

## Meeting on Nov 4

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centres, and other related matters.”  
He said there was no discussion in the meeting on fixing a date for the polls.  
Asked about the possible date for announcing the polls schedule, the CEC said, “The Election Commission has not made any decision in this regard. The commission will sit for a meeting on November 4 to decide on the election schedule.”  
He also said the president expressed satisfaction over the preparations of the EC.  
Responding to a question whether the EC had gained the confidence of all political parties, the CEC said they have largely been able to but they were not sure about all parties.  
In response to another question about a High Court order on the EC to not accept the amended charter of the BNP, he said they received the order and that they would decide after discussing with the election commissioners.  
Asked if all political parties would take part in the polls, he said, “I hope so.”

## Polls in mind

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21 ministries and divisions via videoconference from the Gono Bhaban, reports BSS.  
“Bangladesh will witness further development if the Awami League comes to power again. More development will happen in the country Insha Allah,” Hasina said.  
She reiterated her determination to build a developed Bangladesh by freeing the society from terrorism, militancy, and drugs.  
Asking the authorities concerned to step up their anti-drug drives, the PM said the operations against the menace would continue.  
At the function, State Minister for Textiles and Jute Mirza Azam handed over a traditional “muslin sari” to the PM produced by local weavers.  
In Mymensingh, Hasina will today inaugurate 101 development projects and lay foundation stones of 94 projects in four districts of the division.  
She will also address a public meeting to be organised by the local AL at Mymensingh Circuit House ground. AL district unit President Jahirul Haque Khoka will chair the meeting.  
Of the 101 development projects, 31 are in Mymensingh, 19 in Netrakona, six in Jamalpur, and 45 in Sherpur, Mahmud Hasan, Mymensingh divisional commissioner, told BSS.

## SUNDARBANS NOW FREE FROM ROBBERS

In another development, the PM declared the Sundarbans free from robbers after 54 robbers in the area surrendered their firearms yesterday to the home minister in Bagerhat.  
“The Sundarbans was once gripped by robbers. But with the surrender of the robbers, I can declare the world’s largest mangrove forest free of those.”  
She also announced that each of the 54 robbers would be given Tk 1 lakh.  
Hasina asked the home minister to take measures for withdrawal of cases against them, except those for murder.  
The PM, who was connected with the arms surrendering function via videoconference, said the government would do whatever necessary for the robbers’ rehabilitation. “We want them to return to normal life and live peacefully with their families.”

## Slashed award accepted in Monsanto cancer trial

AFP, San Francisco  
A cancer-stricken groundskeeper on Wednesday accepted a slashed award in a landmark trial focused on weed-killer Roundup, setting the stage for an appeal by maker Monsanto.  
Judge Suzanne Bolanos last week denied Monsanto’s request for a new trial but cut the \$289 million damages award to \$78 million to comply with the law regarding how punitive damages awards must be calculated.  
“We appreciate and acknowledge this jury’s verdict sending a strong message to deter Monsanto’s conduct that caused Lee Johnson’s non-Hodgkin lymphoma,” attorneys for Dewayne “Lee” Johnson said in an emailed statement.  
“However, to hopefully achieve a final resolution within his lifetime, Mr. Johnson has accepted the punitive damages reduction suggested by Judge Bolanos.”

In her ruling, Bolanos denied a request by Monsanto to toss out the jury’s overall verdict against the company.  
Johnson’s attorneys said that they expect Monsanto to appeal, and would defend the verdict at that time.  
Jurors in August unanimously found that Monsanto acted with “malice” and that its weed killers Roundup and the professional grade version RangerPro contributed “substantially” to Johnson’s terminal illness.



