

EC plans fresh ID card project

Previous one was unsafe and a wastage of Tk 190cr, says CEC

NAZRUL ISLAM
With the voters' Identity Card Project falling flat, the Election Commission is once again thinking of another such project to provide more secure and multipurpose Identity Card for every individual voter.

The EC is likely to take up such a project sometime after the upcoming general election to provide multipurpose ID card for nearly 7.48 crore voters. This time the commission plans to include finger print of the voter on the ID card as security mark.

Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed termed the previous Tk 190 crore voters' ID project as wastage of money. He said the existing voters' ID card is very unsafe for use in any election.

"It is easy to copy the existing ID card as there is no security mark on it and can be used for fraudulent activity in any polls," said the CEC while talking to The Daily Star on various issues pertaining to the Election Commission on Thursday.

He said the commission has been looking for funds to go for such a project, but is yet to receive any positive response.

The government enacted a law to ensure the use of voters' ID cards, but it has not been enforced as

existing cards are not used in polls properly since those were introduced in 1996.

Asked whether the inactive law would be reactivated, the CEC said it would not be applicable in the next general election. "The law shall have to be activated after ensuring the security of the voters' ID card; otherwise it would not bring the desired result."

In 1995, the Executive Committee for National Economic Council (ECNEC) had approved a Tk 300 crore project for preparation and distribution of the voters ID cards, which also includes computerised voters' database.

But, considering the ground realities the ECNEC on the basis of a changed proposal from the Election Commission gave the go-ahead only for printing and distribution of voters ID card with an estimated cost of Tk 180 crore and set June 1996 as the deadline for its completion.

Due to irregularities, mismanagement and corruption, only 33 per cent of the 5,59,66,384 voters were registered for the ID cards within the stipulated time. At that time, only 24 per cent voters were given ID cards, which were riddled with errors and misinformation.

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D-8 summit PM leaves for Cairo today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leaves for Cairo today to lead an 11-member Bangladesh delegation to the third D-8 Summit in the Egyptian capital on February 25.

The Cairo summit will focus on expansion of trade and investment and draw up future goals of interaction in shipping, insurance and cyber communications as business people of the member-countries are now being integrated with the cooperation process.

Grouping eight of the most populous Muslim countries of the world, the D-8 or Developing Eight was launched in Istanbul on June 15, 1997 for greater trade and economic cooperation beyond continental bounds.

The forum comprises Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

Sheikh Hasina, the current chairman of D-8 after hosting its second

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Shahjahan Siraj demands judicial probe into Feb 13 incident

BSS, Dhaka

BNP Vice-President Shahjahan Siraj yesterday demanded judicial inquiry into the February 13 incident at Malibagh crossing in which he and BNP leader and former Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury were mercilessly beaten up by some policemen.

Addressing a press conference at National Press Club here yesterday after his release from hospital, Siraj, who once was a firebrand student leader and valiant freedom-fighter, regretted what he said, the

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Two children go through comic books with deep attention at Ekushey Book Fair on Bangla Academy premises yesterday. The fair will continue till February 28.

2 fire incidents 150 shanties, goods worth Tk 30 lakh gutted in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 150 shanties and goods worth Tk 30 lakh were gutted in two incidents of fire in the city yesterday, Fire Brigade sources said.

Fire gutted electronic goods at Prime Electronics Factory at Shideswari in the city yesterday morning.

Fire Brigade sources could not confirm how the fire originated on the second floor of a three storied building at 43/3 Shideswari road at about 9.54 am.

The sources estimated the loss of property at Tk 20 lakh.

Fire fighters extinguished the blaze at about 1 pm.

In another fire incident more than 150 shanties were gutted at Karail slum in the city's Banani area.

Fire Brigade sources said the fire originated from an earthen oven at a shanty at about 11-45 am and soon engulfed the other shanties of the slum.

Fire Brigade estimated the loss of property at Tk 10 lakh.

Space problem in silos

Aman procurement virtually stalled

REAZ AHMAD

Slow progress in implementation of food-aided development projects has virtually stalled government's Aman procurement because of space problem in silos, food ministry officials said.

Unless more foodgrains are released for development projects,

Aman procurement will be hindered, they said.

