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## EC stripped of power

Bill passed with amendment to RPO restricts it from enforcing political party registration provisions

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Awami League-led grand alliance government has curtailed the Election Commission's (EC) authority to take action against political parties breaching registration provisions.

The caretaker administration empowered the EC to cancel registration of a political party for violating the provisions regarding nomination of parliamentary candidates and formation of associated bodies.

But a bill passed in parliament on February 24 to ratify Representation of the People Order (amendment) ordinance restricts the EC's power to enforce the registration provisions.

The EC now holds no authority to take punitive steps against a registered political party choosing candidates from outside the panel forwarded by its grassroots.

The commission can take no action also if a party forms or continues with organisations made up of teachers, students, workers or employees.

As per the latest amendments to the

RPO, a registered political party is not bound to inform the EC if it has picked its parliamentary contenders from grass-roots panel and formed affiliated bodies in compliance with the RPO provisions.

It will only have to inform the EC in the event of any independent lawmaker joining it. Failure to do so might cost the party its registration.

The changes have in fact diluted the RPO provisions for cancelling registration of a political party, observe EC Secretariat officials.

Titled Representation of the People Order (Amendment) Act 2009, the new law says the commission will scrap a party's registration for failing to furnish the information required by this order (RPO) and electoral rules for consecutive years.

Unlike the ordinance, which prescribed cancellation of registration for not providing information for three years in a row, it does not specify time frame.

According to the act, a party might lose registration if it violates clause (4) of article 90B. Interestingly, 90B does not

even have that clause.

The EC however retains the authority to cancel a party's registration for not submitting election expense returns within the stipulated time frame, that is, 90 days since gazette notification of election results and an additional 30 days in some cases.

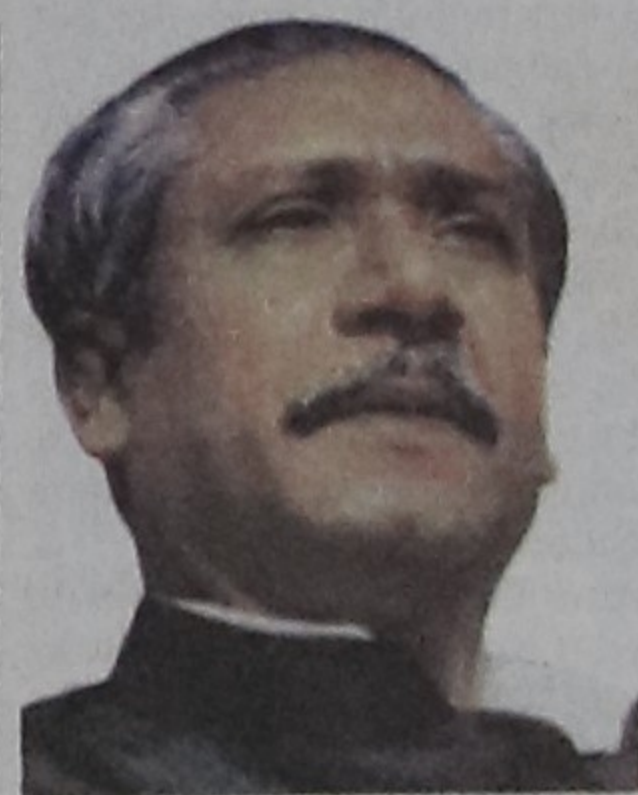
Besides, it still can cancel registration if a party dissolves itself, gets banned by the government or does not contest parliamentary elections for two consecutive terms.

The new law however makes it even harder for a newly floated political party to be registered with the EC.

It says a new party seeking registration must have functional headquarters, offices in at least one third of 64 districts and 100 upazilas or metropolitan thanas, and a minimum 200 voters as members in each of the units.

As per the previous conditions, having headquarters and offices in 10 administrative districts and 50 upazila or metropolitan thanas would suffice.

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## Bangabandhu's birthday today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Children Day will be observed today in celebration of the 89th birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Born in 1920 at Tungipara in Gopalganj, Bangabandhu is revered as the greatest Bangalee who struggled all his life to establish people's rights.

The government, different political parties and socio-cultural organisations including ruling Awami League (AL)

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## Intelligence asked to watch out

PM asks for synergy among agencies to check failures

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the intelligence agencies to work in a coordinated way to thwart recurrence of incidents like the last month's massacre at the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) headquarters.

The directives came at a regular cabinet meeting that began at 11:00am at the Secretariat.

Most cabinet members mentioned lack of coordination and sharing of information among the intelligence wings as the major reason for the failure in preventing almost all major untoward incidents starting from the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the last month's BDR mutiny.

Hasina also directed the intelligence agencies to share information with each other for the sake of country's security and its people.

"Our intelligence wings function without maintaining any sort of communication with each other. One agency remains in the dark

about the other. That's why the prime minister has directed them to work in a coordinated way and share information," a senior minister told The Daily Star after the meeting wishing anonymity.

