

DOOR-TO-DOOR VOTER LIST UPDATING

EC makes a bad start

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday began the much-talked about voter list update by visiting door to door amid disruption as most of the field-level election officers did not work on the weekend.

The EC Secretariat began the updating task without enough publicity and preparation across the country. In many areas, there was no activity at all, as necessary papers were yet to arrive there, sources said.

A few election officers yesterday engaged themselves in voter listing and the same could happen today, also a holiday. However, the officials at EC Secretariat are hopeful that the work will switch to a full mode tomorrow.

DHAKA Field level election workers in the capital said they are facing serious problems, as 80 per cent of the people could not be traced to the addresses in the previous voter list. On the other hand, the teachers who have been appointed for the voter listing now do not want to get involved in the job.

After visiting more than 100 houses in the capital, it has been clear that the election officers did not visit 10 per cent of those. However, Deputy Election Commissioner Abul Kashem for Dhaka told reporters that he has information that election officers have begun their work in many parts of the city. He, however, admitted that there was little progress on the first day.

Talking to The Daily Star, many ward commissioners in the city said they have not seen any voter listing work in their areas. Shahida Morshed, commissioner of ward no 63 said there were no activities of the election officers in her ward.

Many people of the old town said no election officers came to their houses for voter listing. "I have waited for the entire day in my house to be on the voter list, but no one came," Latifa Rahman, a housewife at KM Das lane in old town, told The Daily Star.

The same was the scenario in almost all parts of the capital yesterday.

The finance ministry on Thursday informed the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat that Tk 39 crore has been allocated for the job. The ministry earlier instructed the EC Secretariat to

submit accounts of its previous expenditure of Tk 43 crore for preparing the controversial fresh voter list declared illegal by the Supreme Court.

The EC Secretariat also informed that the recruitment of assistant officials has been completed. A total of 1,35487 staff will visit from door to door across the country to revise the voter list by August 10.

DIFFERENT DISTRICTS Dinajpur District Election official's sources confirmed that the necessary papers for the voter list revision have yet to arrive there. During field visits, our Dinajpur correspondent found that most of the election officers of the district know nothing about the door to door visits.

Similarly, 131 AROs and 3,261 staff did not operate on the first day. Similar reports came from all 13 upazilas of Dinajpur.

According to our correspondent in Kushtia, no enumerator was seen visiting door to door in the town yesterday. Some AROs of the district said the enumerators might be staying at home as it was weekend yesterday.

Dulal Chandra Biswas, district election officer, said the door to

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PHOTO: STAR

Offices of two election officials in Chittagong under lock and key, above, and an official appointed by the Election Commission conducting voter registration work at a Maghbazhar house in the capital yesterday.

UPCOMING POLLS

Govt has to take blame for unwanted situation, says Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina firmly said yesterday no election will be allowed to take place unless the proposed reforms in the caretaker government and Election Commission (EC) are implemented.

No free, fair and neutral election is possible without the electoral reforms, the Awami League (AL) chief said while speaking to leaders of the party's youth front Jubo League at her Dhanmondi office.

"The alliance government and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will

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EC under fire for hiding facts, behaving unfairly

CEC must quit, seminar told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Legal experts, former advisers to caretaker government, former election commissioners, eminent citizens and senior journalists yesterday blasted the Election Commission (EC) for what they said was concealing information and misconduct with journalists.

The EC should follow a journalist friendly policy to restore its lost image. Free flow of information and access to it is a must, and the official secrecy act should be revoked, they told at a seminar also

addressed by Law Minister Moudud Ahmad.

Bitterly criticising Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice M A Aziz for 'failure' to do his duty properly, the speakers demanded his immediate resignation. No one has trust in him and he should quit the post as early as possible, they said.

"Behaviour with journalists at the Election Commission is unfortunate. Such behaviour will create obstacles to free flow of information," Moudud said at the seminar on 'Election-2007: Free flow of information and Election

Commission'.

Reporters Forum for Election and Democracy (RFED) organised the seminar held at Dhaka Reporters' Unity with its President Ashis Saikat in the chair. Journalist Jaglu Ahmad Chowdhury moderated the seminar.

REFD Vice President Kazi Hafiz presented a paper detailing the problems faced by reporters in gathering information due to 'non-cooperation' of the EC including the CEC.

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14-party to discuss polls strategies, seat sharing

Top leaders to meet Hasina this week

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

Senior leaders of the Awami League (AL) led 14-party opposition combine will meet AL President Sheikh Hasina this week to discuss strategies for the next election, seat sharing, and 'dispute' within the alliance, sources said.

Ways to rev up the movement for electoral reforms, formation of a grand alliance and other issues will also figure in the discussion, sources in the opposition alliance said.

