

## EC not partisan

CEC rejects  
BNP claim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday rejected the main opposition BNP's labelling the Election Commission (EC) as partisan and biased. "The allegations are baseless. We can counter all the points raised by BNP but we want no further controversy," he said, adding, "The EC invited BNP thrice for the talk, but they refused. What can we do?"

He also said the people who do not trust the EC stressed the need for strengthening it.

The CEC was speaking at a dialogue with Bangladesh National Awami Party at the commission's secretariat in the capital as part of its ongoing talks on electoral reform with the registered political parties.

Party Chairman Jobel Rahman Gani led a 10-member delegation to the dialogue.

In a separate meeting with Islamic Front Bangladesh, the CEC said the commission will take initiative to monitor grassroots-level activities of the registered political parties.

The commission wants the candidates for parliamentary elections to be at least graduates, but the political parties do not agree with it, alleged the CEC.

## Businessman shot dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A businessman was shot dead by unidentified assailants at Sutrapur in the capital last night.

The dead was identified as Md Shahid, 40, general secretary of Book Binding Samity at Bangla Bazar in Old Dhaka.

Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sutrapur Police Station, said Shahid was riding a motorbike with another leader of the samity sitting behind him at about 11:30pm. He was on his way to Northbrook Hall Road.

"Suddenly, he was shot in the forehead and chest at Justice Lal Mohan Das Lane," he told The Daily Star.

Shahid was taken to nearby National Medical College Hospital first. He was later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

## Lifschultz

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Taher murder case, he said it was a historic moment for Bangladesh and an emotional moment for Taher's family.

In a verdict on March 22 this year, the High Court said Col Taher's execution was a cold-blooded murder given the shape of the trial as per then military ruler Ziaur Rahman's plan.

In 1976, Lifschultz was in Bangladesh and tried to cover the secret trial of Taher in Dhaka Central Jail. He was in front of the jail entrance during the trial as he was not allowed to enter. Later, the then military ruler forced him to leave the country and imposed a ban on his further arrival in Bangladesh, said a source in Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal.

He came to Bangladesh once before in March this year and gave his deposition in Taher murder case before the HC.

He again came on July 19 on Col Taher Sangsad's invitation to commemorate Taher on his death anniversary.

The US journalist said the incident of Taher's murder was a part of Bangladesh's missing history, and the HC verdict established justice.

Addressing the discussion, JSD President Hasanul Haque Inu said the people involved in Taher's murder should be brought to book.

Presiding over the discussion, Justice Ghulam Rabbani said Taher was a symbol of the anti-communal force, and a democratic Bangladesh can be established through implementing Taher's ideologies.

Col Taher Sangsad organised the discussion.

TEESTA, FENI WATER SHARING

## Indo-Bangla JRC to finalise deal

Meeting in Dhaka before  
Manmohan's visit

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA,  
New Delhi

In the run up to Indian prime minister's visit to Bangladesh in September, the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) will meet in Dhaka to finalise a framework agreement of a 15-year treaty for sharing the waters of Teesta and Feni rivers.

"Yes, we expect an agreement on Teesta and Feni [rivers]," Indian Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal told reporters here yesterday after a meeting with Mashur Rahman, adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The date for the JRC meeting, however, is yet to be fixed.

Pawan said he could visit Bangladesh ahead of Manmohan Singh's trip scheduled for September 6-7.

"The basic approach is we share so many things in common and if we can work

together, it will bring benefits to both sides," mentioned Mashur.

While the water sharing issue has been virtually settled, some differences remain on the percentage of water for each country, according to highly-placed sources in the Indian government.

Bangladesh wants a 50:50 share against India's expectation of 45:55, added the sources.

The water resources secretaries of the two neighbours met here a month ago to "fine-tune" the agreement.

The two sides last discussed the deal during secretary-level talks on sharing waters of common rivers in Dhaka in January.

Fast tracking of the water sharing agreement was a part of the joint statement issued by the two countries during Hasina's visit to New Delhi in January last year.

The two neighbours share 54 common rivers.

## Police to probe

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On Monday, locals of Baradeshi village beat to death six students and left one severely injured on Kebalchar in Aminbazar suspecting the students to be robbers. The villagers swooped on them with sticks and sharp objects.

