

Old wine in new bottle

Jatiya Party says about new EC law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Strongly criticising the election commission law, Jatiya Party yesterday said it was nothing but old stuff in new package.

"As a result of the enactment of this law, the process for the formation of the Election Commission and the commission's ability to effectively carry out its responsibilities do not seem to have improved. As before, the above matters will be indirectly under the control of the prime minister," said JP Chairman GM Quader.

Addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Party chairman's office in Banani, he said the new law has legitimised the old system.

"Even after the enactment of this law, there are still doubts about holding of free, fair and acceptable elections, just like in the past," he said.

In a written statement, Quader said the law, which has been passed, only deals with the formation of the election commissions but its powers have not been dealt with.

He said the recently enacted law calls for the formation of a search committee. A definite outline has been given in that regard but the transparency in the search committee's work has not been ensured.

"Moreover, the provision of proposing names within 15 working days seems too short a time, which can create doubts among people," he said.

The JP chief said no provision has been kept to publish the list of names and reveal the identities of those nominated by the search committee. There will be suspicion that the election commission was not being formed as per the search committee's recommendations.

As per Article 48 (3) of the constitution, the president would have to work on the advice of the prime minister and the prime minister will have the opportunity to nominate any person or group of people affiliated with her party through the president.



Colourful masks being sold in front of the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital yesterday. With the country enduring a wave of new Covid cases, many institutions are strictly maintaining a "no mask, no service" policy. Shops like these help people who forgot their masks or are in need of a fresh one.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Global Covid deaths surge by a fifth in a week

AFP, Paris

The number of deaths from Covid-19 soared by a fifth worldwide in the last week, as the number of daily cases surged in the Middle East, Europe and Asia.

The average number of global daily cases leapt to 3.36 million this week, an increase of eight percent over the previous seven days. The pace of the increase nevertheless slowed, according to an AFP tally to Thursday.

The confirmed cases only reflect a fraction of the actual number of infections, with varying counting practices and levels of testing in different countries.

The week's main surge took place in the Middle East, where the number of daily cases rocketed by 70 percent. They also leapt by 20 percent in Europe, by 19 percent in Asia and by eight percent in the Latin America-Caribbean zone.

The situation improved, however, in the United States-Canada zone, where the number of cases decreased by 22 percent. And they fell by 13 percent in Africa, where the highly contagious Omicron variant has begun its rise.

The number of cases also decreased by a quarter in Oceania.

The number of Covid-linked deaths soared globally for a third week in a row,



by 20 percent to 9,050 per day.

The US mourned the most daily deaths with 2,604 per day, ahead of Russia with 673 and India 572.

The countries reporting the highest death rates in proportion to their population were Bosnia-Herzegovina with 8.9 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Croatia with 7.9, Bulgaria and Trinidad and Tobago with 7.3 each and Montenegro 7.2.

The Solomon Islands in the Pacific saw the biggest increase in new infections, with cases shooting up by 1,172 percent on an average of 100 cases a day, after its some 700,000 inhabitants were largely spared in the first two years of the pandemic.

It was followed by Armenia's 253 percent increase and a 172 percent rise in Kosovo. Iran's cases were up 162 percent and Libya's by 157 percent.

Ireland saw the biggest drop in new cases for a second week in a row, with a 45 percent decline.

It was followed by Suriname with a 42 percent drop, Guyana with a 41 percent fall, and Jamaica and the Dominican Republic which each had a 40 percent decrease.

The US remained by far the country with the biggest number of new cases with 591,300 per day on average, a drop of 21 percent from the previous week.

Next in line came France with 360,300 average daily cases, an increase of seven percent, and India with 307,500, a 13 percent spike. Russia also has seen continuous increase in cases in the last week.

A government Covid-19 portal in Russia registered 113,122 new cases over 24 hours, nearly double the number of daily infections just a week ago.

On a per capita basis, the country with the biggest number of new cases over the week remained Denmark with 5,461 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Slovenia with 4,182, Portugal 3,765, France 3,736 and Belgium 3,142.

