PHOTO: STAR

Participants at a roundtable on "Scientific innovation in Bangladesh: Developing rapport among scientists, industries and the media" organised by The Daily Star at its conference room yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

Set out qualifications for election commissioners: CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday stressed the need to set out specific qualifications for becoming an election commissioner.

The method of appointment of election commissioners (ECs) must also be transparent, he said and stressed the need for integrity and willingness on the part of election commissioners to work independently.

Speaking at the launch of an UNDP study report titled 'Elections in Bangladesh 2006-2009: Transforming failure into success' at a city hotel, the CEC also criticised the political parties for demanding resignation of election commissioners frequently.

Currently, the government can appoint anyone as election commissioner without considering his qualifications and past records. Tenure of the incumbent EC members will expire in early 2012.

In the study report, the UNDP said one crucial test that lies ahead will be ensuring that any newly appointed members of the EC enjoy the support and confidence of all major political parties and the public at large.

"Maintaining the success of the electoral reform process will require substantial political will by the political parties, the parliament and specially the government to ensure that conditions remain in place for free, fair and credible national elections," it said.

"The more difficult hurdles ahead, however, are political. Another will be whether the political parties can find ways to cooperate better and to avoid return to the politics of confrontation that brought the country to a precipice at the beginning of 2007," it added.

The study said within parliament, the opposition parties have averted to traditional politics of boycott and outside of parliament, there are some signs of the reemergence of politics of confrontation and retribution.

Peter Eicher, Dr Zahurul Alam and Jeremy Eckstein conducted the study.

CEC Shamsul Huda said the current EC has charted out the path and hoped that the process of electoral reforms would continue.

Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda

In an oblique reference to the main opposition's demand for his resignation after Bhola-3 by-election, the CEC said, "If you keep asking for resignation all the time, then it [EC] would not grow as an institution."

He also said the EC comprising human beings might make mistakes. "But you will have to be patient."

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said the EC would have to engage mechanism to contain the use of unauthorised money in the elections.

Nomination process in the political parties must also be transparent to stop transaction of money, he said.

In his welcome address, UNDP Resident Representative Stefan Priesner said progress on electoral reforms undertaken during the 2008 election period needs to be sustained.

"For this, the independence of the Election Commission is absolutely critical. Also, all stakeholders have a role and responsibility to play in ensuring an environment conducive to holding of free and fair elections", he said.

HASINA'S MOSCOW VISIT IN EARLY NEXT YEAR LIKELY

Russia keen to help in energy

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Russia is eagerly waiting to receive Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when she will visit Moscow in early next year likely, says a Russian foreign ministry official in the city yesterday.

Andrey V Vorobiev, Deputy Head of the Press and International Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, said this while he was speaking at a lecture on "Russian foreign policy in the 21st century" at Russian centre of Science and Culture in Dhanmondi.

He said Russia is looking for cooperating Bangladesh in energy and many other areas.

"In international relations, as everywhere in nature, there are ebbs and flows. That's good to know that now Russian-Bangladesh relations are on the rise," said Vorobiev.

Russia is keen to pursue the positive course of cooperation with Bangladesh and strengthen bilateral ties, he added.

Replying to a question, he said there might be high profile visit from Russia after the visit of Hasina when Bangladesh will formally invite the Russian leadership.

Vorobiev, who is now on an official visit to Bangladesh, said Russia is not only eager to cooperate in energy sector, but also want to cooperate in many other sectors like agriculture, ICT, science and technology.

When asked what are the areas Russia wants to sign deals with Bangladesh during Hasina's visit, he said, "It depends on Bangladesh where it wants cooperation."

Turning on bilateral relations and his childhood memories, he said, "I must admit that I remember very well despite the fact that in 1971 I was only 11 years, with what emotion and sympathy we all watched the news on the crucial events of the conquest of the independence of Bangladesh and subsequent first bilateral contracts of the Soviet Union and Bangladesh."

"For me, then the name itself Mujibur Rahman was surrounded by romantic aura, like Fidel Castro or Jawaharlal Nehuru. Much later I learned that the Soviet Union was among the first countries which recognised Bangladesh, and the first, which opened its embassy here," said the Russian official.

The Russian diplomat, who is in Bangladesh as part of exchange of visits by high officials, said Russia-Bangladesh just signed a framework agreement on setting up of nuclear power plants in Bangladesh as well as peaceful usage of nuclear technology, and officials of both the countries are now working out details of the agreement that will be signed during Hasina's visit.

Vorobiev in his speech also touched about current global situation, role of Russian Federation in global peace, situation in Iraq and Afghanistan and American strategies, role of NATO and Iran and Palestinian issues.

He was critical about American role in Afghanistan saying that "Afghanistan posed no terrorist threat to the United States nor does it now. Today the main threat emanating from Afghanistan is the level of narcotics production has increased 44-fold since 2001."

Director of BILIA Dr Shahdeen Malik and Yury I Makarov, head of cultural department of Russian Embassy also spoke at the lecture session.

DEATH IN CUSTODY

HC contempt rule against Ctg police commissioner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday issued a contempt of court rule against the police commissioner of Chittagong for not complying with its order that earlier asked him to submit a report to it on the steps taken against the recent incident of death in the police custody.

In the rule the court asked Chittagong Police Commissioner M Muniruzzaman to explain why he should not be punished on charge of violating its order.

Md Manik Mia, a security guard of Anjuman Market at Reazuddin Bazar in the city, also an accused in a theft case, died in police custody in Chittagong on May 11.