"Apart from unfolding the mystery behind the killings, the committee has also been asked to recommend the means of stopping such barbaric events from recurring," said the IGP, adding that the committee will submit its report within 10 working days.

Headed by Deputy Inspector General (DIG-Admin) of Police Mohammad Amir Uddin, three other members of the committee are Md Masud Karim, special superintendent (SS) of Special Branch, Sheikh Md Rezaul Haider, SS of Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and Dhaka district Additional Superintendent of Police Sheikh Rafiqul Islam.

The families of the victims have also rejected the police case saying that the law enforcers favoured the killers. They said they would file separate cases with police after Sunday and if police refuse to record their cases they will go to the court.

Meanwhile, Prof Mizanur Rahman, chairman of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), yesterday termed the death of six students a cold-blooded murder.

"It was an extra judicial killing," he said while addressing a programme in Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhawan of Dhaka University.

While the administration is calling it an isolated incident, Rahman believes that such incidents are occurring very often these days.

Following Monday's incident, Abdul Malek, a sand trader, filed a case against the seven victims saying that locals beat them up after the students robbed his trading centre.

Later, a second case was filed by Sub-Inspector (SI) of Savar Police Station Anwar Hossain against 600 unnamed people.

Both the cases have a peculiar resemblance. The SI in his case statement branded all the seven victims as robbers as did the sand trader in his.

The SI did not mention the victims as students although he talked with their parents and relatives and collected their details before filing the case.

His statement reads, "I recovered six bodies of unidentified robbers and arrested another from the spot. I took their photographs and seized six sharp weapons and a cell phone found on the spot. I collected the details of all the deceased and the injured robbers and prepared their police inquest report."

"There is a delay in filing the case as I have been busy in collecting the details of the robbers and arranging treatment for the one who survived."

Asked why Savar police branded the victims as robbers prior to any investigation and made the same statement as the sand trader, IGP Hassan Mahmood said, "The probe committee has been asked to carry out the investigation focusing on this specific issue."

Meanwhile, hundreds of students and teachers of different educational institutions in Kalyanpur and Mirpur and the locals of the areas formed a human chain on Mirpur Road demanding exemplary punishment of the killers and immediate withdrawal of the robbery case filed against Al Amin, the lone survivor of the incident.

The demonstrators also demanded punitive measures against Savar police chief Mahburur Rahman, arrest of culprits including sand trader Abdul Malek who filed the robbery case against the victims, and compensation to the bereaved families.

Meanwhile, SI Matir Rahman, investigation officer of the cases filed by Abdul Malek and Savar police, yesterday said they could not yet identify or arrest anyone.

## Protector

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decision". Biplab is on death row in the much-talked-about Nurul Islam murder case.

In a statement yesterday, acting secretary general of the main opposition party Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said that by granting mercy to Biplab, the president has become a protector of dangerous criminals belonging to the ruling AL.

The presidential pardon will create a reign of terror in the country, he said.

Addressing a protest rally in front of the BNP central office at Nayapalton in the capital, Fakhrul said, "The president has granted clemency to a killer. Six students were beaten to death at Aminbazar [near the city]. Opposition activists are being tortured across the country. The nation cannot move forward this way," he told the rally organised by Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal, a front body of BNP.

Fakhrul asked the government to step down without further delay to pave the way for holding general elections under a non-partisan caretaker government.

The BNP leader alleged that the prime minister is "resorting to falsehood to malign the Zia family."

Party leaders Barkat Ullah Bulu, Moazzem Hossain Alal, Habib-un-nabi Sohel also spoke at the rally chaired by Hamidur Rahman.

## Govt asked

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capitulation within 30 days. Delivering a verdict on a writ petition, the court also ordered the government to shut within this period the factories and business enterprises which are using tannery waste as ingredients in poultry and fish feed production.

It also asked the authorities concerned of government to prepare a guideline within two months in order to monitor and control whether tannery waste is being used in poultry and fish feed production in any manner.

Secretaries to the ministries of home, commerce, industries, food, and livestock and fisheries, and inspector general of police have to implement the directives.

Details of the verdict could not be known immediately as the copy of the verdict was not released yesterday.

An HC bench of Justice A H M Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore came up with the verdict following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh.

The petition was filed on July 26 last year following a report published in The Daily Star on July 24 that year titled "Toxic poultry feed poses health risk".

