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REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XVIII No. 249

DHAKA TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 23, 2008

www.thedailystar.net

ASHWIN 8, 1415 BS

RAMADAN 22, 1429 HJRI

24 PAGES PLUS STAR LIFESTYLE PRICE: Tk 10.00

## EC to ease party registration rules

Asks govt to leave the latest revision to ordinance alone, also criticises govt for not letting it ring enough changes in electoral laws

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday announced it will ease the procedure for registration of the political parties, and said it can do nothing more about the issue, a sticking point in electoral negotiations.

Chief Election Commission (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda made the announcement at a press briefing at the EC Secretariat's conference room.

He criticised the government for not allowing enough electoral reforms.

He said the commission had proposed a number of reforms in the electoral laws to bring about a qualitative change in politics in line with the aspiration of 1/11.

But, he added, the government did not let it happen as it gave priority to the opinions of political parties.

The polls chief said the EC will send a set of proposals to the government in a day or two for amendments to the revised Representation of the People Order (RPO). The proposals include the one for relaxing the registration procedure.

He asked the caretaker administration not to rework the proposals this time.

"The government should accept them [proposals] as they are. They can't be changed as they've been prepared after the third round of discussions with the political parties. Any alteration would call for further talks."

Referring to the move to make the registration easier, Huda said, "We have made whatever concessions we could. There's no room to do anything more. That's it."

If the revised RPO is amended according to the new proposals, the political parties will not have to

organise national councils to amend their constitutions to meet the registration criteria.

Those unable to hold councils now can register with the EC on making provisional changes to their constitutions.

But their highest policymaking bodies must pass a resolution to have the changes ratified at national councils within six months since the first sitting of ninth parliament.

Detailing the proposal on registration, the CEC said, "The parties will have to attach the resolution papers to their registration applications."

He said the government will amend the RPO in line with the fresh proposals in a week.

"The political parties must get registered to contest the polls. We can do nothing more about it

## CEC shocked at Jamaat flip-flop on reform talks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday criticised Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) for their "about-face" on electoral reforms.

Referring to Saturday's talks with the parties, he said their attitude frustrates him.

"They now reject all reforms including the ones they accepted before. We don't understand their u-turn," he told reporters at the EC Secretariat.

In the first two rounds of talks, both Jamaat and IOJ agreed to get registered, but in the final round they did a complete about face, Huda continued.

"I was just taken aback, and said to myself, 'Oh God, what are we hearing from hujurs [Islamic scholars] in the month of Ramadan!'"

Rather, he added, it was BNP whose approach was more positive. "Discussions with the party's delegation gave me a ray of hope amid frustrations. They seemed eager to contest the elections and it makes us optimistic."

The CEC said 13 out of the 16 parties that attended the third round electoral talks said they would get registered with the EC after a little revision of the registration procedure. Those included parties like AL and JP.

"It's only BNP, Jamaat and IOJ, who want all new provisions to be scrapped or suspended till the upcoming polls."

Meanwhile, in a press release yesterday Jamaat strongly protested the CEC's comment.

"His comment has upset us. It's not only unbecoming to his post, but also indecent," Jamaat acting secretary general Muhammad Kamaruzzaman said in the release. "We hope he will realise that he shouldn't have made the comment," he added.

"In the first two rounds of talks, we said since mandatory registration is new to the political parties, the Election Commission should employ an easy procedure to ensure all parties get registered. But they took no heed," the release read.

## AL, JP go for registration after Eid

HASAN AHMED TUSHER

Awami League (AL) and Jatiya Party (JP) will apply to the Election Commission (EC) for registration after Eid-ul-Fitr by amending party constitutions as the EC in a new proposal yesterday relaxed a few provisions for political parties' registration.

Jamaat-e-Islami, which opposed registration at its recent talks with the EC, might also consider registering now as they welcomed the new proposal, according to party leaders.

A political party wishing to contest the parliamentary election slated for December 18 must apply to the EC by October 15 for registration.

