

EC bins complaints

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Acting Secretary to the EC Secretariat Mohammad Zakoria refused to talk to the newsmen. His personal secretary said Zakoria was busy and has nothing new to say about the draft list, which was prepared ignoring the High Court directives on voter list.

The secretary at a training programme for the election officers yesterday defended the sharp increase in the electorate, sources said.

"Objections to the rise in the number of voters have been raised. But the upward trend in the number of people enfranchised is usual compared to the previous voter rolls," sources quoted Zakoria as saying.

He also referred to the appeal pending with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court against the High Court's January 4 directives for revising the existing roll. Hearing on the appeal is scheduled for May 14.

The draft voter list shows at least 1.11 crore unaccounted for voters if one goes by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) census report, 2001.

The EC came up with 9.13 crore voters on its draft list, but the BBS report shows the number of people 18 years and above should not exceed 8.02 crore if no death had occurred during the period and if every person eligible to be a voter is listed.

After publication of the draft list, electoral experts and demographers questioned the sharp rise in the number of voters while newspapers reported about anomalies in voter-listing in many areas.

But CEC MA Aziz stayed mum for the last few days. "I am busy and I can't talk to the media now," Aziz told reporters through his personal

secretary yesterday.

Even while speaking at the training programme yesterday, he refrained from making any comment about the controversial increase the numbers of voters, sources said.

Election Commissioner SM Zakaria too refused to speak. "The commission has decided that other than the chief election commissioner and the secretary, none of the election commissioners will talk to the media," the personal secretary to Zakaria told reporters.

Meanwhile, the EC Secretariat in a press release yesterday said of 9,13,14,592 voters on the draft list, 4, 68, 64, 302 are male and 4, 44, 50, 290 female.

ELECTION OFFICER SUSPENDED

The EC Secretariat on May 2 suspended Mir Mohammad Shajahan, Lalmonirhat district election officer, as he questioned the secretariat's shady role in preparing the voter list, sources said.

In a letter to the secretary this month, he complained that the secretariat had forwarded to them letters that did not have signature of any designated officers. Besides, the work of preparing the draft list was being hampered due to constraints of money, the sources said, citing from Shajahan's letter.

Annoyed by the letter, the secretary suspended the district election officer without even issuing a showcause notice.

Punitive actions are likely to be taken against some other district election officers as well, added the sources.

Upazila election

FROM PAGE 1
Upazila have been left out of the draft list.

They also demanded immediate removal of the Upazila Election Officer Mohammad Zakaria for excluding local lawmaker Ekabbar Hossain and former lawmaker from Mirzapur Fazlur Rahman Faruque from the list.

Advocate Badsha Miah, vice-president of district AL, Mosharraf Hossain Moni, chairman of Mirzapur pourasabha, Meer Sharif Mahmud, general secretary of Mirzapur upazila unit of AL, Shahadat Hossain Sumon, organising secretary of Mirzapur upazila unit of AL, local AL leaders SM Monir Hossain, Toufiquur Rahman and Talukdar Razib addressed the rally among others.

Later, the leaders and activists of AL marched in procession to Ashakbar Bhaban near Mirzapur bus stand and held a rally, which was addressed by incumbent and former lawmakers from Mirzapur, Ekabbar Hossain and Fazlur Rahman Faruque.

When contacted on Saturday, Ekabbar Hossain told The Daily Star, "I filled in the voter form and submitted it to the local election office myself, but did not find my name on the draft voter list." The names of a large number of AL leaders, activists and supporters in Mirzapur have been dropped from the draft voter list, he alleged.

Contacted, Mirzapur upazila election officer Mohammad Zakaria yesterday admitted that the local lawmaker filled in the voter form and himself (lawmaker) submitted to him.

"The name of Ekabbar Hossain was dropped from the draft voter list due to a mistake by the supervisor and assistant registration officer. We are very sorry for it," he added.

Earlier, officials of local election office had claimed that their men went to lawmaker Ekabbar Hossain several times, but he (lawmaker) did not enter his name in the draft voter list.

The draft list contains names of 2,79,176 in Mirzapur, which was 2,32,196 on the list prepared in 2001, showing an increase of 47,000 voters in the constituency.

30 killed

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Baghdad, killing one civilian and wounding five. The target was not clear.

Interior Ministry sources said 42 bodies had been found in the last 24 hours in the capital alone, including eight found dumped near Kindi hospital in central Baghdad. The figure is in line with levels of violence seen in recent months.

PM reaches

FROM PAGE 1
After the guard-of-honor ceremony, the two prime ministers introduced each other to the respective presentation lines, first by the host-country premier.

