

CEC 'will be happy' if BNP takes part in nat'l polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaajpur

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday said he would be happy if the BNP participated in the coming national election.



The Election Commission encourages participatory election, but cannot force anyone to take part, he said during a meeting at the DC office in Rangpur.

The political parties should resolve their conflicts through dialogues, he added at the meeting ahead of the Rangpur City Corporation election, which will be held through electronic voting machines later this month.

He said strict action would be

The political parties should resolve their conflicts through dialogues, he added.

taken if anyone tried to prevent citizens from exercising their voting rights.

Law enforcers have been ordered to stop such attempts, he said, urging people to freely cast their vote.

The polls will be monitored from Dhaka through security cameras and the local officials have been asked to carefully observe it, he said.

Referring to the Gaibandha by-polls, the CEC said that action has been taken against the ones involved in irregularities.

The commission's probe committee found around 100 people, including election officials, involved in electoral irregularities during the Gaibandha 5 by-polls on October 12.



Russia rejects peace proposal

Says Ukraine needs to accept new territorial 'realities'; Kyiv allies pledge \$1b in energy aid

AGENCIES

Russia yesterday dismissed a peace proposal from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that would involve a pullout of Russian troops, saying Kyiv needed to accept new territorial "realities".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said those realities included Russia's addition of four Ukrainian regions as its "new subjects" - annexations it proclaimed in September but which most countries of the United Nations have condemned as illegal.

He was responding to a request by Zelensky to leaders from Group of Seven powers on Monday for more military equipment, support for financial and energy stability, and backing for a peace

solution that would start with Russia withdrawing troops from Ukraine, beginning this Christmas.

"These are three steps towards a continuation of hostilities," Peskov said. "The Ukrainian side needs to take into account the realities that have developed during this time," he added when asked about the proposed Russian troop withdrawal.

"And these realities indicate that new subjects have appeared in the Russian Federation. They appeared as a result of referendums that took place in these territories. Without taking these new realities into account, no kind of progress is possible."

There could be "no question" of Russia starting to pull out its troops by the end of the year, he said.

Recruit doctors for prisons: HC to govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the government to recruit doctors for 48 vacant posts in prisons across the country to ensure proper treatment for inmates.

Secretaries at the ministries of health and home; and the inspector general (IG) of prisons have been directed to comply with the order and to submit a compliance report by January 15, 2023.

Earlier, the office of the IG of prisons submitted a report through its lawyer to the HC bench saying that a total of 93 physicians have been appointed on deputation in the prisons and 48 posts of doctors are vacant there.

On November 15, the bench asked the government to appoint doctors on deputation to vacant posts at the prisons and to submit a report.

2 killed as lorry hits rickshaw at Dhanmondi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were killed after a lorry rammed a rickshaw in the capital's Dhanmondi area early today.

The identities of the deceased could not be known immediately, Sub-Inspector Nazrul Islam of Kalabagan Police Station told The Daily Star.

Of the victims, one was the rickshaw puller and the other was passenger, said the SI.

He added that the accident occurred around 12:30am when a lorry hit the rickshaw on Mirpur Road near Dhanmondi-32, killing the two on the spot.

Niko graft case indictment hearing on Jan 17

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court set January 17 for a hearing on charge framing in the Niko graft case against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Judge Sheikh Hafizur Rahman passed the order at a temporary courtroom of the Dhaka Special Judge's Court-9 at Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

A hearing on charge framing against Khaleda Zia was scheduled for yesterday, but she was unable to appear in court due to illness. Subsequently, her lawyer requested the court to adjourn the hearing.

On December 9, 2007, the ACC filed a case against five people, including Khaleda Zia, with the Tejgaon Police Station for abusing power in signing a deal with the Canadian company Niko to explore and extract gas.

Probe money laundering allegations against Sikder family: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday ordered an investigation into the allegations of money laundering using international credit cards against Sikder Group Managing Director Ron Haque Sikder and his family members.

The court, issuing a rule, directed Bangladesh Bank, BFIU, CID, and the ACC to investigate the matter and submit their findings by January 15, 2023.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khizir Hayat passed the order after hearing a writ petition in this regard.

Ron Haque Sikder and his family members reportedly spent Tk 116 crore beyond their balance limit using international credit cards, said petitioner's lawyer Munsurul Hoque Chowdhury.

"This is a money laundering offence and thus needs to be probed," he added.

Prepare to face Stay united

FROM PAGE 1

"We have received reviews from all our secretaries on the cost reduction efforts," he said.

Since June, the electricity bill has been brought down by about 48 percent, he said, adding that the PMO has reduced it by more than 60 percent.

The PMO's fuel consumption is down 40 percent, Islam added.

"The prime minister gave us directives on how to deal with the coming challenges. The cabinet secretary instructed us on how to carry out the directives," Mosammat Nasima Begum, a planning commission member, told The Daily Star.

The PM held a meeting with the secretaries on November 27.

