

EC needs to be strengthened further: PM

UNB, Dhaka
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the Election Commission needs to be strengthened further to uphold people's voting right and thus keep the flow of democracy uninterrupted in future.

She also sought cooperation of the media men in strengthening democracy as she said without uninterrupted democracy a country can't achieve the cherished development of the mass people.

"You (media people) have to remain always alert so that the practice of democracy in Bangladesh is not hampered anyway," she said.

Sheikh Hasina made the remarks at a view exchange meeting with reporters of political bit at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the morning.

Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad gave the opening speech on the occasion. Subhash Chandra Badal, Shahed Chowdhury, Shamim Siddiqui, Mohammad Alam, Farayazi Azmal Hossain, Kalyan Saha and Dip Hossain also spoke at the function.

Hasina, also president of Bangladesh Awami League,

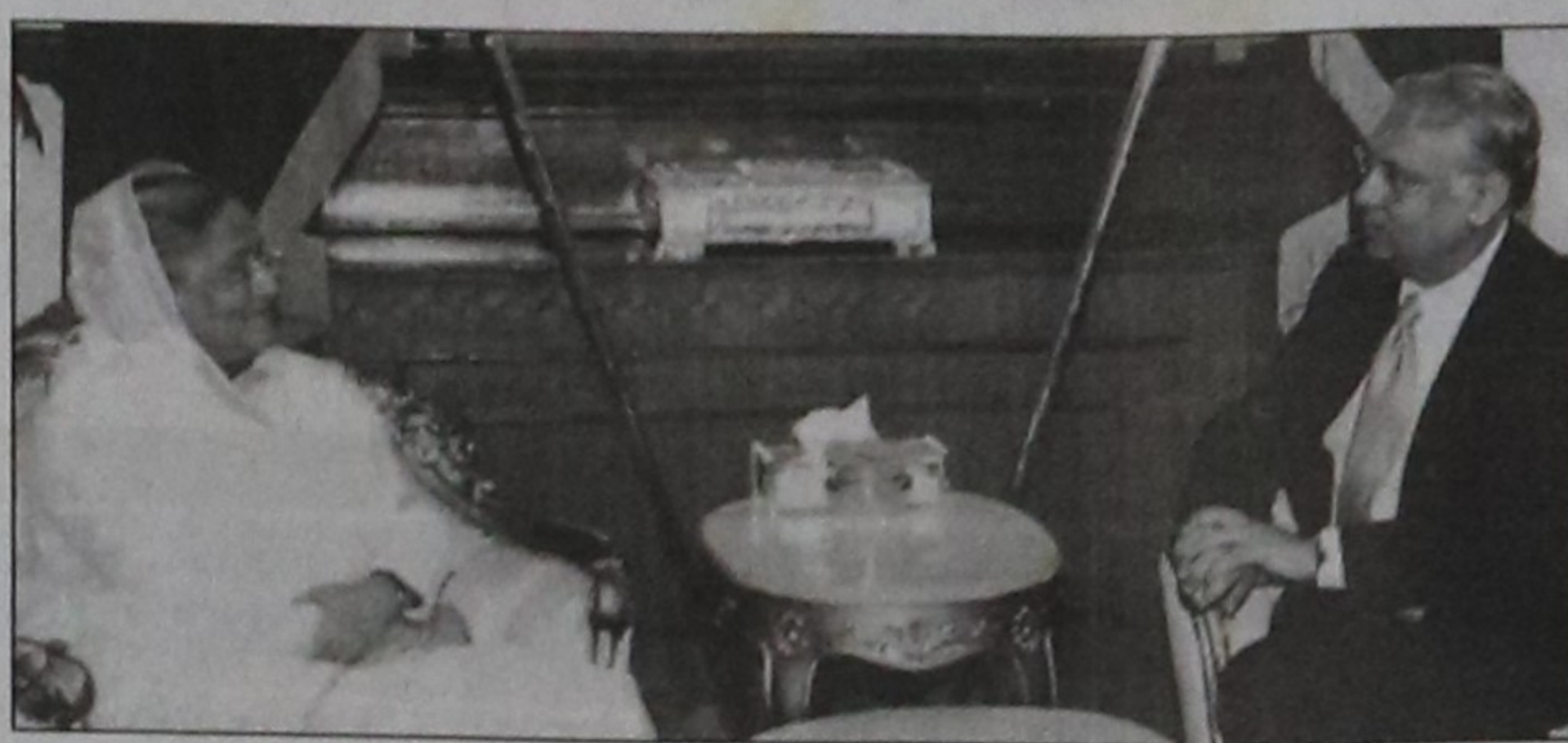
said the December general election could take place in a free, fair, neutral and acceptable manner as the elections were held on the basis of a flawless voter list with photographs.