Later, Prime Minister Khaleda was taken on a ceremonial motorcade to Bayan Palace where she will be staying during her tour of the oil-rich Gulf State.

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan, Principal Secretary to PM Dr Kamal Siddiqui and Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin are accompanying the prime minister.

Bilateral talks between the two governments were scheduled to start late last night.

On the second day, Prime Minister Khaleda is scheduled to call on Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the place of the monarch in the morning.

HC stays

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BTRC on March 23 issued two

tender notices inviting local, foreign and joint-venture companies to bid for the 'central zone' that is comprised of metropolitan Dhaka, the municipal areas of Narayanganj, Gazipur, Tongi, Savar and Jinjira. The regulator will issue four licenses among the top four successful bidders.

Counselors for the petitioner argued that the regulator explicitly and repeatedly expressed its preference for specific type of bidders instead of open competition.

Mentioning the criteria of the bid invitations counselors pointed out that the highest mark will be given to the bidder who has already built the longest microwave backbone network for its services. The lowest mark will be given to the bidder who has built the shortest backbone and others will be marked accordingly.

It means only four companies — Rangs Tel, National Telecom, Tele Barta and Dhaka Telecom — who have activated their fixed telephone networks in four zones, will remain in the race for winning four licenses in the central zone. Rest of the local and foreign bidders will be disqualified in this bid, they argued.

Counselors termed the criteria as discriminatory. They also said microwave is a conventional technology to build transmission backbones while optical fibre is a far more efficient and modern replacement of microwave.

Respondents to the rule are — telecommunication secretary, industry secretary, finance secretary and the chairman of BTRC.

Advocate Abdul Baset Mojmuder, Barrister Shafiq Ahmed and Aminuddin represented the petitioner.

Govt now turns

FROM PAGE 1
The government has miserably failed in the power sector. So much so that the country will be far behind its goal of reaching power for all by 2020, the official said.

In 2020, the demand for power is projected to be around 17,000 MW. This requires the country to increase power generation by 950 MW a year. But the alliance government in its five-year term will be able to increase it by only around 550 MW.

The updated plan for 26 power plants, which includes four under-implementation projects, needs an investment of Tk 33,710 crore with Tk 13,108 crore earmarked as foreign funding.

Some of the projects now in tender process are going to incompetent and novice builders. For instance, the government is awarding the 450 MW Meghnaghat-2 power project to a consortium of Orion and Belhassa because the chief of Bangladeshi company Orion is close to ruling BNP top leaders. Neither Orion nor the UAE-based Belhassa has ever built a power plant.

Moreover, under this plan the government has awarded three contracts for 150 MW skid-mount power plants to novice builders. The power ministry itself is doubtful whether these plants would ever add power to the national grid. The plan says a total of 450 MW power will be generated by skid-mount plants.

The under-implementation projects meanwhile are showing unhealthy signs because of poor selection of power plant developers. The four such projects include two Baghabari Westmont plants (130 MW), Barapukuria coal-fired plant (250 MW) and Mymensingh-3 plant (70 MW). The Baghabari plants were supposed to be commissioned in phases from April while the two others were supposed to launch operation by March. But these are actually producing a maximum of 125 MW to 130 MW.

The Barapukuria plant constructed under Chinese Supplier's Credit was supposed to start operation last year. This corruption-plagued project over-priced by at least \$70 million, which mainly went

to a particular BNP man, is stumbling again and again. According to the latest schedule, the plant was supposed to start full operation in February-March but till date it is only partially functioning.

The 70 MW phase-3 Mymensingh plant under Rural Power Company, over-priced by nearly \$80 million, was also supposed to come into operation in December last. Its updated schedule fixed April as the latest deadline but it also failed to keep this schedule.

The government has awarded 90 MW Fenchuganj power plant and 150 MW Chandpur plant to Harbin. In both the cases, the government violated rules to favour Harbin, the same Chinese company that built the alliance government's only power plant — 80 MW Tongji plant. The plant tripped 75 times in a year and is still malfunctioning due to poor machinery. "The future of Fenchuganj and Chandpur plants is therefore doubtful," observed an official.

Interestingly, the Sirajganj 450 MW project, which was supposed to go into operation early next year had the government not cancelled it at its final stage in 2004, is now scheduled to start production in 2009.

Other projects in this plan, conceived by the previous Awami League government but yet to be implemented because of inaction or wrong action of the present government, include Sylhet 150 MW project, Siddhirganj 240 MW, Sikalabaha 150 MW, Siddhirganj 300 MW, Siddhirganj 210 MW and Bheramara 450 MW project in the public sector. In this category, the government added a 150 MW Bogra project.

