

CG can hold

FROM PAGE 1
Journalists at the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat.

Talking on the Awami League's proposal to limit the tenure of the CG to 90 days, the election office chief said, "The Election Commission will comply with anything that comes in the form of law. There is no scope for us to violate the law."

The correct voters list prepared by the EC would allow holding any election within a short notice, he said, adding that the list will just be needed to be updated before the polls.

On ending of the commission's tenure in February next year, the CEC said, "Everything remains prepared for the next commission. The Election Commission will reconstituted at least one year before 10th parliamentary elections. We don't know how that commission will be. But we believe it will be able to hold any election within a short notice," Shamsul Huda said.

The present EC was formed during Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker government. The CG held the ninth parliamentary elections about two years after its taking office instead of 90 days due to a flawed voters list.

The commission took one and half years to prepare the voters list with photographs with consent of all the political parties.

Intellectuals

FROM PAGE 1
briefing at the Parliament's Media Centre said the committee will sit with the country's senior journalists next Tuesday and with the intellectuals on Wednesday.

He said the committee will also have the opinions of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) in writing and consider their proposals. The committee cannot invite the CPB leaders for talks as they do not have representation in parliament, he said.

The CPB is an old political party. The committee will respect its opinions. The committee will receive the proposals it should like to offer in writing, he said.

Replying to a query, Suranjit said the committee is ready to sit with the BNP leaders if the latter want to place their proposals reconsidering their present stance.

Leader of the Opposition and BNP chief Khaleda Zia was invited to the talks Monday, but she spurned it terming the invitation "conspiratorial".

About the ruling Awami League's proposals placed before the special committee, Suranjit said the committee will consider the proposals with due importance.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina in the talks with the special committee Wednesday proposed a set of changes to the constitution including one for strictly limiting the caretaker government's tenure to 90 days.

Suranjit said on completion of consultation, the special committee will review all proposals and prepares its report.

Pollution

FROM PAGE 20
Munir Chowdhury, director (Monitoring and Enforcement), also halted the activities of Index Constructions Ltd and Microcred Centre for illegally filling up the riverbanks of Bramhaputra in Narsingdi.

The team fined Minan Steel Industries and New Dhaka Moulding International in Fatulla Tk 7.5 lakh for releasing toxic fumes and polluting the air in the area.

The two factories were ordered to set up smock extraction systems within 15 days.

Meanwhile, K T Textile Ltd in Narsingdi was fined Tk 13.44 lakh for discharging toxic waste in the river Bramhaputra. The DoE ordered the factory owner to set up an effluent treatment plant (ETP) within June 30.

Huji boss

FROM PAGE 20
remand for interrogation in connection with the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally in 2004.

Metropolitan Magistrate Keshob Roy Chowdhury passed the order after the Criminal Investigation Department's (CID) Special Superintendent of Police Abdul Kahar Akand, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case filed under the Explosive Substances Act, produced him before it with a 10-day remand prayer.

In the prayer, the IO mentioned that Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan in a confessional statement given on April 7 said Farid was involved with the 2004 grenade attack.

Farid was also involved in Ramna Batamul blast on April 14, 2001, the IO said.

So, he needs to be remanded to find out whereabouts of the attackers on the AL rally, he added.

Farid, also known as Shawkat Osman, was arrested in Tongi Railway Station area on Tuesday.

Farid was also shown arrested in the case filed for basting bombs on a rally of Communist Party of Bangladesh on Paltan Maidan on January 20 of 2001.

CID Inspector Mrinal Kanti Saha, also the IO of the

case, prayed for a ten-day remand for him, but the court did not pass any order on the prayer.

Meanwhile, another Huji man Maolana Sabbir Ahmed alias Abdul Hannan, was shown arrested in the same case.

CID also prayed for his ten-day remand but the court did not hear the prayer as Sabbir is now on remand in another case filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act with Keraniganj Police Station.

