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## Initiate talks for all-party election

*Khaleda urges president, gets assurance of his 'efforts within constitutional powers'*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday met President Abdul Hamid and urged him to take steps towards a consensus between the ruling and the opposition parties for holding a free, fair and participatory election under a non-party government.

In response, the president said his constitutional powers were limited with regard to taking any such initiative.

He, however, assured that he would do his best within his powers for resolving the ongoing political crisis.

"No government has incorporated any provision in the constitution that allows the president to take steps to overcome a critical situation," Hamid was quoted as telling the opposition leader by his Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim at a press briefing at the Bangabhaban.

A 20-member delegation of 18-party alliance led by Khaleda held an hour-long meeting with the president at the Bangabhaban a day after eight new faces were inducted in the present cabinet to transform it into a polls-time government.

"We have come to you since you are the guardian of the state. It is our earnest request that you ask the government to shun the path of conflict and create an atmosphere conducive to holding dialogue," read a statement that the BNP-led alliance submitted to the president.

"We are aware of your [President] constitutional limitations and powers .... But the supreme people of the state have to play a role under certain circumstances. We think such a situation has arisen today in our national life. People hope you will play such

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President Abdul Hamid and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia talk at the Bangabhaban yesterday evening.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

HASINA-BISWAL Discussion was 'disappointing'

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

At the talks between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and US Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Desai Biswal, some issues were not fully satisfactorily discussed.

Biswal raised three points during the meet at the Gono Bhaban on Sunday afternoon.

She said the election should be inclusive meaning the situation should be such that BNP would participate.

To this, the prime

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## EC for all-party polls

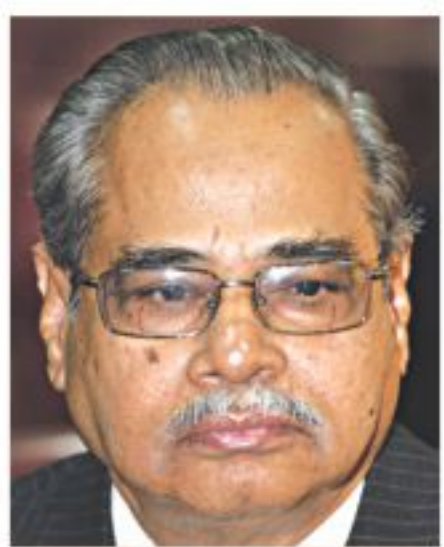
*Urges president to make efforts to ensure participation of all*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday requested President Abdul Hamid to make efforts to ensure participation of all political parties in the next general election.

The EC made the request when it met the president amid a persisting political crisis with the main opposition BNP sticking to its stance that it would not take part in the election unless held under a non-party government.

On Monday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inducted eight new faces in her cabinet to form a



Kazi Rakibuddin

polls-time government headed by her, which the BNP has rejected.

Talking to journalists after the meeting at the Bangabhaban, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad said, "We want to hold a fair and peaceful general election with the participation of all. We have also requested him [president] to continue his endeavours for this."

The CEC also said, "We hope the election will be held with the participation of all, and we will be able to create a level playing field for all."

He went on, "We have apprised the president of

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## Confusion runs high

*Govt yet to notify size of polls-time cabinet*

M ABUL KALAM AZAD and PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Cabinet Division officials yesterday waited beyond their office hours for government orders to publish the gazette notifications allocating portfolios of the newly sworn-in ministers. But no orders came till 8:20pm and they left their offices without doing so.

The much-expected notifications were also to clarify how many of the 52-member cabinet would be dropped, and how many of them would be in the polls-time administration.

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NEWS ANALYSIS

## Testing time for president

SHAKHAWAT LITON

It will be a true test for President Abdul Hamid whether he would be able to do something extraordinary now to break the political deadlock over the general election. If he rises to the occasion, his move can build up the hope for a solution to the crisis through discussion between the ruling and opposition camps.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia in a clever strategy has put the ball in his court by requesting him yesterday to take steps to resolve the political impasse. All eyes now will focus on the Bangabhaban to know whether his office could make any effective move.

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People who came to this open market sales (OMS) truck at Dholai Khal in Old Dhaka yesterday were caught off-guard to know that they have to buy flour if they want to buy rice. They were also asked to pay higher than the fixed prices of flour.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## FLOUR AT SUBSIDISED PRICE

## Consumers forced to pay higher

SOHEL PARVEZ

The poor and low-income groups are forced to pay higher than the subsidised price of flour being sold on trucks as part of Open Market Sale (OMS) programme.

Besides, if anyone wants to buy a single item, either flour or rice, a number of dealers are compelling them to buy both.

Dealers were seen at Jatrabari in the city yesterday charging Tk 2 extra for flour against the subsidised price of Tk 22 per kilogram.

Men on two trucks -- one at Dholairpar and another at Shamir Akhra -- were also seen forcing the consumers to buy rice even if they came for flour.

No supervisory officer was found on the spot, although as per rules an officer was

supposed to oversee the OMS, a government scheme to provide cereals at lower price to the poor and fixed income groups.

"What should I do with flour if I do not need it? They say I will have to buy flour to get rice," said a frustrated Shilpi Akter, who was queueing behind an OMS truck at Kutubkhali.

Shilpi, who works at a small factory in the locality and earns Tk 2,000 a month, came early to buy five kilogram of rice at Tk 24 per kilogram. She knew the offer would save at least Tk 50 from her small income.

But she was asked to buy flour to get the rice. After a bargain in front of this correspondent, the salespersons agreed to sell her only rice.

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## A father's case against son

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

For Liakat Ali, the decision has been hard and painful. His was a choice between love and need. In the end, it was his need to which his fatherly passion succumbed.

The 60-year-old yesterday filed a case against his son, a migrant worker in Dubai, for not looking after the family for the last three years.

The son, Yasin Rana, has instead been sending money to his in-laws since his marriage about three years ago, according to the case filed under Parents' Care Act-2013.

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## MAKING ACC TOOTHLESS

## TIB urges president not to approve bill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh has appealed to the president not to consent to a bill passed recently introducing a provision that makes it mandatory for the Anti-Corruption Commission to take government's permission before filing cases against public officials.

It also requested the president to exercise his constitutional authority to send the bill back to parliament for reconsideration.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman yesterday at a press briefing said the organisation sent a letter to President Abdul Hamid on November 17 requesting him to

take steps for dropping the controversial provision.

The Jatiya Sangsad on November 10 passed the bill amending the ACC Act, 2004 to introduce the provision, paying no heed to widespread criticism against it.

The bill will be presented before the president today or tomorrow for his consent, sources in the parliament secretariat said.

According to the constitution, the president can return the bill to parliament with a message requesting that the new provision be reconsidered. If the president exercises this authority, parliament will have second thoughts about the controversial provision.

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## SOLUTION TO CRISIS Mozena still optimistic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Ambassador in Dhaka Dan W Mozena is confident that major political parties in Bangladesh will find a way out of the ongoing crisis to hold free and credible elections.

"Major parties must engage in political dialogue and I am very confident that the leaders will do it at the end to hold the elections the country deserves," he said yesterday.

Bangladesh has no need for outsiders to play that role, as there is no shortage of ideas, he told a luncheon meeting organised



Abdur Razzaque, outgoing food minister, wipes away tears at the last meeting of his term with officials at his ministry yesterday.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA