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## Unmoved by hartal, CEC says polls to be held on schedule

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Mohammad Abu Hena yesterday said the upcoming municipal polls will be held as scheduled in view of legal obligations following a High Court order, report agencies.

"It is mandatory to hold the municipal elections by March 19 due to the High Court order and legal obligations. Considering all aspects, February 23, 24 and 25 have been fixed for voting," an EC press release quoted Hena as telling a meeting with representatives of the law enforcing agencies.

Hena said, "The Election Commission is pledged bound to carry out its duties."

Election commissioners Abidur Rahman and Mushtaque Ahmed Chowdhury, Home Secretary Sufiur Rahman, Election Commission Secretary Abdullah Harun Pasha, Inspector General of Police AYBI Siddique, Director General of Bangladesh Rifles

Major General Azizur Rahman and Director General of Ansar and VDP Major General Khondokar Mohammad Nurunabu, Additional Director General of Coast Guard Captain Motaleeb BN and other officials concerned were present at the meeting.

The CEC said one magistrate will be on duty at every polling centre to be guarded by adequate number of law enforcing people.

Apart from police, members of the armed police battalion, BDR and Ansars will be deployed. One magistrate will be available for giving directives to all mobile and striking units.

Hena said voting will be stopped instantly if violence occurs in any centre.

He said independent local and foreign poll observers are being encouraged to monitor the election for the sake of its transparency and acceptability.

Getting feedback from the

agencies in the meeting on law and order, he said good electioneering atmosphere is prevailing across the country.

Talking to journalists Hena said he had also taken feedback about the situation from the field levels, where the situation was reported in favour of election.

Referring to the reports of the law enforcing agencies, the CEC said there was no abnormal situation anywhere and contending candidates were campaigning for the upcoming polls.

Hena said although it is a non-party election, but as per reports of the agencies and reports coming from field levels, people associated with the boycotting political parties are taking part in the election in large number.

He, however, said to take stock of the field level situation he had called the Commissioners, DIGs, Deputy Commissioners

and SPs for a meeting on Sunday.

Deployment of armed forces on election days yet to be discussed, Hena said.

The CEC was asked whether he had any talks with the Awami League delegation that met him in the afternoon, about deferring the polls. "No comments. Wait and see," he promptly said.

Earlier, emerging from the meeting Awami League leader Amir Hossain Amu told the reporters that they had assured the CEC of all-out support for conducting a free and fair election and of abiding by the rules and regulations set by the EC.

When asked, Amu said they were still ready for a dialogue with the boycotting opposition.

Amir Hossain Amu, Mozaffar Hossain Paltu, Rahmat Ali MP and Abdul Mannan Khan had over an hour-long parley with the CEC at his office.

## Tougher actions ahead, warns BNP

By Staff Correspondent

asked them not to become "tools of the AL repression".

The leaders who spoke included M. Shamsul Islam, Sadek Hossain Khoka and Anwar Zahid of BNP, Kazi Zafar Ahmed and Saifur Rahman of Jatiya Party, Matiur Rahman Nizami and ATM Azharul Islam of Jamaat and ATM Matin of Jatiya.

"Police gave the false news to the press. In fact, Mamun was killed in police firing." The victim's body was not handed over to his family members until yesterday as a "conspiracy" was on to bury the body without autopsy," Khoka said.

Khoka also charged the police with arresting three of Mamun's associates and forcing them to admit the "bomb story".

Condemning the "attacks" on pro-hartal activists, Kazi Zafar Ahmed said that he never saw such kinds of "government repression" in his long political career. He also accused the government of pushing the country towards a civil war.

Anwar Zahid added that a Chhatri Dal worker, Yusuf, was shot dead at Banshkhali in Chittagong yesterday.

Sadek Hossain Khoka referred to "government-sponsored terrorism" during yester-

day's hartal in different parts of the capital.

He also challenged the police statement that Chhatri Dal worker Mamun died while making bomb Wednesday night at the Government Kabi Nazrul College.

