

Hasina renews call for early election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina again urged the caretaker government to initiate electoral process without further delay after updating the voter list as per the High Court directives.

"As the present caretaker government took oath as per article 58 (C) of constitution, it is their obligation to hold elections within stipulated 90 days. Fifty days have already passed but the electoral process is yet to start," Hasina said at the meeting of AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) yesterday.

The meeting started on Saturday at the AL chief's Dhanmondi office in the capital.

She urged the interim government to start groundwork for the elections that should be free, fair and credible as well as free from the influence of black money.

She demanded the use of transparent ballot boxes for the elections. Showing a sample transparent ballot box, she said an AL delegation

will soon take the box to the Election Commission (EC).

It is not necessary to import ballot boxes as it can be made in Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory, said Hasina.

The EC should prepare a policy on registration of political parties through discussion, she said, adding that the percentage of votes bagged by a party is to be considered in case of registration as a political party.

If a free and fair election is held, it would be possible to determine the percentage of the votes got by political parties and the parties getting votes under a minimum percentage should not get registration, she said.

Terming unfortunate 'sweeping criticisms' against politicians, the AL chief said some vested quarters weigh all the politicians on the same scale only to fish in the troubled waters.

The government should prepare a real list of the corrupt and criminals.

Urging the government not to harass innocent people and political leaders, she demanded the release of AL leaders and workers who had been

arrested without any case or specific allegation.

Hasina, who is the immediate past leader of the opposition and also a former prime minister, demanded that the caretaker government start inquiry into all the killings, bomb and grenade attacks.

Accusing Jamaat-e-Islami leaders of 'criminal acts, bomb and grenade blasts and patronising militants' she said, "Why are Jamaat leaders not arrested?"

She said the people witnessed widespread corruption, looting of relief materials, misrule, rise of militancy, grenade and bomb attacks, repression and criminal activities during the previous BNP-Jamaat government's rule while the AL during their tenure had achieved the people's trust.

The ALCWC meeting urged the caretaker government to take crash programmes for solving fertiliser and power crises and checking price hike of essentials.

S Asia Energy Dialogue in Delhi today

UNB, New Delhi

South Asia Energy Dialogue, focused on development of the sector in the Saarc countries, will be held in New Delhi today to recommend measures for tapping vast energy resources in the region.

The topics of the dialogue include discussion facilitating development of grid connectivity and gas pipeline in the region, universal access to commercial energy, and development of hydro-potential in the region.

Senior officials, experts and academics of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and host India are taking part in the dialogue. Afghanistan, which has been co-opted as member of the Saarc, will also be represented at the conference, says an official release.

Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh proposed a South Asia Energy Dialogue at the 13th Saarc Summit in Dhaka in November 2005.

It is in this context that the dialogue is being convened here to promote various non-conventional sources of energy, needed for fuelling higher economic growth in the member-countries.

Indian Power Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde will inaugurate the Dialogue, being jointly hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Power.

The Energy and Resources institute has been associated for preparing basic papers on the subject.

Shameem Osman's associate dies in custody

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'gari

A close associate of Awami League (AL) leader Shameem Osman died in custody yesterday evening.

The dead identified as Sajedul Islam Saju, 30, a Jubo League cadre, was arrested on Saturday evening from his house.

Saju, a cadre of top criminal Nurul Amin Maksud, was also a bodyguard of former AL lawmaker Shameem Osman during the last AL regime and he was wanted in many cases, including Anu and Bhulu murder cases.

Saju became sick after law enforcers along with Saju had launched several drives at different places, said Fautullah army camp chief Lieutenant Colonel Abu Ohab Mohammad Hafizul Haq.

Saju admitted to Narayanganj General Hospital at 4:10pm and on-duty doctors declared him dead at 4:35pm, hospital sources said.

Family members alleged that Saju died due to torture by the law enforcers which army officers denied saying he died due to a cardiac arrest.

