

HC asks EC

FROM PAGE 20

Mohammed Yeasin Khan, the lawyer for the EC, told The Daily Star that there is no legal bar for the EC to hold the by-election to Tangail-4 (Kalihati) constituency following the HC verdict.

The EC will now fix a new date for holding the by-polls, he said, adding that Kader Siddique cannot contest the polls.

Kader Siddique's lawyer Raghbir Rauf Chowdhury told this correspondent that his client will move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court against the HC judgment.

The HC has rejected his client's writ petition, saying it is not acceptable since there is a provision to file an appeal over the election dispute before the tribunal to be formed by the EC after the election is held, he said.

The lawyer added that the HC has not said whether Kader Siddique is a loan defaulter or not.

On September 16 last year, the EC issued a notification, fixing November 10 for the by-polls that fell vacant following the resignation of Awami League lawmaker Abdul Latif Siddique from parliament.

It asked aspirants to submit their nomination papers by October 11.

On October 13 that year, the returning officer cancelled Kader Siddique's nomination on loan default charges.

He filed an appeal with the EC against the decision, but the commission on October 18 rejected his appeal. He later filed a writ petition with the HC against the EC's decision.

On October 21, following the writ petition, the HC directed the EC to accept Kader Siddique's candidacy and also asked it and the government to explain why the cancellation of his candidature for loan default could not be declared illegal.

After a government petition against the HC order, the Appellate Division of the SC on October 27 stayed the election till November 2.

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Govt to guard

FROM PAGE 20

There is no vaccine for the disease, WHO says.

WHO of South-East Asian region that includes Bangladesh has been urged to strengthen surveillance and take measures to prevent the spread of Zika infection.

Bangladesh is not immune to the virus as Aedes Aegypti that spreads the virus is an active vector of dengue here.

AKM Shamsuzzaman told The Daily Star that the government had decided to take all possible measures, including engaging local government bodies, mainly city corporations, in tackling mosquitoes.

The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research and the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh have all facilities to detect Zika virus, he said.

Yesterday's meeting also decided to create awareness that Zika is not a dangerous virus and that no death has been recorded yet because of Zika infection.

"We urge people, therefore, not to be panicked," Shamsuzzaman said.

Univ teachers'

FROM PAGE 20

universities, who have been agitating since May last year over "pay discrepancies", went on a seven-day strike on January 11. On January 20, they suspended their strike until February 3 after getting assurance from the prime minister.

Prof Maksud said they had held meetings with four government secretaries and officials of University Grants Commission (UGC) twice to resolve the issue.

"We hope a solution will be reached soon as the prime minister is well aware of the situation," said Prof Maksud who teaches disaster science and management at DU.

Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed, president of FBUTA, said they would continue to hold meetings with the government high-ups until February 23.

A meeting would be held between UGC Chairman Prof Abdul Mannan and education and finance secretaries on February 7, he said.

"... as some secretaries are trying to foil the attempt to meet our demands, we're worried," said Prof Farid.

The teachers suggested that 25 percent professors should be given grade-I status and 5 percent distinguished professors' salaries and status should be equivalent to senior secretaries.

Biggest ever trade deal

FROM PAGE 20

as Japan -- is a key plank of Obama's so-called "pivot" to Asia, as he seeks to counter the rising power of China.

Along with a rebalancing of the US military machine towards the western Pacific, the TPP is recognition of the growing might of China, which has come to dominate the region, threatening American influence.

Supporters of the deal say harnessing the power of free trade in such a dynamic part of the world is vital if the US is to fend off China's challenge to its supremacy.

Trade ministers from 12 participating countries -- Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam -- signed the pact in Auckland early Wednesday.

Bangladesh is, however, set to lose competitiveness in the global apparel trade because of the TPP deal.

The TPP would create a preferential trade zone between 12 countries including Vietnam, Bangladesh's direct competitor in the global apparel market, and the US, the country's single largest garment export destination.

Garment exports of Vietnam would now enter the American market duty-free.

