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LOCAL POLLS Contestants to lose candidature if they use political face

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Candidates in the local elections who use their political identity during campaign would lose their candidacies, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain yesterday said.

He told this at a view-exchange meeting with election officials at Government Devendra College auditorium in Manikganj.

According to Article 66 of the constitution, local-government polls should be held before the general election, he said adding that the constitutional

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EPR AMENDMENT SOON

High profile graft accused may get bail

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The amendment to the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) planned by the government will create scopes of getting bail for many high profile corruption suspects and convicts who are not prime accused in any graft case.

The probable amendment will facilitate bail to politicians like Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, MK Anwar, Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, M Shamsul Islam and Motiur Rahman Nizami, who are co-accused--convicted or not--in

such graft cases.

A few more amendments are also likely to be made effective after the Truth Commission starts functioning maybe later this month, sources said.

Through these amendments the government is, however, unlikely to offer the scope for bail to any principal accused in a graft case, sources involved in the government's anti-corruption drive said.

An amendment will offer bail to a convict facing a maximum of three years' imprisonment if their appeal against the verdict cannot

be disposed of within the stipulated 90 working days which is no fault of the appellant.

This amendment has been proposed in line with the Supreme Court's observation on a certain case in February.

Amendment is also likely to be made to EPR Section-15, which automatically applies to all corruption cases without requiring any permission from the government and blocks bail to the accused.

Through this amendment a provision for acquiring

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Grabbed water bodies must be restored

Greens demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Illegally occupied lands in canals and rivers in and around Dhaka City should be returned to the water bodies immediately, failing which would threaten the very existence of the 400-year-old city, environmentalists warned yesterday.

They were speaking at a press conference, organised by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan (Bapa) at Dhaka Reporters' Unity.

The environmentalists also called for an autonomous body that would coordinate the projects of Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), Dhaka City Corporation,

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Pricey essentials make safety net inadequate

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

While the coverage of government safety net programmes has been inadequate to meet the needs of the poor, the net benefits of the programmes are also shrinking day by day due to price spiral of essentials, says a draft survey report of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Suggesting periodic review and adjustment of allocations for social safety net programmes (SSNP), the draft report strongly recommends increasing allowances for the old, widowed and distressed women, and the disabled.

"Taken all system costs on

recipients' accounts and ever increasing price hikes of essentials into consideration, the net benefit of the present meagre rates of some schemes have already reduced to a great extent..." reads the draft report titled 'Survey on Social Safety-Nets Programs in Bangladesh'.

The BBS study was conducted in 2007 with financial assistance from the World Bank, which surveyed 2,741 households, of which 2,040 were beneficiaries and 701 were non-beneficiaries in 69 upazilas of 12 districts.

Beneficiaries of 12 of the 35 safety net programmes, run by the government in collaboration with

donors and NGOs, were surveyed. About 2 to 3 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is usually allocated for SSNPs.

While the largest programmes are food-based, programmes based on conditional cash transfer are becoming increasingly important, while it has become imperative to improve children's access to schooling, particularly for girl children, the draft report says.

"But fiscal constraints inhibit the SSNP coverage [from reaching] its desired level," adds the report.

Citing a recent World Bank simulation, the report also says eradicating poverty would require

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It's unrealistic to expect food prices to come down

Says: Mirza Aziz

UNB, Dhaka

Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam yesterday said it would be unrealistic to expect that the prices of food items, particularly that of rice, would come down, as less than half of the post-harvest crops have arrived at the market this year.

"What we are considering is to check further rise in the prices," he told a seminar, explaining the government's efforts through measures within and beyond the budget 2008-09.

The finance adviser said 20 percent of the total agriculture production has come to the market after the harvest of this season compared to a normal trend of 40 percent with little impact on the price situation.