London unit of Nagarik Shakti holds meeting

BSS, London

London unit of Nagarik Shakti (NS) organised its first meeting here on Saturday at a newspaper office.

Convener of the NS unit Matiar Rahman presided over the meeting. Convener of the United Kingdom unit of Gono Shakti Giasuddin, Sarwar Morshed, Syed Tanvir Ahmed, Councilor Ayesha Chowdhury, Editor of the Bangla Mirror Abdul Karim Gani and Barrister Arman spoke at the meeting.

Speakers urged the people to make hands of Dr Mohammad Yunus strong for the advancement of the country. They also decided to form committees in each town of the UK.

Library to be set up at villages of language martyrs, Bir Shreshthas

UNB, Dhaka

The caretaker government has decided to set up a library-cum-museum at every village of language movement martyrs and Bir Shreshthas of the liberation war to keep their memories alive.

The government will provide adequate books and required furniture for each of the library-cum-museums.

A meeting in this regard was held at the Local Government Division with LGRD and Labour and Employment Adviser Manwarul Iqbal in the chair.

The meeting reviewed the design of the proposed library-cum-museum and approved it with some changes.

It also decided to allocate necessary funds before the Independence Day on March 26 to start the construction work on the libraries.



PHOTO: STAR

Workers of Apparel Craft stage a demonstration blocking the road in front of Titumir College at Mohakhali in the city yesterday demanding payment of their wages and arrears.

Mushroom growth of substandard coaching centres in Rajshahi

UNB, Rajshahi

The students of secondary and higher secondary levels are increasingly being dependent on the substandard coaching centres in the city and other parts of the district due to lack of proper classroom teaching.

Guardians alleged that most of the teachers of the schools, colleges and madrassahs are irregular in taking classes forcing the students to get admitted into coaching centres for their personal benefit.

They said the standard of education has deteriorated greatly as the teachers are not sincere in classroom teaching. They also said coaching centres that have been mushroomed in various parts of the district mostly lack quality teachings.

Taking the advantage of the situation prevailing in most of the educational institutions, owners of these coaching centres are making a windfall profit by admitting the students promising good results.

Visiting the city areas this correspondent found 15 coaching centres in dilapidated condition. Students of these coaching centres alleged that using the name of the eminent teachers of the renowned schools and colleges the authorities of these centres admitted them. But now they found that in most cases college students are teaching them.

They said these coaching centres announce various attractive offers to raise the number of students. The offers include free coaching of meritorious students who stood first in the annual examinations.

Guardians and local people urged the authorities to look into the matter and take necessary measures in this regard.

Rajshahi sweepers lack civic amenities

RU CORRESPONDENT

The sweeper community of Rajshahi are leading a substandard and inhuman life without the least civic amenities.

Around 1,500 people are living at Harijon Palli at Hatemkhan in the heart of the city, a piece of land where almost all the huts look shabby.

No major development works have been done in the recent past in the colony that was established during the British regime.

Political leaders and NGO workers visit the place like migratory birds only before the election and make a thousand empty promises. However, they don't even think of visiting the place before another election seems inevitable, lamented Bikash and Bipul, two young sweepers of the locality.

The streets and lanes were damaged for want of renovation for years while they have no other alternatives apart from using the polluted water of the only pond for daily usage.

Despite repeated appeals to Rajshahi City Corporation and local ward commissioners, the community are yet to get the least development, alleged Ranak Roy and Kiron Data, also young sweepers.

Most of the youths of this underprivileged community are unemployed, although many of them are educated.

Only 16 unhygienic toilets are available in the colony for about 1,600 people, they alleged adding that four of them are totally unusable.

They drink water supplied by the corporation but the pipes bear a lot of leakages in different places.

The only primary school for the community is seen almost empty

with few teachers and students while the families are too reluctant to send their dependents to the school. Rather the parents opt for engaging their children in their ancestral profession, sweeping.

Only the teachers who have been penalised for their misdeeds are usually sent to this school for teaching the children of the sweeper community.

