

POURA POLLS
Last day of nomination filing today

BSS, Dhaka

Today is the last day for submission of nomination papers for the upcoming pourasabha elections in Chittagong and Sylhet divisions.

Scrutiny of the nomination papers will be completed on December 22-23 and the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers is January 2. The voting in the two divisions would be held on January 18.

Besides, submission of nomination papers in Dhaka division ended at 5:00pm yesterday.

Earlier, nomination papers for Rangpur, Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal divisions were submitted.

Nomination papers would be cancelled for violation of election code of conduct, Chief Election Commissioner Dr ATM Shamsul Huda told reporters earlier.

TAGORE'S 150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY
Indian team arrives today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A nine-member Indian delegation will arrive here today for a four-day visit to finalise the joint celebrations of the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore in 2011.

Bangladesh and India are slated to remember in fondness poet Rabindranath in light of the decision taken during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's official visit to India on January 10-13.

The joint communiqué issued on the visit read "Recalling the shared legacy of the great poet Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, the prime ministers agreed to oversee the joint celebrations of the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath in 2011 in a manner befitting his vision and spirit."

Official sources said Jawhar Sircar, Secretary of the Union Ministry of Culture of India, will lead the 9-member delegation, which comprises officials and cultural experts.

Official sources said there will be a wide-ranging discussion with the officials of ministries of culture and foreign affairs, which will cover various aspects of the celebrations such as exhibitions of Rabindranath's paintings, seminars, workshops, commemorative publications on Rabindranath, joint productions of dances and dramas based on the stories written by Rabindranath, Rabindra Sangeet, films inauguration of "Rabindra Tirtha", or Rabindranath related tourism circuits, including Jorasanko, Shantiniketan and Shilaidaha in both countries.

It will also focus on instituting a Tagore Chair at Dhaka University, scholarships for Bangladeshi students, awards for noted Tagore Scholars in India and Bangladesh, presentation of Tagore memorabilia to Bangladesh and Indo-Bangladesh Maitri Car rally. Sources said the opening ceremony of the celebrations is likely to be held on May 7, 2011 in both the countries and will continue till 2012.

The Indian team also plans to visit important places associated with Rabindranath in Bangladesh including Kushtia, Shahzadpur and Shilaidaha during their stay.

Mishu on fresh remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed Garment Sramik Oikya Parishad President Mosreza Mishu on a one-day fresh remand in a case filed for damaging vehicles and garment factories.

Metropolitan Magistrate Munshi Abdul Majid passed the order after Sub-Inspector Rabiul Haque of Kafil Police Station, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, produced her before it with a five-day remand prayer.

The case was filed on June 30 this year with Kafil Police Station on charge of ransacking Outright Fashion Ltd in the city's Shewrapara area.

She was shown arrested in the case on December 13.

On June 30, at least 40 people including 15 policemen were injured in a string of clashes between garment workers and law enforcers.

Expressway deal by early Jan

Meeting with winning bidder tomorrow to finalise financial terms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is aiming to sign the Dhaka Elevated Expressway deal by the first week of January, said Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain yesterday.

The construction of the expressway would start within three months of the signing and will finish within the tenure of the incumbent government, said the minister at a press conference at the Bridge Division.

As for the latest development, the Bangladesh Bridge Authority and the tender evaluation team, will sit with the winning bidder of Dhaka elevated expressway tomorrow to finalise financial terms.

Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, secretary to Bangladesh Bridge Authority, said following a meeting yesterday (Saturday) they asked the tender evaluation team, Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Centre (IIFC) and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) to work on the bidder's financial offers for further negotiations.

"We look forward to complete the negotiation process by December 21 and then place the project for approval to the Cabinet Purchase Committee," said Bhuiyan, adding, "The annual concession fee will top the negotiation agendas."

The government expected a concession fee of

\$25 million per year in the Request for Proposal (RFP), to which the winning bidder Ital-Thai Development Company has not made any offer yet.

Besides, the company asked 27 percent of the total construction cost, that is Tk 8,703 crore, from Public Private Partnership (PPP) fund as the Viability Gap Fund (VGF).

Porf Md Shamsul Haque, a member of the tender evaluation committee, said they would ask for detailed breakdown of the estimated construction cost per kilometre, which now stands at \$30 million.