In the private sector, the plan includes Sirajganj phase-2 and Meghnaghat-3 and 4 projects.

The updated government plan envisages 3,350 MW power from the public sector and 2,940 MW from the private sector.

Black money holders

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"No political party should nominate the black money holders," the BNP policymaker said replying to a question at a 'meet the reporters' programme of Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) at the DRU auditorium in the capital.

Bhuiyan, also LGRD and cooperatives minister, said when election expenses of a candidate reach up to Tk five to ten crore, the black money holders are encouraged and the honest and competent persons are discouraged in taking part in the election.

The minister said some reforms are needed to make the elections free from black money and terrorism, and make those free, fair and acceptable. "It can be done through discussion," he said speaking on the topic "Next election and present situation."

Regarding the possibilities of a dialogue between the government and the opposition, the BNP leader said he is hopeful that discussion will be held finally and they would reach a consensus over the electoral reforms.

On the opposition's demand for excluding Jamaat from the government panel to discuss the electoral reform proposals, Bhuiyan said the opposition's stance is illogical. "Jamaat is a partner of the ruling alliance, it is difficult to hold discussion without them."

"As we did not dictate them (opposition) in naming their representatives, they should not dictate us in naming ours," said the minister.

Asked about the chance of a direct talk between Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, he said a congenial atmosphere is first needed to have

such discussion at the highest level. "I do not think the two leaders should sit together for discussion at this point of time."

Asked if he will sit with AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil to discuss electoral reforms, Bhuiyan said if the opposition comes up with a formal proposal for direct talks between them, he would consider it after discussing it in his party forum.

Bhuiyan predicted that the next elections would be free from the influence of any party government. Rejecting any possibility of early elections, he said BNP would not hand over power even a day before completion of their term.

Regarding opposition's allegation on the new voter lists, Bhuiyan said there is time to rectify the lists, if there is any fault. "There is scope to include those who are not listed and to exclude those who have been included twice," he said.

Asked about the controversy over the current chief election commissioner (CEC) and a free and fair election under his jurisdiction, Bhuiyan said the previous CEC, who hails from Gopalganj, was also a controversial one. "If he could arrange a free and fair election, why this chief election commissioner should not do?"

Bhuiyan also spoke on the existing power, gas, water crises, price hike of essentials, investment proposal of Tata, donors' aid and other issues.

Replying to a query, Bhuiyan said there are some problems in power, water and gas sectors and prices of essentials. He however termed the price hike "temporary."

REB office

FROM PAGE 1
Police said employees of the REB office were abused by the angry mob. "We reached there just on time when they were attempting to storm into the Palli Biddut office," said officer-in-charge of Fakirhaat police station.

The office was provided with adequate security amid tension running high there.

A large number of people brought out a protest march at 10:00am yesterday in Fakirhaat demanding steady power supply.

Meanwhile, discontent is also brewing among the residents of Khulna city due to frequent power outage.

On Friday night, an angry mob attacked the REB office at Batiaghata upazila in protest against load shedding.

The Khulna power station and all sub-stations in the city have been put on high alert and security forces have been deployed there fearing attack from the people. Security measures have also been taken for all water pump houses in the city.

Khulna Citizens' Forum will hold an emergency meeting tomorrow to announce a programme for a movement against load shedding and water crisis.

Nagorik Committee

FROM PAGE 16
Committee delegation will also talk about how NBR can directly assist the Election Commission (EC) in this regard.

Co-convenor of the Nagorik Committee 2006 and former finance minister M Syeduzzaman, Co-convenor and former president of MCCI Laila Rahman Kabir, former attorney general Mahmudul Islam, former chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh Samson H Chowdhury, former adviser of the caretaker government ASM Shahjahan and member secretary of the Committee and Executive Director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya will attend the meeting scheduled to be held at the NBR chairman's office at 4:00pm.

Transport workers

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The transport workers also damaged the tempo carrying the patrol police team and put up barricade on the Madar Bari DT Road disrupting vehicular movement for an hour.

Witnesses said, Constable Mahub charged truck helper Sattar with theft of motor parts while patrolling the area at around 3:30pm as the latter was fixing his truck at Madar Bari DT Road near the shrine of Tong Fakir. The cop also allegedly demanded bribe from the truck helper for a let-off.

As Sattar produced the purchase receipt of the spare he was using and refused to pay any money, Constable Mahub started beating him. He also beat up truck driver Yasin who tried to save his helper.