"There are so many criticisms about the immediate past caretaker government. But the caretaker government had been successful in formulating a flawless voter list with the help of Armed Forces. They were successful in identifying some 1.23 crore false voters on the list formulated by the previous government," she said.

Hasina further said the present government attaches due importance to "constructive criticism" by the opposition party as it believes that such criticism can help the government in working in the right way for the people.

She said, "Conspiracy against democracy is still on as a vested quarter is engaged in making publicity against the present democratically elected government".

Hasina also praised the role of journalist community in holding the December 29 polls in a free, fair, neutral and acceptable manner.



Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 16)

Raise taxes on tobacco items to reduce consumption

Unnayan Shamannay urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Speakers at a press conference yesterday urged the government to drastically increase taxes on tobacco products in the budget for next fiscal year to bring a decline in their consumption.

Increasing supplementary taxes by 15 percent on tobacco products and fixed duty of Tk two on bidi packets would help the government earn an extra Tk 950 crore in revenue, shrinking tobacco consumption by 20 percent at the same time, they added.

Unnayan Shamannay, a non-profit research organisation, placed the demand at the

press conference on 'Duties on tobacco products: Confusions and reality' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday.

Enhanced taxes on tobacco products will raise their prices, which will discourage smoking, said WBB Trust Executive Director Saifuddin Ahmed.

Referring to a World Health Organisation (WHO) study, the speakers said the government's total earning, including tobacco taxes and employment in tobacco sector, is only Tk 2,600 crore annually, whereas health hazard caused by smoking is worth over Tk 5,000 crore.

Tobacco-related illness

causes a huge loss in productivity as well as lives, said Md Akramul Islam, technical adviser at International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, adding that around 80 percent lung cancer is caused from tobacco use.

He mentioned that WHO brackets tobacco as an addictive narcotic and there is no rationale behind allowing tobacco use.

Consumers' Association of Bangladesh (CAB) General Secretary Kazi Faruk, Dhaka Ahsania Mission Programme Coordinator Iqbal Masud and WHO Representative Dr Mahfuzul Haque also spoke at the programme.

Success of Bangladeshis in UK encouraging

Says visiting British team

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet
Members of British delegation yesterday said the success of Bangladeshis in the UK is encouraging, especially the new generation have been playing a laudable role in a big way in the British society.

The six-men British-Bangladesh team of the successful individuals said this while addressing a press conference in Sylhet in the afternoon. Some officials of British high commission were also present.

They came to the country on May 24 on a five-day visit. The foreign and commonwealth office of the UK sponsored the tour to focus on the role of the British Bangladeshis in the UK and their relationship with the government there.

Stressing the importance of the diversity in the UK, highlighting the achievements of the expatriate community in several spheres, projecting a bright future for Bangladesh as held by the Bangladeshis in the UK and their relationship with the government there.

She said it is possible for

Islam and the west to be compatible.

Mohammad Bilal Abdullah, one of the founding directors of Ebrahim Community College, said, we are proud to be a British and a Muslim too, having root in Bangladesh. We are already in the mainstream of the British society, he added. Abdullah is a member of the UK-Indonesian Islamic Advisory Group too.

The other members of the delegation include Mesba Ahmed, who is the chief executive of London Tigers Football, a sports club, and Konnie Huq, Cambridge University graduate, was the presenter of a popular children's magazine show 'Blue Peter' on the BBC for long.

Abdul Quayyum Jamal Khalique is a leading Bangladeshi entrepreneur, who also has a range of other businesses. Khalique and family members have charities in Bangladesh. They had helped the Sidr victims in a big way.

Oxford University graduate Tasmin Lucia Khan is a presenter and producer in BBC television.

