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CEC makes unscheduled return to Dhaka

All set for Magura by-polls today

By Staff Correspondent

All is set for the by-election to the Jatiya Sangsad constituency of Magura-2 today. Candidates from five parties, including the four major ones, are contesting the seat which fell vacant upon the death of AL MP Advocate Asaduzzaman last year.

Polling begins at eight in the morning and continues until four in the afternoon without break.

There are 2,06,624 voters in the constituency which comprises the Shalikha and Mohammadpur thanas as well as four unions of sadar.

According to the Returning Officer, Deputy Commissioner Nirmal Chandra Sarker, all preparations have been completed to hold the polls peacefully. Tight security measures have been taken to ensure free and fair voting, he said. Units of the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles have been mobilised to assist the law enforcing agencies during the election.

However, in an unexplained move, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice A Rouf who, along with several senior Election Commission officials had gone to Magura yesterday morning, suddenly decided to return to the capital with his entourage in the evening.

An EC announcement earlier had said Justice Rouf would remain present in Magura today (Sunday) to personally oversee the conduct of the polls.

In this connection, the local Circuit House had also been reserved by the local administration to act as an election camp for the CEC and his men.

But after holding a series of meetings with the administration and EC officials, as well as leaders of the major political parties during the afternoon, Justice Rouf quite unexpectedly decided to change his plans and leave for Dhaka. Accompanied by his EC staff he left Magura at around 7:30 pm.

Justice Rouf's decision surprised many and some Awami League leaders and workers even went to the office of the Magura Police Super where See Page 12 Col 7

Hasina confident of retaining seat

Fifth JS sets by-polls record

From Our Correspondent

MAGURA, Mar 19: Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed her party's confidence to win the Magura-2 by-election, saying that the people are determined to vote overwhelmingly for AL as a protest against the government's ineptitude and corruption.

The AL chief accused the BNP of intimidating the voters through threats and using black money.

Sheikh Hasina expressed her disappointment at the BNP's refusal to accept a proposal of the Chief Election Commissioner to constitute all-party observer teams for all the unions in the Magura-2 constituency.

BNP had first agreed to the proposal but had backed out prompting the CEC to depart from Magura in the evening, Hasina said.

The AL chief who addressed a hurriedly called press conference late this evening accused the ruling BNP of having formulated a blueprint to rig the elections and commit "vote dacoity".

She also said that the Chief Election Commissioner's departure from Magura will only "help BNP blueprint to rig the polls".

Replying to question from reporters, Hasina said that despite all these her party will contest the by-election to seek the people's mandate.

The present Jatiya Sangsad, the fifth in independent Bangladesh, has set a record in the number of by-elections to its vacant seats.

The number of by-polls will rise to 16 with the holding of the latest one in Magura-2 constituency today. The 16th by-election is being held just 21 days after the fifth Parliament completed three years.

According to official records, by-elections took place in 10 seats, vacated by those who were elected in more than one constituencies during the 1991 general elections. Of these 10 seats, four each were vacated by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and the former President HM Ershad while one each by Tofael Ahmed and Abdul Razzak of the Awami League. By-polls in another seat was held after President Abdul Rahman Biswas took oath leaving his JS seat vacant. By-elections in another four seats were held following deaths of the sitting MPs. The Magura seat also fell vacant due to death of an AL MP.



SAARC Chairperson and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia delivering her inaugural address at the first South Asian Press Clubs' Conference at the Osmany Memorial Hall in Dhaka yesterday. — PID photo

PM asks journalists of SAARC countries

Help transform South Asia into an 'economic powerhouse'

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the journalists of the SAARC countries to infuse more vigour into their writings for transforming South Asia into a prosperous region, an economic powerhouse, by the turn of the century, reports UNB.

"We are hopeful, our journalists will show us the way for transition to a prosperous region... by transforming the region into a single family you can aid in its transformation into an economic powerhouse," she said.

