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Unhappy CEC wants UP polls his way

Crucial EC meeting tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The standoff over the union parishad election schedule took a new turn yesterday when Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed said the Election Commission (EC) wants to hold the polls according to its own schedule.

"We want the election held as per the previous schedule. January or February is a good time for election. Besides, the previous schedule was acceptable to all," Syed told journalists at the EC Secretariat.

"It is the commission's responsibility to announce the election schedules," he added. "However, we have not taken any decision as yet."

The EC was all set to announce the schedule yesterday with the elections

staggered over January 4 to February 27.

However, in a letter to the EC on Saturday, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives requested that the schedule be deferred by two months and the polls be held in March-April.

The letter said special law enforcement facilities to hold the election between January 4 and February 27 would be difficult to arrange because of the ongoing anti-crime drive by the joint forces.

Till filing of this report at 10:00pm last night, the quasi-judicial body took no decision about the gazette notification on deferment of the election schedule by two months.

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Dark days loom as power investment runs dry

SHARIER KHAN and RAZIUR RAHMAN

The country may face acute power crisis by 2004, owing to lack of fresh investment in the power sector.

The poor investment scenario has a lot to do with a drastic policy shift on the part of the government.

Instead of adopting follow-up measures in the light of the success in setting up private power units like Meghnaghat 450MW or Haripur 360MW plants, the government has resorted to unclear and frequently shifting policy and strategy insofar as setting up new plants is con-

cerned.

The impact of such inconsistent policy shift is evident from the fact that the recently floated tender for the 450MW Sirajganj Power Plant generated an unusually poor response. Only one company has purchased the bid document till date - although the deadline for the bid has been rescheduled.

Power planners, on the other hand, are ringing alarm bells.

"There are few power projects in the pipeline and if we cannot strike some deals very soon, there will be serious power crisis within a couple of years," said a Power

Development Board (PDB) official.

He added that a number of new projects, which have been conceived recently, are not making progress because of the policy and strategy shifts.

"The bidding criteria for the Sirajganj plant are self-contradictory and there is no reason why private power companies would participate in it," said an industry insider.

The offer is that the PDB would hold 40 per cent equity of the project by providing land for the power plant while the private operator would arrange the finance. Previously, the

PDB held 10 per cent equity in both Meghnaghat and Haripur projects.

The PDB is also thinking in terms of holding fresh bids incorporating new ideas in its offer.

PDB Chairman Syed Abdul Mueed said, "It is a very new concept and we are examining it carefully."

He admitted that the response to the Sirajganj bid was 'not satisfactory'.

Talking about the earlier plan of the authorities to float together the tenders for Sirajganj 450MW, Bheramara 450MW and Second

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

A few people are wise up to how semai (vermicelli) is processed before being served on the platter -- mostly in unhygienic conditions. Here near the Lalbagh Fort crossing in Old Dhaka yesterday, a worker processes the Eid food favourite in the open.

Four tribesmen killed in CHT gunbattles

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Four tribesmen were killed and 15 injured in two gunbattles between activists of rival Parbattya Chattagram Janashanghati Shamity (PCJSS) and United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) in Naniarchar on Sunday, police said.

UPDF opposes the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Agreement, signed by PCJSS with the then government in 1998.

Police said some armed UPDF activists went to Borobilli village under Nanerum union in Naniarchar upazila to look for a PCJSS activist in the early hours Sunday. A gunbattle took place when PCJSS activists chased them. A UPDF activist was shot dead and three were injured in the gunbattle

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Walkout over bill to drop name of Bangabandhu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) staged a noisy walkout in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday over the introduction of a bill proposing omission of the name of Bangabandhu from the nomenclature of an annual agriculture award.

Seven minutes into the day's proceedings in the parliament, the AL legislators stormed out of the House protesting the bill -- 'The Bangabandhu Award Fund (Amendment) Act, 2002' -- that proposed substitution of the word 'National Agriculture' for 'Bangabandhu' in an ordinance - Bangabandhu Award Fund Ordinance, 1976. The ordinance was promulgated 26 years ago.