Citing The Daily Star report, the petition stated that the use of tannery waste in poultry and fish feed poses serious health risk for people as the hazardous waste has the possibility of directly entering the food chain.

Earlier on July 26 last year, the HC issued a rule upon the government officials concerned to explain why they should not be directed to stop the use of tannery waste in poultry and fish feed and shut such factories.

The respondents did not make any reply to the rule, petitioner's lawyer advocate Manzil Murshid said.

## HC extends

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scrapping. It ordered the director general of Department of Environment to form and lead a three-member committee within 15 days to monitor whether the conditions on import and scrapping of ships are complied with.

The principal of Bangladesh Marine Academy and the head of chemistry department at Chittagong University will be the other members of the committee. The court asked them to submit a report on its supervision to it within a month.

The bench also asked the government to frame rules by October 12 banning import of toxic ships.

The same court on March 7 permitted import and scrapping of hazardous ships for two months clarifying no ships can be scrapped without cleaning toxic gas and asbestos in presence of experts.

The BSBA is properly complying with the import conditions imposed by this court on March 7, BSBA's counsel Anisul Huq told the court yesterday.

Additional Attorney General Murad Reza sought more time for the government to frame the rules.

Iqbal Kabir Lytton, counsel of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), opposed the extension of HC order.

In response to a similar petition filed by BSBA, another HC bench on May 5 extended the order till July 5.

Following a writ petition filed by Bela, the HC ordered the government in 2009 and again in last December not to allow entry into the country any scrap ship without pre-cleaning and environmental certificate.

## 6-hr shutdown

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According to the government statistics, there are 556 operational CNG stations in the country, selling 2,000 million cubic metres of gas that is 6 percent of the country's average daily production.

The government has to ration gas as the country faces supply shortfall of 500 million cubic feet per day.

Hossain Mansur, chairman of Petrobangla and Shafiul Islam Kamal, president of the association, among others, were present at the meeting.

## President's pardon

FROM PAGE 1

certainly done nothing wrong. If you remember, during the rule of BNP between 2001 and 2006, the then president created a furore by granting clemency to an individual who had fled to Europe as a way of evading justice. In the end, justice did not catch up with him. He was pardoned. There was outrage in the country. The pardoned man's name was Jintu. Please recall that the then law minister Moudud Ahmed had a hard time explaining the act to the nation. His arguments were unconvincing.

This bad legacy has once again been upheld through a grant of presidential pardon to AHM Biplab, son of the controversial Laxmipur Awami League leader Abu Taher. No one questions the right or power of the president to let convicts go free. The constitution empowers him to limit, commute or do away with judicial convictions. But what does cause deep worries among citizens is the extent to which political partisanship has had a bearing on all instances of presidential pardon in the last decade. All too often -- and this happens with all political parties which happen to govern at a given point in time -- cases filed earlier are rapidly withdrawn on the ground that they had been politically motivated. That may be true. Again, that may not be true. More to the point, there is always a thin grey line which makes it

essential for a case to be thoroughly reviewed under duly constituted judicial authority before the decision of whether or not it can be dropped or withdrawn is taken. That line of action has, of course, been a missing factor in Bangladesh even as we have loudly and regularly proclaimed our adherence to the rule of law.

Consider the Biplab factor again. The pardoned man, about whom and about whose family copious reports have appeared in the media (you remember the abduction and murder of the Laxmipur BNP politician Nurul Islam at the beginning of this century), stayed on the run for a decade before turning himself in last April. The proper course for the authorities should have been for this person, assuming that he believed the sentence handed down to him had been a travesty of the law, to seek a review of the case. To be sure, in such instances, a convict under death sentence has all the right in the world to ask for presidential pardon. But presidential pardon, mind you, is a prerogative we expect all occupants of the Bangabhaban to exercise most judiciously after thorough considerations of the ramifications of the move. Article 49 of the constitution cannot be treated lightly or in cavalier fashion. In the present instance, the morally proper course should have been for the president to stay

his hand. That he did not, that the pardon has been granted to a man whose links with the ruling party are public knowledge, only undermines the dignity of the presidential office.