The Prime Minister, also Chairperson of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), was inaugurating a two-day South Asian Press Clubs' Conference on "Building Bridge Between Peoples of the SAARC: The Role of the Press" at the Osmany Memorial Hall in the morning.

Organised by the Jatiya Press Club of Bangladesh, the first ever conference of the press clubs of South Asian countries is being attended by about 20 senior journalists from six other member-countries — Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

SAARC Secretary General Y K Silwal, Jatiya Press Club President Hassan Shahriar, General Secretary Shawkat Mahmood and representatives of foreign delegates — President of the Karachi Press Club, Hasan Abidi and Associate Editor and Delhi Bureau Chief of the Aajkal of Calcutta also addressed the inaugural function.

The Prime Minister termed the SAARC as a unique forum for identifying and solving common problems of the countries of this region such as poverty, illiteracy, overpopulation and unemployment and said journalists could play a catalytic role in combating those.

Begum Zia felicitated the journalists who, she said, cross the barriers of race, colour, religion, state and time and work selflessly for social peace, progress and welfare of the people.

Mentioning the capability of journalists to generate public opinion in their respective countries, the Prime Minister said: "You can influence the political leadership to work in favour of those public opinions."

Begum Zia asserted that the journalists could help transform the region into a single family and, thereby, assist in making it an economic powerhouse. "You can build bridges of friendship among peoples of South Asia."

The SAARC Chairperson felt the urgency of enhanced cooperation among the countries of the region and expressed her optimism that effective mutual cooperation and concerted efforts could resolve their common problems.

She listed poverty, resource constraint, large-scale illiteracy, population explosion and unemployment as some of the major problems facing the countries of the region.

"Journalists and the mass media have contributed significantly towards making the present day world a single unified family," she observed. "Mankind is thus indebted to the journalist community."

Turning on the scenario at home, Begum Zia said the conference was being held at a significant juncture of Bangladesh's history. The foundation of democracy has been strengthened in the country through a free and fair election held in 1991 and the nation was now engaged in giving institutional shape to democracy.

Within a democratic setup all are discharging their respective duties with utmost sincerity and confidence, she pointed out. "Flourishing of this democratic spirit has left a positive impact on other See Page 12 Col 1

NEWS BRIEFS

JS team off to Paris

A three-member parliamentary delegation left for Paris last night to attend a conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union beginning there Sunday. The delegation consists of Abdul Rob Chowdhury MP (BNP), Jubed Ali AM (AL) and Secretary of the Bangladesh Parliament Abul Hashem who already left Dhaka Saturday morning, reports UNB.

Dr Kamal leaves for Qatar

Dr Kamal Hossain, president of the Gano Forum left Dhaka yesterday for Qatar to attend the United Nations Decade of International Law Conference at the invitation of the government of Qatar. Dr Hossain will preside over a session on International Economic Law. He is expected to return on March 25, reports BSS.

Fire at Eastern Paint Factory

A fire broke out at the Eastern Paint and Varnish Factory at Tejgaon in the city yesterday evening. Fire brigade sources said the fire, which originated from raw materials like resin and pigment, was extinguished at about 11.10 pm. None was injured in the fire. The cause of the fire and extent of damage could not be known immediately, fire brigade sources said, reports BSS.

2 die in Kushtia road mishaps

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Mar 19: Two persons died in separate road accidents on the Kushtia-Meherpur highway today.

One Beauty, 10, was critically injured when a Kushtia bound bus (Bogra-Ba 7715) ran over her near the village Jugia at 2 pm. She succumbed to her injuries at the Kushtia Sadar Hospital.

In another accident, a merchant died on the spot when a truck turned turtle on the same highway near Moshan Bazar early this morning. The merchant Mizanur Rahman, 25, was inside the truck.

BNP committed to free, fair polls: Majid

From Our Correspondent

MAGURA, Mar 19: Agriculture Minister M Majidul Huq yesterday emphasised that the BNP was committed to holding free and fair elections, irrespective of victory or defeat.