President Abdul Hamid meets Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda, third from right, and other election commissioners at the Bangabhaban ahead of the 11th national election. PHOTO: PID

## From inside

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regard. He made a short statement saying all their demands could be met within the purview of the constitution.  
He then asked BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir to place their seven-point demand, which Fakhrul read out.  
Fakhrul also talked about the release of party Chairperson Khaleda Zia, now in jail in a corruption case.  
In reply, Hasina said, “It’s not my issue. It’s a court issue. Please remember that I did not file any case against Khaleda Zia.”  
Later on, other leaders took the floor.  
BNP Standing Committee Member Moudud Ahmed talked about the cases filed against party leaders and activists.  
The PM then pointed to Moudud and said, “I went to Khaleda Zia’s office to offer condolence after the death of her son. Mr Moudud, you were standing behind the gate. You did not open the door.”  
Moudud said, “I wasn’t there. I was on the first floor. When I heard about it, I rebuked the office staff for not opening the door.”  
At one point, BNP leaders asked for the PM’s resignation and dissolution of parliament before the upcoming polls. Hasina replied, “You are asking for my resignation. If I resign, who will take over?”  
Turning to Dr Kamal, she said, “You are one of those who framed the constitution of 1972. You know we did not add anything to our electoral system. We brought back what was there in the constitution of ’72.”  
“Did Bangabandhu step down as prime minister to take part in the election then? Or did he join the polls while remaining as the prime minister?”  
“You [Kamal] yourself had participated in that election. Now India and several other countries follow this way. Then why are you asking me to resign?”  
At that, Dr Kamal said, “It will take some time to settle the issue. Don’t end the dialogue process here. Please meet the demands that you can meet now. We can hold discussions on those you can’t meet right now.”  
He urged the PM to continue talks to settle the pending issues.  
Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna asked the PM, “Are you closing the talks or are they still open?”  
She replied, “No, the door [for talks] is open. Whenever needed, we can have talks. Right now, I have 20 applications seeking talks [with us]. It will take 20 more days for holding the talks.”  
Hasina then asked the members of the 14-party to speak.  
Senior Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed took the floor and talked about the Oikyafront demand for deployment of army with magistracy power.  
“The army was given magistracy power during the tenure of Shahabuddin Ahmed. You might have forgotten the way they tortured people but I haven’t,” he said.  
Afterwards, Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu talked about the

## Mystery cloud

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That did not stop many speculating that the images showed a huge fire burning on the planet, despite that being technically impossible. And some even went to far as to suggest that the activity might be linked to alien life, with one newspaper suggesting the evidence could be getting hidden by NASA.  
But the actual explanation is much cooler: it’s not hot, but very cold indeed. Water ice clouds condense over the summit of the volcano, known as Asia Mons, and can be spotted spreading across the surface.  
The images were collected by the European Space Agency’s Mars Express craft. They were first spotted in late September and have been tracked throughout October, allowing for hundreds of pictures.  
The white cloud stretches 1,500km over the surface of the planet – far bigger than the volcano itself – making it easy to see in images sent back from the spacecraft.  
Usually, the clouds disappear around this kind of year. Mars had its winter solstice on 16 October, and the clouds usually go before that.  
But a water ice cloud in this region has occurred at a similar time of year before, scientists say.

## Ansar man

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Tangail Highway.  
Later, the factory security staff admitted that they had beaten Mehdi up after he had confessed to stealing 20 T-shirts. However, they said he was not seriously injured.  
Armed with stick and brick bats, the workers vandalised at least 10 factories in the area, starting from 9:00am.  
At one point, five ansar members, including Bhairab, came under attack by the workers when they tried to break the gate of Delta Spinning Mill to bring out its workers to join them, Mollah said.  
They fired around 10 blank shots to disperse the workers, he added.  
After the attack, Bhairab was sent to Enam Medical College Hospital in Savar, where he was declared dead.  
Bhairab was dead by the time he was brought to hospital around 12:25pm, said Arnab Sarkar, the emergency medical officer at the hospital.  
The situation was brought under control around 1pm after Mehdi was brought to the workers, said the Inspector Selim.

## I am very

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[licences for new banks] are given on political grounds.”  
On Monday, Bangladesh Bank gave its final nod to a commercial bank and asked three others to produce documents required to obtain licences.  
Community Bank Bangladesh, proposed to be set up by Bangladesh Police Welfare Trust, got the nod at the central bank board meeting.  
The BB board also asked Bengal Bank, People’s Bank and Citizen Bank to submit their proper documents to the central bank.  
Bengal Bank is initiated by Bengal Group of Industries, a local manufacturer of plastic goods. Awami League lawmaker Morshed Alam is the chairman of the Group, and his younger brother Jashim Uddin is the chairman of the proposed bank.  
The chairman of the proposed People’s Bank MA Kashem is an AL leader in the US.  
Jahanara Huq, mother of Law Minister Anisul Huq, is the chairman of proposed Citizen Bank.  
At present there are 58 banks in the country.  
Asked about the poor state of a bank linked with former minister MK Alamgir yesterday, Muhith said, “That’s true... Many ministers have involvement in banks.”

