

Govt plans reform in city polls

Mayors to be elected through indirect polls

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The government has initiated to annul direct election to the mayor and chairman posts in the local government levels.

According to the move, elected councillors and members will elect a mayor or chairman from among themselves.

Local Government and Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashraf Islam disclosed the plan at a meeting with deputy commissioners (DCs) yesterday, on the second day of the DC conference being held in the cabinet division of Bangladesh Secretariat.

Ashraf told the DCs that a national dialogue would be initiated before introducing the system, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

As per the current rules, city corporation mayors and upazila chairmen are elected through direct voting.

Ashraf said mayors and chairmen used to get elected through indirect voting before the country's liberation. In 1973, the then government introduced direct election system for mayors and chairman by nullifying the previous method because the councillors and elected members used to get teamed up and sell their votes to influential people, who wanted to be in the helm of the

local body.

The LGRD minister pointed out that the mayors and chairmen should be elected as the prime minister is elected in the parliamentary system of democracy. Currently the mayors and chairmen are elected like the presidential form of system where the president is elected through direct voting of people.

He said two different systems cannot go along in a country. Elections to local government institutions would be held following the parliamentary form of system [indirect voting] if his party Awami League-led alliance assumed power in the next election, said Ashraf.

He also told the meeting that the level of the local government institution would also be reduced to strengthen the body organisationally and financially so that there was a powerful decentralised government system in the country, added sources.

In the meeting, the DCs alleged that the elected local government representatives in many cases did not follow the laws and created divisions among themselves over carrying out their duties. Their tasks should be defined and fixed to avert any feuds and factions in the local government institutions.



With prices of essentials skyrocketing and clothes pretty expensive at fancy shops, a section of the middleclass depend on the stalls on the pavement near Dhaka College on Mirpur Road for their Eid-shopping needs.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

DCs asked

FROM PAGE 16

commissioners (DCs) on the second day of DC conference at the Cabinet Division.

The DCs were asked to help remove illegal structures and transport from roads across the country to ensure smooth traffic, he added.

About the present traffic situation, Quader said traffic jam was his biggest concern now. "When I see depressed and exhausted faces looking at me through bus windows, I feel hurt.... When I see a lot of people waiting on roads for buses in the Ramadan, I feel ashamed."

Terming the Padma bridge and metro rail projects "next generation" schemes, the minister said these projects have been underway and will continue in future as the incumbent government will not be able to complete these projects during its tenure.

"But our immediate target is the maintenance of roads and highways so that it does not become a reason for sufferings of people during the rainy season. And if any crack develops on the roads, we can repair those immediately by our mobile teams. This is our priority and I'm not thinking much more than that," he noted.

In another working session with the DCs, Commerce Minister GM Quader asked the district administrators to be strict about controlling prices of essentials.

"We have asked them [DCs] to check money receipts while monitoring markets. They have also suggested that they should monitor the prices of wholesalers and retailers," Quader told newsmen after the meeting.

Regarding the DCs' recommendation for checking formalin in foods, the minister said the government has already taken initiatives to check use of formalin in foods.

Rony arrested

FROM PAGE 1

Masudur added that Rony would stay for the night at the DB headquarters at Minto Road, where he was brought after his arrest.

Sources at the Prime Minister's Office said Sheikh Hasina was "fed up" with Rony for his anti-organisational activities for long. His latest action -- beating up two journalists in the capital on Saturday -- angered the prime minister, prompting her to take a tough stance.

Meanwhile, locals at Galachipa and Dashmina in Patuakhali from where Rony was elected in 2008 brought out "cheerful" processions after the news of his arrest broke, reports our district correspondent.

Local leaders demanded that the party cancel Rony's membership in parliament for his various "misdeeds". They also called upon the Anti-Corruption Commission to launch an investigation to look into Rony's corruption in the last four and a half years.

Earlier in the day, detectives arrested Rony around 3:40pm while he was waiting for his car at the gate of Bashundhara Residential Area.

About one and a half hours before his arrest, a metropolitan magistrate cancelled his bail and ordered his arrest.

Rony had obtained an ad-interim bail on Sunday

from another court in connection with the case filed by Independent Television, whose two journalists Rony assaulted.

Yesterday, the court passed the order after complainant Yusuf Ali, assistant manager of the TV, appealed for cancelling Rony's bail. In his appeal, Yusuf claimed that Rony had been asking him to withdraw the case or face consequences.

Following the threat, Yusuf filed a general diary at Shabbagh Police Station on Sunday. The next day, the court instructed the investigation officer to probe the matter and submit a report within 24 hours.

The officer told the court that during primary investigation he found evidence of the threat.

On Saturday, Rony beat up Independent TV reporter Imtiaz Momin and cameraperson Mohsin Mukul at his Topkhana Road office.

Imtiaz and Mohsin are members of a team that produces a crime-investigative show, Talash (search), for the TV.

They went to Rony's office on information that the lawmaker was to receive Tk 1 crore in bribe money. They were waiting at Rony's office to interview him about the allegation.

When Rony came to the office and found them

waiting, he started kicking them, asking them to get out of his office. Within moments, Rony's followers joined the assault, driving the two out of the office.

