

Govt refusal

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disregarded their plea for army deployment in the two constituencies.

Sohul said they might discuss the issue at their next meeting.

At a meeting on January 10, the EC decided to deploy army in the by-elections to Habiganj-1 and Brahmanbaria-3. The Armed Forces Division high-ups present there also agreed on the need for army deployment, said a senior EC official.

Accordingly, the EC sent a letter to the AFD, a division under the Prime Minister's Office, and asked it to arrange for troops deployment in the constituencies.

Later, the commission asked the government to deploy army also in five of the 12 municipalities that went to the polls on Thursday.

But it did not get any response from the government that had earlier deployed army in the election to 65 municipalities between January 12 and 18.

The government's indifference prompted the EC to convene another meeting on January 25, two days before the by-elections and municipal polls, to review the security measures in the polling areas.

At that meeting, when election commissioners Sohul Hussein and M Sakhawat Hossain enquired about the matter, an AFD official said it was still under consideration.

The EC again wrote to the government but got no response.

Instead of deploying troops, the government engaged regular law enforcers to maintain law and order in the polling areas.

Though the government did not meet the EC's requirement for army deployment, the elections were peaceful barring a few stray incidents.

In February 2009, parliament amended the Representation of the People Order to scrap the authority granted for the military men on election duty during the tenure of the caretaker government before the 2001 parliamentary polls.

In the 2001 and 2008 parliamentary elections, members of the armed forces had the power to arrest anyone without warrant within 400-yard radius of a polling station. But they had to be given the status of "law enforcement agencies" to exercise the authority.

A wami League demanded scrapping of the military men's authority after its debacle in the 2001 parliamentary elections. The party, however, accepted it during the last caretaker government's tenure.

AL got back to its previous stance against the military's authority after its victory in the 2008 parliamentary polls. But then again the AL-led government went for army deployment in local body elections.

While ratifying local government ordinances promulgated during the last caretaker government rule,

Cuet shut

FROM PAGE 1
Over the issue, students on both the sides were locked into a scuffle.

The violence spread through other departments and a clash broke out yesterday between students with sticks and sharp weapons. The clash left Sazzad Hossain, a student of mechanical engineering department, severely injured.

He was admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

The Cuet authorities held a meeting in the afternoon and took the decision to close the university.

The exams scheduled for the period will be held from February 17.

Male students were asked to vacate their dormitories by 5:00pm yesterday and female students by 10:00am today.

The admission programme for session 2011-2012 will, however, continue.

Vice-Chancellor of Cuet Prof Shyamol Kanti Biswas said misunderstanding among students led to the clash.

"The situation is normal now," the VC said.

it did not scrap the defence forces' status as law enforcement agencies.

Many lauded the present government's support for the EC in holding the municipal polls between January 12 and 18.

But its refusal to deploy army in the by-elections has brought into question its sincerity in strengthening the EC in line with its electoral pledges.

The main opposition BNP, which is now vocal about the EC's constitutional authority and its independence, did otherwise while in power.

"The government is constitutionally bound to fulfil whatever the EC needs to conduct elections. But the government did not do so. Even the EC could not exert its constitutional authority to put pressure on the government," BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain said at a press conference yesterday.

But it was the BNP-led government that refused to entertain the EC's request for army deployment in union parishad and municipal elections in 2003 and 2004.

It also did not respond to the EC's decision to deploy army in all polling centres in the by-election to Dhaka-10 constituency in 2004.

The government's refusal prompted the opposition candidate to take the matter to the High Court that asked the government to meet the EC's request for army deployment. But the government deployed army only at some strategic points in the constituency.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Ambassador-at-Large M Ziauddin, Bangladesh High Commissioner to UK Sayeedur Rahman Khan, among others, were present.

Charles Tannock, member of European Parliament elected from London, also paid a courtesy call on Hasina at her hotel suit.

Tannock expressed solidarity with Bangladesh's struggle against adverse impact of climate change and assured Hasina of providing all assistance in this regard.

He also said under Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh will be able to attain the long-cherished economic emancipation.

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Hasina seeks

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Hasina said Bangladesh wants IMO as a regulator to stop piracy.

The premier said Bangladesh, if requested, will join the taskforce to counter piracy in and around Somalia.

The IMO secretary general has expressed interest to help flourish ship building and recycling industries in Bangladesh.

Efthimos said IMO wants to train Bangladeshi marines.

The premier appreciated IMO's role in developing and maintaining a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping, ensuring maritime safety, providing technical cooperation and enhancing efficiency.

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BNP plans fiery

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asked opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farroque on Wednesday to ensure that party lawmakers are prepared to strongly protest "failure" of the government to deliver.

"We should return to the House now to speak for the people. You [BNP lawmakers] make preparation to ensure that party lawmakers are prepared to strongly protest 'failure' of the government to deliver."

