

‘Elections will be free, fair’

EC Rasheda on C'nawabganj by-polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Chapainawabganj

Election Commissioner Rasheda Sultana yesterday encouraged voters to exercise their franchise at the by-polls in Chapainawabganj 2 and 3 constituencies, promising free and fair elections.

She made the remarks while addressing journalists following a meeting held at the deputy commissioner's office in the presence of the contesting candidates and law enforcers.

The election to the constituencies will be held on February 1.

The EC urged law enforcers to ensure a secured and fair elections, and called upon all the political parties to freely participate in the by-elections, making it a competitive one.

She ordered law enforcement agencies to take necessary steps in this regard.

France eyes closer ties with Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

France wants to enhance cooperation with Bangladesh and plans to have "ever-closer" ties with countries of the Indo Pacific, to address major challenges in terms of climate change and security, said a visiting senior French official.

"It gives us a golden opportunity to review the common works we pursue together, and decide new projects and initiatives across the board," Bertrand Lortholary, director for Asian Affairs (General Political Directorate) at the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs told reporters yesterday.

France and Bangladesh share the same vision for a "free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive" Indo-Pacific region, based on international law, with shared prosperity for all.

Responding to a question, Lortholary said there is a lot the two countries can do, and military-to-military cooperation is part of that defence and security collaboration.

Earlier, the French official had a political consultation with the Bangladesh side led by Director General (West Europe and EU) Kazi Russel Pervez and discussed issues of mutual interest.

TIB to get Tk 4.25cr from Netherlands

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) will receive Tk 4.25 crore from the Netherlands for a project aimed to support the social movement against corruption.

The grant agreement was signed by Dutch Ambassador to Bangladesh Anne Van Leeuwen and Executive Director of TIB Dr Iftekharuzzaman at the Embassy of Netherlands in Dhaka.

Under the grant, TIB will implement a 5 year project -- Participatory Action Against Corruption: Towards Transparency and Accountability (PACTA) -- which has been ongoing since January 2022, said a press release.

The PACTA project aims to contribute to promoting better governance and curbing corruption towards a more inclusive, equitable, and non-discriminatory society consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



This illegal brick kiln, built on agricultural land at Jirampur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, has been running its operation for a couple of years now.

PHOTO: STAR

Saline land now a green landscape

Coastal village in Barguna yearly produces vegetables worth Tk 5 crore

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Farmers of a remote coastal village in Barguna's Taltali upazila have not only become solvent by producing seasonal vegetables but also turned the salty land into a green landscape.

For the last couple of years, vegetable cultivation seems to be more profitable than growing paddy for the farmers of Saudagarpara village, about five-kilometre from the upazila headquarters, due to high soil salinity.

However, switching to another crop was never easy for local paddy farmers, thanks to Shahadat Matubbar for his leading role in producing different vegetables around the year.

Shahadat used to run a readymade garment shop in Taltali town. In 2015, he went to Dhaka with a huge sum of money to purchase some goods for his shop, but unfortunately, he was robbed on the way and returned home empty-handed.

After that incident, he could not continue the business due to the financial crisis and soon became homeless.

The idea of vegetable farming came to Shahadat's mind after watching a programme on a private television channel.

Inspired by the idea, he started cultivating different seasonal



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer and his family members are putting beans in a sack. The photo was taken from Saudagarpara in Barguna's Taltoli upazila recently.

vegetables on a small scale, by raising his low paddy land.

Now Shahadat produces various vegetables that include gourd, pumpkin, beans, eggplants, green pepper and watermelon all year round.

Seeing his success, many farmers of the locality raised their lowlands and started cultivating seasonal vegetables.

Apart from paddy cultivation, more than 200 farmers of the village are now engaged in producing various types of vegetables around the year.

During a recent visit to the area, this correspondent saw field after field covered with winter vegetables.

People were seen either collecting vegetables from the field, or loading produced crops on trucks to send those to different markets.

Farmer Ibrahim said he grows gourd, pumpkin, potato, bean, brinjal and green chillies.

Traders from Barguna, Patuakhali, Barisal and even Dhaka travel to the village to buy those vegetables.

Another grower Ismail Matubbar said he cultivated beans on 120 acres of land and had already sold the crop worth Tk 1 lakh this year.

