

## RESERVED SEATS FOR WOMEN Elections to 1,600 posts in UZs this year likely

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Polls to some 1,600 posts reserved for women in the upazila parishes may be held anytime this year, completing formation of the local government bodies more than three years after the system was restored.

The Election Commission held polls to the posts of chairmen and vice-chairmen for 481 upazila parishes on January 22, 2009. But it could not hold the polls to the reserved seats for various reasons including the one that there was no authority to fix the schedule.

The government itself had retained the authority to fix the timetable since February 2009 but did not make any move. Even the government did not frame rules for the election.

At the end of November last year, the government returned the authority to the EC by amending the Upazila Parishad Act.

In exercise of the authority, sources in the EC Secretariat say the commission has recently drafted rules for conducting polls to the upazila parishes.

"The Election Commission has already approved the rules for conducting the upazila parishad elections. It will be sent to the law ministry soon for vetting," a senior EC official told The Daily Star wishing not to be named.

"Once it is finalised, we will ask the district-level officials to prepare the voter list for holding polls to the reserved seats for women," the official added.

The women representatives elected to reserved seats in union parishes and municipalities are entitled to contest the polls to the reserved seats in the upazila parishes.

As per the Act, an upazila parishad consists of a chairman and two vice-chairmen, including a woman, while municipality mayors and union parishad chairmen under the upazilas become ex-officio members and members of the reserved seats.

As per the existing law, the number of reserved seats for women in upazila parishes is one-third of all union parishes and municipalities taken together.

There are over 4,500 union parishes and 333 municipalities. So the number of the reserved posts for women in 481 upazila parishes would be around 1,600. If polls to the reserved seats are held, it would have elected women representatives to the upazila parishes for less than two years.

The military-backed caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed in 2008 introduced the provision of reserved seats in its efforts to empower women politically by ensuring their participation in the local government bodies.

Immediately after the upazila polls, the EC could not move for holding the elections as the specified tenure of women representatives elected to reserved seats in union and municipalities who are eligible for polls to the reserved seats in upazila had expired, said an EC official.

Tenure of the union parishes and municipalities expired in early 2008 and mid-2009. Polls to the union parishes and municipalities were held in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

But even after that the EC could not move to hold polls to the reserved seats as it did not have the authority to fix the timetable. The government did not ratify the Upazila Parishad Ordinance promulgated by the past caretaker government under which the January 22 polls were held. The ordinance empowered the EC to fix the timetable for the upazila polls.

The government in February 2009 reintroduced the Upazila Parishad Act of 1998 that empowered the government to fix the polls schedule.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## OFF TO JAIL

High-profile opposition leaders being taken to jail from the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka yesterday after their bail prayers, in connection with an arson case, were rejected. 1) Former DCC mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka 2) MK Anwar 3) Khandker Mosharrif Hossain and Bangladesh Jatiya Party President Andalib Rahman Partha 4) Liberal Democratic Party President Oli Ahmad 5) ASM Brig Gen (retd) Hannan Shah 6) Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anne 7) BNP leader Nazimuddin Alam and Aman Ullah Aman and 8) Mirza Abbas and Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu. (Story on Page 1)



## CHECKING FOOD ADULTERATION

## Need for single regulatory body underscored

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday stressed the need for a single regulatory body to check food adulteration and sub-standard drugs in Bangladesh.

Presenting the keynote paper, Pharmacy faculty acting dean of Dhaka University Prof ABM Farooque said the government regulatory bodies like BSTI and DCC's Food and Sanitation Department do not play significant role to ensure quality of food. So, a single and independent body is necessary to ensure quality of food, drugs, household products, agricultural products etc, he added.

Poribesh Bachao Andolan (Poba) and Eastern University organised the roundtable at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday.

Bangladeshi food items are not getting international market due to adulteration, observed ABM Farooque.

He said formalin is used to preserve

milk, DDT and heptachlor are used to preserve dried fishes while calcium carbide, copper sulphate, potash solution and other chemicals are used to ripe fruits artificially as well as hormones used to fattening cows, poultry and fishes.

Consumption of such chemicals through food items is severely damaging people's health, specially children, pregnant women and old age people, he said.

Experts at the roundtable said people are suffering from various diseases, including cancer, heart problems, and liver cirrhosis due to the rampant use of chemicals in food items.

Professor of Dhaka University's Marketing department ABM Shahidul Islam moderated the discussion.

PoBA Chairman Abu Naser Khan, Vice Chancellor of Eastern University Nurul Islam, General Secretary of Khelaghar, Dr Lelin Chowdhury, Former director (food and nutrition science department) of BCSIR also spoke at the roundtable.



Bangladesh Gram Police Karmachari Union forms a human chain before Jatiya Press Club yesterday, demanding a salary scale similar to that of fourth class employees.

## Death anniversary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 9th death anniversary of Rahmat Ullah Chowdhury, a freedom fighter and founder of Bangladesh Railway Sramik League, says a press release.

He was also former president of Bangladesh Railway Sramik League and Jatiya Sramik League.

On the occasion, wreaths will be placed and prayers will be offered at his grave near the mazar Hazrat Garibullah Shah (Ra) in Chittagong at 8:30am.

A discussion and milad mahfil will also be held after Asr prayers.

In Dhaka, a discussion on Rahmat's life and a milad mahfil will be held at Bangladesh Railway Sramik League's Shahjahanpuro office.

Dhaka Ahsan Mission will organise a workshop; Venue: Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban, Dhaka University; Time: 9:00am.

Bangladesh PWD Diploma Engineers' Samity will hold a national convention; Venue: Department of Public Works Bhaban, Segunbagicha; Time: 4:30pm.

Kranti Shilpigosthi will organise a discussion; Venue: Central Public Library; Time: 5:30pm.

Liberation War Museum will hold a discussion; Venue: its premises; Time: 5:00pm.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry will organise a discussion; Venue: Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel; Time: 9:30am.

SME Foundation will hold a discussion; Venue: its conference room, Royal Tower, 4 Panthaphat, Karwan Bazar; Time: 4:00pm.

Human chain

University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh will organise a human chain; Venue: before its Dhanmondi campus; Time: 10:00am.

## Encourage hill people to mainstream politics, JS body urges ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary standing committee yesterday asked the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Affairs Ministry to take measures so that hill people get interest to engage in the country's mainstream politics instead of local and regional politics.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on CHT Affairs Ministry, at a meeting, also asked the law enforcement agencies to keep vigil if any militant outfit operates 'hidden activities' in the hill areas.

"Generally, hill people are not inter-

ested in the nation's mainstream politics, rather they get involved in their local and regional politics, which often causes scores of killings and injuries," Md Abu Zahir, a member of the committee, said after the meeting at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in the capital.

Abu Zahir, also a ruling Awami League lawmaker, said the committee members discussed about the internal politics of the hill districts of Bandarbans, Khagrachari and Rangamati.

The members also opined that most of the killings and fierce gun fights in the three hill districts is the result of

internal or regional politics, he said.

"The committee therefore asked the authorities concerned to encourage hill people to get involved in the national politics instead of their local political groups," he added.

It also suggested expanding schooling programmes to give education to the children in these areas.

On the issue of indiscriminate chopping of trees and land grabbing in the hills, the committee asked the law enforcement agencies to take immediate steps against persons involved in such activities.

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