

Report on franchise of expatriates submitted

BSS, Dhaka

The Law Commission yesterday submitted its report on voting rights of Bangladeshi citizens residing abroad.

Law Commission Secretary Iftedhar Ahmed formally handed over the report to Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Secretary Afzal Hossain Ahmed here, an official press release said.

The Commission, in its report, recommended that it would be proper to register all Bangladeshi citizens residing abroad as voters in the relevant electoral rolls if they are not otherwise disqualified.

If it is decided to enrol Bangladeshi nationals residing abroad as voters, the purpose can be achieved by suitable amendment to Section 8 of the Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 1982 (Ordinance No LXI of 1982), it added.

The Commission has observed

Latifur Rahman

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six-week long bar vocational course (BVC) under Legal Education Training Institute (LETI) of Bangladesh Bar Council at 4:30 pm today, 30 minutes before expiry of his tenure.

Eminent lawyer and Vice Chairman of Bangladesh Bar Council, Barrister M Amir-ul Islam will preside over the function.

Satkhira by-polls

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authorities concerned for strictly following the election rules and maintaining law and order during the election, an EC press release said yesterday. Any lapse on the part of those engaged in conducting the by-polls would be severely dealt with, it said.

The authorities have also formed vigilance and observation teams in addition to the Electoral Inquiry Committee and the Election Monitoring Team.

Besides B M A Nurul Islam of Awami League, there are six other candidates in the by-election. They are Shahidul Islam of JSD, Krishak Mohammad Sadek of Krishak Sramik Mukti Andolon and independent candidates Abdul Kalam Azad, Khan A Mirza Masud Jewel, Md Abdul Majid and Sheikh Sirajul Islam.

The seat fell vacant following the death of ruling party MP Syed Kamal Bakht Saki on December 15 last year. According to the fresh voter list, 3,03,088 voters are eligible to vote in the by-election. Voting will start at 8 am and continue till 4 pm.

Split verdict read out

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Nazmul Hasan Ansar, Justice Ruhul Amin had said these three officers were seen at night parade at Balurghat at the instruction of their seniors and their mere presence did not prove their complicity in the August 15 murder or conspiracy.

In his judgement Justice Ruhul Amin had further said that the prosecution through its witnesses also failed to prove that those three officers came out of Dhaka Cantonment driving tanks.

About Risaldar Moslemuddin, Justice Amin said the prosecution witness' statement that Maj (ret'd) Aziz Pasha shot Begum Mujib and other inmates in a room taking a stungun from Moslem is not trustworthy, "so charge against him is not proved."

Justice Ruhul Amin, who modi-

that it is required to be considered whether Bangladesh has the logistics to make arrangements for providing its citizens residing abroad for proper facilities to cast their votes if they are enrolled as voters.

Earlier in a reference from the government, the commission examined a proposal sent to the Prime Minister by the speaker for conferring voting rights of Bangladesh nationals residing abroad, the release added.

Case under PSA SC orders not to arrest JP leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A High Court Division of the Supreme Court yesterday issued an order not to arrest Jatiya Party leaders who were accused in a case under the Public Safety Act.

The order was issued following the filing of a writ against PSA and a case against some JP leaders under PSA with the Dhamondi thana on February 25.

The High Court also issued a rule nisi as to why should the PSA not be declared ultra vires the constitution.

A division bench comprising Justice ATM Monowar Uddin and Justice Mohammad Mozammel issued the rule nisi after the hearing.

BNP alleges

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Meanwhile, Khulna district and city BNP leaders blamed AL's intra-party rivalry for Haroon Sardar's murder.

BNP leaders alleged police excess during raid in several places of Rupsha upazila.

The IO of the case SI Shahabuddin created panic among the families of BNP supporters and insulted some women of Nandanpur village during drive to arrest the alleged killers, they said.

The IO is being guided by a top AL leader and his younger brother to drive BNP leaders and activists out from Rupsha upazila centering upcoming parliamentary election, city BNP leaders said.

City BNP president M Nurul Islam Dadu Bhai, 68, has been working in the Rupsha-Terokhedda-Digholia constituency during the last one year in preparation to contest the next parliamentary polls against Whip Mostafa Rashidi Shuja of Awami League.

Shuja was elected MP from this constituency against Nurul Islam in the last parliamentary elections held in 1996.

fied the charge against Captain Majed but upheld the death sentence in his judgement, said that Majed was a retired officer so his presence in the night parade on August 15 proved his conspiratorial involvement in the killing of Bangabandhu.

