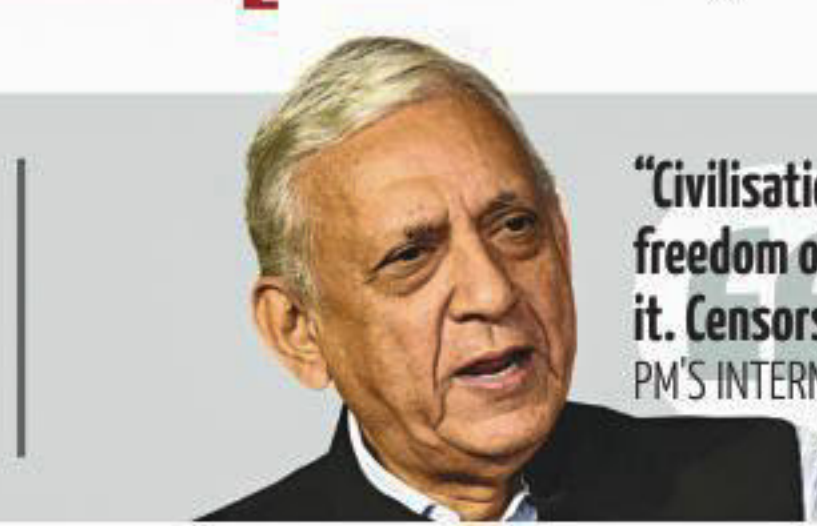



**"The leaders of the ruling alliance are working as public relations officers of the Election Commission. Every day, they [alliance leaders] are praising it ... This is a joke..."**  
COLUMNIST SYED ABUL MAQSUD AT A PRESS CONFERENCE (PAGE 3)



**"Civilisation cannot flourish without freedom of expression. No one can curb it. Censorship never works."**  
PM'S INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS ADVISER GOWHER RIZVI (PAGE 20)



**"There are three options: one is to leave the EU with a deal ... the other two are that we leave without a deal or that we have no Brexit at all."**  
BRITISH PM THERESA MAY AHEAD OF CRUCIAL VOTE IN UK PARLIAMENT (PAGE 9)

# Healed partly

**37 BNP aspirants among 80 win appeals with EC after ROs reject their nomination papers**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty-seven BNP candidates yesterday won appeals at the Election Commission, helping the party recover partially from the damage done by rejection of the nomination papers of its 141 parliamentary aspirants.

Their win also ensured the party's candidature in four of the six constituencies where returning officers (ROs) rejected all nomination papers of BNP leaders during scrutiny.

Hearing of the aspirants' appeals in the remaining two seats will be held today and tomorrow.

Yesterday's successful appellants include BNP senior leaders barrister Aminul Huq and Maj (retd) Akhtaruzzaman, who are now allowed to contest the polls from Rajshahi-1 and Kishoreganj-2.

But the rejection of appeals of several BNP leaders, including former ministers Mir Nasir Uddin, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, and Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu, has raised concern in the BNP camp.

The ROs concerned rejected their nomination papers on the grounds of their conviction in graft cases. The EC upheld the ROs' decision.

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Students of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College on their third straight day of protest in front of the institution yesterday. They later postponed demonstrations following assurance that the authorities would meet their demands. They started protesting after ninth-grader Arित्रy Adhikary had died by suicide following her parents' alleged humiliation by school teachers.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Viqarunnisa protests postponed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After three days of protest, students of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College (VNSC) yesterday decided to go back to class and attend exams after being assured that their six-point demand, over the death of ninth-grader Arित्रy Adhikary, would be implemented.

Meanwhile, another group of students protested the arrest of class teacher Hasna Hena, who was taken to jail yesterday in a case filed by Arित्रy's father for "provoking the suicide". The group claimed the teacher was not involved in the incident.

In the morning, protesters, mostly from classes IX and X, took position near the main entrance of the institution in the capital's Bailey Road, to press home their demands, including the resignation of the acting principal and the school's governing body.

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## Ill but can't go abroad

**Ershad says as he appears in public, won't say who bars him from leaving country**

RASHIDUL HASAN

Appearing in public for the first time since November 20, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday claimed that he was not being allowed to go abroad for treatment though he was ill.

Ershad, known as an unpredictable politician, however, did not name anyone.

Around 12:15pm, he made a sudden visit to his Banani office in the capital, straight from the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) where he was admitted on Wednesday, said JP sources.

Before leaving for his Baridhara

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## PARTY CANDIDATES FOR POLLS

# AL, BNP likely to unveil lists today

**AL's negotiations with partners end, says Quader; BNP to give partial list**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Both the ruling Awami League and its archrival BNP are likely to unveil today their final lists of parliamentary candidates, leaving out seats for their alliance partners.