At one point, all the truck drivers and helpers of that area, along with local people, caught the cop and gave him a good beating.

Later, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Double Mooring Police Station Kutubur Rahman rushed to the spot and made apology for the misconduct of the cop. He also assured the mob of taking action against the constable.

Constable Mahub was later suspended for illegal practice and "excess," sources said.

Biman

FROM PAGE 16
why its "arbitrary" and "mala fide" increase of cargo rate and fuel surcharge over the fruits, vegetables and betel leaves should not be declared "to have been made and issued without lawful authority and of no legal effects".

Biman increased the shipment charges of vegetable products by 25 per cent on an average effective from March 1.

The Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Products Exporters' Association went into a strike the same day, saying it is not economically viable to export these items at Biman's increased rate.

An HC division bench issued the rule nisi after hearing a writ petition filed by the exporters' association on March 1.

The court also stayed the operations of Biman's previous six increases of cargo charges for perishable items between January 24 and April 23.

The Biman has increased its cargo charges nine times since January this year.

The airline last increased its freight charges for vegetables to Damnam from \$1.12 to \$2.12 per kilogram, to the UK, Italy, France and Germany from \$1.55 to \$2, and to Dubai and Maskat from \$0.75 to \$0.85.

The HC directed Biman and others to frame guideline criteria for fixation of charges—rates, tariffs, freights and others—for carrying commodities of the petitioners.

Meanwhile, exporters' association leaders at a meeting yesterday decided to resume exporting vegetables tomorrow, said association President Md Farid Uddin Ahmed.

Business leaders

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take action against the offenders," said the commerce minister, who also holds the portfolio of water resources ministry.

He also blamed mismanagement of power sector and devaluation of taka against dollar and price hike of imported essentials in international market as other major factors for price spiral.

The commerce ministry alone cannot curb price spiral, he said, adding, "It is a team work. The home ministry needs to stop extortion in market and trucks carrying goods, agriculture ministry needs to increase production and finance ministry needs to set tariff structure and policy support to curb price spiral."

He said the prices of essentials have already reduced and the situation will improve further in the near future.

The minister called upon the main opposition Awami League to shun negative politics in order to improve the overall economy of the country.

He assured the FBCCI leaders of help to set up the federation's own building.

Addressing the meeting, FBCCI president Mir Nasir Hossain suggested that the government take effective steps against the syndicates of commodities manipulating prices of commodities.

The other suggestions made by the FBCCI include expanding export market, product diversification, ensuring quality of products

through mutual recognition of certification with other countries, increasing efficiency of ports, and power and gas sector and improving law and order.

FBCCI first vice-president Mohammad Ali, vice-president Dewan Sultan Ahmed, directors, Commerce Secretary Md Abdul Karim, Vice-Chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) Mir Shahabuddin Mohammad and other senior government officials were present at the meeting.

Meanwhile, LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the price hike of essentials is 'temporary' and the government is trying to bring down the price to a tolerable level.

Price of essentials will go high as the economy flourishes, the minister said while addressing 'meet the reporters' programme on 'Next election and present situation' organised by Dhaka Reporters Unity at its auditorium in the capital.

Admitting that there are some problems in power, water and gas sectors, Bhuiyan said the price of sugar has increased in the country due to price hike in international market.

Regarding syndicated business in hiking up price of essentials, the minister said if anyone, even if he is a minister or secretary, is found guilty, stern action will be taken.

Poll symbols

FROM PAGE 1
The HC fixed today for passing order on the matters.

The petitioner said boat, the election symbol of Awami League, is used in the monogram and flag of jail guards under the police department, BNP's poll symbol sheaf of paddy is used as part of the national symbol, according to article 4(3) of the constitution. Besides, Jatiya Party's election symbol plough is used in the monogram of Bangladesh Ansar.

Petitioner said allocating these symbol for political parties as their election symbols has damaged the image of different institutions of the state.

Advocate Md Tajul Islam moved for the petitioner. Another writ petition was filed on May 2 that challenged the operation of Rule 9 (1) of the Conduct of Election Rules 1972 in respect of inclusion of scales as election symbol for a political party by the Election Commission.

Five lawyers of the Supreme Court — Barrister Moksadul Islam, advocates SM Fazlul Hoque, Asaduzzaman Siddique, Shamsul Alam and Mustafa Zaman Islam filed the petition that was also heard in the HC yesterday.

Counsel for the petitioners Advocate Manzill Murshid told the court that scales have been used in the monogram of the Supreme Court since the establishment of the East Bengal High Court in 1947. The citizens Bangladesh consider the monogram as a symbol of justice.

