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BARAPUKURIA CASE HC bench feels embarrassed to hear Khaleda's petition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A High Court (HC) bench yesterday felt embarrassed to entertain a petition filed by former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for quashing the proceedings against her in Barapukuria coal mine graft case.

The HC bench comprising Justice Syed AB Mahmudul Haq and Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury referred the matter to Chief Justice (CJ) MM Ruhul Amin for a decision.

Barrister Rafique-ul Haq, principal counsel for Khaleda, told newsmen that Justice Moyeenul felt embarrassed to entertain her quashing petition. "We will pray to the chief justice tomorrow (today) to constitute another bench of the HC for hearing it," he said.

He however did not say why the judge felt embarrassed.

Some lawyers present in the court at the time said Justice

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List of 8.11 cr voters handed over to EC

Army winds up a highly ambitious mission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the completion of the electoral roll with photograph, Bangladesh is now also the proud owner of the world's largest electronic database of 8.11 crore voters.

A delegation of Bangladesh Army, which assisted the Election Commission (EC) in implementing the voter list project, handed over the printed electoral roll to EC yesterday, wrapping up the over-one-year-long mammoth task.

It will soon hand over to EC the electronic database, which is higher than that of France's 7.3 crore voters.

The entries have been checked and re-checked in such a way that strictly prevented duplication, causing a decrease by 1.5 crore voters in the new list compared to the previous controversial electoral roll prepared in 2006.

Highlights

- 8.11 crore voters, each with national ID cards
- 1.5 crore less voters than on previous list
- Duplication in only 4,286 names of voters
- Field level registration began in August 2007
- Field level registration complete in June 2008
- Printing of final list done on October 13, 2008

"Today we're really delighted and proud of it. The high ambitious task has been completed putting to rest all skepticism about the project's success," Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said receiving some

copies of the voter list symbolically in a special ceremony.

The poll chief said the stalled ninth parliamentary election is going to be held in December as the task for preparing the voter list with photograph has been completed within the stipulated timeframe.

Termining a flawless voter list the main base of holding a free and fair election, the CEC said: "We can now assure the nation that there is no scope for casting fake votes in the elections."

On the authenticity of the electoral roll, Maj Gen Shafiqul Islam, military secretary to the Army Headquarters, said the new electoral roll is comparable to the lists prepared in the western and other developed countries.

"We believe our voter list has less errors compared to the lists prepared by the developed

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AL, JP submit registration forms today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) submits its application for registration with the Election Commission (EC) today with a renewed call on EC to withdraw its authority to cancel candidatures in parliamentary polls on grounds of violation of electoral laws.

Jatiya Party will also submit its application for registration to the EC today.

AL's decision for registration came at a meeting of its party president -- its highest policy-making body -- which passed the amendments approved by the party's Central Working Committee a day before.

The meeting was held with AL's acting president Zillur Rahman in the chair at his Gulshan residence.

AL amended its constitution on Monday, but kept its 'associate organisations' and foreign chapters, which contradict with the party registration laws in the revised RPO.

Talking to reporters after the

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No result yet from govt's talks with BNP, Jamaat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The dialogue between the caretaker government and BNP yesterday ended inconclusively with both sides agreeing to meet again to resolve differences on issues like lifting of the state of emergency and constituency re-demarcation.

There was however no disagreeing about the need for a free and fair election on schedule, a level playing field for all parties and post-election stability.

Coming out of the three-hour discussions at the Chief Adviser's Office, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain told reporters, "We've had lengthy discussions on elections, Representation of the People Order (RPO), and other issues."

"We made it clear to them [government] that the polls must be held in a manner free, fair and acceptable to all."

Late in the afternoon, the care-

taker administration held talks with Jamaat-e-Islami that raised issues from a standpoint identical to its ally BNP's.

Delwar led the 13-member BNP delegation while Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed headed a team of five advisers at the talks that began at about 11:15am.

At a post-dialogue briefing, the BNP secretary general said they would sit with the government again to work out an agreement on the seven-point demand they had just put forward.

The demands are deferment of upazila polls, further amendments to the revised RPO, relaxed registration provisions, cancellation of constituency re-demarcation, and release of all political leaders and withdrawal of cases against them.

"I can't say at this moment whether we'll go to the polls if emergency is not lifted," Delwar replied to a query. "Everything depends on the outcome of the

second round of talks."

Commerce and Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman, who spoke on behalf of the government side, said they could not yet complete discussions on some issues including the state of emergency and upazila polls dates.

"However, we share views on an acceptable and participatory election, post-election stability, neutrality of the administration and a corruption-free society," he said at the briefing.

"They (BNP) spoke at length about emergency that was imposed under certain circumstances. But since things have changed, the emergency curbs have been relaxed," said Zillur.

The adviser observed it is very important that political activities do not face any major impediments.

"At the same time, we must ensure that voters can cast votes in

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Hearing of Hasina's 2 writ petitions deferred

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday deferred until October 19 the hearing on two writ petitions filed by Awami League President Sheikh Hasina for quashing the proceedings of Niko and barge-mounted power plant corruption cases against her.

An HC bench comprising Justice Sheikh Rezaul Karim and Justice Md Rais Uddin deferred the hearing as two government appeals against the HC orders staying the proceedings of the two corruption cases remain pending with the Supreme Court.

The HC bench, which was set to hold the final hearing on the petitions yesterday, asked the government to dispose of the appeals at the Supreme Court by October 19.

Sheikh Hasina's counsel barrister Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh told the court that since the government appeals had been pending with the Supreme Court, the hearing on the petitions should not be held at the High Court.

Attorney General Salauddin Ahmed appealed to the court to hold the hearing on the writ petitions, saying that there was no bar to holding the hearing.

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'Fugitive' Jamaat leader Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid, in circle, is seen during the dialogue between Jamaat-e-Islami and the government at the Chief Adviser's Office in the capital yesterday.

'Fugitive' Mojahid seen prominently at CA's meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

When the police claim that Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid is fugitive, the Jamaat leader joined his party's dialogue with the government yesterday.

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed was present at the talks.

Mojahid has been attending various programmes in the city after police Sunday reported to the trial court that he went into hiding after the issuance of an arrest warrant against him in the

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RE-DEMARCATION EC takes back petition for vacating stay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday took back from the High Court (HC) its petition for vacating the court order staying the EC's re-demarcation of parliamentary constituencies.

In response to a prayer from the EC's counsel Mahmudul Islam, the HC bench comprised of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Quamrul Islam Siddiqui, which was set to hear the petition yesterday, allowed the EC to take back its petition.

The EC petition for vacating stay, and the writ petition following which the HC issued the stay order

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PHOTO: STAR

The supply of good quality jute seeds produced at Bangladesh Jute Research Institute in Dhaka is inadequate. The crisis forces farmers to use untested imports.

Shortage of quality seeds costs output up to 20pc

PORIMOL PALMA

Acute shortage of quality seeds costs the farmers 15-20 percent in jute production every year while unavailability of enough water for the jute plant to rot lowers the quality of the fibre.

The government again does not have any workable plan to reach seeds to the farmers.

Every year around 4,000 tonnes of seed are required to grow jute on about five lakh hectares of land, but the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) can produce only 700-1,000 tonnes annually. Farmers add to the tally with 500-700 tonnes.

Pointing to inefficiency in marketing, a high BADC official said his



department grew 750 tonnes of seed this year, but could sell only 350 tonnes.

He then said projecting the demand for seeds is also difficult because farmers change their mind to grow jute with fluctuations in jute prices.

"Around 60 percent seeds are imported from India. But quality is never ensured though the Department of Agriculture

Extension (DAE) has facilities for this," said a scientist at the Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI).

Besides, sub-standard seeds are smuggled from across the border. "These low-quality seeds significantly reduce production—one two bales per hectare," he said.

He blamed farmers for not distinguishing the quality gap between the locally-produced seeds and the imported ones.

But imported seeds are cheaper and traders sometimes sell them on credit.

The BADC official said farmers have the misconception that Indian seeds are better and yield higher, noting that plants from

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Watch out!

The whole country is agog with the expectation of getting democracy back as December 18 draws nearer. The Daily Star will run a series of interviews of key politicians and eminent citizens from tomorrow to give readers an insight into the preparation of political parties for the ninth parliamentary elections and what the nation can expect of the found-again democracy. Our endeavour starts with seasoned Awami League leader Mafiz Chowdhury.



GLOBAL CRISIS Banks cautious in funding small, new exporters

SAJJADUR RAHMAN

The continuing global financial crisis has prompted Bangladeshi banks to be cautious in financing small and new exporters, top bankers of the country said yesterday.

The banks however forecast 'no risk' in financing medium and large-scale export houses.

"I don't see any problem with medium and large exporters. But the situation has forced us to be careful about the small ones," Ali Reza Ifekhar, managing director also chief executive officer of Eastern Bank Ltd (EBL), said.

"We are feeling more risks in financing small exporters," said Helal Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director of Pubali Bank, one of the largest private banks in the country.

"A small exporter will not be able to sustain if it faces a loss of 50,000 dollars or if a payment is

held up or delayed for the present crisis," Chowdhury added.

The global financial disaster that initially affected the US and EU countries, is now spreading to Asia. Two Indian banks -- ICICI and HDFC -- are also facing the jolt of the crisis because of its business links with the US and EU markets.

According to the local bankers, Bangladesh has no investment in foreign capital markets, especially in the US, as it has with the Indian banks.

The local banks have to deal with foreign banks only for payments of letters of credit (LC), they said.

Private banks which used to place their excess funds in different US and EU banks, also withdrew those funds to mitigate their risks.

Although Bangladeshi banks still seem insulated from the global financial meltdown, they however smell a possible decline in their

business, if the crisis continues for several months.

As a precautionary measure, the banks have decided to take a careful stance in financing small-scale exporters and new entrants considering the risk factors.

"We are not saying no to small exporters, but adopting a very careful posture," the EBL managing director said.

The Pubali Bank managing director said his bank is counselling small exporters on the present situation.

"We are only financing existing projects but no new ones, considering the risk factors," a senior Exim Bank official said.

Big exporters have diversifications in their products and businesses, he said adding that they could sustain a shock of not getting paid for an export.

Some bankers are however

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4 Huji men captured in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested four activists of banned Islamist outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad (Huji) in Khalishpur area yesterday.

The arrestees are Mizanur Rahman Tushar, 22, Mujahidul Islam, 23, Omar, 20, and Yusuf Al Helal, 24.

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AUGUST 21 CASES
Court rejects Salam Pintu's plea for stay
COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected detained former BNP lawmaker Abdus Salam Pintu's petition for staying the proceedings of two

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PHOTO: STAR

An agriculture extension department official inaugurates early harvest of BRR1 Dhan-33 paddy at Taluk Dharmadas of Rangpur.

New rice varieties smile at monga-hit people

PORIMOL PALMA with RAFIQUE SARKER in Rangpur and AMINUL ISLAM in Mymensingh

Agriculturists and farmers of the northern districts are finally seeing some hope of defeating monga, a recurrent near famine situation with wholesale unemployment, as harvest of the newly developed early harvestable rice varieties, cultivated in greater Rangpur this aman season, has already begun.

Immediately after harvesting the new varieties BRR1 Dhan-33, BINA Dhan-7 and BU Dhan-1 through October and the first quarter of November, farmers will be able to go for early cultivation of vegetables and robi crops, and then on to boro rice.

Success of the new varieties of rice opens the door for turning arable lands into multi-crop ones, maintaining continuation of employment opportunities for a large number of local day labourers.

Monga is an annual phenomenon in October-November in Rangpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha and Nilphamari districts when farm workers face unemployment and marginal farmers face their annual big economic crisis.

Monga forces a large number of local farm workers to leave for other districts in search of employment.

Production cost of the early harvestable high yielding varieties is also lesser than the cost of cultivating traditional high yielding varieties like BR-11 and swarna.

Moreover, when BR-11 and swarna varieties face pest attacks and leaf blight disease, the new varieties remain immune to those, as they are already matured when it is time for the attacks, agriculturists said.

Tayeb Ali, a farmer in Rangpur, planted BRR1 Dhan-33 on 82 decimals of land after getting train-

ing from local NGO Krishi Angan on June 25, and he harvested the yield on October 7. The yield was 16 maunds a bigha or per 33 decimals.

Ali said he will be doubly benefited because of the lower production cost and better sale prices in the off season, as rice prices are usually lower during the peak harvest season in November-December.

"I will also be able to sell each bundle of straw for a taka and a half right now, which is usually 1 taka a bundle in peak harvesting season when there is no scarcity of fodder for livestock," Tayeb added.

Another farmer Abdur Rahman of Thakurgaon is very happy about BRR1 Dhan-33's ability to escape pest attacks.

"I can get cash from the sales of this rice and can also go for early cultivation of robi crops like potato, maize or wheat," he told The Daily Star.

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MELAMINE IN MILK BSTI still waiting for lab test results

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A month after the milk scandal in China, Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) is still unable to confirm or deny the presence of industrial chemical melamine in formulas available in the market.

The BSTI authorities say that they are yet to receive the test results of milk powder from the chemistry department of Dhaka University.

Meanwhile, parents are panicked and worried about their children as they feed them formulas.

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WHEN EMERGENCY STRIKES

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