

Voter listing

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prospective voters," EC Joint Secretary Mohammad Zakoria told journalists at his office yesterday.

Replying to a query on the EC Secretariat's decision to keep doing the work, former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court Ghulam Rabbani said, "The Election Commission must take initial steps to stop the process of collecting information for a fresh voter list until it receives the certified copy of the court's order."

Echoing the view, Kazi Ebadul Haque, another former judge of the Appellate Division, said, "The commission is obliged to obey the High Court's orders. Contempt proceedings may be brought if the orders are not complied with."

CEC MA Aziz yesterday declined to talk to the journalists about the issue while election commissioners AK Mohammad Ali and M Munsef Ali said the EC must abide by the court directives.

About the implications of the directives, Justice Rabbani, said, "Continuing the process [collecting information about the prospective voters] is illegal after the High Court had asked the commission to revise the existing roll," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Justice Haque said as far as he knows from the newspapers, it is clear that the court has asked the EC to revise the existing one.

"The difference is clear between preparing a voter list afresh and revising the existing one," Haque told The Daily Star.

As the work of preparing a fresh list continued, the two election commissioners, who have all along been opposing the idea of having a fresh voter list and favouring instead a revised list, yesterday expressed fears for the fate of the ongoing task undertaken unilaterally by the CEC.

"One can understand with ease what might happen to the voter list not prepared in accordance with the High Court's order," Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told journalists at his office, referring to continuing of the task for preparing the fresh voter list as decided by the CEC unilaterally.

Election Commissioner M Munsef Ali said going by the newspaper reports, he understands that the High Court's judgement has established their opinions.

"We never spoke for preparing a fresh voter list as the existing electoral rules do not allow to do so," the election commissioner added.

TASK CONTINUES

The CEC has neither initiated steps to hold an EC meeting nor consulted with the two election commissioners in the wake of the changed situation. The EC Secretariat yesterday directed the field-level election officials to continue collecting information on the would-be voters.

The CEC and the EC Secretary yesterday declined to comment on the issue. Zakoria told journalists that they are continuing the task, as they have yet to have in hand any certified copy of the HC directives.

The EC Secretariat is not likely to get the copy before Sunday due to the weekend on Friday and Saturday. So it will continue the task and there is no possibility for the EC to issue any directive before Sunday.

Bar Council

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investigations into the attacks on court premises since August 17 following a writ petition filed by advocate Panna on November 30.

The police submitted two progress reports on December 13 and 26.

"I am greatly disappointed to find a simple chart giving some figures with reference to different police ranges, not district or police stations," advocate Panna yesterday said at a press briefing at Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) conference room.

In yesterday's supplementary affidavit to the HC, advocate Panna emphasised inclusion of police station-wise list of cases, particulars of offences, details of explosives and other weapons, remand duration of the arrested, information on how many arrested persons submitted statements under Section 164 and how many got bail, sources of supply of the weapons and explosives, financing of the terrorist activities, and many other relevant information in the progress report.

The progress report has mentioned nothing about the weapons seized after the recent militant attacks though these are frequently highlighted in the media, he added.

Any human rights organisation, even Human Rights Committee of Bangladesh Bar Council could give better progress reports, Panna said.

The hearing of the supplementary affidavit will take place after the 16-day winter vacation starting from tomorrow.

"A total of 504 bombs were blasted across the country on August 17, but according to the police report, only 154 cases have been filed in this regard and only ten cases have gone under trial," SCBA Secretary advocate M Enayetur Rahim said.

The progress reports prove the government's failure as it mentions that only 42 cases have been filed after the August 17 bomb attacks and only seven of them are now under trial, he added.

Advocate Sahara Khatun and advocate Shahidul Islam were also present at the press briefing.

Meanwhile, the enumerators, who began their work on January 1, are faced with new difficulties as the intending voters are questioning the fate of the ongoing listing process following the HC directives.

"Some even refused to fill up the voter registration forms, saying their names are already on the existing list," enumerator Hossain Ahmed, who is collecting information in the city's Mohammadpur area, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"When the court has asked to revise the current list why are you (enumerators) preparing a fresh one," he quoted a voter as asking.

"We are struggling to reply to their queries as the commission did not send us any further directives," said Sirajul Islam, an enumerator.

He said the EC had given us the training to prepare a fresh roll, not to revise the existing one. "We were told today that in a couple of days they will provide us with the existing list to carry out the task."