Following her meeting with secretaries at the PMO on November 27, she directed the secretaries to make efforts to attract foreign investment in her directive issued on Monday.

She directed that priority be given to development projects, projects that could be implemented quickly, and foreign-funded projects, while also asking that cost escalations and time extensions of the projects be avoided.

The premier asked to practice austerity in government spending and follow the rules and regulations properly while importing vehicles and other items.

Hasina directed that exports be diversified and that exports of items other than garments be increased.

She also directed that the country be kept free of terrorism, militancy, and drugs and that measures be taken to ensure that militants and terrorists do not find shelter or money within the country.

The premier stressed the need to practice good governance and integrity at all stages. She asked for raising food production and bringing fallow lands under cultivation.

She called for a strong watch on the spread of misinformation and asked to publicise the government's achievements, success and development activities.

Belarus holds snap 'combat readiness' drills

AFP, Moscow

Belarus held a surprise inspection of its armed forces yesterday, the defence ministry said, after repeated warnings from Ukraine of a threat from its Moscow-aligned northern neighbour.

"A snap check of combat readiness has begun," the ministry said, adding it was ordered by Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko.

Stay united

FROM PAGE 1

At the meeting, Raushan assured Hasina the JP under no circumstances would form an alliance with the BNP or Jamaat or support their political programmes, meeting sources said.

"By and large, the prime minister's message was that if Raushan and Quader remain united, it will stand the party in good stead, which will be good for all," a JP leader said.

Pointing to the conflict, Hasina said there are discussions outside that a rift has been deepening between Raushan and Quader. But both the JP leaders denied it.

After around two-hour long meeting followed by lunch, Quader went to the JP chairman's Banani office and met the party's leaders.

After returning to Westin hotel, Raushan shared the meeting experience with her political secretary Golam Moshir and others, said sources close to Raushan, who has been staying there since coming back from Bangkok.

The JP participated in the last national polls in 2018 under the grand alliance led by the ruling Awami League.

Quader has lately been under pressure and "inactive" in the party's affairs since a Dhaka court in October ordered him to refrain from performing any activities regarding his party.

Talking to this correspondent, JP leaders loyal to Quader said yesterday's meeting was part of the government efforts to keep the JP under its control ahead of the next general election.

On November 16, Quader told this paper that efforts were on to control the Jatiya Party in favour of the government.

At yesterday's meeting, it was also discussed that Raushan would remain the opposition leader, meeting sources said.

Earlier, JP Parliamentary Party decided to make Quader the opposition leader, dropping Raushan.

Hasina also urged the JP to join the by-polls to the parliamentary seats that fell vacant following resignations of the BNP MPs, added the sources.

A press release of the PMO said the PM enquired about the health of the opposition leader and exchanged greetings.

BNP plotted to create anarchy, oust govt

FROM PAGE 16

sought an amicable solution to the venue issue, the letter said.

"Presumably, BNP leaders wanted to make a political issue out of the venue. Their objective was to create anarchy on the busy public street as they did in 2014 and 2018 before the national elections. They wanted to take common people under hostage situation to make their unlawful demand."

There was no restriction on peaceful assembly as the BNP organised nine public meetings in nine divisional districts. So, BNP took a ploy to press for the constitutional right to the peaceful assembly through violent means.

Against this backdrop, BNP leaders and activists started gathering in front of their party office in Nayapaltan on December 7, blocking the main road, though they did not seek permission from the DMP.

Therefore, additional police forces were deployed to maintain the law and order in the area.

As traffic remained disrupted for quite some time, police requested them to cease the blockade and move away from there.

However, BNP leaders and activists became aggressive and attacked

police with stones and brick-bats without any provocation, leaving injured 49 policemen who were trying to neutralise the vandals, the letter said.

In the ensuing clash, unfortunately, one passer-by was killed.

According to article 37 of the constitution, every citizen shall have the right to assemble and to participate in public meetings peacefully and without arms, subject to any reasonable restrictions.

However, BNP leaders resorted to vandalism and anarchy in the name of assembly, the letter said.

Police later seized 160 sacks of rice from the BNP party office and found cocktail bombs there, a piece of circumstantial evidence that shows the party's actual target was to occupy the street unlawfully three days before the scheduled public gathering, it said.

The rice was brought to feed the activists for three days.

Following the attack, police filed four cases against leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations, and two BNP leaders - Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Mirza Abbas - and were shown arrested under the Penal and Explosive Substance Act 1908 on 08 December.

She also thanked the Jatiya Party for playing a constructive and positive role in the parliamentary democracy.

The JP leaders said a stable democratic system is in place in the country. The people are getting the benefit of this, and positive changes are being made in every sector, the release said.

The party is committed to helping the democratic and constitutional government system continue, they added.

The fresh conflict between Quader and Raushan, wife of former president and JP founder HM Ershad, started brewing when she suddenly on August 31 convened the party's 10th council for November 26.

Reportedly on the government's advice, Raushan, also chief patron of the JP, later postponed the council.