The prosecution yesterday at the directive of the court read only the portion of the judgement involving the six convicts.

The judgement portion of Justice Ruhul Amin was completed yesterday while Adv Anisul Huq began reading the judgement of Justice Khairul Huq in the latter part of the day.

AAQ Syed Ali Haider also read from the paper book yesterday.

The court will resume hearings today at 10:30 am.

Mollah sworn in as PSC member

BSS, Dhaka

Md Yahya Mollah, former divisional commissioner of Barisal, yesterday took oath as the member of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission.

Chief Justice Latifur Rahman administered the oath at a simple function here. Chairman of the commission Prof Mostafa Chowdhury, other members and officials concerned were present, an official press release said.

Smog shrouds

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difficult to check their expansion, sources concerned pointed out.

Meanwhile, the authorities recently prohibited use of unsealed engine oil but it is yet to be enforced strictly. Auto-rickshaw operators are reluctant to buy sealed lubricants at higher prices. They still use the unsealed lubricant which does not contain proper additives, causing air pollution.

Besides, diesel fuel used by buses and trucks have high contents of sulfur that adds to the air pollution.

Meteorologists forecast haze laden with pollutants during the dry season unless it rains shortly. However, rain is likely soon, they said.

During the 24 hours till 6 pm yesterday, there were 82 mm rainfall in Sylhet, 32 mm in Sitakunda, 18 mm in Kustia, 11 mm in Mymensingh, 10 mm in Barisal, seven mm in Khulna, six mm in Srimangal, Majidi Court and Chandpur, three mm in Patuakhali and 4 mm in Khepupara, they said.

Air pollution

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as auto-rickshaws and tempos are a major source of pollution. An auto-rickshaw belches out obnoxious gases 30 times more than an automobile.

Two-thirds of the motorised vehicles emit excessive amount of black fumes thanks to incomplete combustion engines, contributing directly to the present concentration of lead along with oxides of nitrogen and sulphur in the blood.

The paper strongly recommends conversion of all motor vehicles to the Compressed Natural Gas based system with minimal rate of pollution.

The seminar was organised by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and the Japan Transport Cooperation Association (JTCA).

Ershad's fine

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lben sent to jail. It was announced that each of the JP Presidium members would deposit Tk 2 lakh each. Party secretaries and MPs were to contribute Tk one lakh each.

Following the announcement, the tax department of the government sent a letter to the party asking for a list of the prospective depositors. This letter held back the JP leaders from contributing to the fund.

Ershad was jailed for a term of five years along with a fine of Tk 5.5 crore or six more months in prison in default.

The deposed president has already served out the five-year term and spent three more months -- from November 20 to February 20 -- in jail for his failure to pay the fine. He is now trying to get released by paying half the fine.

Meanwhile, Ershad's lawyer Khandker Mahub Hossain yesterday filed a petition at the Appellate Division seeking review of the Supreme Court verdict on the Janata Tower Corruption case.

EC to talk with 9 parties

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dialogue with political parties ahead of the next general election. It also plans such talks with members of the civil society, professional bodies and others concerned to ensure a free and fair election.

"The fate of the proposed reforms depends on how the opposition BNP reacts to those," an EC official said.

Before holding talks with the AL, CEC Syed had contacted leaders of both the ruling party and the opposition parties. The opposition leaders assured that they would join talks on the EC proposals, he said earlier.

The EC would have discussions with some eminent personalities involved with political parties, Syed said.

When contacted yesterday, Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata league leader Kader Siddique said, "All the parties which participated in the last general election and the newly formed parties should be

invited for discussion." He appreciated the EC move for reforms.

The EC had earlier proposed some reforms in the election process and sent those to the law ministry in 1999 but no progress was made in this regard.

This time the EC has specified four issues for discussion. These are registration of political parties, regulation of election expenses, shortening the time-frame for disposal of complaints filed with the election tribunals and Constitutional amendment allowing a person to contest parliamentary polls from at best two constituencies.

The Commission has been emphasising registration of political parties with the EC as the country has no guideline to regulate the parties. "As our neighbouring countries like India, Pakistan and Nepal are following such guidelines to regulate the parties in practising democracy, why should we not go for this?" The CEC told this corre-

spondent.