Addressing a press conference at the Magura Press Club at 10:30 pm tonight, Majidul Huq dispelled opposition charges of any plans to rig the polls.

The Agriculture Minister said that during the tenure of the BNP government, several by-elections, including the mayoral polls, have been held in a free and fair atmosphere.

"We even lost two mayoral seats, which only shows that we have never tried to influence the polls nor the conduct of polling by the Election Commission."

Majidul Huq said that Opposition charges, particularly that of the Awami League of a so-called blueprint to rig the polls was totally unfounded and was being trumped up because they were afraid of losing the seat.

The clash continued for some hours but the situation came under control when a large contingent of police rushed to the spot.

Sunday's polls.

Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Amanullah Aman, MP, also addressed the press conference.

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Ctg Polytec Instt closed sine die

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 19: The Chittagong Polytechnic Institute has been closed sine die and students have been asked to vacate the hostels before 6 pm today.

Earlier, a series of cocktail explosions rocked the campus here this afternoon when two groups of students clashed for possession of the hostels of the institute.

The clash continued for some hours but the situation came under control when a large contingent of police rushed to the spot.

\$ 75m fund for Pak-Bangla stock markets launched

By Staff Correspondent

A 75-million US dollar foreign investment fund has been launched recently with the primary objective to invest in the capital markets of both Bangladesh and Pakistan.

"This is for the first time an overseas investment fund has been created to invest in the stock market of Bangladesh," said Khurshid Alam, chairman of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), yesterday.

Briefing newsmen at the Dhaka Stock Exchange conference room Alam, however, underlined the importance of making good scrips available in the share market to meet the impending demand.

"If we cannot utilise this fund by increasing the availability of shares, securities, debentures and bonds, then it will go to Pakistan," he cautioned. "It will be a big failure on our part if we cannot hold on to the investments which are already coming here."

The Regent Moghul Fund, a company incorporated in the Cayman Islands, was recently floated with an application for listing of its shares at the Irish Stock Exchange in Dublin and planning to raise a 75 million dollar fund for investment.

The fund's investment objective is to achieve growth by investing in a diversified portfolio consisting primarily of equities listed in the Bangladesh and Pakistan stock exchanges and equity related securities, including convertible bonds and warrants issued by (the two countries). Also, it is expected that up to 20 per cent of the Fund's portfolio may be invested in unlisted securities," Alam said.

The fund will be managed by Regent Fund Management Ltd, which is wholly owned by the Regent Pacific Group Ltd and is the holding company of a financial services group with operations in Hong Kong, London and Toronto. It manages and acts as an advisor to funds with aggregate assets in excess of 1.7 billion dollars.

The lead managers to the issue, the DSE chairman informed, is Carr Indosuez Asia Ltd, and the selling agents are Dongshu Securities, LCF Edmond de Rothschild Securities and N M Rothschild and Sons and W I Carr (America) Ltd.

A member of the DSE, Imtiaz Husain, who is its current vice chairman, has also been included as a director of the fund. Two of the other directors are from Hong Kong while the fourth is from Pakistan.

"It is good that a local stock market expert has been selected to manage a foreign investment fund," Alam pointed out.

However, the DSE chairman expressed his concern at the existing paucity of quality shares amid the ongoing bull run in the market. "If we ignore this period then the total See Page 12 Col 1

UN condemns Hebron massacre

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 19: The Security Council Friday condemned a massacre last month of some 30 Palestinian Muslims by an Israeli settler, and the United States immediately announced that senior Israeli and Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) officials would shortly meet, reports Reuter.

American UN envoy Madeleine Albright told the Council after the vote: "They have finally agreed to convene a senior-level meeting — the timing of which will be announced in the days ahead."

She also said that "Syria, Jordan and Lebanon have agreed to resume bilateral negotiations with Israel in April."