TARIQUE RAHMAN'S FUEL BILL

Farooque rejects JS body's findings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Faroque yesterday outrightly rejected the findings of a Jatiya Sangsad sub-committee that the parliament secretariat had to meet the cost of fuel for a government vehicle used in a political tour by Tarique Rahman, elder son of Leader of the Opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Faroque also made allegations against two members of the sub-committee, saying that they were involved in murder, bank looting and anarchy.

He strongly criticised Shajahan Khan, chief of the sub-committee, for his 'disclosure' of Tarique Rahman's fuel bill and demanded an unconditional apology.

"We fail to understand how the sub-committee could make such statements to the media tarnishing the image of any individual before the completion of investigations," he told reporters at the office of the opposition leader in parliament building.

He (Shajahan Khan) is spreading propaganda against Tarique Rahman to tarnish his image, which is the continuation of the same policy pursued by the caretaker government during the emergency," he added.

He also claimed that the transport pool of the parliament secretariat has stated that Tarique never took fuel or vehicle from parliament secretariat.

Replying to a question, Faroque said the BNP parliamentary committee will take the decision on the issue of BNP joining the next session of parliament.

On May 24, the parliamentary sub-committee said that Tarique used a government vehicle allocated for former deputy speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui and the parliament secretariat had to pay for 530 litres of fuel.

The sub-committee chief also said the former deputy speaker's office received the money and it was mentioned in the receipt that it was for Tarique's trip.

PROCLAMATION OF INDEPENDENCE

NU VC asked to submit copy of telex message June 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The High Court (HC) yesterday directed the national university vice chancellor to submit to the court on June 1 a copy of the telex message sent by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declaring independence of the country on March 26 in 1971.

The HC bench comprising Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Mamtazuddin Ahmed passed the order during the hearing of a writ petition regarding the declaration of independence.

The court asked the VC to produce through the Attorney General's office the copy of the telex message sent by Bangabandhu, as the petitioner's lawyer advocate Manzill Murshid submitted to the HC some newspaper reports, saying that the telex message is being kept in a museum of the national university.

The court also fixed today for further hearing of the petition.

Manzill yesterday told the court that Ziaur Rahman never

claimed that he had declared independence of the country.

He presented some documents, including an article written by Ziaur Rahman, in support of his arguments.

Barrister Ruhul Qudus Kaja, counsel for M Hamidullah Khan, who became an additional party to the litigation, submitted some copies of the newspapers to the court, saying that Zia declared the independence of the country on March 27, 1971.

On April 19, Dr MA Salam, a freedom fighter, filed the writ petition.

On April 20, the HC upon a writ petition issued a rule on the government to explain why directives should not be given to prosecute 2004 edition of the Bangladesh War of Liberation in which (the then major) Ziaur Rahman was said to have proclaimed independence on March 26, 1971.

The court also asked the government to explain why it should not be directed to ban the set of books that distorted facts regarding declaration of independence.

Khoka asked to appear before HC on June 29

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The High Court (HC) yesterday directed Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and four others to appear before the court on June 29 in connection with a contempt petition for not complying with its order.

The HC bench comprising Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Mamtazuddin Ahmed passed the order upon a contempt petition filed by Md Shamsul Haque Bhuiyan, a former acting chief executive officer of the DCC.

Meanwhile another HC bench directed Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Shikder, Special Superintendent of Police (Immigration) Aurangzeb Mahubb and Officer-in-Charge (immigration) at Zia International Airport Azizur Rahman Chowdhury to appear before the court on June 3 to face a contempt petition against them.

The four others, who have been directed to appear before the HC, are the then DCC and LGRD officials Md Alaiddin, Md Golam Mostofa, Khorshed Alam and Mizanur Rahman.

Shamsul retired in 2005, but he was not paid any retirement benefit till 2008.

He filed a writ petition with the HC to direct the DCC authorities to pay his due benefits.

Upon the petition, the HC on June 5, 2009 directed the authorities to pay his benefits within two months.

CONTEMPT AGAINST HOME SECRETARY
The HC bench of Justice Tariqul Hakim and Justice M Azizul Haque directed the home secretary and two others to appear before the court on June 3 and issued a rule upon them to show cause within one week why punitive action should not be taken against them for barring former state minister for power Iqbal Hassan Mahmud Tuku to go abroad despite the its order.

Tuku filed the petition with the HC on May 26 for restricting him from leaving the country for Singapore on May 24 defying an HC order.

