

Emergency should be lifted 2 months before local body polls: CEC

UNB, Dhaka

Emergency should be lifted at least two months before the polls from places where election will be held, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said yesterday.

EC has proposed for holding election to the city corporations where it is due from early next year. Huda said emergency is required to be lifted from areas where local body election will be held to facilitate the electoral campaign by the candidates.

"What I visualise that I don't expect much that the government will lift emergency from across the country," Huda told reporters when asked to clarify his earlier statement that emergency should continue until the general election.

He said the election will be scheduled in way keeping more

MONEY LAUNDERED BY TOP GRAFT SUSPECTS Govt mulls treaty with UK to get back money

EMRAN HOSSAIN

In an effort to recover the money siphoned offshore from the country, the interim government is planning to sign a treaty with the British government for getting assistance from New Scotland Yard.

Popularly known as The Yard, the British law enforcing agency is responsible for policing the Greater London area as well as for helping other countries in investigating criminal offences.

Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) Secretary Mukles Ur Rahman yesterday told the Daily Star about the plan.

"We are working to strike a deal with the Scotland Yard for recovering the money smuggled off from

the country," said the ACC secretary adding that an agreement must be signed between the two countries for the cooperation to take place.

The ACC secretary also said before signing the treaty the Bangladesh government needs to promulgate some laws giving the specific bilateral relation legality for getting regular assistance in the future.

"A dialogue is on regarding various strategic issues as the matter is between two states. It is also necessary to give the effort legality to yield long-term results from a treaty," said the ACC secretary.

A few weeks ago, while ACC Chairman Lt Gen (retd) Hasan

Mashud Chowdhury was visiting the Scotland Yard, the British law enforcement agency assured him of its assistance in recovering the money smuggled off from Bangladesh.

The idea of signing an agreement stemmed from the thought of giving a permanent shape to The Yard's assurance of giving occasional assistance to Bangladesh.

Since the drive against high profile corruption suspects had been initiated in February, the interim government repeatedly talked about recovering the huge amount of the money siphoned offshore over the years.

Replying to a question, the ACC secretary told The Daily Star, "I

SC now to hear Khaleda appeal Thursday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) chamber judge yesterday did not deliver any order following Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) appeal against the High Court (HC) decision of granting bail to Khaleda Zia in a graft case and fixed tomorrow for hearing of the matter in the full bench of the Appellate Division.

The ACC in its application sought stay order on the HC decision following a writ petition filed by the detained former prime minister and BNP chairperson challenging the legality of filing and continuing the graft case against her.

The SC chamber judge also fixed tomorrow for hearing of three other ACC applications seeking stay order on the HC decision of staying proceedings of the ACC graft cases against BNP leaders

Tarique Rahman, Moudud Ahmed

Power ministry power being decentralised

Bid to make 7 companies more dynamic

SHARIER KHAN

In an unusual move, the power ministry is curbing its control over seven power companies including the Dhaka Electricity Supply Company Ltd (Desco) to make these more dynamic and efficient.

This would mean the power secretary will no longer chair the boards of these companies. Besides, the ministry is working on some other changes to decentralise its power to make the companies more functional and responsible.

Though originally the power secretary was not supposed to head the companies, bureaucrats in the recent years increasingly took control of affairs of all the power service bodies for petty personal gains, sources said. These

bureaucrats also included their power in the legal framework to ensure absolute authority.

"The power sector has been almost crippled due to excessive centralisation of power in the ministry. How can the power companies (like Desco) can function when one person (power secretary) holds the chair of five companies?" said a top official of the ministry.

This is why the power ministry on July 3 initiated a decentralisation process amid resistance from a section of bureaucrats. The changes are expected to take place by December.

The official said that on July 3 the ministry initiated a proposal saying that the power secretary will no longer chair the boards of Power Grid Company of Bangladesh

(PGCB), Ashuganj Power Company, Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa), Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco), West Zone Power Distribution Company (WZPDCO), South Zone Power Distribution Company (SZPDC) and Electricity Generation Company of Bangladesh (EGCB). The ministry recommended that a secretary from any other ministry or a retired secretary or an eminent citizen could represent the government in the boards of these organisations.

The proposal further said that from now on, the power division would not be a party to decisions of each of these companies. Representatives of shareholders of the companies will take decisions.