The PLO and other Arab delegations broke off peace talks with Israel after an American-born settler, Baruch Goldstein, killed and wounded scores of Ramadan worshippers February 25 at a mosque in the West Bank town of Hebron. He was beaten to death by enraged survivors.

The Council resolution calls for a temporary international or foreign presence, which was provided for in the declaration of principles signed by Israel and the PLO last September, to ensure the protection of the Palestinians throughout the occupied territories.

The resolution does not say what from the international presence should take, although the United Nations and the European Union have offered to send observers.

The proposed presence would not include an armed UN force, as the PLO had wished, since that would require Israel's consent.

The resolution as a whole was adopted without a vote after the United States, in prior balloting on individual paragraphs, abstained on two.

One affirmed Jerusalem's status as part of the Israeli-occupied territories. Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war, but the United States believes the status of the holy city should be decided at a later stage of negotiations between Israel and the PLO on the accord they signed last September on limited Palestinian self-rule.

The other US abstention was on a paragraph referring to 'occupied Palestinian territory' rather than 'territories' a formulation the United States says could be taken to indicate sovereignty or statehood.

Albright told the Council she would have vetoed the resolution if the language the US found objectionable had appeared in its operative section rather than the preamble.

Council action had been repeatedly postponed, at the request of the United States, which first hoped for a PLO commitment to return to the negotiating table.

The PLO repeatedly said it was awaiting the implementation of measures to ensure the safety of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and to curb Israeli settlers.

The Council resolution strongly condemns the massacre on Hebron and its aftermath which took the lives of See Page 12 Col 8

BCL (M-I) threatens boycott

Students prepare for DUCSU elections

By Staff Correspondent

The student bodies began their preparations for the DUCSU polls with the reopening of Dhaka University yesterday.

The Awami League's student wing, Bangladesh Chhatra League (M-I), has however, decided to boycott the elections if steps are not taken to ensure congenial atmosphere on the DU campus.

The Vice-Chancellor of the university, Prof. Emajuddin Ahmed, talking to The Daily Star last night, however, ruled out the possibility of shifting the date of the elections even if any organisation abstained from taking part in the polls.

"How can the date be shifted for a single student organisation, when all others want the polls to be held on schedule," the Vice-Chancellor said adding the atmosphere in the university is better than any time in the past.

Iqbalur Rahim, the General Secretary of the BCL (M-I), said the presence of a large number of armed hoodlums in various residential halls, capturing the halls by the activists of some of the student organisations and the failure of the DU authorities to ensure con-

See Page 12 Col 7

Body to remove pay-scale anomalies

The government yesterday constituted a four-member committee headed by Labour and Manpower Minister Abul Mannan Bhuiyan to look into the discrepancies if any in the salary scales of different cadres and non-cadres officials belonging to government and semi-government organisations, reports BSS.

The committee will submit a full recommendation after thoroughly examining the problems to find out a solution.

The members of the committee are: Abdul Mannan, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, M Siddiqui Rahman, former Cabinet Secretary and S M Al-Hussainy, former chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission.

The Committee will, among others, also make recommendations to introduce a balanced and a just salary structures for all concerned after examination.

The Establishment Ministry will provide secretarial facilities to the committee.

The committee will submit a full report with the government within three months.

Lalbagh murder: One more arrested

By Staff Correspondent

An absconding suspect of the Lalbagh post-polls carnage, Iqbal Hossain, was detained by the Detective Branch early yesterday morning.

On a tip-off, the DB men raided Siddiq Bazar in the old part of the city and arrested Iqbal who latter reportedly confessed to his involvement in the killing on January 31.

So far, 14 of the 18 accused killers have been arrested by police. The main accused Abdul Aziz, however, is still at large. Six people were killed when the poll-looters attacked their rivals at Nawabganj under Lalbagh Police Station. Iqbal was produced before the Magistrates court and was taken on police remand.