



Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority demolishes a market built by occupying the bank of the Buriganga river near Lalbagh Fort intersection in the capital yesterday.
PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

47 illegal structures knocked down

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Selim, however, could not be reached for his comment over the ownership of the warehouse as his phone was found switched off.

Haji Mobarak, a resident of Lalbagh, said the place where the warehouse was being built after filling up the area with garbage and earth was once part of the river.

Construction materials

were also seized from the warehouse during the drive.

The Buriganga second channel used to flow from Chandrahat to Rayerbazar through Lalbagh, Nawabganj, Hazaribagh and Mohammadpur, covering nearly a five-kilometre area.

Half of it has now been grabbed and officially allotted, said locals.

Saiful Islam, joint director (port and traffic) of BIWTA, said the place of the encroachment was once the original channel of the Buriganga.

But the channel hardly exists now due to continuous dumping of garbage and grabbing over the years, he said.

BIWTA once had a plan to set up a harbour on the channel to ease pressure

on Sadarghat terminal in the capital.

Md Abul Bashar, director (port) of BIWTA, said the authorities would continue the drive to free both sides of the channel from encroachers.

Asked how the BIWTA authority would keep the recovered lands free from grabbers, he said, they had taken plans to set up walkways and plant saplings on

both sides of the river.

About the BWDB's failure to stop the grabbing, its Executive Engineer Tarik Al Fayez said the organisation had only one assistant director and a surveyor to cover a 33-km stretch from Abdullahpur to Postogola.

Raselul Kader, executive magistrate of the deputy commissioner's office, led the drive.

Frayed and feared vs free and fair

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differently from the other. There are also questions of pay, perks and other facilities. It will be a case of paying MPs while they contest for their own reelection.

Above all, this provision militates against the cardinal principle of contesting elections in a democracy, that is, of all candidates being equal before the law, before the EC and fundamentally, before the voters. Candidates challenging the incumbents are at a natural disadvantage, which can have a significant impact on the outcome.

Finally, such a system does not exist in any other country practising parliamentary democracy like India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and, of course, the UK. In all these countries parliament is dissolved before fresh elections are called. Here the PM's claim that our elections will take place like any other country in the world that practises parliamentary democracy is simply not true.

So why should we adopt a system that other countries, in their collective

wisdom, have not found acceptable?

As for point 3, Sheikh Hasina is right. In all democracies the incumbent government continues in an interim capacity, discharging the ordinary day to day business of government, while an all-powerful Election Commission presides over the elections. In all the countries that we mentioned earlier -- India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and UK -- the incumbent governments continue in power while elections are held.

So why can't we be like other countries practising parliamentary democracy? Because:

1. In no other country does the opposition constantly boycott parliament. (Just imagine, today, we would have had a 22-year tradition of parliamentary opposition only if our opposition -- belonging to both parties -- just did their duties inside the House, instead of creating havoc on the streets.)

2) In no other country the government tries to suppress and discredit the

opposition as we do. (Each time an opposition MP gets beaten up by the police, our democracy's image is hurt.

3) In no other country the leader of the house and the leader of the opposition abuse each other every time they refer to each other. Imagine, they have not had a single serious conversation about the country's problems in the last 23 years, while they have been leading us either as PM or as opposition leader.

4) In no other country bills proposed by the opposition never even get discussed, let alone passed.

5) In no other country the opposition finds nothing about the government, howsoever sound their policies can be, to praise, and vice versa.

6) In no other country the opposition vows to "topple" an elected government within months of an election.

7). In no country the opposition calls hartals purposelessly, without the least concern for the economy, only to harass the government.

8) In no country the

statutory bodies, oversight institutions, bureaucracy, law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies, etc., are used for political purposes by the ruling party as we do. The list can go on and on.

No caretaker government is an old stance of the PM and we have already called it a "mistake" in our editorial when it was first abolished by her. There is very little prospect of an acceptable election participated by all sides without it.

The most important reason is the existing 'trust deficit' between AL and BNP. If BNP was in power today and had abolished the caretaker system, giving the same reasons as given by the PM, would AL have participated in the polls? If the AL found K.M. Hasan as caretaker chief in the 2007 elections unacceptable because he belonged, years before, to BNP prior to becoming a judge, then is it realistic to expect BNP to accept AL party chief as the head of the government that will preside over the coming elections? How unrealistic can we get?

Given the hatred that

exists between the BNP and AL chiefs (and both of them have done everything possible to let the whole world know about it), it is nothing short of a pipe dream to expect Khaleda Zia to accept Sheikh Hasina's heading the interim government. We can talk, argue and debate till eternity but to expect a solution defies logic.

Given the above, the PM's latest stance as revealed during her talk with the secretaries is a sure recipe for political conflict, which must be avoided both for the sake of democracy and for the future of the country, which is being increasingly viewed as a destination for FDI, but will lose its attractiveness if violence become widespread.

We have no illusions that our comments will be considered with any seriousness, but we still write hoping, as hope springs eternal in our hearts, for some sanity at some point in time. Otherwise we are likely to have a frayed and feared election rather than a free and fair one.

