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Economics of electioneering

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It costs around Tk 800 to hire an announcer, a loudspeaker and a rickshaw for the whole day. An energetic young man gets Tk 100 a day for participating in noisy processions that pass through roads, lanes and by-lanes in each ward in the Dhaka City Corporation(DCC). The ward commissioner candidates in the 25 April DCC election also have many other expenses but the ceiling of their polls expenditure is Tk 55,000 each, set by the Election Commission (EC).

Printing of posters, recording of promotional music, telephone, transport, food, wall writing, make-shift offices for campaigning and overhead arches also cost a lot. Although some of these are done in violation of the electoral code of

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Switch off cell phones, home ministry warns police again

ABUL KALAM AZAD

The home ministry has directed the police headquarters to take actions against those police officers who are still using cell phones, violating its earlier order.

Police officers across the country have been using cell phones, defying an order issued in November last, the ministry observed.

Ban on the use of cell phones by police officers under the rank of assistant superintendent of police (ASP) was imposed to maintain secrecy in the police service and snap links with criminals. But most officers-in-charge and even sub-inspectors frequently use mobile phones.

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The Daily Star RANGS TOSHIBA WORLD CUP QUIZ! 2002

See the rules and coupon of

The Daily Star RANGS TOSHIBA WORLD CUP QUIZ Round 1 on Page 15

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Apr 19		6-22 pm
Apr 20	5-33 am	

Prayer Timings

Apr 19

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-15
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-25	6-30
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Criminals in DCC fray

Police alter list

CEC finds most constituencies vulnerable; hoodlums can't be nabbed as they "campaign at night"

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed yesterday said many of the constituencies in the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) are still violence-prone with only six days to the elections.

"You should rather ask which areas are not vulnerable," the CEC told reporters after emerging from a meeting on the security steps ahead of and during elections to three city corporations slated for April 25.

According to the latest police list, 15 wanted criminals are running for the offices of ward commissioners only in the Dhaka city. Earlier, there had been 28 listed criminals in the DCC fray. It is still unclear how the number came down or whether the charges against the 13 have been dropped, of late.

Sources said when the CEC lashed out at the

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner MA Quaiyum for their failure to net the listed criminals running the race, he told Syed the criminals go into hiding during daytime and canvass at night, which makes the police's job difficult.

"Let's see if it works," said Syed to the reporters while talking about his venting anger at the meeting.

Later, the police commissioner said to reporters, "We must bring them (the listed criminals) to book before the election... they simply cannot escape arrest."

Amid growing fears of massive violence, the Election Commission (EC) yesterday decided to take massive security measures to ensure peace and fairness in the polls to Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna city corporations.

The CEC also said the EC has agreed on mobile courts for summary trial of election offend-

ers and other trouble mongers, and separate roving teams of army, BDR and police personnel before, during and after the polls.

Recent instructions by the prime minister and the CEC to nab the criminals ahead of the city corporation polls have so far yielded little results.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at a meeting of the cabinet committee on law and order earlier this week expressed her dissatisfaction over the police failure to nab listed criminals.

A joint meeting of the EC and the police authorities of the three cities decided the measures. Besides, the election commissioners and EC officials, the divisional commissioner of Dhaka, the police commissioners of the three

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New rules for visa on arrival

UNB, Dhaka

Travellers from countries where Bangladesh has no embassy, or countries which issue landing permits to Bangladeshis, will be entitled to get visas on arrival (VOAs) at the Zia International Airport.

A home ministry circular issued yesterday outlined the changes in the provisions of VOAs for travellers without valid visa.

The immigration authority at the ZIA has been empowered to issue VOAs for at best 30 days to the foreigners as specified in the changed provision.

Visitors from countries in which Bangladesh has no mission, and from those countries which issues LP or VOA to travellers from Bangladesh, will qualify for the same at the ZIA. The foreign ministry will supply the names of the countries, which extend such facility to Bangladeshi travellers.

People from any country under official ban will not, however, qualify for VOA or LP, the home ministry circular said.

