

# Hasina thanks

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progress of democracy," the premier said.

Hasina, also the ruling Awami League chief, said this while speaking at a view-exchange meeting with the party's grassroots and leaders of Faridpur district unit at the Gono Bhaban.

City corporation elections in Rajshahi, Barisal, Khulna and Sylhet will be held on June 15.

Claiming that different local government elections held under the incumbent government's tenure were free and fair, Hasina said, "Our government has proved that we can hold free, fair and credible polls. The next parliamentary election will also be free and fair."

The general election would be held in our country the way it has been being conducted in other parliamentary democracies, she noted.

"I would like to urge you to recruit new party members and hold councils on a regular basis at every tier to strengthen the organisation," Hasina told the leaders and activists of her party.

The AL leaders and activists of central and Faridpur district units were present at the meeting.

# Black money

## POWER OF BLACK MONEY

IN DIFFERENT REGIMES

Regimes	Total whitened	Total tax received
1975-82	Tk 70 crore	Tk 10 crore
Ershad (82-90)	Tk 850 crore	Tk 185 crore
BNP (91-96)	<b>No provision of whitening money</b>	
AL (96-01)	Tk 1560 crore	Tk 109 crore
BNP (01-06)	Tk 1000 crore	Tk 100 crore
Caretaker (06-08)	Tk 9682 crore	Tk 911 crore
AL (09-13)	Tk 1305 crore	Tk 38 crore
<b>Total</b>	<b>Tk 14,467 cr</b>	<b>Tk 1353 cr</b>

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for areas other than in Dhaka and Chittagong Tk 3,000.

In case of a house or flat of the size above 200 square metres, the tax may be between Tk 3,000 and Tk 7,000.

Moreover, if anyone wants to construct or purchase more than one house, he may have to pay an additional 20 percent tax.

The government has also been considering fixing tax on the purchase value of a plot at 10 percent.

An NBR official said they had held discussions with the government on the issues on several occasions, but could not reach a decision.

The current government in its first budget gave scope for whitening money in four broad categories. A total of 1,923 persons then whitened around Tk 923 crore. Of them, 1,320 people whitened around Tk 500 crore for purchasing flat and land.

The NBR official said the government had been considering giving the scope again in view of such a response.

In FY 2010-11, the scope for whitening money was given through investment in the stockmarket. Around Tk 382 crore was whitened then.

But both the scopes were made void from the next FY.

In the current FY, the scopes were brought back, but they did not elicit much response. As a result, the government is considering withdrawal of the money whitening facility in the stockmarket.

In this FY, a new article was incorporated in the Income Tax Act that undisclosed income of a year would have to be whitened by paying 10 percent fine.

The NBR official said the opportunity had been given on a permanent basis but none had taken it so far.

Adviser of a former caretaker government ABM Mirza Azizul Islam yesterday told The Daily Star that he had always been against the scope for whitening black money.

He said it was ethically unjust and from economic point of view it does not bring much benefit.

When his attention was drawn to the fact that the scope for whitening money had indeed been given, the former adviser said that at the time no scope was given for whitening illegally earned money; rather it was given for those who could not pay tax for some reasons.

Over the post-1975 dispensations, every government provided the scope for whitening money. Of them, the immediate past caretaker government had the most amount of money whitened.

# Ershad's challenge

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would not be able to defeat him in a presidential election.

"If you [AL and BNP] amend the constitution, restore the presidential form and then contest together an election against me, I will win. This is my challenge," Ershad said while speaking at a view-exchange meeting with Noakhali unit JP leaders and workers at his Banani office.

Regarding the dialogue between the opposition and ruling party, the former mili-

tary strongman said there won't be any dialogue as long as the ruling party sticks to its stance and the opposition keeps pressing for a caretaker government.

Ershad, a leader in the AL-led grand alliance, however, added, "It will be tough to hold the general election without a caretaker government."

He also said he will divide the country into eight provinces if he could win the next general polls.

# Reamarkable day in Pakistan

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traditional recitation from the Quran.

The national assembly secretariat said in a statement that a new speaker and deputy speaker will be elected through secret ballot on Monday, while the new prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, will be formally elected by the lower house and sworn in on Wednesday.

Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) romped to victory in the elections and will command 177 of the 342 seats in the new assembly, giving it significant leverage to oust

President Asif Ali Zardari when his term expires in September.

The former prime minister, 63, will take up the reins of power for an unprecedented third term when he is sworn in. During his two previous administrations he earned a reputation for hotheadedness and pugnacity.