Besides, the mainstream school authorities are reluctant to admit the students of the sweeper community, as they are from the lower cast, alleged Shuvom Chatterjee, president of Rajshahi Underprivileged Children's Council.

Bhola Kumar, a sweeper of the colony, said the rainy season causes them untold sufferings as rain pours in through the shabby and old iron sheets.

The residents of the colony alleged city Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu and ward commissioners only assured them of distributing test relief and rehabilitation of their families but their words were never translated into actions.

Bilkis Banu, commissioner of ward-11, expressed her anguish as she failed to change the living standard of the community.

After being elected in 2003, the corporation only allocated her some rice and dates for distributing among the distressed people, she added.

People of this deprived community urged the government to ensure their rehabilitation and the least amenities. They also demanded distribution of the reliefs that have been recovered from the houses and offices of the political leaders.



The ancestral home of Sergeant Zahurul Haque at Noakhali recently received an eviction notice from the district administration terming it an illegal structure.

Fair to create awareness about gender issue begins tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Gender and Development Communication Fair, first of its kind in the country, will begin in the city tomorrow.

Steps Towards Development (Steps), an NGO that promotes gender equality, human rights and good governance, has taken the initiative to popularise some seven different forms of communication as effective means to raise awareness about gender issue among people.

The three-day fair will be held at Chhayanaut Sangskriti Bhavan in Dhanmondi featuring painting exhibition on violence against women, rickshaw painting on gender equity, slide show on child rights, and pot painting on women's contribution to communication.

A total of 42 organisations including Acid Survivors Foundation, Action Aid Bangladesh, Asia Foundation, Hunger Project Bangladesh, Brac, D-Net, Unicef, Women for Women, Nari Pakkha and Democracy Watch will take part in the fair.

Ambassador of Sweden Britt F Hagstrom will inaugurate the fair in the afternoon.

At a press conference at its office in the city yesterday Steps Executive Director Ranjan Karmakar explained the objective of the fair and said there are not enough materials to sensitising gender issues among people.

But there are various traditional cultural practice and entertainment work like pot painting for example through which contribution of women to the development of the nation can easily be highlighted, he said.

"Not necessarily the sophisticated means of communication including documentary and reporting always work, but some unusual materials like 'rickshaw painting' might be an effective way to disseminate the message in the society," he added.

Country's leading intellectuals, cultural personalities and rights activists are expected to attend the fair aimed to help bring social change through various forms of social communication.

Shahin Rahman, director of Gender and Development Communication Centre, Shabnam Ferdousi, senior programme officer, Naznin Akhter Shifa, advocacy officer and Manan Morshed, publication officer of Steps were present at the press conference.

Notice to evict Sgt Zahurul Haque's ancestral home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noakhali district administration has issued a notice of eviction terming the ancestral home of Shaheed Sergeant Zahurul Haque as illegal structure.

Members of Zahurul's family in a press release said the eviction notice, issued on February 25, ordered them to vacate the 76-year old historical residence at Sonapur village under Sudharam upazila of the district where the grave of Zahurul's mother is situated.

The press release claimed that Zahurul's grandfather Quazi Serajul Haque constructed the house after taking a lease from the District Board in 1930.

He was the honorary magistrate of the district and founding professor of Barisal BM College at that time.

Upon a writ petition filed by the members of Zahurul's family, a higher court has granted stay order against the eviction notice for three months.

The court also served a show cause notice on the authorities concerned to explain the reason for the move within a week.

The family members of Zahurul are now deeply concerned over the future of the house and urged the

caretaker government to take effective steps against the illegal move, the release added.

Six PBCP cadres arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police arrested six cadres of Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) from Bagmara upazila early yesterday.

The arrested are Hekmat Ali, 46, Sazzad Hossain, 38, Abdul Hannan and Abdus Sattar of Hamirkutsa, Muhammad Ali, 40 of Rayapara and Hossain Ali, 37 of Konabaria villages.

The police said the arrestees are listed PBCP members.