The government earmarked 1.8 million tonnes of foodgrains for development projects in the current financial year. But in seven months, only one third of it was utilised, the officials said.

Though a food reserve of one million tonnes is regarded as the

safety limit to face any shortage in the market, the current stock is over 1.5 million tonnes, they said. This also involves a huge maintenance cost, they said.

The government in November last year fixed the Aman procurement target at 2.5 lakh tonnes, to be fulfilled by January this year. The deadline has been extended till February 28 due to slow procurement.

It is highly unlikely that the target would be fulfilled, they said.

Because of the sluggish procurement, the farmers are also being deprived of the government's price support, which is also affecting IRRI-Boro cultivation now, experts said.

The farmers desperately need

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6000 children develop thalassaemia a year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 10 million people in the country carry genes related to the thalassaemia syndrome, one of the worst forms of blood cancer, and roughly 6000 children develop the disease each year.

This was disclosed at the inaugural session of the First International Paediatric, Haematology and Oncology seminar held at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city yesterday.

Addressing the inaugural session as chief guest, President Shahabuddin Ahmed said, "Dreadful blood diseases like thalassaemia syndrome are already posing a major threat to the country. However, the overall health situation is gradually improving, mortality rate is significantly on the decline and the ratio of cancer-related deaths is decreasing."

In Bangladesh, about 70 per cent of children below five years of age suffer from some degree of anaemia, (lack of red blood cells in the blood), speakers told the seminar where a huge number of medical

A S M NURUNNABI

The city life is presently at stake on account of persisting traffic chaos which has been assuming horrendous proportions day by day. Dhaka city has only 2000 km of roads, against a minimum requirement of at least 8000 km. The most important factor contributing to this chaos in the city's limited road space is the locust-like proliferation of rickshaws which now poses as a necessary evil. There are plans to phase them out but realistically speaking, these plans could never be implemented at least in the foreseeable future. They provide employment to more than half a million people in Dhaka city alone. They also carry 45 per cent of the total passengers in the city. Thus it seems that we will have to live with them until we achieve a more or less respectable standard of living.

The next potent factor in the growing traffic congestion is the burgeoning growth of vehicular transports of all descriptions which the existing road space in the city is hardly able to accommodate. What with new faces of rickshawpullers now numbering into lakhs, what with impatient, wayward autorickshaws, queues of buses and trucks outmaneuvering their turnings ahead of others at road-

DOWN TO EARTH

Many facets of traffic chaos in city

crossings, it takes hours to negotiate one's way through the resultant traffic medleys.

The baby taxis and tempos are also a nuisance and a danger. They weave in and out of traffic without the least regard for normal precautions or elementary road rules. They are also, because of their two-stroke engines, the greatest polluters of air.

The proliferation of shops in the Dhaka city is such a staggering phenomenon that its nearly nine million residents are virtually choked with various types of shops. Side by side with this picture, we have been lately witnessing a similarly steady growth of large shopping complexes or what are called malls. The extravagant multistoried shopping complexes can be found in all important areas of the city. The real problem of these high-rise shopping com-

plexes is parking area. In most of these complexes as well as many of the numerous shops, there is inadequate parking space. As a result, acute traffic jams are created in front of these premises by the cars of customers throughout the day and in the evenings.

No less important factor in creating traffic congestion is the invasion of footpaths by all sorts of encroachments and other impediments to traffic including dumping of construction materials and raising of unauthorised structures that stand in the way of traffic.

Last but not the least is the latest causative factor for traffic chaos which results every evening when the entry points to the city are turned into parking lots. The three entry points to the city are a) Siddhirganj-Simrail Road junction and Kanchnur Bridge on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, b)

Mirpur Bridge and Aminbazar c) on the Dhaka-Aricha Road and d) Tongi Road junction in the north of the city. As there are restrictions on entry of trucks into the Dhaka city from 8 am to 8 pm, trucks from all these directions are parked from 4 pm at these points, thereby obstructing normal traffic flows which gradually spawn traffic jams for hours. The haphazard parking of trucks at the three entry points to the city creates a serious traffic management problem which the appropriate authorities seem unable to handle properly, so that the overall traffic situation of the entire city goes awry.

Thus it is a day-to-day affair for many of the city dwellers to confront the many facets of traffic chaos in the city with no immediate prospect of relief in sight.

