

LDP for enactment of law to form EC

Kader Siddique keeps faith in president

RASHIDUL HASAN

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) yesterday submitted a 17-point proposal to President Abdul Hamid on formation of the Election Commission. It also urged the president to enact a law in this regard.

However, Krishak Sramik Janata League during its meeting with the president at the Bangabhaban opposed any such move by the current parliament, saying it was formed through the January 5, 2014 polls without voters.

LDP President Col (retd) Oli Ahmed led a 10-member party delegation to the dialogue that began at

3:00pm.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, he said the president assured them of doing his best to prepare a draft on setting up of a strong EC acceptable to all.

The LDP proposed that armed forces members, like the policemen, should be empowered to arrest criminals on the polling day.

Oli said he called upon the president to dispel mistrust among the political parties.

"The honourable president wanted to know how the mistrust was built. We told him that the national election in 2014 without voters led to mistrust.

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President Abdul Hamid in talks with Liberal Democratic Party President Col (retd) Oli Ahmed and Krishak Sramik Janata League President Abdul Kader Siddique, right, at the Bangabhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Big opportunities to grow further

But Bangladesh needs to address challenges in energy sector, climate change, says US economist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has a big opportunity to grow further but it needs to address a number of challenges for sustainable development, says a globally renowned economist.

"This is clearly a time of optimism for Bangladesh. Bangladesh's economy is growing rapidly. There are many opportunities for further growth," said Jeffrey David Sachs, professor of economics at Columbia University, yesterday.

He was speaking via Skype at the concluding session of the day-long international conference on "New Economic Thinking: Bangladesh 2030 and Beyond" at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka.

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) organised the conference to discuss issues related to investment and potential sectors of export.

Sachs said the country's economy is growing at more than seven percent

and that there are a wide range of opportunities for further development.

Apart from the readymade garment sector, Bangladesh has opportunities in pharmaceuticals, tourism and agriculture sectors.

The US economist said the country is now rapidly urbanising, which is another reason for being optimistic about its economic growth.

Bangladesh's development should not be considered on the basis of its GDP growth only. The qualitative development it made in sectors like health, energy services and social inclusion of people and minority groups should also be taken into account, he suggested.

Sachs said Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate change and that the country should emphasise on the fundamental climate change issues.

He stressed the need for using clean and green energy. He suggested

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All eyes on Narayanganj

FROM PAGE 1

The EC has received widespread criticism for its failure to hold free and fair elections since the January 5, 2014 one-sided parliamentary election which witnessed an unprecedented 153 of 300 MPs elected uncontested.

Widespread electoral anomalies dominated the subsequent elections to different local government bodies.

Even though there was no violence during campaigning in Narayanganj, many city dwellers fear untoward incidents may spoil their election day.

Tight security measures were put in place by the administration to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for the polls, being held on partisan line.

"We have taken extra security measures to maintain the peaceful atmosphere. There is no possibility of any untoward incident," the returning officer of the polls, Nuruzzaman Talukder, claimed yesterday.

Like the last few days, Narayanganj, the small city 16km from the capital, may have a foggy and mildly cold morning today, when voters start queuing up at polling stations. Just like the previous days, sunshine is expected to remove the fog a few hours after the polling begins.

"So far, there has been no violence centring the elections. If law enforcers and the administration work properly, concern over the voting atmosphere on election day would be eliminated," Shahadat Hossain, a student of

Tolaram College in Narayanganj, told The Daily Star.

Lutfunnahar, an NGO worker in sadar area, said, "We will observe the voting atmosphere in the morning... if we find it congenial, we will certainly cast our votes. The atmosphere is good so far."

The focus, however, will be on the mayoral race.

Ruling AL's mayor candidate Selina Hayat Ivy's main challenger is the BNP's Shakhawat Hossain Khan.

None of the other five mayor aspirants are expected to be a threat to either of them.

Ivy won the first polls in 2011 defeating the then ruling AL-backed candidate Shamim Osman with a margin of more than one lakh votes. Her party had not extended support to her in that election.

This time, Ivy was able to get the AL's ticket, stopping controversial AL MP Shamim Osman's attempt to deny her the party nomination.

Shamim and local AL leaders had manipulated local unit of AL not to include Ivy's name in the list of three placed before the AL high command to choose.