Earlier, it cost Tk 10,000 to Tk 12,000 to carry the products to

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Need cultural centres to counter extremism

Say speakers at event marking 31st anniv of Nirmul Committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should put more effort in developing and promoting cultural activities in the country. Not only should it allocate more budget in this regard, but also take steps to set up district-based model cultural centres, which will help combat fundamentalism and militancy in the country, said speakers at an event yesterday.

They were speaking at a programme marking the 31st founding anniversary of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee at the Capital's Bangla Academy. Freedom fighters, educationists, historians and cultural activists participated in the event, among others.

Prof Muntassir Mamoon, president of 1971-Genocide-Torture Archive and Museum Trust, said, "The government should construct model cultural centres in 64 districts to counter extremist ideologies."

Ramendu Majumdar, president of International Theatre Institute, said

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LALMONIRHAT, KURIGRAM

135 brick kilns operating illegally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

There are 135 brick kilns operating illegally in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram, posing serious threats to public health as well as the environment.

According to Department of Environment (DoE), there are at least 174 brick kilns in the two districts.

Of those, only 16 out of 63 in Lalmonirhat, and 21 out of 111 brick kilns in Kurigram have clearance certificates from the DoE.

The rest of the 135 brickfields, mostly built on agricultural land and close to human habitat, are operating illegally without a licence.

Local people alleged many illegal brick kilns, built on agricultural land, have been running their business for years but the local administration seems quite reluctant to take any legal action.

Many farmers in the two districts said they are not getting the expected crop production from their lands as most of the brick kilns are built either in the middle or close to croplands.

Moreover, despite submitting written complaints to local administration and DoE, they are yet to get any remedy for their losses, farmers said.

Farmer Nityananda Barman of Ghanoshyam village in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila said he is not getting the desired production from his fruit trees due to the brickfield's impact, built on agricultural land, close to his house.

The toxic smoke emitting from the brick kiln is also polluting the environment of the village, he said.

Badiar Rahman, a resident of Hamirbazar in Kurigram's

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TURAG, KERANIGANJ

Work to reframe DPPs continues

State minister for housing and public works tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajuk is continuing its work to reframe development project proposals (DPPs) to develop two townships in Turag and Keraniganj as part of reducing the growing pressure of population in Dhaka, said State Minister for Housing and Public Works Sharif Ahmed.

He made the remarks in parliament yesterday while replying to a tabled question from Awami League MP Mohammad Habib Hasan from Dhaka-18.

In the scripted answer, Sharif Ahmed said the initiatives were taken for two projects, titled "Conservation of Flood Flow Zone of Turag River and Compact Township Development Project" and

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RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Savita Bhaban inaugurated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"I feel incredibly fortunate to have fulfilled my late wife's dream."

These were the words of industrialist Subal Chandra Saha during the inauguration of Savita Bhaban in Ramakrishna Mission, named after his late wife Savita Rani Saha, who was a devotee of the mission.

The building was inaugurated in its newly built auditorium yesterday. The expenses of the building have been financed by Subal himself.

Savita Bhaban is a multipurpose building with an auditorium, a library and a publishing and information centre.

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Selling govt land as plots

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A local influential has been selling government land by dividing it into plots along Kharijama canal in Patuakhali's Galachipa upazila.

Nizamul Haque alias Quddus Shikder has been involved in this illegal business for the last couple of years.

The matter came to light when Galachipa Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mohiuddin Al Helal raided the area in the middle of December last year and stopped the labourers working for Quddus while they were cutting soil from the bank of the canal to make a new plot.

Quddus, who was present on the spot during the drive, somehow managed to flee.

Locals alleged that Quddus sold many plots verbally and also handed over possession of several plots to several buyers.

They said Kharijama canal had been gradually filled up due to loss of navigability, creating vast khas land along the canal.

Afterwards, Quddus gradually grabbed parts of the khas land and sold the plots to many in the area.

With over 300 makeshift shops and dwelling houses, Kharijama Bazar has now turned into a commercial hub, where a weekly market is held every Friday. Like many others, grocer Saidul Islam bought purchased a plot, measuring four decimals, from Quddus for Tk 20,000 about three years ago.

Quddus also sold several other plots to Babul Chowdhury, Zafar Howladar, and Suman Shikdar.

Of the buyers, Babul has built a one-storey building

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A local influential has continued selling government property by dividing khas land into plots in Patuakhali's Galachipa upazila.

PHOTO: STAR