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UK foreign office director links fair polls with free politics

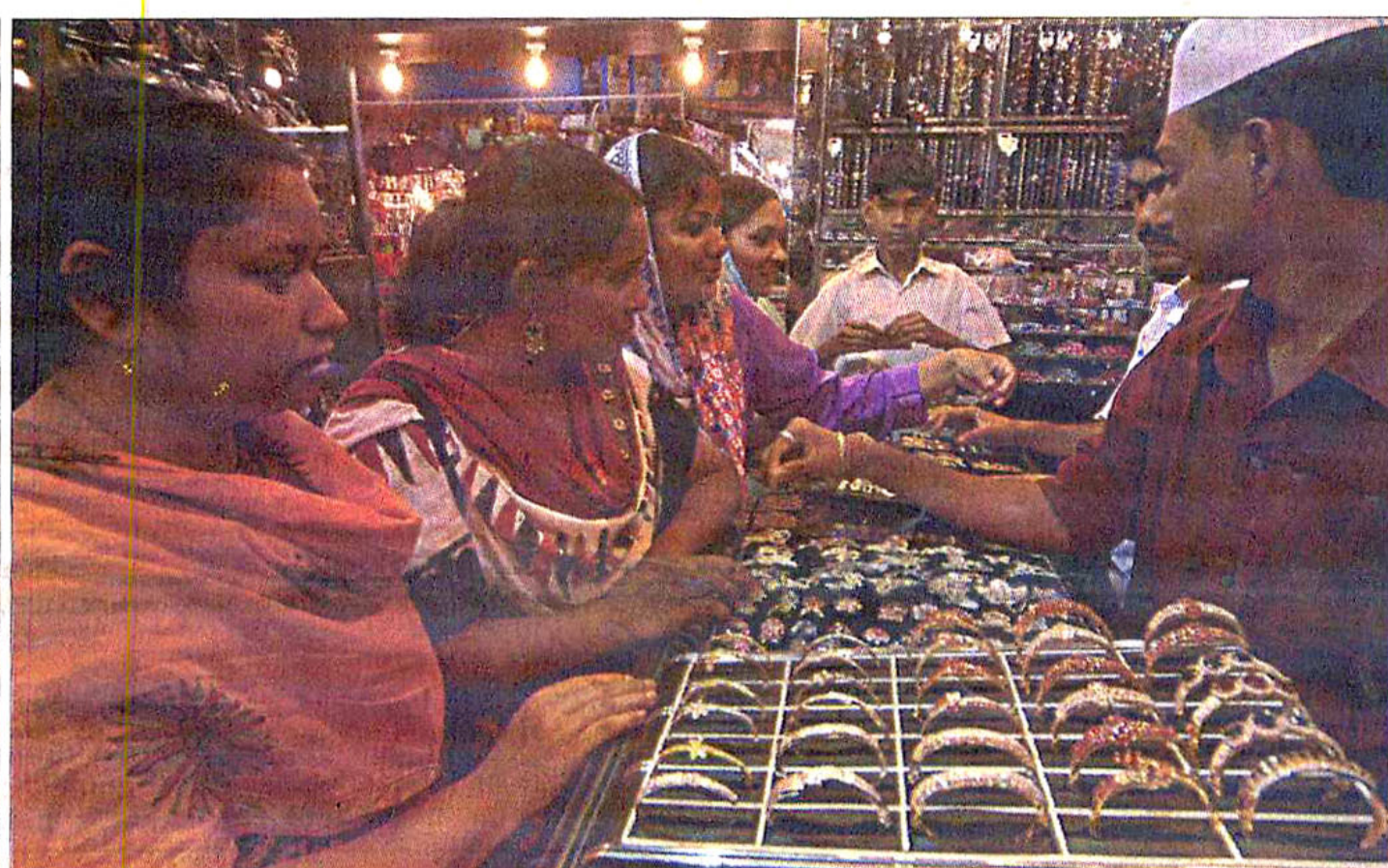
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting British Foreign Office Asia Director John Dennis yesterday said holding free, fair and credible elections requires an open and transparent environment, which the government can create through specific measures to remove restrictions on political activity.

"What is important is when the election takes place it should take place in open and transparent environment...It's a matter to be decided by the Bangladesh government and particular measures need to be taken by the government," Dennis said on the first day of his three-day visit.

The British Foreign Office director yesterday met Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain at the foreign ministry. After the meeting he told reporters that the lesser the restrictions on political activity, the more are the chances of holding the elections in fair and free environment.

"We hope as time goes on the government will do as much as possible to create the environment



Eid shoppers choosing imitation gold jewellery at a shopping arcade in the capital yesterday as gold price in the international market skyrocketed recently.