Consider too the ill consequences of the pardon on the family of Nurul Islam, on the nation as a whole. With all the systematic flouting of the law going on apace across the country, with individuals and groups all too easily taking the law in their hands, with mobs bludgeoning people to death and the police unwilling or unable to act against such blatant undermining of decency, legality and morality, the presidential clemency to Biplab can only send popular confidence in governance slipping several notches more.

The time is here for a review and reconsideration of the factors that have led to a grant of presidential pardon in the last decade. It is a job the Jatiya Sangsad must do in order for public questions about the advisability or otherwise of recent applications of article 49 to be allayed. The nation needs to return to the rule of law. The presidential pardon to the convicted criminal in Laxmipur is a new hurdle in our journey to that cherished goal. It impedes good governance. It raises legitimate concerns about the damage that may have been done to the sanctity of the office of the president.

## Honour they never

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Now aged, they trembled as they told their stories as to how some razakars (collaborators of Pakistani forces) handed them over to Pakistani soldiers.

"Freedom fighters sacrificed their blood to liberate the country and now enjoy many state facilities and get allowances," said Raju Bala. "But nobody recognises the sacrifice we made...nobody would even look at us!"

She gave a pause and said, "We dug holes and used to hide our goats in there," she said. "And we hid ourselves in the water in a nearby pond whenever the Pakistani soldiers passed by."

"One day, some soldiers saw us in the water. A razakar named Badsha asked us to come out of the water," said Surjo Begum. Soaking wet from head to toe, a teenage Surjo followed her family out of the water.

"He told us that we would not have to hide any longer, and that nothing would happen to us," she said, adding that she saw the razakar whispering to the Pakistani soldiers as she and her family returned home.

Six Pakistani soldiers from a nearby camp came to the house the next day. Two of them stood guard outside the house while four soldiers raped four of her family members inside.

"I was the last to be...," she fell short, covering her face with her sari. She then gave a low, choking moan and began to tremble.

Surjo was married to a cousin a few weeks before the incident.

In Bangla, the word Birangona means brave woman. The government conferred the title on the women who were raped by the

Pakistani army during the nine months of the war.

But the title has come to mean a "dishonoured" or "violated woman," other speakers said, and the Birangonas, including Raju Bala and Surjo Begum, have been forced to live in seclusion rejected by their families and the society.

Raju Bala, a devout Hindu, said she is not allowed to enter a temple. And her grandchildren are mocked and teased for being the offspring of a woman "who was taken away by the military."

"I'm speechless," said Prof Mizanur Rahman, chairman of National Human Rights Commission, addressing the programme as chief guest.

"While many razakars go to mosques and even conduct prayers, this brave woman who had to sacrifice everything for the country can't even enter a temple."

He demanded that the sufferings and harassments of these women end now. He also promised to take their cases to the government.

Women rights activists, teachers and students at the programme demanded that the Birangonas should be recognised as freedom fighters and given all the facilities they get.

According to government statistics, around two lakh women were violated during the war of liberation. However, some independent sources put the number at four lakh.

## 4 die in lift collapse

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another worker, said. "I was also looking down the shaft to see if the lift had reached 12th floor." The lift could not go beyond that level.

"But it was taking unusually a longer time. Suddenly, I heard sound of tearing of its cables and found it going down fast," he said.

"Running down the stairs, I went to the labourers' shed in the basement and informed other workers about the disaster," he added.

The workers rushed to the spot where the lift fell and found the four in the pile of tiles.

The victims, all of whom were almost thrashed and looked lifeless to their colleagues, were however taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. There, doctors declared them dead.

Sohel said the lift was being used for carrying goods and workers at the building being constructed by Building for Future Ltd.

Sekender Ali Mina, programme director of rights body Safety and Rights Society, said Bangladesh National Building Code reads

"A material hoist shall not be used to transport worker(s). Temporary elevator shall be installed if necessary."

Sohel also said the elevator was in poor condition and lacking safety door in its passage.

The victims had been doing overtime from 5:30pm after completing their shift from 8:00am to 5:00pm, he added.

An official of the developer company was reached over the phone late at night. But the person refused to say anything.

Ajar Ali, a foreman of the building, told The Daily Star the temporary service elevator was a makeshift one and it was used from dawn to around 10:00pm almost every day.

He claimed it had a capacity to carry 1,000kg.

Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Rafiqul Islam of Ramna Police Station said they had detained a site engineer from the spot in this connection.

