

Obama 'wins' final debate

FROM PAGE 20

While tamer than the second debate last week in New York state, the matchup had its share of zingers and putdowns, most of them doled out by an aggressive president eager to stop a surge in polls by the former Massachusetts governor.

"I know you haven't been in a position to actually execute foreign policy, but every time you've offered an opinion, you've been wrong," said Obama.

"Attacking me is not an agenda," was Romney's frequent retort, alluding to Republican accusations that Obama had not laid out enough of a policy plan for a second term.

Snap polls declared Obama the winner, but 60 percent of people in a CNN survey said Romney was capable of being commander in chief, accomplishing a key goal set out by his advisers.

A CBS News poll said 53 percent believed Obama won the debate, versus 23 percent for Romney and 24 percent calling it a draw. The CNN poll put Obama as the winner by 8 percentage points.

With foreign policy a low priority in a campaign focused on the economy, it was unclear what impact the debate would have on

the race. Respondents in the CNN poll were split over whether it would influence their votes in the November 6 election.

The campaign now enters its decisive phase with two weeks of campaign rallies across battleground states. Polls show a tied race, after Romney clawed back from a deficit by outdueling Obama in their first debate on October 3.

The Boca Raton showdown was one last chance for the candidates to appeal to millions of voters watching on television and Obama was the aggressor from start to finish.

He criticised the Republican for lacking ideas on the Middle East, mocked his calls for more ships in the US military and accused Romney of wanting to bring the United States back to a long-abandoned Cold War stance.

He had a biting and perhaps condescending response when the Republican said the US Navy had fewer ships now than at any time since 1917 and needed more.

Romney was cautious throughout and often refused to take the bait when attacked, which may have led viewers to declare Obama the winner.

The former business executive's approach

seemed to be a sign that he feels he has the momentum in the campaign and was trying to avoid the kind of mistakes he made on a trip abroad in July to London, Jerusalem and Poland. He often steered the conversation back to the economy.

"The president's path means 20 million people out of work struggling for a good job," Romney said in his closing statement, delivered as he sat at a table with Obama and facing CBS News' moderator Bob Schieffer. "I'll get people back to work with 12 million new jobs."

Romney accused Obama of failing ally Israel, which the Democrat has not visited since taking office four years ago.

Both men declared, however, they would defend the Jewish state if it were attacked by Iran and both vowed to pursue tough policies against Tehran's nuclear ambitions and keep military action as a last resort. Iran says its atomic program is for peaceful purposes.

Increasing the pressure, Obama said the Republican presidential candidate was seeking to turn back the clock to the 1980s by once declaring Russia the top "geopolitical foe" of the United States.

POLLS-TIME GOVT

CEC for political settlement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad yesterday said the issue of polls-time government might be settled politically soon.

"It is a political issue. Discussions are going on in the political arena. We hope the mode of election-time government will be decided soon," he told reporters at the EC Secretariat in the capital.

Responding to a query, he said it was not the EC the BNP-led opposition party was against. The opposition parties had said they would not join the next parliamentary elections under the incumbent government, Rakibuddin added.

"Under this situation, it is not the election commission's duty to ask the two major political parties to sit for a dialogue on the issue. The matter will be settled in parliament."

On holding electoral talks with political parties after the Eid vacation, the CEC said the commission would sit together with all the parties registered with it.

On the registration of political parties, he said the EC Secretariat had already issued a circular, asking parties willing to get registered to apply to the commission by December 31.

The CEC was talking to reporters after a meeting with members of the law enforcement agencies on the law and order situation in Tangail ahead of the by-election on November 20.

Necessary measures would be taken to maintain law and order and ensure a peaceful atmosphere during the Tangail-3 by-election, he said.

Rtv takes live show off air as rival leaders lose temper

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of the private media channel Rtv had to suspend a live programme for a few minutes last night due to a nasty argument between Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan and BNP leader Rafiqul Islam Miah.

The two got locked into a fight in the "Our Democracy" programme where yesterday's topic was "Safe Journey Home for Eid and Puja".

The programme, which started at 11:15pm, was taken off air, as the two leaders took to personal attacks while talking about the performances of the incumbent government and the BNP-led four-party government, Prothom Alo online reported.

As it resumed after some time, Shahjahan and Rafiqul shook hands on the insistence of the others present.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 20

Chairperson Khaleda Zia's meetings with Indian leaders during her upcoming visit to New Delhi.