The same court yesterday sent two former National Security Intelligence directors general Maj Gen (retd) Rezaqul Haider Chowdhury and Brig Gen (retd) M Abdur Rahim to jail on completion of their four-day remand in second phase in connection with the case.

Meanwhile, Huji Chief Mufti Abdul Hannan and one of his accomplices Abu Zandal were sent to jail after CID produced them before the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Ismail Hossain on completion of their one-day remand in Dr Azizur Rahman abduction case.

They were earlier remanded on several days in the same case filed on September 23, 2003.

Royal wedding

FROM PAGE 1
says the invitation for the Syrian ambassador in London has been withdrawn following reports that up to 400 pro-democracy protesters have been killed in Syria by security forces in recent weeks.

A Foreign Office statement said "Buckingham Palace shares the view of the Foreign Office that it is not considered appropriate for the Syrian ambassador to attend the wedding."

Miss Middleton has taken part in her last rehearsal at Westminster Abbey, with best man Prince Harry, the bridesmaids and pageboys.

In their official wedding programme released yesterday, William and Kate's message reads: "We are both so delighted that you are able to join us in celebrating what we hope will be one of the happiest days of our lives."

"The affection shown to us by so many people during our engagement has been incredibly moving, and has touched us both deeply."

"We would like to thank everyone most sincerely for their kindness."

MUSIC CHOICES

Details of the order of service have been released on the eve of the wedding.

The bride will walk up the aisle to a coronation anthem I Was Glad by Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry from Psalm 122.

It was composed for the crowning of Prince William's great-great-great grandfather Edward VII at Westminster Abbey in 1902.

The couple have chosen to use the Series One (1966) Book of Common Prayer ceremony.

Classical compositions by Elgar, Britten and Vaughan Williams will feature during the ceremony, alongside the hymn Jerusalem and the English melody Greensleeves.

St James's Palace said many of the "stunning" pieces were chosen by the royal couple for their "theatre".

The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall, Prince Harry and Kate's parents Carole and Michael Middleton, sister Pippa and

Garment owners

FROM PAGE 20
favourable business environment in the country that resulted in increase of export of Bangladeshi products abroad, especially to the EU countries.

Lauding the BGMEA's initiative of arranging music competition for the garment workers, the PM asked the garment owners to arrange more such programmes in future to strengthen relations between owners and workers.

"Arranging such programmes will help flourish latent talent of the workers along with strengthening relations between owners and workers," she added.

Principal Secretary to the PM M A Karim and Secretary to the PM's Office Molla Waheeduzzaman were, among others, present on the occasion.

Investigate

FROM PAGE 20
Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, acting secretary general of BNP, at a press briefing at party's central office in the capital.

He alleged that Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, standing committee member of the party, was brutally tortured several times by the law enforcers and jail authorities since his arrest on December 16, 2010.

Condemning the incident, Alamgir asked the government to launch a probe and identify those responsible for the torture of Chowdhury after his arrest.

Former state ministers Lutfozzaman Babar and ANM Ehsanul Haque Milon, deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu and former lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu are still behind bars and facing torture in custody, the BNP leader said.

Referring to the recent human rights report disclosed by US State Department, he said they [US] also expressed their concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in the country but the government remains silent over the matter.

Party leaders Nazrul Islam Khan, Selima Rahman, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury's wife Farhat Quader Chowdhury and Milon's wife Nazmunnahar Baby, among others, were present in the briefing.

Indian

FROM PAGE 20
Rabindranath Tagore.

A scholar on literature, Ansari, leading the Indian entourage, will reach Dhaka by a special plane and will attend the function the next day, officials told The Daily Star here yesterday. Ansari will return to Delhi on May 6.

Hasina is expected to call on Ansari during his stay in Dhaka.

The delegates are being finalised by the Ministry of External Affairs in coordination with Indian Culture Ministry.

A team of Indian journalists will also accompany Ansari to cover his first visit to Dhaka and the start of year-long celebrations of Tagore's 150th birth anniversary.

