

First polls with new voter list in RCC: CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said the first poll with the new voter list would be held in Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) in January.

"We have a plan to hold RCC election at first in January. It will be an experiment. We want to see how the new voter list works," the CEC said.

He was talking to newsmen after visiting several voter registration centers in Rajshahi.

The CEC said the countrywide voter listing would start in October if all equipment are available in time.

He urged the people to enroll names in due time saying, "At the moment, we are requesting you, but if you do not do so, you will suffer a lot in future as you will be

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No room for confusion over polls by Dec 2008

Says chief adviser

UNB, Rajshahi

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said there is no room for confusion over holding the parliamentary elections by December 2008.

He said the caretaker government has been carrying out relentless efforts since assuming office seven months ago to arrange a free, fair and acceptable general election.

He hoped that the Election Commission (EC) would be able to accomplish the task by preparing the voter list according to its roadmap for holding the election in

time.

Inaugurating the voter listing work with photos and national ID cards at Rajshahi Medical College auditorium in the morning, the CA urged the citizens to go to registration centers to become voters and cast their votes to make the country's democratic future stronger.

Termining the beginning of the voter list preparation work a milestone in the forward march of the country's democratic process, he said a flawless voter list is a prerequisite to holding a fair, neutral and acceptable election.

"The procedure now being followed to make the voter list must

be easier to update the voter list every year, which will reduce debates on the electoral roll not only in the next election, but also in all future elections.

The CA said the Election Commission will start preparing the electoral roll in Khulna City Corporation and nine municipalities this month and across the country later on.

He said the important role being played by army and armed forces in voter listing will be written in golden letters in the nation's history of democracy.

Chief Election Commissioner
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Nation today mourns for Bangabandhu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a call for officially recognising Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the father of the nation, Bangladesh will observe today the 32nd death anniversary of the

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Banks asked to cut interest on essential import loans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The central bank yesterday directed all the banks to slash interest rates temporarily to 12 percent on loans for importing essential food items to rein in spiralling inflation and prices of essentials.

Meanwhile, the agriculture ministry yesterday decided to provide fertilisers and seeds to seven lakh flood-affected farmers for free to help them recover the loss wrought by recent floods.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday issued a directive to all the banks to cut down interest rates temporarily on loans for importing rice, wheat, sugar, edible oil (both crude and refined), chickpeas, beans, lentils, onions, spices and dates.

The ceiling for interest rate on loans for importing these food items was 16 percent, which has been reduced to 12 percent.

Bangladesh Bank has pegged the interest rate for the first time since 1997 when they liberalised the financial sector.

"The internal production capacity has been severely damaged by recent floods while prices in international market have also gone up significantly. Because of the two reasons we are witnessing a rise in prices of essentials in the local market," stated a BB circular sent to the banks.

It also added that the central bank has taken the decision to cut interest rates to "ensure adequate supply of commodities and reduce rising prices."

Agrani Bank Managing Director Syed Abu Naser Bakhtiar Ahmed said, "The middle-men and traders will receive benefits from this interest cut, not the consumers."

"But, since Bangladesh Bank has given us this directive, we will reduce our interest rates on loans for importing those products," he said.

"This will make things difficult for us, because we cannot determine interest rates according to their risk evaluation," he added.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) president Mir Nasir Hossain said the interest rate cut might have a positive impact if prices in international market do not increase further.

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Trim long-term state welfare programmes to help the poor

Says Dr Yunus

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus yesterday urged governments to provide greater loan access for the poor instead of state welfare programmes that do little to solve their predicament.

"All over the world there are so many welfare programmes. But if one monitors these welfare programmes properly, then they will see it never really helps the poor," said Dr Yunus, known as Bangladesh's "banker to the poor."

"Instead, these programmes actually keep them in the position they are today and just let them barely survive," said Dr Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank that provides micro-lending to the poor.

He said about two-thirds of the world's population were not eligible for any kind of loans and are highly dependent on state welfare.

"I strongly believe that welfare programmes should only be for short terms and help the poor to come out

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Nagging traffic jam is usual on busy Dhaka-Tongi road in Uttara area as damage of the road on one side has narrowed it to about half with authorities turning a blind eye.