Sources at the JP said that through the council, pro-Raushan faction had planned to oust Quader, younger brother of Ershad, from the party helm.

Feud between Raushan and Quader started over taking the party helm when Ershad fell sick in early 2019. The conflict reached its peak following his demise in July that year.

An initial investigation found that they have been involved in planning deliberate violence and chaos by instigating their party workers to attack law enforcement agents.

On the same day, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court sent them to jail without granting bail, the letter said.

The BNP leaders' target was to invite a vested quarter to power unconstitutionally by creating an anarchic situation as it did before the parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2018. So, the law enforcement agencies did not take any risk this time.

"The arrestees have every option to exercise their legal rights before the judiciary, which is acting independently."

BNP later agreed on an alternative venue at Golapbag for the December 10 meeting, and the meeting went peacefully without any major incident.

"This reflects the government's willingness and efforts to ensure freedom of expression and assembly. However, the government would not allow deliberate violence and vandalism by anybody that are threats to public security and the law-and-order situation in the country."

Modernity the enemy

FROM PAGE 1

month. Even as recently as the start of the millennium, the World Cup was as much about discovering the hottest talents from far-flung countries as it was about the battle for the ultimate prize.

From Pele's blistering arrival in 1958 to Geoff Hurst and Franz Beckenbauer's limelight-stealing outings in 1966, Diego Maradona's introduction to the world in 1982 and Salvatore Schillaci's heroics in 1990 all the way to Thomas Muller's Golden Boot heist in 2010, World Cups usually saw the introduction of a character that held the potential that could threaten the world order.

That aura began to fade by 2014. By 2018, teams had begun swooping for players preemptively, such as when PSG signed Kylian Mbappe for 180 million euros. Now, players like Bukayo Saka, Moises Caicedo, Enzo Fernandez and Rodrygo, all born after 2000, are already old news. Even Jude Bellingham, still just 19 years old, is a well-known prospect. The youngest player in Qatar, Australia's Garang Kuol, secured a move to Premier League outfit Newcastle well before the World Cup.

Such is the flow of information and highlight reels that most discussions around the hottest prospects in the world during the course of this World Cup have revolved around Endrick, a 16-year-old striker from Brazilian club Palmeiras who is playing no part in Qatar. He made headlines last year when he signed his first professional contract, featuring a 60-million-euro buyout clause. He has been subject to a pursuit from Europe's elite clubs since.

Scouting reports about Endrick are widely available and videos abound, which begs the question whether it is even possible for a player to emerge from the shadows anymore. With the amount of advances in scouting, not to mention the adoption of more data-driven scouting systems, and less reliance on having to be physically present at venues, it appears those days are over.

Take Morocco for example, who have made history on their fairytale run to the World Cup semifinals. Complete team performances and tactical execution have seen them become the first African team to make it this far in the World Cup.

But the fact is that 20 players in their 26-man squad feature in Europe's top five leagues. While the likes of Selim Amallah, Azzedine Oumahi and Sofyan Amrabat, were far from unknowns as they headed to Qatar, nor are they world-beaters in the aftermath, at least individually. Overall, the 32 teams, bar Qatar

and Saudi Arabia, featured only two or three players from outside the top leagues. In fact, 25 per cent of the players at this World Cup ply their trade in the Premier League. 40 per cent of players play in either Spain's La Liga, Germany's Bundesliga, Italy's Serie A or the Ligue 1 in France.

This means that every team is equipped to contend with the challenges that elite players can pose, as evidenced by the number of upsets at the World Cup. Teams have also caught up in terms of tactical execution and planning. But there is also a negative side, as Juanma Lillo - Pep Guardiola's former assistant and long-time inspiration - pointed out in a recent column.

"We have globalised a methodology to an extent that it's crept into the World Cups. If you got the Brazil and Cameroon players to change shirts at half time, you wouldn't even realise. Maybe with the tattoos or the yellow hair, but not the performance. Everything is 'dos toques'. Two touches. Because they all train with two touches, they all play with two touches," he wrote for The Athletic.

He also could not name a standout player from the World Cup, opining that they were all too similar, remarking later: "It's true now that there aren't bad players any more. But there are no exceptional players either. In trying to kill the bad guys, we've killed the good guys, too."

That view may be a bit harsh. Under the shadow of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, many players have emerged over recent years such as Mbappe and Vinicius Jr and even as far back as Eden Hazard.

But even if the next star is just around the corner, the element of surprise will have all but worn off by 2026, costing the game nothing more, and nothing less, than some of its romance.

Messi on the cusp

FROM PAGE 1

Orsic, and five minutes later and threw on striker Bruno Petkovic.

They were positive moves but still Argentina looked the more dangerous with Messi, after a swift exchange with Fernandez, forcing a save at the near post.

Messi saved his best for last though, tormenting Josko Gvardial down the right before leaving the 20-year-old defender behind and pulling the ball back to Alvarez who coolly slotted home.

Croatia were finished but it was clear that Argentina and Messi are peaking just in time for the biggest game of their lives.