The three AL leaders in the list were all pro-Shamim Osman.

But the AL high command chose Ivy disregarding the grassroots' list.

Shamim still remains the centre of discussion in Narayanganj and there is a lot of speculation as to what he and his men might or might not do today to influence the polls.

Political analysts said Ivy's clean

image, popularity, and development activities she carried out in her first term might benefit her in the polls today.

BNP's Shakhawat came into the limelight by leading a street protest against the seven murders in Narayanganj. A lawyer by profession, he is also the counsel for a victim's family. He has never been elected to any public office.

During the campaign, he tried to woo voters by using national issues alongside his promises for local development.

His campaign talked about issues like the 2014 one-sided parliamentary elections and the controversial polls to some local government bodies.

The records offer hope for Sakhawat. If national issues dominate the Narayanganj city polls, he may get an edge. In the past, voters in most cases disappointed the ruling party in free and fair elections.

The AL-backed mayor candidates were beaten in Chittagong City Corporation in 2010 and in Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and Gazipur city corporations in 2013.

During the BNP-led alliance rule, elections to Dhaka and Chittagong city corporations in 1994 and polls to Chittagong City Corporation in 2005 were largely free and fair.

In those races, the BNP-backed mayor candidates faced humiliating defeats to their opponents supported by then opposition AL.

Mexico fireworks blasts kill 31

AFP, Tultepec

A massive explosion gutted Mexico's biggest fireworks market on Tuesday, killing at least 31 people and injuring 72, the authorities said.

The conflagration in the Mexico City suburb of Tultepec set off a quick-fire series of multicoloured blasts that sent a vast cloud of smoke billowing over the capital.

The San Pablito market had been packed with customers buying pyrotechnics for traditional end-of-year festivities. Christmas and New Year parties in many Latin American countries often wrap up with clattering fireworks blasts.

"You just heard the blast. And everything started to be on fire. People came running out on fire," Walter Garduno said. "People were alright -- children," he added before trailing off.

From a few kilometres (miles) away, the multiple explosions that started at 2:50 pm almost looked festive, alight in blue, red and white. They were anything but.

Of the 31 confirmed dead, "26 (died) at the scene and five in hospitals," local media reported Mexico's chief prosecutor Milenio Alejandro Gomez as saying.

Forensic experts are working on genetic analyses of the bodies because

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PHULBARIA KILLINGS AL lawmaker, 6 others sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A case was filed against the Phulbaria ruling Awami League lawmaker and six others yesterday in connection with the killings of two people, including a teacher of Phulbaria Degree College, during a demonstration demanding nationalisation of the institution last month.

Apart from lawmaker advocate Muslem Uddin, the other accused in the case are his son advocate Emdadul Haque Selim, information and research affairs secretary of Phulbaria upazila unit AL, Phulbaria Degree College Principal Nasir Uddin Khan and its Vice-principal Amzad Hossain, Officer-in-Charge of Phulbaria Police Station Rifat Khan Rajib and its Sub-inspector (SI) Rafiqul Islam and Assistant

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Osmans' role could be a crucial factor

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support to Awami League candidate Selina Hayat Ivy, it is hard to believe that he and his followers would back Ivy, he said.

Until yesterday, no major incident of election violence or violation of electoral code of conduct was reported. However, voters are still apprehensive of some councillor candidates. About 34 candidates have criminal records.

According to local politicians and the city people, the influence of the Osman family will play a crucial role in determining the fate of the mayor and many councillor candidates.

BNP nominated Shakhawat Hossain Khan is Ivy's main rival.

Rafiqul Rabbi, an aide to Ivy, told The Daily Star, "Shamim Osman might hatch conspiracies on election day. Those who are known to have a bad reputation, especially the councillors, might influence the voting, but I think they wouldn't be successful."

"I think Shamim Osman might face trouble if he goes against the ruling

party nominated candidate. It might put his political career at risk," he added.

The Osman family drew flak on many occasions as their names came up in several incidents, particularly the humiliation of a headmaster, killing of schoolboy Tawki and the sensational seven-murder of Narayanganj.

In the 2011 polls, Ivy defeated AL-backed Shamim by one lakh votes though the city was known to be a stronghold of the Osman brothers, whose grandfather, Khan Shaheb Osman Ali, was a founding member of the AL.

