

# Fire orphans 2-yr-old

FROM PAGE 1

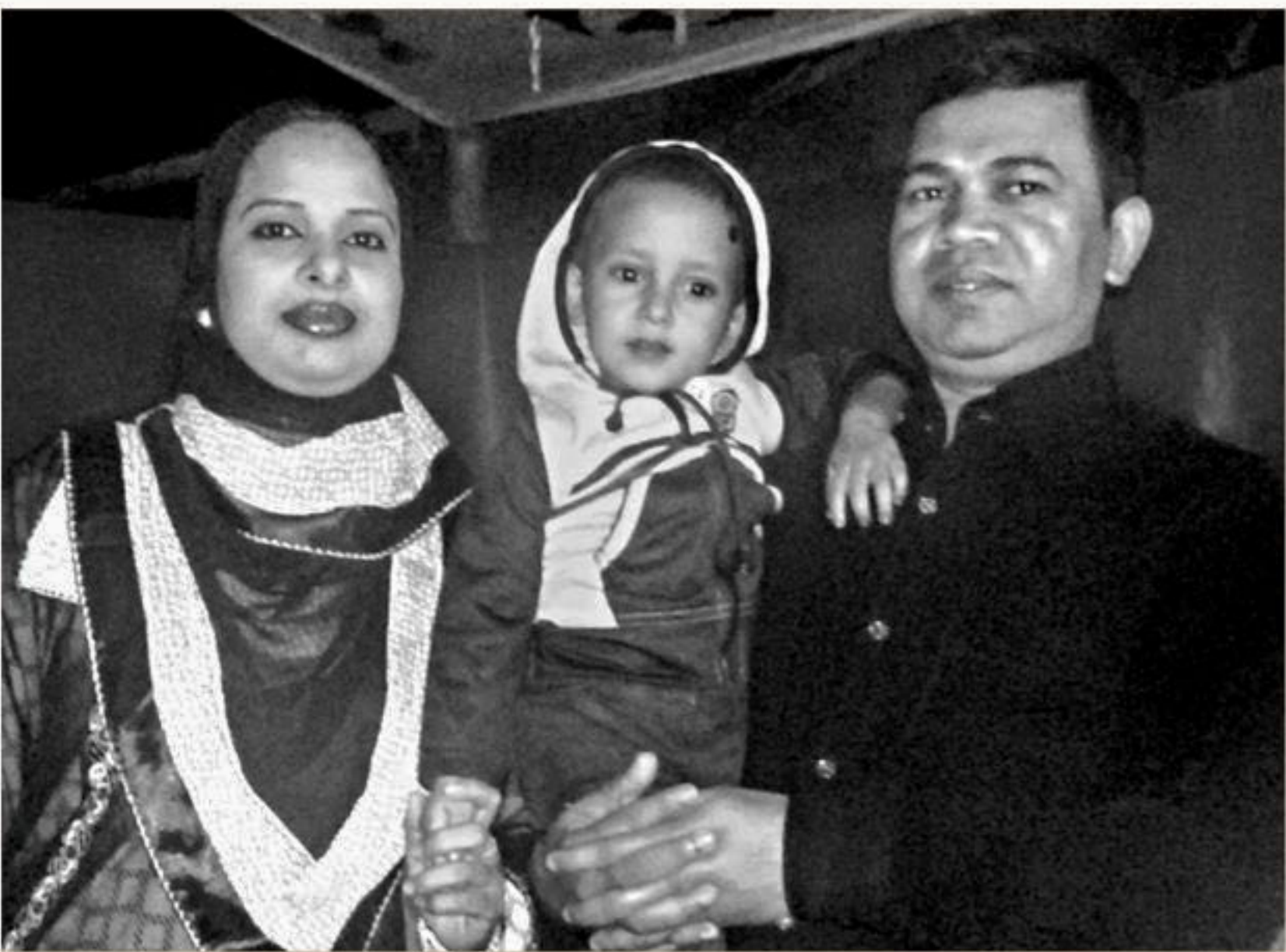
Around 3:30am, a house in the area was on fire. The fire had originated from an earthen stove and had engulfed two other houses, said Otish Chakma, senior station officer of Kalurghat fire station.

