

Poll code violation

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would warn him in writing for the violation. He warned the speaker verbally, he said.

In response to a letter, the EC had earlier informed the speaker that he could not use his official vehicle and enjoy protocol during election campaign. But the speaker ignored the EC's advice.

Two parliament officials in uniform, who usually stand behind the speaker's chair when the House is in session, were found standing on two corners of the stage at Sircar's campaign rally at Turinhat in Panchagarh on Sunday.

These officials were never found with the speaker in any programmes outside parliament even in the capital.

Earlier, Sircar had allegedly used the government circuit house at Panchagarh while submitting nomination papers.

PDP candidate M Delwar Hossain made written complaint to the CEC and the returning officer concerned about Sircar using the circuit house for electioneering.

He also complained that while conducting election campaign the speaker used official staffs and vehicle.

Later, Sircar stopped using the circuit house.

Meanwhile, a notice in this regard was served yesterday on Sircar and two other candidates for Panchagarh-1 by the Joint District Judge of

Panchagarh AkM Enamul Karim, who is also the electoral enquiry committee officer.

BNP candidates who have been warned are Sujat Mia for Habiganj-1, Abu Lais Mubin Chowdhury for Habiganj-3, SM Foysal for Habiganj-4, Abdul Gafur for Rajshahi-4 and Harun-ur-Rashid for Chapainawabganj-3. The AL nominees are Enamul Haque for Rajshahi-4 and Shahriar Alam for Rajshahi-6.

Besides, two independent candidates -- Sardar Amjad Hossain for Rajshahi-4 and Nur Hossain for Jessore-1 have been warned.

Abdul Mannan violated the code of conduct by using helicopter in polls campaign, and the others either pasted posters on walls or brought out processions with motorcycles or set up more than one election camp in a union.

MOBILEPHONE NETWORK
Talking to reporters yesterday evening at the EC Secretariat, the CEC said he thinks mobile phone network should operate also on the polling day.

"If the network remains in operation, it will be easy for us to communicate with the polling personnel," he said.

Huda however said there are differences of opinion in this regard among political parties, the home ministry and intelligence agencies. "We will take a decision on it by December 27,"

No question

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"If any attempt is made to change the election results, the consequences will be disastrous," she said at the rally in Feni-1, one of three constituencies the BNP chief is contesting from in the upcoming election.

"I would like to make it clear that there is no reason for BNP and its allies to quit the election race," said the BNP chief.

"Noticing the popularity of the BNP-led electoral alliance, a certain quarter is propagating that we shall not contest the elections," she said.

"BNP is the largest political party in the country and no election can be held without it," Khaleda said.

"Those who want to turn the country into a 'failed state' and form a 'puppet government' are planning to foil the next election like they scotched the January 22 polls" she added.

"Some quarters do not want BNP to contest the elections. They also did not want the emergency to be lifted. It is the BNP that mounted pressure on the caretaker government to withdraw the emergency and meet the people's demand," the BNP chairperson said.

Referring to the 'attempt to assassinate' her in Comilla on Tuesday, Khaleda said, "I will not stay away from electioneering. We shall continue the movement to establish people's rights."

"There was an attempt to assassinate me at Chandina. But the conspirators could not be successful because if Allah wants to keep someone alive, none can harm that person," she said.

Terming the lifting of emergency 'a victory for BNP and its allies', she said the government withdrew the emergency bowing to their demand.

She said the BNP-led government during its tenure curbed terrorist activities in Feni and if voted to power, they will take necessary measures to root out terrorism in the country.

The BNP chairperson sought vote for her party candidate VP Joyal in Feni-2 constituency.

Khaleda also addressed street rallies at Fulgazi Bazar, Munshirhat, Chhagalnaiya, Parshuram, Choudhagram and Narayanjan before returning to the capital.

She was expected to attend a Christmas programme in the capital's Kakrail Church late at night.

2 killed

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The dead are Mohiuddin, 14, and Selim, 26. Of the injured, four were admitted to Laxmipur Sadar Hospital while the rest to Kamal Nagar health complex.

Angry processionists set the bus on fire but none of the passengers was injured.

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Witnesses said a bus of Ayesha Enterprise ploughed into a procession of the supporters.

Bikalpadhara candidate Maj (rtd) M A Mannan at Kamal Nagar while it was heading for a public meeting on Upakul College ground.