"Those who created chaotic and abnormal situation in the past might do the same on election day. We are concerned," said ATM Kamal, city BNP general secretary.

The Osman family has adopted a strategy to keep its dominance by extending support to ward councillor candidates, irrespective of political affiliations.

Talking to various sections of people, it was learnt that the family extended support to some AL-backed

councillor candidates, some BNP minded candidates and a few Jatiya Party candidates.

For example, Shawkat Hasem Shaku, city BNP joint secretary, is running for councillor post in ward-12 and he is backed by Shamim's supporters.

Sources in the returning office said rival ward councillor candidates might be a reason for their headache.

"We've taken extra security measures at the most important polling centres," Nuruzzaman Talukdar, returning officer of NCC polls, told journalists yesterday.

Mahfuzul Huq Nuruzzaman, deputy inspector general of Dhaka range police, said there would be no incidents like snatching of ballot boxes in the NCC polls.

"We're ready to hold a free and credible election. I assure you all that a free and fair election would be held, which would be a model. We don't want any controversial polls," he told journalists at a press conference.

Meanwhile, Ivy and Shakhawat

spent the whole day yesterday mostly holding meetings with party leaders and activists.

Ivy was in her Paschim Dewbogh home and had talked to party leaders and activists.

"I will not talk to the media today [yesterday]... I'm busy working out election strategies."

Shakhawat, on the other hand, went to the BNP office in the morning and had a meeting with its leaders. In the afternoon, he went to his media cell office and talked to party men.

"The voting atmosphere is still not congenial as arms were recovered even today [yesterday]," he claimed.

NUR HOSSAIN

Nur Hossain, the arrested prime accused in the sensational seven-murder case, is allegedly influencing voters of his area, ward-4.

Ariful Hasan, a councillor aspirant of ward-4 and also a former associate of Nur, said, "Nur Hossain is making phone calls from behind bars and threatening my supporters."

HIGH-RISE ON ORPHANAGE LAND

Concord must hand it over in 30 days: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday released the full text of its judgment that ordered confiscation of Concord Group's 18-storey tower on government land leased to Sir Salimullah Muslim Orphanage in the capital's Azimpur.

Concord has to hand over the building, through the social welfare ministry, to the orphanage in 30 days after it receives the judgment copy, the court said. Otherwise, the ministry will take over the possession and property of the multi-storey building within seven days without any fail and hand it over to the orphanage.

The verdict delivered in September last year also directed the government authorities to immediately constitute

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Muktadir's rejoinder, our reply

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nefarious incidence of Nasiragar attack on Hindu community. The so called 'investigating report' by two of your reporters, namely M Abul Kalam Azad and Rashidul Hasan (the person who interviewed me few days back before I left for U.K. on personal ground), caught my attention three days later after the report was published when one of my well-wishers from media circle informed me about it (on 12.12.2016).

According to Society of Professional Journalists, "Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information." It says, 'take responsibility for the accuracy of their work, verify information before releasing it and use original sources whenever possible.' It also says, 'consider sources' motives before promising anonymity.' Unfortunately, both the reporters have violated all these conditions that ought to have studied.

I very much doubt that the whole story by two guys, I feel shame to call whom journalist, has been influenced by otherwise and worked to serve the interest of the vested quarters. I do challenge both of them to prove their claim by evidence. Moreover, try to be rational, it is not merely a question of evidence. Before using a negative term against a politician, who holds confidence and trust of the majority in his constituency, a newspaper should

show its responsibility.

The report has labeled me as 'an ambitious person'. No doubt about it. Every human being has to be ambitious. To have ambition is of no fault. The famous Spanish painter Salvador Dali once said, intelligence without ambition is a bird without wings. Yet both of these reporters did not understand what they meant by using the word 'ambitious'. In the report they termed me a 'bureaucrat-turned politician'. It is unfortunate that the reporters even did not look into my political background before submitting the report. It is widely known to all politically conscious people that I was a student activist and a veteran freedom fighter. I have been pursuing the ideals of Bangabandhu for my whole life. I had been an active central committee member of erstwhile East Pakistan Students' League and Bangladesh Students' League as well. Later, I was chosen by Bangabandhu as a member of BAKSAL students' front Jatiyo Chattrra League Central Committee. I had been in jail for 23 months after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu and his family members. I contested DUCSU election on BCL ticket as General Secretary Candidate in the Quader-Rabul Parishad. Later on I joined Civil Service and resigned from the service in 2005 and joined politics. I was given AL ticket to contest 2007 election in the parliament. But unfor-

tunately could not get nomination in the 2008 election due to a technical ground that three-year bar for a govt. servant in contesting election was not fulfilled. So, is there any way to describe me a parvenu politician, what your newspaper has done?