"Hearing screams, we all got out and saw the fire," said Manjur Alam, brother of Syed. Nahida gave her son to one of the neighbours and tried to douse the blaze as it spread to theirs, he added.

Later, firemen extinguished the flames around 4:30am, he said. But Nadia went inside the house, said neighbours Mohammad Babul and Md Rahsed. As she was not coming out, Syed went in too.

They were found lying unconscious inside, said Rina Akter, Syed's sister-in-law. Both were rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where doctors declared them dead around 6:00am, said Nayek Hamidur Rahman of CMCH police camp.

They went inside the house to recover their certificates and other



Adiat with his parents in a family photo.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

documents, said the family members.

Nur Banu, Syed's mother, could not speak. She was holding Adiat tight.

"Will we be able to take care of him

like his parents?" lamented Rina Akter.

Some seven houses were gutted, and the damage was estimated around Tk 3 lakh, said a fire service official.

# Evacuation suspended

FROM PAGE 16

A number of buses containing fighters from east Aleppo and their families left the last rebel-held sector of the Syrian city yesterday after a deal between rebels and pro-government forces allowed evacuations to resume, reported Reuters earlier.

Pro-government forces agreed to the deal in exchange for people being allowed to leave two Shia villages besieged by insurgents. The Aleppo evacuation ground to a halt on Friday after a disagreement over the villages of al-Foua and Kefraya.

Syrian state television, citing its correspondent in the city, yesterday said buses had started to leave east Aleppo where over 15,000 people gathered in a square to wait for the buses. Many had

spent the night sleeping in the streets in freezing temperatures.

Some buses and Red Crescent vehicles also arrived at the entrance to the two villages, most of whose residents are Shia Muslims, shortly after the deal was announced, according to al-Manar television. The broadcaster is affiliated to the Lebanese group Hezbollah, an ally of Damascus.

However, five buses were attacked and burned on their way there, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and Syrian state media said.

State television showed pictures of flames coming from the green buses which have come to be synonymous with evacuations in Syria.

Videos broadcast on social media showed men with guns cheering and

shouting "God is great" as the buses burned.

State media said "armed terrorists", a term it uses for groups fighting against President Bashar al-Assad's rule, carried out the attack. Pro-Damascus Mayadeen television said the rebel group formerly known as the Nusra Front was behind the attack.

Rebel officials said an angry crowd of people, possibly alongside pro-government "operatives", was responsible.

Aleppo had been divided between government and rebel areas in the nearly six-year-long war, but a lightning advance by the Syrian army and its allies began in mid-November following months of intense air strikes, forcing the insurgents out of most of the rebel-held territory within a matter of weeks.

# Making people smile

FROM PAGE 1

those in the audience to form groups and collect information of patients in their districts," Arman said.

He and his volunteers set up the link between patients and the NGOs offering the treatment free of cost.

"Such a tiny effort can change the life of someone with cleft lips."

A common birth defect in Bangladesh, it is possible to surgically remove the cleft in most of the cases.

Though many people have come forward to lend their support to the cause, initially drawing people's attention to the matter was not an easy task.

His fame from Mirakkel has helped Arman get quick response from people. He now leads a network of volunteers to ensure better treatment of those born with the defect.

Arman is grateful to Lion Mukhlesur Rahman Foundation's (LMRF) chief Nader Khan who first

engaged him in this work six years ago. "I was inspired by his guidance," Arman said.

A number of organisations in the country have been providing almost free treatment that cost around Tk 20,000.

Arman has continued working with the LMRF. He also communicates with other organisations working in different parts of Bangladesh to ensure that people from those areas also get free medical services.

For spreading his messages about cleft lips, Arman runs a Facebook page "CureCleft" which now acts as an information centre for patients.

Volunteers collect information about patients and post on the page.

