



A flurry of posters pasted on the front walls of the Titas Gas office (left) in Shantinagar gives it a deceptive look. Law enforcers dispatch ballot papers from the Motijheel Government High School to different polling centres across the city yesterday.

TODAY'S POLLS AT A GLANCE

- Voting time: 8:00 am to 4:00 pm
- Mayoral candidates : 28
- Ward Commissioner (WC) candidates : 1054
- WC (reserved) candidates : 267
- Unopposed elected (WC) : 10
- Total voters: 34,60,498
- Security personnel deployed : 33,000
- Polling stations : 1,713

RAW FOR ROUND

keep your fingers crossed! Let our special guests pick your name on April 26

Venue:
Aswini Kumar Town Hall

BARISAL

Time: 4pm

Best wishes for you in Round 1. But, just in case you miss out, there's always Round 2 starting April 26

City polls today amidst high security concern



MA Syed

CEC unhappy over law and order

NAZRUL ISLAM

With election authorities still 'not satisfied' over law and order, Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi city corporations go to long-overdue polls today amid boycott by the main opposition Awami League.

"I'm not satisfied over the law and order, it must be improved," Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed said while talking to newsmen yesterday about the Election Commission's polls preparation.

The voting will take place from 8 am to 4 pm without any break.

The government earlier announced public holiday today in the three cities to enable over 34 lakh voters to exercise their franchise.

As the AL is staying off the race, the ruling coalition's mayoral candidates are virtually without rivals. Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadeq Hossain Khoka is the coalition's nominee for the post of mayor in Dhaka.

Incumbent mayors Taiyebur Rahman and Mizanur

Rahman Minu, also nominees of the coalition, are in the race for the posts again in Khulna and Rajshahi respectively.

But close contest is expected for the posts of ward commissioner as some AL-backed independent candidates are vying for those.

Three mayors, 151 ward commissioners (general) and 50 women commissioners (reserved) will be elected from among 28 mayoral candidates, 1,045 ward commissioner candidates and 267 woman commissioner candidates in the three cities. They will be elected for a five-year term. Women are directly contesting the city corporation elections for the first time.

Meanwhile, 10 commissioners including two women are unopposed in Dhaka.

The CEC said the commission has taken all preparations to hold a "meaningful election". He said, "It is the government which is responsible for law and order and the election commission is constitutionally mandated

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News Analysis

The flip side of polls

NAZMUL ASHRAF

The city corporation elections have brought up close this year than ever before the flip side of the local government bodies, particularly in urban areas.

The dominance of alleged thugs with multiple criminal records in the fray for offices in the city corporations in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi has somewhat tainted the credibility of the elections.

Nearly 300 of over 1300 candidates with criminal charges are vying for the office of more than 200 ward commissioners in the three cities, according to an unofficial estimate.

But the police record says no less than 50 of them are most wanted in various criminal offences including murder, rape, mugging, extortion and land grabbing.

Despite frequent directives by the prime minister and the chief election commissioner, the police

have failed to book these listed criminals.

Such candidates running mostly on tickets of the BNP-led ruling coalition did electioneering almost uninterrupted. Allegations are there that money and party dictums cushioned them against arrest, proving the directives nothing but public eyewash.

Reports have it that the police not only closed their eyes to the candidates they 'wanted to catch', but also shielded many of them. And, the "VIP" candidates got "political immunity" thanks to their berths in the ruling alliance.

The ward commissioners being the grassroots public representatives provide a solid base to a political party. Traditionally, the party in power does not miss the opportunity to grab the local government bodies at any cost, be it fair or unfair.

The immediate past ruling party, the Awami League, held elections to

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Extra levies on SIM card, mobile handset to go

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The government has decided to withdraw the recently slapped levy on subscriber identification module (SIM) card replacement and reconnection fees for cell phones, and will also lower import duty on mobile handsets, sources in the National Board of Revenue (NBR) said.

"A revised SRO (Statutory Regulatory Order) will be issued on Saturday to this effect," an official of the NBR told The Daily Star last night.

The import duty on each handset will be fixed at Taka 2,500 instead of the current Tk 4,000.

The government through a SRO on March 9 slapped a fixed import duty of Tk 4,000 on each mobile phone handset in place of the previ-

ous variable duty rates.

In case of SIM card replacement or change of ownership, a fixed charge of Tk 4,000 was imposed.

The imposition of the new levies had a negative impact on the growth of the mobile phone market. Mobile market analysts predicted a 50 per cent drop in sales due to the increase in start-up costs. The country's mobile phone sector grew by about 120 per cent in 2000 and by over 150 per cent in 2001.

Many viewed the decision going against the National Telecom Policy, 1998, which envisaged increasing teledensity of the country, one of the lowest in the world.

When the March 9 SRO was imposed, the authorities expected

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Top criminals go scot-free, in Khulna fray

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Only two out of 84 'listed criminals' were arrested by police during the special drive that began on April 15 centering round today's Khulna City Corporation (KCC) elections.

An outdated weapon was recovered during the same period.

The drive has gone up in smoke as none of the ten top criminals contesting in different wards has been arrested despite persistent demand from other candidates including mayoral candidates, and members of the civil society and leaders of different political parties.

Listed criminals in the election fray were seen joining the last minute campaigning on Tuesday night. They addressed street corner meetings in their respective wards and later went from door to door appealing for voters to elect them. "Help us return to normal life in the civil society so that we can serve you without guns and goons" was the appeal of a certain feared criminal

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BTTB asked to join submarine cable consortium

First meeting in Cairo on May 8

ABU SAEED KHAN

The Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) has been officially invited to become an 'initial party' to the SEA-ME-WE4 submarine cable consortium.

Major telecom operators from Far East, South Asia, Middle East, Africa and Europe meet in Cairo on May 8 to discuss issues related to the transcontinental submarine cable for the first time.

Member (maintenance and operations) and submarine cable project director of the BTTB will attend the two-day meeting of the consortium.

The meeting was originally scheduled to be held in Singapore early next month, but the date and venue were later changed with concurrence from all parties.

Abdulhameed Al-Hamad, general manager of Saudi Telecom, officially

informed the BTTB of the latest development.

France Telecom, Telecom Italia, Telecom Egypt, Saudi Telecom, Pakistan Telecom, Singapore Telecom, Bharti and VSNL of India, Etisalat of the UAE and Indosat of Indonesia are primary partners of the BTTB in this 11,793-kilometre transcontinental submarine cable consortium.

They would sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) by next June. Marine route survey of the cable would be complete within the next six months.

Sri Lanka Telecom, Telecom Malaysia and Communication Authority of Thailand are would join the SEA-ME-WE4 consortium during this period. Construction and maintenance agreement

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