



"Weak institutions and challenges of governance have retarded Bangladesh's competitiveness significantly."
CPD RESEARCH DIRECTOR KHANDAKER GOLAM MOAZZEM WHILE UNVEILING GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS REPORT (GCR) 2018. (PAGE B1)



"Such question leaks deprive the deserving candidates ... This is unfair."
DHAKA UNIVERSITY STUDENT AKHTAR HOSSEN, WHO IS ON A HUNGER STRIKE DEMANDING FRESH ADMISSION TEST IN DU 'GHA' UNIT. (PAGE 3)



"Today, the BJP government has rectified the mistake made by [emperor] Akbar... Allahabad has been renamed Prayagraj by our govt."
UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER YOGI ADITYANATH

Thorny issues remain thorny

Country ticks towards 90-day countdown to JS polls beginning Oct 31

SHAKHAWAT LITON and MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Less than two weeks before the 90-day countdown for holding the general election begins, a number of contentious political issues remain unresolved.

The issues include the nature of the polls-time government and dissolution of parliament before announcement of the election schedule -- two key demands of the BNP and some other opposition parties.

Under the constitutional provision introduced in 2011, the next national election must be held within 90 days before the five-year term of the current parliament expires on January 28. And the Election Commission has said it would announce the schedule any day after the countdown begins on October 31.

The government and the ruling Awami League have already rejected the opposition demand for a nonpartisan administration and dissolution of parliament, saying the election will be held in line with the constitutional provisions -- that is under the current government.

However, the size of the government during the election remains unclear.

The prime minister and some of her cabinet colleagues have said the polls-time cabinet will carry out some routine work only and provide all assistance to the EC to hold the polls.

Another unsettled issue is the deployment of army during the election.

In the 2008 parliamentary election, armed forces personnel were deployed to work alongside regular law enforcement agencies. At the time, army personnel were given the power to arrest troublemakers without warrant. That power was curtailed by amending the law after the 2008 election.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES

Mode of polls-time govt

JS dissolution

Use of EVM

Role of army

Mahbub under fire

14-party wants him to quit EC; his colleague Kabita says one of his proposals unconstitutional

SHAKHAWAT LITON and MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The ruling Awami League led 14-party alliance has accused Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar of "violating the oath of secrecy" and it thinks he should resign.

At a meeting at the AL president's Dhanmondi office yesterday, the alliance also criticised the commissioner for disclosing contents of an Election Commission (EC) meeting to the media, said meeting sources.

Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar

KSA deports another 80 Bangladeshis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Saudi authorities yesterday deported 80 more Bangladeshi migrants, bringing the total number of deportees close to 600 this month.

The migrants, including those having valid iqamas (residence permit), arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on a Saudia Airlines flight around 3:30pm, said Tanvir Hossain, assistant director at the expatriates' welfare desk at the airport.

"Many of the returnees said they were detained and deported despite having iqamas," Tanvir told this correspondent.

Al-Amin Gazi of Chandpur's Faridganj said he went to the Middle Eastern country in December last year spending Tk 6.5 lakh. However,

DEFENCE COOPERATION DEAL

Dhaka, Riyadh opt to take more time

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The expected defence cooperation deal between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia was not signed as both sides agreed to discuss the matter further.

"The proposed Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation between Bangladesh and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was not signed today [yesterday]...", the prime minister's Additional Press Secretary Md Nazrul Islam told The Daily Star over phone last night.

Both sides agreed to sign it sometime in the future, after making some adjustments, said the official accompanying the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

It could not be immediately known which part of the deal needed to be improved or changed.

Nazrul Islam, however, said Dhaka and Riyadh signed the ICT deal and five other MoUs to enhance cooperation in chemical, steel and solar power sectors between the two countries.

He said apart from meeting the Saudi King, the PM also had a courtesy meeting with the kingdom's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the evening.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, at a press conference in Dhaka on October 15, announced that two memorandums of understanding (MoUs) -- one on defence and the other on ICT -- would be signed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to the gulf country.

Ali, however, did not elaborate on the defence deal.