While the IIFC analyses the terms and conditions of the financial offers, Buet team will carry out technical analysis on the cost per km and the traffic flow projected by the bidder.

The concessionaire has to pay the government 37.5 percent of its income as corporate tax, 15 percent VAT on each transaction, and 11 percent customs duty on imported materials for the concession period of 25 years, until they handover the expressway to the government.

In the press briefing, the communications minister and Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, convener of the seven-member tender evaluation committee, ruled out the allegations regarding the selection of Italy-Thai joint venture firm.

"We work independently; free from any pressure or influence from any quarters," said Prof Jamilur, adding that everything was being done fairly.

Two 'leaders' were picked up from Bangladesh

Claims Ulfa

PTI

The banned Indian outfit Ulfa yesterday claimed that two of its leaders were picked up by Indian intelligence agencies in Bangladesh.

An e-mail to the media signed by Ulfa Publicity Secretary Arunudoy Dohotia said 'captain' Lientenant and 'second lieutenant' Pradeep Chetia of the outfit were picked up on December 13 and their whereabouts were unknown since.

The e-mail, however, denied reports that Saudang's wife was also detained by the security agencies in Bangladesh.

Saudang is the third top leader remaining absconding after 'c-in-c' Paresh Barua and another commander of the armed wing, Jibon Moran.

A BSF official said Bangladesh security agencies had raided an ULFA hideout in the Jinaighati area of Sherpur district on Thursday and seized a huge cache of weapons including 10 AK 47 rifles.

Many Pak youths still in dark about '71 war

Says Tariq Ali

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

World-renowned political commentator Tariq Ali yesterday said many youths in Pakistan are not aware of real accounts of 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh since much of the country's political records has been distorted.

Many Pakistanis do not even know that Bangladesh was once known as East Pakistan, a part of Pakistan, he said while addressing an international videoconference from London on Islam and politics in South Asia. The two-day conference was organised at the Brac Centre Inn in the capital.

The conference will highlight different global, national and local situations through which Islam has emerged as a key element of political developments around the world.

About post-independence political development in Bangladesh, the renowned political critic said Bangladesh's political situation was identical to that of Pakistan. Both countries saw military rules and political killings.

About Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination, Tariq said some Pakistani military officers had considered it as their victory.

He believes that alongside the unruly army officers, an invisible hand was behind the killings of Bangabandhu and his family members.

Describing Pakistan as the most corrupt state in the world, he said the present political situation in that country is "horrific".

Syed M Hashemi, director of Brac Development Institute (BDI), said that after the 9/11 incident in the USA, a tendency has been noticed among many Muslims to engage more closely in the teaching of Islamic values and conventions.

The ever-progressive social forces in South Asia could not assess the changing behaviour of Muslims, he noted.

The "secular" and "progressive" non-Islamic world observes Islam as an inferior and backward religion opposed to modernity, said some participants at the conference.

Mashiur Rahman, economic adviser to the Bangladesh prime minister, said, "Islam is now widely misrepresented in the world."

Islam is a code of conduct, which deals with every possible aspect of human life, be it religious, political, economical or social issues, he said.

The negative stereotyping has been one of the main reasons for the rise of rigid, fundamentalist and, in some cases, violent Islamic groups, observe a few speakers at the conference.

Prof Saba Mahmood of University of California at Berkeley presented the keynote paper at the conference while Prof Willem Van Schendel of University of Amsterdam, Prof Kamran Ali of University of Texas at Austin, Dr Samia Huq of BDI, Prof Amina Jamal of Ryerson University, Urvashi Butalia of Zubaan Books, among others, spoke.

Besides, political experts, sociologists, anthropologists, journalists, experts in feminism, governance and other related areas were present on the occasion.



Devotees belonging to the Shia Muslim community bring out a mourning procession from Hosni Dalan in the city yesterday on the occasion of Holy Ashura, commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein (RA), a grandson of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM). The photo was taken from Azimpur intersection. (Story on Page 20)

Refrain from cheating

PM warns recruiting agencies

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina yesterday issued a strong warning to recruiting agencies, discouraging them from cheating migrant workers.

She gave the warning while addressing the inaugural function of the International Migrants Day at Osmani Auditorium in the morning.

The day is being observed this year with the slogan -- Abhibasir Adhikar Marjada and Naibichar (Dignity and Justice are the Rights of Migrants).