The components of the 14-party--11-left parties, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), and National Awami Party (NAP)--want

to have a clear idea from the AL over seat sharing as they suspect that if they failed to reach an agreement well before the election, the AL might not offer them enough seats at the eleventh hour.

On the other hand, the AL policymakers believe that it is premature to discuss seat sharing when the movement for reforms has still a long way to go. They think the issue could be discussed during the rule of caretaker government.

"We need to talk to Sheikh Hasina as soon as possible to discuss the strategy for the upcoming election," Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon told The Daily Star.

Dilip Barua, a senior leader of the opposition alliance, said they will sit with the leader of the opposition this week to discuss current political situation and future strategies that he termed essential for the alliance.

Sources said the opposition alliance, formed last year, is now faced with disputes over seat sharing, formation of a grand alliance and other minor issues.

While many leaders of the AL allies hint at dispute within the opposition alliance, the AL keeps on dismissing the reports of disagreement as mere speculation.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL

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Japanese FM to hold talks with president, PM and FM

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso will arrive in Dhaka on Monday on a two-day official visit to exchange views on enhancing Japan-Bangladesh relations and other topics.

During his three-nation tour, the Japanese foreign minister will visit the Philippines, Bangladesh and Malaysia, a release of Japanese embassy in Dhaka said yesterday.

In Bangladesh, Taro Aso will have talks with President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan.

During his meeting with the Bangladesh leaders, the Japanese foreign minister will exchange views on enhancing Japan-Bangladesh relations, and regional and international issues of common concern.

"The Bangladesh side is looking forward to welcoming the Japanese foreign minister in Dhaka as his visit is considered to be very important," said a senior foreign ministry official.

Dhaka will reiterate its request for duty free access of Bangladeshi products to reduce trade deficit, more Japanese investment, and financial support for the proposed Padma bridge during the talks with the Japanese foreign minister, sources said.

The two-way trade is heavily in

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Striking teachers won't join any informal talks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Teachers and employees observing indefinite strike at non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas yesterday said they will not sit in a dialogue with the government unless they get formal letter inviting all the groups of teachers.

They said this as Deputy Minister for Information Abdus Salam Pintu started contacting the teachers associations over cell phone.

Shikkhak Karmachari Oikya Jote, a pro-BNP teachers' platform led by Selim Bhuiyan, sat at an unscheduled discussion with Education Minister Dr M Osman Faruk and the deputy information minister on Thursday night while other teachers' organisations -- both pro-government and anti-government -- yesterday criticised Selim Bhuiyan's act.

Selim Bhuiyan at a press conference yesterday also announced shifting of their July 23 grand sit-in programme to August 6.

The government wastes time in the name of dialogue, chief coordinator and convener of National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE) Quazi Faruque said, adding that they will not call of their strike if the government meets only the demand for 10 per cent basic salary increase.

He urged the teachers to join the grand rally at the Central Shaheed

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Announcement

Today's edition of The Daily Star includes a two-page supplement on the Citizen's Dialogue on 'National Election 2007', held in Comilla on May 20, on pages 12 and 21.



Regional dialogue in Khulna today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channel i are jointly organising their ninth Regional Dialogue on "National election 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development" to be held in Khulna at 9:00am today.

Eminent academics and professionals, development and cultural activists, public representatives and political leaders and other civil society representatives of Khulna will speak at the dialogue.

The distinguished members of the "Nagorik Committee 2006" who are preparing a Vision Paper for Bangladesh will also be present at the meeting to receive public feedback.



PHOTO: AFP

Smoke billows after an explosion at the Muqataa building of Palestinian authority headquarters in the West Bank city of Nablus on the third day of an Israeli military incursion yesterday.

Israel mobilises troops for ground invasion

Tel Aviv asks civilians to quit south Lebanon; 5 civilians, 4 Israeli soldiers killed; Beirut ready to go into war

AFP, AP, Beirut

Israel waged deadly strikes against Lebanon for the 10th day yesterday and mobilised more troops after warning it could launch a full-scale ground invasion -- despite mounting international calls for a ceasefire.

"The army called up several thousand reserves in order to strengthen our forces against Hezbollah," a military source said after the army again warned residents of bomb-hit southern Lebanon to flee.

Pitched battles raged between Israeli forces and Hezbollah fighters on the border, and Israel warned hundreds of thousands of people to flee southern Lebanon "immediately," preparing for the likely ground offensive to set up a buffer zone.

Israeli strikes Thursday also pounded southern Beirut and the Bekaa valley as well as villages and towns in the Shia heartland of the south.

Beirut said its army was ready to go into battle if Israel invaded, an action that would sharply raise the

stakes in a conflict that has killed close to 340 people in Lebanon and raised fears of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Waving white scarves, residents of the south streamed to safer havens in the north as buses and boats continued to ferry thousands of foreigners out of Lebanon in one of the biggest mass evacuations since World War II.