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"People will no more remain silent spectators to the ruling

party's behaviour with the opposition. Their acts will be retaliated in the normal course of politics," he said.

Matiur Rahman Nizami said the three-day hartal was observed to foil the government's attempt to hold a one-party municipal elections under a blueprint. The rulers are conspiring to consolidate power, grabbing the local government bodies including those in the city corporations and Upazilas.

Meanwhile, the opposition parties are due to hold gayebana Janaza of Sohel Chowdhury, shot dead allegedly by AL activists, on the first day of the three-day hartal, after Jum'a prayers today at the Baitul Mukarram.

The parties have also planned to bring out separate processions tomorrow afternoon to mourn his death.

BNP's procession will start from Paltan Maidan, JP's from the Muktangon and that of the Jamaat from Purana Paltan crossing.

"Mother, let's go to that Mela that we passed by; I think it will be more fun there and more things to buy," asked Nabil to his mother who was busy looking for her favourite writers' novels and making her son understand the meaning of the Ekushey Boi Mela.

At first, the boy wasn't convinced; but when Rahman bought another set of Tona-Tuni and took him in front of the large computer screen, then the boy seemed to be enjoying the kernel, and for that matter the serenity around him.

## All's fair in Ekushey book fair

By Ekram Kabir

JUST two years ago, every day congregation at the commemorative Amar Ekushey Boi Mela at the Bangla Academy premises was nothing short of a celebration like Muharram or Eid. Last year, the chaotic character of the Boi Mela (Book Fair) was avoided with some inflexible measures. Now the subtlety of the Boi Mela is back in place. Still the political stench has not completely disappeared, as when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was inaugurating '99 Fair, gunshots from not-so-far-away Shahbagh were heart-sore.

Surely somebody didn't like her presence at the inauguration ceremony of the fair. Many felt uncomfortable with it and denounced the Bangla Academy for continuing the trend started in early '90s of propelling the greatest cultural carnival of the country by a political-somebody.

"But what injury did it cause to the Mela? the prime minister happens to be one of the life-members of the Academy; and there were also non-political celebrities who carry significant literary weight after their names at the inauguration; and yes we have already conceived the concept of inviting literateurs from abroad," explained the director general of the Bangla Academy.

But for literature-enticed Ishtor Rahman, it didn't make any difference. She came to the fair site all the way from Mirpur accompanying her six-year-old son Nabil. On their way to the Bangla Academy Mela, there was another fair going on near Chandrima Uddyan, the Dhaka International Trade Fair. The six-year-old's eyes didn't miss the glamour of trade fair.

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Centre of the fair

A pavilion dedicated to the works of Rebel Poet Nazrul stands at the foot of the venerable banyan tree in the Bangla Academy premises

— Star photo: Zahedul I Khan

dressed personnel, camped in a stall meant for Shamshill Samskrithi Jote, are making sure that no dopey episode by any scamp at the conjunction takes place.

Said Professor Syed Anwar Husain: "Alongside, the academy authority has fashioned some directions mandatory for everybody. Following so, visitors are not throwing polythene bags here and there, but in the well kept bins. Time-to-time water-sprays are helping the audience from inhaling dust. If they are hungry there are stalls in the Suhrawardy Uddyan, and if somebody wants to buy household items, the New Market close to this place."

Regular caucus of visitors in front of the screen, seeking information about new books, every evening is a quite happy sight. Fifty-six new book-covers, carrying writers', publishing houses' names were screened on first three days.

For Rahman, it was a smooth shopping for the post-modernist wooters are not active trying to spitefully "impress" the ladies.

So have the machos of Dhaka city suddenly turned gentle? "No," says Police Constable Ujjal. "We are anchoring the security with care so that no one is harassed while flocking through the Mela," he adds, walking leisurely at the huge white entrance. True, the blue-

In terms of selling books, no worms of all age.

