

Hold UZ, parliament polls simultaneously

Speakers urge CG at discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent citizens at a discussion yesterday demanded holding of long-awaited Upazila Parishad election together with the parliamentary election terming it mandatory for improving governance and quality of politics in the country.

The Upazila Parishad election, if held with the national election, will bring a qualitative change in the politics, they said at a discussion on 'Good governance and development in the context of Upazila election' at the National Press Club in the city. It was organised by Shushashoner Janney Nagorik (Shujan) and Swashashito (self-ruled) Union Parishad Advocacy Group.

The speakers also demanded amendments to local government-related laws that contradict the basic spirit of the Constitution and empower the members of parliament (MP) to interfere in the affairs of the local government.

"As the caretaker government (CG) is initiating various reforms, it could consider whether the Upazila Parishad election could be held along with the national election," said Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, president of Shujan.

According to the Constitution the local government should be at every stage of governance, but in reality the role of local government is destroyed due to intervention of the MPs and bureaucrats, he said.

Prof Ahmad said the main task of the MPs is to formulate laws and policies, but they often remain absent from parliamentary sessions, keeping themselves engaged



PHOTO: STAR

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad speaks at a discussion on 'Good governance and development in the context of Upazila election' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his left is ASM Shahjahan while on his right are Justice Ebadul Haque and M Hafizuddin Khan.

in the activities of personal interest.

He said sick politics and central nomination process for parliamentary candidates are the outcome of weak local government.

In the keynote presentation, Shujan Secretary Dr Badiul Alam Majumder said, "We demand the Upazila Parishad election with the national election, as it may not be held in future due to opposition from the MPs. Besides two elections at a time will be economical."

Demanding President's ordinance for amending the Upazila Parishad Law 1998 and Union Parishad Ordinance 1983, Badiul Alam said both the laws have made the local government institutions subordinate to central administration.

M Hafizuddin Khan, former adviser to caretaker government, said the MPs have restored feudalism at upazilas through their activities, which should be stopped by strengthening the local government.

"The MPs' race for black money would be stopped at least to some extent if there is strong local government," he added.

ASM Shahjahan, another former adviser to caretaker government, said, "We have a local government ministry, but not a proper local government. The caretaker government should initiate Upazila Parishad election as part of its reform initiatives."

Justice Ebadul Haque, who moderated the discussion, said there are many instances that the

government in power had victimised the UP chairmen or members for their belonging to other political parties. This practice must end, he noted.

Demanding Upazila Parishad election soon he said the supervisory power of the MPs or government officials on the local government goes against the Constitution.

Supreme Court Advocate Shahdeen Malik said forty percent of the budgetary allocation of India is spent through the local governments while it is 90 percent in Europe.

"But it is very insignificant in case of Bangladesh," he said, adding that local people cannot come to the secretariat for their needs, they go to their local representatives.

This is why the election of Upazila Parishad should be held at the earliest possible time, he said.

Jatiya Party (Manju) Secretary General Sheikh Shahidul Islam said the extra-constitutional power of the MPs should be curtailed to remove the corrupt people from the central government.

Taleya Rehman of DemocracyWatch, Prof Sharifa Khatun, former additional secretary Shawkat Hossain, Swashashito UP Advocacy Group General Secretary Matiur Rahman Tapan, former upazila chairman Ziaul Haque Sarker, UP Chairmen Abdul Khaleque, Munir Chowdhury and Sazzad Hossain Mukul also spoke.



PHOTO: PID

Members of House of Lords of the UK Baroness Pola Uddin and Lord Nazir Ahmed call on Chief Adviser to Caretaker Government Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed at his office in the city yesterday. British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury was also present at the meeting.

Holding polls biggest challenge for CG, say UN agencies

UNB, Dhaka

UN agencies in Dhaka yesterday said the caretaker government's mandate for holding the general election is the most important challenge for it.

"We pledged our support to the caretaker government...the caretaker government's mandate with respect to election is, of course, the most important challenge," said UN Resident Coordinator Renata Lok Dessallien, after a meeting with Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury.

In reply to a question, she said the adviser explained to them the importance of moving quickly towards free and fair elections that would be also credible and can sustain over time and deepen democracy in the process of organising impartial elections.

Dessallien, who led a 10-member UN team at the meeting with the adviser, said they also discussed both UN development mandate and norms and standards of protecting human rights in Bangladesh.

The adviser briefed them on the

caretaker government's mission during the nearly 45-minute meeting at the foreign ministry.

The meeting was attended by Ad Spijkers, FAO representative, Gopal Bhattacharya, director, ILO, Shahidul Haque, regional representative, IOM, Hassan Abdi Keynan, officer-in-charge, Unesco, Carolyn Benbow Ross, officer-in-charge, UNFPA, Pia Prytz Phiri, representative, UNHCR, Louis Georges Arsenault, representative, Unicef, Douglas Broderick, representative, WFP and Duangvadee Singkhobol, representative, WHO.

