CLASH WITH AL

BNP lawmaker's son bullet-hit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Chittagong*

A clash between the activists of Awami League and BNP at Sandwip upazila in Chittagong yesterday left the son of local BNP lawmaker Mostafa Kamal Pasha bullet-hit.

Iqbal Pasha Javed, the eldest son of Mostafa Kamal Pasha, was whisked off to Chittagong Medical College Hospital and was in a stable condition as of filing of this report at 9:00pm.

Witnesses said a group of AL activists attacked the lawmaker's house where a Jubo League activist was allegedly held and tortured by the supporters of the MP a few hours earlier.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Engineer Belayet Hossain, general secretary of Sandwip upazila BNP, alleged that the AL men armed with lethal weapons attacked the lawmaker's residence at Rahmatpur around 3.30pm prompting a clash with his supporters.

"They fired shots into the house through the windows and Javed received a bullet in his right chest," he added.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Sandwip Police Station Gias Uddin said they rushed to the lawmaker's residence and rescued Javed.

Yesterday's clash followed a series of violent incidents occurring from Saturday evening when a group of BNP men allegedly attacked a local Jubo League activist named Akbar Hossain and cut off his wrist.

Sandwip AL's general secretary Mohammad Ali Khosru alleged that another Jubo League activist, Mehedi, was kidnapped by some miscreants of BNP yesterday morning.

"They took Mehedi to Mostafa Kamal Pasha's house and beat him up severely before releasing him," he added.

Ukrainians march to demand EU pact

AFP, *Kiev*

Thousands of pro-Western Ukrainians marched in the capital Kiev yesterday to protest against the government's decision last week to scrap an EU trade treaty.

About 10,000 people, waving European Union and opposition party flags, began to march through central Kiev, an AFP correspondent reported.

The rally was expected to grow as more groups of demonstrators converged, amid light police presence, heeding the opposition's call for a massive protest.

Govt forms pay commission

FROM PAGE 16

consideration the living cost of a six-member family, including the parents of a government official. The previous commissions used to consider the living cost of a four-member family.

The commission will also consider the health and education spending for a maximum of two children.

Presently, taxpayers contribute Tk 27,500 crore a year, including Tk 4,500 crore as dearness allowance announced last month, to pay the public servants. The expenditure is almost 3 percent of the country's gross domestic production.

Although this is the eighth pay commission of the country, it is the first time an elected government formed the pay commission ahead of the parliamentary polls, raising many questions.

The move has evoked strong debates whether the government, which is now said to be responsible for holding the next general elections, has the authority to make such decision.

According to political observers, the government cannot do it morally.

However, a finance ministry official argued that Finance Minister AMA Muhith in his last budget speech in June had said a commission for public servants and a separate pay scale for bankers would be formed before the tenure the Awami League-led government ends.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had approved the proposal on November 20, after which the procedure for the polls-time government began, the official added.

Yesterday, Muhith said the polls-time government was yet to be constituted.

"The election-time government will come into effect after the Election Commission announces the polls schedule," he told reporters at the Secretariat.

Former election commissioner M Sakhawat Hussain said, "If this is a polls-time government as the prime minister said in parliament, it should not make any policy decision. The decision may influence the general elections."

He also said when a government, still run by a party or an alliance, makes such decision, it cannot ensure level playing field.

Former adviser to a caretaker government Akbar Ali Khan echoed Hussain.

He said, "The pay commission may influence the election. Besides, the political parties may raise complaints with the Election Commission."

Khan, also a former cabinet secretary, said a caretaker government could not make policy decision; rather it was authorised only to make decisions on routine affairs.

"But in the current structure of the government, the ministers will run the government as well as contest the elections. So, they cannot make any decision -- policy or routine -- that can influence the polls," he added.

Yesterday, Muhith also said an order on the separate pay scale for the employees of the central bank and four state-run commercial banks would be issued in a day or two.

On October 30, the finance minister had announced forming a permanent pay commission by November 15.

In August 2008, the then military-backed caretaker government formed a 13-member pay commission headed by former secretary M Mustafizur Rahman.

The seventh pay commission took 14 months to submit its recommendations although the subsequent government implemented the pay rise retrospective from July 2009.

The sixth pay commission was formed in July 2004 while the fifth in September 1996, fourth in July 1989, third in 1984, second in February 1976 and the first one in July 1972.

COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mohammad Farashuddin is the chairman of the pay commission.

The three full-time members are: former secretaries Abul Kashem and Sheikh Khurshid Alam, and former controller general of accounts Md Shahad Chowdhury.