No threat

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After the meeting, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Director General Hasan Mahmud Khandaker said special measures will be taken to ensure foolproof security for the two former prime ministers.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday said an investigation is underway to find if the suspected JMB activists arrested on Tuesday in Debidwar of Comilla district had planned to carry out any sabotage at the election rally of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, reports BSS.

"It is being examined if there has been any link between the possible acts of the arrested militants and the deterioration of law and order at Begum Zia's rally," said an official statement referring to Tuesday's incident in Comilla.

It said the government is pledge-bound to ensure "the highest security measures" for the two former prime ministers while the law enforcement and intelligence agencies, including the SSE, are taking all-out measures instantly on receiving any information regarding their security.

The statement, issued in view of media report, said on the basis of intelligence reports Rab on December 23 arrested JMB members Abdul Alim alias Naim and Ayub Ansari alias Masud in Nariabad area of Debidwar along with five grenades and a bomb.

It also said Rab action came as part of an intensified security vigil in and around the areas where Khaleda Zia was scheduled to address rallies.

Public investment

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employment generation, loan flow to unproductive sectors must be cut down.

In his last press briefing, successes of the caretaker government in last two years were highlighted. "On failure side, GDP growth could not be taken to 7-8 per cent, inflation could not be contained to 2-3 per cent. However, compared to the neighbouring countries, the rate of growth cut in Bangladesh was less and the rise of inflation was also low. It is not a mean success, the advisers said.

A report titled 'Present State of Bangladesh Economy: Achievements and Challenges' was presented at the press conference.

"Economic meltdown in the developed countries has devastated the world economy. Consumer expense is dropping in our trade partner countries due to depression, which may have an adverse impact on our export prospect in future. Remittance inflow might come down as a result of fall in demand of workers in the Middle Eastern and developed countries," Mirza Aziz said.

"If the world depression lingers and intensifies in future our rate of growth may slow down and the target of poverty alleviation hampered."

He said the estimate of GDP growth rate at lower than five per cent, made by the Bretton Woods Institution, is a "Very conservative estimate". Six per cent GDP growth could be achieved, he added.

Mirza Aziz urged the next government to continue the on-going special reform programme in the state-owned banks (SOBs).

On election manifestos of the two major political parties, the finance adviser said the challenges have been reflected in those, and now emphasis should be given on implementation.

Mentioning the experience of working with the donors in last two years he said, "There was no conflict. However, there were differences of opinions."

Explaining this, he said once the IMF emphasised contractionary monetary policy but the government did not accept it.

Others present at the press briefing included Bangladesh Bank Governor Salehuddin Ahmed, Finance Secretary Mohammad Tareque, Planning Secretary Jafar

Dhaka signs

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Foskett inked the MoU on behalf of their respective governments.

Foreign Secretary M Touhid Hossain was present on the occasion, said a foreign ministry release.

"The MoU will provide a framework for cooperation between the two countries in combating international terrorism," it said.

The areas of cooperation include cooperation in combating organised transnational crimes, preventing and investigating acts of terrorism and bringing the perpetrators to justice, sharing best practices and procedures and capacity-building initiatives in terms of specialised training and technical assistance.

An avenue

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election campaign to the hawkers, once ordered off roadsides and sidewalks by the caretaker government. Their business had been hurt by the state of emergency. In the closing days of the campaign, hawkers like many others on the margins of society are at the centre of attention, as they always have been when it comes to elections.

Bangabandhu Avenue, a famed venue for hawkers, comes alive with gossips and speculation over who to win the election.

Abdur Razzak, a shoeshine boy squatting on the sidewalk, feels his vote is equally important. "Leaders come and ask for vote," he says with pride, as he polishes a customer's shoes in the awning of his shop.

In a hushed voice, Razzak says as he is an adherent of Awami League, but admits many hawkers on Bangabandhu Avenue are the backers of the BNP.

On Election Day, Razzak will not work morning hours. He will go to the polling centre in the morning in his constituency, which is more urgent to him than anything else.

Mohammad Tipu, a way-side vendor of men's underclothes, is not quite happy. "My mother didn't let me become a voter."

But he has all the good wishes for the BNP. "I came from Noakhali, you know," He means Noakhali is a BNP

Ahmed Chowdhury, National Board of Revenue (NBR) Chairman Mohammad Abdul Mazid and ERD Secretary Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan.