Besides, foreign investors, exporter and the people who will come to attend seminar or symposium organised by the government will also be eligible for VOA after producing valid documents.

People from the Board of Investment (BOI) will be on duty round-the-clock to facilitate foreign investors to get VOAs or LPs on the basis of certification from BOI, BEPZA or Industries Ministry.

Since Bangladesh encourages both investors and tourists, quite a big number of foreigners apply for VOAs or LPs, prompting the government to change the 2000 circular on VOA and LPs and update the provisions in line with other countries.

Exporters will get landing visa on the basis of the certificate by the export-

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4 graft cases against Altaf withdrawn

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Special Court for Dhaka Division, yesterday granted the petition, seeking withdrawal of the four graft cases against Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury.

Judge Mohammad Siddiqur Rahman Miah (in charge) passed the order following a petition submitted by the public prosecutor on Wednesday.

Earlier, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), in a letter to the public prosecutor on April 4, asked him to take necessary steps regarding withdrawal of the cases.

All the four cases were filed on October 15, 1998.

In the first case, the accused was charged with misusing his official position by flying to his village in a helicopter in 1994, while cost the government Tk 12,54,822.

In the second case, he was charged with misappropriating Tk

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Curious campaigning... cows, keys and umbrellas rule election processions of Dhaka City Corporation ward commissioner hopefuls while women visit different city areas to seek votes for mayoral candidate Sadek Hossain Khoka.

Political face of BAC

Graft cases filed only to be put off

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Meant to curb corruption, the Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) has clearly become a political tool to harass the government's opponents.

Since 1991 after the restoration of democracy, nearly 200 graft charges have been filed against politicians, including president, prime minister, ministers and MPs. Charges have also been pressed against secretaries to different ministries for aiding and abetting corruption.

Till BNP's return to office this time, BAC probed all cases and some of them are on trial. Some more cases have been stayed by the High Court. The trial court handed down verdict on only nine of the accused.

Again, of them the highest court had only declared former president HM Ershad guilty.

Now, the BNP government is gradually withdrawing or having the graft cases filed against its ministers and MPs during the previous Awami League rule prematurely disposed of. Legal experts termed such action "opaque".

Side by side, the government is

filing corruption cases against ministers and MPs in the immediate past Awami League (AL) government. The BNP government has so far filed more than 25 cases against ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 14 former AL ministers.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Similarly, the AL had filed 69 cases against previous BNP government's ministers and MPs in 1996. The then Prime Minister Khaleda

Zia's son Tareq Rahman and her brother Sayeed Iskandar were also accused.

And in 1991, when the BNP came to power BAC filed cases against almost all ministers of the previous Ershad government.

Interestingly, and ironically, all the accused in these cases have blamed either the BNP, or the AL and or the Jatitya Party for bringing the graft charges against them out of 'political vengeance'.

The ruling BNP even handpicked Barrister Moudud Ahmed and

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SB gets kind to Tk 170cr loan defaulter

STAR REPORT

The Sonali Bank last week waived Tk 46 crore of interest including Tk 11 crore in applied interest, of a top defaulter, Rahman Group, with a conditional rescheduling facility to loans that had been secured through gross anomalies.

Sources said the Sonali Bank board last week approved rescheduling of loans amounting to Tk 173.82 crore taken against 11 organisations of the group.

Although the Sonali Bank board recommended the rescheduling, the facility will be subject to clearance from the central bank.

Highly placed sources said a number of influential ministers got themselves involved in creating pressure on the bank authorities for getting the loan rescheduling approved by the board.

At the end of last year, the central bank made it mandatory for banks to get its clearance for rescheduling large loans including the loans of the Rahman Group against which gross anomalies in loans procurement were unearthed.

It however withdrew the condition soon after the present government assumed office. But in spite of that, the rescheduling of a loan the size of which is more than 15 per cent of the bank's paid-up capital, as is the case with loans to Rahman Group, still requires clearance from the central bank.

A number of top Bangladesh Bank officials observed that there were severe irregularities in rescheduling the loans. They referred to a study by the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) which pointed out that the group has far less collateral than required

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Nine die after taking potka fish in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Nine people died after taking 'potka fish' in Digholia upazila of the district yesterday.