BNP Vice-Chairman Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury said this to journalists after Indian High Commissioner Pankaj Saran called on the opposition leader at her Gulshan office last night.

Reaz Rahman, BNP chairperson's adviser and former state minister for foreign affairs, was present at the 40-minute meeting that started around 8:00pm.

Khaleda, who will leave for India on October 28, is scheduled to meet, among others, the Indian president, prime minister, chief of Indian National Congress and top leaders of the Indian opposition party.

"Our relations with India are important, and there are some unresolved issues between the two countries, which will be discussed during the visit," Shamsher told reporters.

He added that indo-Bangla relations would take on a new dimension after the meetings between Khaleda and Indian leaders.

Beware! It's a black law

FROM PAGE 1

government to do. Such is the extent of the authority vested in the amendment that the government will not even require permission from the court for any takeover.

More disturbingly, the government will not be held responsible for any financial loss the private enterprise may have incurred after the takeover. No wonder why it has sent a chill down the spine of the private sector. Businesspeople will be at the total mercy of the government, ruling politicians, to be precise. Keep the politicians happy or face doom!

All that the government should have wanted in safeguarding people's interest is to go after the MLM swindlers and errant cooperatives. Small changes in parts of the relevant law or enforcing the law that fits the crime would have served the purpose very well.

But, intentionally or unintentionally, the government has gone to an extreme -- that is by legalising its scope to take over private businesses. The government should have restricted its authority by ensuring good financial governance, punishing errant businesses and shutting out illegal ones.

Instead, the government appeared keener on appointing its administrators. Taking over private businesses under any pretext just cannot be government business. It is downright criminal and tantamount to usurping private property.

The call for a reform to financial governance or a revisit to the existing laws

grew louder against the backdrop of an alarming rise in swindling by multi-level marketing companies and illegal banking by cooperative societies, with Destiny Group in the forefront.

Now, do we really need a new law or a government takeover to fix these menacing irregularities? Could the illegal banking not be stopped or swindlers be punished by enforcing any of the existing laws?

For example, as per Cooperative Societies Act, no cooperative society can indulge in banking. Illegal banking by the cooperative wing of Destiny Group caught the relevant ministry and the central bank napping. Belatedly though, the central bank has acted on the irregularity by freezing its bank accounts. The National Board of Revenue is trying to find out tax anomalies and the Anti-Corruption Commission too weighed in to take care of graft issues. If there is any money-laundering issue, the government does have a specific law in hand to deal with it. If any criminal offence is committed, the Penal Code can come into play. That is exactly how a law should take its own course.

Destiny Group is accused of swindling people through its controversial MLM business. This pyramid business model, which makes a few people at the top richer and millions at the bottom losers, may not be illegal yet across the world. But it is highly controversial indeed. So, what our government should have done? Like other countries, we could have got the people aware of

the controversy and swindling surrounding the business. A regulatory body should have been in place to watch its activities.

Then why is the need for a takeover? Why should the government be too keen to take this additional burden to run a business entity?

The law must put a leash on runaway businesses such as Destiny Group but it must not punish the private sector as a whole. Why didn't the government care to sit with business leaders before altering the law? If it had done so, it could have taken into account the opinions of the business community.

With the change in law in place to regulate rogue companies by appointing administrators, we wonder how far the government can go. Is this the end of the private sector, successes of which keep the country afloat against the failure of the public sector? Who will make sure future governments do not lean on private businesses if they fall out with the governments?

There is none in this case. The judiciary has been curiously kept out of the loop. The government has decided to call all the shots.

The government has reserved the absolute power to serve notice on the board of directors of a company seeking explanation why it should not be governed by an administrator. Again, it is the government that will decide whether the company's explanation is satisfactory or not. It is the government that will finally decide whether to appoint an administrator to the company.

Sunil Gangopadhyay

FROM PAGE 1

West Bengal and Bangladesh, died of heart attack at his home in Gariahat in South Kolkata in the wee hours of yesterday.

The 78-year-old poet, novelist, columnist and journalist who penned more than 200 books and was conferred several prestigious awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, had not been keeping well for the last few days and lost appetite, family sources said.

On Monday night, he went to bed without having any food. At around 10:00pm he wanted to go to washroom when he felt unwell again and asked his wife Swati for help. Soon afterwards the writer collapsed. Swati massaged his heart in a bid to revive him but to no avail. The author died even before a local doctor could be summoned.

