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Local polls allowed to go political

HC declares no bar to holding city polls

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The August 4 polls to four city corporations and nine municipalities will be held as per schedule and political parties can contest them as the High Court (HC) yesterday declared the election schedule valid.

The HC also declared illegal and void the electoral rules disqualifying candidates using political affiliations in these elections.

The HC bench of Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Md Abu Tariq declared valid the Election Commission (EC) schedule for holding the local government polls

on August 4, saying the commission has completed preparing the voter lists of those areas.

The judgment came following a writ petition filed by Jasim Uddin Sarker, a Supreme Court (SC) lawyer and a leader of the Dhaka city unit of Jamaat-e-Islami, seeking directions to stop the August 4 elections.

Counsel for both the petitioner and the EC said following the HC verdict there is no bar now to holding the August 4 polls and participation of political parties in those elections.

Barrister Masood Reza Sobhan, counsel for Jasim Uddin, said, "The

High Court has declared illegal the provisions for sentencing candidates to four months' imprisonment for violating the Election Commission's rules for not using political affiliations."

He said the top EC officials should resign as they have violated the constitution again and again.

EC's counsel Dr Shahdeen Malik said the HC has cancelled the electoral rules barring political parties from contesting the local government elections.

In the judgment, the HC observed that since the functions and activities of the political

LOCAL BODY POLLS CEC for law amendment to bar party campaign

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said the Election Commission (EC) might ask the government to incorporate specific provisions in laws regarding local body polls to prevent political parties from campaigning for their candidates in future.

The CEC's comment came a day after the High Court (HC) scrapped provisions from the code of conduct of city corporations and municipality polls that restricted political parties from campaigning for their candidates.

"Any amendment to the original laws on local government bodies is not possible now before the August

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Tata pulls out

Indian giant finally gives up \$3b investment plan over gas guarantee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indian industrial conglomerate Tata Group yesterday scrapped its plan for \$3 billion investment in Bangladesh as it sees "no prospect" of taking the projects any further.

"It is clear... that the government will not be in a position, in the foreseeable future, to grant the projects the natural gas commitment they would require," Tata said in a statement yesterday.

"Consequently there is no prospect of taking these projects further," it said, abandoning its plan after four years of endeavour to persuade Bangladesh government into ensuring a guaranteed supply of gas to its plants.

Tata Group, which made over-

seas acquisitions of \$18 billion in the last eight years, in 2004 first proposed establishing four large steel, power and fertiliser projects in Bangladesh in the biggest foreign direct investment in the country to date and continued intensive negotiations with the government until 2006.

"At that point the group suspended further work on the projects as agreement on key issues with the government was not possible," the Tata statement said. "Since then the Tata Group has had frequent enquiries on the status of the projects and the prospects for reviving negotiations with the government."

"All of our four projects were based on the assured supply of gas.

But Bangladesh government has not been able to give us any assurance regarding the long term gas supply," Manzer Hussain, former resident director of Tata Group in Bangladesh, told The Daily Star over telephone from the UK.

He, however, said, "It does not mean that it is end of relationship between Tata and Bangladesh."

The Tata Group, which has wide-ranging businesses from computers software to automobiles, had placed a proposal to the government to set up two 500MW power plants, a steel mill with an annual production capacity of 4,20,000 tonne and a fertiliser unit capable of producing one million tonne.

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UK minister for local govt in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

British Minister for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears arrived in Dhaka yesterday on a two-day trip.

She was received at Zia International Airport by Home Advisor Maj Gen (retd) MA Matin.

While talking to reporters at the airport, the advisor said that the government might lift the state of emergency before the national elections.

Matin said, "We have already relaxed a few restrictions. If deemed necessary, the government will reconsider lifting the emergency."

However Matin warned against a return to a pre-1/11 situation, which he termed as anarchic.

"No one, including you and me, want to go back to that anarchic situation," he said, adding that the emergency was declared to end that 'anarchy'.

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Of forests and Kochu plantation



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN
The forest on the hills of Marissa in Rangamati has been wiped out while arum is planted on forestland at Ramgarh in Khagrachhari as the forest department officials encourage such cultivation.

VANISHING FORESTS-1



INAM AHMED

The arum (*Kochu*) plantation says it all. Or the new settlement a little away from the BDR camp in Marissa. Or the hills themselves. The story they tell is the same—it is one of mass scale destruction of forests in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). It could as well be called a genocide of trees.