Israeli combat jets and artillery were back in action in raids that killed four people in the eastern town of Baalbek -- a Hezbollah

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Panna Bahini chief, his 2 aides killed in Rab action

AMANUR AMAN, from Kushtia

Two members of infamous 'Panna Bahini' were killed in an encounter with the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) at Daulatpur upazila in the district early yesterday while another, critically injured during his capture, died in hospital Thursday night.

The dead, Amirul, 24, and Mohon, 35, hailed from Koldira village of Daulatpur upazila. Mohon was in command of the gang since its chief Panna was killed in Rab action on June 6 in Natore.

According to a Rab statement, 15 members of Rab-5 went to Haripur, a char in the Padma at Bheramara upazila, some 40 kms off Kushtia district headquarters, around 7:45pm Thursday following a tip-off that some 20 cadres of the group would gather there for a meeting.

They entered the area, posing as day labourers and soon found the Panna Bahini cadres holding a meeting at the house of Azibar Thakur.

The Rab men surrounded the house and asked the gangsters to surrender. But they ignored the call and opened fire on the crime busters, said Major Rashidul Islam of Rab-5 in Rajshahi.

The Rab team returned fire, leading to a gunfight that lasted for about half an hour, he added.

The Rab arrested four men while the others managed to flee the scene.

The arrestees--Shukman 35, Iza 30, Mohon, 35, and Amirul 24--were caught in the possession of a foreign-made pistol, two guns, one sawn off rifle and 160 bullets.

Later, all four were handed over to Rab-6 in Kushtia.

Shukman and Iza who sustained bullet wounds in the shootout were rushed to Kushtia General Hospital while the other two were taken to Rab office. Shukman succumbed to his injuries at about 11:00pm.

During interrogation, Amirul and Mohon had admitted their

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Criminal killed in Raozan 'shootout'

CU CORRESPONDENT

A listed criminal was killed reportedly in a shootout between police and his cohorts at Raozan upazila in the district in the early hours yesterday.

Nilu Barua, 35, was an accused in six cases filed for various crimes including murder, sources said.

Police also recovered a locally made gun, a revolver, a booster and some cartridges from the spot.

According to sources, police arrested Nilu at South Kadalpur under Raozan upazila Thursday evening.

Acting on information obtained from him during interrogation, a team of Raozan Police taking Nilu with them went to Pahartoli at around 3:15am yesterday to nab his accomplices and recover firearms.

As they reached the area, Nilu's cohorts opened fire on them. Police returned fire that resulted in a gunfight.

At one stage of the shootout, Nilu trying to escape was hit by bullets.

He was rushed to Raozan Health Complex where the doctors on duty declared him dead on arrival, sources said.

Three policemen were also injured in the gunfight and were undergoing treatment at Chittagong Metropolitan Police Hospital, they added.

Malaysia to hire workers thru' private sector

PORIMOL PALMA

With the withdrawal of ban on Bangladesh manpower export to Malaysia after a decade, Kuala Lumpur has now decided to hire workers through the private sector Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira).

Malaysia will maintain a computerised system for selection of workers in Dhaka and processing approval letters, visa, work permit and other formalities in Malaysia, sources in the expatriates' welfare ministry said.

Fifty 50 percent of foreign workers of any company in Malaysia can now be recruited from Bangladesh.

Under the first ever government-private sector joint management in

manpower export, the role of Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur would be limited to overseeing the process on the basis of information from the Malaysian government and Baira.

Recruiting agencies in Bangladesh have lauded the Malaysian decision saying this will reduce corruption in manpower business. Introduction of computerised system will make this sector hassle-free and transparent and create scope for reducing migration cost.

Baira Secretary General Ali Haider Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "We have already rented an office in Kuala Lumpur and will soon install the required computer system both in Dhaka and the Malaysian capital."

He went on, "We shall discuss with the government the mechanism to reduce migration cost. We are very hopeful that we can do business with Malaysia in a disciplined manner under this system."

According to a high official, the Bangladesh mission in Malaysia has sent a letter to the government saying that on Bangladesh side, Baira will be responsible for selecting workers through various recruiting agencies and completion of other formalities including medical examination and a short training course for them.

The Malaysian home ministry will have a foreign workers cell called Division-N in the Foreign Workers Management Wing to process and approve all demand

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Jagannath varsity extends closure

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Jagannath University authorities have decided at a meeting Thursday to extend the university's closure till July 24 fearing further clashes among the feuding student organisations.

The decision came after Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) informed the authorities that Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) has been planning to carry out attacks on them soon after the reopening of the university on July 20.

Earlier, the university authorities declared a 3-day closure after July 17 when at least 100 students and several policemen were injured as ICS clashed with the

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