"We tell them what to do next," Arman said.

Referring to a recent experience, he said a follower of the page Abdus Samad Raju met a girl with cleft lips

while travelling in a three-wheeler at Chawkbazar in Chittagong city.

Raju immediately posted her picture in the inbox of the group alongside the phone number of her family.

The girl received treatment and got rid of the birth defect in just six days, to the surprise of her family, Arman said.

The girl's mother told Arman the family had avoided taking her out because neighbours used to describe her distorted lips as a curse.

Dr Shamim Khan, executive director of the LMRF, said he was very happy working with the young star. Arman began working as a volunteer with them in 2010 and looked after organisational work in Cox's Bazar district.

"We feel very happy. We are proud of Arman who did not leave the work even after becoming a celebrity," said Shamim, expressing the hope that other celebrities would come forward to work for social causes.

# Manna out on bail

FROM PAGE 16

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha passed the order after disposing of two separate leave-to-appeal petitions filed by the government challenging the HC bail orders.

More than 20 hours after "plain-clothes men had picked up" Manna from his niece's house in Banani around 3:00am on February 24 last year, officials said he was arrested by Rab members who handed him over to the Detective Branch of police.

Rab officials had then said Manna was arrested in a case filed with Gulshan Police Station for "trying to instigate revolt by the armed forces". The arrest came days after his two telephone conversations were leaked.

In one conversation, Manna, also former organising secretary of the ruling Awami League, was heard talking to BNP leader Sadeque Hossain Khoka about strengthening the anti-government movement, among other issues.

The other call was made to an

unknown person. During the conversation, the man asked Manna if he would like to sit with top army officers.

A Dhaka court on February 25 last year allowed the police to take Manna on a 10-day remand in the case.

Arguing against the remand petition, Manna had told the court, "Everything I said during my two conversations is already public. What additional information will you [police] collect from me when I have nothing new to say about this? There is no need for you to take me on remand."

On the allegation of instigating the armed forces to revolt, Manna told the court he never said anything like that in the conversations.

The former vice-president of Dhaka University Central Students' Union also protested that during the conversations he talked about the need for dead bodies to intensify the anti-government movement.

But prosecutors said they needed to quiz Manna to know the names and addresses of those, including a Bangladeshi living in Australia, "in-

volved in a conspiracy" against the government.

On the third day of the 10-day remand, Manna fell sick. He then filed a petition with the HC, challenging the legality of the remand order of the lower court.

Following his petition, the HC on December 10 last year scrapped the lower court order that had placed him on remand.

On March 31 last year, following his another petition, the HC directed the prison authorities to admit the Nagorik Oikya convener to Ibrahim Cardiac Hospital in Dhaka immediately for treatment, as he had been suffering from different diseases, including cardiac problem and diabetes.

Following two separate bail petitions filed by Manna, the HC, on August 30 and November 10 this year, granted him permanent bail in the cases.

The government later on moved the leave-to-appeal petitions before the Appellate Division, challenging the HC orders.

# Exploited throughout history

FROM PAGE 16

Bengal, although by many accounts they have been here for thousands of years. Their oral traditions speak of great wanderings until they arrived at this place.

During the Muslim invasions of Bengal in the thirteenth century, they retired to calmer areas, away from conflict.

After the British Raj had taken over the administration of India, taxes were levied on their traditional ways of living. They faced oppression from tax-collecting mahajans and zamindars.

In 1832, the government demarcated the Damin I Koh region in present day Jharkhand in India and invited Santals to settle in the area in order to reclaim the forest. A great exodus of Santals from Cuttack, Dhalbhum, Manbhum, Hazaribagh, Midnapore etc came to settle in the reserve due to promises of land and other economic amenities.

However, these never materialised.