EC search panel

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Majumder is likely to be named as one of the two distinguished citizens, if he agrees. The female member could be a public university teacher.

The search committee will get 15 working days to recommend names,

according to the law.

The committee can propose two names to the president for the post of CEC. It can also recommend two persons against each of the commissioner's post.

The tenure of the current EC, led by KM Nurul Huda, expires on February 14.

Easiest way is to attack

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Shujan member and noted green activist Syeda Rizwana Hasan said the organisation received Tk 12.5 lakh from the then EC for organising campaign programmes ahead of the Narayanganj City Corporation polls in 2011 and Cumilla City Corporation elections the following year.

The job was done accordingly and the related bills and vouchers were submitted to the EC on time, she said.

Rizwana said it is inappropriate to raise any allegation of irregularities to this end. However, KM Nurul Huda raised an allegation of Tk 1 crore financial irregularities against Badiul Alam Majumdar.

Criticising the CEC, eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said the easiest way to avoid criticism is to

attack the critic personally if there is no answer for the wrongdoings of the person in question.

He said politicians often do like this, but it was unexpected that the chief of a very important constitutional institution would make remarks in a similar way.

Stating that the CEC's comments were not surprising, the lawyer said Huda during his five-year tenure never felt the necessity to explain his position on criticism of his "inefficiency and incapability".

Shujan President M Hafizuddin Khan, retired judge Justice MA Matin, and local government expert Tofail Ahmed, among others, addressed the press conference.

The tenure of the incumbent EC expires on February 14.

Highest Covid deaths

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at the Management Information System of the DGHS are also getting infected and this has increased pressure," Mushtuq said.

This newspaper also learnt that many staffers

at the Management Information System of the DGHS are also getting infected and this has increased pressure," Mushtuq said.

Whimper drowns the hype

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to formulate PPP projects in close collaboration with the relevant line ministries.

"Sustainable development depends on the successful implementation of projects within the expected time and with proper quality," Reaz added.

Eight projects including the Dhaka Elevated Expressway, upgrading of Dhaka Bypass to four-lane (\$350 million), blocks - 2 and 5 of Bangabandhu Hi-Tech City (\$25 million), economic zone - 2 at Mirsarai (\$735 million) are currently under implementation.

Line ministries often struggle to understand projects due to a lack of skilled manpower in technical matters such as the legal and financial aspects, he said, while advising the government

The rest of the projects are now at different stages of development, according to the Public-Private Partnership Authority (PPPA), which has taken public-private partnership projects in various sectors namely transport, health, shipping and tourism and development of factories.

Sultana Afroz, chief executive officer of PPPA, acknowledged the sluggish pace of the PPP projects.

"Since I took on the responsibility of PPPA, I have been trying my best to push all the projects," she said, adding about

17 ministries have been involved.

Afroz, also a secretary, took charge in April 2020.

The first phase of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway (Airport-Mohakhali), one of the flagship PPP projects, is nearly complete and will be open to the public by the end of the year, she said, adding that the project might be completed by 2023.

To tackle the problem of technical know-how fit for PPP projects, a training session for hundred government officials will be conducted, she said.

Dope tests begin today

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licence from the BRTA.

Such a licence is a must for operating commercial vehicles or rental cars or being a driver for the government.

The BRTA is going to introduce the dope test system more than a year after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on October 22, 2020, gave directives to bring public transport workers under a dope-testing system.

Contacted, Director Brig Gen Nazmul Haque of Dhaka Medical College Hospital said they did not have the testing facilities, so they would not be able to do the tests right away.

"We have already informed the DGHS that we are trying to start dope tests soon," he said.

Rehabilitation, also known as Pangu Hospital, said he was not aware of any such directive regarding dope tests for drivers.

He said they have a limited facility to carry dope tests.

Abu Ahmmad Al Mamun, assistant director of National Institute of Laboratory Medicine and Referral Centre (NILMRC), said they got a notice regarding dope tests but do not have any idea how many people would be tested every day.