FULL STORY ON STAR BUSINESS B-1

NURSING IN TATTERS

Nurses missing in nursing

No recruitment in public hospitals in 5 years

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

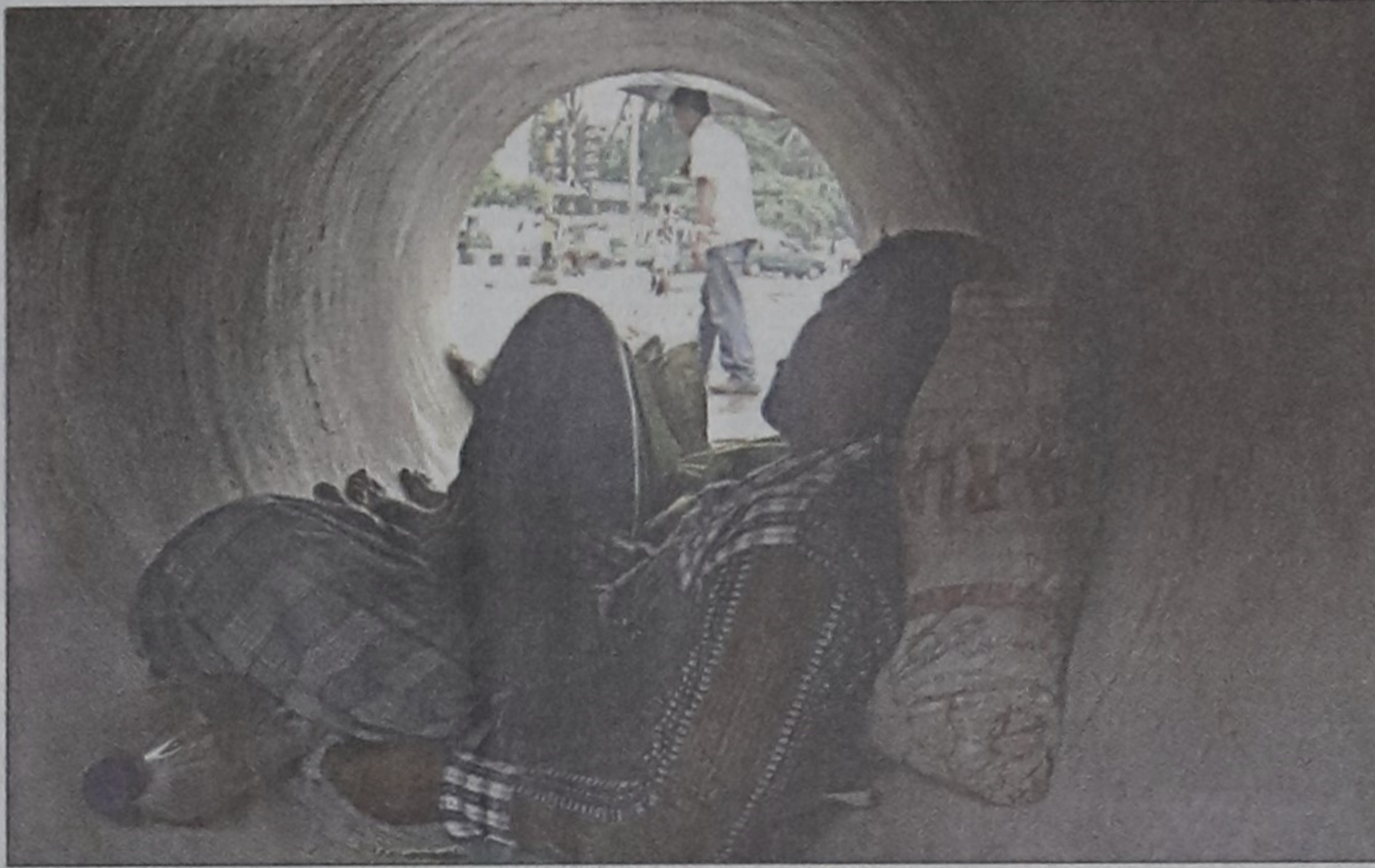
Firoza, a 22-year-old burn patient, was screaming in pain when the ward assistant (Aya) was changing her bandages. The aya was removing the gauze mercilessly from the wounds on her chest, hands and abdomen; she was never trained for this and had many other things left to do.

Trained nurses usually do this job in hospitals of Bangladesh but as there are very few nurses, the

ayas do it alone. "As the number of nurses is inadequate here and they are busy with other work, it is the norm here that the ayas would change the bandages in exchange for Tk 100," said a relative of a patient complaining to The Daily Star correspondent about nurses' poor quality training, behaviour and non-cooperation.

However, doctors and nurses defended themselves saying that

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Homeless people during yesterday's rain take shelter inside a sewage pipe left by Dhaka Wasa beside a street near Matshya Bhaban intersection in the capital.

CITY ELECTIONS

BNP may go soft on poll-runners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP might not take disciplinary action against those who will participate in the August 4 polls though it appears unlikely to change its stance against the local elections.

Considering the enthusiasm of the rank and file for elections and the prevalent view that the organisation would lose ground in local politics if it boycotts the polls, the BNP high-ups now prefer taking a soft line with those who intend to take part in the elections, said insiders.

Archival Awami League's (AL) decision to participate in the polls is another reason for their easing

up on the ones defying the party decisions.

A BNP leader yesterday told The Daily Star, "The party would neither endorse the contestants nor discipline them for their participation. It might even welcome those who would emerge victorious."

Speaking on condition of anonymity, he also said detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will come up with fresh directions regarding the polls when she appears before a court for hearing tomorrow.

Following the announcement of election schedules last month, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain and leaders of the four-party alliance declared they

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