Bangladesh Planning Minister A K Khandker, who was a sector commander during the Liberation War, will attend the inauguration of the Nobel Laureate's 150th birth anniversary in India by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Vigyan Bhavan here on May 7.

Among the members of the Bangladesh team, eminent Rabindrasangeet singer Rizwana Chodhury Bannya will be present.

India and Bangladesh had decided to jointly celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Tagore during Hasina's visit to Delhi in January last year.

Both the countries have also chalked out elaborate programmes to mark the year-long celebrations of the poet who has penned the national anthems of India and Bangladesh.

Sayedee

FROM PAGE 1
interrogated for a day between 10:00am and 5:00pm, and the prison authority will take him to jail after the interrogation, the tribunal said.

The investigation officers will fix the date, and a counsel of the defendant and a doctor of a prison hospital will be present in an adjacent room during the questioning.

The doctor will examine Sayedee's health condition before and after the interrogation.

The court directed the investigators not to pressurise or threaten him.

Meanwhile, the tribunal yesterday upheld its order that granted bail to former BNP lawmaker Abdul Alim on March 31 in connection with similar charges and directed him to appear before it on July 21.

Alim, a member of late president Ziaur Rahman's cabinet, appeared before the tribunal yesterday in compliance with his bail conditions.

The tribunal also ordered the prosecution to submit the investigation report against him by July 21.

Standard & Poor's

FROM PAGE 1
improvement in debt ratios, underpin the ratings on Bangladesh. Improved central bank reserve coverage and bilateral and multilateral donor engagement are other supporting factors for the ratings, it said.

However, the ratings on Bangladesh were constrained by the country's limited fiscal flexibility due to low revenue-generation capacity, against relatively high public and external debt and significant physical and human capital development needs, said the global rating firm.

Earlier this month, Moody's Investors Services, another rating agency, rated Bangladesh "Ba3" also with a stable outlook.

S&P confirmed its "BB-" long-term and "B" short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings on Bangladesh. The transfer and convertibility (T&C) assessment remains "BB-".

These ratings mean that S&P thinks the outlook for long-term international credit to Bangladesh is fairly stable, second in South Asia to only India.

The stable outlook reflects

strong growth prospects and ongoing donor support, which ensures low-cost and long maturity external debt that minimises refinancing risk. These factors are balanced against emerging balance of payments pressures as remittance growth slows and imports expand, and the risks posed by rising inflationary pressures and a weakened banking sector.

The relatively high public and external debt levels are one of the main factors constraining the ratings on Bangladesh. Net general government debt at a projected 36 percent of GDP in 2011 is well above that of peers, and the associated interest burden of 18 percent of general government revenues is more than double the median for similarly rated countries and of peers. The external debt component, at 66 percent of current account receipts in 2010, is similarly high.

"Bangladesh's limited fiscal flexibility owing to a narrow revenue base and high infrastructure needs also constrains the rating. We project the country's total revenue at 12.3 percent of

GDP in fiscal 2011," said S&P's credit analyst Agost Benard.

"Significant energy and infrastructure deficiencies and administrative weaknesses also constrain the ratings. These factors prevent Bangladesh from achieving higher economic growth," said the analyst.

S&P could raise the ratings if the Bangladesh government persists with implementing measures to expand the revenue base and improve administrative and collection efficiency, leading to a material rise in its revenue. It could also upgrade Bangladesh if rising investment leads to a sustainable increase in real GDP growth.

"Conversely, we could downgrade the sovereign rating if fiscal slippages result in rising public debt and external donor support declines materially. We could also lower the ratings if incipient balance of payments pressures accentuate and result in a significant erosion of external liquidity through lack of appropriate policy responses," said the rating agency.

No top parties want

FROM PAGE 1
restriction than the existing one.

During the one party regime of BAKSAL the restriction was tightened in 1975 through the 4th amendment, and in 1991 that was tightened some more by a BNP-led regime through the 12th amendment.