Contacted, Farid Hossain Miah, director (hospital) of DGHS, told The Daily Star last night that they would talk to the hospital authorities to carry out the tests smoothly.

Prof Abdul Gani Mollah, director of National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic

Country to shiver for next two days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The mild to moderate cold wave may continue for 48 hours beginning last midnight, the Met department said.

The mercury dropped significantly in Lalmonirhat, Panchagarh and Kurigram districts yesterday.

The country's lowest temperature -- 7 degrees Celsius -- yesterday was recorded in Kurigram. In Dhaka, the temperature fell to 12.6 degrees Celsius, according to the Met.

Bazlur Rashid, of the Met office, said, "The ridge of sub-continental high extending up to West Bengal and its adjoining western part of Bangladesh was causing the cold wave."

In Lalmonirhat, people, particularly those living along the Brahmaputra, Teesta, Dudhkumar, Gangadhar, Jinjiram and Dharla rivers, have been hit hard by the chilling weather, reports our correspondent.

Farmers and farm workers are forced to stay indoors, while people in many parts of the district were seen lighting fire with straws and tree leaves to keep warm.

Counter plots against Bangladesh: Momen

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday urged Bangladeshis abroad to put in strong efforts to counter conspiracies, noting that there might be more "assaults" on the country and its interests based on propaganda and misinformation.

Momen, also president of the Bangabandhu Foundation, said each Bangladesh Mission abroad that runs with the taxpayers' money is the number one lobbyist of the country to uphold Bangladesh's interests.

He was addressing a virtual discussion titled "Lobbying conspiracy that started centering the 12th parliamentary election and steps that Bangabandhu Foundation can take" as the chief guest.

Referring to the letter by Member of the European Parliament Ivan Stefanec to High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, Momen said, "When I was reading the letter, I felt that I was reading about another country as the letter's content doesn't go with the situation of the country."

4 journos hurt in attack by Awami League men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Four local journalists were injured after ruling party men attacked them in Thakurgaon's Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon.

The reporters had gone to Mandalpara village to photograph supporters of Nobel Kumar Singh, an AL-nominated chairman candidate in the January 7 Senua union parishad election, as they were preparing to attack supporters of independent candidate Motiur Rahman as both groups called a meeting in the village, Tanvirul Islam, OC of Thakurgaon Police Station, said quoting locals.

The injured journalists are Tanvir Hasan Tanu of Daily Ittefaq, Mahiuddin Talukdar Himel of Rising BD.com, Sohel Rana of News Bangla.com and Jahid Hasan Milu of Doinik Ushar Bani.

Russia loses a million people in historic population fall

AFP, Moscow

Russia's population declined by more than one million people in 2021, the statistics agency Rosstat reported Friday, a historic drop not seen since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Ongoing demographic woes have been exacerbated by the pandemic with Rosstat figures showing more than 660,000 had died with coronavirus since health officials recorded the first case in the country.

The new figures continue a downward trend from the previous year when Russia's population fell by more than half a million.

The Covid-related fatalities figures published monthly by Rosstat are far higher than death figures released by a separate government website, which is dedicated to tracking the pandemic in the country.

Those government website figures only take into account fatalities where the virus was established as the primary cause of death after an autopsy and shows just 329,443 total fatalities.

EC formation

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a discussion on the proposed law, the lawmakers strongly criticised the government, saying the law was being formulated hurriedly without discussions with political parties and other stakeholders.

They proposed the recommendations by the search committee should be made public.

As per the law, a six-member search committee, headed by a judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, will recommend the names.

The judge will be nominated by the chief justice.

The search committee will make the recommendations in 15 working days following its

formation.

The committee can propose two names to the president for the post of CEC. It can also recommend two persons against each of the commissioner's post. The president will then make the appointments upon the recommendations.

The JS passed the law giving legal cover to the chief election commissioners and other commissioners appointed through search committees in the past and no question can be raised in any court over this matter.

The government move to enact the law came nearly 50 years after the constitution prescribed enacting a specific law for forming the EC.