Only two of the dead were identified till filing of this report last night.

They were Mizanur Rahman, 30, of village Panighati and Dhalamia, 40, of Hajigram.

According to OC of Digholia thana, 30 people of Panighati and Hajigram villages fell sick after eating potka fish purchased from the Digholia bazar yesterday noon.

They were admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital in critical

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Torture on schoolboy

2 cops closed for defying court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two sub-inspectors (SI) of the city's Uttara police station were 'closed' yesterday on charge of torturing a schoolboy in custody, violating court order.

They are Abul Kalam Azad and Shariful Islam.

Sources said Md Akram Khan, son of one Aliboddin Khan and an SSC examinee from Ashraf Textile Mills High School at Uttara, was picked up by police on the night of

April 10 from near their residence in the area. Later, he was shown arrested in an arms case and a case for attempt to commit dacoity. Shariful Islam was made investigation officer (IO) of both the cases.

Police produced Akram along with four others before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court on April 11, seeking a five-day remand.

The court rejected the prayer for Akram's remand when it saw his admit card for SSC examinations

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Fernando tells newsmen

Air Lanka will soon resume Dhaka-Colombo direct flight

UNB, Dhaka

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Tyrone Fernando said here yesterday he is neither overoptimistic nor pessimistic about the ongoing peace process with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

He said the ceasefire agreement signed with the LTTE in February is still in force and a final agreement depends on talks, likely to begin in Thailand next month.

Addressing a press briefing at

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Rajuk wracks residential plots

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The Rajuk is converting all residential plots along 'any' 60-foot-or-more-wide road in Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani and Uttara into commercial one without any planning or clearance.

Top Rajuk officials admitted that they were permitting "non-residential" use of residential plots in these areas on the basis of the "Dhanmondi example".

In 1996 four Dhanmondi roads were declared 'viable for non-residential use' because, in the initial stage of planning in 1962, the then Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) had failed to acquire the land earmarked for shopping complexes and commercial area, leaving the area without markets or shops.

Planners, architects and engineers believe that such unplanned conversions are set to create enormous urban problems in the near future.

Roads and other infrastructures of these areas were laid for residential use, hence do not meet the criteria for commercial use, they said.

"Technically, it is not possible to convert a residential area into a commercial zone," said Professor Dr M Shahidul Ameen of the Faculty of Architecture at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology

(BUET).

Before conversion into commercial zone, the authorities must first ensure adequate infrastructure, including proper parking facilities and unhindered pedestrian movement, he added.

Dr Ameen said that parking alone was not all for a shopping centre.

"One has to ensure that vehicles can enter a building without hampering others' right to movement, drop the passengers, find a place for parking and finally pick them up. This pattern of vehicle circulation is vital for a commercial complex."

He also emphasised on the need to "discern between shops and shopping centres".

"In residential areas we can only allow corner shops, pharmacies or may be a grocery shop for meeting the residents' urgent requirements," Dr Ameen explained.

The Rajuk has applied the 'Dhanmondi example' to places like Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani and Uttara, notwithstanding the fact that these areas, unlike Dhanmondi, have designated commercial sites with all sorts of facilities.

Sources in the Ministry of Housing and Public Works termed the move "nothing but a way to make more

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Once a tranquil neighbourhood, Uttara is today more than a shopping place with restaurants, shopping malls and what-nots sprouting along residential roads under Rajuk's dubious approval.

Judicial probe into Baniarchar Church blast begins

UNB, Gopalganj

The judicial inquiry into the last year's bomb blast at a church of the Christian community that left 10 people dead and 26 injured began yesterday.

The four-member inquiry committee, led by Justice (retd) Abdul Bari Sarker, visited the Baniarchar Church and started recording statements from the witnesses of the incident.

The other members of the team are Additional Secretary Mustafizur Rahman and Joint Secretary Kamaluddin Ahmed and SS KM Rahman.

Among the witnesses, Sujala Halder, wife of victim Sumon Halder, accused Nihar group, including Babu Halder, Jewel and

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