

EC withholds poll fixture plan over writ tangle

Goes to SC for vacating writ petitions; rulings on Sunday; EC sits with govt; CEC asserts polls on Dec 18

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

The Election Commission (EC) will not announce the detailed schedule for the December 18 parliamentary polls on Sunday as declared earlier but said emphatically that the delay would not affect holding of the election on schedule.

"We will not be able to announce the schedule until the legal dispute over re-demarcation of parliamentary constituencies is resolved," Chief Election

Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda told reporters at the EC Secretariat yesterday afternoon.

But even if the schedule is deferred, the declared poll date December 18 would not be changed, Huda said, adding, "We have appealed to the court to vacate the High Court stay order on re-demarcation of the constituencies."

Failing to declare the polls schedule on November 2, the EC will also fail to maintain the 45-day gap between announcement of

polls schedule and the poll date.

Commission officials said the delay in schedule announcement will make it tough for them to smoothly complete vital tasks like scrutinising nomination papers to identify convicts and loan and utility services bill defaulters.

"The more the announcement of the schedule is delayed, the further the pressure we are already facing to finish election-related tasks in time will be mounting," said an EC official, seeking anonymity.

Sources in the EC Secretariat told The Daily Star that the polls schedule would probably be announced by the first week of November after the re-demarcation dispute is settled.

The EC and the government held an unscheduled meeting yesterday afternoon where the election commissioners informed the chief adviser about the latest development regarding the re-demarcation of parliamentary constituencies.

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HC blames EC for killing time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday blamed the Election Commission (EC) for getting in the way of completing the hearings of 12 writ petitions which challenge the commission's delimitation of parliamentary constituencies.

The bench of justices Mir Hasmat Ali and Shamim Hasnain told EC counsel Shahdeen Malik that the defence is trying to run out the clock by repeating the same arguments again and again.

It appears to the court that the EC wants to delay the general election by keeping the petitions pending, the bench added. Shahdeen Malik however told the court that the commission is very sincere about disposal of the petitions.

He said according to the constitution the gazette notification that the EC put out on delimitation of

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61 killed as 12 blasts tear through Assam

300 injured; curfew imposed in Guwahati; Ulfa denies responsibility

AFP, Guwahati

At least 61 people were killed and more than 300 injured yesterday in a dozen blasts that ripped through towns and markets in the insurgency-hit northeastern Indian state of Assam.

A police spokesman confirmed a total of 12 explosions within the space of about one hour, six of them in the state's main city of Guwahati.

Three other districts in western Assam were also hit.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, although state

officials said the bombings may have been the work of the rebel United Liberation Front of Assam (Ulfa), which has been fighting for an independent homeland since 1979.

Police were also investigating whether Islamist fundamentalist groups active in Assam may have been to blame.

"Jihadi forces could be behind this in collaboration with local militants," said state police intelligence chief Khagen Sharma.

The Ulfa released a statement denying it was involved in the blasts.

Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, who put the death toll at 61 with 300 injured, described the attacks as "an act of cowardice... designed and carried out to spread terror."

An immediate curfew was clamped on Guwahati as angry residents went on the rampage, attacking police vehicles, fire engines and even ambulances.

"The area was teeming with people, office workers, shoppers and vendors when a very big explosion took place," said witness Arindam Das, who was shopping in

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Ban Ki-moon arrives tomorrow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled to arrive tomorrow evening on a two-day official visit to the country.

During his visit, the secretary general is scheduled to hold discussions with the government and political leadership, and see for himself the development and disaster management programmes.

The talks Ban will be holding with the president, chief adviser and leaders of BNP and Awami League are expected to be dominated by the current political

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Hasina's bail plea turned down by SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday denied bail to Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina in an extortion case filed by businessman Noor Ali.

The refusal came when the full-bench Appellate Division dismissed a petition for permission to appeal against the High Court (HC) order that earlier rejected her bail prayer.

A fresh bail prayer was tagged to the leave-to-appeal petition.

Defence lawyer Shafique Ahmed described the ruling as unusual. Speaking to reporters, he said the case lacks element strong enough even to frame charge.

The five-member bench headed by Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin snubbed the leave petition on the basis of majority view.

Usually, the lawyer added, the apex court grants leave in favour of the petitioner if the bench does not appear unanimous.

Also president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, Shafique said many politicians including those already convicted have been granted bail. It is unfortunate that the same did not happen to Sheikh

Hasina.

He said they were considering filing a petition with the SC for a review of the order.

M Amir-Ul-Islam, another counsel for the former prime minister, said if the top court refuses to review the order, it would set a bad precedent.

Additional Attorney General Mansur Habib said if Hasina seeks bail on return from abroad, grounds for the prosecution to oppose her prayer would be much weaker then.

He said the HC refused her bail in the same case before for not being in the country. Besides, the medical report, which was the basis for seeking bail, was prepared much before filing of the prayer.

Perhaps for the same reasons, the SC did not overrule the HC order, he observed.

Mansur said the caretaker administration has extended the petitioner's parole several times so she could continue treatment abroad. It did not take any step against the AL chief despite her involvement in political activities in the US.

"I don't think the government will try to keep her from politics

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Vehicles burn after powerful bombs exploded near the District Court of Guwahati yesterday. The series of blasts ripped through the north-eastern Indian state of Assam killing at least 61.

AL sees fresh uncertainty over polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission's decision of not announcing the national polls schedule on November 2 as planned earlier has created fresh uncertainty over holding the parliamentary elections on December 18, said Awami League (AL) acting president Zillur Rahman yesterday.

"It is shocking that the Election Commission said the polls schedule will not be announced on November 2. It will create fresh

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No more doubt over polls

Says adviser Zillur

UNB, Dhaka

Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman said doubts about the election have already been removed and the government's current responsibility is to hold the polls as per the declared timeframe.

"We've removed uncertainty... now our main target is to hold the polls on December 18. We're moving towards that target," he told

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'TOXIC' MILK No test result from abroad yet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A government taskforce during a meeting yesterday criticised the Institute of Public Health and Nutrition (IPHN) of the health ministry for not filing cases against the importers and traders of adulterated and unregistered powdered milk brands.

The government recently formed the taskforce, comprised of high officials from different ministries, to investigate unregistered and adulterated powdered milks in the market. The taskforce would soon submit its report.

Surprisingly, customs officials told the meeting that they allowed importers to import the unregistered milk since they were not aware of the laws, sources in the

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10 new HC judges to be appointed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Judicial Commission yesterday decided to appoint 10 new judges to the High Court (HC) division of the Supreme Court (SC) to fill the vacant posts.

The commission at its second meeting after being formed in March this year decided to recommend 20 people for the post of HC judges to the president for appointment.

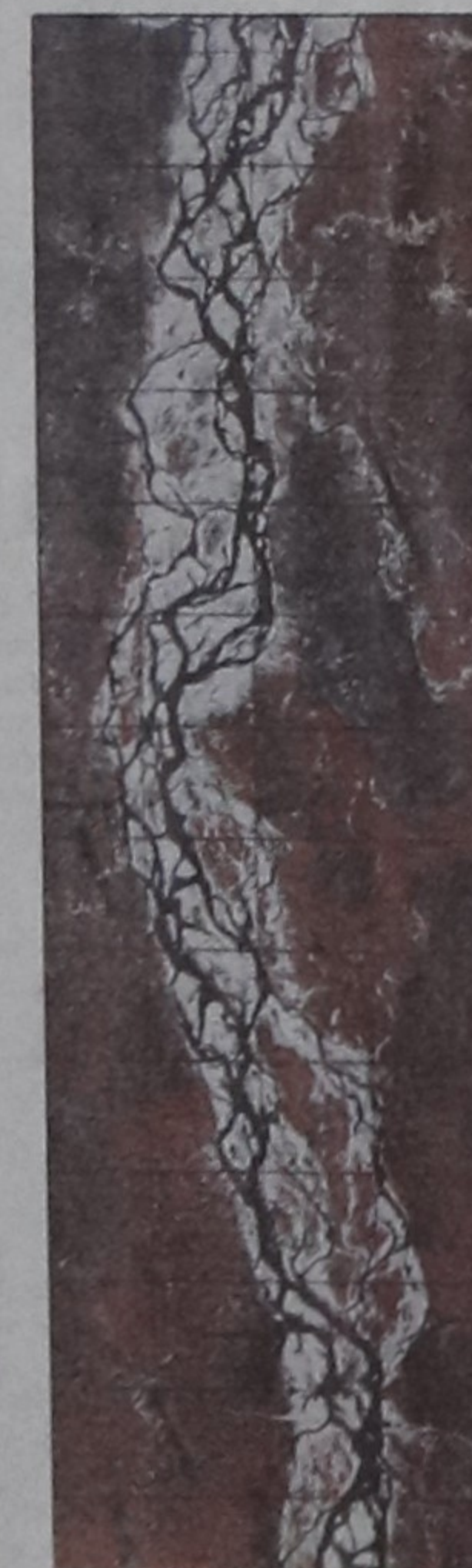
Sources said the president would appoint 10 of them as HC judges.

Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin, chairman of the Supreme Judicial Commission, presided over the meeting at his office lounge at the Supreme Court building in the afternoon.

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Devouring Jamuna a threat to bridge?

Study finds world's only braided river eroding 48m land on western side of the bridge



The satellite image of the Jamuna dated 1999, left, shows the river's course. The gradual movement of the river to a westerly direction is visible from the image, right, taken in 2007.



PINAKI ROY and HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU

The mighty Jamuna appears to be a serious threat to the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge and many other establishments in five districts as the river is changing its course eroding the western bank in the last few years.

This devastating trend of the river is revealed by experts from Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Service (CEGIS) after analysing satellite pictures of several years.

A survey report by CEGIS says on an average 48 metres of land is eroded on the right side of the 220-kilometre-long Jamuna every year.

On the other hand, BWDB Bogra circle survey report says 150 metres of land on an average is eroded in the circle area.

The erosion is so severe in certain places that the river devours around one kilometre of land within a year, locals observe.

The river is moving westwards due to creation of large shoals on its main flow as well as accumulation of sand on the main riverbed seriously, says Shaikh Abdul Momin, additional chief engineer, BWDB.

The western side of the Jamuna bridge along with

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BNP assessing equation in redrawn constituencies

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN and RASHIDUL HASAN

BNP is assessing whether it will be affected or not due to the re-demarcation of parliamentary constituencies, and collecting reports on organisational activities across the country.

Party insiders said six teams headed by senior party leaders are now evaluating the fresh delimitation while some of those are facing difficulties in different areas due to intra-party feuds.

The teams are also trying to identify the districts where BNP would be affected by the re-demarcation of constituencies.

The Election Commission redrew the boundaries of 133 out of the 300 constituencies, and a gazette notification containing demarcation of all the constituencies was published on June 10.

Meanwhile, the High Court (HC) stayed effectiveness of the gazette notification following a writ petition challenging it, filed by former BNP lawmaker Abdul Mannan. His petition is one of three similar petitions filed on Aug 6.

The HC will deliver its verdict on it on Sunday.

BNP leaders believe the re-demarcation will harm BNP as it decreased the number of parli-

mentary seats in some districts traditionally known as BNP strongholds.

"The fresh delimitation will affect many of our seats in different districts including Dhaka, Manikganj, Gazipur and Satkhira," BNP chairperson's adviser Brig Gen (ret) Hannan Shah told The Daily Star yesterday.

Of the six evaluation teams, Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky and Nazrul Islam Khan jointly lead the team for Dhaka Division, former lawmaker Abdul Mannan heads the team for Sylhet Division, Selima Rahman heads that for Barisal, Sarwari Rahman leads the one for Khulna

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Hasina to meet Boucher before heading home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina may hold meetings with important US officials including Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher before heading for Dhaka.

The former premier will fly to London on November 3, according to US-based Bangla news agency ANA. It however said her London-Dhaka plane ticket was not yet confirmed.

Acting AL President Zillur Rahman yesterday said the AL chief will return home any day between November 1 and 7.

Hasina went to the US on parole

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Abbas not freed as detention extended

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday issued a one-month detention order against detained former public works minister Mirza Abbas just before his release from jail on bail.

He was arrested on February 25 last year when he went to the Anti-Corruption Commission office at Segunbagicha to submit his wealth statement.

Abbas, also a joint secretary general of BNP, has been sentenced to eight years imprisonment for tax evasion. He recently secured bail from the High Court in all graft cases filed against him.

Deputy Inspector General (Prisons) Major Shamsul Haider Siddique told UNB last night that they received the detention order

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Talking polls and beyond

Onus of democracy on Khaleda, Hasina

Emajuddin feels parties have to be organised democratically first

SHAMIM ASHRAF

Political scientist Dr Emajuddin Ahamed has said political parties must be organised democratically if they want to have a democratic system in the country.

"The top leaders of the parties must be elected by party workers, not by the party chief alone," he said during an interview with The



Daily Star.

Being the top leaders of the two biggest political parties, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina should play a pivotal role in giving other leaders a sense of direction regarding democratic

values. "They are the ones who can, by setting examples, rejuvenate democratic culture in the

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Find details of the interview on page 11

Hannan Shah asks CEC to resign for 'favouring AL'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP chairperson's Adviser Brig Gen (ret) ASM Hannan Shah yesterday demanded resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda for comparing the upcoming election with that of 1970 and "favouring" the Awami League.

"The chief election commissioner recently expressed his desire to hold an election like the one held in 1970. Is he going to ensure the same arrangements as in 1970 when Awami League won 160 seats out of 162?" Hannan Shah said.

"The present chief election commissioner is favouring Awami

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