A district election officer in Sylhet division yesterday said enumerators, supervisors and assistant registration officers have been querying about the fate of their assignments following the HC directives.

According to the electoral rules, the forms to be used to revise a voter list should be different from those for preparing a fresh list, he observed.

"In this situation, alongside the voters, we too are confused and worried about our job," the election officer told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

Munsef Ali however said there is nothing to get confused about.

He said, "The existing voter list will have to be corrected by revision. Then a draft of it will be published in accordance with the procedure."

Mohammad Ali said he has asked the law officers of the EC Secretariat to collect immediately the certified copy. "On receiving the copy, we will sit to decide the next course of actions."

"The commission's meetings are usually convened by the CEC. If he does not call a meeting immediately on his own, we will ask him," the election commissioner said.

Replying to a query about the manpower recruited ignoring the objection of the two election commissioners, Mohammad Ali said they [commissioners] would do everything necessary to prepare a fair electoral roll.

MAHBUBUDDIN'S PLEA

Khondker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, the counsel for CEC, yesterday rushed to the HC bench that delivered the directives in response to two writ petitions challenging the preparation of the fresh voter list and sought the court's intervention in ridding people of the 'confusion' created by the newspapers.

He submitted before the court that the newspapers reported differently and pleaded for the court's directives ordering the print media to report 'correctly'. Confusion swept the country due to varying reports in the newspapers, he argued.

He also requested the court to finalise immediately the certified copy of the directives.

The court did not say anything about issuing directives for the newspapers, but assured the counsel that it will try to finalise the certified copy as soon as possible.

The HC on Wednesday asked the EC to prepare a voter list based on the existing one amid an intense debate for and against preparing a fresh electoral roll for the next parliamentary elections.

Explaining the HC's observations that asked incorporating the names of people aged 18 or above in the new electoral roll and excluding the names of dead and insane voters from the existing list, experts on law and electoral affairs said it means revising the existing voter list.

Palli Bidyut

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at Kansat in Shibganj upazila in the afternoon demanding uninterrupted power supply and withdrawal of metre.

SM Nasir Uddin, assistant general manager of Palli Bidyut, filed the case against the people, including Golam Rabbani, convener of the Sangram Committee, which led the programme.

Meanwhile, local people yesterday staged demonstrations at Kansat in Shibganj upazila against police firing. They demanded punishment to those responsible for the firing.

Witnesses said locals hurled abuses at local MP Shahajahan Ali Mia when he visited Pukuria Bazar yesterday morning. They held the lawmaker responsible for the two deaths and injury to 90 others in police firing.

About 12 policemen, including the officer-in-charge of Shibganj Police Station, were among those injured.

An uneasy situation still prevails at Kansat following the deaths of the two in police firing. They are Kajal, 35, son of Manjur Ali of Abbas Bazar, and Nayan, 23, son of Biswajit of Chakkirti village in Shibganj upazila.

16 CPB men get bail in JP-filed case

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted anticipatory bail to 16 leaders and workers of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), including its President Manjurul Ahsan Khan, in an 'attempt to murder' case filed by the Jatiya Party (Ershad).

After hearing a bail petition filed by the accused CPB men, a division bench of the court comprising Justice MA Rashid and Justice ATM Fazle Kabir issued a rule upon the government to show cause why the petitioners should not be granted regular bail in the case.

The anticipatory bail order will remain valid until submission of the police report.

On January 2, Jatiya Party Office Secretary Rezaul Islam Bhuiyan filed the case with Paltan Police Station, accusing the CPB leaders and workers.

In the case, he stated that the CPB men launched an attack in a pre-planned way on January 1 to kill Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad and Vice-Chairman Rowshan Ershad.

The activists of the two political parties clashed in Paltan area on January 1, leaving 50 injured. The CPB also filed a case against the JP leaders.

Barrister Shafique Ahmed moved the petition before the court.

One given

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week ago and that special attendant of DMCH Shila Begum mediated between them.

"I already have one son and it is almost impossible for me to bear the expenses of another one," the DMCH sources quoted Hakil as saying.

He also said they gave the baby to Jharna, 43, whose husband lives abroad and who does not have any child, as they believed that she will bring up their son well.

Police on Tuesday rescued the baby boy along with a girl aged about 10 days from Jharna.