The British government merely

wanted "to ascertain what profits are now derived from the land" (Bhagalpur Commissioner Report, 1836), while missionaries sought their beliefs, hoping that "Christianity take firm root . . . in the forest and wilds of Rajmahal hills." (Letter from the commissioner of Bhagalpur to the secretary of the government of Bengal, 1836)

The Scottish historian W W Hunter had described the Santal colony as one of the safest districts of Bengal. He wrote "Hindu merchants flocked thither every winter after harvest to buy up the crop, and by degree each market-town throughout the settlement had its resident Hindu grain dealer. The Santal was ignorant and honest; the Hindu was keen and unscrupulous."

In every transaction the Santals were cheated. When they ran out of money, borrowing from the usurer, they and their family became bonded slaves. The administration was not worried about their exploitation, and so in 1855, under the leadership of two

brothers, Sidhu and Kanoo, they rose up, only to be crushed by the British.

"It was not war; they did not understand yielding. As long as their national drum beat, the whole party would stand, and allow themselves to be shot down. . . . There was not a sepoy in the war who did not feel ashamed of himself," WW Hunter would write later.

It seems little has changed today for these peace-loving people, one of the earliest to settle in Bengal, who cleared the forests and built the railroads. In 1855 their grievances were not given importance as today their rights are ignored. The exploitation that Sidhu and Kanoo fought against is still their lot.

One needs only to see the recent developments in Gaibandha, where their village was razed to the ground, their claims to their land ignored, to wonder: how much longer till they are accorded rights as human beings by those in power?

*The writer is a member of the editorial team, The Daily Star*

## Nasa

FROM PAGE 16

Large objects from outer space that could cause mass extinctions have tended to hit Earth about 50 to 60 million years apart. The dinosaurs were wiped out 66 million years ago by an asteroid that struck what is now the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr Nuth, speaking at Nasa's Goddard Space Flight Centre in San Francisco, said that if a potentially dangerous object was on a crash-course with our planet "there's not a hell of a lot we can do about it at the moment", according to The Guardian.

He said: "They are the extinction-level events, things like dinosaur killers, they're 50 to 60 million years apart, essentially. You could say, of course, we're due."

Earth had a "close encounter" with a comet in 1996 and again in 2014, when one passed "within cosmic spitting distance of Mars", he said.

Scientists had only 22 months' warning time for the second pass, less than half the time currently needed to get a craft capable of deflecting such an object into space, Dr Nuth said.

Dr Nuth said he had recommended Nasa build an interceptor craft and keep it in storage in order to cut down on the time it takes to organise such a mission.

Dr Cathy Plesko, of Los Alamos National Laboratory, told the Guardian that humans could deflect an Earth-bound asteroid or comet with either a nuclear warhead or a "kinetic impactor, which is basically a giant cannonball".

## Ctg RMG workers

FROM PAGE 5

Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) Zahangir Alam said the police dispersed the demonstrators by firing tear gas and rubber bullets as they blocked the road, which was causing a tailback in the area.

Officer-in-Charge of Baizid Police Station Md Mohsin claimed that some four to five of their colleagues were also injured as the protesters hurled brickbats.

Md Mohiuddin, the factory's director and chief executive officer, said, a group of outsiders spread a rumour that some workers were being kept captive inside the factory, enraging the other workers.

"Trade union is approved by the labour directorate, and the management has nothing to do with this," he added.

A decision was taken to form a ten-member committee to hear and convey their demands to the authorities, he said.

In Ashulia of Savar, around 20,000 workers of 15 garment factories went on a strike and demonstrated, demanding fixing Tk 15,000 as their minimum wage, adds a correspondent.

Currently, on an average they are getting Tk 7,000, according to the workers and Industrial Police.

Workers of around seven factories started their movement on December 12, who were later joined by workers of other plants joined to press home the demand.

Yesterday, with the authorities keeping the factories closed to avoid any untoward incident, some workers tried to block the Dhaka-Tangail highway at Jamgora around 11:00am, but the police foiled the move, said witnesses.

A protester, Siddikur Rahman, said they are raising the demand for wage hike to cope with the rising prices of essential commodities.

Mizan Shafiqur Rahman, superintendent of police in Dhaka, said additional police were deployed in the areas to check violence.