BCL factions clash at Dhaka Polytech

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Seven BCL activists were injured in a clash between two rival factions of the student wing of Awami League at Dhaka Polytechnic Institute in the city yesterday over establishing supremacy on the campus.

The clash broke out when a supporter of Zakir faction was beaten up by the supporters of Shaheen faction on the campus around 2:30pm.

Later, both the groups equipped with sticks attacked each other, leaving at least seven activists of both the factions injured, witnesses said, adding that chases and counter chases took place.

During the clash, panic spread among the general students and classes were suspended for the day, sources said.

At one stage, supporters of Zakir group chased the supporters of Shaheen out of the campus and they also misbehaved with the principal of the institute, campus sources said.

They also damaged windowpanes and flower tubs of the principal's office.

When contacted, Officer-in-Charge Md Omar Faruq of Tejgaon Industrial Area Police Station said on information, they rushed to the spot and searched Laf Hall and brought the situation under control around 4:00pm.

They searched the dormitory as feuding students claimed there were firearms in the hall but they did not find any, he said, adding that none was arrested in this connection.

Police raid residence to arrest DU teacher

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The police raided the residence of Prof Syed Abul Kalam Azad, immediate past treasurer of Dhaka University, in the early hours of yesterday to arrest him following a case filed by a National University teacher against him and seven others.

However, the police did not pick him up following the intervention from the high-ups of the university.

In the case filed with Shahbagh Police Station on Tuesday, complainant Md Hafizur Rahman said that Prof Azad, then treasurer of the National University, and some of his colleagues tampered the resolution of the 75th syndicate meeting of the National University, ransacked his office room and took away important documents in March 2005.

Officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station Rezaul Karim told The Daily Star that they went to the residence of Prof Azad at Fuller Road to arrest him in connection with the case around 12:30am.

On hearing the news, incumbent DU Treasurer Prof Mizanur Rahman rushed to the scene and assured the police of producing Prof Azad before a Dhaka court on the day, if necessary.

Some top leaders of pro-BNP-Jamaat 'White Panel' and administrative officials also requested the police not to arrest him.

Meanwhile, Dhaka University Teachers' Association at an emergency meeting yesterday condemned the police attempt to arrest Prof Azad and urged the university administration to take all necessary steps to avert such attempts in future.

Impose unified duty structure for cellphone sets

Mobile importers assoc urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Leaders of Mobile Phone Importers Association yesterday urged the government to impose a unified duty structure on import of mobile phone sets of all ranges instead of the proposed divided rates to avoid 'harassment' by the customs officials.

The association leaders also called on the government to cut import duty to Tk 100 from existing Tk 300 on each set in the upcoming budget.

They said this at a meeting with Hasanul Haq Inu, chairman of parliamentary standing committee on post and telecommunications ministry, at his office at the parliament building.

Inu supported the business leaders, saying that it might create problems to collect import duties if the duty is fixed at different levels on the basis of prices of mobile handsets.

He reiterated to waive all kinds of import duties on mobile phones up to Tk 3000 and fix Tk 300 import duty on phone set worth above Tk 3000.

"The government has to reduce import tax on mobile phone if it wants to make a digital Bangladesh," Inu told reporters after the meeting.

Inu talked in favour of the mobile phone importers who urged the government to impose flat rate import duty instead of the proposed divided rate.

Faisal Alim, secretary general of the association, suggested a specific and unified duty structure should be followed.

Death anniversary of Dr Kasiruddin

METRO DESK
Tomorrow is the 38th death anniversary of Shaheed Dr Kasiruddin Talukder, an eminent physician of Bogra, says a press release.

He was killed by the Pakistani occupation forces during the liberation war. As he led the doctors' movement in Bogra in support of the war and offered free medical services to injured freedom fighters.

A forthright and progressive social worker, Dr Kasiruddin was also imprisoned during the Ayub Khan regime in a conspiratorial case.

In an active public life, he served as a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) of the undivided Bengal and president of the Doctors' Association of Bogra. The road linking his dispensary and residence in Bogra has been named Shaheed Dr Kasiruddin Sarak.

To mark his death anniversary, a doha mahfil and feeding of destitute have been arranged by his family members.

Tk 181cr EU grant for ultra-poor

UNB, Dhaka
Marginal and landless farmers in Bangladesh are going to get a productivity boost soon under innovative projects of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) funded with a 20-million-euro donation worth Tk 181 crore from the European Union.