He noted that if some others use scales as their symbol, confusion might be created among people, which might undermine the status of the apex court.

Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali submitted yesterday that two writ petitions challenging some election symbols are not maintainable, as these do not fulfil criteria of PIL. Additional Attorney General Fida Kamal also opposed the petitions.

AL walks out of JS

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The speaker's decision also created mixed reaction in the treasury bench. Law Minister Moudud Ahmed was seen telling LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan that "why the opposition can't demand government's resignation?"

Soon after the opposition's walkout, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain took the floor and requested the speaker to reconsider the opposition's expunged words, saying that such remarks are usual in parliamentary democracy.

"While in the opposition, we also demanded government's resignation in parliament," he said adding, "I don't see anything unparliamentary here."

Earlier, the AL lawmakers slated the government for its failure to ensure smooth supply of power, fuel and water. They referred to the incidents in Kansat and Shanir Akhra [in Demra] as the expression of no-confidence in the BNP-Jamaat coalition." AL lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta said.

He said the government has failed to control public in Demra and "handed over power" to the army to quell the agitating people.

Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim demanded a judicial inquiry committee to probe the incidents of Kansat and Shanir Akhra.

Mohammad Nasim demanded discussions in the House on crucial issues like the price hike of essentials, rise of religious militancy and the crises of power, water and fuel.

But LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan opposed the AL lawmakers' remarks and said Kansat and Shanir Akhra incidents were isolated.

Bhuiyan alleged that the opposition has tried to have political gains from Kansat and Demra incidents, but the government resolved the problems quickly.

several AL lawmakers asked the government to admit its failure to run the country and resign immediately to pave the way for early election.

"People have taken to the streets against the government and the incidents in Kansat and Shanir Akhra [in Demra] are the expression of no-confidence in the BNP-Jamaat coalition." AL lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta said.

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Saifur

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responded well to the treatment and is normal", a hospital spokesman said yesterday.

Saifur was admitted to the corporate hospital after he complained about breathlessness during the Asian Development Bank (ADB) meet and was being treated for urinary tract infection with spillage of infection to blood.

500 eligible voters

FROM PAGE 1
of Sohrab Hossain Shaikh and Saleka Begum, wife of Kader Shaikh.

Md Panu Mallick, 47, and his wife Rabeya Begum, 36, are the only two persons from Billalua village under Narua union at Balakandi upazila in Rajbari who were named as voters on the new draft list.

On the previous voter list published in 2000, the total number of voters in these two villages stood at 500.

The new draft list of voters in Rajbari district published by the EC has raised questions about the enumeration process.

When contacted, Rajbari district election officer said he was not aware of the matter. It might have been a mistake made by the enumerator concerned, he said.

Heroin smuggling

FROM PAGE 1
Superintendent of Police Dipak Chandra Gupta mentioned that Bashar and Zafar smuggled 54kg heroin to the UK in a consignment of TAZARO Floor Tiles.

He said the accused prepared fake documents in connivance with some officials of the Foreign Exchange Corporate Branch of Sonali Bank in Motijheel and the appraisers concerned of Chittagong customs. They also opened a clearing and forwarding agency named AR Haq Trade Corporation Ltd at Agrabad in Chittagong to carry out their activities, Gupta added.

Bashar and Zafar exported 330 cartons of TAZARO Floor Tiles to the UK, but the UK customs at the Southampton port found 54kg heroin in 108 cartons of the consignment.

The CID yesterday produced Bashar, arrested early Saturday in Jessore, before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM), Dhaka with a prayer for a 10-day remand. The court granted a remand of seven days.

Zafar is also on remand in another heroin smuggling case filed recently with the Motijheel Police Station.

The law enforcers meantime arrested four others—a former BD Foods official and an associate of a detained BD Foods staff, among them—finding evidence of their involvement in the heroin smuggling.

The UK customs in May 2005 accused five Bangladeshi business firms of smuggling heroin to that country in the guise of food, toiletries, cosmetics and floor tiles.

An investigation by the National Board of Revenue last year confirmed the validity of the allegations and involvement of BD Foods Ltd, Emdad Traders, Jamil International, MM Enterprise, and Green Haven Enterprise in the dirty racket.

The five companies sent apparently legitimate consignments containing heroin to Ocean Line Foods and Bengal Bay and Coastal Spices in the UK several times.

A four-member team comprising members of the CID, Special Branch of Police, Rapid Action Battalion and Bangladesh Bank is investigating the smugglings at the directive of the home ministry.

Ships' calling at Ctg