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EC reconstitution likely in a couple of days

New CEC will be appointed, controversial commissioners will have to resign, says law adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government is likely to reconstitute the Election Commission (EC) within a couple of days, fulfilling one of its main priorities towards creating conditions for holding free and fair polls.

Law Adviser Mainul Hossain told The Daily Star last night, "A new chief election commissioner will be appointed. There is no question of sending people on leave anymore, they [the controversial EC commissioners] will have to resign."

The 300 level election officials are also unlikely to be given any election duties while the

EC Secretariat is also likely to go through a major reshuffle, sources said.

Adviser Mainul said he discussed the matter with Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed on Friday. "The EC reconstitution process will be evident within the next day or two," he added.

Sources said President Iajuddin Ahmed is likely to ask Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz and election commissioners SM Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury to resign.

Bangabhaban officials said the chief adviser is likely to address the nation either today or tomorrow when he will announce the care-

taker government's moves, among other things.

The Awami League (AL) led grand alliance had earlier cited the present EC members' bias towards the immediate-past BNP-led coalition government as one of the reasons for boycotting the January 22 elections.

CEC Aziz and Election Commissioner SM Zakaria have already been sent on leave as part of a package deal between the Iajuddin Ahmed-led former caretaker government and the major political parties.

Saiful Alam and Modabbir were appointed in the posts, but the AL-led alliance opposed their appoint-

ment, alleging they also have bias towards the BNP.

Meanwhile, the EC is likely to publish a gazette notification today to cancel the ninth parliamentary election schedule.

Regarding the EC recast, Mainul told The Daily Star, "We are hoping to see some developments. We are going to do this as soon as possible."

"Reconstituting the EC is complicated. We are actively engaged in recasting the EC," he said, adding that the chief adviser asked him on Friday if it can be done quickly.

Mainul said the caretaker government will sit with the political parties after the EC recast to

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Bush has done 'tremendous damage'

Says Dr Yunus

AFP, Madrid

US President George W Bush is a terrible leader who has done tremendous damage worldwide, Bangladeshi Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus said in an interview published yesterday.

"Bush is a terrible leader, not only for the United States but for the entire world," Yunus, a 66-year-old micro-credit pioneer and "banker to the poor", told El Mundo newspaper.

"He has led the world on a dangerous path and it will take a lot of time to take it back on the right one," he was quoted as saying.

"Bush has caused tremendous damage. The cold war was over and with it all this wasted energy and mistrust of so many years. We were speaking about the dividends of peace," he added.

"And then the war on terror started and the vengeance and

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PHOTO: STAR

Three sisters, who are singers by profession, take shelter on the street with their violin and harmonium after Rajuk evicted them from their house in Uttara in the capital yesterday during its ongoing drive to demolish illegal structures.

Intelligence officials helped Ulfa in Aug 21 grenade attack

A commander tells Indian police

AFP, Dhaka

A commander of the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) confessed his group was behind the August 21, 2004 grenade attack in Dhaka, aimed at Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, in which 20 people were killed.

Pallav Saikia, the Ulfa commander, reportedly told Assam police that his group had lobbed grenades and fired rifles at an Awami League rally in the Bangladesh capital on that day, private news agency BDNews24.com said.

Assam police special branch chief Khagen Sarmah told BDNews24 that Pallav confessed they attacked the rally at the "explicit instruction" of Ulfa military-wing chief Paresh Barua.

Saikia, who was arrested by Assam special branch police on December 14, reportedly said that a group of 11 fighters led by him carried out the attack, BDNews24 said.

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Salman Rahman barred from flying abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Immigration authorities yesterday barred Awami League (AL) Advisory Council Member Salman F Rahman from flying abroad.

Zia International Airport (ZIA) sources said the leading businessman wanted to fly to London by a British Airways flight.

When contacted, Salman Rahman told The Daily Star that he went to ZIA to see off his son and daughter-in-law, who stay in the United States.

His daughter-in-law is former foreign minister M Morshed Khan's daughter.



Castro battling for his life

Says Chavez

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Ailing Cuban leader Fidel Castro is fighting for his life, his friend and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said.

"He's back in Sierra Maestra and locked in a battle for his life," said Chavez, referring to Castro's legendary guerrilla war that toppled Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in

