

‘Govt to probe source of BNP’s lobbying money’

Says Shahriar Alam

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SHAHRIAR ALAM
State Minister for Foreign Affairs

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to investigate the source of BNP’s lobbying money, amounting to at least \$3.75 million, that BNP spent in the last several years to campaign against Bangladesh, said State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam yesterday.

He said the Awami League government has not appointed any lobbyist in the US but a PR firm to promote Bangladesh’s positive image as well as fight the negative publicity against the country.

“In the last several years, BNP signed three agreements with US-based lobbyist firms. Our estimates suggest that BNP spent at least \$3.75 million,” he told reporters at the foreign ministry.

Besides, Jamaat also signed deals with some US lobbyist firms, including New York-based Organization

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Balancing a bunch of fresh produce on his head, this man is on his way to sell his goods at the nearby kitchen market. Even though the roads are barely visible due to the winter-morning fog, the seller, clad in warm clothes, does not seem to be fazed. This photo was taken recently from Dhamrai’s Royail area.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

It won’t bring any positive change: BNP

“ The government’s attempt to legitimise the ongoing process of forming a loyal and incompetent Election Commission in the interest of the ruling party will produce the same result as in the past. This time it’s possibly going to be even worse than in previous elections.

NAZRUL ISLAM KHAN
BNP senior leader

UNB, Dhaka

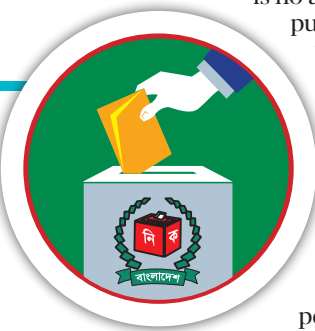
BNP yesterday said the draft law on the Election Commission (EC) formation will not yield any positive outcome as the party thinks it will only protect the interests of the ruling party.

“The government’s attempt to legitimise the ongoing process of forming a loyal and incompetent Election Commission in the interest of the ruling party will produce the same result as in the past. This time it’s possibly going to be even worse than in previous elections,” said BNP senior leader Nazrul Islam Khan.

Speaking at a press conference at BNP Chairperson’s Gulshan office, he said what has been happening in the administrative system for so long will now happen in the legal system after the enactment of the law. “That’s why we think it won’t bring any positive change.”

The BNP leader said as per the provision of the draft law no one can be an EC member without having experience in government service. “This means no one

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PRAYER TIMING JAN 19



	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	5:30	12:45	4:15	5:40	7:00
Jamaat	6:05	1:15	4:30	5:44	7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SC judicial functions to run virtually from today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All the judicial functions of both the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court will run virtually from today, due to the ongoing surge in Covid-19 infection.

The SC administration issued two separate notifications to this effect yesterday.

The notifications said judicial activities of all the benches of the Appellate and High Court Divisions will be conducted under the Usage of Information Technology by Courts Act, 2020 and following the practice directions issued by the then chief justice in 2020 for maintaining health guidelines from January 19.



Even though the footbridge is right within reach, a person goes through the hassle of contorting his body to pass through the road divider in Basabo area yesterday. And two other like-minded individuals are waiting for their turn. Such activities makes one wonder whether people do it for convenience or to save time. But there’s no doubt about the fact that this is quite dangerous and a clear violation of traffic rules.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

‘Listen to the people’

Says TIB on enacting law for EC formation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday said it is necessary to finalise the law regarding formation of the Election Commission (EC), incorporating opinions of civil society and all stakeholders.

“If the law is passed without the opinions and scrutiny of stakeholders concerned and civil society, its acceptability will be questioned, and its effectiveness will not be assured. Therefore, there is no alternative to passing the law based on public opinion, giving utmost importance to public expectations.”

In a statement, TIB executive director Dr Iftekharuzzaman demanded the draft law to be made available to all immediately.