According to the proposed reforms, the EC would maintain a register of political parties applying for registration. Nine basic information including the name and address of auditor of a party, a statement affirming its commitment to a free and fair election and a copy of its last annual income and expenditure would be required for registration of a party.

The Constitution says, "Political parties include a group or combination of persons who operate within or outside the Parliament under a distinctive name and who hold themselves out for the purposes of propagating a political opinion or engaging in any other political activity."

The EC's reform proposals include raising the limit of expenditure of a candidate in parliamentary polls to Tk five lakh from three lakh now and strengthening the election tribunals.

Govt employees' grand rally in city today

UNB, Dhaka

Government employees staged demonstrations in their respective offices across the country yesterday to press home their five-point demand.

Bangladesh Sarkari Karmachari Samannoya Parishad in a press release said some 11 lakh employees joined rallies and processions from 11 am to 1 pm to realise their demands, including 30 per cent dearness allowance.

They also demand change in designations, second-class status for the working nurses, perk equivalent to three months' salary and dress allowance for the fourth-class employees and drivers.

ADB: Confrontation

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It also said that political disputes were aggravated following enactment of the Public Safety Act (PSA).

In the current political situation, ADB said, hartals are likely to increase in the run up to election. Without ruling out the possibility of early election, it said the government might stay in power till July 2001.

The government is reluctant to undertake politically sensitive policy measures like public administration reforms, privatisation and other sectoral reforms because this is the election year, ADB noted.

The rallies were held in different office premises in Dhaka, which were addressed, among others, by M Salehuddin Selim, M A Awal, Abdul Hannan, Kutubuddin, Selim Bhuiyan, Abul Hossain and Nazma Begum.

The government employees will hold a grand rally at Muktangan in the city at 10.30 am today in support of their demands.

"The movement will continue until the realisation of the five-point demand," said the Samannoya Parishad.

EC allows

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"It also shows that we are serious and that we want to try to improve the economic conditions of the least developed countries. This gives an important signal to the UN conference on the least developed countries this May and for the forthcoming negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO)," said Minister for Trade Leif Pagrotsky, who represents Swedish Presidency of the EU.

The EU decision would make it difficult for the USA, Canada and Japan to refuse duty- and quota-free access of goods from the LDCs, sources said.

The council also agreed to monitor imports and introduce safeguards if necessary. There will be monitoring to verify adherence to the rules of origin and prevent fraud.

Eid cattle markets

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of a number of cattle markets, though the traders had plans to sell their cattle at other city markets.

According to the DCC rules, cattle traders are supposed to pay the lessee five per cent of the amount they get from sale of each sacrificial animal. But for the last few years, the traders have come to Dhaka from different parts of the country, have allegedly been harassed by the lessees in different ways. They were also victimised by the extortionists.

When asked, a concerned DCC official said in addition to deployment of police at the cattle markets, the lessees are supposed to protect the traders from such unwanted incidents. DCC alone is supposed to do the cleaning work for which each cattle market has to pay Tk 10 thousand.

DMP Commissioner Motiur Rahman told The Daily Star last night that 50 to 100 policemen would be deployed at each cattle market as part of security measures.

There will be special police patrol teams so that musclemen can not

force the traders to unload their trucks as in the last year, continued the commissioner.

The 21 spots in the city are the place in front of Nawab Yusuf Market at Naya Bazaar, Karwan Bazaar, Golapbagh ground, both sides of Alam Market near Postogola shashan ghat, Hajirabag ground in Jhigatola, Dhupkhola ground, Rahmatganj playground, west of Narinda road at Dholaikhal, Khilkhet Tanpara, open space of Rajuk at Uttara (sector-12), Rayer Bazaar playground, open space of Merul Badda Bazaar, Shaidnagar playground of ward-83, Banani playground, Brothers union club ground near the Bangladesh Bank, Meradia Kancha Bazaar, Arambagh Kira Paribad playground, the open space beside Hosni Dalan, Azimpur Road, the open space near the rail-crossing of the Syedabad Terminal and Doyaganj Truck Terminal.

Besides, sacrificial animals will be sold at the permanent cattle market at Gabtali where traders from different parts of the country have already started selling sacrificial animals.

Abductors rule out

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ment stand and said they would be allowed to walk free if the hostages are freed.

But sources said that unless there was an "all-party" guarantee, the abductors would not free the hostages.

"There is a serious lack of coordination among army, police, local administration and the public representatives. This problem must be addressed immediately," said a top official requesting anonymity.