The minister said the prime minister is planning to reorganise the activities of the intelligence wings gradually for their smooth functioning.

Bangladesh has five intelligence agencies -- National Security Intelligence (NSI), Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Military Intelligence (MI), Special Branch (SB) and Detective Branch (DB) of Police.

The meeting also expressed concern over activities of militant outfits in the country.

The prime minister asked the law enforcement agencies to remain alert about the militant outfits and urged people to share information about them with law enforcers, said the PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad after the

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## 17 districts get new DCs

14 DCs attached to ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government started rearranging the field level administration yesterday with the appointment of 17 new deputy commissioners (DCs) and posting them to as many districts.

Separate official announcements said the government also withdrew 14 DCs and attached them to the establishment ministry.

Deputy secretary (DS) of local government division MN Shamsuddin Azad Chowdhury will replace DC of Mymensingh Md Ziaur Rahman Khan while DS of finance division Md Abdul Jalil to replace DC of Dinajpur Md Nabiul Haq Molla, director of Shilpakala Academy Md

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PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

When parts of the Chittagong city are suffering hour-long power cuts every other hour, street lights of Sarsan Road are left on throughout the day. The photo was taken around 1:00pm yesterday.

## BNP MPs stage walkout amid debate over proclamation of independence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Treasury and opposition bench lawmakers in parliament yesterday locked in an unscheduled debate over who proclaimed the country's independence in 1971.

During the debate the BNP-led opposition lawmakers walked out protesting against "indecent remarks" made by treasury bench lawmakers about late president Ziaur Rahman and demanding the remarks be expunged from the proceedings.

They returned after the over an hour-long debate was over.

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## Tension along Myanmar border

STAR REPORT

Tension runs high along the Bangladesh-Myanmar borders as the neighbouring country started erecting barbed-wire fences unilaterally on its side of 200-kilometre land borders with Bangladesh, said defence sources.

The neighbouring nation is also mobilising its troops and naval force, sources said.

When contacted, Foreign Secretary Mohammad Towhid confirmed it saying Myanmar started mobilising its forces in the bordering areas since the November incident in the Bay of Bengal.

"The reinforcements are still there but we do not have any information about the construction of fences," Towhid said.

Bangladesh has no problem if Myanmar erects fences on their territory, he said adding, "It will curb smuggling and illegal trespassing."

Myanmar initiated erecting barbed-wire fences along its borders with Bangladesh since last November when its naval ships intruded into Bangladesh's maritime boundary. But the construction of the fences became visible recently.

Sources said an airport in Myanmar's Sitwa, close to Bangladesh border, is being revamped through construction of long runways.

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## 312 more workers return home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 312 Bangladeshi workers returned from abroad yesterday due to various problems in the wake of the global economic meltdown.

Of them, around 90 came back from Malaysia, over 100 from Saudi Arabia and 122 from United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"Workers who returned from Malaysia today (yesterday) said they were not provided with jobs or their work permits were not renewed and wages not paid making their return obvious," said an official at Zia International Airport (ZIA).

They came back with special travel pass. Bangladesh mission in Kuala Lumpur gives special travel pass to workers having problems with employment and wages.

Returnees from Saudi Arabia either overstayed or were in jails, the official said.

Those who came back from the UAE said they had unemployment or underemployment problems but the situation was not so bad.

Workers returning this month from different countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia and Singapore totalled more than 4,000 until yesterday.

In February, the number of returnee workers stood at over 8,000, which was double that in January.

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## Pak govt reinstates sacked top judge

Sharif calls off long march

AP, AFP, Islamabad/ Gujranwala

Pakistan opposition leader Nawaz Sharif called off a protest march on Monday after Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani reinstated the country's sacked top judge ahead of a showdown with opposition parties and defiant lawyers.

The announcement was made by Gilani in a televised address to the nation.

Pakistan's government relented in a major confrontation with the opposition yesterday, agreeing to reinstate a fired Supreme Court chief justice whose fate had sparked street fights and raised



Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry

fears of political instability.

The dawn announcement by the prime minister that Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry would be sworn back in on March 21 capped a night of high drama and led activist lawyers to drop plans to march on the capital and stage a sit-in at Parliament later in the day.

Pakistan's main opposition leader Nawaz Sharif on Monday said he had agreed to call off a mass protest march after the government decided

to reinstate the deposed chief justice.