Sunil's son is based in Boston and the writer's funeral will be held today after he reaches Kolkata.

Born on September 7, 1934, in Faridpur of Bangladesh, the prolific poet and novelist had explored almost all genres of literature: short stories, novels, plays, literary criticism, travelogues and children's literature.

But he had always main-

tained that poetry was his first love and close to his heart. His Nikhilesh and Neera series of poems are hugely popular and had become a craze with youths when they were first published.

Sunil had often used pen-names like 'Nil Lohit', 'Sanatan Pathak', and 'Nil Upadhyay'. His short stories under the title 'Nil Lohiter Chokher Samney', which used to be published in Ananda Bazar Patrika every week in the 70's, had become a craze for readers of all ages.

The stories reflected the writer's lucid prose and ability to churn out highly-fascinating stories out of most ordinary events in day-to-day lives of people.

Some of his poems, including "Keu Kotha Rakheni", had become hugely popular among the youths in West Bengal in the 70's and 80's.

Among the best-selling works of the winner of the 1985 Sahitya Akademi Award, are his extensively researched novel 'Sei Samay', which was serialised in "Desh" magazine, "Protham Alo", "Purbopaschim" and "Aranyer Din Raatri" which was made into a feature film by maestro director Satyajit Ray. The writer's another novel

"Pratidwandi" was also turned into a film by Ray.

Sunil, recipient of Bankim Puraskar in 1982 and Ananda Puraskar twice (in 1972 and 1989), was the founder-editor of "Krittibas", a little magazine for poetry that encouraged new poets experimenting with new forms and became immensely popular in West Bengal in 70's and 80's.

A pall of gloom descended on the literary circles in West Bengal following the death of Sunil and Indian President Pranab Mukherjee led the country in paying rich tributes to the writer.

"Gangopadhyay had enriched Bangla literature through his unique style. He was one of the best intellectuals among his contemporaries. The vacuum created by his death cannot be filled," the Indian president said.

Writer Sirshendu Mukherjee, who is also popular on both sides of the border, said, "It will be extremely difficult to fill the vacuum in Bangla literature caused by his death. Sunil had heralded a new style in Bangla literature."

Author Samarendra Majumdar said, "Bangla literature has lost its guardian."

Trips home turn horrible

FROM PAGE 1

(BIWTC) was trying to prepare another new terminal for transporting more vehicles and freeing the highway, reports our Munshiganj correspondent.

"We expect to make the new terminal ready in the next couple of days," Sirajul Haq, BIWTC manager at Mawa, told The Daily Star. He added the BIWTC needed at least four terminals.

The two alternative terminals were failing to transport an adequate number of vehicles, causing immense sufferings to people leaving the city to celebrate puja and eid.

"I have been waiting here for the last four days but failed to cross the river. I don't know when I will get the chance," said truck driver Shafu Mia.

Rodela, a college student in Dhaka, said she had sent my family to Jhenidah last week. "But I have been stuck here for about five hours to get a ferry."

At the Kawrakandi end, a

large number of cattle and goods-carrying trucks were waiting to cross the river and come to Dhaka. At least 650 vehicles lined up on each side of the river.

The situation on the Dhaka-Tangail highway, which connects the capital with the 23 north-western districts, remained unchanged yesterday. Passengers have been facing untold sufferings since Monday morning as traffic from Gazipur to Tangail came to a halt.

The tailback was created as a huge number of cattle-laden trucks from northern districts were rushing towards the capital ahead of the eid, Sub-Inspector Mamun Mia of Gorai Highway Police Station told our Tangail correspondent.

A level crossing at Dherua in Mirzapur and 22 speed breakers from Kaliakair to Elega in Tangail worsened the situation, headed.

But officials of Roads and Highways Department put

the blame on the narrow Kaliakair-Elega road. They said the two-lane road was unable to afford a rising number of traffic ahead of eid.

According to the Bangabandhu Bridge Authorities, normally 10,000 vehicles cross the bridge every day, but the number doubles as eid approaches.

Businessman Arif Abdulla was travelling on a Rangpur-bound bus. He said, "It took us four hours to reach Tangail from Gabtoli. We don't know when our bus will reach Rangpur."

Passengers also experienced traffic congestion on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway throughout yesterday.

An increasing number of vehicles, indiscriminate movements of sand-loaded trucks for Dhaka-Chittagong four-lane project and narrowness of the highway have led to the traffic congestion.