## Food officials eat up Tk 10cr wheat, rice in 2 districts

By Gobinda Bar

were shifted to LSDs in Dimla, Kishoreganj Aditmari and Koimari TSD, but an on-the-spot investigation showed that the foodgrains did not reach there, the report said.

The officer in charge of Dimla godown, Khaibar Rahman, embezzled rice worth Tk 1.01 crore.

"The godown documents showed that the rice was sent for crushing to five rice mills but Khaibar Rahman as the officer in charge of the godown did not record the crushed rice in the ledger book of the godown," the report said.

The government suffered a loss of Tk 9.04 lakh as 38.552 tonnes of crushed rice returned from mills were stolen at the Dimla LSD. The rice was not recorded with the LSD register when those were returned from rice mills.

A total of 48,769 tonnes of rice worth Tk 5.72 lakh was embezzled at the Dimla LSD in the same way, the audit report said.

At the Jaldhaka godown, rice worth Tk 5.40 lakh was misappropriated by delivering 23,000 tonnes of extra rice more than the delivery order.

Rice worth Tk 4.58 lakh was embezzled at the same godown as 39,101 tonnes of crushed rice brought from rice mills were not deposited in the godown.

A total of 19 tonnes of rice worth Tk 4.58 lakh was misappropriated at the Dimla godown showing fake invoice.

At the Dimla LSD, foodgrains worth Tk 4.24 lakh contained in 72,000 sacks were misappropriated by the officials. They did not record those foodgrains received from Syedpur godown, the report said.

A total of 50,612 tonnes of foodgrains worth Tk 4.16 lakh from Kishoreganj LSD "did not reach" different godowns. "No invoice was received at the receiving ends to which the foodgrains were sent," the report said.

At the Koimari TPC, 5,643 empty sacks worth Tk 1.66 lakh were stolen. A total of 19,000 sacks of rice worth Tk 1.54 lakh was stolen from the Dimla LSD. At the same godown, 30 tonnes of rice worth Tk 1.92 lakh were embezzled.

"In August 1991, 200 tonnes of rice were procured by the LSD. Of the total quantity, 170 tonnes were sent to mills for crushing but no information about the rest 30 tonnes could be gathered by the audit team," the audit report said.

A total of 20 tonnes of wheat worth Tk 1.46 lakh, sent from Baladangi LSD to the Jaldhaka LSD, was missing. The official concerned did not register the wheat in the LSD and CSD ledger though it was received on May 8, 1995.

The store officer at Kishoreganj LSD (under Nilphamari) misappropriated foodgrains worth Tk 15.54 lakh. The store officer misappropriated a total of 202,253 tonnes of wheat in favour of the LSD on different occasions. He also sent weekly receipt report to the district food controller though he

## Sajal's father accuses Mokbul

By Staff Correspondent

Shahidur Rahman Chowdhury, father of Sajal who was gunned down at Science Laboratory intersection on Tuesday morning by anti-hartal activists filed a GD against Al Haj Mokbul Hossain MP yesterday.

In the GD the father accused Mokbul, a ruling party lawmaker and his associates who took part in an anti-hartal procession that had encountered pro-hartal one at Science Laboratory crossing.

Two BNP legislators, Fazlur Rahman Patul and Ruhul Kudus Dulu, local Ward Commissioner Abul Khayer Babul were named as witnesses.

When contacted Dhanmondi thana, the duty officer said father of the victim lodged a complaint but didn't accuse any one. However, Shahidur Rahman said he had named suspects in the GD.

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The two countries, which have fought three wars since independence in 1947, are trying to turn a new page in rela-

A month ago, Asma's hope for survival seemed minute. But that has changed now. Doctors are confident that she will make a full recovery. They are confident that Asma can lead a normal and healthy life.

In a major operation, teenager Asma Begum underwent a kidney transplant on February 2 at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical Hospital. This was about five months after doctors had removed her sole functioning kidney at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

"Asma's kidney is functioning completely normally although the rate of her urine discharge is still high – about ten litres a day," said Professor Harun-ur-Rashid, head of Nephrology department of the hospital.

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