The PM said the government has introduced Machine Readable Passports (MRP) and set up the Expatriate Welfare Bank to ensure a safe migration experience for migrants.

"Despite these steps, migrants are being cheated by being given fake work permits. I want to make it clear that no irregularities in sending the migrants abroad, either at government or non-government level, will be tolerated anymore," she said.

The PM urged the people intending to go abroad for jobs to take loans from the Expatriate Bank instead of selling property to manage the required money.

"When you come to the bank for loan, the authorities can check whether the visa or work permit given to you is fake or real," she said.

Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni, Home Minister Sahara Khatun and Minister for Labour and Employment Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain also addressed the function.

INT'L MIGRANTS' DAY
'Establish expat workers' rights'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different government and non-government organisations yesterday observed the International Migrants' Day with a call for establishing migrant workers' rights by stronger regulations and better training for the expatriate workers.

Rallies, discussions, and debates were held on the occasion highlighting the migrant workers' contribution to the national economy.

The ministry of expatriates welfare and overseas employment and different NGO brought out a procession from Ramna.

"It is high time that Bangladeshi migrants who send home nearly US\$11 billion yearly are given due importance," said Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, minister for the expatriates' welfare.

Mosharraf was speaking at a debate competition organised by Debate for Democracy at the National Press Club.

Nearly 70 lakh people work abroad, said the minister. "We are planning how to cut the cost of migration and regulate the recruitment process."

Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) President Abul Bashar urged the government to reduce undocumented migration which he says is enough to destroy the labour market.

Bullet-hit tannery owner dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A tannery owner died after being bullet-hit mysteriously at his residence in the city's Hazaribagh on Friday night.

Mohammad Tanvir, 30, was declared dead when his family took him to Samorita Hospital. The bullet hit Tanvir on the head.

The deceased's family filed an unnatural death (UD) case with Hazaribagh Police Station.

Obituary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Roma Rani Acharjee, mother of journalist Joynta Acharjee, former chief reporter of Shaptahik 2000 and coordinator of Bangladesh Enterprise for Development and Securities Studies breathed her last at her residence in Gopalganj Bank Para on Friday at the age of 65, says a press release.

She left behind her three sons, two daughters and a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn her death.

Awami League Information Secretary Advocate Afzal Hossain, General Secretary of Peshajibi Shamannay Parishad Prof Dr Kamrul Hasan Khan, Major (Retd) A S M Shmsul Arefin, President of Bangladesh Muktijuddho Projomno A K M Azam Khan, General Secretary Nurul Alam Babul, President of Smriti 71 Asrarul Hasan and President of Prajanjama 71 Mohammad Azizur Rahman condole the death.

They also conveyed sympathy to members of the bereaved family and prayed for salvation of the departed soul.

Frame law to stop human trafficking
Women lawyers urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) on Friday demanded of the government to formulate a law to prevent human trafficking.

BNWLA and Atsec Bangladesh jointly organised a press conference on the issue at the National Press Club. Speakers at the conference said the law will ensure security for the migrant workers who bring more than US\$10 billion for the country annually.

BNWLA Executive Director Salma Ali said the law is not demanded to destroy the human resources export business. Rather it will ensure safe migration and boost the business as a result, she added.

Salma pointed out it is wrongly perceived that the law will destroy the human resources export.

In a written statement, she said trafficking victims are deprived of justice even though the constitution says that all citizens will get state security.

Atsec Chairperson AKM Masum Ali also addressed the news conference.

Free polls from fear of defeat

Says justice Habibur Rahman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Elections in Bangladesh would continue to be expensive, intimidating and hostile unless the contestants are free from the fear of defeat, said former chief adviser to a caretaker government justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman yesterday.

Referring to US President Franklin Roosevelt's realisation that the goal of the Second World War was freedom of speech and religion and from poverty and fear, he said, "We have an additional fear of defeat in the elections."

"We remain very worried about it. Unless we are free from such fear, the polls will be expensive, intimidating and hostile."

He was addressing as the chief guest at the tenth animators' reunion titled "A person empowered with self-esteem cannot remain poor" organised by the Hunger Project at Ganashasthya Kendra in Savar, Dhaka.

Habibur called upon the young generation to learn accepting defeat in the

elections and other contests, even if not with smiles.