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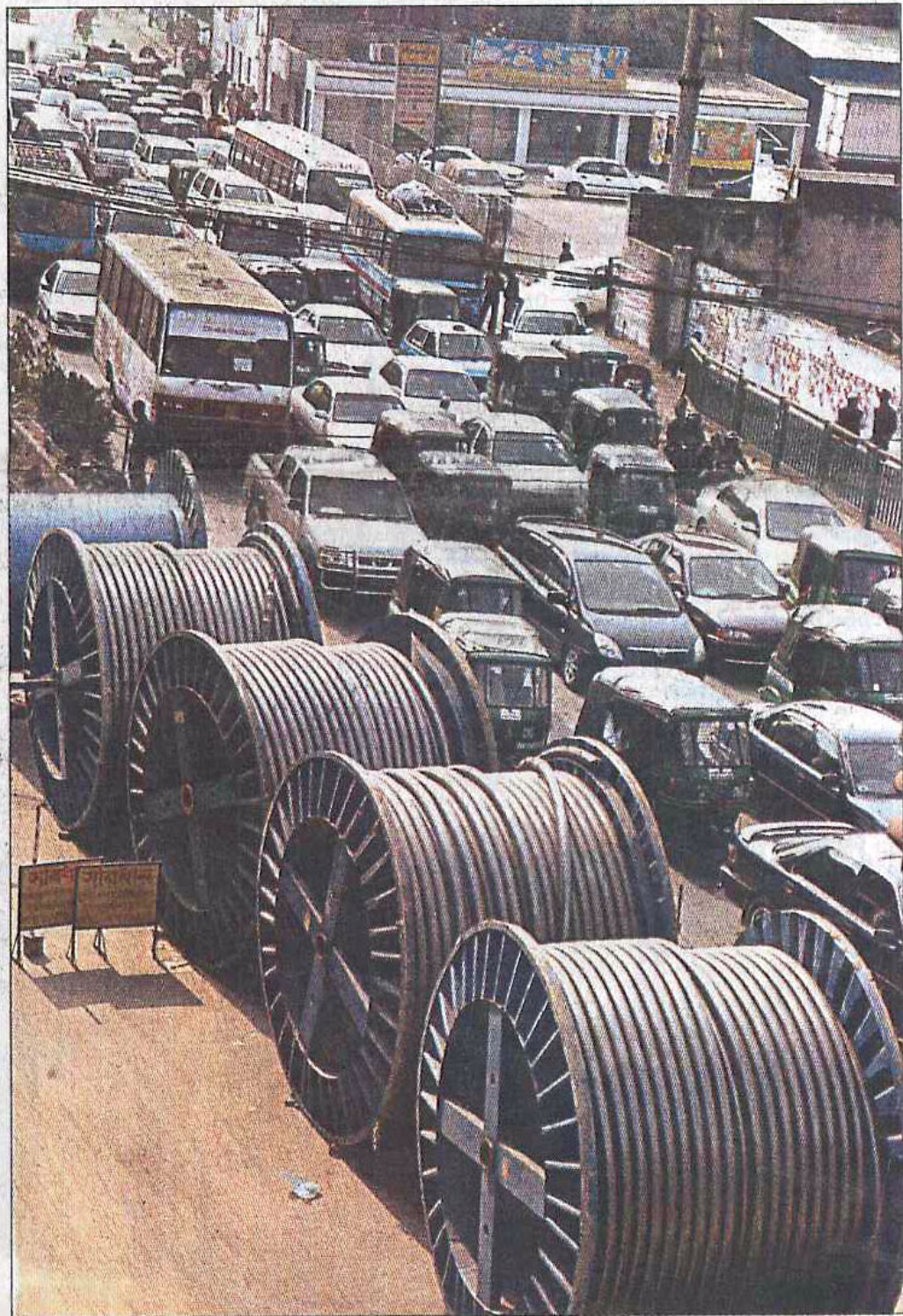


PHOTO: STAR

Vehicles swerve to avoid hitting the huge rolls of electric cables Dhaka Electric Supply Authority has kept on the road for installing near Moghbazar intersection. The photo was taken yesterday.

Govt to produce octane in 2009

SHARIAR KHAN

Bangladesh is all set to produce octane from naphtha, a byproduct of imported crude oil, in 2009, according to a competent energy ministry source.

This will help the oil importing country to save its foreign exchange for import of 120,000 tonnes of refined octane worth Tk 480 crore a year to meet the entire local demand. It will also help best utilise naphtha, one kind of natural gas byproduct.

The government in mid-November signed a contract with Bangladesh-US joint venture Mobil Jamuna Fuel Company (MJFC) to set up a naphtha processing plant in Chittagong, which will produce octane from naphtha.

The MJFC will invest \$300 million to set up this plant.

Sources said the Mobil-Jamuna board headed by Energy Secretary M Nasiruddin will hold a meeting

within a month to approve the investment. A 30-month construction of the plant will follow this.

Initially, the government will sell 100,000 tonnes of naphtha to this plant annually to produce 80,000 tonnes of octane plus 10,000 tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LPG). The import-substitution value of this LPG is another six million dollars or Tk 40 crore a year.

The government would gradually increase supply of naphtha so that this plant produces enough octane to meet the country's entire demand.

Success of the Mobil Jamuna Lubricant (MJL) venture, launched in 2004 following the 1998 contract, prompted the MJL to pursue the idea from 2005 noting that the Eastern Refinery produces around 150,000 tonnes of naphtha while processing 14 lakh tonnes of imported crude oil.

As there is no domestic demand

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FDI dips 43pc in July-December

MCCI thinks target still achievable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country received foreign direct investment (FDI) worth \$400 million in the first six months of the current fiscal year while the target for FY is \$1 billion.

