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## Polls only after basic reforms

Eminent citizens outline challenges of interim govt, ask for roadmap with specific timeframe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) needs to be reconstituted within the shortest possible time so it can assess and announce a time limit for carrying out the electoral reforms essential for holding a free, fair and credible election.

The polls must be held in line with the Representation of the People Order (RPO) and soon, but only on completion of fundamental reforms like reconstitution of the EC, correction of the voter roll and introduction of voter ID cards, eminent citizens told a roundtable yesterday.

But the interim government should not take too much time for the reforms and the state of emergency should not be in force for long either.

Organised by The Daily Star at its office, the roundtable was on

'Challenges before the Caretaker Government'.

The speakers said the new chief election commissioner (CEC) should be a person with a clean record who can withstand pressures from the political parties. It is rather the EC, not the caretaker government, that will hold the election and so it must start its

work forthwith.

They proposed that for the sake of transparency a depoliticised mechanism should be used to make appointments to the constitutional bodies like the EC, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Public Service Commission (PSC). Later, those could be ratified by parliament.

The discussants stressed that rule of law that has taken a dip must be restored immediately, and demanded that the caretaker government (CG) enact the Right to Information Act.

Some of them recommended involving the local government and members of the armed forces in the voter list correction job.

Ways to hold a free and fair election, reforms of the political parties, and depoliticisation of the administration were among the issues talked over at the roundtable moderated by The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam.

Dr Kamal Hossain, Dr Rehman Sobhan, TIB board of trustees Chairman Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, former caretaker government advisers Dr Akbar Ali Khan, CM Shafi Sami, Lt Gen (retired) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, Sultana

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

### ROUNDTABLE HIGHLIGHTS

- CG should reconstitute the EC immediately
- Elections soon but only after fundamental reforms
- Appointment of a strong, impartial CEC
- Reforms timeframe set by reconstituted EC
- Immediate reconstitution of the ACC
- Withdrawal of emergency as soon as possible

## TORTURE AT POLICE STATION OC, 4 other Bogra cops suspended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

The officer-in-charge (OC), three sub-inspectors (SIs) and one constable of Bogra Sadar Police Station were suspended yesterday for torturing a suspected thief at the police station (PS) on Thursday.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police of Rajshahi Range Khan Sayed Hasan took the action yesterday after conducting an investigation into police brutality following the publication of a photograph

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

## CA to address AFD today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed will address the Armed Forces Division today.

The interim government chief

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



PHOTO: STAR

A Dhaka City Corporation worker standing on a crane removes election campaign posters from the wall of a foot over-bridge at Farmgate in the capital yesterday.

## Top JMB leaders seek president's 'mercy'

Abdur Rahman questions his authority to offer mercy in Islamic law

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Five of the seven condemned top Islamist militants, including banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) chief Abdur Rahman, begged the president for their lives yesterday by submitting mercy petitions to the jail authorities with one of them expected to do so today and another absconding.

The four others who submitted mercy petitions are JMB Majlis-e-Shura (highest policy making body) members Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal and Khaled Saifullah, and suicide bomber Iftekhar al Mamun.

Major Shamsul Haider Siddiqui, deputy inspector general (Prisons), told The Daily Star last night, "We have received five of the mercy petitions, and Siddiqui Islam alias

Bangla Bhai said he would submit it tomorrow (today)."

Prison sources said, Abdur Rahman, who is imprisoned in Kashimpur Jail, handed over a three-page hand-written mercy petition to the jail authorities, which would later be sent to the president.

The petition mostly comprise lengthy quotes from the Quran and the Hadith.

While handing over his mercy petition, Abdur Rahman told jail officials that under Islamic law, the president does not have the authority to show mercy, so he (Rahman) does not want the president's mercy.

In the petition, Rahman said he invited the president to join the path of Islam.

Asked if they had considered it as a mercy petition, Haider said,

"Whether they plead for mercy or not, whatever they write would be considered as mercy petition."

The jail authorities will send the mercy petitions to the home ministry today and the ministry will then pass it on to the president. The mercy petition of Bangla Bhai, if received today, would be sent to the home ministry tomorrow.

Prison sources said when the jail authorities visited Bangla Bhai at Kashimpur jail yesterday, he told them that he is writing a letter with lengthy quotes from Islamic scriptures and he would hand it over today.

"When all the mercy petitions reach the president, we (jail authorities) would wait for his decision," said the DIG (Prisons).

According to relevant laws, the jail authorities mention scheduled

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

## Bomb goes off near Rab vehicle 7 injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least seven people, including a Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel, were injured as a bomb went off near a parked Rab patrol van in front of Sergeant Adad Police Box at Gulistan in the capital yesterday evening.

Injured Md Milon, 14, a worker of the police box, Nasir Ali, 35, a rickshaw-puller, Abdul Aziz, 32, an employee of a nearby public toilet, Abul Bashir, 35, a businessman, Abdur Rahsid, 60, a pedestrian and Khairul Hasan, 36, an engineer, are undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Saifur Rahman, assistant sub-inspector of Rab-3, who received injuries in his right arm and leg, is being treated elsewhere.

Khairul Hasan received injuries in his head and abdomen and he was stated to be in a critical condition. He was undergoing surgery at DMCH till the filing of this report at

12:00am.

