Rakib in footsteps of Sadek, Aziz?

FROM PAGE 1

unprecedented record. All of them, however, did not walk away from their rivals despite a boycott by the BNP-led opposition parties.

Allegations of ruling Awami League nominees forcing rival candidates to withdraw their candidatures in many constituencies have marred the election process. There were also complaints that the returning officers in some districts pressed many candidates to withdraw their nomination papers on instructions from government high-ups to make sure that certain candidates win unopposed.

Many candidates of HM Ershad's Jatiya Party were kept forcibly in the electoral race. Returning officers rejected their applications for quitting the polls. Even after all these occurrences, Rakibuddin and his team remained silent. They might not have received any information from the EC officials. But national dailies ran many reports on the anomalies. It seems that the CEC and his colleagues have either not gone through any of the reports or could not trust those.

The EC even did not take into consideration the Jatiya Party chief's letter asking the commission not to allocate the party's electoral symbol "plough" to any candidate. During registration with the EC in 2008, the JP was allocated this electoral symbol.

CEC Rakibuddin and his team might have been unlucky as they had to confront some difficult questions from journalists. But their responses were shocking. On the record of a huge number of candi-

dates winning seats uncontested, Rakibuddin on December 15 said: "The candidates have withdrawn their nominations on their own. We've noting to do here. The election will be held for the contenders who are still in the

He did not make any comment on the allegations of forcing nominees to withdraw candidatures.

its electoral symbol "plough", the CEC on matter. December 13 said, "We've directed all the returning officers. They will take decision on

this matter as per law."

Who are the returning officers? They are divisional and deputy commissioners who run the government administration at the field level. They did exactly what the government wanted them to do.

Meantime, the government continued negotiations with the JP to bring it back in the election. It did not allow the JP ministers quitting the "election-time cabinet" despite the fact that they handed in their resignations soon after the party had decided to boycott the election. JP Chairman Ershad is still a valid candidate

in two constituencies because he was not allowed to withdraw his nomination papers. As he sticks to his decision to boycott the polls, has been forcibly kept "confined" to a hospital in the name of treatment. He and some of his party leaders have repeatedly been claiming On the JP letter regarding the allocation of that he is not ill. But the EC keeps mum on the

Asked, Election Commissioner Abu Hafiz said he was unaware of the incident.

The record number of uncontested winners has already raised questions over the acceptability of the January 5 election. Many AL leaders, in private conversations, have also expressed their concern about it.

But the EC takes a cavalier attitude to it. Abu Hafiz on December 14 said the time to question the credibility of the election was yet to come. "Once the election is over, we can understand whether it is credible or not."

The election, said Rakibuddin, is a legal process and it will be continued as per law. The remark sounds ridiculous. The CEC and his team forgot their constitutional responsibility and mandate to hold a free and fair election.

Though holding the polls is a huge responsibility, the constitution gave the EC huge authority to have the job done. It also empowered the EC with adequate protection to maintain their independence and freedom from political and executive influence. But nothing has worked effectively with the incumbent EC. They are going to present the country with a maligned election.

Rakibuddin was a fortunate man when he assumed the office of CEC in February last year. He took charge of an EC then resting on a record of many encouraging successes. The more important thing was that he could see people's overwhelming confidence restored in

the EC. His predecessor ATM Shamsul Huda was the man under whose leadership the EC had scaled new heights, through setting new standards.

Rakibuddin and his team were required to work hard to live up to people's high expectations and accomplish many tough tasks. But they miserably failed to deliver the goods. The EC now look all set to be accused of destroying people's confidence in it. His name will be remembered along with those of Justice Sadek and Justice Aziz. Sadek led the commission in conducting the February 15, 1996 maligned election amid a boycott by opposition parties.

Under the leadership of Aziz, the EC was desperately moving towards holding another controversial election slated for January 22, 2007. Their leaderships were a

Criminals shoot dead

FROM PAGE 16

The miscreants asked the labourers to stop the work. But as the workers continued with their jobs, the criminals had suddenly opened fire on them and fled away blasting homemade

The shooting left three of the labourers severely injured, they added.

Faruk Hawlader, owner of the building, told The Daily Star "An unknown person, introducing himself as Nirob, phoned me around 11:00pm Wednesday last and demanded extortions for constructing the building."

"I do not know whether the incident had taken place due to my refusal to pay them extortion," he added.

Iqbal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Badda Police Station, said local criminals might have killed them for extortion.

"We detained two persons for interrogation. We are hopeful of identifying the killers after gleaning information from them," he added.

