

Shamim, Ivy told

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Alam Hanif, acting general secretary of the ruling Awami League (AL), told The Daily Star last night after emerging from a meeting at Gono Bhaban where Shamim and Ivy separately went to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina seeking her blessing.

However, preferring anonymity a highly placed source close to the premier told The Daily Star last night that considering all aspects, AL will opt for keeping the field open for both the candidates -- a stance the party earlier adopted.

Contacted, AL presidium member Obaidul Quader, who was also present in the meeting, said, "Wait and see till October 12, the deadline for candidacy withdrawal."

He said that they will follow the election code of conduct to make the party's stance clear. He however declined to comment further on the matter.

Sources said Hanif will sit with the Election Commission (EC) today to discuss whether his party can support any candidate openly. If the EC speaks against it and the candidates stay rigid about contesting the polls, both of them will vie in the polls.

Earlier on Sunday, AL informally opted to reward Shamim if he agreed to quit the mayoral race. But sources said both the candidates yesterday expressed firm determination to the premier to vie in the polls.

Earlier on October 2, premier's first round of talks with Shamim and Ivy came out unfruitful. Since then many formal and informal talks took place between the AL rank and file and the two aspirants, but to no avail.

Both Ivy and Shamim expect party backing as single candidate to contest the polls but AL is yet to provide open support to any of them. AL insiders said the party chief have become annoyed with both of them for their rigid stance to vie in the poll.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ivy, a vice-president of the Narayanganj town AL unit, also expressed confidence over getting party backing as a single candidate.

Meanwhile, Taimur Alam Khondaker, the opposition BNP-backed mayor aspirant in the NCC polls, yesterday opposed the use of electronic voting machines (EVM).

His objection came after the Election Commission decided to use EVMs in one-third of the poll centres -- nine out of 27 centres -- yesterday in a bid to modernise election management.

"I have no idea on how EVMs work and believe that so haven't the people of Narayanganj. That is why, I strongly opposed the system," Taimur told The Daily Star.

He said he has already conveyed his objection to Election Commissioner M Sakhawat Hossain and will launch a formal application against the system when it feels necessary.

Taimur and his supporters were yesterday seen campaigning in full swing using megaphones at different spots of the municipality.

On the other hand, the campaigners and supporters of Shamim Osman were seen not campaigning and silent about party backing. Despite a number of attempts over the phone The Daily Star could not reach Shamim for his comments. However, several local AL leaders, who are close to him, said they did not get any directive from him on what to do if he does not get the party nod.

The local AL leaders demanded that the party resolves the issue of backing soon.

Meanwhile, the EC yesterday decided to deploy additional forces to beef up security in Narayanganj City Corporation area for holding the election peacefully on October 30.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Police, Ansar and coast guard personnel will remain vigilant in election areas for five days from October 28, Election Commissioner Sakhawat Hossain told reporters after a meeting at the EC secretariat in the capital. A team will be deployed in each poll centre for video surveillance, he added.

He said members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) will not be deployed for poll duty as many of its members are engaged in the 2009 mutiny trials.

Asked about army deploy-

ment in the election, the election commissioner parried the question saying, "All options are open."

Sakhawat said the EC asked the local returning officer (RO) to warn local lawmaker Nasim Osman, brother of mayor aspirant Shamim, once again for violating the election code of conduct. He was warned on similar offences earlier.

Contacted, officials of the local RO's office said they were examining the audio record of Nasim Osman to ascertain how he violated the election code on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the Narayanganj district law and order committee at a meeting yesterday decided to take all necessary steps to conduct the upcoming poll in a free, fair and peaceful manner.

12 promoted

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Those who became additional secretaries are Jalal Ahmed, Azizur Rahman, Anwarul Karim, Mahfuzul Haq, Lutfur Rahman, Abdul Hamid, Saiful Islam Chowdhury, AM Badruddoza, Tapan Kumar Sarkar, Abul Kashem, Aftab Uddin Talukder, Mostafizur Rahman, Mostafa Kamal, Sarwar Khan, Amalendu Mukherjee, Selina Afroz, Mojibur Rahman, Firoz Mia, Fazlul Haq, Moyejuddin Ahmed, Gayendra Nath Biswas, MA Hannan, AS Shamim Ahmed, Shahin Khan, KM Mozammel Haq, Abdur Noor, Ashraf Hossain, Mortuza Ahmed, Kazi Akhter Uddin Ahmed, AKM Nesar Uddin Bhuiyan and Subhashis Bose.

The promotions came a week after the government appointed Muhammad Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan as cabinet secretary and Sheikh Wahid Uz Zaman as principal secretary to the Prime Minister Office.