The police later arrested Jharna and Shila's husband Manik who are on three-day remand at present.

Jharna claimed to police that she bought the boy for Tk 12,000 and the girl for Tk 10,000, the police said.

A number of DMCH staff said Jharna had been looking for a baby for adoption for the last few months.

The law enforcers raided several places in Dhaka and Fatullah, where the handover took place, to arrest Shila, believing that she might reveal the story behind the two infants.

The police on Wednesday night handed over the infants to a woman residing near the Sabujbagh Police Station and appointed a woman following a Dhaka court directive. They are also supplying food for the two infants, said the officer-in-charge of Sabujbagh PS.

The police said no one showed up to claim any of the infants until 8:00 last night.

BNP lawmaker

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Around 500 examinees went to meet their principal, praying to consider the extra fee. The principal, however, refused the request.

The BNP lawmaker, also president of the executive body of the college, at a meeting of the institution came to learn that the students denied to pay the extra charge. He called the examinees and beat Debashish in presence of over 500 students.

Shahidul also warned journalists not to make any news of the incident.

Abdul Haq Mia, acting principal of the college, refused to say anything on the matter.

The MP also could not be reached for comments.

Last year, Shahidul beat daily Jugantar correspondent Monjur Morshed.

23 hajj pilgrims

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The worst hajj-related tragedy occurred in 1990 when 1,426 pilgrims were killed during a stampede in an overcrowded pedestrian tunnel leading to holy sites in Mecca.

In 2004, on the final day of the ceremonies, 251 people were trampled to death when the crowd panicked during the ritual stoning of the devil. Three years earlier, 35 hajj pilgrims were killed in a stampede during the same ceremony.

In 1998, about 180 pilgrims were trampled to death when panic erupted after several fell off an overpass during the ritual.

In 1994, some 270 pilgrims killed in a stampede during the stoning ritual.

During an anti-U.S. demonstration staged by Iranians in 1987, some 402 people, mostly pilgrims from Iran, were killed and 649 were wounded in the crash of a Pakistani jetliner carrying hajj pilgrims from Jiddah to Riyadh, the Saudi capital.

Bangladesh ranks

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Hong Kong, which scored 1.28 points, was ranked first in the index, followed by Singapore with 1.56 points and Ireland with 1.58 points. They are among the 19 countries dubbed as free and placed in the first category.

Bangladesh's ranking was the worst among five of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc).

Sri Lanka was in a better position and shared the 92nd position with Romania with a score of 3.19, followed by Pakistan with 110th position and 3.33 points, India with 121st position and 3.49 points, and Nepal with 125th position and 3.53 points. Bhutan and the Maldives were not included in the list.

All the Saarc member nations were placed in the third category, as they were dubbed 'mostly unfree' economically.

Bangladesh, which managed to reduce its overall score by 0.07 point this year, obtained better score in the monetary policy than in the other areas. A lower score signifies better position.

The country's monetary policy scored 2.0 points, followed by wages and prices with 3.0 points, fiscal burden with 3.3 points, government intervention, foreign investment, banking and finance and property rights with 4.0 points each, informal market with 4.5 points and trade policy with 5.0 points.

The government intervention score is 0.5 point worse this year, the fiscal burden score is 0.2 point better, and the banking and finance score is 1 point better.

The Wall Street Journal and the Heritage Foundation in their report on Bangladesh said: "...weak rule of law -- manifesting itself in some of the world's worst official corruption, civil crime, and political violence -- continues to burden Bangladesh's democracy."

On the country's trade policy, the report said Bangladesh imposes a number of prohibitions and restrictions on imports, and corruption also serves as a non-tariff barrier.

Quoting the US Department of Commerce, it said business people consider Bangladesh Customs to be a thoroughly corrupt organisation in which officials routinely exert their power to influence the

tariff value of imports and to expedite or delay import and export processing at the ports.

The government's simplistic policy solutions have made the situation worse, the report said, adding the government attempted to boost law enforcement by forming the Rapid Action Battalion with attacks on suspected criminals, numerous abuses, including extra-judicial killings and torture, but crime or corruption have not declined measurably.

"The chaos of a lawless society has added to other problems keeping economic growth to roughly 5 percent annually, substantially below the 8 percent needed for appreciable development."

It added: "Until the government addresses Bangladesh's many structural weaknesses, there is little reason for optimism about the country's future."