Gordo lottery

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a cook, plans to open a restaurant with the money, reports a news agency.

The incident caused quite a stir as different Spanish newspapers on Tuesday published the picture of one of the youths showing his bank savings book.

FACUA, a consumers' organisation, was however more interested in the entries in the youth's savings book that date back before he received the winnings. These entries show that he had paid the bank a total of 22.93 euros as the charge for six transactions after opening the account in February with only 50 euros.

"This shows clearly how banks profit even from people with very small financial means," a FACUA spokesperson said.

"El Gordo", meaning "the fat one", is a Christmas tradition in Spain dating back to 1812. It is designed to give as many people as possible a windfall before the holidays.

33-member

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Manikas, senior associate and director for Asia Programme at NDI, are also in the relegation.

"The purpose of the delegation is to demonstrate the international community's interest in Bangladesh's return to a democratically elected government," says the announcement.

The team members will also meet the local election authorities, party and media representatives and domestic election monitors.

On the election day, the NDI observers will observe polling stations and vote counting.

The NDI observer mission, funded by USAID, will conduct its activities in a non-partisan manner and in accordance with Bangladesh law and the declaration of principles for International election observation.

EC backtracks

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Sheikh Hasina, who leads AL-led grand electoral alliance, and Khaleda Zia, who leads BNP-led four-party alliance, have been touring the country in a whirlwind speed.

Had the commission's plan worked, it would bring archrivals Hasina and Khaleda face to face before the parliamentary poll. According to the plan, the debate was supposed to be broadcast live on the electronic media, the sources added.

The EC organised an electoral debate among mayoral candidates before the August 4 polls to four city corporations. The programme was lauded in all quarters.

During the electoral reform talks between the EC and political parties, a few politicians actually came up with the suggestion of the debates.

Dulu granted HC bail in last 4 cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former BNP deputy minister for land Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu secured bail in all eight cases filed against him as the High Court (HC) yesterday granted him bail in four remaining criminal cases.

Upon hearing separate bail petitions filed by Dulu, an HC vacation bench of Justice Moeenul Islam Chowdhury granted ad-interim bail to the BNP leader till January 4, the opening date of the court after its vacation.

Talking to The Daily Star after the bail order, Dulu's lawyer barrister Ahsanul Karim said there is no legal bar now to his release from jail as he secured bail in all the eight cases.

Of the cases in which Dulu obtained bail yesterday, three were filed by the government on charges of extortions and purchasing lands by providing false information while another one was filed by the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) on charges of amassing wealth illegally and concealing information of his wealth from the Commission.

The cases were filed after his arrest in February last year.

Barrister Rafique-ul-Huq appeared for the petitioner while advocate MA Aziz Khan stood for the ACC.

S Asian editors

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world have closely followed the recent developments through print, audio and visual media and the Internet. The media coverage has influenced opinion on crucial issues and impacted on the political stance and policies of the authorities, they said in a statement.

In the current situation, the media cannot be seen as being partisan or driven by a particular agenda, the editors and columnists said.

As media can exacerbate a situation, journalists based in various parts of South Asia continue to seek a common future in peace, they added.

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, Dhaka, Anuradha Bhasin, editor of Kashmir Times, Jammu, Vinod Mehta, editor of Outlook, New Delhi, Subir Bhaumik of BBC, Kolkata, Sumit Chakravarty, editor of Mainstream, New Delhi, Dileep Chandan, editor of Asom Bani, Guwahati, Kanak-Mani Dixit, editor of Himal Southasia, Kathmandu, HK Dua, editor-in-chief of The Tribune, Chandigarh, Yubraj Ghimire, editor of Newline, Karachi, Sanjoy Hazarika, columnist from New Delhi, Nurul Kabir, editor of The New Age, Dhaka, Kumar Ketkar, chief editor of Loksaatta, Indian Express Group, Mumbai, Abbas Nasir, editor of The Dawn/Dawns News TV, Karachi, Kuldip Nayyar, columnist from New Delhi, Mrinal Pande, editor of Hindustan, New Delhi, Pradip Panjoubam, editor of Imphal Free Press, Imphal, Associate Editor AJ Philip of The Tribune, Chandigarh, Chief Editor Pamela Philopose of Women's Feature Service, New Delhi, columnist Ghazi Salahuddin of The News, Karachi, Associate Editor Siddharth Varadarajan of The Hindu, New Delhi, former editor BG Verghese of Indian Express/Hindustan Times, New Delhi, Editor Narayan Wagle of Dainiki, Kathmandu, were among the signatories.