## Time to reverse

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“Governments conduct surveillance of journalists and undermine digital security as part of the daily attack on free and independent media. Press freedom organisations conservatively estimate that dozens of reporters have been killed this year alone.”  
They said the states had not responded adequately to these crimes against journalists.  
“Most recently, states and the international community, including the United Nations, have failed to address the enforced disappearance and murder of Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi. The only way forward is to establish an independent, transparent and credible investigation into his murder, one authorised by and reporting to the United Nations. Anything short of a complete investigation, recognised as

such by the international community, will make a mockery of government claims of commitment to the safety of journalists.”  
As a matter of urgency, the experts called on all states to implement the international legal framework on safety of journalists.  
They said the high-level commitments, such as the latest resolution on the safety of journalists adopted this year by the Human Rights Council, must be implemented.  
“We call on all leaders worldwide to end their role in the incitement of hatred and violence against the media. These last weeks have demonstrated once again the toxic nature and outsized reach of political incitement against journalists, and we demand that it stop,” the statement reads.

## Google workers

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Two blocks away, a larger crowd of people that appeared to number a thousand or more, including Google employees and New Yorkers not working for the company, filled a small park. Some held larger signs than those at the Google office, with more confrontational messages including “Time’s up Tech”.  
“This is Google. We solve the toughest problems here. We all know that the status quo is unacceptable and if there is any company who can solve this, I think it is Google,” said Thomas Kneeland, a software engineer who said he has been at Google for three years.  
Google employees have been getting a lot of emails from managers and colleagues to participate in the walkout recently, he said. Just around 11 a.m., people started forming groups to leave the building. “We had engineers on our team bring their pagers since they were on-call, but that’s how we thought of the walkout. It’s important.”  
The demonstrations follow a New York Times report last week that said Google in 2014 gave a \$90 million exit package to Andy Rubin after the then-senior vice president was accused of sexual harassment.  
Rubin denied the allegation in the story, which he also said contained “wild exaggerations” about his compensation. Google did not dispute the report.  
The report energized a months-long movement inside Google to increase diversity, and improve treatment of women and minorities.  
In a statement late on Wednesday, the organizers called on Google parent Alphabet Inc to add an employee representative to its board of directors and internally share pay-equity data. They also asked for changes to Google’s human resources practices intended to make bringing harassment claims a fairer process.  
Google Chief Executive Sundar Pichai said in a statement that “employees have raised constructive ideas” and that the company was “taking in all their feedback so we can turn these ideas into action.”  
GLOBALACTION

Hundreds more filed out of its European headquarters in Dublin shortly after 1100 local time, while organizers shared photographs on social media of hundreds more leaving Google offices in London, Zurich, Berlin, Tokyo and Singapore.  
Irish employees left a note on their desks that read: “I’m not at my desk because I’m walking out with other Googlers and contractors to protest sexual harassment, misconduct, lack of transparency, and a workplace culture that’s not working for everyone,” national broadcaster RTE reported.  
Google employs 7,000 people in Dublin, its largest facility outside the United States.  
The dissatisfaction among Alphabet’s 94,000 employees and tens of thousands more contractors has not noticeably affected company shares. But employees expect Alphabet to face recruiting and retention challenges if their concerns go unaddressed.  
Much of the organizing earlier this year was internal, including petition drives, brainstorming sessions with top executives and training from the workers’ rights group Coworker.org.  
Since its founding two decades ago, Google has been known for its transparency with workers. Executives’ goals and insights into corporate strategy have been accessible to any employee.  
But organizers said Google executives, like leaders at other companies affected by the #metoo movement, have been slow to address some structural issues.  
“While Google has championed the language of diversity and inclusion, substantive actions to address systemic racism, increase equity, and stop sexual harassment have been few and far between,” organizers stated.  
They said Google must publicly report its sexual harassment statistics and end forced arbitration in harassment cases. In addition, they asked that the chief diversity officer be able to directly advise the board.