Ex-ISI chief appointed as Musharraf successor

Benazir may get graft amnesty; Pak opposition MPs formally resign over polls

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf yesterday appointed former intelligence chief Ashfaq Kiyani to be his successor as army chief, the military said.

Musharraf, a key US ally in the "war on terror", has said he will step down as head of the powerful army by November 15, provided that he is re-elected as president in a vote on Saturday.

"Lieutenant General Ashfaq Kiyani has been appointed the chief of army staff-designate," top military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad told AFP, without saying when he would take up the role.

In another development Pakistan's government said it will grant an amnesty to Benazir Bhutto on corruption charges, meeting one of the former premier's main demands for a power-sharing deal, a cabinet minister said yesterday.

Two-time prime minister

Benazir has vowed to return to Pakistan on October 18 after living in self-imposed exile in London and Dubai since 1999 because of the allegations against her.

"The government has agreed to grant an indemnity on cases against Benazir Bhutto," Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid, a close confidant of President Pervez Musharraf, told AFP.

Musharraf has been under growing international and domestic pressure to give up his military role, which he has kept since he grabbed power in a bloodless coup on October 12, 1999.

Opposition grew after Musharraf tried to sack the country's independent-minded chief justice in March, a move that sparked mass protests and growing anger against the army for its interference in politics.

But analysts say Musharraf was keen to appoint a loyalist as his army successor to ensure that he

himself does not fall victim to military intervention when he becomes a civilian leader.

Kiyani appears to fit the bill as a former head of the country's premier spy agency, Inter Services Intelligence, or ISI, which is engaged in the hunt for al-Qaeda militants as well as providing internal security.

He was replaced in that role on September 21 by Lieutenant General Naadeem Taj in a batch of promotions.

"President Musharraf has made a very correct choice as a successor in Kiyani," retired general-turned-political analyst Talat Masood told AFP.

"He will be a healer in the civil-military divide which exists today," Masood said.

"This will also help reduce the uncertainty surrounding Musharraf's announcement to shed his uniform and pacify those

Govt to buy SUVs for UNOs from Pragati

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The adviser committee on public purchase yesterday approved buying 150 brand-new sport-utility vehicles (SUVs) for the upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) through state-owned auto assembling plant Pragati Industries Ltd.

Presided over by Finance Adviser Mirza AB Azizul Islam, it also approved proposals for purchase of electricity from rental power plants and import of fertilizer and rice.

The government will buy the four-wheel drives, Mitsubishi Pajero, each for Tk 26 lakh from Pragati without any tender.

Replying to a query, the adviser said the public procurement regulations do not oblige the government to invite tender in the case of buying anything through its own entity.

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ZIA FERTILISER COMPANY Amonia pollution poses health risk in Ashuganj

SHEIKH MD SHAHIDUL ISLAM, Dhaka

Zia Fertiliser Company Limited (ZFCL) in Ashuganj is causing immense ammonia pollution, leaving at least 200 families of Chartala village and ecological balance of five other villages under serious threat.

The ammonia tank of the ZFCL is continuously emitting gas and badly polluting the environment. As a result, about 200 acres of surrounding crop land are losing fertility.

The affected villages are Chartala, Sharifpur, Shariannagr, Panchbhitha, Madhupur and Lalpur.

Villagers allege they cannot lead a normal life any more as the ZFCL tank is emitting excessive volume of gas every day. Most of them are suffering from suffocation ailments and respiratory and skin diseases.

Suffocation problem is severe in Chartala. When the level of gas emitting increases panicked villagers start fleeing in fear of suffocation and take shelter in a faraway place for fresh air.

MD Abbas Uddin has long been suffering from suffocation problem. He said sometimes situation becomes so worse that they fear they are going to die of suffocation. Amina Begum, who is suffering from skin diseases, said she recov-

ers whenever she goes to a distant village and stays there for some time.

Fishermen of the village said they often find dead fish floating in the water bodies around the ZFCL. They said no one has ever seen anything like this in the village before the launch of the ZFCL.

The farmers said at least 200 acres of land around the ZFCL are becoming sterile day by day, resulting in poor harvest. During dry season paddy does not grow well and its green plants turn to be yellowish. Trees face the same fate as shoots die and leaves fall prematurely.

Several housewives of Chartala

34 BNP-Jamaat men sued for JMB patronage

RU CORRESPONDENT

A case was filed in Rajshahi against 34 BNP and Jamaat leaders on Monday for torture and extortion and patronage of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) -- a banned Islamist outfit.