At the conference, the minister had said relations with the Kingdom had been

BUSINESS

COMPETITIVENESS

Bangladesh slips 1 notch in new index

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh dropped one spot in the World Economic Forum's competitiveness index.

The country came in at 103 -- down from last year's 102 -- out of 140 countries.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue published the report on behalf of the WEF in Dhaka yesterday.

Bangladesh's overall score has marginally improved in 2018, but its competitiveness has weakened in most of the indicators, both in rank and score.

SEE DETAILS ON B1

SA Group MD held over loan scams

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shahabuddin Alam, managing director of Chattogram-based SA Group and a director of Mercantile Bank, was arrested yesterday on at least five counts of loan irregularities.

The irregularities include illegal transfer of mortgaged assets, forgery of import documents and signatures of bank officials, cheque dishonour and willful non-payment of bank loans.

He was picked up from the capital's Gulshan area in the afternoon in a case filed by Bank Asia, Molla Nazrul Islam, special superintendent of police of the Criminal Investigation Department, told The Daily Star.

Shahabuddin was later produced before a court which sent him to Keraniganj jail.

Police didn't seek his remand, saying they had already collected a lot of information from him.

SA Group is one of the biggest loan defaulters in the country with more than Tk 3,500-crore loans from over a dozen banks and financial institutions. These institutions have so far filed more than 100 cases against Shahabuddin.

Two private enterprises also filed two cases against him over a claim of Tk 28 crore.

Mohammad Eqramul Islam, a counsel for Bank Asia, told this newspaper that Shahabuddin was arrested in a fraud case filed by the private bank for siphoning off around Tk 28 crore from it.

The bank lodged the case with the EPZ Police Station in Chattogram city last year, alleging that he had forged import documents and forwarded those to the shipping agent concerned in 2014 for having released imported crude palm oil from the port.

He then sold the goods on the open market but didn't give back the money to the bank, said Eqramul.

Bank Asia has filed a total of 12 cases against him to recover its defaulted loans amounting to Tk 373 crore.

Shahabuddin Alam

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talks to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud at the royal palace yesterday.

RAID AT MILITANT HIDEOUT

2 women surrender after 39 hours

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN in Dhaka with MASUK HRIDOY

Two female militant suspects holed up in a building at Narsingdi's Gangpar surrendered yesterday after nine hours of negotiations with law enforcers and mediators.

Khadija Parveen Meghna, 24, and Israt Jahan Mou, 20, came out of the sixth-floor flat around 1:30pm ending a standoff that began at 10:00pm Monday when law enforcers cordoned off the seven-storey building.

The two had been arrested a couple of years ago in connection with militancy and were released on bail earlier this year.

Meanwhile, Monirul Islam, chief of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CITC) unit, briefing reporters on the spot around 2:45pm yesterday said during an operation on Tuesday at another alleged militants' den in nearby Shaikerchar area, "neo-JMB"

suspects Abu Abdullah al Bangali, 26, and his wife Aklima Akhter Moni were killed.

CITC officials said Abdullah was the media wing head and a key leader of "neo-JMB".

On August 15, 2016, members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Aklima, Khadija, and Israt -- all then fourth-year students of pharmacy at a private university -- at Signboard in Gazipur and Mirpur in Dhaka for their alleged link with Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

Crimea college attack kills 19

Gunman opens fire at fellow pupils before killing himself; dozens hurt; probe launched

REUTERS, Moscow

At least 19 people were killed and dozens injured at a college in the Black Sea region of Crimea yesterday afternoon when a student went through the building shooting at fellow pupils before killing himself, Russian law enforcement officials said.

Eighteen-year-old Vladislav Roslyakov turned up at the college in the city of Kerch carrying a firearm and then began shooting, investigators said. His body was later found in the college with what they said were self-inflicted gunshot wounds.

There were no immediate clues as to his motive in mounting such an attack, which recalled similar shooting sprees carried out by students in US schools.

Soon after the attack, Russian officials said they were investigating the possibility that it was terrorism. Troops with armoured personnel carriers were sent to the scene. Local parents were told to collect their children from the city's schools and kindergartens for

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