

Presidential election to be held by Feb 23

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday said the presidential election will be held sometime between January 23 and February 23.

EC Secretary Jahangir Alam, after a meeting at the EC office, said the election process has already begun.

“We will contact the Parliament Secretariat and fix the date of a meeting between the chief election commissioner and the Speaker. The election will be held sometime between January 23 and February 23.”

On April 24, 2018, President Abdul Hamid took oath as the head of the state for the second consecutive term, which will expire on April 24 this year.

Hamid’s first five-year tenure had expired on the same date in 2018, after he took office in 2013.

According to article 123 of the constitution, the presidential election must be held 90 to 60 days before the expiry of the five-year term.

And as per the constitution, Hamid cannot become president for another term, as he was elected for two terms.

Speaking to reporters at her Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban office yesterday, SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Bill to allow govt adjust power, gas prices placed in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The amendment to the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission act that empowers the government to adjust the gas and electricity tariffs without hearing has been placed in the parliament yesterday.

Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, placed the bill, which was then forwarded to the parliamentary standing committee on the power ministry for vetting.

The parliamentary watchdog has been asked to submit its report within five working days.

Earlier on January 5, Law Minister Anisul Huq placed the “Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (amendment) Ordinance, 2022” in the

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Local residents lay flowers at a bus stop in front of a residential building in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro yesterday. The building was destroyed as a result of a missile strike that killed at least 45 people on January 14.

PHOTO: AFP

BIDEN’S HOME SEARCH

Six more classified documents found

AFP, Washington

Officials from the US Department of Justice found six more classified documents during a search of Joe Biden’s family home in Delaware this week, the president’s personal lawyer said in a statement Saturday.

The new disclosure served up another embarrassing twist for Biden in an affair dogging him just as he gets ready to declare whether he will run for another term in 2024.

Biden insists he has done nothing wrong and has downplayed the situation as an innocent mistake.

Documents from his time as vice president and marked as classified first turned up in an office at a Biden-affiliated think tank in Washington last year, and then again at his home in Delaware. Altogether they are about a dozen documents.

After the second find, the White House offered to let the Department of Justice search the Delaware home – the search was carried out on Friday and is now concluded, Biden attorney Bob Bauer said.

“DOJ took possession of materials it deemed within the scope of its inquiry, including six items consisting of documents with classification markings and surrounding materials,” Bauer said.

The search lasted more than 12 hours and covered “all working, living and storage spaces in the home,” Bauer said.



“DOJ had full access to the President’s home, including personally handwritten notes, files, papers, binders, memorabilia, to-do lists, schedules, and reminders going back decades,” he said.

Some of the new papers seized were from Biden’s time in the Senate and some were

from his tenure as vice president, according to Bauer.

The White House has said the earlier batches of documents were turned over to the Justice Department and National Archives, which handles presidential records, as soon as they were found.

On Thursday, Biden dismissed the furor over the discovery of the old classified documents.

Asked by reporters during a trip to California about the issue, he said: “I think you’re going to find there’s nothing there.”

“I have no regrets. I’m following what the lawyers have told me they want me to do. It’s exactly what we’re doing.”

“We found a handful of documents... were filed in the wrong place. We immediately turned them over to the Archives and the Justice Department. We’re fully cooperating and looking forward to getting this resolved quickly,” he added.

Attorney General Merrick Garland earlier this month appointed a special counsel, former government lawyer Robert Hur, to act as special counsel for the investigation.

Still elusive after all these years

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on large tertiary hospitals could be halved. Presently, many go straight to those hospitals with minor illnesses, deterring the hospital’s ability to properly treat critical and emergency patients.

They said a solid patient referral system could connect around 18,000 public and 16,000 private healthcare facilities with all other high-level hospitals countrywide.

NO TRUST IN PRIMARY CARE

About 5,000 union healthcare centres countrywide are supposed to be the first place for patients to go to. But none of them work 24/7 due to a lack of doctors and other support staff, health officials said.

Most of the upazila health complexes also fail to properly serve patients due to shortages of doctors, support staff, logistics, and inefficiency in hospital operations.

Without options, people rush to large hospitals in cities.

Joyal Abedin, 62, of Cumilla, had been suffering from chest pain for six months. He had no confidence in the upazila health complex or the medical college hospital in Cumilla. “There’s no proper treatment there,” he said.

He travelled 70km to Dhaka and stood in a queue of 500 patients at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD).

The NICVD doctor, Nurun Un Nobi Khandaker, said Abedin could have had treatment in his locality. “This is a specialised hospital that handles complex heart-related illnesses. But we have to handle a large number of patients with minor illnesses every day,” he said, adding, “The rush could have been halved if these patients had visited primary healthcare hospitals first.”

If there had been a patient referral system, Abedin would have been seen by a primary healthcare doctor first, who would have sent him for an ECG. After going through the results, the doctor, if needed, would have sent the patient to a better equipped hospital like NICVD. This would have saved travel costs and ensured timely treatment of the patient and reduced overcrowding of NICVD.