Ibrahim Ali of Kismat Bihanali village in Bagmara upazila lodged the case with a Rajshahi magistrate court, accusing, among others, Bagmara's Maria UP chairman and Jama'at leader Rezaul Karim Bacchhu and his predecessor and BNP leader Ismail Hossain.

The complainant in his case statement said the accused tried to pressurise him into joining the JMB and demanded Tk 1 lakh in toll for the terror outfit on December 14, 2006.

As he could not pay the money,

AUG 21 MASSACRE Given top priority, still probe didn't move an inch

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the present government soon after assuming power put the case of August 21, 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League (AL) rally on the top of its priority list, the investigation of it still remains at the startline.

The deadly grenade attack on the AL rally and party chief, Sheikh Hasina, which left 24 killed and over 300 maimed, apparently got lost from the government's radar, as the investigation of the case remains exactly where it had been

nine months ago.

Kaasar Ahmed Haydory, special superintendent of criminal investigation department (CID) who is now supervising the case, told The Daily Star yesterday that efforts are on to collect statements on the basis of a presumption that Islamist militants might have carried out the attack.

In February this year the government included the case on the list of sensational cases of the home ministry's monitoring cell for quick and proper investigation of it.

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Grameen Shakti clinches Right Livelihood prize

AFP, Stockholm

The Right Livelihood prize, an annual "alternative" to the Nobel prizes, was awarded yesterday to peace and environmental activists from Sri Lanka, Kenya, Canada and Bangladesh.

The two million Swedish kronor (310,000 dollars/220,000 euros) prize will be shared by Christopher Weeramantry of Sri Lanka for "his lifetime of groundbreaking work to strengthen and expand the rule of international law and Dekha Ibrahim Abdi from Kenya for her "effective peace work and conflict resolution" in many divided countries.

Percy and Louise Schmeiser of Canada were named for giving "the world a wake-up call about the dangers to farmers and biodiversity everywhere from the

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Graft charges pressed against Pintu, wife

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday pressed charges against detained former BNP lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and his wife Nasima Akhter in connection with a case filed for concealing their wealth information.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia, in connection with a graft case.

The same court fixed October 8 for the hearing on the charge framing of a graft case against detained former Awami League (AL) lawmaker AHM Kamal alias Lotus Kamal, his wife Kashmiri Kamal and their two daughters -- Kashfi

Kamal and Nasifa Kamal.

PINTU CASE

ACC Assistant Director Nasiruddin Ahmed, also the investigation (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet against Pintu and his wife to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, showing 61 individuals as prosecution witnesses.

The IO prayed for issuance of arrest warrant against Nasima as she has been at large since the case was filed against her. Her husband, Pintu, was sent to jail in February this year after he surrendered to the court fearing arrest.

On June 13, ACC Assistant Director Nurul Alam filed the case with Hazratnagar Police Station against the couple for concealing Tk 21,88,78,217 in their wealth

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In protest against the news titled "NASSA INVOLVED IN TEJGAON GARMENT SECTOR VIOLENCE" published in the Bangladesh Observer on 1 October 2007

The Management of the world famous garment manufacturers and exporters' conglomerate NASSA is shocked to see the news published in the Bangladesh Observer dated 01 October 2007 titled "NASSA involved in Tejgaon garment sector violence". The news stated, "It was not possible for a single factory workers to continue a three-hour long violence without the patronization of some other powerful sections....the Management of Nassa Group has provoked the whole incident and tried to turn the matter to a large-scale industrial riot in the heart of the capital. Most probably, the NASSA management tried to corner their business rivals by creating anarchy in the garments sector. Not only that Nassa management also tried to mislead the BGMEA authority by giving disinformation about the incident."

In protest against the above news, we would like to clearly mention that Nassa Group has never been involved in such activities, nor has it ever provoked anyone to do such activities which may harm the garment sector any way. On 20 September 2007 when suddenly the workers stopped their work to realize some unreasonable demands, the factory management tried their best to control the situation. The police, other law enforcing agencies and the BGMEA high officials were immediately informed. The police and the BGMEA representatives also tried their best to motivate the workers to resume their work, but in vain.

NASSA Group comprises of 30 garments manufacturing units, 5 textile mills and many other subsidiary units having a workforce of about 25000 workers. Since its inception in 1990, NASSA group has been running all its units as per the Government laws and buyers compliance requirements. We pay salary, bonus, over-time pays and all other facilities to the workers as per the existing labour laws. This is the first time we have experienced such an untoward incident by the workers of a few of our units during our 18 years of operation, whereas all other units are running quite smoothly.

Maj. Sohail Ishaque (Retd.)
Resident Director
NASSA Group