Initiate process of holding polls as early as possible: AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) yesterday urged the caretaker government (CG) to initiate the process of holding a free, fair and credible election after preparing an accurate voter roll as early as possible.

The call came at a meeting of the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) chaired by party President Sheikh Hasina at her Dhanmondi office in the city.

The meeting was organised marking the International Mother Language Day on February 21.

The meeting observed that the CG did not initiate any process of holding the election even after one month of the interim government's assumption of the office.

After the meeting attended by most of the senior leaders, AL acting General Secretary Obaidul Quader briefed the journalists on behalf of Sheikh Hasina.

Quader said the meeting welcomed the joint forces' drive against those who resorted to lootings in last five years, amassed huge illegal wealth, championed in corruption four times, owned huge amount of black money, broke all records in criminal activities and created militancy in the country.

He said the CG should see that the innocent people or the family members of the arrestees or who have been in the list of arrest are not harassed.

"We are also demanding immediate release of our leaders and workers who have been arrested," Quader said, adding that it is regretful to equate the AL with the party involved in corruption and criminal activities.

He said the BNP-Jamaat coalition government during its five-year tenure filed false cases against the AL leaders and workers to harass and torture them.

So it will not be fair to search the houses of AL leaders and workers in the name of maintaining 'balance', he added.

Quader said newspapers had carried out the details about those BNP-Jamaat leaders who became rich overnight by looting public money, and were involved in murder, torture and rape.

Those people should be arrested and their properties be confiscated after bringing them to trial, he demanded.

The ALCWC meeting urged the CG to vacate the house at 6, Mainul Road inside the Dhaka Cantonment by evicting its occupiers and recovered all lands grabbed by big fishes of the BNP.

The meeting observed that those who set up illegal slums and bazars to collect tolls are the real culprits, and not the poor people or petty traders.

So it is necessary to take initiatives to rehabilitate the evicted slum dwellers and petty traders on humanitarian grounds, Quader said.

The meeting decided to hold a discussion in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Road No 32 in Dhanmondi on February 20.

AL Chief Sheikh Hasina will attend the discussion as chief guest.

On February 21, the AL will hoist both national and party flags half-mast at 6:00am and place wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar at 7:30am.

The AL acting general secretary urged all party units and front organisations to observe February 21 with due solemnity.



PHOTO: STAR

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina presides over the AL Central Working Committee meeting at Dhanmondi party office in the city yesterday.

Tk 2cr Japanese aid to improve city storm water drainage system

UNB, Dhaka

Japan will provide around Tk 2 crore to Bangladesh to implement the project on improvement of the storm water drainage system in Dhaka city (phase-11).

To this effect, Economic Relations Division Secretary of Finance Ministry M Aminul Islam Bhuiyan and Japanese Ambassador Masayuki Inoue signed an "Exchange of Notes" on behalf of their respective governments in the city yesterday.

Dhaka Wasa of Local Government Division under the LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry will implement the project.

The main objective of the project is to reinforce the drainage capacity of the existing Kalyanpur pumping station and sludge removal work in open channels and drainage pipes.

It is expected that implementation of the project will minimise the damage, caused by flood, in the capital.



Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country having chances of rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind at one or two places over Khulna, Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Light fog may occur over the river basins of the country during late night until morning, Met Office said.

It said night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

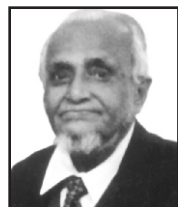
Highest temperature 32.2 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Cox's Bazar and lowest 13.6 degree Celsius at Srimangal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:52pm today and rises at 6:34am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	29.4	16.8	62	50
Chittagong	30.6	18.5	67	64
Rajshahi	27.5	16.1	74	54
Khulna	28.6	16.8	83	77
Barisal	30.0	15.3	86	74
Sylhet	30.0	16.5	57	52
Cox's Bazar	32.2	19.5	72	77

Obituary



Nausher Ali Khan (N A Khan), a businessman and social worker of North Askerdighi in Chittagong, passed away in Dhaka on

February 9, says a press release.

On the occasion, a doa mahfil will be held at his son's residence at House 5, Road 109 at Gulshan in the city beside Heritage Restaurant after Maghrib prayers today (Monday).

Relatives, friends and admirers are requested to attend the doa mahfil and pray for salvation of the departed soul.

His chehlum will be held on March 23 in Chittagong.

Pledge to build corruption-free Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 450 volunteers of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday have taken oath to build a corruption-free Bangladesh, says a press release.

The volunteers from 36 regions under six divisions of the country have taken oath at the annual meeting of TIB at the Biam auditorium in the city.

They pledged to hate corruption in their personal life, keep themselves away from it and to sacrifice their lives if necessary to prevent corruption. They also pledged to remain honest and show purity at its highest level in rest of the life.

The volunteers appreciated the stand of the caretaker government against corruption. They however, urged the government to take sustainable steps to stop corruption permanently.

TIB Trustee Board Member Advocate Sultana Kamal delivered the welcome speech while Chairman of the board Professor Muzafer Ahmed was present.