Visiting the mason's house in the afternoon, this correspondent found that Shathi Begum became speechless after hearing the news of her husband's death.

Tahmina Begum, mother of Faruque, told The Daily Star her son informed Shathi on Monday night that construction work might be stopped as the local youths were demanding extortions.

At Milon's house, around half a kilometre away from Faruque's house, his mother Helena Begum and sister Hanufa Begum, also the wife of the injured, were seen wailing.

"My son had taken training on how to drive a private car. He was working as a labourer to collect fees for getting a driving licence," Helena said.

"We had chosen a bride. He was supposed to get married after getting the licence," she added.

Locals said five criminal gangs were involved in land grabbing and collecting extortion from the land and building owners and businessmen in the area.







PHOTO:

FOCUS BANGLA

yesterday.

Family

members

mourn the

death of two

construction

workers,

Milon, top

right, and

Faruque,

killed in

in the

Badda

capital's

bottom right,

shooting by

extortionists

Imran jumps on

FROM PAGE 16 various levels of legalities employed in Mollah's trial before the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami leader

was finally convicted and hanged. Mollah, originally sentenced to life in prison in February this year, had his conviction turned into one of execution by Bangladesh's Supreme Court in September. The sentencing prompted

before the SC, which dismissed the petitions. The Jamaat leader, convicted of killing a number of Bangalees in collaboration with the Pakistan occupation army, was hanged on

Mollah's lawyers to file two review petitions

December 12. Pakistan's interior minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, who continues to misinform Pakistanis about what actually their soldiers did in

Bangladesh in 1971, also spoke at the same

national assembly session.

"We witnessed the fall of Dhaka forty-two years ago and we seem to have not learnt our lesson," he said but did not explain his statement. The Pakistan assembly, in a fresh indication

of the lessons not learnt by the country's establishment since Bangladesh's battlefield triumph in 1971, adopted on December 16 a resolution demanding that the Bangladesh government not resurrect the issues of 1971 but should end all cases against the Jamaat leadership in Bangladesh. It said not a word about the atrocities the Jamaat committed, in association with the Pakistan army, during the sonal difficulties." nine-month war.

Earlier on December 14, Nisar Ali Khan said Quader Mollah was hanged "through a judicial murder for supporting a united Pakistan in 1971".

Defence allowed

On December 11, the tribunal cancelled his vocalatnama (power of attorney) and asked Yusuf to appoint a new lawyer.

leaders Ghulam Azam, Motiur Rahman Nizami and Delawar Hossain Sayedee, yesterday joined as the conducting counsel for Yusuf amid a fresh 72-hour blockade being enforced by the opposition. Senior counsels of war crimes accused

on the days of hartal or blockade citing "security concern or unavoidable situation or per-Yusuf, the founder of infamous Razakar force, is facing 13 charges of involvement in

crimes against humanity and genocide committed in greater Khulna region during the ninemonth-long Liberation War in 1971.

QAISAR'S CASE

Meanwhile, the prosecution completed its Mohammad Qaisar, who had been the state minister during HM Ershad regime.

Reading out the 18 charges brought on In an email reply to The Daily Star, Biman November 10, prosecutor Rana Dasgupta said, "We believe that we have succeeded in giving necessary documents [statements of witnesses and other relevant documents] for framing charges [against Qaisar]."

According to the prosecution, Qaisar had been involved in an act of genocide that left 108 people, mostly Hindus, dead, at least 10 incidents of killing that left 47 people dead, two incidents of rape and five incidents of abduction, loot, arson and other crimes

The tribunal asked the defence to place its

FROM PAGE 16

Mizanul Islam, who had defended Jamaat

Jamaat leaders usually skip court proceedings

between April 27 and November 15, 1971.

submission tomorrow.

the resolution.

FROM PAGE 16

"We came to know through the media that

"A Pakistani minister has said that Mollah was hanged for his loyalty to Pakistan in 1971 and every Pakistani was disheartened by Mollah's execution. It is surprising that the party of former Pakistani cricketer Imran Khan also echoed the same view."

an independent and sovereign country, which is run according to its own constitution and

"Every Bangladeshi expects that they

show respect for the spirit of the 1971 Liberation War, Bangladesh's history and its constitution earned at the cost of three million lives." The statement was signed, among others, by

Dr Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Dr Anisuzzaman, Barrister Rafique-ul Haq, Kamal Lohani, Sultana Kamal, Gholam Rabbani, Golam Sarwar, Abed Khan, Manzurul Ahsan Bulbul, and Shahdeen Malik.