As our car entered Khagrachhari, the scenes hit us in the face. Whichever direction you look all you see is denuded hills, shaven clean of everything, like systematic ethnic cleansing. As if somebody was hell-bent on not leaving anything standing there.

In the dull monsoon light, the hills reminded us of shaven heads. Some hills are still to be cropped. But they will be soon as the work of the approaching loggers was visible. Some hills

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Truth Commission rolls into action Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Truth and Accountability Commission (Tac) starts functioning on Sunday, Tac Chairman Justice Habibur Rahman Khan confirmed yesterday.

Under the provisions of the Tac, corrupt individuals will be allowed to plead for mercy after voluntarily admitting their past corruption and depositing their ill-gotten wealth to the state exchequer.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) at a routine press briefing yesterday said it would consider sending its cases to the Tac if an accused is deemed eligible to apply under the conditions set by the Tac.

Earlier on Wednesday, the president appointed Justice Khan, a retired High Court judge, as the chairman of the Tac for a five-month term.

The president also appointed two members to the commission for the same duration. The members are Asif Ali, a former comptroller and auditor general, and Major Gen (retd) Manzur Rashid Khan.

The government has already posted 26 officials and employees

to the commission to work on deputation.

The Tac will operate for five months under the Voluntary Disclosure of Information Ordinance 2008, promulgated on June 5 and later amended on July 20.

The commission is likely to make public notifications on Monday in the media including newspapers, announcing in detail the eligibility of an individual for pleading for mercy through the Tac as well as the objectives and jurisdictions of the Tac.

After the notification, people involved in corruption in the past will be able to admit their crime and plead for mercy by applying to the commission in a prescribed form, disclosing detailed relevant information including his/her moveable and immovable properties.

According to the ordinance, the government, in consultation with the Tac, will formulate rules for the commission. Until necessary rules are formulated, the Tac will run at the discretion of its chairman following the commission's approval.

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Ex-minister Shamsul Islam freed on bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former BNP minister M Shamsul Islam was released from prison on bail in the Gatco corruption case yesterday.

He emerged from Dhaka Central Jail at 12:20pm, jailer Faruk Ahmed said.

Earlier on Monday, the High Court granted two months' bail to him and former BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. Bhuiyan was freed on Wednesday.

They were sent to jail after their surrender to a Dhaka court on May 18 in connection with the case.

Shamsul told reporters at the jail gate that he was feeling good to be out of jail, adding that it would give

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Kuwait won't renew residency visas

160 more Bangladeshi workers deported

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Kuwait has decided not to renew residency visas of Bangladeshis doing menial jobs, saying these workers are a threat to state security and bring unnecessary international focus on the country, reports the Kuwait Times.

The Gulf state that faced strong demonstrations by Asians, mainly Bangladeshi cleaning workers, demanding better wages, is also considering raising minimum wage to Kuwaiti dinar 40.

Meanwhile, at least 160 Bangladeshi workers who allegedly instigated and took part in strikes in Kuwait in the last few days arrived in Dhaka yesterday, immigration police said. With the latest arrival, the number of deportees in two days now stands at 217, said an official of the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training.

The Kuwait Times reports that the Kuwaiti government has decided not to renew residency visas of Bangladeshis to cut the number of marginal workers,

especially those who fall victim to negative practices by companies or visa traders. However, the country will renew residency visas of Bangladeshis doing specialised jobs.

Quoting high-ranking official sources, the daily says the government is determined to solve the problems through strict legal action and reduce workers' numbers in the country.

Presently, around 2 lakh

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No alternative to BNP unity to compete in polls

Says Bhuiyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP leader Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said there is no alternative to unity for the BNP to compete in the next general election.

He was talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence after laying a wreath at the grave of his party's founder Ziaur Rahman at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city, one day after his release from jail on bail.

Several thousand BNP leaders and workers including most of the union parishad (UP) chairmen from his Shibpur constituency in

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COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEET Dhaka calls for stronger Saarc to tackle food crisis, climate change

UNB, Colombo

Dhaka yesterday called for making Saarc more effective to enable it to tackle the major regional and global problems like food security, trade, energy and climate change.

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury made the call while addressing the first session of the Saarc Council of Ministers in the Sri Lankan capital.

The foreign adviser stressed the need for continued focus on pov-

erty alleviation within the broad context of social development.

He made the statement on food security that is to be issued by the heads of government in Saarc. He also called for making Saarc Food Bank operational immediately.

Iftekhar described the South Asian Free Trade Area as a "vehicle of progress in trade and investment" and asked for the removal of all non-tariff barriers that impeded intra-Saarc trade and posed

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