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HC asks EC to allocate 'Kula' to Mannan

Dhaka-10 by-polls in 24 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday directed the returning officer to allocate 'Kula' (winning fan) symbol to Bikalpa Dhara in the Dhaka-10 by-polls to be held in 24 days.

Referring to the constitutional obligation for holding by-election in 90 days after a seat falls vacant, the HC asked the Election Commission (EC) to adjust the 24 days lost to legal battle from May 20 in the new poll schedule.

The verdict came in the wake of Bikalpa Dhara candidate retired army major Abdul Mannan's writ petition challenging the non-allocation of his party's symbol to him and a HC stay on the polls until yesterday.

As no respondent is likely to file any appeal against the judgement, the by-election is now set to be held in 24 days from yesterday. The EC had earlier said it would not lodge any appeal against the court verdict in the interest of holding quick polls.

Neither the EC nor the returning officer has any objection to the allocation of 'Kula' as the symbol of the party.



Bikalpa Dhara candidate for Dhaka-10 by-polls MA Mannan, middle, poses with his counsels after the High Court yesterday asked the returning officer to allocate him 'kula' as polls symbol.

Vat ceiling lowered to widen net

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has, except for Dhaka and Chittagong, reduced the minimum payable Vat charges to ensure collection from most of the small retailers and shop owners across the country.

In a statutory regulatory order (SRO) issued Thursday, the government kept the minimum Vat charges for small businesses in the two metropolitan areas the same at Tk4,200.

But the charges in other city corporation areas have been lowered to Tk 3,600 from Tk 4,200, in pauras, in district towns to Tk 2,400 from Tk 3,600 and in rest of the areas to Tk 1,200 from Tk 2,000.

About 80 percent small businesses in Dhaka and Chittagong are now under the Vat net, prompting the government to devise new strategies for widening coverage in other areas.

"These rates have been lowered to encourage businessmen outside Dhaka and Chittagong to pay the Vat," a National Board of Revenue (NBR) official explained.

The divisional officials, circle superintendent and inspectors concerned will make a list of small businessmen, detailing their annual turnovers with a projection of payable amount in Vat.

The small businessmen will not require filing tax returns, but they will have to conserve cash memos, purchase records and sale receipts.

Small businessmen should contact officials concerned by July 31 to submit their Vat.

Local industry takes a knock from tariff proposals

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The proposed reduction of tariff slab and supplementary duties will affect a number of local industries.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in his budget speech suggested reducing the four-tier import duty to a three-tier one and the seven-tier supplementary duty down to three tiers too.

His suggestion may have been intended for simplification, but an analysis of these new tiers reveals some inconsistencies.

The present four-tier import duties are: 7.5 percent, 15 percent, 22.5 percent and 30 percent. The new proposal puts them down to: 7.5 percent, 25 percent and 30 percent.

The present seven-tier supplementary duties are 15, 25, 30, 40, 50, 60 and 75 percents. The new proposal puts them down to 15, 25 and 35 percents.

This structure is hostile to TV, refrigerator and motor vehicle assemblers as against importers as they will have to pay more in tax than the finished goods importers.

If these items are imported in Completely Knocked Down (CKD) condition, importers have to pay import duties ranging from 15 percent to 22.5 percent. But with

the proposed structure, they will have to pay 25 percent.

If these products are imported in finished form, importers now have to pay 30 percent duty. But under the proposed structure, they will have to pay 25 percent.

In other words, entrepreneurs will have less incentive to go for assembling.

While Bangladesh manufacturers and exporters bicycles, Saifur's proposal will encourage import of finished bicycles.

Import duty on bicycles will come down by 5 percent as per the new slab. In addition to that supplementary duty on bicycle has been proposed to be reduced to 15 percent from 40 percent. This will greatly reduce price of imported bicycles.

Local manufacturing and backward linkage industries, particularly textiles, ceramic, footwear, electronics, toiletries, agro-based and food-processing industries will also suffer from the proposal, a Centre for Policy Dialogue analysis said.

At least 2,400 finished products now subject to 30 percent duty will benefit from the new duty slabs.

Major finished products that fall under the new duty slabs are: shoes, handbags, leather goods, etc.

Police press charge today despite little probe headway

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police probing the country's largest ever arms seizure in Chittagong on April 2 is expected to press charges against about 30 suspects today despite making headway in the investigation.

Police said of the suspects, 21 were arrestees. The names of Hafizur Rahman, Haji Sobhan, Abul Kashem Modhu, Deen Mohammad and Jahur figures high on the list, they added.

They said they were rushing through the charge-framing process to meet the legal obligation of carrying out the job in such arms and ammunition seizure cases in 60 workdays.

Joint forces of the police and coastguard seized 10 truckloads of arms and weapons including rockets, rocket launchers, AK-47 assault rifles, etc.

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Correction

In our front page story headlined 'Stop taxmen's graft to boost revenue' published yesterday, the first paragraph should read: "Two leading chambers yesterday termed the targeted 16.7 percent revenue hike a challenging task, as it could be achieved only by containing taxmen's corruption." We regret the mistake.

