

EC snubs UP polls holdback plea, sticks to its plans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday rejected a government request for deferment of the union parishad (UP) elections, sticking to its previous schedule.

An EC meeting yesterday, chaired by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed, announced the schedule for elections to the union parishads, to be held between January 4 and February 27.

However, the government will once again request the EC to consider deferment of the polls.

"We will soon make the request as it will be difficult for the government to provide logistics required for elections on the EC-planned dates," Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told newsmen at his residence last evening. "The home ministry has already informed us of their inability to extending security measures."

On the other hand, Awami League General Secretary Zillur Rahman welcomed the EC decision.

Meantime, the EC yesterday

started despatching election accessories such as nomination forms, manuals, etc to different districts.

Earlier, with the schedule set to be announced on Monday, the LGRD and cooperatives ministry issued a gazette notification for a two-month deferment of the polls on Saturday without consulting the EC.

Editorial on page 4

The ministry wanted the election rescheduled March-April, instead of January-February. With the joint forces engaged in the ongoing countrywide crackdown on crimi-

nals, the government would be hard put to arrange adequate security arrangements for the polls, it explained.

The EC strongly reacted to the gazette notification, terming it "unlawful" and "containing incorrect information".

At a meeting with the CEC on Tuesday, LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Political Secretary to the Prime Minister Haris Chowdhury articulated the government's change of heart and requested the EC to hold the UP polls between February and March. The EC did not budge, though.

2 journalists quizzed to find their 'motive'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) interrogated the two foreign journalists and their local guide, arrested and now on remand, for nearly the whole day yesterday to ascertain the 'actual motive' of their (journalists) visit to Bangladesh.

The JIC -- comprising Criminal Investigation Department (CID), National Security Intelligence (NSI), Special Branch (SB) and Defence Forces Intelligence (DFI) - also tried to know why the two journalists concealed their identities in their passports.

Sources said the JIC team was verifying video footages, recorded

statements and other documents seized from the arrested. It checked videotapes containing statements of a cross section of people.

The two journalists -- Led Poldo Brono Sorrentino of Italy and British national Zaiba Naz Malik of British

Editorial on page 4

Channel 4 TV network -- were arrested on Monday while crossing Benapole border. Their local guide Moniza Pricilla Raj was picked up from Rajbari while returning to Dhaka from Benapole. All three were placed on a five-day remand on Tuesday for interrogation.

Earlier on Monday, one Didarul

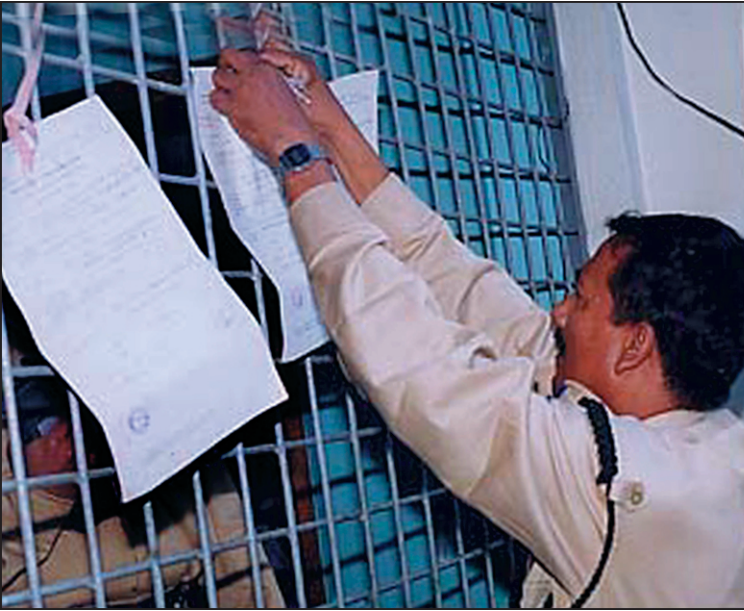
Islam had filed a seditious case against them with the Motijheel Police Station.

Police maintained tight security at the Detective Branch of police (DB) headquarters where the arrested have been kept. No journalist was allowed there. Police remained tight-lipped and none of the JIC officials also made any comment to the press.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of the DB Kohinor Mia said JIC was interrogating them on the basis of seized documents. "We are trying to know the motive of their visit to Bangladesh."

He said the two journalists

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



A policeman (left) hangs a notice of arrest warrant and property attachment with the grille of the house of former chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah at Kalibari Road in the Barisal town yesterday and another loads furniture into a police pickup on a court order.



PHOTO: STAR

Assets of ex-chief whip attached

A CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Police yesterday confiscated movable property of former chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah and his three sons on a court order to force them to surrender.

Kotwali police led by a magistrate entered the Kalibari road residence of Hasnat Abdulla in the city at noon and seized sofa sets, steel almirah, refrigerator, washing machine, tables and chairs from three rooms on the ground floor.

Police also sealed the rooms on the first floor of the house to confiscate movable property from those. They will again launch their operation today.