In the recent constitutional amendment talks with the parliamentary special committee, ruling AL allies Workers Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, and National Awami Party proposed for amending article 70 to allow MPs freedom to perform their duties as lawmakers, except on some specific issues like no-confidence motions against the cabinet.

Jatiya Party, another major component of the AL-led grand alliance, however refrained from proposing an amendment to the article, while main opposition BNP boycotted the talks altogether.

AL in the run up to the last parliamentary polls promised to take all necessary measures to make the House more effective, and to hold the executive branch of the state accountable for all its activities.

"Except for some specific subjects related to the security of the state, parliament members will be allowed to express differing opinions," says the AL electoral manifesto titled "the charter for change".

Changes to the article 70 is required to implement AL's electoral pledge, but the party chief does not want any change to the article, some members of the special committee told The Daily Star yesterday.

Hasina's stance might frustrate the parliamentary

special committee's move to amend article 70 to relax the restrictions imposed on MPs, without hampering the stability of the cabinet.

The committee's members at a meeting on March 29 agreed in principle on two propositions.

One idea is to allow MPs to express differing opinions and cast votes against party decisions in the parliament except on some specific issues like no-confidence motion against the cabinet, finance bill, and matters related to state security.

A number of AL leaders who joined the talks with the special committee on Wednesday, and eminent jurists who joined the talks on Sunday, are also for amending the article without hampering the stability of the cabinet, committee sources said.

The special committee's second proposition is to restore the original article 70 of the 1972 constitution, as it imposed less restriction than the existing one.

The original article 70 of the constitution barred MPs from casting votes in the parliament against the party that nominated them during elections. If any MP violated it, he or she would lose parliamentary membership.

In 1991 the restriction was tightened some more through the 12th amendment by inserting an explanation, the framework of which had been set in 1975 through the 4th amendment.

The explanation says if any MP being present in parliament abstains from voting or remains absent in any sitting ignoring the direction of his or her own party, he or she will be deemed to have voted against

own party.

With the incorporation of this explanation, the MPs' freedom was completely quashed giving them no alternative to marching in lockstep with party decisions.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday a member of the special committee said they will continue their efforts to bring necessary changes to article 70 to provide MPs more freedom to perform their duties independently in the parliament.

When another committee member also AL lawmaker's attention was drawn to the AL electoral manifesto, he said article 70 should be amended to implement the party's electoral pledge.

"The party chief did not put forward any specific proposal about article 70. We will however look carefully into what we can do in this regard," he said.

RESERVED SEATS

AL's another proposal for increasing reserved seats for women in the parliament to 50 from 45 also runs counter to the party's electoral pledge.

In the electoral manifesto, AL promised to increase the number of women's reserved seats to 100, and to introduce direct election to the seats.

But AL chief Hasina on Wednesday at the talks with the special committee proposed for adding only five more seats for women in parliament, and refrained from proposing direct elections.

In defence, she cited shortage of seats in the chamber of parliament. There are a total of 354 seats in the chamber. At present, the number of MPs is 345, and there are three technocrat ministers.

Graft failing objectives

FROM PAGE 20
money, the study added.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque attributed the irregularities to the lack coordination among various ministries and the inadequate number of monitoring officers.

The study titled 'Social Safety Net and the Marginalised: Implications for Budget 2011-12' was presented by Dr Mahfuz Kabir, research fellow at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, at a discussion yesterday.

Shamunnay, a non-government organisation, arranged the dialogue with the support of Manusher Jonno Foundation at Cirdap auditorium in the city.

A sample survey on Employment Generation Programme for Hardcore Poor (EGPHP) found at least 5.6 percent of its beneficiaries do not fall under its criteria, while that for Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), the figure was 10.76 percent.