Nobody else from the developer was found at the project site, he said.

ADC Nurul Islam of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna)

said steps would be taken if any fault on the part of the authorities is found.

Between January and April this year, 59 people died because of the construction authorities' callousness and lack of care for human life, according to Safety and Rights Society.

Earlier on July 6, Habibur Rahman Munna, an HSC examinee of Tejgaon College, died at a roadside construction site of Sagufta Group in Panthapath in the capital. A brick fell on him from 10th floor.

Also, Chittagong Technical College student Usha-e-Marma, 20, sustained severe head injury as a brick from an under-construction building fell on his head on July 19.

In a suo moto order, a High Court bench on July 19 summoned the chairman and managing director of Sagufta Group in connection with Munna's death.

An HC bench yesterday directed the two to appear before the court at 10:30am on July 26 to explain their role in the incident, what safety measures they took and if there was any negligence on their part.

## Stop coaching

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It is imperative for the government to enact a law to stop private coaching, observed Khaleda Hakeem, principal of Udayan School and College.

Principal of Notre Dame College Benjamin Costa regretted that the guardians and students go to coaching centres for securing more numbers. He suggested arranging remedial classes for weak students.

Manju Ara Begum, principal of Viharunissa Noon School and College, said it would be truly good if the coaching centres could be stopped as these initiate various irregularities.

Termining the incidents of sexual harassments in academic institutions unfortunate, the education minister said stringent action will be taken against the culprits to uphold the dignity of girl students.

Nahid recommended the authorities conduct an annual evaluation of teachers and urged the teachers to gradually end their involvement with private coaching.

## National film

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Chowdhury Pintu (best film - Manpura), Syed Ohiduzzaman Diamond, (best film director - Gangajatra), Alam Khan (best music director - Ebadot), Tanjil (best dance director - Amar Praner Priya), Chanchal Chowdhury (main character - Manpura) along with Ferdous (Gangajatra), Shahidul Alam Sacchu (side character best actor - Britter Baire), Mamunur Rashid (best villain character - Manpura), ATM Shamsuzzaman (best comedian - Mon Basena Parar Taile), Sadika Parveen Popy (best actress main character - Gangajatra), Nipun (best actress side character - Chandermoto Bou).

Syeda Ohida Sabrina (best child actress - Gangajatra), Zarkan (special award (child section) Priyotomeshu), Syed Ohiduzzaman Diamond (best story writer - Gangajatra), Giasuddin Selim (best screenplay, Manpura), Mujtaba Soud (best dialogue writer - Chandermoto Bou), Kumar Biswajit (best singer - Swami-Streer Waada), Kaji Krishnakoli Islam and Chandana Majumdar (best singer - Manpura), Kabir Bakul (best lyric writer - Swami-Streer Waada), Kumar Biswajit (best music composer, Swami-Streer Waada), Mahfuzur Rahman Khan (best cameraman - Britter Baire), Sujan Mahmud (best sound recording - Britter Baire), Junayed Halim (best editor, Britter Baire), Md Kalamator (best art director, Gangajatra), Khalilur Rahman (best make-up - Manpura) and Dilip Singh (best costume and designer, Gangajatra).

## OMS of rice

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industrial districts from Sunday.

At present, the OMS activity is going on in the capital, in a limited scale. Apart from the divisional headquarters, the rice will also be sold in Narayanganj, Gazipur and Narsingdi districts, said the release.

A person can buy five kg of rice at Tk 24 per kg, but not more than once, a press release of the ministry said.

A total of 355 trucks, each carrying three tonnes of rice, will sell rice six days a week. There will be no sale on Friday. Around 200 trucks will sell the rice in Dhaka, 30 trucks in Chittagong, 25 in Khulna, 20 in Rajshahi, 15 in Rangpur, 15 in Sylhet and 10 trucks in Barisal.

The OMS rice will also be sold in the Aila-affected Koira and Dakope upazilas of Khulna district, where three dealers will be engaged per upazila.

"A total of 27,846 tonnes of rice will be required per month for the OMS operation," said SM Golam Kibria, senior information officer of the ministry.

The ministry will sell each kg of rice to the dealers at Tk 22.50 who will get Tk 1.50 per kg as their commission through sale, he added.