The government then also carried out reshuffle in five secretaries of different ministries. Of them, public administration secretary Iqbal Mahmud was transferred to the ERD while home secretary Abdus Sobhan Shikder to the public administration ministry and planning division secretary Manjur Hossain to the home ministry.

Sources in the public administration ministry said more promotions and reshuffle are likely to take place in the coming months.

The promotions of the joint secretaries to the post of additional secretary created scope for those serving as deputy secretaries now, the sources added.

Seek legal action

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news," said meeting sources. Preferring anonymity, two senior ministers said the prime minister told the meeting that the media must be open to criticism like the politicians are to them.

Commenting on a Bangla daily's news report that he owns three apartments in Dhaka and a "royal palace" in his Patuakhali constituency, State Minister for Religious Affairs Md Shahjahan Miah told the cabinet that the report was completely false and fabricated.

"I urge you [PM] to take action against the newspaper and its journalists," he was quoted as saying by a senior minister.

"The false news has spoiled my image," Shahjahan said in an emotion-choked voice.

The prime minister suggested that he should take the matter to court or the press council to seek justice.

"But I cannot suggest harassing the newspaper's journalists," Hasina was quoted as saying by another minister.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan told the meeting that a newspaper published a report that he went abroad 14 times on official visits.

"But actually, I have so far travelled abroad three times on official visits," he was quoted by one of his colleagues.

A few other ministers wondered how information shared in a close-door meeting leaked out to the media.

Referring to a meeting between the prime ministers and AL leaders at Gono Bhaban on Sunday, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Jahangir Kabir Nanak said it is mysterious how the contents of discussions at the meeting got published in newspapers.

Jagjit Singh no More

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whose soulful numbers evoked a range of emotions among millions of hearts, had been in coma ever since he was admitted to hospital on September 23 with brain haemorrhage hours before he was to perform with Ghulam Ali at a concert in Mumbai.

Jagjit Singh, popularly called the "Ghazal King", is credited with not only reviving the dying genre but also popularising it.

Jagjit Singh's songs like "Tum itna jo muskara rahe ho" or "Honto se chhoo lo tum/mera geet amar kar do" will continue to reverberate in the hearts of all ages to come.

Songs like 'Jhuki jhuki si nazar' and 'Kaagaz ki kashti' saw the singer breathing new life in the dying genre of music in 1970s and carving a niche for himself in Bollywood.

Conjuring up hits like 'yeh zindagi kisi aur ki', 'mere naam ka koi aur hai', 'Patta-patta boota-boota haal hamaara jaane hai', 'Tum ko dekha', 'Hazaar baar ruke ham and hazaar baar chale', Singh appeared on the scene and made a mark during the '70s when the ghazal scene was dominated by well-established names like Noor Jehan, Malika Pukhraj, Begum Akhtar, Talat Mahmood and Mehdi Hassan.

Singh was inspired by singers like Kundan Lal Saigal, Talat Mahmood, Abdul Karim Khan, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and Amir Khan.

One of the most successful artistes of his time, whose popularity went beyond the borders of India, Jagjit Singh has left behind a huge body

of work in a career spanning half a century, including 80 albums.

Jagjit was born in a Sikh family on February 8, 1941 in Sriganganagar district of Rajasthan state to Amar Singh Dhiman, a government employee, and Bachan Kaur. He had four sisters and two brothers and was called Jeet by his family.

His birth name was Jagmohan but his Sikh father rechristened him as Jagjit following the advice of his guru.

It was his father, who first recognised his son's talent although he had wanted him to be an Indian Administrative Service officer.

He sent a young Jagjit to learn the nuances of music under a blind teacher Pandit Chhaganlal Sharma. He later trained under Ustad Jamal Khan of Sainia gharana for six years and gained knowledge in Khayal, Thumri and Dhrupad forms.

A music composer also, Jagjit Singh has sung in Bangla, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Sindhi and Nepali and was awarded India's third highest civilian honour, the Padma Bhushan in 2003.

His music became more popular through films like Prem Geet, Arth, Saath Saath and Joggers Park and TV serials Mirza Ghalib (1988) and Kalkashan (1991).

Among Jagjit Singh's countless admirers are Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his wife Gursharan Kaur.

Manmohan Singh paid rich tributes to Jagjit Singh, saying he would be remembered for his "golden voice".

Noting that he is among

Jagjit's admirers, the Prime Minister said in his condolence message that by "making ghazals accessible to everyone, Jagjit Singh gave joy and pleasure to millions of music lovers in India and abroad....he was blessed with a golden voice"

Legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar said Jagjit Singh's death was a big loss for the music industry. "I knew him well. I hoped he would come out of the coma. But God willed otherwise."

Asha Bhonsle said hearing Jagjit's ghazals brought peace to the mind. "Listening to him was a soothing experience. If one wanted to get away from everyday stress, the best way was to play a Jagjit Singh record."