Moreover, I cannot understand how a man's ambition, if the gossip we suppose true, could be the cause of a communal violence against which he fought whole of his life? I have firmly requested the law enforcers publicly to take necessary action against the culprits, does not matter who they are. I would like to say very clearly that I only know a few persons in Nasiragar and that also I do not have any contact with those 08 to 10 persons. I visited Nasiragar long after 40 years only to see the devastation done by the criminals. I have always avoided having any sort of political contact in Nasiragar in favor of the local MP as to he could do his politics without any hindrance.

There is no grouping in Brahmanbaria Distrit [sic] Awami League politics. MP from Nasiragar, who is also a minister, has no say or he does not have any interest in Brahmanbaria politics. He is totally satisfied with his Nasiragar politics. So there is no question of clash between us. To nominate U.P. chairmanship, we from District Committee proposed five (5) name for five (5) unions. The central nomination

committee for local government has finally nominated two among five where Akhi was one. Before the nomination done by the committee, Akhi had been completely unknown to me.

But whatever the conflict, if were, of District and Upazila AL (on which the local MP has absolute control) could never be a cause to attack on Hindus. This rumor was actually aired by a vested quarter. Rather, the whole things, I like to say, had been the result of negligence and utter foolishness of local administration, both civil and police as well as of local political forces, who did not take appropriate measures to control the situation, rather helped to aggravate the situation by allowing two meetings of, so-called religious groupings. There was total callousness on the part of local political forces and administration. To hide the actual perpetrators and criminals a vested quarter came up with the maiden story of so-called political conflict, which is totally baseless and fictitious. Money and illegal influence are being used to divert the attention from the actual perpetrators of the heinous crime.

The reports earlier presented in your newspaper also contradicts present one, prepared by the same reporters. I wonder how these persons could change their earlier position without being otherwise influenced. I have the reason to believe that the very law maker (I hope that he does not belong

to AL) whom they quoted (the reporters) in their concocted report, might invested a lot to influence the report. In this regard I like to mention here of two recent reports published in the national dailies where I came to learn that the Deputy Speaker of our neighboring country India's Tripura State Legislative Assembly Mr. Pabitra Kar and Swami of Dhaka Ramkrishna Mission, stated that the attack was completely a local issue. It has no other implication. Politics has nothing to do with it. The attackers were religious bigots and were from all shades of political quarters. Now, is not it your duty to probe that the fact was something different? Let's forget your condition of anonymity'.

It has been more than clear that the report was deliberate and inequitable. In one of your reports you reported that three government investigation report did not find my name. It is your fictitious characters "condition of anonymity" only found me in the case. Is not it a laughable effort to debase a politician? 'Condition of anonymity' is a term most frequently being used by some newspaper without having responsibility of using the term. Moreover, no concerned committee, no professional reporting or no individual found my involvement in the matter except your newspaper. The body language of reporting in your newspaper has been completely

inequitable. Your newspaper report compared two politicians in a way that has been totally conflicting with newspaper's morality. It is unacceptable not only to me but also to the people of my constituency."

OUR REPLY

Our report was based on police findings and our own investigation in which we talked to more than 100 people in the locality.

Two police probe committees -- one formed by the Police Headquarters and the other by Brahmanbaria district police -- investigated the attack by the religious zealots, and both found internal conflict of local Awami League was a major reason behind the attack, and that finding has already been published.

"The attack took place following an internal conflict of the local AL over establishing supremacy," Deputy Inspector General of Police of Chittagong Range Shakhwat Hossain, who headed the probe body formed by the Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star in Brahmanbaria.

Moreover, additional superintendent of police in Brahmanbaria, who headed the probe body formed by the office of superintendent of police (SP) in Brahmanbaria said, "There were several elements involved in the attack but it was the internal conflict of the local ruling party, in which one group tried to discredit the other, was a leading element."