The 12 temporary members are: Zafar Khaled, professor of ophthalmology of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University; Prof Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed, chairman of Department of Accounting and Information Systems at Dhaka University; ABM Badruzzaman, professor of Department of Civil Engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology; Lutful Hassan, professor of Agricultural University of Mymensingh; Binayak Sen, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies; Ruhul Amin, former deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank; Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry; CK Hyder, former secretary general of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI); AKM Rafiqul Islam, a director of MCCI; Emdadul Haque, additional secretary of the finance division; and Syed Aminul Islam, joint secretary of the law ministry. The armed forces division will nominate the 12th representative to the commission.

Md Ehsanul Haque, additional secretary of the public administration, has been made the member secretary.

Widow testifies against Yusuf

FROM PAGE 16

family but narrowly escaped, has also testified that the Pakistani army and Razakars shot Shanti Ranjan and three other detainees one after another at the launch terminal on May 19, 1971.

Pijush said the detention and the killings had taken place hours after Yusuf directed his cohorts to annihilate the Awami League supporters, pro-liberation people and the Hindus.

Pijush and Mukul gave their testimony as the 10th and 11th prosecution witnesses respectively in Yusuf's case before the three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan. They are set to face cross-examination today.

Yusuf, who is historically known as the founder of infamous Razakar force, is facing 13 charges of crimes against humanity and genocide committed in Khulna region during the war. During his 42-minute testimony, 60-year-old Pijush of Morrelganj Bazar said after the proclamation of independence, they had formed a 35-member team of freedom fighters under the leadership of Liakat Ali Khan.

The witness said Yusuf, who was a top leader of Jamaat and chairman of Peace Committee, formed the Razakar force at Khulna Ansar camp, gave them short-term training and arms and ammunition, and sent them to different places in the country.

Following the order of Yusuf, 20/22 Razakars set a camp occupying Baraikhali Union Parishad office and started looting and arson in the houses of AL supporters, pro-liberation people and the Hindus. They had also forcefully converted the Hindus to Muslims, said Pijush.

He added in the early morning of May 13, he heard that Razakars shot freedom fighter Abu Bakar Siddik to dead. He said he had gone near Baraikhali Razakar camp secretly around 8:00am and found Bakar's body lying on the ground.

Tunu Mia, Bakar's younger brother, took his body from the camp taking permission of Yusuf and other Razakars for burial, said Pijush.

On November 14, Tunu, fifth prosecution witness, also testified that he had seen Yusuf near Bakar's body at the Razakar camp on May 13, 1971 and he had to get Yusuf's permission to take his body.

"Razakar founder" Yusuf had often visited Razakar camp at Morrelganj and held meetings with Razakars, Pijush added.

He said around 10:00am on May 17, he was at Morrelganj Bazar when Yusuf along with 15/20 Razakars arrived there and directed his cohorts to "annihilated" AL supporters, pro-liberation people and Hindus.

Following Yusuf's directive, Razakars attacked the Bazar and looted 300/400 houses including Pijush's house and set fire to those, said Pijush, adding, "I along with some people witnessed the incident from a distant place."

Around 10:00pm on May 19, Yusuf along with 10/20 Pakistani army personnel and Razakars arrived at Morrelganj Bazar again, said Pijush, adding that the accused had issued the same termination instruction to his men.

"I was at my house when [someone] called me. As I came out, they picked me up and started torturing me with sticks and rifle butts while taking me to the [Morrelganj] launch terminal," said Pijush.

He said when he had been taken near the terminal, he saw Razakars and Pakistani army beating up Shanti Ranjan Das, Satya Ranjan Das, Keshob Chandra Das, Sankar Das and Amar Das.

"Around 12:00pm, the detainees were shot dead at the terminal and their bodies were dumped in the river," he said, adding, "I was waiting for a chance and at one stage, I put off my lungi and was able to escape."

He also heard that Amar had also survived by jumping into the river with bullet injury in his hand, said Pijush, adding that Razakars and Pakistani army had also looted their houses.

After lunch break, 66-year-old Mukul Rani gave a 20-minute heart-wrenching testimony.

She said around 9:30pm on May 19, 1971, Yusuf along with Pakistani army and Razakars besieged their house at Morrelganj Bazar. At that time, some people looted their house before taking away her husband, brother-in-laws Satya Ranjan Das and Keshob Chandra Das, her younger brother Sankar Das and uncle-in-law Santosh Kumar Das.

"Razakars released my uncle-in-law, after taking him to a short distance and when I asked him about the whereabouts of others, he [uncle-in-law] said Yusuf Shaheb, who was their leader, asked to take them [detainees] to him and they [Razakars and Pakistani army] have taken them," said Mukul.

After around two hours, they heard gunshots and they didn't get any information that night, she said, adding, "The next day we learned that those who were picked up were killed." Pijush Kanti Gharai, who survived narrowly from the Pakistani army and Razakars, also witnessed the incident, she added.