Mustafizur Rahman, director of Industrial Police-1, said they are continuing talks with the factories' owners as regards their demand.

## Ties not reliant

FROM PAGE 5

"Pakistan has always harboured and supported terrorists. We feel those who support terrorism should be discouraged and isolated. We should do everything to discourage and condemn such attacks. Such kind of terror attacks should not be carried out against any country," Kamal says.

On terror attacks both in India and Bangladesh having roots in Pakistan, he says, "Both India and Bangladesh have the same stand on the issue of terrorism. We have noticed in recent past, how Pakistan's involvement in various terror attacks has come out into open. This has to stop."

## Duterte painkiller use draws concern in Philippines

AFP, Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's admission that he used a powerful painkiller has prompted concern about his health, with lawmakers urging him Sunday to undergo a medical examination and disclose the results.

Duterte on Monday revealed that he used to take fentanyl, often prescribed for cancer pain and other chronic ailments, because of a spinal injury from previous motorcycle accidents.

# TIB finds anomalies

FROM PAGE 1

more in the newly established universities compared to the old ones."

Adherence or inclination to the ideology of the ruling political party always acted as an important catalyst in the recruitment of lecturers, it says.

Information on recruitment of lecturers from 2001 to November 2016 was considered for the research conducted between January and December this year.

Thirteen universities have been selected for the study. They include eight general universities, two science and technology universities, two engineering universities and an agricultural university.

"We can see reflection of the country's divided national political scenario here. We can see that the zero-sum game which is: you have to win or establish supremacy at any cost is vigorously accumulating here," TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said at a press briefing at the TIB office in the capital.

The research also found some positive aspects such as some public universities maintained recruitment process based on merit and good academic records of the applicants, he said.

Some universities continue to follow this positive practice going against the tide. It can be a sign of hope and a good example for getting out of the malpractices, noted the TIB boss.

"However, the overall picture that we have found is frustrating and alarming,"

According to the report, the country's 37 public universities have 12,047 teachers, of whom 21.4 percent are female and 78.6 percent male. The number of lecturers is 2,830, and the teacher-student ratio is 1:19.

The report found no comprehensive rules for recruiting lecturers at the universities surveyed by the research team.

It pointed out that the vice-chancellors and pro-VCs have the scope to influence the recruitment process.

The TIB team found that irregularities in the recruitment of lecturers often start from the academic stage. Instances were found that teachers engineered or influenced academic results of some preferred students and

subsequently helped their recruitment.

"There are instances where teachers divulged questions to preferred students before academic examinations and gave idea about possible questions in examinations in exchange of engaging students in their personal chores or matters.

"Again, there are examples of publishing academic results quickly to recruit a follower in the university, as well as delaying results for obstructing non-favoured candidates," it says.

Different categories of internal and external stakeholders were found involved in the irregularities, including unauthorised financial transactions during recruitment of lecturers, the TIB report mentions.

Such stakeholders include a section of VCs, Pro-VCs, deans of faculties, departmental or institutional heads, teachers' association leaders and members loyal to the ruling party, staff at registrars' offices and student leaders, adds the report.

At the press briefing, Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam of Dhaka University said there is no scope for making compromises over such irregularities at public universities.

A brilliant student can be an asset for a university, while recruitment of an ordinary student as teacher can limit the institution's capacity to provide quality education, said Manzoorul, also a member of the TIB board of trustees.

The TIB report made some recommendations, including formulation of comprehensive policies or guidelines and rules for appointment of VCs and pro-VCs.

It says qualifications and rules for applying for the post of lecturer should be properly specified in advance, avoiding "preference given to candidates with special qualifications".

Specific policies should be framed on constitution of recruitment committees at all universities while maximum publicity of recruitment notices should be ensured through major newspapers, it adds.

It further suggests that the role of teachers' associations should be limited to the academic agenda of universities.