Earlier, 38 opposition lawmakers belonging to BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Bangladesh Jatiya Party remained absent from the House proceedings for 64 consecutive days since June 2009 to February 11, 2010.

Asked about the opposition plan, treasury bench Whip ASM Feroz yesterday said, "We know the opposition lawmakers were boosted by the just concluded municipal poll results. And they will launch attack on us on some issues including the share market."

He mentioned that they have already asked the ruling AL-led alliance lawmakers, particularly young ones, to take preparation to face the opposition.

AL lawmaker Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, also an organising secretary of the party, said they will welcome their (opposition) return and face them with arguments and logic.

The parliament sitting will resume on February 1 kicking off a 40 hour discussion on the thanks giving motion on the president's January 25 address.

Toxic industrial

FROM PAGE 1
required by the law," said Abdur Rahman, a veterinary doctor and agriculturist.

He said mostly dying and garment factories are causing damage to soil, water and air.

Mangal Mridha of Kumkumari said the factory liquid used to empty into rivers after flowing several miles through some channels. But now all the channels have been filled up by realtors and the waste has nowhere to go but our agricultural land.

"I have lost all crops on my five bighas of land because of toxic waste. Like me there are hundreds of small farmers who have been ruined," said Mangal.

Locals say pollution is pushing well-off farmers into miseries.

"We have nothing left except for the barren land. If law and order prevailed we would have been compensated for such environmental crime done to us," said Ramjan Mia, a farmer from Khagan.

"We used to grow aman and boro rice and keep stock for the entire year and sell the surplus. But we are now totally out of business," Ramjan said.

Despite strict provisions in the environmental law, many industries reportedly have remained defiant and kept polluting environment.

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interested in participating in parliament proceedings. We want to raise our voice strongly on capital market collapse, ruling party's defeat in the just concluded municipality polls and skyrocketing of prices of essentials."

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Wrong choice

FROM PAGE 20
percent of the minority votes."

Talking to The Daily Star an AL-leaning union parishad chairman in Bahubal said AL's selection of candidate went wrong.

"We could have won the seat easily by holding memorial meetings only if Dewan Shahnewaz Gazi Milad, son of Dewan Farid Gazi or Reza Kibria, son of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, were nominated," he mentioned, seeking anonymity.

One of the two upazila parishad chairmen of Nabiganj and Bahubal, who is an influential local AL leader, did not work for the party candidate, sources in Habiganj/AL said.

"Some of our leaders did not work for our candidate which proved suicidal," Mujibur Rahman, president of Nabiganj upazila AL, told The Daily Star.

"There were nine candidates including myself. Once Mushfiq Hussain got the nomination I started working for him, but some of them remained inactive," noted Mujibur.

According to him price hike had been one of the major issues and obtaining lesser votes in the minority populated areas was another reason for the setback.

Results show BNP candidate did well in the tea gardens which are known as vote banks of AL.

BNP bagged more votes in one centre out of six in the tea gardens while Jatiya Party candidate won in another. The rest, however, went to AL candidate. Compared to the previous election results this was a rarity.

Locals said the tea garden workers had some unfulfilled demands which led to the swing votes.

In Thursday's by-election, Sujat secured 81,330 votes while his rival Mushfiq Hussain Chowdhury of AL bagged 80,045 votes.

Abdul Munim Chowdhury of Jatiya Party, a component of AL-led grand alliance, pulled 22,220 votes helping Sujat prevail on Mushfiq.

BGB rescues

FROM PAGE 20
Ali, 21, Obaidur Rahman, 20, Raisa 5, Alamgir Hossain, 25, Nikhil Das, 30, Proshanto Kumar, 30, Topon Biswas, 40, and Mollick Hossain, 18.

Acting on a tip-off, BGB personnel conducted a drive and rescued the victims. However, sensing presence of the border guards, the criminals managed to flee the scene.

The victims were later handed over to Benapole port police.

A gang of traffickers brought them from Faridpur, Barisal and Khulna districts promising them lucrative jobs in India, said Liaquat Hossain, camp in-charge of BGB Benapole.

Biswa Jitema

FROM PAGE 20
On Sunday.

For the first time this year, the Jitema is being held in two phases. Traditionally, it used to be a three-day single-phase gathering held since 1967.

The first phase was held from January 21 to 23 on the same venue.

Devotees from 33 of the country's 64 districts joined the first phase while devotees from rest of the districts joined the second phase.

The districts include Dhaka, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Narayanganj, Netrakona, Tagail, Jamalpur, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Laxmipur, Comilla, Barahmanbaria, Molvibazar, Sunamganj, Chapainabaganj, Noagaon, Pabna, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Bogra, Sathkha, Jhenidah, Magura, Meherpur, Barisal, Pirojpur and Patuakhali.

Meanwhile, two devotees died of heart attack yesterday. They are Azim Uddin, 62, of Narayanganj and Khokon Sardar, 70, of Khulna, reports UNB.