"We are now calling off this long march," he

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## Govt to provide housing to slain army officers' families: PM

UNB, Dhaka

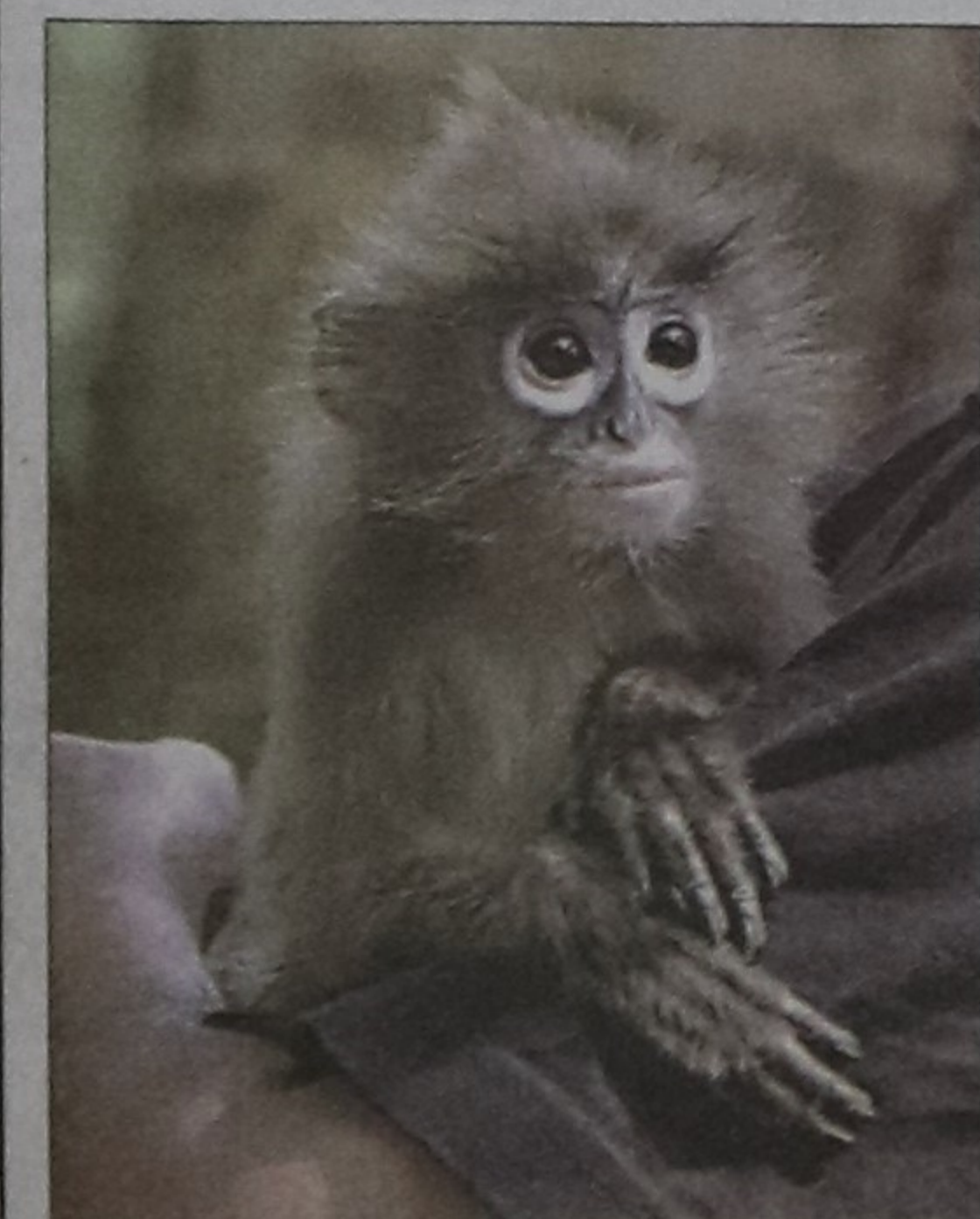
The government will provide housing to the families of the army officers killed in the February 25-26 BDR mutiny.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said this when grief-stricken family members of four army officers met her at her residence Jamuna yesterday evening.

The four deceased officers are Col Anisuzzaman, Lt Col Elahi Manjur Chowdhury, Col Kudrat Elahi Rahman Shafiq and Col Rezaul Kabir.

She said the government will also help the families to continue their children's studies and arrange employment as per their qualifications.

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This file photo shows the baby langur that died yesterday morning.

## Baby langur takes final farewell

STAR REPORT

She will no more grow into womanhood from the girl she was. She will no more enjoy the freedom of the wilderness.

The baby langur, a rare Phayre's Langur that was taken to the Lawachhera wildlife rescue centre two days ago, after she was rescued from the forest, mysteriously died yesterday morning.

Wildlife officials are not sure what caused her death.

Sri Mongol foresters informed Dr Anwarul Islam, the zoologist, about the death of the primate in the morning.

"The baby was okay even last

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## Militants apart, a few others linked

Faruk on BDR carnage; Shafique says nobody should be accused before probe completes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sticking to his earlier claim of Islamist militants' link with the massacre at BDR headquarters, Commerce Minister Faruq Khan yesterday said involvement of some other quarters are also cropping up.

However, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said nobody should be specifically accused of having links with the conspiracy of the Pikhana carnage before the enquiry reports are published.

Talking to reporters after a meeting with Bangladesh Judicial Service Association (BISA) leaders at his Secretariat office yesterday afternoon, he said activists of some banned Islamist outfits are still active.

He said the militants are now working under the banner of different organisations and the law enforcers are arresting them.

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