First-hand accounts of the incident could not confirm whether the bomb was placed there or hurled at the Rab vehicle.

Witnesses said the bomb went off around 7:00pm only five metres from the Rab patrol van parked in front of Sergeant Adad Police Box. The blast injured the people who were waiting in front of the public toilet. Milon was only a few metres away from the blast while Nasir Ali was pulling his rickshaw close the spot.

Abdul Aziz said, "I came out of the toilet to listen to the radio news outside when the sound of explosion rocked the area. I started running in fear when I discovered I was bleeding."

Police Sub-Inspector (SI) Atiqur Rahman said he was in the area and rushed to the spot following the explosion. The blast shattered the windows of the Rab vehicle, he added.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

### Commentary

## Can this be the CA's vision of Bangladesh?

Still time to step back from an inevitable disaster

MAHFUZ ANAM

Given our faith (which is being put to a severe test) in Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed's sagacity, and his commitment to democracy, fundamental rights and the free press, we would like to believe that the just published rules promulgated to implement the emergency does neither reflect his policies nor his views. If our faith in him is correct then we expect an immediate withdrawal of the restrictive measures imposed on the media. We would like to unambiguously state that this promulgation of rules has been an unmitigated disaster for the newly formed caretaker government, whose image, both national and international, has taken a severe beating

because of this unthinking act. It is hardly the image that this government needs at this moment.

As a well-wisher of Dr Fakhruddin's government we suggest an immediate rethinking on this matter. There is still time to step back from this disastrous move, which has to be done immediately before this government, which still enjoys enormous public support and the media's goodwill, suffers a serious credibility gap.

We urge the chief adviser to recall his recent meeting with the editors. There was practically no hard question put to him. Why? Because everyone had a genuine feeling of goodwill for him. There was an overall sense of relief at the caretaker government having saved the nation from a one-sided

election and the consequent inevitable bloodbath. Almost all the editors openly extended their support to his government and to him personally.

But today the mood is dramatically different. Most of us are very concerned, in fact worried, at what is in the rules just promulgated. Yes, no specific instance of press censorship has yet occurred but an environment of self-censorship, a thousand times higher than normal, has been created. As the chief adviser himself knows very well that there is but a hair's breadth difference between censoring and creating pressure for self-censorship.

The emergency rules promulgated yesterday state, "The government can (also) restrict any

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



Waheedul Haq  
passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Veteran journalist and noted Tagore song specialist Waheedul Haq died at the city's Birdem Hospital yesterday evening leaving behind

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

## NGO director arrested in Satkhira

STAFF REPORTER

The joint forces yesterday arrested Shahidul Islam, executive director of a Satkhira-based NGO, Uttaran.

Police said they picked up Shahidul Islam in the morning from his house in Tala upazila. He was handed over to the police in the afternoon.

Uttaran has been working for

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8



PHOTO: STAR

Onlookers watch from a rooftop as a fire-fighter tries to douse the raging flames at Sultan Ahmed cotton factory at Pahartali in Chittagong yesterday morning.

## INACTION OVER ILLEGAL VOIP TRADE IN 5 YRS BTTB earning drops Tk 267cr a year

SHARIER KHAN

Due to deliberate inaction of the immediate past alliance government in the matter of stopping illegal VoIP business, the overall annual earning of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) sharply dropped by Tk 267 crore during its five-year tenure, official data shows.

While phone companies around the world are enjoying a steep business rise, the BTTB's annual earning from foreign calls dropped by Tk 135 crore in fiscal 2005-06 from that in 2001-02.

All the while, the business of more than 100 illegal Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) expanded

beyond control. Industry insiders say various political beneficiaries are running this business in connivance with a section of employees of leading mobile phone operators and of the BTTB.

Over 70 ISP licence holders, who are paying annual licence fees to Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC) without having any valid business or tax records, are also running this operation. The BTRC's dealing with this matter also raises questions about its role in this business.

While illegal VoIP operation has made foreign calls cheaper than ever much to the delight of the consumers, VoIP operators were

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

## Canadian jobs beckon Bangladeshi workers

PORIMOL PALMA

For the first time, Bangladesh is expecting to send workers to Canada, a lucrative job market that ensures high salaries and workers' rights at low service charges.

Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL), a state-owned recruiting agency, has already prepared a draft contract with a Canadian outsourcing company that was attested by the Canadian High Commission in Dhaka recently.

Once the contract is approved, BOESL can start sending workers of various technical professions, including plumbers, truck drivers, electricians and welders, within the next few months, sources in the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment said. A worker has to pay only 4,000

Canadian dollars or Tk 2 to 2.5 lakh to get to Canada, while he can earn around Tk 1.5 to 2 lakh every month, a high official of the ministry pointed out while talking to The Daily Star.

"There are opportunities for the Bangladeshi workers to earn even more than that as they usually work after the scheduled working hours also," he added requesting not to be named.

The way the Canadian company approached Bangladesh shows that it has huge demands for technical professionals, he said adding, "We can earn huge remittance once we start sending workers as the salary is quite high over there. We can also train up our large number of unemployed youths to the standard preferred by the country."

The Canadian company,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

## Fake medicine factory busted at Tongi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel seized a huge cache of spurious medicines, including vaccines of hepatitis B and polio, after busting an illegal medicine factory at Tongi on Friday.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

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