No change in hartal Programme

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Central Liaison Committee of the BNP-led four-party opposition alliance was determined till last night to go ahead with the country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal on Sunday and Monday, ignoring Khaleda Zia's instructions to call off Monday's hartal.

Prior to leaving for Singapore on Wednesday night for her arthritis treatment, Leader of the Opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia gave instructions to call off Monday's hartal in view of the plight of pilgrims flying to Saudi Arabia for the annual Hajj. February 27 has been scheduled for the last Hajj flight.

Meanwhile, Nazir Rahman Manju, Secretary General of Jatiya Party told The Daily Star last night that the hartal would be enforced as per schedule. Joint Secretary of Jamaat-e-Islami also expressed the same view.

Acid attack on Deve Gowda's wife

AP, Bangalore

The wife of a former Indian prime minister suffered burns when her nephew tossed acid at her at a village temple, police said on Thursday.

Chenamma, wife of HD Deve Gowda, was burned on the head and back in the alleged attack by her nephew Lokesh Wednesday night, when she was visiting her village in the Hassan area in the southern Karnataka state.

Both Chenamma and Lokesh use one name.

A long-running property dispute between Gowda and his brother Basave Gowda was the suspected cause of the attack, police said.

The two brothers also belong to rival political parties. Gowda is the president of a faction of the socialist Janata Dal, while his brother is a

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AL blasts Opposition for hartal affecting Hajj pilgrims

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League presidium yesterday castigated the opposition for calling hartal at a time when pilgrims are leaving for hajj and people preparing for Eid-ul-Azha and SSC exams ahead.

Chaired by Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina, in the afternoon, the presidium meeting discussed overall political situation of the country.

The meeting held at Ganobhaban also expressed concern and deep shock at yesterday's killing of Awami League leader Sardar

Harunur Rasheed in Khulna. Harun, general secretary of Rupsha thana unit of AL, was gunned down by armed assailants in the morning.

The ruling party top brass thinks that the opposition having failed to face the government politically chose the path of killing to trigger political unrest in the country.

Condemning the killings of police constables inside a mosque and at Rajarbagh police barracks, the meeting called upon pious Muslims and Ulama-Mashaik to ensure the sanctity of mosques.

The AL presidium called upon the people to remain alert against such

evil activities of the opposition and vowed to protect the hard-earned democracy and voting right "at any cost".

It also called for the people to build resistance so that the opposition "through their evil designs cannot hinder the pace of economic development".

AL presidium member and Forest and Environment Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury would act as president of the party in absence of Prime Minister Hasina, who is leaving for Cairo today to attend D-8 Summit in the Egyptian capital.

Shrimp production likely to face serious setback

Acute shortage in supply of fries in Satkhira

RAFIQ HASAN, From Satkhira

Shrimp production in the country is likely to be affected seriously this year due to acute shortage in supply of fries in the major shrimp cultivation zone--Satkhira.

More than 48 thousand hectares of land are under shrimp cultivation in this district, out of a total of 1.20 hectares in the country.

Shrimp farmers and fry traders alleged that owners of the Cox's Bazar-based hatcheries formed a syndicate this year and created an artificial crisis of shrimp fries during the peak season beginning this month.

They said that due to the ban on

import and natural collection of fries, they have virtually become 'hostage' to the hatchery owners. Import of fries was banned in 1999 and natural collection was declared 'illegal' last year.

Hatchery owners decided that they would supply only 200 crore fries to Satkhira this year but traders said they need at least 500 crore fries.

Price of fries at farmers level shot up due to shortage in supply. Fries are being sold at Tk 950-1050 per thousand against the average price of Tk 250-300 last year.

"If the crisis continues and price of fries does not fall, shrimp produc-

tion in the country will decrease by at least 50 per cent this year from that last year, said Dr Aftabuzzaman, President of Bangladesh National Shrimp Farmers Association.

A large number of farmers would not be able to release fries at 'gher' during the peak season due to high price and shortage in supply.

He told this correspondent that a joint meeting of shrimp farmers and fry traders in the district on Monday gave an ultimatum to the hatchery owners to solve the crisis within seven days by increasing supply and reducing price.

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