

EC to stop campaign before polls schedule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Irrked by the ongoing election campaign through posters, billboards and wall writings by aspirant candidates, the Election Commission (EC) has planned to stop the campaign before declaring the election schedule.

"These are immoral activities. But we can not take any step at this moment due to legal limitations," Abdur Rashid Sarkar, secretary of the EC Secretariat, yesterday told reporters at his office.

The EC will soon hold meetings with the police administration and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) as they have jurisdictions to stop the unauthorised campaign, he said.

"We will ask the police administration and Dhaka City Corporation

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PM calls for resisting 'plot' to boycott election

UNB, Barisal

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday cautioned that those who want to foil the upcoming general election will have to bear all the consequences as the people will not allow them to execute that plot.

She said the people of Bangladesh are ready to resist any move to foil the election.

"Whoever doesn't want the election to be held is enemy of the people, country's development and democracy. They (opposition) will have to be resisted," Khaleda, also chairperson of the ruling BNP, told a big public meeting in Barisal.

She noted that a political vacuum would be created in the country if the election didn't take place.

The prime minister said witnessing massive development activities carried out by her government across the country the

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Outraged by outage

Highest-ever 2200MW power shortage as 19 generation units shut down

STAR REPORT

As 19 power generation units remain shut down, the country is reeling under perennial power cuts with daily power supply shortfall exceeding 2200 megawatts (MW) -- the highest power shortage in the country ever.

According to the data from the Power Development Board (PDB), against the 'official' demand of 4,300 MW yesterday, the country's power plants were producing 3,126 MW in the peak hours. But according to the power demand chart of the Rural Electrification Board (REB), Dhaka Electric Supply Authorities (Desa) and its company Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco) and the PDB, the demand for power

was 5,400 MW -- leaving a wide demand supply shortfall.

The PDB officially shows a lower level of load shedding to tone down the government's failure in the power sector, sources said.

However, frequent power disruptions and low quality power supply in the city and elsewhere in the country have reached a new height. All parts of the city regularly undergo power cuts for hours.

"For instance, the power went off in our area at 7:30pm Saturday," a Mirpur section 2 resident said, adding, "It came back at 8:30pm. Then it went off again at 9:30pm and returned at 10:30pm and again went off at 11:30pm and returned at 12:30am."

"But that's not all. The power had

gone off at 8:00am in the morning on Saturday and came back at 9:00am. Then it went off again at 10:00am and came back at 11:00am. It again went off at 2:00pm for another hour. This is not an exceptional incident. This happens every day here," he added.

In Karwan Bazar, no business establishment would spend a single day without running their own power generators for at least three hours. Some days this load shedding can extend to eight hours. The frequency of load shedding is minimum four times and it can be as frequent as eight times.

In Green Road, it has become a routine for everyone to face four to five hours of power cuts a day in at

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Bhuiyan feels better, flies to S'pore for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan left Dhaka for Singapore last night to have better medical treatment.

Doctors here, however, said the BNP secretary general was recovering fast. Bhuiyan was admitted to hospital on Thursday following chest pains.

The BNP secretary general, also

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EU mission takes views of donors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The visiting European Union (EU) Observation Exploratory Mission yesterday exchanged views with different development partners of Bangladesh.

Separately meeting with the USAID, Cida, Asian Foundation, DFID, NDI, IRI and a few other donor organisations, the EU mission asked them whether it would be useful and feasible to send an election observation team to Bangladesh.

The six-member EU team led by Andrew Bruce came to Dhaka on September 11 on a ten-day visit to assess Bangladesh's pre-poll environment.

Party activist can't be chief of caretaker govt: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Justice KM Hasan has already proved himself as a BNP man as he visited several mazars in Comilla accompanied by local BNP leaders and activists.

"The coalition government now dreams of winning the next election

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GRAND RALLY AT PALTAN

Opposition declares 'final' agitation for reforms today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) led 14-party opposition combine at a grand rally in the capital today will announce the final round of agitation seeking to force the ruling alliance to concede the demand for electoral reforms.

Many of the opposition leaders and workers from across the country were already bound for Dhaka to join the rally at historic Paltan Maidan.

For the last few days, the 14-party has been going all out to mobilise more than a million people in the rally with a view to proving the popularity of the demand for reforms.