"I thank Allah who gave our nation an opportunity to bring a new government through elections," Sharif told reporters at Islamabad airport where he arrived from his home town Lahore.

"It is a good development that a peaceful democratic



Services at Chittagong Medical College Hospital were disrupted as the interns yesterday locked, *inset*, almost all entrances to the hospital to protest Shibir attack on a fellow intern and former president of Chhatra League CMC unit . Story on Page 3.

# 50<sup>2</sup> km turned into wasteland

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distance if there is any wind blowing," said Haraprasad Roy of Fakirdanga. He owns much cropland with zero harvest now.

Khorshed Alam, director of the Soil Resource and Development Institute, notes, "The soil of Dakop upazila had always been extremely saline [on a scale of five, it ranked 5]. But the salinity level drastically increased after Aila had brought in sea water, with farmland in many areas remaining inundated for long."

Before the cyclone made a landfall, farmers could cultivate transplanted Aman during the rainy season. But nothing grows here any more after the cyclone.

The two unions are surrounded by the Vadra, Dhaki and Shibsa rivers, whose waters are also so saline that they cannot be used for irrigation or drinking.

The situation has pushed several thousand people into abandoning their ancestral land and looking for jobs in the towns and cities, locals say.

"Many people have lost their livelihood. Aila has ruined all scope of economic activities," said Samoresh Roy, former chairman of Kamarkhola union.

The remaining farmers have become day labourers. Their family members spend a significant time looking for fresh water in the neighbourhood every day. While each household saves the rain water by whatever means possible, there are a number of ponds that serve as the major source of drinking water.

"Sometimes we have to

buy drinking water at Tk 30 for a 20-litre jar from vendors coming by boat from Khulna," said Shekhar, who hails from Kalinagar village in Kamarkhola.

Sushila Roy of Channir Chak village in Kamarkhola said she worked as a day labourer in a development project of a non-government organisation. Her husband Suvash used to be a farmer before Aila. But he too has been forced to turn a day labourer.

"We have two bighas of land completely ruined by salinity," she said.

Against this backdrop, 250 families from Kamarkhola union and another 1,900 people of Sutorkhali who took refuge on the embankments in 2009 never returned home.

"These people are still living on the embankments because they do not have land to make their houses on," said Uma Shankar Roy, chairman of Kamarkhola union.

The elderly woman Nashpati Roy lives on the embankment with her husband, a tuberculosis patient, her daughter and two grandsons. "My daughter and my grandsons are working as day labourers for survival," she said.

Nashpati had a house on a 15-decimal plot of land in Jaulakhali village. After the cyclone, the Shibsa river devoured the house, she added.

Experts see little hope for a revival of traditional farming in the area. While shrimp farming could be one option, the land needs a regular pumping out of saline water, which poses risks to the embankments as the riverbeds have become higher than the

farmlands due to siltation.

SRDI Director Khorshed Alam said the farmers could grow pumpkins, spinach [pui shak] and watermelons.

Prof Dr Ainun Nishat however said, "The salinity level of the soil would leach out in three to four years if there is adequate rainfall to wash up the land.

"Otherwise people can cultivate some saline tolerant variety crops like sunflowers, maize or watermelons," added Dr Nishat, a leading hydro-expert of the country and vice-chancellor of BRAC University.

Aila had damaged about 2 lakh acres of cropland, affecting the food security of the area. The SRDI is now conducting a fresh survey to determine if the situation caused by soil salinity has improved at all.

# KISHOREGANJ BY-POLLS

## AL distributes nomination papers today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League will begin distributing the party's nomination papers today among its aspirant candidates to contest the upcoming Kishoreganj-4 by-polls to be held on July 3.

Nomination papers can be collected from the political office of AL President Sheikh Hasina in the capital's Dhanmondi area. These have to be submitted at the same place by tomorrow [Monday] at 5:00pm.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the AL parliamentary board chaired by the party chief, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, at Gono Bhaban last night.

The board will interview the aspirant candidates at Gono Bhaban Monday night and then hold a meeting there.

# Tea workers' wage hiked

A CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The daily wage of tea garden workers has been enhanced by Tk 14 with effect from June 1. Earlier, it was Tk 55.

The decision was taken at a tripartite meeting held at the labour ministry on May 28. Presided over by Labour and Employment Minister Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju, the meeting was attended by leaders of the workers and representatives of tea garden owners.