"Then we left the country for India and returned after independence. We didn't find the bodies of my husband and relatives," said Mukul as she burst into tears and prayed with folded hands, "I want justice for the killings of my husband and relatives."

Join, choose any ministry

FROM PAGE 1

to work together for those who would be on the party ticket.

"You all have to work to win people's confidence. It doesn't matter who gets nomination. You all have to work for boat [AL election symbol]," she said.

Hasina also said the nominations would be given on the basis of opinions of the grassroots and several survey reports.

None of the aspirants spoke at the meet.

About the polls-time government, the prime minister said all the parties, except for the BNP, had joined it.

However, only four parties -- AL, Jatiya Party, Workers Party and JSD -- have representatives in the newly formed election-time cabinet, while two leaders each from Samyabadi Dal and JP (Manju) have been made advisers to the PM.

No component of the BNP-led 18-party alliance has agreed to be part of the interim government.

Hasina alleged the BNP and Jamaat have merged and are killing innocent people in the name of agitation, as these two parties "do not believe in a Bangladesh founded on the spirit of Liberation War".

Citing her meeting with President Abdul Hamid last week, Hasina said, "The honourable president has advised me to keep the cabinet smaller and I have taken steps accordingly. Now he will advise the Election Commission to announce the election schedule."

She added the election would be free and fair, and people would exercise their voting rights without any fear.

Also at the programme, AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam said the AL would come to power again with absolute majority if the party's leaders and activists remained united.

He asked all the aspirants to work hard to win the nomination.

AL aspirants fear election

FROM PAGE 2

BNP-Jamaat alliance would try to unleash violence to resist the polls, which could hamper the festive atmosphere of the election.

Freedom fighter Syed Najir Hossain (Feni-3) voiced concern that the BNP-Jamaat might resort to violence as they announced to foil the election. He, however, hoped that the BNP would change its stance on the election at the last moment to contest the polls.

Faramarz Al Nur (Mymensingh-4) said if the BNP boycotts the polls, the election atmosphere would not be festive. But he thought that as the BNP grassroots have been waiting for the election, it would be very tough for the party high-ups to keep them away from the polls.

Talks on, so is confusion

FROM PAGE 1

Contacted, a party standing committee member said, "The meeting indeed took place. But if you ask me to speak on the record, I have to stick to the party line and deny that it happened."

According to him, during the talks Fakhrul placed a set of demands, which Ashraf was supposed to discuss with the prime minister yesterday and then return to Fakhrul with feedback in a day or two.

Some BNP leaders said they were denying the fact as Ashraf could not give any assurance that its demand for installing a non-party government would be met.

Off the record, party insiders said they were doing so on instructions of Khaleda Zia.

Confusion is running high also over the announcement of the polls schedule, as the Election Commission continues to make contradictory statements.

Earlier reports suggested the commission would announce it by the middle of this month.

But last evening, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed said the commission was yet to decide the date for announcing the schedule.

On Friday, Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz told reporters that the polls schedule would be announced "by Sunday or Monday" of this week.

Another commissioner told this newspaper that the schedule might be announced tomorrow. "But I cannot confirm it," he said, requesting anonymity.

There were speculations throughout the day yesterday that the EC would make the announcement, and many officials were seen busy preparing necessary documents.

Several officials told The Daily Star that they had prepared all the documents and the EC could announce the schedule if it wanted to.

But in the evening, the CEC told journalists: "We have not held any commission meeting over the issue. No decision has been made in this regard. You will know everything about it very soon."

The meeting may be held tomorrow or the day after, he added.

Whenever the announcement comes, it is certain to face strong resistance form the BNP-led 18-party alliance. The opposition has all along said it would not participate in the election if it is not held under a non-partisan caretaker government.

Recently, the BNP has even threatened to resist any polls under Hasina administration.

Party policymakers are now finalising strategies to ramp up agitation by boosting up leaders and supporters of the alliance.

BNP insiders say the government may try to foil the opposition movement by "staging a dialogue drama". Apprehending this, the party has decided not to contact or sit with the AL unless it gets an assurance that its demand would be fulfilled.

HANNAN ADMITS, HANNAN DENIES

Speaking at a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, Hannan said: "The talks between our party acting secretary general and the Awami League general secretary could not bring any positive outcomes.

"There was no agenda for the talks. That is why there was no significant outcome. Throughout the talks Ashraful Islam just said he would not be able to say or do anything. His leader [Sheikh Hasina] will make the decision regarding our demand."

But in the party statement, he later said: "My speech today [yesterday] at the Jatiya Press Club that BNP acting secretary general Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and the Awami League general secretary held a so called dialogue was reflected wrongly in the media. My speech in this regard was based on reports published and aired in the media.