College Physicians, Surgeons executives

Dr Md Abdul Mobin Khan, Dr Quazi Deen Mohammad and Dr MA Majid have been unanimously elected president, senior vice-president and vice-president of the executive committee of the Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons, says a press release.

Other office bearers are Dr Md Abul Kashem Khandaker, treasurer, and members Dr Md Abdul Hadi and Dr AHM Towhidul Anwar Chowdhury.

WEATHER TODAY

Rise in temperature likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may rise slightly over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 30.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sylhet and Rangamati and lowest 12.4 degree Celsius at Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:03pm today and rises at 6:17am 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	27.8	16.9	58	43
Chittagong	28.8	17.6	57	58
Rajshahi	28.0	14.4	70	55
Khulna	27.5	15.8	76	60
Barisal	28.5	14.5	65	53
Sylhet	30.0	15.1	61	46
Cox's Bazar	29.5	19.8	57	50

JMB militant handed 40yrs behind bars

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chittagong court yesterday sentenced a cadre of the outlawed militant group Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to 40 years imprisonment.

The court of Third Additional Metropolitan Session's Judge HLA Mong in the verdict of an arms case awarded the punishment to Laltu alias Anam.

The court heard the testimony of eight witnesses during the trial before handing down the verdict.

Laltu was arrested on October 3, 2005 at the Chittagong Court premises immediately after a bomb exploded at the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Akram Hossain.

Following his confession, a team of Detective Branch of Police raided Colonel Haat area of Kattali under Pahartali Police Station and recovered a locally made gun and two cartridges on October 4, 2005.

An arms case was filed with the concerned Pahartali Police Station later on and the charge sheet of the case was submitted on October 14, 2005.

After hearing the verdict, the convict in his reaction said he does not recognise the judgment, as it was not given according to the teachings of the holy Quran and Sunnah.

Desco to supply electricity to Tongi

BSS, Dhaka

The Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa) yesterday handed over the electric supply authority of Tongi area to the Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd (Desco).

An agreement was signed in this connection at a ceremony in presence of Adviser for Energy, Power and Mineral Resources Tapan Chowdhury. Secretary of the Desa Rafiul Alam and Secretary of the Desco AHM Nurul Huda signed the accord, an official press release said.

The Desa has handed over the electric supply management in Tongi area to the Desco for ensuring better services to subscribers and meeting the growing demand for the electricity.

The agreement signing ceremony was also attended by Secretary of the Power Division AKM Zafrullah Khan, Desa Chairman Brigadier General Nazrul Hasan and Desco Managing Director Saleh Ahmed, among others.

There are 40,000 subscribers of the Desa in Tongi area. Three 33/11 KV sub-stations, one switching station, one distribution lines and other power infrastructures of the Desa were handed over to the Desco, the press release said.

Obituary

BSS, Dhaka

ErsHADur Rahman, a former zonal chairman of Lions Club 315/B and former director of Comilla Cooperatives Bank, passed away due to a massive heart attack at Comilla Medical Centre on Saturday at the age of 59.

He left behind his wife, mother and two sons to mourn his death.

A doa mahfil will be held after Asr prayers tomorrow at Bara Shalghar village mosque for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

His kulkhwani will be held after Asr prayers on Friday (March 9) at his residence at House No. 15, Section No. 4, Block-H at Comilla Nurpur Housing.

Mir Mobarak Hossain



Mir Mobarak Hossain, former official of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB), passed away due to kidney disease on Saturday at the age of 73, says a press release.

He was buried at Azimpur graveyard after Zohr prayers yesterday.

Hailing from Kashba village of Munshiganj, Mobarak was an athlete and played for Dhaka Mohammedan Sporting Club in early 50s.

He left behind his wife and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

His kulkhwani will be held at his residence at Shiddheshwari after Asr prayers on Tuesday.

DHAKA TODAY

Prize giving ceremony

The prize giving ceremony of Birshreshtha Munshi Abdur Rauf Rifles