Passengers, especially women and children, are the

But what should be the mechanism of the government before coming to this observation? In reality, such observation or directive can only come from the court.

Our next-door neighbour, India, provides a good example. On August 31, India's Supreme Court ruled that finance schemes run by two Sahara companies were illegal and ordered it to repay \$4.5 billion to up to almost 30 million mostly small investors, plus interest.

Sahara employed agents to raise deposits from rural Indians. The sums are small, but important to the customers who trusted the company with their limited savings.

The case has thrown a rare light on the unlisted giant whose interests range across finance, housing, media and entertainment. But the Indian government did not appoint an administrator to discipline the dodgy company. Everything proceeded through the court system.

So, we ask the government to wake up to its senses. It must play the game by the rules. Powers should be entrusted with the court to decide on whether to appoint an administrator in any company. The court should only appoint an audit or chartered accounting firm. Not just anybody, certainly not a bureaucrat. So, go to court, if need be. But let businesspeople mind their own business.

Prices high

FROM PAGE 20

Traders blamed high purchase prices of the cattle from local markets and increased prices of cattle food for the high prices of sacrificial animals this year.

"We had to pay an additional Tk 10,000 to Tk 15,000 for a medium-sized cow," said Anowar, a cattle trader from Jhenaidah. He brought 29 cows to the Dhupkhola market three days ago.

Amzad Ali, a trader from Ishwardi, said though there was an abundant supply of cattle this time around, traders would not be able to sell the cows at comparatively lower prices as that would leave them suffering from losses.

MACHINESTO

DETECT FAKENOTES

In line with the directive of Bangladesh Bank, different commercial banks have already set up machines in all 20 cattle markets in the city to detect forged notes.

MARKETSON

THESTREETS

Flouting the government directive, almost all cattle markets in the city have spread across the nearby streets disrupting traffic.

Though the lessee of Armanitola cattle market was leased the Armanitola playground, the market has spilled out onto the adjoining streets.

Visiting the Nayabazar cattle market at noon yesterday, this correspondent found some traders busy digging holes on the main road to place bamboos in to tie up their cattle.

WB to sit with co-financiers

FROM PAGE 1

improve rural transport and bring rural areas under the power network, which will benefit some 25 million people.

Earlier on Sunday, she said a WB mission would arrive in Dhaka next month to begin talks on the execution process of the \$2.97 billion project, the largest infrastructure scheme in the country. Goldstein also hinted that the project work and corruption investigation would go on simultaneously.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday sent responses to all the inquiries of a WB panel, which is assigned to review the ACC probe. ACC officials said they had sent 20 investigation-related files to the WB expert panel.

The WB, lead financier of the Padma bridge project, cancelled its \$1.2 billion loan deal in June, saying it had proof of a "corruption conspiracy" involving some Bangladesh government officials and executives of a Canadian firm.

The co-financiers -- the Asian Development Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Islamic Development Bank --

- also halted release of their funds following the WB decision.

In September, the WB re-engaged in the project after the government agreed to meet the bank's conditions, including sending the suspected government officials on leave till the investigation was completed and giving a WB panel access to the ACC findings.

Accordingly, the WB formed a three-member external panel headed by Luis Moreno Ocampo, former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The panel made its first three-day visit to Dhaka from October 14-16.

"They [the panel] left on October 16 after a very positive meeting. They also agreed to work with the ACC," Goldstein said yesterday. "When the panel receives the answers the mission will be in a position to write its first report."

She said the bank encouraged the ACC to move ahead with the investigation as fast as possible for the WB to move forward to implement the project.

Earlier on several occasions the WB hinted its funding would depend on a "positive review" by the panel.

ACC SENDS DOCUMENTS

Talking to journalists at the ACC office in the capital's Segunbagicha, ACC Chairman Ghulam Rahman said, "All the information and data sought by the World Bank panel of experts has been sent."

He, however, would not give any details of the information.

Replying to a query, Ghulam Rahman said the commission would not interrogate any WB officials. But if necessary, it would discuss relevant matters with the bank.

ACC Commissioner Mohammad Shahabuddin later told reporters that the ACC had sent 20 files detailing the ACC probe into the corruption allegation.

Shahabuddin said the ACC investigation was yet to be completed. Asked, he refused to reveal the commission's findings obtained so far.

"We sought help from the World Bank to get us information from Canada," he said.

On Monday, the ACC chief said the attorney general on the commission's behalf was in touch with the Canadian authorities. But the Canadian government was yet to respond.