BNP to resist

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Alamgir at a rally yesterday urged the opposition activists to make preparation for a tougher agitation.

"We have a few weeks in hand for preparation. We have no alternative. Within this time, we have to prepare ourselves fully and force the government to step down."

Alongside waging street agitations, if the BNP-led 18-party alliance opts for taking extreme steps like resignation of the alliance MPs in the middle of October, this will complicate the situation further, political observers say.

If so, it will put additional pressure on the Election Commission since it will have to hold by-elections to those vacant seats at a time (within 90 days of their resignation) when it has to proceed with the holding of general election.

"This will create a chaotic situation," jurist Shahdeen Malik told The Daily Star yesterday.

As per the present constitutional provision, the general election will be held any time between October 27 and January 24.

Asked about such a situation, jurist Anisul Islam Mahmud, also a presidium member of the Jatiya Party and a lawmaker, said, "It is a grey area. It needs interpretation of the constitution," he told The Daily Star.

He, however, said in such a situation, the Speaker may take the same strategy as the then Speaker took between 1994 and 1995 to delay accepting the resignation letters of MPs belonging to the Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami to avert by-elections.

A senior leader of the ruling AL, on condition of anonymity, said if such a situa-

tion crops up, one may go to the higher court challenging the en masse resignation.

Such an incident took place following the en masse resignation of opposition MPs in 1994, sparking a constitutional crisis.

Asked, AL leader Suranjit Sengupta, however, said there is no possibility of any constitutional crisis. "After the prime minister's announcement [polls without dissolving the present parliament and the cabinet], the ball is now in BNP's court. The BNP chief will have to say what more she wants to join the polls."

He said the opposition parties will now have to think beyond their demand for restoration of the caretaker government system.

Senior leaders of the AL-led ruling alliance interpret the prime minister's announcement as a strategy to put pressure on the BNP policymakers to sit for talks to resolve the crisis.

If both the parties reach any understanding on the polls-time government, they claim, the prime minister may advise the president to dissolve the House before the election.

The ruling alliance leaders believe there will be an understanding between the two rival camps and the BNP will join the general election.

BNP leaders, however, claimed the prime minister's announcement has shut the door on a solution of the ongoing political standoff through talks.

But they hope the UN and international community's ongoing efforts will force the government to relax its stance on the polls.

"We hope a solution will come from their efforts," said BNP leader Mahbub.

Criminals kill

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India, as the border adjacent to the village is unguarded and the barbed wire fence at Shailmari point has cuts that allow robbers and abductors to sneak in and out.

At about 1:30am, the gang broke open the main door to the brick house where the boy lived with his mother Shamena Khatun, said police.

Holding the mother at gunpoint, they took the child and started running away.

The mother's cries for help brought many neighbours to the scene. They started following the gang, but the criminals responded with gunshots and bombs.

Eken Uddin, who was injured by a bomb, told journalists that the teacher had

almost reached the abductors when one of them shot him point-blank.

Halim instantly fell to the ground, dead.

The sight of the teacher dying struck terror into the other villagers, who decided not to follow the gang.

Ataur has a brother who lives in Dhaka for studies while his father Alif Hossain works in South Africa.

Several police teams rushed to the village around 3:30am and scoured the nearby areas but failed to trace the abductors.

Nahiduzzaman Nahid, Meherpur superintendent of police, told The Daily Star that they had informed the Indian authorities about the abduction.

EC asked

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year and January 24 next year.

Polls to the newly formed four upazila parishes and by-elections for chairman or vice-chairman of 29 upazilas have fallen due. The commission had planned these elections for September 25.

The new upazilas are Bijoynagar of Brahmanbaria, Rangabali of Patuakhali, Taltoli of Barguna and Kalukhali of Rajbari.

The EC now will have to defer the elections because, as per the law, any local government election can only be held with the prior consent from the local government and rural development (LGRD) ministry, said EC officials.

The EC last month had postponed the September 8 polls to three municipalities as desired by the ministry.

Martyr's wife

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Gangasagar Dighi [of Akhaur], said Bhanu Bibi, ninth prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Mobarak at the International Crimes Tribunal-1.

The septuagenarian witness added, "On the morning of Bhadra 5 [August 22 in 1971] Mobarak appeared and said a meeting of Peace Committee [auxiliary force of Pakistani occupation army] would be held at our house in the afternoon. He asked my father-in-law Noor Bux Hazi, husband, and brother-in-law Abul Bashar to be present."

About 130 people assembled at Noor's house for the meeting jointly started by Mobarak, his associates and the Pakistani army.

"At one stage, villagers were tied up and forced into boats. They were taken to the bank of Sagardighi," she

said, adding, her father-in-law, two maternal uncles-in-law, brother-in-law and husband were among the detainees taken to a camp of the Pakistani army.

The villagers were tortured there. The Pakistani army and Razakars sorted out those who had performed the Hajj and set them free.