In its new proposal, the EC said political parties unable to hold national council now to amend their constitutions to meet the registration criteria can get registered by making necessary provisional changes to their constitutions.

But these parties must decide at their highest policymaking bodies to bring the necessary amendments to their constitutions at national councils within six months of the first session of ninth parliament, says the proposal.

## BNP feels polls dates too close

Zillur too wants upazila polls to be deferred; EC says it is capable of maintaining the timeframe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Asking the Election Commission (EC) to defer the dates for upazila elections, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said the sequence of dates for the parliamentary and upazila elections fixed by the commission might give rise to questions in the public mind.

"It will be tough for the government to hold upazila elections within five days of the national election, which might hamper holding of the national election," BNP Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed quoted Khaleda as saying.

She, however, welcomed the date for the parliamentary election and thanked the chief adviser to the military backed caretaker government for declaring it, according to Rizvi.

Rizvi was talking to reporters after the BNP chairperson met the party's front organisation leaders, former lawmakers, and leaders of

the four-party alliance in the Eskaton residence of Shafik Rehman, editor of the vernacular weekly Mouchake Dhil also former editor of the daily Jai Jai Din.

Meanwhile, Awami League (AL) acting President Zillur Rahman yesterday suggested deferring the upazila polls by one or two months.

"It will be wise if the Election Commission revises the dates for upazila polls," Zillur told reporters at his Gulshan residence.

Saying that it is his personal opinion, Zillur said he thinks the environment of national elections will be harmed if upazila elections are held on the announced dates.

Zillur said the next government could hold the upazila polls if the present government announces a revised date for it.

Rizvi also said the BNP chairperson has asked the leaders and activists of the party to remain united and to take preparations for the upcoming parliamentary

## JS SEAT DELIMITATION HC hears petition Sept 29

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) will hear on September 29 the pending writ petition challenging the legality of the Election Commission's (EC) gazette notification, finalising the re-demarcation of parliamentary constituencies.

The case is likely to draw much more attention in the hearing as BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has asked pro-party lawyers to start legal battle together against the demarcation, sources in the BNP said.

The BNP chief gave the directives on Saturday night when three lawyers, who are the counsels of the writ petition filed with the HC, met her at her cantonment residence. On instructions, the pro-BNP lawyers practising in the Supreme Court are preparing for the legal fight, sources added.

Responding to a prayer moved by barrister Nasiruddin Ahmed Asim, a counsel for the writ petitioner, a vacation bench of the HC comprising Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana and Justice Md Rezaul Haque yesterday fixed the date for hearing on the writ petition.

Barrister Asim told the court that they need extra time for making preparations for moving the



A rickshaw-van puller trudges through pitch-black water spewed from textile dyeing units on the north-east side of Kanchpur bridge.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Police 'weak force' IGP tells of failure in graft probe; points at police ordinance not being passed in 2 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad yesterday termed the police "a weak force" which has been failing to run strong investigations into cases including those for corruption.

The IGP made the observation in reply to journalists' questions while coming out of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) headquarters after meeting its Chairman Lt Gen (ret'd) Hasan Mashud Chowdhury.

To strengthen the force, a draft ordinance was prepared which has not been approved yet. "I have been vocal for about two years to get the ordinance passed, but it's not being passed since it might affect someone's interest somewhere," the police boss said.

The seemingly frustrated police chief said: "Police investigations have never been conducted strongly, it's not being so right now and will never be. It's obvious."

"How many cases turn into charge-sheets and how many become final reports in the developed countries? But we submit charge-sheets in 60-65 percent of the cases and the rest end up in

final reports," he observed.

"Here comes the question of facilities police are enjoying and weakness they are suffering. Police don't have the position to work strongly with all this," Nur Mohammad added.

Replying to a question whether the government's unwillingness prevents reformation in the police, he said, "We're saying that we'll be corrected. Let the police have a chance to be corrected through reformation. But you are not giving that chance."