Biman passengers submission on the charge framing against Syed

I hope the two aircraft will join the fleet in a day or

Managing Director Kevin Steele said, "Kolkata

flight was delayed for a few hours, but we don't

He added, "The latest flight schedule disrup-

The DC10 had a fuel leak, Steele said, adding

"We have reached an agreement with Kabo [a

tion was caused by two of our seven aircraft having

that both the aircraft would be back in operation

have any stranded passengers...."

technical problems at the same time."

"We had some of the Dhaka-bound passengers in Kolkata board an aircraft of Indian Jet Airways as they were stranded for several hours," said Captain Ishrat Ahmed, director of flight operations of Biman.

"The Hong Kong-bound passengers were scheduled to fly at 11:00 in the morning, but they had to fly at 11:00 at night due to failure in flight schedule," Ahmed told The Daily Star by phone.

He said the Dhaka-bound passengers at Dammam airport in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait airport were also stranded for a few hours on Monday, but they were later taken by other

airlines. He added, "Maintenance work is going on, and

Nigerian airline on their B747, on using the aircraft if any of our own aircraft have a problem in

by 10:00am today.

But for a place like Naogaon, a major rice and paddy hub, hard cash is of the essence now, as farmers are bringing in their recently-harvested

aman paddy to sell. For instance, on Tuesday, Jamuna Bank's Naogaon branch had nearly Tk 6 crore of cash withdrawal demands, but was unable to honour the amount, according to Md Rafiqul Islam,

manager of the branch. "Banks usually bring in money from Dhaka to meet the higher fund demand from rice millers and wholesalers during the paddy procurement seasons, but the consistent blockades have

created a bar in cash transport." Islam said the branch is relying on daily deposits from savers to manage the withdrawal

The cash shortage, he says, is testing their people skills to the limit, as they are inundated with angry customers. "We are handling the situation very delicately, with a lot of empathy."

The bank is honouring the cheques partly and is requesting the customers to come the following

demand.

day for the remaining amount, he said. "We have been seriously struggling for almost a

month now to meet our regular cash demands,"

said Ruhul Amin Siddique, manager of the

Sapahar branch of Mercantile Bank.

Banks running short of cash The branch would be unable to bring in money from feeder branches this week because of blockade until Friday. "The hope to bring some cash is next Sunday, but that too is uncertain," he added.

As for the wholesalers and traders, they are facing the ire of farmers, many of whom are desperate for some returns after 5-6 months of hard work to harvest the paddy.

"The fund shortage has put us in a tricky situation. The rice millers have transferred the amount to our accounts but we cannot pay the farmers up front, and they are none too pleased about it," said Md Lokman Ali, one of the main paddy wholesalers and commission agents of Shisha Haat, a bustling paddy hub in Naogaon.

Sekendar Ali, a rice wholesaler from Naogaon, further said: "Some banks say it straight that they are unwilling to take risks to bring cash from other branches to meet our requirements."

His dues to farmers and small paddy traders,

because of the banks' inability to supply cash, now stand at Tk 5 lakh. Meanwhile, knowing that they might not get

"Although the prices of paddy are higher than last year, many of us are shy of selling paddy because of the uncertainty over getting money

reluctant to bring their paddy to wholesale hubs.

timely from the wholesalers," said Abul Kalam Azad, a farmer at Porsha upazila of Naogaon.

As for Sajjad Ali, now desperate for money, he arrived at Mercantile Bank even before the shutters were up, yesterday.

This time, however, he did not need to return completely empty-handed: after earnest pleas, the branch managed to gather Tk 1 lakh for him. He then proceeded to the Islami Bank branch, from

where he left with the full amount, though. The fund crisis was prevalent at the Parbatipur upazila of Dinajpur district, as well.

Mostafizur Rahman, a rice farmer from the upazila, brought 35 kachi (1 kachi equals 28 kilogram) of aman paddy to sell at the Habra

Seeing that many wholesalers were not paying right away, he took his produce to the vendor who had cash on him and sold the entire lot for Tk 5 less on each kachi. Liakat Ali, a book seller at Parbatipur, deposited

an account payee cheque worth Tk 2 lakh to his account with Sonali Bank last Wednesday. It has been almost a week now and the amount is yet cash up front, many farmers in Naogaon are to be transferred to his account from Agrani "I am dire need of money. I have been calling

my bank every day, but they say the same thing to me, that Agrani is yet to clear that cheque," he

Eminent citizens

Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami has recognised Quader Mollah as its loyal friend, and is instigating the Pakistan army to attack Bangladesh in retaliation for Mollah's execution," said the statement.