"I feel sad for his wife Chitra. She lost a son earlier and now husband. She is very lonely now," Asha said.

Bollywood lyricist Javed Akhtar described Jagjit Singh as an "extraordinary" ghazal singer whose death has caused "an irreparable loss to the Hindi film and music industry".

"I first heard him when I attended an event in Kanpur named 'Music Night by Jagjit and Chitra' while in school. He was an icon. There is nothing I can say to console his wife (Chitra). All I can say is that he will never be forgotten. I pray to God to give her the strength to recover from the loss," classical vocalist Shubha Mudgal said.

An emotional Usha Uttup recalled her time with Singh. "I can't believe it. It was because of him that ordinary men could enjoy good ghazal. We worked together in a jingle when I was just starting my career."

Italian vessel hijacked by Somali pirates

AFP, Rome

An Italian vessel carrying 23 crew was hijacked by five pirates about 620 miles east of the Somali coast yesterday, the D'Alesio shipping company said.

The ship's owners said the crew comprised Italian, Ukrainian and Indian nationals, adding it was "actively collaborating with all the related Italian and international authorities to respond to the emergency."

"There has been no contact with the ship since 6:44 (0444 GMT) this morning," when the captain sent a message saying the vessel was under attack and he had activated "the security operating procedure."

No rental power

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public undertakings, told this correspondent after the meeting at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

There are around 15 rental plants among the new ones and PDB officials have assured the committee members that those will start retiring from 2014. The tenure of any rental unit will not be extended after expiry of its agreement, said the parliamentary body chief.

"Power generation has been increased by 2,200 megawatt since the present government assumed office in 2009, while steps have been taken to produce another 2,000 megawatt power by 2012-13," Mostafa, also a ruling Awami League MP, said.

The committee members in the meeting said the government is spending huge sums as subsidy in rental power sector putting pressure on economy.

"The committee, therefore, recommended phasing out rental power generation as early as possible," another member of the committee told The Daily Star.

The committee chief said they have asked the Rural Electrification Board (REB) to improve and upgrade power supply system in rural areas so that a wide range of people come under coverage of power.

In reply, REB officials informed the committee that it had taken steps to increase capacity of transfer and power transmission line in rural areas.

The House watchdog also asked the authority concerned to finalise coal policy as soon as possible and go for coal based power plant.

Qaeda confirms Awlaqi death in Yemen

AFP, Dubai

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula yesterday confirmed the death of US-Yemeni militant Anwar al-Awlaqi in a US air strike on September 30, the US-based monitoring group SITE Intelligence said.

"We confirm to the jihad Ummah that is uprising against oppression, the martyrdom of the mujahid heroic sheikh Abu Abdur Rahman Anwar bin Nasser al-Awlaqi," SITE quoted an AQAP statement issued on jihadist forums as saying.

Dead on AL

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vice president of the committee, and Mizanur Rahman Minu, who died of cardiac failure on July 27, was made its organising secretary. Abdus Sattar, who died on February 22 this year, was made labour affairs secretary, local AL leaders said yesterday.

Nofel, former chairman of Puthia upazila, served as joint secretary of the AL committee and Minu as the mayor of Arani municipality.

In a letter to the new committee president and the general secretary on October 8, AL Joint Secretary General Mahbub-ul Alam Hanif said the party chief has approved the committee constituted in the council of district AL in October 2005.

However, local AL leaders said neither Nofel nor Minu had been elected in the council. Their names were not even officially proposed for any posts in the committee.

Although the AL council in 2005 elected Tajul Islam Faruk as the committee president, lawmaker Meraj Uddin Mollah has been named president of the new committee.

Lawmaker Omar Faruk Chowdhury has been made general secretary.

Akhtar Jahan, Nurul Islam Thanda, lawmaker Zinnatunnesa Talukdar, Mokbul Hossain, Sahabuddin Sarker and Anil Kumar Sarker have been made vice presidents of the committee. Two more posts of vice presidents still remain vacant.

Lawmakers Shahriar Alam, Enamul Haque and Kazi Abdul Wadud Dara have been made committee members.

Meraj Uddin Mollah, president of the new committee, said names of the two dead persons might have been included in the district committee mistakenly, as the central committee had no knowledge of their deaths.

No more

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member, ruled out the opposition's demand for restoration of the system. "It was declared illegal by the Supreme Court and the 15th amendment to the constitution has been passed in line with the verdict," she said.

Referring to the BNP chief's previous remarks on the caretaker system, the agriculture minister said, "Khaleda Zia in two telephone interviews with the media in New York on July 1, 2007 said 'for what's going on in the name of caretaker government, people will seek its abolishment'."

About the ongoing movement on the issue, she said her party and the government have no intention to thwart the opposition's peaceful and democratic programmes including road march.