Poll spending

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who have given Tk 40 lakh to Tk 1 crore to the party funds to get party tickets.

According to the survey, 51 candidates of Awami League, 42 of BNP, 12 of Jatiya Party and six of Jamaat conducted campaigns illegally.

The candidates spent about Tk 4.32 crore during this period, the report says. The candidates of BNP on average spent Tk 3.89 lakh each and each AL candidate on average spent Tk 3.09 lakh.

The highest spend by a BNP candidate was Tk 19.78 lakh and Tk 16.02 lakh by an AL candidate, says the report.

The independent candidates on average spent Tk 3.3 lakh with the highest spend being Tk 38.5 lakh, it adds.

A survey report of TIB conducted before the cancelled January 22 election revealed that each BNP candidate on average spent Tk 18.69 lakh and each AL candidate Tk 13.96 lakh.

The report says political parties again nominated black money holders, industrialists and criminals who do not show respect to electoral laws.

Although there was an obligation of giving nomination to the candidates recommended by the grassroots level political parties hardly obeyed it, the report observes.

Besides, several candidates did not clearly reveal information of eight categories, but EC took no action against them.

TIB has recommended monitoring campaign expenditures and violation of electoral code of conduct regularly for a fair and acceptable poll. It also suggests action against the candidates who would conduct campaigns before announcing poll schedule.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Treasurer M Hafizuddin Khan, among others, attended the press conference.

4-party slams

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press conference at the BNP Chairperson's Gulshan office said the popularity of BNP and the combine could not be brought down in spite of attempts to send Khaleda Zia into exile.

They also alleged that 'the plot to assassinate Khaleda' is aimed at making the country 'leaderless'.

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain demanded immediate arrest of the mastermind behind the 'plot to assassinate Khaleda Zia'.

He said any attempt to foil the next parliamentary elections would be resisted strongly.

BNP and its associate organisation Jubo Dal held protest rallies in city's Naya Paltan and Muktangan following the arrest of two suspected JMB men and seizure of grenades near the venue of Khaleda's rally in Comilla.

They also demanded that the government beef up Khaleda's security.

BNP leader Mirza Abbas, Khelafat Majlis leader ATM Ishak, Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Tasnim Alam and Jasimuddin were also present.

A procession brought out by BNP from its central office paraded streets from Naya Paltan to Muktangan.

Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, also brought out a procession and paraded various roads in the capital.

Our Chittagong Correspondent reports: The BNP activists loyal to Abdullah Al Noman, BNP candidate for Chittagong-9 constituency, gathered in front of the Zilla Parishad Market at Laldighi to

attend the rally in the afternoon protesting the 'attempt on Khaleda's life'.

When BNP leader and former state minister Mir Nasir Uddin arrived there with his supporters, Noman's followers chased them forcing Nasir to take shelter at the Zilla Parishad Market.

On information, police rushed to the spot and charged baton on supporters of both the BNP leaders to bring the situation under control.

Assistant Commissioner (Kotwali) Babul Akhter said the police barred the BNP activists from holding the rally as they tried to hold it blocking the road.

Pintu freed

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Commission filed the cases against Pintu with Hazaribagh Police Station last year.

DIG (prison) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddiqui told The Daily Star, "Pintu has walked out of the jail at about 12:45pm from Kashimpur jail."

On December 22, the vacation bench of Justice Moeenul Islam Chowdhury awarded him ad-interim bail in last two cases until reopening of the court after vacation on January 4, 2009.

After the HC order, Pintu's lawyer advocate AHM Mizanur Rahman told that his client has been accused in total 11 cases including amassing wealth illegally and tax evasion. The police have earlier submitted final reports in two criminal cases exonerating him from the charges of the cases.

Pintu was sent to jail on February 15 last year after he surrendered before a court.

Xmas today

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his son, Jesus Christ, on this day.

The Christmas is also a celebration of rebirth, new beginnings, forgiveness and peace as the New Year approaches. It is an occasion for the Christians to renew their relationship with god and with their fellow humans.