PHOTO: STAR

Voter list, NID scheme to cost Tk 580cr

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) has readied a Tk 580 crore project for preparing the electoral roll with photographs along with national identity (NID) cards.

The project, launched this year and to be completed in 2010, still needs the approval of the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) -- the highest government body that examines, appraises and gives final approval to all development projects and programmes of the country, sources in the EC Secretariat said.

Besides, the EC Secretariat is making preparations to sign agreements with different donor agencies for financial assistance in the project titled "Preparation of Electoral Rolls with Photographs and Facilitating the Issuance of National Identity Card", added the sources.

"We are hopeful to complete the process of signing agreements with

the donors this month," said Aminul Islam Bhuiyan, secretary to the Economic Relations Division (ERD) that initiated the move to collect foreign funds for the project, while talking to The Daily Star.

According to a document prepared by the EC Secretariat and the officials of planning ministry for a meeting of the EC, the government will finance about Tk 236 crore for the project while various donor agencies will provide Tk 344 crore.

At a meeting last May with the ERD, as many as 23 donor agencies including United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Commission, and Department For International Development (DFID) agreed to provide funds for the EC project.

The EC, however, has already started the process of purchasing necessary equipment for preparing the electoral roll on an emergency basis since it intends to complete

the task within the 18-month timeframe it had announced earlier, reads the EC's document mentioning that the project proposal is now at the planning ministry and it will be placed before the ECNEC for final approval.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday formally inaugurated EC's preparation of electoral roll in Rajshahi City Corporation area.

The task is supposed to be completed by October next year when only eligible voters will receive the NID cards to be able to vote in the elections scheduled for December 2008.

Once the project is approved by ECNEC, it will be continued till 2010 so that NID cards can be issued to the citizens ineligible to be voters in 2008. Also under the same project, the EC will update

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Emergency Power Rules challenged in court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A BNP activist from Natore yesterday filed a writ petition with the High Court (HC) challenging some sections of the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

Abdul Quddus Mandol, who claimed himself to be a BNP activist, said an extortion case was filed against him in April this year under the EPR, but the incident described in the case occurred months before the declaration of the state of emergency.

Mandol in his petition challenged the legality of the government move to put the case against him under the EPR, which was formulated under the Emergency Power Ordinance promulgated after the declaration of the state of emergency in January.

After hearing the petition, an HC bench comprising justices Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury asked the petitioner's counsel to inform the court in specific where the EPR has been misused and the constitutional provision has been violated.

Barrister Rafique-ul Huq and Barrister Azmalul Hossain moved

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Nadim Mostafa gets 10-yr in jail for felony

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A Rajshahi court yesterday sentenced former BNP lawmaker Nadim Mostafa and 14 others to 10 years rigorous imprisonment in two separate cases of extortion and criminal activities during union parishad (UP) election, 2003 in Durgapur upazila.

However, the convicts would actually serve only seven years in jail as the second court of Additional Sessions Judge Rejaul Islam ordered simultaneous execution of two sentences. All the 15 convicted were also fined Tk 13,000 each, in default they would have to suffer 18 months more in jail.

The judge in the extortion case sentenced them to seven years in jail and fined them Tk 10,000 in default they would have to serve 12 months more in jail.

In the case filed in connection with criminal activities, the judge sentenced them to three years imprisonment and fined them Tk 3,000 in default they would have to serve six more months in prison.

The judge, however, acquitted two of the 17 accused in the cases.

Nadim Mostafa and 11 other convicted have been absconding since the state of emergency was proclaimed earlier this year.

Durgapur Municipality Chairman and local BNP Secretary Saidur Rahman Mantu, BNP adherents Babul of Maria, Ansar of Shahbajpur, and two accused later acquitted--were in the dock during the delivery of the verdict.

Other convicts are Mominur Rahman, Enamul Haq, Shahin, Tuhin, Abu Bakkar, Nazim Uddin, Malek, Labu, Chanchal, Huda and Zaker.

Sekander Ali lodged the case with Durgapur Police Station on April 24 accusing 20 people. Sub-inspector Golam Mohammad of Durgapur Police Station submitted the charge sheet against 17 people on May 18.