Arrest terrorists

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can get away through loopholes of law," she told the officials.

She said people will have to be involved in the process of improving law and order and curbing "bomb terrorism". "Now people have united against bomb terrorism."

The prime minister, however, thanked the police for their efforts in improving law and order and maintaining peace and discipline.

Peace, discipline and stability are necessary for socio-economic development, investment, employment and reducing poverty. As a result of maintaining these prerequisites, foreign investment is coming and massive development work is going on in all sectors, she said.

She directed the home ministry to set up a separate police station for women in Dhaka Metropolitan area within a month and expedite the process of introducing metropolitan police system in Sylhet and Barisal.

Responding to their demand, the prime minister said police officials will be provided with ration, Mirpur police barrack will be expanded and a suitable land will be allocated for housing project for the police officials.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar, Home Secretary Safar Raj and IGP Md Abdul Quyyum also spoke at the meeting.

14-party rally

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rally, the killing of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, and other political killings.

Even after Wednesday's High Court order, the CEC has continued the work of preparing a fresh voter list, AL General Secretary (GS) Abdul Jalil MP told the rally.

He urged Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to stop preparing of fresh voter list.

Khaleda-Nizami alliance government is trying to stay in power for the next term and preparation of new voter list aims at it, he said, adding that the strong movement of the 14 party coalition led by AL President Sheikh Hasina will oust the four-party alliance government.

"We have a very simple demand, a fair election, and that's why we want reformation of caretaker government and the Election Commission," the AL General Secretary said.

Abdur Razzaq MP said CEC Abdul Aziz, who has been preparing the fresh voter list with the participation of Chhatra Dal and Chhatra Shibir cadres, will now be forced to stop the process due to the High Court verdict.

The election will be free and fair if the government implement the 23-point demand of 14-party, he

said, adding that the people will not allow any election without reformation in caretaker government and election commission.

The government has to arrest not only Bangla Bhai and other JMB members, but also their god-fathers Golam Azam, Motiur Rahman Nizami, Delawar Hossain Saidi and others, and punish them under the sedition law, the AL leader said.

He urged the people to make the 14-party's February 5 long march successful.

To save the country's freedom and sovereignty from the Khaleda-Nizami alliance government, the opposition coalition will continue its movement defying the fear of more casualties of party leaders and activist, AL Presidium Member Motia Chowdhury said.

Gonotorty Party President Nurul Islam, AL Presidium Member Tofael Ahmed, Gono Forum Presidium Member Pankaj Bhattacharya, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal GS Sayed Jafar Sazzad, Samyabadi Dal GS Dilip Barua, NAP GS Enamul Haque, Gano Azadi League President Abdus Samad, among others, spoke at

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon presided over the rally.

Warid Telecom

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challenges Warid, however, has decided to install microwave links for rapid deployment of local and countrywide transmission networks. It has stipulated a few critical tasks like site acquisitions for base stations and energising these installations as the suppliers' responsibility.

French Alcatel, Swedish Ericsson, Chinese Huawei, German Siemens, Finnish Nokia and American Motorola are scheduled to submit their bids for the supply and installation of the transmission network on January 14 at Warid's headquarters in Dubai, according to sources.

Warid also has asked them to arrange 80 percent financing of this several hundreds of million dollars mobile phone project. It has proposed to repay the principal amount of the credit in 11 equal, consecutive, semi-annual instalments. The first tranche of the repayment will be disbursed no later than 18 months from the final acceptance or 21 months from the provisional acceptance of the commissioned equipment.

Warid will award the contract to the winning bidder on February 11 apparently to break the news

during the 3GSM World Congress opening in Barcelona on February 13.

The only country Warid has run telecoms business in is Pakistan. Yet, it managed the mobile phone operating licence in Bangladesh on December 21 last through a controversially structured licensing process.

Bangladesh Telecom-municipal Regulatory Commission (BTRC) stipulated numerous non-telecoms preconditions for qualifying as a bidder for this operating licence. Evidently, only Warid could meet these non-telecoms prerequisites. Experts believe the unusual preconditions discouraged many world-class operators from participating in the bidding.

Initially, the BTRC planned to award this licence through open auction, as Pakistan did recently and bagged nearly \$6 billion fees from two licences. The BTRC later abandoned the auction plan reportedly due to pressure from the alternative powerhouse of the ruling coalition leader.