The AL may declare the names of candidates for around 250 out of the 300 constituencies and leave the rest for its partners, including the Jatiya Party.

The ruling party has now 278 candidates in 264 constituencies.

Speaking at a discussion in the capital yesterday, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said, "Negotiations with alliance partners have been completed. The party nominees will get final letters from tomorrow [Friday]."

AL Presidium Member Mohammed Nasim, also the coordinator of the AL-led 14 party alliance, said the list of candidates in 300 seats may be disclosed today.

"The components of the 14-party alliance may get 13 to 14 seats," he told The Daily Star last night.

AL insiders said the Jatiya Party might get 30 to 35 seats though it had demanded more than 70 seats.

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## Supporters of Natore AL aspirant block train link

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Train services between Dhaka and the northern districts remained suspended for around an hour yesterday as the supporters of an Awami League aspirant blockaded rail link demanding his party ticket for the December 30 polls.

Supporters of Shahidul Islam Bakul, an AL nomination seeker for Natore-1, put up the blockade between Bagatipara and Malanchi railway stations around noon to press home their demand, said Ataur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bagatipara Police Station.

Around an hour later, police rushed to the spot and dispersed the agitators, he added.

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# Sonali in a fix

**Worried about recovering Tk 3,000cr from Hall-Mark Group as it finds no buyer for mortgaged assets**

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The Sonali Bank has floated tenders 60 times between 2013 and 2017 to sell the mortgaged assets of Hall-Mark Group but got no buyers, and the lender is now worried about recovering nearly Tk 3,000 crore from the scamster.

Bidders are not showing interest to buy the highly disputed properties of the garment maker, fearing it might invite trouble for them in future, sources in the state-owned bank said.

"The bank is in a fix, as it can neither use the properties nor sell those," said a senior official of the bank.

"The machinery is gradually losing productivity as they have remained unused for long," the official added, asking not to be named.

On top of that, the Sonali Bank has to count more money now to guard the mort-

gaged assets at its own cost. It also had to bear the cost of running about five dozen advertisements in different newspapers.

Finding no other alternative, the lender is now considering turning the Hall-Mark factory complex built on over 61.17 acres of mortgaged land into an economic zone, although it has not made a final decision yet.

As per Sonali Bank's assessment, Hall-Mark's assets and infrastructures are worth Tk 1,170 crore. Of this, the Group has mortgaged assets are worth Tk 389 crore.

After the loan scam surfaced following a Bangladesh Bank investigation in 2012, the Sonali Bank filed a petition with the civil court, seeking ownership of the rest of the Group's assets, worth Tk 781 crore, so it can recover the loan. The court is yet to deliver a verdict.

The lender also filed 16 lawsuits with money loan courts and two with civil courts, said a senior official.

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## Mystery remains

**Autopsy performed on Banglamotor toddler; father remanded**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There was no sharp weapon or electric shock injury marks on the body of the two-year-old boy recovered from his Banglamotor home on Wednesday, according to the autopsy report.

A three-member medical board yesterday conducted the autopsy on Noor Safayet's body at the Dhaka Medical College morgue.

Sohel Mahmud, head of the forensic medicine department at the DMC, said there was a small injury mark on the child's forehead but no sign of bleeding.

"We found his lung and liver to be a bit swollen and we have sent his brain, liver, blood, and lung for histopathology," he added.

The injury mark on his forehead could have been due to a fall "but we need the histopathology report

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Tamim Iqbal did not miss a beat on his return to action following a three-month injury lay-off, hitting a blistering 73-ball 107 that was punctuated by 13 fours and four sixes against the West Indies in a practice match yesterday. The BCB XI won by 51 runs.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# He wanted to be 'Boss'

**How a movie inspired a landlord to set up a network of gangs**

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

In 2015, AKM Rana was doing rather well as a landlord. The then 35 years old did not have to do much yet money was flowing in from the two buildings and several shops he leased out.

But then he watched a movie – Boss: Born to Rule – in which the lead creates a network of gangs, develops a crime empire, and assumes control of the underworld.

He formed a gang that year comprised mostly of ruling party men. They picked up people posing as law enforcers and robbed them. Rana used to claim that he was an assistant commissioner of detective branch of police.

But leading a gang was never Rana's ultimate goal. He wanted an empire to rule.

Rana connected his gang with eight more gangs operating in the capital and brought them under a single umbrella. He even employed sources across the capital to tip the gang off about people carrying valuables and large amount of cash.

Together the gangs, each 16 to 20 men strong, mugged people in broad daylight posing as law enforcers, said Bashir Ahmed, superintendent of Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI). They would use motorbikes and minibuses to take their victims to isolated places, he said.

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AKM Rana