Later on the day, Rony sued Imtiaz and Mohsin for "attacking him, threatening him with life and trying to extort him".

Imtiaz and Mohsin got bail from the High Court on Tuesday.

Also on Tuesday, Rony at a press conference claimed he did nothing wrong on Saturday. "I have used minimum strength. Defending myself as an MP, I have upheld my right to self-protection."

He also claimed that he was a victim of the wrath of Independent TV owner Salman F Rahman against whom he had spoken up in TV talk shows.

SPEAKER DENIES RONY'S CLAIM
Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury yesterday denied making any comment about not being embarrassed by Rony's action.

"I did not need to make such comment," she told reporters at her parliament office.

After a meeting with the Speaker on Tuesday, Rony had told reporters that the Speaker told him that neither she nor the Jatiya Sangsad was embarrassed about his action.

SQ Chy's trial

FROM PAGE 16

exercising their inherent power, recorded the deposition of hurriedly produced defence witness Abdul Momen Chowdhury, a former diplomat.

Momen said he had met war crimes accused BNP leader once in Pakistan in April, 1971. The prosecution cross-examined him for about 90 minutes. After that the tribunal closed defence witness deposition and fixed July 28 for the start of closing arguments.

The tribunal set three days, from July 28, for the prosecution and four days from July 31, for defence to place their closing arguments.

Yesterday was last scope for Salauddin's counsels to bring their last two witnesses.

The defence produced Momen before the tribunal 20 minutes after noon.

Momen said he was appointed at the embassy of Damascus of Syria as the third secretary in 1968. He was transferred to Tanzania on February 1971.

As the Liberation War began in 1971, Momen came to Karachi on either the second or third week of April, 1971, to take his family back with him from Dhaka.

But he could not fly to Dhaka as all flights between then West Pakistan and East Pakistan were suspended. He said he could not contact his family via phone either.

He stayed in Pakistan for about two weeks and one day during his stay in Pakistan he met Salauddin Quader Chowdhury at a government office.

He also met Salauddin's cousin Qayum Reza Chowdhury, the third defence witness in the case, who assured Momen

that his family was safe in Dhaka. When asked by the tribunal, the defence counsel said the witness in question was not even on their list of 1,153 defence witnesses.

"You don't have five witnesses to testify [for Salauddin]. We are feeling sorry that we allowed you five witnesses out of 1,153," said Justice Kabir.

He said the defence submission was contradictory.

Meanwhile, tribunal member Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim asked the defence counsel whether their newly proposed witness was fit to appear before the tribunal.

Fakhrul said yes. The tribunal then gave the defence an hour to produce their witness.

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that his family was safe in Dhaka.

During cross-examination, Momen said Salauddin was his distant relative as Qayum was his brother-in-law.

Salauddin himself testified in the case as the first defence witness and defence named Justice Shamim Hasnain, Salman F Rahman, Qayum Reza Chowdhury and Nizam Ahmed.

The war crimes case had sort of stalled after Nizam and Qayum testified since the defence repeatedly failed to produce Justice Shamim Hasnain and Salman before the court.

The defence yesterday sought adjournment until July 28 for producing Justice Shamim Hasnain but since the tribunal gave the defence time on several occasions to produce witnesses, it closed off witness deposition altogether.

As per relevant laws, after hearing the closing arguments from both the prosecution and the defence, the tribunal would set a date for delivering the verdict.

NIZAMI'S CASE
The 15th prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Jamaat chief Motiur Rahman Nizami yesterday testified and was cross-examined at Tribunal-1.

Witness Amirul Islam Dablu backed up the testimony of his brother, 14th prosecution witness Abdus Selim Latif, who had said that on the directive of Nizami, Al-Badr killed many people including his father on December 3, 1971.

The proceeding of the case was adjourned until August 1 after the defence completed cross-examining Amirul.

JS body

FROM PAGE 16

demand ransom from their family members in return for their release," Mujibul Haque Chunnun, a member of the committee, told The Daily Star after the meeting.

Allegations run rife that the plain-clothes police are harassing people on different excuses, Chunnun said, which is not acceptable.

Pointing to the custodial deaths of Shamim Reza and Shamim Sarkar at Sonargaon and Savar police stations respectively, Jatiya Party lawmaker Chunnun said civil teams of the aforesaid police stations had arrested the duo before they died in torture.

He alleged police file cases against several thousand unnamed people following different incidents.

"Filing of such cases ensures the harassment of people at the hands of police," Chunnun said.

After the arrest of the innocent people, police demand extortion from them and threaten them to include their names in the cases otherwise, Chunnun added.

IGP Hasan Mahmud Khandaker assured the committee that he would look into the matter.

The committee also asked the officials concerned to increase police vigilance on the roads to check hijacking and other criminal activities ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Attacks on cops kill 9 in Iraq

AFP, Mosul

Militants attacked a police station in north Iraq yesterday with mortar rounds and automatic weapons, killing nine police, while six people died in other violence, security officers and doctors said.