The TPP is a comprehensive agreement that will open markets, set high-standard trade rules, and address 21st-century issues in the global economy. In so doing, it would promote jobs and growth in the US and across the Asia Pacific region.

Bangladesh's garment exports to other nations of the TPP, like Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and Chile, might not be affected, as it already enjoys zero-duty benefit there.

Beijing was muted in its reaction to the deal, saying its officials were studying the 6,000-page document.

A commerce ministry statement said China would "actively participate in and facilitate highly transparent, open and inclusive free trade arrangements in the region".

Despite Obama's comments, the US has also sought to play down any overt anti-China rhetoric.

US trade representative Michael Froman, in Auckland, said the agreement was "never directed against" any specific country and "it's important to have a constructive economic relationship" with China.

Although the signing marks the end of the negotiating process, member states still have two years to get the deal approved at home before it becomes legally binding.

"We will encourage all countries to complete their domestic ratification processes as quickly as possible," New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said.

"TPP will provide much better access for goods and services to more than 800 million people across the TPP countries, which make up 36 percent of global GDP."

However, ratification may prove far from easy, notably in the United States, where poisonous election-year politics are likely to stymie cooperation over a deal opponents have spun as a job killer.

"It's highly unlikely (ratification) before the national elections in November," Tom Switzer of the University of Sydney's US Studies Centre told AFP.

"In an election year, free trade is not a popular cause, and there are a lot of constituencies in both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party who are very much opposed to free trade or any kind of trade deal."

In Japan -- the second biggest economy in the bloc, and one that was a relative latecomer to the process -- mainstream politicians and economists have generally supported the TPP as positive for Tokyo's export-driven growth even amid concerns over its impact on its prized agriculture industry.

The Canadian government, which has changed since the deal was negotiated, signed up Thursday but has yet to decide whether to go through with ratification.

While the 12 trade ministers were shaking hands in Auckland, thousands of protesters clogged the streets outside to voice their opposition.

They argue the TPP will cost jobs and impact on sovereignty in Asia-Pacific states.

American economist and Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz believes the TPP "may turn out to be the worst trade agreement in decades."

"In 2016, we should hope for the TPP's defeat and the beginning of a new era of trade agreements that don't reward the powerful and punish the weak," he recently wrote in The Guardian newspaper.

Obama visits US mosque

FROM PAGE 20

advocated Christian-only admissions and championed "Judeo-Christian values."

Obama took on such comments, and asked Christians to see "an attack on one faith is an attack on all our faiths."

He also criticised the media and Hollywood, which he said portrayed Muslims in a narrow way. "Our television shows should have Muslim characters that are unrelated to national security," he said.

"THANK YOU"

Obama has visited mosques in Malaysia, Indonesia and Egypt as president, but this was his first visit to one of America's 2,000-plus places of Islamic worship.

In 2009, a freshly elected Obama travelled to Cairo to call for a "new beginning" with the Muslim world.

Much of Obama's foreign policy agenda has focused on improving ties with Muslim nations, from making a nuclear deal with Iran to ending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But the effort has been stymied by continued confrontation with jihadist groups and military strikes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

Obama restated his case that organisations like the Islamic State group pervert Islam and do not represent the vast majority of Muslims.

The president offered "two words

that Muslim-Americans don't hear often enough, and that is 'thank you'."

But he also called on Muslims to help tackle radicalisation. "How do we defend ourselves against organisations that are bent on killing innocents?" he asked.

"It can't be the work of any one faith alone. It can't be just a burden on the Muslim community, although the Muslim community has to play a role."

That message is a vexed one for members of the Muslim community, including audience member Riham Osman, who works for the Muslim Public Affairs Council, an advocacy group.

"I know national security will come up in the speech just because of the climate of today," she said ahead of Obama's remarks.

"It does upset me a little bit that it is his first time coming to visit a mosque, and there will be kids there who have grown up in this post 9/11 era and their faith is constantly linked to national security and extremism."