With this assistance, WFP Bangladesh through its High Food Price Emergency Operation will assist 40,000 ultra-poor people, including landless farmers affected by volatile food prices, to improve livelihood and ensure food security, an announcement said here yesterday.

The programme through different schemes aims at helping poor farmers to produce food more efficiently.

It will also improve the capacity of ultra-poor agricultural workers or wage labourers in entrepreneurship, developing their skills in small-scale agro-based activities, group farming, food processing, diversified crop production, poultry or cow rearing and other income-generating activities.

"Through this EU grant we hope WFP will generate employment opportunities and boost agricultural productivity and give marginal and landless farmers or agricultural labourers access to employment opportunities and sufficient food," said Dr Jean Jacques Lautre, acting head of cooperation of the European Commission Delegation to Bangladesh.

ANJUMAN ARA BEGUM
Today marks the 5th death anniversary of Anjuman Ara Begum, a versatile artiste in the cultural arena of the country, says a press release.

Although best known as an icon of modern songs and playback music, Anjuman Ara was an equally adept exponent of patriotic songs, folksongs and ghazal.

She started her career in playback in 1958 at the age of 16 and also rendered one of the first songs telecast when BTV started its operation in 1964. In an illustrious musical career spanning over 40 years, she lent her voice to numerous memorable songs on radio, television, film and stage.

'Aakashar Haatey Achhe Ekraash Neel', 'Tumi Ashbe Bole', 'Obhimaan Korona', 'Chandni Bhigi Bhigi Hawa', 'Kay Swaran er Pranite', 'Barkat Salaam er Shonite', 'Kedona Kedona Mago', and 'Brishi Jokhon Ihore' are only a few of hundreds of her most popular songs that touched the hearts of people over the years.

Several of them are archived in Gramophone Records and HMV while her popular songs for youngsters (like Khokon Shona, Sath ti Ronger Majhe, Ko-Kho-Go) are recorded in an audio cassette 'Khokon Shona Boli Shono'.

She represented Bangladesh in many cultural programmes at home and abroad. Besides being a member of the Film Jury Board and the Executive Board of Jatiya Mahila Sangstha, she was also active in various socio-cultural activities.

For her contribution to music, Anjuman Ara was honoured with several accolades, including the Ekushey Padak in 2003. Besides, she also received the Taroklok Award, Gunjan Award (from Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy) and Kolodhhan Padak.

To mark her death anniversary, a doha mahfil and feeding of the destitute have been arranged by her family.

WEATHER TODAY

Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely occur at one or two places over all the six divisions in next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may rise by 1-2 degree Celsius over the country, Met Office said.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:40pm today and rises at 5:11am Friday.

Country's highest temperature 35.4 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 21.7 degrees Celsius at Chittagong.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	32.8	24.0	85	79
Chittagong	32.4	21.7	83	82
Rajshahi	34.0	23.6	92	78
Khulna	35.0	26.0	84	67
Barisal	34.2	24.6	77	76
Sylhet	32.7	23.8	72	69
Cox's Bazar	34.0	26.6	79	77

DHAKA TODAY

Art exhibition
Shilpangan organises a 15-day group art exhibition titled 'Appointment 2009' beginning from today. Venue: Shilpangan Gallery. Time: 5:30pm. The exhibition will continue till June 12 from 12:00pm to 8:00pm everyday.

Discussion
Bangla Academy will hold a discussion to mark the 110th birth anniversary of national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. Venue: Academy seminar room. Time: 4:00pm.

Meeting
The monthly general meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh will be held. Venue: Society auditorium. Time: 4:30pm.

Roundtable
Shushashoner Janney Nagorik

(Shujan) organises a roundtable titled 'Parliament and special rights, privilege and immunity of the lawmakers'. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 10:00am.

Anniversary
Shahtahik 2000 organises a programme to mark its founding anniversary. Venue: 96-97 New Eskaton Road. Time: 11:15am.

Education fair
E3 Solutions organises the 5th Dhaka International Education fair. Venue: Hotel Sheraton. Time: 10:00am.

Art camp
Desh TV and Zainul Shishu Kala Niketan will jointly organise a children's art camp. Venue: Faculty of Fine Art, Dhaka University. Time: 2:00pm.