"The FDI inflows recorded a sharp decline in the second quarter

of the current fiscal year. With improvements in the political situation, and if the government approves the large investment proposals that are lying pending, the FDI target will not be difficult to achieve," said the October-December 06 Review of the

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ORIENTAL BANK SCAM

More frauds unearthed

Forex smuggled, cheques forged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The central bank has found more irregularities in Oriental Bank's operations including forgery of cheques and foreign drafts and smuggling of foreign currencies by some shareholders in collusion with a section of bank officials.

After taking over Oriental Bank in June last year, the central bank found the irregularities by carrying out a special investigation of Oriental's 30 different branches.

During the investigation, the central bank found that a section of officials of different Oriental branches had removed transaction records of many accounts from the computerised database and embezzled a large amount of money through the process.

Termining such types of activities

as 'major irregularities' the central bank said such types of activities are totally illegal and most harmful for both the bank and its clients.

Citing an incident that had taken place in Oriental Bank's Gulshan branch in 2003, the central bank report revealed that some of the Oriental officials had been involved in smuggling a huge amount of foreign currencies out of the country.

The central bank report said in the name of importing waste papers the embezzlers smuggled a total of \$1.8 lakh out of the country through Oriental's Gulshan branch with the help of a section of its officials.

When the central bank investigation team sought documents related to these irregularities, officials of Oriental submitted fake

documents to the investigation team.

The central bank investigation failed to trace whether the supposed imports had entered the country at all. The Oriental Bank officials also failed to show any customs document issued by the Chittagong Port, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) report said.

The central bank investigation found a foreign currency draft of \$13,220 at Oriental Bank's Mirpur branch, on which the name of the beneficiary had been tampered with. Some bank officials embezzled the amount themselves by changing the beneficiary's name on the draft.

In the same branch, an Oriental official embezzled Tk 16.66 lakh from a client's account by copying

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ACC files 4 more cases against 16 including ex-MD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has filed four more graft cases against 16 people, including former managing director of Oriental Bank Ltd CM Koyes Shami, in connection with embezzlement of around Tk 22 crore from the bank.

Out of the 16 accused, 14 are former and current officials of Oriental Bank.

The cases were filed with Kotwali police station on Thursday night in connection with misappropriating the money using fake names and organisations, ACC sources said.

Following news items run by different dailies on the scam, the ACC made partial enquiry into the matter and filed 33 cases so far, including the freshly filed four. On December 28 and 29, the ACC filed 29 cases against 14 former and current officials of Oriental Bank.

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Ashura on Jan 30

UNB, Dhaka

The holy Ashura will be observed on January 30 as the moon of the Arabic month Moharram was sighted yesterday.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the National Moon Sighting Committee in Islamic Foundation conference room in the evening with Adviser for Religious Affairs Ministry Major General (ret'd) ASM Motiur Rahman in the chair, said a press release.

Religious Affairs Secretary M Ataur Rahman, Information Secretary Kamaluddin Ahmed, Director General (DG) of Islamic Foundation Fazlur Rahman, Spasro Chairman Abdul Halim Howlader, Meteorological Department Deputy Director Shah Alam, Khatib of Baitul Mokarram National Mosque Maulana Obaidul Haque and other members of the committee were present.

Pariahs in police

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Policemen coming from Gopalganj, the birthplace of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and belonging to a certain religion had become pariahs in the police administration in the last five years of the BNP-led four-party alliance government.

Throughout the tenure, they had been deprived either of promotions or better postings. Worse still, the differential treatment continues even now—during the caretaker government.

Analysing track records of the Hindu and Gopalganj-born officers of the superintendent of police (SP) rank and above, The Daily Star found that the immediate past government had posted those mostly to places of little significance.

All too often the officers had been superseded and denied due promotions.

Ten Hindu officers of the rank of SP and above were posted to Police

Academy, Police Training Centre (PTC), Armed Police Battalion (APBn), Range Reserve Force (RRF), Traffic Training School (TTS), Detective Training School (DTS), Highway Police, railway police, staff colleges and Police Headquarters (PHQ) during the five-year period. All of them were superseded, mostly multiple times.

Hailing from Gopalganj, 11 other officers of the same rank had similar postings and history of deprivation.

At the beginning of its term, the immediate past government had run through the rank and file of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) to identify and get rid of the ones coming from Gopalganj. Even the one of constable rank was not spared.

"We thought the unfair treatment that we'd long been dealt out would end with the caretaker government taking over," said an officer having roots in Gopalganj. "But it didn't look long for me to be disillusioned as I found myself,

posted to an even more unimportant place."

Another officer of the SP rank, who was superseded several times, reasoned: "May be my religion has been the major stumbling block to rise in my career."

GOPALGANJ LINK Mohammed Nazibur Rahman, who has recently been transferred as a deputy inspector general (DIG) to Highway Police, was SP Sirajganj in 2001. Over the years of last BNP-Jamaat rule, he was transferred to Police Academy, made SP Bandarban and a deputy commissioner of DMP.

Nazibur was closed to the police headquarters for not agreeing to intercept and disperse a peaceful procession of the then opposition. Later, he was transferred to the Police Special Training School (PSTS) at Bethunia, Rangamati and then to Tangail PTC on promotion. From there, he was sent to SB Training School and then Sardar Police Academy. He is the second

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