"But later I was confirmed by the party's acting secretary general that the news of holding any talks is baseless."

Full SC verdict soon

FROM PAGE 1

for its execution, SC sources said.

The five-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain on September 17 sentenced the Jamaat assistant secretary general to death, overruling his life imprisonment awarded by the International Crimes Tribunal.

The government will execute the SC verdict as per the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act immediately after its certified copy is released, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star.

The judges are to sign the "order of the court" now if they have finished writing the verdict, he said, adding the remaining formalities to release the verdict might take another one or two days.

Mahbubey Alam added there was no scope for a review petition as per the Tribunals Act, 1973, under which Quader Mollah had been convicted.

Tajul Islam, a lawyer of the Jamaat leader, said the SC would decide whether his client's review petition was acceptable or not.

"Of course, Abdul Quader Mollah has right to file a petition with the Supreme Court, seeking review of the verdict against him," he said, adding that the defence would file a review petition in 30 days after receiving the certified copy of the verdict.

The SC condemned Quader Mollah to death for killing Hajrat Ali Laskar, his wife, three daughters and his two-year-old son on March 26, 1971 in Mirpur, Dhaka. One of the three daughters was raped.

His eldest daughter was also raped but she survived and testified in the court against Mollah.

In February, the ICT also found Quader Mollah guilty of this charge but sentenced him to life imprisonment.

Case delayed at final stage

FROM PAGE 16

The court will set a date for delivering the judgment if the prosecution places its arguments on January 22.

Ershad's counsel Sheikh Md Serajul Islam concluded arguments on Wednesday and sought his client's acquittal on the charges.

In an application to the court on October 2 last year, the former military dictator protested his innocence.

Manzoor was killed at Chittagong Cantonment on June 1, 1981. Around 14 years after the killing, his elder brother Abul Mansur Ahmed filed the murder case with Panchlaish Police Station on February 28, 1995.

On June 27 that year, Abdul Kahar Akand, the then assistant superintendent of police of the Criminal Investigation Department, pressed charges against Ershad and four others.

Trial proceedings against two of them, Maj Gen (Retd) Abdul Latif and Lt Col (Retd) Shamsur Rahman Shamser, were stayed following a High Court order.

The case was later transferred to Dhaka for security reasons.

More than 21 cases were filed against Ershad after he was deposed on December 6, 1990. He was convicted and given different terms of punishment afterwards, but was released on bail during the tenure of the Awami League government in 1996.

Ershad was acquitted and discharged in six corruption cases amid speculations that he would join the ruling BNP-led alliance ahead of the 2006 parliamentary election.

He now stands trial in three cases, including the one for Manzoor's murder.

Vancouver bans knobs

FROM PAGE 16

lever handles on all new building doors instead of round doorknobs.

The City Council passed the new code in September to make the city more accessible to the disabled and elderly. The change was part of the council's 'age-friendly action plan'.

Besides, the city has passed similar building requirements such as wider door frames, faucet levers and minimum height standards for electrical outlets to create 'a more safe, inclusive and engaging city for all seniors'.

With Americans and Canadians living longer, age-related issues are coming to the forefront especially as the Baby Boomer generation enters retirement.

"Technology changes. Things change. We live with that," Will Johnston, the city's former chief building inspector, told the Vancouver Sun.

The new code isn't retroactive and doesn't apply to current buildings, but it has still angered many who don't like the idea of their government dictating such a minor detail in their homes.

HC issues rule

FROM PAGE 16

The provision empowered the EC to hold re-election in a constituency where more than half of the voters rejected all candidates.

Despite strong opposition from major political parties at that time, the EC pressed on with its proposal, arguing that negative voting would force the political parties to nominate honest and competent candidates in the polls.

However, the provision failed to have much impact on the 2008 election, as only about four lakh people cast "no" votes.

Assuming power in 2009, the Awami League decided to discontinue the provision, and dropped it from the bill passed in parliament to retain the changes in RPO brought through the ordinance.

Against this backdrop, Supreme Court lawyers Md Shahriar Mozid and Rokunuddin Md Faruq filed a writ petition with the HC as public interest litigation on November 17, seeking its directives for reintroduction of the provision.

The petitioners said the option of casting "no" vote in polls is there in 14 countries. If the provision is included in the RPO, competent candidates will be elected in the polls, they added.

The secretaries to the law ministry, cabinet division and Election Commission secretariat, and the chief election commissioner have been made respondents to the HC ruling.

In a landmark judgment in September, the Indian Supreme Court gave an order, allowing Indian citizens to exercise negative voting.

"If the right to vote is statutory right, the right to reject candidates is a fundamental right of speech and expression under the constitution [of India]," said the court.

Democracy is all about choice, and the significance of the right to negative voting is massive, it added.