"I learned from my father-in-law [who was set free] that all these people had died because of Mobarak," she added.

The witness said about two to three days ago her husband and father-in-law had helped villagers dismantle a bridge in Tin Lakh Peer area.

Defence counsel Ahsanul Huq Hena cross-examined the witness after her deposition.

EC not sure

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said the next general election will be held without dissolving parliament and the cabinet.

"Ultimately, the final decision will be taken as per the political situation [in the country] and we will have to wait for the final decision for making full fledged preparations to hold a free, fair and credible election," said the commissioner.

Replying to a query, he said the EC was making general preparations for holding the election. Necessary measures will be taken for ensuring a level playing field considering the probable situation ahead of the election, he noted.

Expressing optimism that a political consensus would be reached ahead of the polls and the main opposition BNP would join the election, he said the EC believes that the politicians would do everything in the interest of the country.

The EC, said Hafiz, will sign a contract with the army printing press within one or two working days for printing the updated voter list.

About the selection of polling centres, he said the EC will select government institutions as polling centres. Private institutions will be used wherever government institutions are not available.

The number of total voters has increased to over 9.19 crore from around 8.10 crore in the last national election, while the number of polling centres might go up from around 35,000 to around 40,000, added the commissioner.

Regarding the registration of the much talked about political party Bangladesh Nationalist Front (BNF), he said any political party will get registration from the EC if it can fulfil the legal obligations. But none will be given undue privilege.

Bracelet uses

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band worn on the wrist.

The Nymi bracelet reads and monitors the wearer's cardiac rhythm, which is as unique as a person's fingerprint, to authenticate who they are.

A built-in proximity sensor can then detect where they are, and when the wearer is close to a paired computer, device or car, will automatically confirm their identity and unlock the required hardware or software.

The bracelet contains a HeartID that measures the amount of electrical power generated by a human heart, called a cardiac rhythm tracked on an electrocardiogram, or ECG.

Nymi only works with a registered person's cardiac rhythm, meaning if the bracelet is stolen it can't be hacked.

Along with the HeartID and proximity sensors, the Nymi bracelet also has a motion sensor and connects to devices using Bluetooth.

Applications on smart TVs can also be controlled using flicks and spins of the wrist. Plus, Nymi can be used to pay for shopping wirelessly and securely.

Although the first Nymi release is a bracelet, Dr Karl Martin of Bionym founder claims that the technology could also be embedded into other accessories, such as a ring or belt.

The bracelet only works with paired devices and once it has been joined to a smartphone.

The product's site said: "Nymi offers security without compromising convenience, putting you and only you in control of your identity."

"It can replace everything from the PIN on your credit card to the account information on your gaming console without sacrificing security, privacy or convenience."

The Nymi bracelet can be pre-ordered for \$79 for the first 250,000 orders.

Devices will be shipped 'early 2014.'

Obama urges world support

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On Tuesday, after a passionate plea by US Secretary of State John Kerry not to succumb to "armchair isolationism," lawmakers in Washington drafted a bipartisan measure imposing a 90-day deadline for any US military intervention.

It would also ban the deployment of any US troops on the ground in Syria, where fighting, now in its third year, has claimed more than 110,000 lives.

Obama has deferred any military action in Syria, seeking Congressional approval at a vote scheduled for September 9.

The US Senate committee, after a nearly four-hour hearing, re-worded the resolution put forward by the White House to restrict it to "limited and

tailored" use of the United States Armed Forces against Syria, according to a copy of the draft obtained by AFP.

Obama's trip will also take him to the G20 summit in Russia's Saint Petersburg, where he is expected to rally support for, or at least acceptance of, moves to punish Syria's President Bashar al-Assad for an alleged deadly gas attack in Damascus suburbs last month.

White House officials have said Obama will hold meetings on the sidelines of G20 with the president of France, the main foreign backer of a strike on Syria, as well as the leaders of China and Japan.

While no formal bilateral meeting is planned with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a strong supporter of Assad, a

White House official suggested there likely would be some kind of dialogue.

Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Muqdad, in an exclusive interview with AFP, said his government was ready to retaliate in the event of a military strike.

"The Syrian government will not change position even if there is World War III. No Syrian can sacrifice the independence of his country," Muqdad said.

"Syria has taken every measure to retaliate against... an aggression," he added, refusing to elaborate.

He also stressed that Syria's important ally Russia had not wavered in its support, despite comments by Putin suggesting a more conciliatory tone towards the West.

Both Iran and Russia

have warned that any military intervention would have devastating regional consequences.

But in an interview broadcast earlier yesterday, Putin appeared to strike a more conciliatory note by saying he did not exclude agreeing to strikes if it were proven the regime had carried out the alleged gas attack.

Muqdad stressed that Moscow had not wavered in its support of Damascus.

In later comments at a Kremlin meeting, Putin appeared to corroborate this, warning the US Congress that it would be legitimising an "aggression" if it gave its blessing to military action in a vote expected next week.

Obama said in Stockholm that he hoped Putin would change direction on a military interven-