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No poll in next 18 months

CEC says voter list, national ID cards to be prepared during this time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said the Election Commission (EC) will not think about holding any elections either to parliament or local government bodies in next one and a half years.

"During this time, we will simultaneously prepare a voter list with photographs and national identity cards. Once the massive task is done, we will think about holding elections. But now we cannot give any timeline when the elections are likely to be held," the CEC told a press briefing.

When the electoral roll is prepared, there would be a lot of other tasks to be done. The government will have to create a congenial atmosphere for elections, he said.

"So, we cannot say that parlia-

mentary elections will be held just after 18 months. We will be ready for elections after 18 months if everything goes smoothly."

Facing a volley of questions about a tentative timeframe for holding the stalled ninth parliamentary elections, which was earlier scheduled for January 22, the CEC said it is not possible now to specify

any timeline for holding the ninth parliamentary polls.

He also disclosed a set of proposals for electoral reforms at the briefing.

"There are now so many uncertainties before us about preparation of voter list correctly. After next six to nine months, we can give a clear picture about the planned task. And

now I do not dare to speak about any timeline for elections," said Shamsul Huda, who was appointed CEC on February 4 following resignation of his controversial predecessor MA Aziz.

In reply to a question, he said, "There is no scope to expedite our plan. This is the minimum time (18 months) subject to fulfilment of several conditions."

In defence of the EC plan, the CEC said they are working in the interest of the nation and the country. "We joined our posts not to hold parliamentary election as was usually held. And it needs resolution of matters concerning the arrested corrupt. There will be no point in holding election if they come back in the polls process."

He believes that political parties will not oppose the EC plan that is

SEE PAGE 19 COL 1

Poll reform proposals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday formally unveiled a set of proposals for electoral reforms that include making public the statements to be submitted by the parliamentary election candidates.

If anyone is found to have concealed facts, the commission will recommend cancellation of their membership in parliament.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 7



PHOTO: STAR

The nearly completed courtroom at the old MP Hostel in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex. The courtroom is being prepared for proceedings of graft cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 5

Shops allowed to be open 7 days a week

UNB, Dhaka

Shop owners across the country now can keep their shops open all the seven days of the week to recoup losses being incurred following the government decision on closure in the evening to save electricity.

The decision was taken in a meeting between LGRD and Cooperatives Adviser Anwarul Iqbal and the leaders of the Shop Owners Association in the ministry's conference room yesterday.

It was decided in the meeting that shop employees would be given necessary allowances and facilities under the Labour Law 2006 for their overtime work.

The meeting also decided to readjust the matter of arranging hawkers market (holiday market) at some places in the capital in the wake of keeping the shops open all the seven days of the week.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 5

Elections only after necessary reforms

CA tells Boucher govt fully accountable under gaze of free media

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN, New Delhi

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday told US Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher that for a credible election it is necessary to have the electoral reforms, including the anti-corruption drive to eliminate influence of money and muscle in election.

The US assistant secretary of state for south and central Asian affairs, who called on Fakhruddin in New Delhi yesterday, asked the chief adviser when the elections might be held. He also reiterated Washington's full support to the ongoing reforms in Bangladesh.

Fakhruddin said the reform process is fully transparent and the government is fully accountable under the gaze of a "free media".

He apprised Boucher of his government's commitment to hold free, fair and acceptable elections only after implementing necessary electoral reforms, chief adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim told The Daily Star over telephone yesterday.

Fakhruddin also met with Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala yesterday and asked Nepal to take advantage of the Mongla Port and the improved infrastructure in Bangladesh.

Fakhruddin's meeting with Boucher--his highest-level contact with the US government until now--took place at the end of the 14th Saarc Summit in New Delhi.

Chief adviser's Press Secretary Fahim Munaim said Fakhruddin told Boucher that the people of Bangladesh do not want to return to its chaotic days and the government is trying to meet a variety of demands from the previously disenfranchised sections.

Boucher told the chief adviser that the US is very supportive and will continue to support the steps the Bangladesh government is

SEE PAGE 19 COL 3

ACID BRUTALITY ON 49-DAY BABY Finding words to a pulverised mouth

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Little Durjoy can now say 'amma' (mother).

Uttering this simple word by this twenty-eight-month-old boy could be considered a miracle since acid was poured down his throat when he was only 49 days of age!

Though his speech is still blurry, he can pronounce a few other words too.

Success story of this young boy was presented yesterday by Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) at its seminar room in the capital where Durjoy along with his parents appeared before journalists after his return from Prince of Wales Hospital in Hong Kong.

This time, less external deformity caused by acid burn was visible on Durjoy's body.

His oral cavity--which was almost melted--as well as his neck and chest were reconstructed through two complicated surgeries in the hospital, said Dr. Rebecca Milton, Manager of ASF Medical Unit.