It has instructed its leaders and workers to put up stiff resistance in case of the law enforcers barring

them from joining the rally. It also has asked them to stage instantaneous sit-ins to protest police excesses.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina will announce a fresh spell of programmes aiming to elevate the reforms movement to a fever pitch.

The government on the other hand has taken unprecedented security measures looking to today's rally. Some 12,000 law enforcers will be deployed in and around the venue to maintain law and order.

The opposition parties will take up even tougher programmes including an indefinite hartal in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country to see off what they said was the BNP-Jamaat obstinacy regarding the proposed reforms in the caretaker government and electoral

systems.

They now look to realise the demand for reforms before tenure of the alliance government expires on October 27. A non-party caretaker government will take over from the ruling coalition to oversee a general election in the next 90 days.

AL and its allies have been campaigning for the reforms since July 15 last year.

14-party Coordinator and AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star yesterday, "We are doing everything necessary to pull off tomorrow's [today's] programme."

He said, "We have asked our leaders and workers to stage sit-ins wherever they might face obstructions."

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Ershad gets fourth acquittal in a month

Judge finds defendant harassed in case filed by BNP 14 years back

SHAKHAWAT LITON and CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad was acquitted of graft charges yesterday in yet another case filed against him during the previous BNP government in connection with allotment of plots of land violating government laws. The acquittal is also the fourth for him in a month.

In its verdict, the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court that began the trial in 1998 observed that the former president has been harassed with the case for the last 14 years.

"It has been proven that the case was filed on political grounds to harass the former president," Judge SM Mojibur Rahman said in the verdict referring to a petition filed by

Ershad in 1999 claiming that the government filed the case on political grounds.

Cheerful Ershad, who was acquitted of graft charges in cases one after another following the ruling BNP's move to have the deposed dictator on its side in the upcoming parliamentary election in exchange for gradually withdrawing pending cases against him, yesterday said he is getting justice.

"Ershad did not allot any plot to any of his relatives. Those who were allotted plots were not accused in the case," the court observed.

While the court was delivering the verdict Ershad was sitting in a sofa in the courtroom without taking permission from the court, instead of being in the dock.

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Sircar fends off move to talk on KM Hasan's visit to Comilla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar yesterday did not allow the members of parliament to speak on points of order when a debate arose on Justice KM Hasan's visit to Comilla with ruling party men on Saturday.

Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid raised the issue after Maghrib prayers on a point of order and termed Justice Hasan "an activist of a political party".

"KM Hasan visited Comilla and attended several programmes with Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof SMA Faiz, Comilla district BNP Secretary General Jahangir Alam and other BNP and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dalmen," he said.

"KM Hasan proved what we have said before about him—that he is actively working for a political party," Shahid said amidst support from other opposition lawmakers.

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ORIENTAL BANK

Top brass fined for violating SEC rules

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) yesterday fined 13 former directors, a former managing director and a company secretary of the Oriental Bank Ltd for breaching securities rules.

The directors and the managing director were fined Tk 500,000 each while the incumbent company secretary Tk 100,000, sources said.

The payments will have to be made to the stock market regulator by bank draft or pay order within the next 15 days.

The former directors were disciplined for not furnishing the commission with uninterrupted audio-visual records of the 18th annual general meeting (AGM) held on October 16, 2005.

The bank had submitted edited minutes of the AGM that was found to have lasted only for five or six minutes. The board of directors did

not also place and discuss the agenda properly, said Mansur Alam, executive director of the SEC.

"For the first time the SEC has taken disciplinary action against a bank for not providing a complete audio-visual record of an AGM. And it was done so that the listed companies follow the securities laws properly," observed Mansur.

The persons on the receiving end are former managing director CM Koyes Sami, Company Secretary Alamgir Kabir Samad and the former directors--Masum Ahmed Chowdhury, Rezaul Karim, Salman Karim, Mehedi Hasan, Zakir Hossain, Nesar Uddin Mohammad Oliullah, Mujibor Rahman, Shahedul Islam, Niaz Ahmed, BMM Mazharul Haque, Patinson Temple, Peter Yu Chun Kuo, and Azian Bin Hajj Ujir.

In August, the Bangladesh Bank

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PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Police conducted wholesale arrests of opposition activists and brought them to court yesterday ahead of the opposition's grand rally in the capital today. The arrestees were picked up from different places in the city.

