

Election by year-end EC assures president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday assured President Iajuddin Ahmed of holding the long-stalled ninth parliamentary election by this year-end.

Meanwhile, sources in the EC said the commission expects the voter list to be ready by early October, three weeks ahead of schedule.

The field level task of voter listing will be completed by the end June or first week of July while the final roll with photographs will be ready by the end of September or first week of October.

Talking to reporters at the EC Secretariat on return from the Bangladesh, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said, "The president enquired if it is possible to hold the parliamentary election by December. We assured him the

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GAS EXPLORATION Lukewarm response to offshore bidding

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a lukewarm response to the country's first offshore bidding round, only six oil and gas companies submitted their bids yesterday for 16 out of 28 offshore blocks.

With a few offers overlapping different blocks, the oil companies offered to invest \$1.6 billion. The bids included three offers for exploration in shallow water blocks.

The second round block bidding in 1998 generated offers from 22 oil companies, of which Shell Oil alone offered to invest over \$2 billion.

The off-shore bidding round

OFFSHORE OIL & GAS EXPLORATION BIDDERS		
Company	Total offer (US \$)	Block numbers
Santos (Australia)	852 million	10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16
ConocoPhillips (US)	442.63m	10, 11, 12, 17, 15, 16, 20, 21
Longwoods (US-China)	170m	03, 13, 18
CNOOC (China)	115m	01
Comtrack (Cyprus)	61m	09, 14
Tullow (Ireland)	50m	05

was announced in February with 20 deep sea blocks and eight shallow water blocks—each having exploration area cover between 3,000 square kilometres (sqkm)

and 7,000 sqkm. Only nine companies demonstrated seriousness by purchasing block data.

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CG popularity on the wane Says outgoing UK envoy

UNB, Dhaka

British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury observed that the popularity with which the caretaker government came to power seems to be on the wane as he said two years are a long time for an interim regime.

"Yes, it is a longer period of time. Our view was that it should be as shorter as possible and actions should be as faster as possible so you get to the elections," he said in an exclusive interview with the UNB.

Choudhury said, "The longer you take to do anything, the more risky you are from unseen events. Even if you are brilliant, you are prone to risk from unseen events."

Asked if he felt that the government lost the popularity it took

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NIKO CASE Charges pressed against Hasina for 'graft'

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday pressed charges against detained former premier Sheikh Hasina, detained former state minister for energy Prof Rafiqul Islam and seven others for awarding gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko Resources through corruption and abuse of power.

The case was not brought under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR), so there is no time limit to dispose of the case, sources said. The authorities concerned, however, had decided to bring the case under the EPR.

Hasina was earlier charged in



two cases—a Tk 3 crore extortion case filed by businessman Azam Chowdhury and a barge-mounted power plant graft case filed by the ACC.

The other chargesheeted accused are former principal secretary to Prime Minister's Office Dr SA Samad, former energy secretaries Dr Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury and M Akmal Hossain, former Petrobangla chairman Mosharraf Hossain, and Vice-President (South Asia) of Niko Resources Bangladesh Ltd Kashem Sharif, former secretary of External Resources Division Dr AKM Moshir Rahman and former director of Petrobangla (mines and mineral and operation) Sayed Anwarul Haque. The last two were included in the charge sheet in addition to others named in the

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AL won't take part in polls if Hasina not freed Says Zillur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) acting President Zillur Rahman yesterday reiterated that the AL would not take part in the upcoming parliamentary election without the release of detained party president Sheikh Hasina.

"Our first and principal demand is that Sheikh Hasina will have to be freed. We hope that the caretaker government will resolve the prevailing political crisis through releasing her," Zillur said addressing a book-launching programme.

The book titled 'The first elected

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The ruins at Rangs Bhaban from where the body of Shahidul, a security guard, was recovered yesterday, five months after he died in the building collapse. PHOTO: STAR

Rangs Bhaban guard's body recovered after five months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The decomposed body of the missing security guard of Rangs Bhaban was recovered from under debris of the building yesterday, five months after the collapse of the building in city's Tejgaon area.

Workers of Six Star, the company that is demolishing the building, recovered the body at around 11:30am and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College morgue.

Morgue sources said Shahidul was discovered dressed in his uniform under the debris between the second and third floor. His body had partially decomposed.

The death toll in the building collapse is now 13 with the recovery of the last one missing in the accident.

Shahidul Islam, 23, is the son of Abdus Sattar of Kazigram village of

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NIKO, BASHUNDHARA CASES Arrest warrant against fugitives

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued arrest warrants against former BNP lawmaker Qazi Saleemul Haq, Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, his two sons and the personal secretary to detained BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman in connection with the Tk 21 crore bribery case.