On January 19, 2004, at remote village Azmirpur of Bagharpura upazila in Jessor, 49-day-old Durjoy's aunt allegedly fed him acid.

After Durjoy received treatment in Jessor, Khulna and at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for



Durjoy, an acid crime survivor, on his mother's lap at a press conference at the Acid Survivors Foundation office in the capital yesterday.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 2

SEE PAGE 19 COL 4

Convicted killer of Ahsanullah Master held

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday arrested Hafiz alias 'Kana' Hafiz, who was sentenced to death in Awami League (AL) leader Ahsanullah Master killing case, in the city's Khilgaon area yesterday.

Rab sources said 'Kana' Hafiz was wanted in nine cases filed against him with Tongi Police Station. A total of 14 people, including Hafiz, were awarded death penalty by the Special Tribunal, Dhaka, in Ahsanullah Master murder case.

The AL leader was shot dead by the assailants near his residence at Tongi on May 7, 2004.

The March 21 amendment suspended bails under the Arms Act, Foreign Regulation Act and Explosive Substances Act.

The amendment added Penal Code to the three acts and renamed Foreign Regulation Act as Foreign Exchange Regulation Act.

Following this amendment, bails in cases under all the 511 sections of Penal Code, which include cases for

petty crimes for which maximum punishment is one month's jail, are suspended.

Most of the arrestees under bailable charges of the Penal Code are deprived of getting bails following this amendment, sources mentioned.

"Eighty percent of the cases filed with different police stations in the city and district (Dhaka) every day are under the Penal Code," said a senior official in a court.

On March 21, the government amended the rules under Emergency Powers Ordinance 2007, suspending the rights to appeal for bail and seek redress from any higher court until a case is

resolved in a trial court.

After receipt of the gazette containing the amendment, all the courts in the capital including the District and Sessions Judge's Court, Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court and District Magistrate's Court stopped hearing the bail petitions.

Sources in the courts said hearings on at least 500 bail petitions are being held back every day, resulting in a massive backlog of cases.

In such a situation, Law Adviser Mainul Hosein recently said the third amendment relating to granting or rejection of bail prayer of any

SEE PAGE 19 COL 6

CHANGE IN EMERGENCY POWER RULES

No hearing on bail prayers in 10 days

CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER

Hearings on the bail petitions of cases filed under various acts were not held in Dhaka courts in the last 10 days following a second amendment to the emergency power rules curbing bail right.

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The amendment added Penal Code to the three acts and renamed Foreign Regulation Act as Foreign Exchange Regulation Act.

Following this amendment, bails in cases under all the 511 sections of Penal Code, which include cases for

ably backed by the armed forces.

Coming from the head of the army has given rise to the question as to whether there are differences of views between the government and its most important backer. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the Chief Advisor was away attending his first summit as the head of the government when the speech was made. Imagine his discomfiture when such a fundamental policy speech is made about the future structure of the government without him being anywhere near the picture. How much credibility is he likely to enjoy under these circumstances? How seriously will he take

SEE PAGE 19 COL 4

Commentary

GEN MOEEN GOES PUBLIC ON POLITICS

How can national interest be served best?

MAHFUZ ANAM

Now that the Chief of Army Staff (CAS), Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed has decided to go public on political issues he must be ready, willing and open to public debate on them including criticism of his views, if any.

To start with, should a sitting CAS speak in public and in presence of the President on the political future of a country? Such speech making will naturally raise questions as to whether or not the chief or his institution plans to get involved in the country's politics? When such comments touch even the structure of the future government and the power balance between the

President, the Prime Minister and the cabinet, then the question in the public mind acquires more poignancy. So what do we make of the General's speech? Was it a mere intellectual exercise? Or a purposeful floating of ideas to gauge public reaction? On both counts there should be wide ranging discussions, in fact public debate, on the very important questions that he has thrown open.

As to the timing, we feel that such a policy speech on the future direction of the country, its politics, its government, its political parties and several vital related issues should have come, as a part of the reform agenda, from the head of the caretaker government which is being

SEE PAGE 19 COL 4



Tarique Rahman sitting inside the prison van in front of the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in Dhaka yesterday.

ACC sues Harris Chy, Mamun Arrest warrants issued

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued arrest warrants against Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia, and controversial businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun following two cases filed against them.

Metropolitan Sessions Judge Momin Ullah issued the order when two officials of the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) filed separate cases yesterday seeking arrest warrants against them for not submitting their wealth statements to the commission within the stipulated time.

ACC Deputy Director Abu Sayeed filed the case against Harris while the commission's Assistant Director SMM Akther Hamid Bhuiyan lodged the case against Mamun.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 3

SEE PAGE 19