The court heard the accounts of 17 witnesses till August 8 when arguments between the prosecution and defence lawyers concluded.

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BNP always will stand beside people in distress

Khaleda in teleconference
OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said her party will always stand beside the people of the country in their distress as it did before.

"The government did not allow me to visit you," she told flood-affected people of Narayanganj during a teleconference.

"Pray for me so that I can stand beside you at bad times...I have sent my party leaders to help you," she said at the teleconference at the home of party's district unit office secretary Zannatul Ferdous.

Brig Gen (ret) Hannan Shah distributed relief materials among the flood victims at different places in the district on behalf of the BNP chairperson.

While talking to the media, Hannan alleged that the government and the administration are not following the same principles.

Erratum

In the "Independence Day of Pakistan" special supplement published yesterday the following words "see what you're getting into... before you go there" inadvertently crept in due to computer error at the bottom of the High Commissioner's message. We regret this mistake and apologise to our readers.

ALEEM JUTE MILLS 800 workers apply for voluntary retirement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

State-owned Aleem Jute Mills Ltd in Agra industrial belt of Khulna is on the verge of closure as almost all of its workers applied for voluntary retirement with immediate effect.

The applicants -- 801 workers, 50 employees and 6 officials -- turned in their retirement applications to the project director at 8:30pm on Monday. The jute mill had 812 workers, 57 employees and 20 officials.

Apprehension about closure of the mill played a role in the mass retirement decision to take

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ACC probing Khaleda's wealth statement

Inquiry into Tarique's completed

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has started investigating the wealth statement of former prime minister Khaleda Zia and completed inquiry into the wealth of her son Tarique Rahman.

"As far as I know, the inquiry (into Khaleda's wealth) has begun...According to the rules, there'll be an inquiry for a month," ACC Secretary Mokhles ur Rahman told reporters at his office yesterday

afternoon.

Khaleda submitted her wealth statement on August 6 in compliance with the ACC directive.

About the inquiry into the wealth statement submitted by BNP Senior Joint Secretary Tarique Rahman, the ACC secretary said the inquiry has been completed and it is under the process of vetting. "A case will be filed after the approval of the commission."

Meanwhile, a competent source told the news agency that ACC

Deputy Director Jahirul Huda submitted the inquiry report on Tarique on July 25, but the commission is yet to take any decision.

The ACC secretary said it takes one month for inquiry and if there is a considerable gap between the information provided by the corruption suspect and the ones obtained by the ACC, investigations would go on for two months. After three months, a case will become ready for trial, subject to

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Ex-MP Abu Hena sued for extortion

STAR REPORT

A fresh lawsuit was filed against former BNP lawmaker Abu Hena yesterday on charge of extortion.

Ashraful Israil, a BNP activist of Suryapara village in Bagmara upazila filed the case with a Rajshahi Metropolitan Magistrate court against three persons including the former BNP lawmaker.

The other accused are BNP activists DM Fazlur Rahman and Asgor Ali.

Rajshahi Metropolitan magistrate Sayed Rabiul Alam recorded the statement of the plaintiff and

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SC rejects govt plea for stay on Hasina's bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday rejected government prayers for staying the High Court's (HC) August 7 interim orders granting bail to Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina in an extortion case filed by businessmen Noor Ali, and staying operation of the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) order to Hasina for submitting her wealth statement.

The six-member full bench of Appellate Division of the SC headed by Chief Justice Mohammad Ruhul Amin yesterday turned down government pleas for stay in the two cases and directed it to file by today regular appeals against the HC orders. The SC also fixed tomorrow for hearing on those.

Earlier this month, the SC had stayed till yesterday (August 14) the

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FIRE INCIDENT Ten staffs of Ghorashal urea factory suspended

UNB, Narsingdi

Ten officials and employees of Ghorashal Fertiliser Factory were suspended yesterday for their negligence of duties during a fire broke out in the factory on August 12.

The suspended officials and employees are General Manager (Operation) Abu Jamal Sarker, Chief Chemist Abdus Samad, Chemist Matiur Rahman, Deputy Joint Chemist Sukumar Pal, production assistant Zakir Hossain, operators Jasimuddin and Zakir Hossain, and master operators Harun-or-Rashid, Shafiqul Islam

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