Insurgents kill Iraqi deputy FM

AGENCIES, Baghdad

Gunmen ambushed and killed an Iraqi deputy foreign minister as he went to his Baghdad office yesterday, the foreign ministry said.

The assailants shot Bassam Salih Kubba in Baghdad's Azimiyah district, a Sunni Muslim neighbourhood where support for Saddam Hussein's regime had been strong. He died later of his wounds, said Thamer al-Adhami, the foreign ministry spokesman.

Kubba, 60, was one of several deputy foreign ministers, and was responsible for legal issues. He was the ministry's most senior career diplomat.

He served as the acting chief of the Iraqi mission to the United Nations in New York and as the Iraqi ambassador to China. Kubba also served on the committee which ran the ministry after the fall of Saddam's regime.

He held a master's degree in international relations from St. John's University in New York.

The attack was the second on members of the interim government in the last four days.

HOSTAGES KILLED

Insurgents cut the throats of a

Lebanese and two Iraqis, who worked for a telecommunications firm and were kidnapped Thursday on the road near the flashpoint town of Fallujah, a Lebanese diplomat told AFP yesterday.

"Hussein Olayyan, from south Lebanon, and two Iraqis working for a telecommunications company disappeared Thursday in the area around Fallujah," said Lebanese Charges d'Affaires Hassan Hijazi.

"The Lebanese company, which had a contract with the Iraqi government, asked the embassy to investigate. On Friday at noon (0800 GMT), some drivers found their bodies brutally mutilated on the roadside between Baghdad and Jordan. Their throats were slit."

The killings were the latest in a slew of murders of foreign contractors. Four security contractors, two Americans and two Poles, were gunned down on the road to the Baghdad airport last Sunday.

A 26-year-old business man Nicolas Berg, whose body was found on May 8, was kidnapped by insurgents and beheaded, with the grisly killing captured on videotape.

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Gas price goes up from July

UNB, Dhaka

The government is going to give a weighted average of 2.5 percent rise in gas prices, a measure seen as prerequisite to getting funds for the energy sector.

Officials at the Energy and Mineral Resources Division said the price hike, likely to be effective from July 1, would take place mainly in case of bulk use. For domestic users the rise would be as less as possible.

They said a slight rise in the bulk sector -- electricity and fertiliser would not affect overall price of the value-added products and also give a relief to the domestic consumers.

Under a condition put by the World Bank (WB), an overall 5.77 percent gas price hike was due in three phases -- September 1, 2003 and March 1, 2004 and September 1, 2004 under an energy-pricing policy.

As the government failed to follow up, the WB later determined the time as October 1, 2003, April 1, 2004 and October 1, 2004, with 1.92 percent increase in each phase.

But Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had rejected the proposal when the government wanted to go for first phase of price hike in October last year and deferred it for the time being.

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Talks on budget begins today

AL finalises return to JS at tomorrow's meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad today begins a 40-hour discussion on the proposed budget for fiscal 2004-05 with the main opposition Awami League (AL), which has been boycotting the House, set to stage a comeback to the current session.

A final decision on when the AL lawmakers will return to parliament will be taken at a meeting of the AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) at the Sangsad Bhaban at 10:30pm tomorrow. Leader of the Opposition and AL chief Sheikh Hasina will chair the meeting, party leaders said.

The budget discussion in the House begins at 4:00pm today.

"We want to return to the House and take part in discussion. But the government forces us to stay out", Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the House Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star.

Some AL sources said the party is going to join parliament session

to save membership of its eight MPs, including Sheikh Hasina.

After 11 months of absence, 50 AL lawmakers returned to the House on May 12 to take part in the obituary reference on Ahsanullah Master MP. Hasina was on a trip to US at the time.

The AL lawmakers did not continue their presence in the House and stayed away when Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman placed the proposed budget on Thursday.

A senior leader of the party, however, said, "This time we are considering a return to the House not only to save membership but also to expose misdeeds of the present government before the nation".

"We want to take part in the budget discussion taking the opportunity of specific time allocation for opposition members", he said on condition of anonymity.

Apart from Hasina, the AL lawmakers will also be present.

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All set for Euro 2004



AFP, Lisbon

Whatever happens on the field, Portugal has already achieved a victory of sorts in organising the Euro 2004 finals which gets underway Saturday, the biggest international event in its history.

"After five years of work, I hope this will be the start of a period of pride and joy for Portugal," said Portuguese Football Federation president Gilberto Madail, who also heads the tournament's organising committee.

Since UEFA awarded Portugal the right to host the 16-nation tournament, the country, western Europe's poorest, has built seven new stadiums and completely refurbished three others for the event at a cost of 650 million euros (790 million dollars).

Europe's biggest football names will congregate at the grounds over the next three weeks during the 31 matches of the championship, the third-biggest sporting event in terms of television audiences after the Olympics and the football World Cup.

And Portugal, a nation which is not used to the international spotlight, is delighting in the attention.

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