On the eve of the occasion, the Christian community of the country has wished peace and prosperity for all. To ensure peaceful celebration of the festival, security in the capital and other places of the country has been beefed up.

The day is a public holiday. Special prayers will be held at churches.

The celebrations of the festival starts on the Christmas Eve with singing carols in public places like lobbies, restaurants and lounges. A number of organisations, individuals and Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka Sheraton and The Westin Dhaka have arranged parties featuring Christmas carols, games and dance shows.

The churches and adjoining grounds have already been decked out with colourful tiny blinking lights and illuminated Christmas trees will be placed with a star standing right on top. Besides, Santa Claus will hand out Christmas gifts to the children, family gatherings will take place and Christmas Day feasts will be held.

President Iajuddin Ahmed will host a reception for the members of Christian community at Bangabhaban today.

Pakistan MPs

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addressing concerns relating to the Mumbai incident."

Lawmakers said that Pakistan had put forth these proposals "to defuse tensions in South Asia" and expressed their condolences to families of the victims. A total of 172 people were killed, including nine of the attackers.

India says the gunmen were trained and equipped by LeT, which is fighting Indian rule in disputed Kashmir, and travelled to Mumbai on a hijacked trawler from the Pakistani port of Karachi.

They rejected as a cock and bull story this claim by India.

"How was it possible for a group of 10 to split and engage the entire security apparatus of a country for three days," they questioned.

They also questioned the manner in which the United Nations adopted a resolution for sanctions on Jamaatud Dawa, saying the action had been taken at the behest of India.

They referred to some reports which claimed that China wanted to block the UN resolution, but it was allegedly persuaded by President Asif Ali Zardari not to do so. The senators asked the government to explain its position.

Leader of the Opposition in Senate, Kamil Ali Agha, expressed concern over the absence of Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN when the resolution was adopted by the Security

Council.

He termed the arrival of an Interpol team to Pakistan alarming and said that the purpose of the visit was to implicate Pakistan in the Mumbai terrorist attacks. He said the US wanted to engage Pakistan on its eastern border to achieve its objectives.

Earlier Pakistani senators on Tuesday called for a review of Pakistan's role in the 'war on terror' and suggested the redeployment of troops from the country's

Relations between the two countries have deteriorated following the attacks, with both sides raising the spectre of war, while at the same time calling for a calming of tensions and an end to empty rhetoric.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Tuesday dismissed talk of war with Pakistan, but again demanded that Islamabad do more to crack down on militants blamed for cross-border attacks.

Pakistan's parliament condemned the "war hype" in a situation where war is not an option" as both countries had nuclear weapons -- but noted that the armed forces would defend the nation at all costs.

The lawmakers urged India to "exercise restraint" and stop "hostile propaganda", which sought to cover what they called New Delhi's "intelligence failure" in relation to the attacks.

Tac winds

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Besides, 24 graft accused who have applied for clemency did not draw application forms while six others did not submit the forms they drew.

"The Tac has brought a relief for those who have faced the commission. Many of them went to perform Hajj after disclosing information about their ill-gotten wealth. They also pledged not to get involved in corruption in future," said Tac Chairman Justice Habibur Rahman Khan at a press briefing yesterday.

Justice Habibur earlier announced to finish all pending work. On November 16, the Supreme Court stayed the HC order that declared formation and operation of the Tac illegal and unconstitutional on November 13.

"We are perturbed about the matter. We will leave the matter for the law ministry," said Habibur Rahman Khan in reply to a query about the fate of the remaining work of Tac.

The unfinished work of Tac includes distribution of clemency certificate, the fate of those who applied through the National Coordination Committee (NCC) on corruption and serious crimes but did not appear, the fate of money of the graft accused who confessed to having ill-gotten money but did not deposit it, and where to deposit the ill-gotten money of the graft accused as their accounts are still frozen.

Justice Habibur said the law ministry has formed a committee headed by a deputy secretary to take care of the incomplete work after being informed by the Tac about the matter.

He also said files of those graft accused who have applied but did not appear will be sent back to the offices through which they have applied for. Of the 30 graft accused, 17 applied through the ACC while 13 through the NCC.

When asked about the fate of 13 graft accused as the NCC is also going to wind up its activities on December 31, he said, "Then the matter will be looked after by the law ministry."

The Tac completed hearing of 490 graft accused, including 68 females,