Speedy trial tribunal, Barisal, SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Speedy Trial Tribunal takes up Sutrapur double murder case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Speedy Trial Tribunal, Dhaka Division, yesterday began its function taking up the Sutrapur double murder case.

Judge Shahed Noor Uddin fixed December 1 for next hearing of the case.

The court also issued summons upon the witnesses to appear before it, issued production of warrant (PW) against the accused, now in the jail custody, and served notice upon the accused, now on bail.

The case pending with the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, was shifted to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court on Tuesday. It was transferred to the Speedy Trial Tribunal yesterday for disposal.

The investigation officer (IO) of the case submitted a charge sheet against Rabid Hasan Sumon, son of Nasibun Ahmed, former president of Dhaka city Mahila Awami League and 33 others on May 19 this year.

Of the accused, 15 are now in jail custody, four on bail and the rest 15 have been absconding since the incident.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Indian FM sees Al-Qaida links in Bangladesh

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India yesterday said it has reasons to believe that some al-Qaida elements as well as some Indian insurgents have taken shelter in Bangladesh.

"We have reasons to believe that some al-Qaida elements have taken shelter in Bangladesh as well as some Indian insurgent groups operating in the northeast," External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha told the Lok Sabha in reply to a question by a lawmaker yesterday.

He said Bangladesh has been informed about the matter from time to time and Dhaka has assured New Delhi of its support to help tackle the problem.

Sinha alleged that Pakistan has been using foreign territories for

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Another AK-47 seized in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The joint forces of the army, paramilitary BDR and police recovered three sophisticated firearms including an AK-47 assault rifle and 250 bullets from the residence of a cadre of the now defunct National Democratic Party (NDP) Rafiq Ahmed alias Baicchya at Gohira in Rauzan upazila of Chittagong yesterday.

In the capital, army on late Tuesday night arrested an alleged ringleader of an organised racket of autorickshaw lifters in Badda. Sources said he got caught while attempting to realise money from an owner of an autorickshaw that his gang had lifted earlier.

In the Rauzan raid, the troops

recovered an AK-47 rifle, an LMG (light machine gun) and a 9mm pistol along with the bullets. They dug up the floor of a poultry farm and a pond adjacent to Rafiq's house at Gohira to make the recovery, our Chittagong correspondent reports.

The troops also raided different areas of Gohira following a confessional statement of Rafiq, an accused in as many as 15 criminal cases. He was held on Monday night from a rented house at Oxygen Crossing at Muradpur in the port city, sources said.

Earlier, after his arrest, the troops also recovered a sawn-off gun from Rafiq's village home at Gohira on Tuesday. Of the recovered AK-47

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Bangabandhu's name dropped from nat'l agri award

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid boycott by the main opposition Awami League, the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday amended the Bangabandhu Award Fund Bill, 2002.

With the amendment, the Bangabandhu Agriculture Award has been renamed the National Agriculture Award.

Before passage of the bill, Jatiya Party (JP) lawmakers GM Quader and Hafizuddin Ahmed brought another amendment with a plea that the word 'Bangabandhu' should not be dropped from it. The omission of Bangabandhu's name from the title of the award is an insult to the national leader, the JP lawmakers felt.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

JS sees a brief but busy session

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad had a short-lived but business-crammed session, enacting or amending as many as 13 laws, before it was prorogued yesterday.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar read out the presidential order for prorogation at the end of yesterday's sitting, with the main opposition Awami League keeping off the House.

The session, which began on November 14 and spanned over ten working days, approved three new laws and amended 10 others amidst protest from the opposition lawmakers.

The new laws include the much-debated Speedy Trial Tribunal Act for quick disposal of cases for murder, rape and possession of

illegal arms or explosives or narcotics.

Of the two others, one envisions a police staff college and the other smooth disbursement of retirement benefits to teachers and employees of private educational institutions.

Significant among the amended laws is the Vested Property Return Act that allows the government unlimited time to return vested properties to their owners.

Change in another law dropping Bangabandhu's name from an agriculture award prompted the AL to boycott the session for the last two working days.

The brief session was also marked by frequent walkouts by AL MPs amidst furore over different issues.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

NBR transfers 577 customs officials

RAFIQ HASAN

In a surprise move, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) yesterday transferred 577 grassroots customs officials.

The officials, 118 customs superintendents and 459 custom inspectors, have been asked to join their new posts by December 10.

According to sources, never before NBR made such a massive overhaul of its staff.

A total of 577 customs officials have been relocated to 16 customs commissionerates through out the country.

A three-member high-level committee prepared the transfer list. The transfers had been due for the last one and a half years. Sources

said one of the motives for such mass-scale transfer is to bring dynamism in revenue collection.

Earlier, customs superintendents and inspectors were posted under the same commissionerate throughout their service tenure without being transferred.

The NBR prepared a new policy guideline for transferring such officials from one commissionerate to another, which the finance ministry recently approved.

Earlier, the NBR faced tremendous difficulties in disciplining the grassroots customs officials due to lack of any policy guideline in this regard. Many such officials were often involved in corruption, but they were neither transferred nor given any punishment.