Come mass arrest, come sufferings to innocents

SHARIFUL ISLAM

A prison van crammed with arrestees was waiting in front of Pallabi Police Station in the city yesterday afternoon. Among the grim faced insiders, one--continuously sobbing in a corner of the van--looked too innocent to be a victim of mass arrest.

Fighting back tears, the youth, Mohammed Russell, said he is a day labourer and came all the

way from Netrakona to collect some pending bills from a man in Kafrul.

He said Kafrul police picked him from Mirpur Section-13 on his way to Kafrul. "I was supposed to go back home this morning. I do not know how my family will get the news of my arrest and how my wife will run the family," Russell said.

Another man named Shahid shouted out from the prison van

to this correspondent, saying the police arrested him from the same area around 4:00pm on Saturday. A carpenter by profession, Shahid said he just arrived in the capital from his village home in Barisal to visit one of his brothers-in-law at Kafrul.

Many others among around 600 people arrested yesterday told similar stories. A total of 387 of them were produced before

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Land grabber chokes twin temples

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

A ruling BNP man has allegedly grabbed a piece of land of the Archaeological Department nestling a rare combination of a pair of temples of god Shiva and goddess Kali in Kalibari area under Muktagachha municipality.

Archaeological Department sources said the pair of temples existing together is unique here and one of two such temples in Asia. The temples are around 200 years old.

According to local Archaeological Department sources, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs acquired an area of 99 decimal land as an archaeological site through a gazette notification on June 9, 1993. But it did not take any initiative to renovate the temples or save the property from land grabbers.

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PHOTO: STAR

Two 200-year-old temples of Kali and Shiva stand side by side at Muktagachha in Mymensingh.

TECHNICAL FAULTS Biman flight makes emergency landing at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Sylhet-bound aircraft of Biman Bangladesh Airlines from Dubai was forced to make an emergency landing at the Zia International Airport yesterday following a technical problem.

Pilot of the flight BG052 noticed a leakage in the aircraft's hydraulic system after he took off from Dubai on its way to the Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.

"One of the three hydraulic systems failed after the plane took off," a Biman official told The Daily Star last night.

Amid tensions that a big accident might occur, the authorities signalled 'yes' to the pilot immediately when he sought permission for emergency landing at the ZIA without going to Sylhet. The plane

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Fix realistic minimum wage, not complete pay scale

BGMEA members ask govt, say 50pc factories to be shut in 6 months if proposed pay package implemented

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rejecting outright the proposed pay structure for the garment workers, owners urged the government to return the matter to the Minimum Wage Board immediately and fix a revised lowest wage instead of a full-fledged scale.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) at an emergency general meeting at their office yesterday also condemned the workers' leaders for 'provoking' the workers without considering the real situation.

They questioned who would take the responsibility of the workers if the factories are shut down and the

workers become unemployed as a result of 'unrealistic wage hike'.

The BGMEA members gave the association's executive committee full authority to take any decision including closure of the factories to create pressure on the government to review the proposed pay scale.

Reading out the decisions, BGMEA President SM Fazlul Huq asked the members to do an impact assessment of their factories if the proposed pay structure is implemented and send it to the association office.

The meeting also decided that the owners will send letters to the Minimum Wage Board, informing the real situation of their factories to the board.

The wage board has declared a recommendation unilaterally, which it is not possible to implement, Tipu Munshi, immediate past president of BGMEA, said at the meeting.

Hurried declaration of a pay scale was made to gain cheap popularity and accepting the pay scale would be suicidal for the garment owners, he said.

Annisul Huq, BGMEA representative on the wage board, said a worker can survive somehow with an income ranging between Tk 1,900 and Tk 1,950 a month.

As the owners are not in a position to pay as per the need of the

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ACC lacks transparency completely

Says Miah

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) a non-transparent institution, one of its commissioners Maniruzzaman Miah yesterday asked for an all-party parliamentary body to probe and find out its problems.

"There is complete lack of transparency in the commission," said the commissioner at a roundtable. Citing non-cooperation among the ACC commissioners as the main cause for its ineffectiveness, the commissioner said, "I don't understand how this commission would work."

The government established the commission in a hurry 'to satisfy the donors', as well as to meet the party's election pledge,

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