"The youths have to learn the sense of responsibility. They should not have the attitude of ignoring wrongdoings even if those seem small," he told several thousand animators from across the country.

One cannot be happy by completely depending on the elected people's representatives, said Habibur and added that that the image of politicians globally is cloudy.

"They (global politicians) too are aware of their own salaries and facilities and special rights. It is common everywhere."

Cracks are developing in the large democracies of the west and politicians of the developing nations are trying to cover their irregularities by citing those faults of the Western democracies, he said.

"We have a lot of lacking in all the five areas -- electoral process and pluralism, people's freedom, government's functioning, political participation and political culture."

To fill the gaps, citizens' strength has to be increased, said Habibur, urging the youths to come forward and stand against all wrongdoings.

"We have to think on how to best use the youths in creating self-employment, preservation of environment, poverty alleviation, women's empowerment and mother and child health improvement."

Human rights activist Irene Khan said rights and responsibility are interlinked and one cannot enjoy rights without rendering duty. In democracy, people are the base of power, which remains at the grassroots, not at the top, she said.

"You, the active citizens at the grassroots who are really working, can surely bring a change. I am inspired by you," said Irene.

The Hunger Project, Bangladesh's Country Director Dr Badrul Alam Majumder and former adviser to a caretaker government ASM Shahjahan also spoke on the occasion and singer Fahmida Nabi sang inspiring patriotic songs.

WEATHER TODAY

Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain dry with temporary partly cloudy sky over the country in next 12 hours till 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins of the country during mid night till morning, Met Office said.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:15pm today and rises at 6:36am tomorrow.

Country's highest temperature 28.4 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sitakundu and lowest 09.3 degrees Celsius at Srimongal.

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	25.8	14.6	59	58
Chittagong	25.5	14.8	77	58
Rajshahi	24.7	10.4	82	83
Rangpur	25.3	12.0	87	76
Khulna	25.6	13.2	83	71
Barisal	26.5	12.8	89	90
Sylhet	27.0	13.1	63	66
Cox's Bazar	27.5	16.2	52	72

Glaucoma second largest cause of blindness, say experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Glaucoma, the preventable eye disease, is the second largest cause of blindness in the country, accounting for 3 percent of the people aged over 40 years, said experts yesterday.

They were speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the 1st Annual National Conference of Bangladesh Glaucoma Society (BGS) at a city hotel.

The experts also said glaucoma is a complex disease and caused due to the death of optic nerve cells. It gradually weakens eyesight and cannot be cured, they added.

But awareness and early diagnosis can prevent blindness from glaucoma, they said adding that approximately 586,000 people aged 40 and above are suffering from glaucoma in the country.

While delivering his speech Prof Sharfuddin Ahmed, secretary general of Bangladesh Medical Association, said glaucoma should be addressed nationally and there should be a glaucoma management protocol.

"Massive glaucoma screening programmes across the country is very urgent," said Prof Ava Hossain, president of Ophthalmological Society of Bangladesh.

Approximately 586,000 people aged 40 and above are suffering from glaucoma in the country

Though most of the people of this country are poor and living in rural areas, 90 percent of the modern ophthalmological treatment is limited in towns. It forces a significant number of people to remain out of the network of modern treatment, the experts said.

They urged the government to give more emphasis on glaucoma treatment and awareness building in the National Eye Care Plan that has been addressing

the cataract patients since 2005.

At the same time, Vision 2020 should also address glaucoma while modern diagnosis and treatment facilities should be made available in all general hospitals, they added.

Prof Syed Modasser Ali, the chief guest, said a Glaucoma Institute and Research Centre could be established at the National Institute of Ophthalmology Complex at city's Agargaon.

Prof Sheikh M A Mannaf, president of the society, stressed the need for vision, action and propagation to prevent glaucoma and to treat a significant number of patients suffering from the disease.

The Bangladesh Glaucoma Society will start a mobile unit equipped with modern instruments to screen and treat the glaucoma patients across the country, he added.

Prof M Nazrul Islam, general secretary of BGS, Prof Deen Mohammad Noorul Huq, president of Bangladesh Academy of Ophthalmology, Prof M A Matin, lifetime chairman of Bangladesh Academy of Ophthalmology, also spoke among others.