The BTRC charged Warid only a \$50 million licence fee, whereas this Persian Gulf company had to pay \$290 million to get a similar licence in Pakistan.

Criminal killed in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A listed criminal was killed in "crossfire" during an encounter between his accomplices and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Wednesday at Phultala upazila in Khulna.

The dead was identified as Khandaker Selim Ahmed Tutul, 36, of Kharhki Karbala under Jessore Kotwali Police Station.

According to a Rab press release, Tutul was arrested on Tuesday at Jessore. Following his confession, Rab members took him to Damodar Morolpara under Phultala upazila at midnight to recover illegal arms. When they reached the spot, Tutul's accomplices opened fire on Rab team. Rab retaliated triggering a 15-minute long gunfight. Tutul died when he got caught in the shootout, while his accomplices fled, the press release said.

Around 34 rounds of bullets were traded during the gunfight.

Two pipe guns, one pistol, four pistol bullets, five rifle bullets and two shotgun bullets were recovered from the spot. One of the Rab members sustained bullet injuries, the press release added.

According to the press release, Tutul was accused in four and two cases filed with the Dhanmondi and Hazaribagh police stations in Dhaka, in addition in two cases filed with the Jessore Kotwali Police Station. He was also a close cohort of the country's top criminal Imon, in hiding since Operation Clean Heart.

His first day

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Zillur and other pedestrians rushed seriously injured Rubel to nearby Islami Bank Central Hospital, where doctors referred him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). When Rubel was taken to the DMCH around 10:45am, doctors there declared him dead.

"I was in utter shock when I received a phone call and came to know that my beloved son is no more," said a sobbing Billal Hossain, father of Rubel, at the DMCH. His relatives were seen trying to calm the disconsolate father.

Of his two sons and one daughter, Rubel was the eldest. Billal is a cloth trader at the city's Bangabazar Market.

The pedestrians at the Mouchak crossing chased the bus and managed to catch its driver Farid, 25. Police arrested Farid and seized the bus.

Call money

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Tk 66.35 yesterday, which was Tk 66.31 on Wednesday.

In import, dollars were even costlier, selling at the highest Tk 68.65.

From the next week the banks will be disbursing advance loan for the purchase of hides, which will further flare up the interest rate in the call money market. Ninety-five percent of such loan is usually provided by the nationalised commercial banks.

It was learnt that Sonali, Agrani and Janata banks together will provide Tk 210 crore for purchasing hides in the Eid-ul-Azha. Rupali Bank will take decision on Sunday about how much loan they will provide in the coming week.

A baul

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of widely known *Sagar Kanya* Kuakata.

Hailing from Nalchhiti in Jhalakathi, Azim moved his six-member family to Kuakata more than a year ago to live in a tiny polythene-made home on the beach.

"I try to feel everything with my *baul* mind. I may or may not return home someday," said Azim as the reddish sun behind him was sinking in the sea.

He does not mind whether or not someone does him an act of charity. He earns Tk 200/300 each day when tourists throng here during winter season.

Inspired by his uncle late Mohammad Ali Khan, Azim grew a fondness for music at the age of seven and started practising music on his own. He worked in Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill in Khulna for some years but left the job to devote himself to music. Locals in Kuakata sometimes invite him in cultural functions on March 26 and February 21.

"I love singing along the beach. I want to read too. I will start study when my father will settle somewhere permanently and our poverty is over," said a smiling Monira, who had to leave study due to the bohemian life and financial constraints of her father.

Azim still wanders at the killings of innocent people in bomb attacks by militants in the name of establishing Islam.

People scramble

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on weekly holidays during this period.

Thousands of passengers were also seen crowding major bus terminals, including Gabtoli, Shyamoli, Kalyanpur, Syedabad, Jatrabari and Mohakhali terminals, yesterday for advance tickets only to find that tickets for seats of only rear rows in the buses for journey on January 9-10 were on sale. Tickets for January 9-8 were however available.

Many of the suffering passengers alleged that they bought tickets paying Tk 50-100 each more than the normal fare.

Meanwhile, the government has stepped up security at the railway station and bus and launch terminals. Vigilance teams comprising officials of the BRTA, BIWTA, mobile courts, and Rab personnel were patrolling these places to ensure security of passengers. They were also trying to prevent harassment of passengers, sale of tickets in black markets and charging of extra fares.

"A complaint box has been placed at Gabtoli bus terminal but none