Around 49 percent of all Americans think "at least some" US Muslims hold anti-American sentiments, according to a Pew Research Center poll released Wednesday.

The United States is home to around 3.3 million Muslims.

Around 81 Muslim-Americans were involved in violent extremist plots in 2015, according to the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security.

Tunisia lifts nationwide nighttime curfew

AFP, Tunis

Tunisia said yesterday it is lifting a nationwide nighttime curfew imposed last month after the worst social unrest witnessed in the country since its 2011 revolution.

"In light of the improvement in the security situation, it was decided that from Thursday... the curfew on all Tunisian territory will be lifted," the interior ministry said in a statement.

The curfew was imposed after protests that started in the central town of Kasserine, where an unemployed man was electrocuted during a January 16 demonstration over the lack of economic prospects in the region.

The unrest, the worst since the uprising five years ago that ousted longtime dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, spread to several other towns and to Tunis where shops were burned and

looted in one suburb in the night of January 21.

The authorities announced the curfew the next day, and protests ebbed after continuing for a while in Kasserine and the nearby town of Sidi Bouzid, the cradle of the 2011 revolution.

Tunisia in November imposed another nighttime curfew in the capital and suburbs after a deadly bus bombing claimed by the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group. It was lifted in December.

Following the November 24 suicide attack that killed 12 presidential guards, the government also declared a nationwide state of emergency, which remains in place.

While Tunisia is considered a rare success story of the 2011 regional uprisings known as the Arab Spring, the authorities have failed to resolve the problems of social exclusion.

Clinton fights Sanders for progressive mantle

AFP, New York

Hillary Clinton laid into her Democratic challenger on Wednesday, accusing Bernie Sanders of trying unfairly to hog a progressive mantle but admitting she had work to do to win over young voters.

"I am a progressive who gets results and I will be a progressive president who gets results," she told a town hall meeting in Derry, New Hampshire, where she is fighting against Sanders' dominance in local polls ahead of next week's state primary, the second contest in the 2016 race for the White House.

"I was somewhat amused today to hear Senator Sanders set himself up as the gatekeeper for the definition of what's progressive," she said during the event moderated by television news network CNN.

"I don't think it helps for the senator to be making those kind of comparisons because clearly we all share a lot of the same hopes and aspirations for our country."

A relaxed and confident former secretary of state answered questions from voters after clinching the narrowest win in Iowa caucus history with 49.8 percent compared to 49.6 percent for Sanders.

Disconcerting for Clinton in the first test of the lengthy presidential campaign was Sanders' crushing victory among Democratic voters aged 17 to 29, who gave him 84 percent of their support.

"That's amazing," she said when asked by CNN about Sanders' majority backing among young people in Iowa.

"I accept the fact that I have work to do to convey what I stand for, what I've accomplished, what I want to do for young people in our country," she said.

"They don't have to be for me, I'm going to be for them," she added to warm applause.

Her challenger told the town hall that he respected Clinton for her "long and distinguished career" but insisted: "I think there are issues where she just is not progressive."

The senator from Vermont has inspired a passionate following among young voters with his Scandinavian-inspired anti-Wall Street, poverty busting, democratic socialist agenda.

Court accepts

FROM PAGE 20

Prevention of Women and Children Repression also fixed February 22 for the hearing on the charge framing.

Shahadat Hossain and his wife Jesmine Jahann Nriytra were present at the court during yesterday's hearing.

On December 29 last year, Shafiqur Rahman, investigating officer of the case and also officer-in-charge of Mirpur Police Station, submitted the charge sheet before the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

On September 6 last year, domestic help Mahfuza Akhtar Happy brought allegations of torture by Shahadat and his wife. Later, a case was filed against the couple with Mirpur Police Station.

Shahadat was sent to jail by a Dhaka court after he surrendered before it on October 6, two days after police arrested his wife Nriytra.

The cricketer secured bail from the High Court on December 8 on health ground while his wife got bail from a Dhaka court on December 1.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) suspended Shahadat on September 13 following the allegation.