The AL lawmakers did not come back to the House for the rest of the day. Later at a press briefing outside the parliament, they termed the government move a naked manifestation of political vendetta and a ploy to erase the glorious past of the nation.

The main opposition will hold a meeting of the its parliamentary party

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Ministry asked to strengthen food supply under OMS

BSS, Dhaka

The cabinet at a regular meeting yesterday asked the Food Ministry to strengthen sales of foodgrains under the Open Market Sale (OMS) programme and ensure adequate supply to meet demand of the respective areas.

The meeting, held at the Prime Minister's Office with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair, examined a report prepared by the secretary committee to ensure full-time presence of government officials and employees at the field level.

The meeting emphasised on maintaining discipline among the civil servants and took some administrative decisions to encourage

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Two foreign journalists arrested at Benapole

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The immigration police yesterday arrested two journalists working for the British Channel 4 television network as they attempted to cross into India at the western Benapole border checkpoint.

According to police, the two journalists - British national Zaiba Naz Malik and Italian-born Leonardo Bruno Sorentino - are arrested on specific charges under the Bangladesh Penal Code for treason.

One Didarul Islam of H/72 New Airport Road of Mohakhali filed a case against the two with the Motijheel police in the capital before their arrests yesterday.

A video camera, some videocassettes and some papers were seized from their possession.

The Benapole police said the two journalists had told a joint team of police and military intelligence

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Criminal 'Benga' Babu nabbed; two more die



'Benga' Babu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A young man the army picked up in Joydevpur, Gazipur yesterday afternoon died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) last night, while another youth detained in Khulna on November 1 died at the Khulna District Jail last night.

In the capital, the joint forces of army, BDR and police arrested notorious criminal Nazmul Hasan Riyad alias 'Benga' Babu alias Malik, 24, in his residence at Uttar Goran in the city's Khilgaon area in the early hours of yesterday.

The young man in Gazipur, according to army sources, Arju Miah, 35, was picked up from his Hazipara residence at about 3:00pm yesterday. He was sent to the Gazipur Sadar Hospital. Later, a sub-inspector was called to the hospital and asked to rush the victim to the DMCH who finally died at about 8:15 last night.

The sources said the army turned over Arju to police at about

6:50pm, a contention Gazipur police contested. The police said Arju was not handed over to them. Rather, an officer was asked to attend to him at the hospital.

Police said the dead had no job but was facing several criminal charges. They could not say what those charges were.

No case or complaint as regards the death was filed with the police till late last night. The body was sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

The second victim, Shariful Mallick (26), an alleged outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP), was picked up from his Mohishaguni village home on November 1, according to Our Khulna Correspondent.

He was sent to the Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) where the attending doctors declared him dead at about 8:00pm.

Army sources in the capital said joint forces had arrested him at

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PM leaves for Saudi Arabia today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia leaves here for Saudi Arabia today to perform Umrah there.

A Bangladesh Biman aircraft will fly out of Zia International Airport with the Prime Minister on board for Jeddah at 11am.

She will also offer fateha at the Rouza Mubarak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM).

The prime minister is expected to return home on December 4.

Kathmandu meeting on SAFTA starts Nov 29

Dhaka to seek trade concessions

RAFIQ HASAN

Bangladesh will seek special trade facilities from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka under the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

The first preparatory meeting for transforming South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) into the SAFTA will be held at Kathmandu on November 29-30. A four-member Bangladesh delegation led by a joint secretary of the commerce ministry will attend the meeting.

The ministry held a long meeting yesterday to discuss and finalise the issues for the Kathmandu meet.

The meeting decided that as a Least Developed

Country (LDC), Bangladesh would try to get trade facilities from the three developing nations under the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Of the seven South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) members, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives are considered LDCs, while India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka developing nations.

The meeting also decided that Bangladesh along with other South Asian LDCs would seek special market access and lengthier timeframe for restructuring their tariffs under the envisaged free trade regime.

According to Dhaka's proposal, the LDC SAARC members would gradually reduce their tariff rates to

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Sehri, Iftar timing

Ramadan	Nov	Sehri	Iftar
20	26		5-14
21	27	4-58	5-14
22	28	4-59	5-14