“The sudden government step to enact the law for forming the election commission, which reflects the constitutional commitment and long-standing expectations of the people, is positive,” the statement read.

“ If the law is passed without the opinions and scrutiny of stakeholders concerned and civil society, its acceptability will be questioned, and its effectiveness will not be assured.

It also said according to media reports, the law proposes the formation of an EC through a search committee as usual, which is consistent with international practice.

But the details of what is in the draft law, apart from setting some general criteria for the search committee, are still unknown to stakeholders and civil society.

CONCERNS

- Will there be a woman representative in search committee?
- What will be eligibility criteria of two citizens’ representatives?
- What will be committee’s working procedure?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Incorporating civil society, stakeholder’s opinions
- Keeping assurance provision to ensure neutrality of CEC, others
- Making the law available to public immediately

Dr Iftekhar, in the statement, mentioned some concerns in particular, regarding whether there will be a woman representative in the search committee, the eligibility criteria of the two citizen representatives, the working procedure of the committee and publishing names proposed by it.

The statement also mentioned that an assurance provision should be incorporated in the law to ensure the qualifications, skills, experience, neutrality and acceptability of the chief election commissioner and other commissioners, and their determination to uphold a neutral and objective stance.

“The draft law should be immediately released and finalised based on views of stakeholders concerned and civil society. Otherwise, possibility of forming a free, fair and acceptable Election Commission, as per the expectations of citizens, will be thwarted again,” read the statement.

Finalise OTT regulation in 4 months: HC



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the BTRC to finalise a regulation to operate OTT (over-the-top) platforms and collect revenues from them. BTRC was also asked to submit its progress report to the court in four months.

Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Fatema Najib’s bench fixed May 24 for passing further order on the matter.

During a hearing of a petition yesterday, BTRC’s lawyer Khandker Reza-E-Raquiub told the bench that his client has prepared the draft regulation on the issue.

BTRC wants to finalise the regulation after soliciting opinions from stakeholders on approval from the law ministry, and it needs the HC’s permission in this regard, he said.

The bench granted the permission and passed the order.

BTRC on January 18, 2021, submitted a report to the HC saying it could not collect revenue from OTT platforms as there was no specific guideline.

Earlier, CID submitted another report to the HC through the deputy attorney general, saying it cannot take action against misusing OTT platforms due to the absence of guidelines.

The HC bench on September 8, 2020, questioned the authority’s inaction in removing “obscene and immoral” videos from OTT platforms across the country.

TK 12CR LOAN SCAM

ACC sues former SBACB chairman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has sued former chairman of South Bangla Agriculture and Commerce Bank (SBACB) and seven others for misappropriating a loan worth Tk 12 crore.

ACC Deputy Director Gulshan Anwar Prodhan filed the case with its integrated office in Dhaka on Monday. The accused are SBACB former chairman Amzad Hossain, its former director Capt (retd) M Moazzam Hossain, Rafi-Mahi Corporation owner AKM Asif Uddin, SBACB vice president Sheikh Sharfuddin, its executive officer Ishtiaq Ahmed, assistant vice president Rumon-ul-Islam, executive officer Tanjir Uddin Chowdhury and senior officer Tasrime Nahid.

During investigation, ACC found that SBACB approved the loan without any collateral to a construction material supplier – Rafi-Mahi Corporation. AKM Asif Uddin, owner of the company, was an SBACB employee during the tenure of its former chairman Amzad Hossain when the incident took place.

ACC also found that about Tk 11.55 crore was given to Asif between 2017 and 2018. Of the money, about Tk 4.5 crore was transferred to the accounts of three different organisations of Moazzam Hossain.

Asif told ACC that Amzad gave him money to open a trade licence and Sharfuddin helped him to do so. At the 124th SBACB board meeting, both Amzad and Moazzam admitted that they took the loan and promised to repay it. “The resolution of the board of directors proved that they misappropriated the money,” reads the FIR.