Around 85 SSN programmes operate in Bangladesh, including major programmes like EGPHP, VGD, Vulnerable Group Feeding, Food for Work, Old

Age Allowance, Rural Maintenance Programme, Allowance for the Financially Insolvent Disabled, the study said.

Open Market Sale (OMS) and distribution of food grains through fair price cards are other forms of SSN to provide food at subsidized rates.

In 2010-11, Tk 19,496.99 or 14.75 percent of the total budget was proposed for SSN programmes, it said.

Under EGPHP, the study found that 5 percent beneficiaries were relatives of local chairmen and members, while under VGD, 7.5 percent beneficiaries were relatives of local government representatives.

Around 17.7 percent beneficiaries under VGD were bribed to get VGD cards, while 4 percent were bribed under EGPHP, it said.

"If such loopholes were checked, at least 2.67 lakh more needy people could get benefits while 39,101 tonnes of flour or rice could be saved," said Mahfuz Kabir.

Many programmes are taken up without proper planning or necessary ground work, he said.

Food minister Razzaque said, while listing the urban

Two Killed in Indonesia plane crash

AFP, Yogyakarta

Two people on a training flight were killed when their glider plane crashed in Indonesia's Yogyakarta province yesterday, a military academy official said.

"Two people were killed in the accident. One is the instructor and the other is the student," Air Force Academy governor Id Bagus Putu Dunia said.

"The glider plane crashed at 15:45 PM on land which is still part of the academy in Sleman district. We are still unsure of the cause of the accident," Dunia said.

In February, five people on a test flight were killed in Bintan island when their small plane crashed having changed one of its engines.

Five police on a mission to help flood victims in eastern Indonesia were killed in October when their plane crashed into a tree during an emergency landing.

Sahara

FROM PAGE 20

Asked about the claim in the charge sheet, Sahara said police submitted the report after investigation, and now the court will judge it.

She, however, kept mum when reminded about the Rab director general's statement. The minister was talking to reporters at her secretariat office.

Earlier on April 11, Rab DG Mokhlesur Rahman at a press briefing said Limon was a victim of "shootout".

"He is a young boy, not a notorious criminal but an accused in a criminal case. He is just the victim of the incident," Mokhlesur noted.

Although a Rab press release put Limon's age at 25, police investigation found him to be 16.

Members of Rab shot him in the left leg on his way to bring back his cattle home at Chhaturia village of Jhalakathi on March 23. The leg had to be amputated later.

Meanwhile, Rab said the cases against Limon will be shifted to a juvenile court in Jessore, reports our Barisal correspondent.

Ariful Islam, the current investigation officer of the two Rab cases, has also confirmed this.

Earlier, Ariful was assigned also to investigate the case filed by Limon's mother against Rab members.

At this, Limon's family had expressed concern over a fair investigation into their case.

Ariful, however, told The Daily Star yesterday that the family can appeal to the court seeking order to change the investigation officer.

The enquiry into the case against Rab members is on and action will be taken against the accused as the law permits, he added.

As per the Public Service Act 1985, the accused Rab personnel will be suspended and handed over to police should their bail petitions are rejected by a court, said Lt Col Manirul Huq, commanding officer of Rab-8.

A Jhalakathi court has fixed May 19 for hearing over charge sheet against Limon.

IOM to fly

FROM PAGE 20
of around 300 Bangladeshis will be planned soon, said a press release of IOM regional office in Dhaka yesterday.

The flight details are yet to be confirmed, but are expected to commence from tomorrow, it said.

The decision comes in response to a request from Bangladesh.

"The IOM will continue to monitor and assist return of other Bangladeshis who will reach Tunisian or Egyptian borders in coming days," said the release.

Since the crisis began in March, the IOM has arranged repatriation of over 27,000 of 35,000 plus Bangladeshis from the borders in Egypt and Tunisia.

Bangladesh has agreed to share the repatriation cost of 10,000 Bangladeshis with the IOM.

The IOM had earlier said that it was facing fund crisis as it had to repatriate thousands of migrants of various countries.