An HC bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Md Delwar Hossain yesterday ordered Muniruzzaman to appear before this bench on June 1 for explanation in this regard.

The bench also yesterday kept Mohiuddin Mahmud, officer-in-chare of Kotwali police station of Chittagong and its Sub-Inspector Yunus Miah, also the investigation officer of the theft case, standing before it for not appearing on May 23 for explanation on the incident as per its earlier order.

In response to a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), a human rights organisation, the court on May 12 directed the police commissioner of Chittagong to submit a report to it by May 23 on whether the police have taken any step against the incident of death in accordance with the criminal procedure code or any other law.

Advocate Manzill Murshid appeared for the petitioner, while Deputy Attorney General Nazrul Islam Talukder stood for the government.

US to raise non-immigrant visa fees from June 4

BSS, *Dhaka*

The US Department of State will increase nonimmigrant visa application fees from June 4, a press release of the US Embassy in the city said yesterday.

The current $131 fee is lower than the current, actual cost of processing nonimmigrant visas.

Applicants for all visas that are not petition-based, including B1/B2 tourist and business visitor visas and all student and exchange visitor visas, will pay a fee of $150.

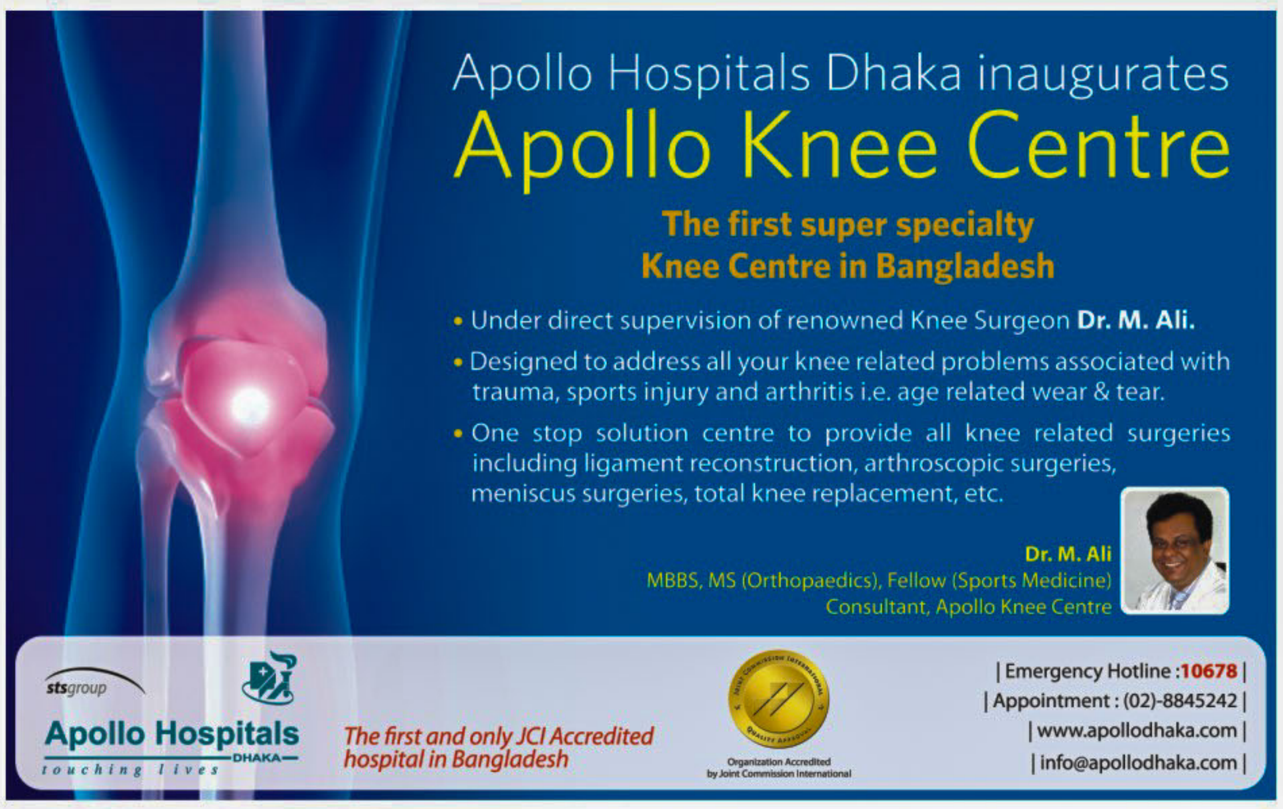
These categories include H visa for temporary workers and trainees, L visa for intra-company transferees, O visa for aliens with extraordinary ability, P visa for athletes, artists and entertainers, Q visa for international cultural exchange visitors and R visa for religious occupations.

The application fee for K visas for fianc,(e)s of US citizens will be $350 and the fee for E visas for treaty-traders and treaty-investors will be $390.

All nonimmigrant visa applicants with interview appointments scheduled on or after June 4 will be required to pay the new visa application fees.

Nonimmigrant visa applicants who have paid the previous fee of $131 and whose interview date is no or after June 4 may pay the difference at the US Embassy on their interview date.

US Embassy Consul General Sandra Ingram in the press release said nonimmigrant visa application fees will increase due to rising costs for providing visa services.

PHOTO: STAR

Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihood and ECB forms a human chain and organises a mime show at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday marking the one year of cyclone Aila.