As the journalists mentioned that ACC has submitted final reports in many of the cases filed by police after 1/11 changeover, the police chief said, "Here lies the question of our position. The ACC conducts enquiry before filing a case and then goes for investigation. But anyone can file a police case and the police investigate this afterwards. If evidence is found the case turns into a charge-sheet; otherwise final report is submitted."

He also said he has been vocal for the last two years to have the police ordinance approved. "Have I succeeded in doing anything for

## Hasina seeks bail in two more cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two petitions were filed with the High Court (HC) yesterday on behalf of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, now abroad on parole, for bail in the Niko and barge-mounted power plant corruption cases.

Hasina's counsel barrister Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh yesterday submitted the petitions to the HC vacation bench of Justice AKM Fazlur Rahman and Justice Sheikh Abdul Awal.

Meanwhile, another HC bench of Justice Sheikh Rezaul Karim and Justice Md Rais Uddin fixed tomorrow for hearing Hasina's another bail prayer in an extortion case filed against her by businessman Noor Ali.

Taposh told journalists that the petitions for Hasina's bail in the Niko and barge-mounted power plant corruption cases filed by the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) would be listed for hearing on tomorrow's cause list of the HC bench.

He said if Hasina secures bail in the three cases, there would be no legal bar to her permanent release.

Taposh also said the hearing of the bail petition in the case filed by Noor Ali was not held yesterday as the petition was placed at the

## BSC to be turned into public co

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) is turning into a public limited company (PLC) to start a new journey through management restructuring under the ongoing reform move meant for efficient run of the state-owned enterprises.

The BSC will be renamed Bangladesh National Shipping Company Ltd.

This was disclosed at a meeting of the BSC board of directors at the shipping ministry yesterday with Shipping Adviser Major General

## Sheikh Selim freed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former minister and Awami League (AL) Presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim was released from the prison cell of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) hospital.

Getting out of the prison cell around 12:30pm, Selim claimed himself innocent of all charges against him and demanded permanent release of AL President Sheikh Hasina. He also demanded withdrawal of the state of emer-

gency before the parliament election.

Later, he went to the Banani graveyard and offered feteha seeking peace for the departed souls of the victims of the August 15, 1975 massacre.

The joint forces arrested Selim on May 28 last year at his Banani residence in connection with an extortion case filed by businessman Azam J Chowdhury with Gulshan police. Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana are co-accused in the case.

## AUG 17 BLASTS Ctg JMB boss gets 10yrs

CU CORRESPONDENT

A court here yesterday sentenced outlawed JMB Chittagong Divisional Commander Javed Iqbal alias Mohammad to 10 years imprisonment in a case filed in connection with serial bomb blast across the country on August 17, 2005.

Judge Shafiqul Karim of Chittagong Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal awarded the imprisonment to the JMB leader for his involvement in bomb blast at

## More Chinese milk powder seized in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court in its continued drive across Chittagong city yesterday seized powder milk of Yashali 1, Yashali 2 and Sweet Baby brands from two shops.

The drive, to find powdered milk manufactured in China, was carried out at different shops of Singapore-Bangkok market in Agrabad, Hazipara and GEC Intersection area.

The drive was launched after worldwide reports that some baby

## Narrow escape at Marriott for Pakistani leaders

Venue was changed at last minute; US helicopters cross into Pakistan

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's top leaders were to dine at the luxury hotel that was devastated by a truck bombing over the weekend, but changed the venue at the last minute, a senior government official said yesterday.

The blast at the Marriott Hotel in the capital Islamabad killed at

least 53 people and underscored the extremist challenge facing nuclear-armed Pakistan, where Taliban and al-Qaeda militants are operating out of tribal regions close to Afghanistan.

In a further sign of the country's deteriorating security situation Monday, gunmen kidnapped Afghanistan's ambassador-

designate and killed his driver in the main northwestern city of Peshawar, said a spokesman for the mission in the city.

The spokesman, who gave his name as Babri, said Abdul Khaliq Farahi was abducted as he travelled toward his home in the city. He gave no more details, but the kidnapping

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