The meeting was called urgently following a report of The Daily Star on the poor wages of the tea garden workers and their other problems on May 25, said a tea workers' leader.

The last time wages of the tea garden workers were increased in 2009.

Bijoy Prasad Banerjee, a tea workers' leader, said, "We are very happy over the increase of the workers' daily wage by Tk 14."

# Talks, not violence

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government and opposition parties to clearly and publicly reject the use of political violence," said Cruden at a book launch in the capital yesterday.

Engaging in peaceful protests is fundamental to democracy, but violence has no place in the democratic process, she added.

"We call on them to engage one another meaningfully and constructively to address the ongoing political issues and to ensure that the upcoming general election is free, fair and transparent."

The high commissioner observed that the recent Savar tragedy along with the political violence in Bangladesh has had "a

chilling effect" on the international community.

She went on, "The current political instability combined with consumer reactions in western countries is causing some companies to question whether they should diversify their risks and move out of Bangladesh.

"This could be very damaging in the medium and long term for Bangladesh."

The High Commission of Canada in Bangladesh and the Canada Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry jointly launched the book, "International Standard Social Responsibility", at Canada Club.

# Water prices

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the same amount of water.

The new rates will come into effect from July 1 and will also be applicable to all non-meter holdings and under-construction buildings, according to Dhaka Wasa (Water Supply & Sewerage Authority).

"This is, however, not a

hike of water prices. It is an adjustment to the inflation, which we do every year," Taqsem A Khan, managing director of Dhaka Wasa, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Dhaka Wasa supplies water to 3.25 lakh customers, serving a population of about 12.5 million in the capital.



Mayoral aspirants in Barisal City Corporation polls -- from right Mahmudul Hoque Khan, Ahsan Habib Khan and Shawkat Hossain Hiron -- at a programme in Barisal city where they promised to accept the election results whatever they may be.

# All candidates promise

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between voters and the candidates.

Shushashoner Janno Nagorik (Citizen's Alliance for Good Governance / Shujan) and Sachetan Nagorik Committee (Sanak), the local unit of Transparency International Bangladesh, Barisal district units, organised the programme at Ashwini Kumar Hall in Barisal city.

Three mayoral candidates at the BCC elections scheduled for June 15 -- Shawkat Hossain Hiron, 14-party alliance-backed outgoing mayor and city Awami League secretary; Ahsan Habib Kamal, the 18-party-backed candidate and district BNP president; and Jubo League leader Mahmudul Hoque Khan Mamun -- made commitments before voters and also

responded to their queries.

Elaborating on his work during the last four years and seven months, Hiron said he needed to be elected for the second term to finish his incomplete projects. If elected, he will free the city from drug peddling, extortion, toll collection and terrorism and will turn it into a green city by constructing parks, community centres, flyovers and

expanded roads, he added.

Kamal said he would make the city the best in the country by constructing proper drainage and sewerage systems and reclaiming canals.

Mamun, the youngest among the three candidates, said if he became the mayor, he would strive for sustainable development and ensure accountability and transparency.

# Lawmakers linked

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styled, "Accessibility of poor and extreme poor people to khas land: Existing constraints and way forward." Care Bangladesh, a humanitarian organisation, hosted the event at a city hotel.

The real acreage of khas lands in the country is at least two to three times higher than the figure shown in government land records, mentioned Qamrul.

He blamed the anomaly on the failure of the land administration to collect

proper and adequate information in time.

According to official records, the country has about 33 lakh acres of khas lands. The number of landless families is estimated at 70 lakh.

Besides the political leaders, said the state minister, there is a group of land grabbers who do not belong to any political party in real sense.

"With each and every change in the state power, they [land grabbers] change the sides to be able to come up with new schemes for grab-

bing more khas lands," he noted, adding that most of the housing companies are run by these "land mafia."

With support from corrupt land officials, particularly the assistant commissioners (land), land grabbers can easily manage false deeds and documents related to the allotment of khas lands, he observed.

The land ministry needs to address the problem with a strong hand and must initiate a tough monitoring of land documents authorised by the

assistant commissioners, added Qamrul.

Addressing the dialogue as the chief guest, Land Minister Rezaul Karim Hira said he has been working hard to improve the capacity and transparency of the land administration.

Care Bangladesh Country Director Jamie Terzi and Information Commissioner Sadeka Halim also spoke at the roundtable, moderated by Monzurul Ahsan Bulbul, chief executive officer of Boishakhi Television.