# 'Discovered by chance'

FROM PAGE 16

New research suggests that the August 1944 police raid in which Frank was arrested may have actually been staged to investigate illegal activity taking place elsewhere in the building.

"The question asked has always been 'Who betrayed Anne Frank and the people in hiding?'" the Anne Frank House said in a statement published yesterday.

But at 263 Prinsengracht in Amsterdam, where Frank and seven others went into hiding in a secret upstairs annexe, illegal work and fraud with ration coupons was also taking place.

"The current research study provides a different perspective: it is possible that the SD (Sicherheitsdienst, or German Security Service) searched the building because of this illegal work and fraud with ration coupons, and that the SD investigators discovered Anne Frank and the seven others in hiding simply by chance," said the museum, which is housed in the same building and dedicated to preserving Frank's memory.

"The Anne Frank House's new investigation does not refute the possibility that the people in hiding were betrayed, but illustrates that other scenarios should also be considered," said Ronald Leopold, its executive director.

**WORLD FAMOUS DIARY**

"The Diary of a Young Girl," which Frank penned while in hiding from June 1942 to August 1944, is one of the

most famous testimonies of life in the Second World War and the most famous diaries of all time.

It has sold more than 30 million copies in 67 languages.

The Jewish girl, who was born in Germany before her family emigrated to the Netherlands, died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany in early 1945, aged 15, less than a year after her capture and just before the end of World War II.

Her father, Otto Frank, was the sole survivor of the war among the eight inhabitants of the secret annexe.

It was commonly assumed that Frank, her parents and sister, as well as four others, were betrayed by an acquaintance to Nazi authorities -- with fictionalised accounts sometimes referring to an anonymous phone call.

But researcher Gertjan Broek honed in on details from Frank's diary about two men who worked in the building illegally trading in ration cards, and who had been arrested in March 1944 for it. Broek said that activity "obviously ran the risk of attracting the attention of authorities".

Broek found other discrepancies that call into question whether the police were specifically hunting for hidden Jews, calling his inquiry "a first step in thinking more broadly about the raid on the 'Secret Annexe'."

"Hopefully it will also inspire other researchers to pursue new leads. Clearly, the last word about that fateful summer day in 1944 has not yet been said," he wrote.

# AL asks BNP

FROM PAGE 1

opposition party for responding to the president's invitation to a dialogue on EC formation and for giving its proposal.

AL leaders Abdur Razzaque and Mahbulul Alam Hanif, however, said several demands put out on BNP's 13-point proposal were unrealistic like EC formation through a consensus among all political parties.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL president member Abdur Razzaque said, "We think the president will make a rational solution ... as the guardian of the nation and constitute a neutral commission that will hold free, fair and credible national polls in 2019."

"He [Hamid] is a wise person and has long experience with politics."

EC formation through all-party consensus is unrealistic but "I hope the president will consider BNP's proposal," said Razzaque.

In the prevailing political situation in the country, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbulul Alam Hanif said, it is impossible that all parties would reach a consensus on a particular issue. He, however, expressed the hope that the president would form a new EC within his constitutional jurisdiction, and that would be acceptable to all.

"I will ask BNP to keep faith in him as he will make a wise decision as our guardian."

At another programme on Bangabandhu Avenue, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said good sense had prevailed as the BNP met the president for talks on EC formation.

"BNP should have an open mind in the dialogue." Otherwise, the efforts will go in vain, he said at a time when BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia along with other senior party members was on the way to Bangabhaban.

"The government thinks the president is very liberal and he will discharge his duties properly," Quader said.

Referring to BNP's meeting with late president Zillur Rahman, Quader, minister for roads, transport and bridges, said the party's dialogue with him had not been fruitful.

"They met the then president, responding to his call, but they didn't accept his decision."

Khaleda on November 18 unveiled her proposal and urged Hamid to form a search committee based on a consensus among registered political parties.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on November 23 requested the president to take steps for dialogues on the BNP's charter.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met Hamid at Bangabhaban on December 4, and eight days later the president's office invited five political parties to join the first phase of the dialogue.