Meanwhile, about 50 tribal women with babies demonstrated in front of the Bethchari army camp about 36km off Rangamati early yesterday afternoon, demanding that their relatives be released from police custody.

They shouted and screamed at plain-clothed security men and said they were going hungry as the earning members of their families had

been on detention for more than five days.

In Rangamati, Kalparanjan said that the authorities would soon send those families some 'ration'. Army and police had arrested 30 tribal men, including some relatives of the abductors, on Friday last. They are now on remand and "helping authorities" set up communication with the abductors.

Security men are still on extra alert in Rangamati and on the Rangamati-Khagrachari Road.

Authorities said they are hopeful of a peaceful solution soon as the new go-betweens have started to make contacts.

"Earlier the go-betweens were reluctant to forge a way of communication because their identities had been disclosed to many," said an official. "They were scared for their lives."



Visitors at the open air photography exhibition of Saiful Islam Kallol that began on Dhaka University campus (near Aparajeyo Bangla) yesterday.

Ban two-stroke engines, speakers at seminar say

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The speakers at an environmental seminar yesterday recommended that two-stroke engine vehicles be phased out and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) adopted for all the motorised ones to minimise the deadly air pollution as well as traffic congestion in the city.

At the daylong seminar on 'Eco-Transport Assistance in Dhaka', jointly organised by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and Japan Transport Co-operation Association (JTCA), they suggested both short and long term measures for cut in emissions.

The short-term measures include reduction of sulphur in diesel, prohibition of the more-than-20-year old vehicles from plying the city roads, public awareness campaign and air quality monitoring.

The experts suggested banning two-stroke engine vehicles, expanding CNG ones and establishing sufficient refuelling stations across the city as part of the long-term measures.

Japan will help Bangladesh introduce environment-friendly transport system in the country. The Ministry of Commu-

nications has decided to develop a policy for safe, cheap and efficient eco-transport, as transport-related investment is a key factor in boosting economic growth. Moreover, transport has a significant effect not only on the environment, but on the substantial development of industry, agriculture and tourism as well.

Addressing the inaugural session of the seminar, Kenji Shimizu, director for the International Co-operation, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, Japan, said Japan will provide technical assistance to development of transport infrastructure and transport services.

Hiroshi Jingu, Japanese acting ambassador to Dhaka, said Japan would help the government to formulate a master-plan for the eco-transport system.

Syed Rezaul Hayat, secretary of the Roads and Railway Division, Ministry of Communications, said, "Nothing seems to be happening despite a lot of discussions and seminars on this issue."

Chairman of BRTA Azizul Haque Bhuiyan said lack of parking space at the shopping complexes, poor maintenance of road network and occupation of sidewalks by the hawkers all lead to traffic congestion.

Taraj murder Sourav, Rana sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Sourav and Rana, accused in the Taraj Uddin Murder Case, were sent to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday.

DB police produced them before the CMM's Court, Dhaka yesterday with a prayer for seven days' remand but the court rejected the prayer and sent them to jail.

Dipu Chowdhury along with Sourav and Rana surrendered before the CMM's court on February 18 for bail. But the court rejected their bail prayers and sent them to the jail.

After confinement of 8 days' at the jail, Dipu was released on bail on Monday upon a bond of Tk one lakh with two guarantors.

Taraj Uddin, president of a co-operative society at Narda in the city's Uttara, was gunned down by a gang of armed men on February 8.

Nurul Islam, the victim's brother filed a murder case with Uttara thana accusing 23 people the same day in this connection.

Ctg carnage

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submitted the chargesheet accusing 22 Shibir men, including the then city president and general secretary.

Four of the chargesheeted accused have so far been arrested while the remaining 18 are absconding.

US sees serious human rights abuses in Bangladesh last year

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report said police shot and killed Mohammad Ahmed Hossain Sumon on February 9 while trying to arrest him.

Police also shot and wounded Sumon's brother and 12-year-old niece. Police shot at the family members of Sumon when they were taking the victims to hospital. No action was taken against the policemen involved in the killing.

Police also killed two workers at the Savar EPZ on March 3 while two others died from stab wounds.

The report also cited that one Mahub Hasan Khan Oli drowned in a pond in the city on September 18 when he jumped to evade police arrest. In a similar case in March 1999, police drowned and killed college student Mujibur Rahman and in July 1999 police severely beat Mohanmad Shahjada Tuku and threw him into a canal where he drowned. As of year's end, none of the policemen involved had been held accountable.

