a radar pole on landing.

"There was no distress indication from the pilot. That means between the pilot and the airport communication there was no indication of any problem," VP Agarwal, director of Airports Authority of India told local television.

The aircraft was reportedly commandeered by Zlatko Elusica, a British national of Yugoslavian origin, who had 10,000 hours of flying experience and had been operating in India for two years, said Hindustan Times.

Television channels said the plane crashed around 6:30am local time. TV images showed it struck a forested area. Flames were seen blazing from the wreckage as rescue workers fought to bring the fire under control.

"While landing at the airport, the plane deviated and hit something," said Krishna, another survivor. "It caught fire and we fell out. We looked up and saw some opening and came out through that route."

Rescuers have recovered 152 bodies from the wreckage of the aircraft, top police official said.

Forty-three bodies have been identified, Commissioner of Police, Mangalore, Seemant Kumar Singh said.