BNP's caravan reached Sylhet last night. Khaleda is set to address a rally in the city today and will lead the march towards Rajshahi on October 18.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku at a discussion ridiculed the BNP programme. Terming it a car march, he said the opposition chief was in a picnic with lavish cars and delicious foods along with several hundred party men who also own luxury cars.

Tuku said the move intends to save war criminals and foil the trials in August 21 grenade attack and 10-truck arms haul cases.

Bangladesh Awami Olama League organised the discussion at AL's Bangabandhu Avenue office, demanding ban on the activities of Jamaat and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Light not thrown

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depends on what response I will make to it," Finance Minister AMA Muhith told journalists at his office yesterday.

The minister was scheduled to hold a press briefing on the bridge project but cancelled it, saying he was not yet prepared for it.

"I am going to hold a (press) conference once I have cleared all the troubles and all the messages," said Muhith.

He also said the government would come forth with a statement on the issue.

An AFP report quoted WB Country Director in Bangladesh Ellen Goldstein as saying yesterday, "We will not proceed until we are fully satisfied on the fraud and corruption front."

The WB was to provide \$1.2 billion for the \$ 2.9 billion

project.

The graft allegations were discussed at the weekly cabinet meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair yesterday.

But no official information was available on the details of the discussion.

The finance minister dismissed the propaganda by different quarters that Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus had a role behind the WB's delaying the funding of the Padma Bridge.

Asked by journalists about the propaganda, Muhith said, "No, I have also said it earlier. I have no evidence."

Muhith said that side by side with the Anti-Corruption Commission, the government would also probe the graft allegations.

The minister declined to say anything about the allega-

tions for the moment.

When told that a minister's business firm had allegedly sought commission from a pre-qualified bidder in the tender process for the Padma Bridge, Muhith refused to make any comment.

He, however, said the WB's allegations were based on the assumption that corruption might have taken place in the tender process. Activities regarding construction of the bridge have remained suspended following the allegations.

"Our concern is to remove this difficulty," he said.

The minister also said except for the Padma Bridge project, all other WB-financed projects are going on. The WB will also give budget support.

He went on, "We will surely get the IMF's Extended Credit Facility (ECF)."

the Supreme Court declared the caretaker system illegal.

The opposition says it will never participate in parliamentary elections under the AL-led government.

While Khaleda Zia, leader of the opposition in the House, adopts a tough stance, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her part maintains that the forthcoming general elections would be held under the present administration since the court had declared unconstitutional the provision for a caretaker system.

Yesterday, the BNP chief also called upon the people to join the opposition agitation to compel the government to meet the demands.

She alleged the ruling party had hoodwinked the people by its election pledges to bring down the price of rice to Tk 10 a kg and to ensure free fertilisers and jobs for every family in the country.

The popularity of the government was on the wane, Khaleda said. She stated that the government was busy serving a neighbouring country instead of working for the people.

As the opposition activists marched on, supporters along the highway chanted slogans. They carried placards, banners and portraits of late president Ziaur Rahman, Khaleda Zia and her son Tarique Rahman. Many were seen presenting sheaves of paddy to their leader.

A beaming Khaleda Zia responded to the crowds on her way to Sylhet by waving from her jeep.

Security was tight and Rab and police escorted the convoy.

Leaders of the BNP-led four-party alliance components and like-minded parties -- Jamaat Ameer (acting) Maqbul Ahmad, BJP Chairman Andaleeb Rahman

Partha, Khelafat Majlish Ameer Moulana M Ishaque and Islami Oikya Jote Secretary General Abdul Latif Nezami, LDP President Col (retd) Oli Ahmed and Jagpa President Shafiu Alam Prodhan joined the march.

After speaking at Narayanganj, Khaleda addressed five more rallies at Narsingdi, Kishoreganj, Brahmanbaria, Habiganj and Moulvibazar.

She also placed floral wreaths at a monument to the late BNP leader M Saifur Rahman at Ashuganj.

Speaking at Bhairab, the BNP chief said her party was involving people with their activities through road marches and would declare the final round of agitation after completing these programmes.

"People have run out of patience as they are not well at all. They have no security and the government has failed in all sectors," she said.

Corruption had pervaded the government machinery at all levels, she added. "The Padma bridge project has been stalled by the World Bank amid graft allegations."

At a grand rally in the capital on September 27, Begum Zia declared three road marches --- to Sylhet, Rajshahi and Chittagong --- as a means of mounting pressure on the government for a restoration of the caretaker system.

Later the party postponed the Chittagong road march considering hajj and Eid-ul-Azha. It will march to Rajshahi on October 18.

Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, the party's acting secretary general, said Khaleda Zia would lead road marches to Chittagong, Barisal, Khulna and Rangpur after Eid.