## Grows globally

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The report found 17 governments approved or proposed laws restricting online media in the name of fighting “fake news,” while 18 countries increased surveillance or weakened encryption protection to more closely monitor their citizenry.  
According to the researchers, internet freedom declined in 26 countries from June 2017 to May 2018. Gains were seen in 19 countries, most of them minor.  
CHINA’S ‘TECHNO-DYSTOPIA’  
One of the greatest threats, Freedom House said, is efforts by China to remake the digital world in its “techno-dystopian” image.  
It cited a sweeping Chinese cybersecurity requirement that local and foreign companies “immediately stop transmission” of banned content, and compels them to ensure that data on Chinese users is hosted within the country.  
This has been followed by “hundreds” of new directives on what people can and cannot do online, and tighter controls on the use of VPNs to evade detection.  
The report said leaked documents and other evidence suggest as many as a million Muslims may be held in internment camps in Xinjiang, many as a result of nonviolent online activities.  
China appears to be using its big tech firms involved in telecom infrastructure to extend its dominance and gain an edge in surveillance, according to Freedom House.  
Companies such as Huawei – largely banned from contracts in the US and Australia – are building infrastructure in many parts of the world including Africa and Latin America, according to Freedom House board chairman Michael Chertoff, a former US secretary of homeland security.  
“This opens up a potential for exploit-

ing information in these countries by having technological backdoors that can be used by the Chinese government to collect intelligence,” Chertoff said.  
The researchers said online freedom is facing threats in democratic and authoritarian states.  
India led the world in the number of internet shutdowns, with over 100 reported incidents in 2018 so far, claiming that the moves were needed to halt the flow of disinformation and incitement to violence.  
Similar actions were taken in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.  
“Cutting off internet service is a draconian response, particularly at a time when citizens may need it the most, whether to dispel rumors, check in with loved ones, or avoid dangerous areas,” Freedom House researcher Adrian Shahbaz said.  
“While deliberately falsified content is a genuine problem, some governments are increasingly using ‘fake news’ as a pretense to consolidate their control over information and suppress dissent.”  
Shahbaz said more governments, including Saudi Arabia, are employing “troll armies” to manipulate social media and in many cases drown out the voices of dissidents.  
“It has now become a tool of authoritarian diplomacy to deploy an army of electronic trolls,” he said.  
The researchers said online freedom also declined in the United States in part due to the rollback of “net neutrality” rules which ensured that all data be treated equally, without “fast” or “slow” lanes for commercial or other reasons.  
It said online freedom also faces threats in the US as a result of the reauthorization of a surveillance law and a “hyperpartisan” environment in social media marked by large disinformation efforts.

## Murder case

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repeatedly stopped on the road, including at Baralekha Bazar and Daser Bazar, the victim’s uncle had earlier told The Daily Star.  
When they reached Chandgram, the ambulance was halted again and this time its driver was beaten up and the key of the vehicle was taken away.  
Akbar said the father, mother, and the grandparents of the child are devastated. “All we want is justice,” he said.  
Yeasin Ali, officer-in-charge of Baralekha Police Station, told The Daily Star that the case was filed against unnamed transport workers under sections that deal with murder, obstruction of free movement, vandalism of public properties, and illegal assembly.  
Two other children – one in Moulvibazar and one in Sunamganj – also died failing to reach hospital during the 48-hour strike enforced by Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation.  
The workers went on strike on Sunday and Monday demanding amendments to the recently passed

Road Transport Act-2018.  
After a writ petition was filed with the High Court over the deaths of the three children, the court on Wednesday issued a rule upon the inspector general of police to take action against the people responsible for the deaths.  
Abu Yousuf, additional superintendent of Moulvibazar police, said, “I have visited the victim’s family and assured them that they will get all necessary legal support to get justice.”  
Md Shahjalal, superintendent of Moulvibazar police, said, “We feel sorry for the death of an infant during the strike and will take action as one case has been filed. If the IGP’s office issues any instruction following the HC directive, we will take additional action.”  
Abdul Matin, general secretary of CNG Transport Workers Union of Baralekha upazila unit, had denied the claim that transport workers had halted the ambulance. He said autorickshaw workers had put up barricades at different points on the road but no one was involved in stopping the ambulance.