Biopsy samples

FROM PAGE 5

some fingers and chances of a complete cure are low, he said.

Admitted to the institute since January 30, Abul, 26, hails from Khulna and has tree trunk like warts, almost weighing four kilogrammes, on both hands and feet.

Meanwhile, visiting Abul, Health Minister Muhammad Nasim said the government was willing to try all means possible to cure him of the disease and urged journalists not to crowd the patient's room.

Dr Abul Kalam, head of a six-member medical board formed for Abul, said the patient was kept isolated in a room for being vulnerable to contracting infections.

Moon can affect

FROM PAGE 20

Tsubasa Kohyama, a doctoral student in atmospheric sciences, said: "As far as I know, this is the first study to convincingly connect the tidal force of the moon with rainfall."

"[But] no one should carry an umbrella just because the Moon is rising."

The bulge in the atmosphere when the Moon is overhead, means the weight of the atmosphere increases. The higher air pressure increases the temperature and warm air can hold more moisture.

And Kohyama said "lower humidity is less favourable for precipitation".

S Sudan bill limits foreign aid workers

AFP, Juba

South Sudan lawmakers have passed a controversial bill restricting numbers of foreign aid workers, sparking fears it will hinder efforts to help millions in need in the war-torn young nation.

The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) bill, passed by parliament on Wednesday, means no more than a fifth of aid workers can be from abroad, a level many humanitarians believe is simply not viable.

Aid agencies must "ensure that not less than 80 percent of the employees are South Sudanese nationals at all managerial, middle and junior levels," the bill read, according to a copy seen by AFP yesterday. It must still be signed by the president to pass into law.

Aid workers contacted by AFP asked not to be named following the bill.

They said there was also concern at a clause making the issuing of a "false statement" about the bill punishable by up to three years in prison, as well as a possible 50,000 South Sudan pound fine, over \$2,000 or 1,790 euros at current rates.

Aid agencies already employ large numbers of South Sudanese -- often far higher than the 80 percent level now required -- but not at senior levels or among technical specialists.

Civil war began in December 2013 when President Salva Kiir accused his former deputy Riek Machar of planning a coup, setting off a cycle of retaliatory killings that have split the poverty-stricken, landlocked country along ethnic lines.

Tens of thousands have died in two years of war, more than 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes and 3.9 million South Sudanese face severe food shortages.

East Africa's IGAD bloc last week

called on rival forces to allow food into conflict zones on the brink of famine, where aid workers have warned tens of thousands may be dying of starvation.

United Nations aid agencies, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross, are exempt from the bill.

A similar bill was passed in May 2015, but was later sent back to parliament.

Foreign agencies often provide the only source of healthcare for vast areas of the country.

At least 34 aid workers have been killed since the war began, and have repeatedly complained of harassment, surveillance and threats of expulsion.

Fighting continues despite an August peace deal, and the conflict now involves multiple militia forces who pay little heed to paper peace deals, driven by local agendas or revenge attacks.

As part of that peace deal, warring sides agreed to support an "enabling" environment for aid agencies.

It also stated that the NGO bill should have been submitted to "a process of public consultation, to ensure that such legislation complies with international best practice".

Opposition MP Onyoti Adigo said lawmakers should have therefore waited until rebel lawmakers and a unity government had been formed to debate the bill.

"Being in hurry to pass it... that means you have no interest in the implementation of the peace agreement," Adigo told Juba's Eye Radio.

South Sudan is increasingly aid dependent.

Oil dollars once accounted for over 90 percent of government revenue, but shutdowns caused by war and slumps in global oil prices have seen that rapidly dry up.

Rogue despite

FROM PAGE 1

by some cops out to pick him up from Mirpur.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, chairman of National Human Rights Commission, went to the hospital yesterday to see Babul but he died minutes earlier.

"The audacity of police has gone to an excessive level. It should be stopped right away," he told reporters there.