Seven acres of forestland recovered in Gazipur 60 families evicted

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Monipur forest department in Gazipur recovered seven acres of land and evicted 60 families from the forestland, who were illegally living here building tin-shed houses for more than nine years.

In the drive in demarcation no. 424 and 428 led by magistrate Kazi Abed Hossain, the forest department also demolished two rooms of Sultana Yearn Dyeing Industries.

The evicted people claimed that they bought position of the land bribing thousands of Taka to the forest officials.

Kalpana, one of the evicted people, said she had built her home here bribing Tk 18,000 to

one of the forest officials of Monipur bit.

Shamsu who had built four houses for his four sons said he bribed Tk 80,000 for these.

The other evicted families claimed the same.

They told the reporters that they had to pay Tk 2,000 for building each kitchen, Tk 5,000 for tube well and Tk 1500 for toilet to the forest officials.

However, the forest officials denied the allegation.

When contacted, forest officer Faqur Alam Khan said he joined the office only five months ago and cannot make any comment on this at this moment.



PHOTO: STAR

The government-arranged 'holiday market' of the recently evicted footpath hawkers in the city could not attract customers because of insufficient publicity. The picture was taken in front of Eastern Plaza yesterday.

Another shakeup in admin

BSS, Dhaka

The established ministry yesterday transferred four senior officials to different ministries as secretary and secretaries-in-charge.

Election Commission secretary M Abdur Rashid Sarkar has been transferred to the Ministry of Textiles and Jute, an official handout said.

Managing Director of Sadharan Biman Corporation M Humayun Kabir has been made secretary-in-charge of the Election Commission (EC) secretariat.

Director General of Department of Youth Development M Nazrul Islam has been made secretary-in-charge of the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division.

Member of the Planning Commission Dhiraaj Malakar has been transferred as secretary-in-charge of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management.

Meanwhile, former chairman of the Land Reform Board M Mortuza Hossain Munshi has been made officer-on-special duty (OSD) under the establishment ministry to facilitate the task of the payment of pension and salaries and allowances of the government officials and employees during their leave preparatory to retirement.

EKUSHEY BOOK FAIR 42 new books on 11th day

DU CORRESPONDENT

Different publication houses shelved a total of 42 new books on various categories at the Amar Ekushey Book Fair with the presence of a number of eminent personalities yesterday.

Eleven of the newly published books were on poetry, eight were story books, six novels and four books on essay.

Former chief adviser to the caretaker government Justice Habibur Rahman, former advisers Dr Akbar Ali Khan, Transparency International Bangladesh Trustee Board Chairman Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, Prof Anisuzzaman and poet Belal Chowdhury also visited the fair for inaugurating two books by Major General (Retd) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury Bir Bikram and former governor of Bangladesh Bank Dr Mohammad Farashuddin.

Justice Habibur Rahman unveiled the cover of 'Gabanterer Pothei Arthonir Samiddhi', while Prof Muzaffer Ahmad unveiled the cover of 'Deshta Kemon Kore Emon Holo', both published by Mawla Brothers.

Dr Akbar Ali Khan, Prof Anisuzzaman and Belal Chowdhury attended the ceremony as guests.

Cover unveiling ceremony of three other books were also held yesterday.

A discussion on 'Classification of Bangladeshi novels: Feature and changes' was held as part of regular programme at the Bangla Ekushey stage yesterday afternoon, followed by a cultural function.

Prof Mohammad Abu Zafar presided over the discussion, while Dr Gias Shamim presented an essay on the issue.

Bangla Academy authorities yesterday launched a drive at the fair against selling of pirated books and selling of books of other publication houses, as a number of stall owners reportedly continued violating rules and regulations.

Acting Director General of Bangla Academy Mainul Hasan said the authorities will continue this relentless effort against those stalls that are violating rules.

NU exams begin today

Degree Pass, Subsidiary and Certificate course examinations-2006 under National University will begin across the country today.

All examinations will start at 10:00am. Detailed schedule of these examinations have already been announced. A total of 193723 candidates from 1316 Degree colleges are sitting for the examinations at 479 centers across the country this year. Among them 98,459 candidates are taking part in BA, 39137 in BSS, 10354 in BSc, 40,019 in BCom, 71 in BMed, 50 in BSports, 4809 in Subsidiary and 824 candidates in certificate course examinations. All information regarding the examinations are available at the National University website www.nu.edu.bd.

Saidee sues Shamokal editor, publisher

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Former lawmaker of Jamaat-Islami filed a defamation case with the first joint district judge court against Bengali daily Shamokal Publisher AK Azad, Editor Abed Khan and News Editor Ahmed Faruk Hassan yesterday.

Saidee paid Tk 40,250 as court fees and claimed Tk 10 crores from the defendants saying that they tainted his image by publishing lead news on the newspaper captioned "Godfathers of Jamaat out of reach" on Saturday.

Siddikul Arefin Chowdhury, the judge of the court, ordered to issue summons against the respondents to appear before the court.