The violence comes a day after an al-Qaeda front group claimed brazen assaults on two prisons in Iraq that killed more than 40 people, among them 20 security forces members, and saw hundreds of inmates, including senior militants, escape.

Security forces are desperately hunting the prisoners who escaped during the assaults that began on Sunday night and continued into Monday, to prevent them rejoining the ranks of the militants and carrying out further attacks.

Yesterday's assault on the police station, which occurred about 60 kilometres (37 miles) south of the northern city of Mosul, also left two policemen wounded.

It was followed by a roadside bomb explosion as emergency personnel travelled to the scene, wounding another two people. In a separate incident, gunmen killed a soldier in Mosul itself, while armed men killed a man in Baquba, a city north of Baghdad.

Jesun new Spelling Bee champion

FROM PAGE 16

Online Spelling Bee game. But he was knocked out in the Divisional Round.

This year, he made a much more concerted effort to improve his spelling. "I learned more words from the dictionary and watched last year's TV episodes to prepare

for this year," he said.

The Spelling Bee of this season has seen an increase in participation with the number of contestants reaching over 2 lakh -- more than double that of last year.

Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, Director and Head of

News of Channel i Shykh Seraj, Managing Director of Fast Group of Companies Hafiz Ahmed, DGM of Metlife Alico Syed Hammadul Karim and CEO of Champs21.com Russell T Ahmed were present at the Spelling Bee grand finale among others.

Final bid for Teesta deal

FROM PAGE 1

to lobby for the Teesta and land boundary deals.

Foreign ministry sources said during her three-day visit, Dipu Moni would discuss India's position regarding the much awaited Teesta deal, and ratification of the land boundary agreement to exchange enclaves and adversely possessed land, and demarcation of undemarcated border.

They said the central government of India had agreed to settle the two pending issues quickly but the solution to the two were facing delays due to politics in Indian states.

The signing of the much-awaited Teesta deal was stalled due to the last-moment u-turn by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during Indian Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh's visit to Bangladesh on September 6, 2011.

The land boundary agreement had been delayed because the Indian government could not place the constitutional amendment bill in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha for ratification as it failed to convince the opposition parties to support the bill.

Diplomatic sources in Dhaka and New Delhi indicated that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance had launched hectic discussion with Indian opposition parties, especially BJP, to introduce the Constitution Amendment Bill in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian parliament, and in Lok Sabha in the monsoon session for ratification.

The main opposition party, along with parties like Asom Gana Parishad, prevented the government from introducing the Constitution Amendment Bill during the last budget session. They continue to oppose the agreement insisting that India was ceding too much territory to Bangladesh.

The agreement envisages transfer of 111 enclaves with a total area of 17,160.63 acres to Bangladesh while Dhaka will transfer 51 enclaves with an area of 7,110.02 acres to India.

Official sources said Dipu Moni during her meetings with the Indian Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister will also discuss the second state visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to New Delhi.

Hasina received an invitation from the Indian government to visit the country in August, but foreign ministry and Indian High Commission sources indicated that the visit was expected to take place sometime in September.

According to the programme schedule, Dipu Moni would leave for New Delhi on a Jet Airlines aircraft at 9:20am today and deliver the lecture at 4:30pm in New Delhi.

She would call on Manmohan Singh at 11:00am and BJP leader Arun Jaitley at 5:00pm tomorrow. The Indian external affairs minister was expected to host a dinner in her honour at 7:30pm that night. She was to return home Saturday afternoon.

Prepare for polls

FROM PAGE 1

boycott the elections if not held under a non-party caretaker government, Ashraf said many people could speak many things, but they were hopeful that all parties would take part in the polls.

On feuds between the DCs and the local government representatives, Ashraf, also ruling Awami League's general secretary, said in any new system there might be some complexities.

He said the government was thinking about curbing the tiers of local governments in a bid to strengthen it. He added the local governments in all developed countries including the US had been facing financial crisis.

"Thus, we are considering if we would keep the existing tiers of local government or not. I have already discussed the issue with the prime min-

ister," he said, adding that the local governments would not be strengthened until those became financially self-sufficient.

HEALTH MINISTRY
At a meeting with the health ministry officials, several DCs have alleged that doctors and nurses did not stay in rural areas causing immense sufferings to the patients.

The DCs requested the ministry officials to take steps to ensure presence of doctors and nurses at hospitals in rural areas.

Emerging from the meeting, State Minister for Health and Family Welfare Capt (ret'd) Dr Majibur Rahman Fakir said they would compel the doctors to serve in rural areas for two years after their appointment.

Besides, the government was going to appoint 5,000 doctors and 5,000 nurses

within a month or two to cope with the shortage of these professionals, he added.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN AFFAIRS MINISTRY
State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Meher Afroz Chumki yesterday said she had urged the DCs to help the ministry arrange sending women abroad as domestic help without harassment by local manpower brokers.

"The ministry will provide the women 21-day training," she added.

She asked the DCs to play their due role in ensuring women empowerment that Hefajat was recently trying to hamper.

The DCs were also asked to launch a campaign for introducing helpline No. 10921 so that woman and child victims of violence could seek help instantly, she added.