This year, police excess came in the limelight after Sub-inspector Masud Sikder of Mohammadpur Police station allegedly tortured Bangladesh Bank Assistant Director Golam Rabby for money on January 9.

Masud was suspended a week after the incident. The police force also warned its other officers and members of stern action if any such allegations were proved against them.

Even after the warning, at least eight similar incidents were reported.

On January 15, Dhaka South City Corporation Conservancy Officer Bikash Chandra Das was beaten up allegedly by Sub-inspector Arshadul Islam Akash and three constables of Jatrabari Police Station "for no reasons". The next day, the SI was suspended.

Constable Mokhesur Rahman of Barisal's Agoiljhara Police Station was closed on January 17 for allegedly assaulting a local Swetchhasebak League leader.

Two days later, Assistant Sub-inspector Aminul Islam of Kafurl Police Station in Dhaka was closed over allegations that he had demanded

bribe from an NGO official and threatened to frame him for yaba possession.

Three cops of Uttara Paschim Police Station, including Sub-inspector Abdur Rauf Bahadur, were suspended on January 26 for allegedly harassing businessman and his female friend for extortion money.

In Jessore, five police members, including Sub-inspector Ezazur Rahman of Jhikargachha Police Station, were closed to Jessore Police Lines on January 29. The action was taken against them on charges of snatching \$3,000 from a Bangladesh-origin Swedish couple.

On February 1, a Dhaka court ordered a judicial inquiry into the allegation of sexual abuse of a university student by Sub-inspector Ratan Kumar and two constables of Adabar Police Station in the capital. Ratan was suspended afterwards.

Sub-inspector Rehan Uddin of Barisal Airport Police Station was suspended two days later after a police investigation found an allegation of extortion against him to be true. The SI allegedly took away Tk 11,000 from two persons after confining them to a local hotel.

Contacted, Muhammad Nurul Huda, a former inspector general of police, told The Daily Star that apart from strict departmental actions, the force must take legal actions against its members involved in criminal offences to stop repetition of incidents of police excess.

Grey peacock-pheasant

FROM PAGE 20

daily routine was to start early before sunrise, head into the forest, walk the forest trails used by local tribes, go deeper into the forest, recording every bird and animal species and checking the camera traps we had earlier set up. The days were magical, miles away from the reach of any cellular network and connections to the modern way of life. Here, our friends were the local indigenous community. It was on the last day of our work in the remote hill-forest of the Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary that presented me with one of the most memorable experiences of my life.

After finishing the day's work, we were returning with heavy hearts to catch the boat that would take us back to the monstrous city. The forest was sombre, as if it was feeling our melancholy. But it had one last surprise in store for us.

When a curious sound caught our attention, which oddly resembled a Tokay Gecko's call, we paid little heed to it. But the sound made one of our team members stop in his tracks. He was certain it was anything but a gecko. He took out a small amplifier and played back a similar call. In the dense undergrowth, there was a slight disturbance, a sound of ruffling. We peered forward, trying to locate the animal

that was still invisible. The rustling in the undergrowth grew louder and the calls got closer. We held our breaths, bracing ourselves for facing the creature that might charge towards us. Adrenaline rushed through our veins, but with remarkable determination and calmness we crouched forward.

After a while, we finally saw it. Its inquisitive eyes bore down on us, with its head stretched forward, a genuine look of surprise on its face as it stared at us, the weird animals calling back to it. It was a grey peacock-pheasant, one of the most secretive ground dwelling birds of our forests! Its stunning features, with a grey body and light purple and green spots (ocelli), etched permanently in my memory.

With the shutter sound of the camera, the elusive bird vanished into the undergrowth with a flutter of feathers, leaving us in a state of awe and disbelief.

Special thanks to the project, "Biodiversity Conservation through protection of streams of Pablakhali area" implemented by the Department of Environmental Science and Management of North South University, spearheaded by Md Jakariya.

The author is an aspiring conservationist with a great liking for life in the wilderness. He studied Environmental Science.