Meanwhile, the same court also issued arrest warrants against former principal secretary to the prime minister's office Kamal Uddin Siddique and four others in connection with the case for abuse of power and corruption in awarding a gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko.

CASE AGAINST SHAHALAM After scrutinising all relevant documents, Metropolitan Sessions Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque issued arrest warrants against the Bashundhara Group chairman and others in connection with the Tk 21 crore bribery case.

The other accused, against whom arrest warrants were issued, are Akbar Sobhan's two sons Shafiat Sobhan Sanvir and Sadaat Sobhan, and Tarique's personal secretary Mia Nur Uddin Apu.

The accused who are now in jail, are former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman Babar, Tarique Rahman, and East West Property Development Pvt Ltd Director Abu Sufian.

The ACC pressed charges against Tarique, Babar and six

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Saifur says his leadership now ineffective

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting Chairperson Saifur Rahman yesterday said his leadership became ineffective as the party's standing committee members who appointed him as the acting chairperson withdrew their support through affidavit.

The post of party's acting chairperson has become ineffective and Khaleda Zia remains the party chairperson, Saifur told reporters at his Gulshan residence.

The BNP leader was to leave for

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LALBAGH SEVEN-MURDER 2 to die, ex-DCC commissioner, 9 others jailed

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced two men to death, nine to 43 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) each and a former Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) ward commissioner to 13 years' in jail in the sensational Lalbagh seven-murder case.

Judge ATM Musa of Public Safety Disturbance Crime Prevention Tribunal delivered the verdict at a packed courtroom in the morning, 14 years after the case had been filed.

The complainant, victims' family members and people of the locality, however, rejected the

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Govt to form committee to determine gas reserve: Zillur

UNB, Dhaka

A committee will be formed to figure out the reserve of country's natural gas, Commerce Adviser Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman said yesterday.

The adviser was talking to the newly elected leaders of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) led by its President Annisul Huq at the commerce ministry.

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Budget deficit to be 11pc over target

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Despite a strong revenue growth, budget deficit in current fiscal year may reach Tk 33,073 crore, 11 percent higher than the original estimate, and the government will have to take loans from banking sector to meet a large amount of the shortfall.

Huge subsidies in the petroleum products, fertiliser and food are the major reasons for such a

high deficit, finance ministry sources say.

The government had a plan to adjust prices of petroleum products to minimise huge losses resulted from under pricing, said a finance ministry official. But the government did not adjust the prices considering possible public sufferings for price hike of fuel, he added.

The official said subsidies in petroleum products in the next

fiscal year would increase more as fuel prices are witnessing an increasing trend in the international market.

MK Mujeri, chief economist of the Bangladesh Bank (BB), is against pulling out of subsidies entirely from the petroleum products right now. He said such a decision would have adverse impact on the country's economy.

"We have a good Boro harvest,

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Armed forces relief team off to Myanmar

UNB, Dhaka

A five-member delegation of Bangladesh Armed Forces left for Myanmar yesterday to participate in the relief and salvage operations in the cyclone-hit country.

The team, led by Brig Gen Taslim Uddin Khan, flew to Myanmar by a BAF transport aircraft following a government decision, an ISPR release said.

Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal SM Ziaur Rahman saw the team off at Kurmitola Air Base. Myanmar

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BISMILLAHIR RAHMANIR RAHIM

CONGRATULATIONS

Heartfelt and Tremendous Congratulations To our Honourable and Dearest Managing Director Fakir Maniruzzaman of Fakir Apparels Ltd For Achieving The Award of "Best Workers Friendly Knit Wear Industry For 2008" Selected By The Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Mr. Fakir Maniruzzaman Managing Director of Fakir Apparels Ltd Receiving the Crest From Mr. Anwarul Iqbal Honourable Adviser Of Ministry Of Labour and Employment.

We Wish Future Prosperity And Good Health Of Our Managing Director

With Thanks
All Officers, Staff & Workers of Fakir Apparels Ltd.



Boucher arrives today on a 2-day visit

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard A Boucher arrives here today to discuss with the government high-ups the progress on the electoral roadmap.

The US embassy in Dhaka in a statement yesterday said that during his two-day visit, Boucher will hold talks with senior government officials and members of civil society on a range of topics, including progress on the electoral roadmap, development and other bilateral issues.

He will also meet the chief adviser, foreign adviser and important political figures of major parties to hear from them about various issues, particularly about the preparations for the next general

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Congratulations

We congratulate
Mr. Mohammed Hanif
for being elected as
Vice-Chairman of Dhaka Bank Limited.
We are confident of his ability to lead
the Bank and wish him all the success
in this august role.

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