All countries, and foreign organisations and diplomats shouldn't forget that Bangladesh is

India hits back at US

FROM PAGE 16 York over visa fraud allegations last week.

Indian Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid said the government had initiated measures to address the issue, saying Khobragade's arrest while she was dropping her children at school was "completely unacceptable".

"We have put in motion what we believe would be an effective way of addressing the issue, but have also put in motion such steps that need to be taken to protect her dignity," he told reporters here.

"We have expressed our distress and sense of disquiet, which has been felt very strongly, in the strongest words possible."

The Indian government has also sought information such as that about salaries paid to all Indian staff employed at the consulates and by Consulate officers and fami-

Indian Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh had earlier summoned US Ambassador to India Nancy Powell and issued a demarche in this regard.

The displeasure was also evident among political leaders and officials of the Indian government who cancelled their meetings with a visiting US Congressional delega-

Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde yesterday cancelled his meeting with the US team ostensibly as a mark of protest against

the treatment of Khobragade. Indian parliament Speaker Meira Kumar had cancelled her meeting with a US Congressional delegation on Monday due to the same reason. National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon, who had a scheduled meeting with the five-member US team, did not meet them apparently for

the same reason.

underground.

US asks for explanation

The minister added the US was also awaiting a statement from the government on how it would face the situation before and after the election.

Replying to a query, Muhith said Mozena asked him about the government plan for the

cumstances. According to the Election Commission's latest data, 154 candidates have already been elected unopposed. Of them, the Awami League bagged 127 seats, Ershad's Jatiya Party

21, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal three, Workers Party

On another question, Muhith said he could not tell the US ambassador anything about the situation as discussions between the two major parties were still on, and that things would get clearer after the talks concluded. "No election is going to be held in half of the

country. We, particularly me, are concerned about it," the minister told reporters. Asked if they would form a government after

the January 5 election, he said, "Of course." On whether the US would be comfortable

affected by the shutdowns and blockades. He described this movement as a terrorist movement and said all the economic indicators had been going down. On the garment industry, which is among

described Jamaat-e-Islami as a terrorist organi-

sation and stressed the need for banning it. He,

however, said it should not be done right now

as the organisation might in that case go

Asked about US's stance on the Jamaat issue,

He said the economy had been seriously

Muhith said: "Mozena did not disagree with

the worst hit sectors, the minister said the government was considering possible incentives for the sector. Mozena declined to comment on the

ers after a meeting with the foreign secretary that the US was assessing the evolving situa-He said the current situation underscored the need to proceed more urgently to find some

meeting with Muhith, but later told report-

way for an election. "We're still assessing the situation. I'm certainly aware of that," he said when his attention was drawn to the 154 candidates already elected unopposed.

"I think, the dialogue, as I understand, is still open...it certainly underscores the need for that to proceed more urgently to find some way that there can be kind of elections that people of Bangladesh want and people of Bangladesh

deserve," he added.

Verdict in Biswajit murder case today Nahid, Shaon, Shakil and Emdadul had FROM PAGE 16 Inspector Jalal Uddin of Sutrapur Police front of Bahadur Shah Park and hacked him made confessional statements before magis-Station. with machetes and beat him with iron rods and Of the accused, eight are now in jail while 13 trates. hockey sticks.

Police pressed charges against the 21 accused

on March 5, and the tribunal framed charges against them on June 2. The trial of the case began on June 14 with

the deposition of the complainant, Sub-

others are on the run. The detainees are Mahfuzur Rahman

Nahid, GM Rasheduzzaman Shaon, Rafiqul Islam alias Shakil, Emdadul Haque, Kayyum Mia Tipu, AHM Kibria, Saiful Islam and Golam Mustofa.

The fugitives are Alauddin, Obaidul Quader Tahsin, Imran Hossain, Rajon Talukder,

Khondoker Md Yunus Ali, Tarique Bin Zohor, Azizur Rahman, Noor-e-Alam Limon, Al Amin Sheikh, Monirul Haque Pavel, Mosharraf Hossain, Kamrul Hasan and Rafiqul Islam.

election.' During the meeting with Mozena, Muhith

FROM PAGE 16

The two held nearly a two-hour meeting at the secretariat to discuss the election process, recent violence, the economy and the Grameen it." Bank issue.

post-election situation given the current cir-

two and Jatiya Party (Manju) one.

to work with a government elected in this way, he said: "I cannot say this. They are waiting

for the government's explanation about the