The report said police routinely employ physical torture and other abuse during arrest and interrogations that consist of threats, beatings and electric shock. The government rarely convicts or punishes those responsible for torture.

The report said police often employ excessive, sometimes lethal

force in dealing with opposition demonstrators. Police obstructed former AL leader Qader Siddique, fired gunshots and beat him severely and detained his followers under the PSA in May.

On October 5, security personnel blocked a road in the southeastern part of the country to prevent Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia from visiting flood-affected areas and address a scheduled rally. AL activists assisted by police dismantled the dais that had been erected for Khaleda Zia's rally.

It said rape of female detainees in police or other official custody has been a problem as the Chief Justice acknowledged in a speech in March when he observed that rapes and killings in police custody frequently occurred. Such type of reports in previous years resulted in a widespread public outcry.

While there was no reports of such rape during the year, it is unclear whether the situation has improved after public condemnation or whether rapes continue and simply are not being reported. Government figures showed that 353 people, including 139 women, were in safe custody at year's end.

Police sometimes rape women who are not in custody. The government reported that in May a police constable raped a woman outside

the custody. A human rights organisation documented nine cases of police raping women who are not in custody during the first nine months of 2000.

It said during an opposition-sponsored hartal in 1999, eyewitnesses saw Awami League MP Maqbul Hossain order the killing of two young BNP activists, who had been seized by Maqbul's armed followers. Members of Maqbul's entourage then shot at point-blank range one of the men, BNP activist Sajal Chowdhury, who subsequently died. The other person was beaten.

About a dozen of police personnel, who were standing nearby in riot gear made no effort to intervene or to apprehend the gunman, nor did the government later take action against those persons responsible.

However, police summoned for repeated interrogations the family members of Sajal Chowdhury. Even police arrested a family member of Sajal on criminal charges. Police in their final report did not find evidence of the murder. Subsequently, the court accepted the police report and dismissed the case against Maqbul Hossain MP.

The report said AL supporters, often with the connivance and support of the police violently disrupted rallies and demonstrations

of the opposition parties. The government imposed Section 144 bans for 33 times during the first nine months of the year.

Many independent observers believe that such ban is usually a pretext. Supporters of the ruling party would frequently schedule their own rallies for the same venue and time as scheduled opposition rallies and meetings, thus providing the government a basis for imposing Section 144 for security reasons.

It said authorities also permit ruling party activists to blockade and take other steps to disrupt opposition events, including countrywide hartals, demonstrations and rallies. It said ruling party activists routinely intimidate opposition supporters and seek to coerce shopkeepers and drivers to ignore the strike.

Local ruling party groups sometimes also call hartals and the supporters enforce these through threatened or actual violence against strikebreakers.

The State Department report highlighted a comment of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after killings of eight Chhatra League activists in Chittagong allegedly by Chhatra Shibir. It said after the murder, the Prime Minister challenged her supporters and the police to retali-

ate for the murders, declaring that there should be 10 opposition bodies for each one from the ruling party.

The report said son of a ruling party MP shot and killed owner of a cellular telephone shop, Iftekar Ahmed Shipu on May 25.

Sumon, son of an influential AL leader on September 15 abducted two young men and demanded Tk 50,000, which the parents did not pay. The dismembered bodies of the two victims were found in a drain the following day. Police did not take any effort to rescue the two young men, rather shared drinks and cigarettes with the gang members as they were holding the two victims.

Laxmipur district BNP organising secretary Nurul Islam was abducted on September 18. General secretary of Laxmipur district AL was behind this abduction and suspected killing.

The State Department report said the government continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily as well as to use national security legislation (Special Powers Act and Public Safety Act) to detain citizens without formal charges or specific complaints being filed against them.

It was also going for preventive detention to harass political opponents and other citizens without

formal charges.

According to the government, 10,582 people were arrested under Section 54 of the Special Powers Act last year. The government sometimes uses Section 54 to harass and to intimidate members of the political opposition and their families. Besides, police commonly detain opposition activists prior to and during general strikes without citing any legal authority. Newspapers sometimes report instances of police detaining persons to extract money or for personal vengeance.

Quoting a parliamentary subcommittee study, it said the SPA cases generally are so weak and vague that the court had no alternative but to grant bail.

The newly enacted Public Safety Act gives the police even greater opportunity to abuse their power. According