Prof Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general (administration) at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said poor services in primary healthcare facilities make for a great barrier to the referral system.

“Until we are able to provide quality services at the primary level and gain public trust, no matter what we say, the referral system will not be a reality.”

WHY IT FAILS

Health experts believe that budget constraints, inefficiency, and a lack of commitment from policymakers to ensure quality healthcare have been the biggest impediments to the introduction of the referral system.

Regarding the 2019 initiative to introduce the system in Manikganj and Chapainawabganj, Mohammad Zaved, deputy programme manager at hospital service management of the DGHS, said, “We only had two consultation meetings with healthcare staff in Manikganj, and could not progress further due to the pandemic.”

But the 2016 initiative in Nilphamari and Rangpur, long before the pandemic, suffered a similar fate.

POLITICAL WILL

Experts say that developing a system to manage this massive network requires a political will and a proper budget that can ensure skilled workforce and necessary logistic support at the

stage.”

Asked about the country’s macroeconomic challenges, he said the WB recently slashed the global growth projection from 3 percent to 1.7 percent, which is the lowest growth projection in three decades.

The commodity prices, disruption in the supply chain and international food prices are challenges for all countries.

At the event, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said Bangladesh is the 35th largest economy now and the country’s per capita income is also rising thanks to contributions from development partners like the WB.

“We want more contributions from them,” he added.

While Bangladesh’s infrastructure

grassroots.

But keeping medical professionals in rural areas has been a big challenge.

The health and family welfare ministry issued a circular on August 27, 2021, proposing to extend the year-long internship programme for MBBS graduates to two years.

If the proposal had been adopted, the interns would have had to spend the second year at union-level healthcare centres.

The government, however, backtracked amid protests from interns and medical students.

“This was a very good move. But I don’t know why the government retracted. It exposes a lack of political commitment,” Gonoshasthaya Kendra Founder Zafrullah Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

He, however, said the rural healthcare centres were not suitable for interns and doctors to stay.

Currently, doctors under the government healthcare service are required to spend the first three years of their job in rural areas. In many cases, they do not stay the full three years, citing poor lodging facilities and a lack of other amenities.

“Healthcare professionals serving in rural areas are incentivised in developed countries. Unless the government incentivises medical students and professionals, they will not like to stay in rural areas. There are security issues too,” Zafrullah said.

Syed Abdul Hamid, professor at the Institute of Health Economics (IHE) at Dhaka University, said secondary and tertiary hospitals need to be simultaneously readied before introducing the referral system.

“There are well defined and established practices of referral systems in many countries. But the

has developed markedly in the last few years, more needs to be done to get the desired GDP growth, said Sharifa Khan, the economic relations division secretary.

“The development partners can do more here.”

In recent times, the country’s foreign exchange reserves are fast depleting and the cost of borrowing is rising as the interest rate has gone up, she said.

“But we are not solely responsible for this situation, so budget support can play a vital role in this regard,” Khan added.

The Washington-based multilateral lender is committed to working with the government in the upcoming months, said Martin Raiser, the WB’s vice-president for the South Asia

region.

The present economic situation of Bangladesh is mainly due to the global situation, so the government has already taken steps in the situation, said Ahmad Kaikaus, the WB’s alternate executive director.

The government ordered to bring down the demand, so that foreign exchange dependency is reduced.

Another order is not to keep any land unfarmed, he said in a panel discussion on ‘Celebrating Success: Exploring Possibilities’.

In the present supply chain disruption, Bangladesh is trying to improve connectivity with development partners and bilateral relationships, said Kaikaus, who is also the former principal secretary of Bangladesh.

Govt bodies in Dhaka

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obstruction of the original route of Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Line-6 in Saydabad while Mouchak-Moghbarz flyover was an obstruction of the planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Line-3 between the airport and Keraniganj.

Yesterday’s DTCA meeting held at its new building was its 16th governing council meeting. The previous meeting was held in June 2021.

The DTCA is tasked with providing regular supervision and coordination for planning for all transportation infrastructure development work in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Gazipur and Narsingdi.

After the meeting, Quader said undertaking and implementing of different projects in Dhaka city lacked coordination and other participants of the meeting made similar observations.

Quader did not directly answer when he was asked whether the new committee was formed because the DTCA failed to play its role as a coordinator.

“He [the LGRD minister] is a vital part of the DTCA...We are not going beyond our jurisdiction. We have formed it [the committee] for better coordination...” Quader said.

There can be disagreements

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based multilateral lender committed to providing \$1.2 billion to build the Padma Bridge.

But in June 2012, it declined to sanction the loan after it found “credible evidence corroborated by a variety of sources” that pointed to a high-level corruption conspiracy among Bangladeshi government officials, SNC Lavalin executives and private individuals in connection with the project.

It imposed conditions for the continuation of loan talks with the government.

The conditions were: place all public officials suspected of involvement in the corruption scheme on leave from government employment until the investigation is completed; appoint a special inquiry team within the Anti-Corruption Commission to handle the investigation; and agree to provide full and adequate access to all investigative information to a panel appointed by the WB comprised of internationally recognised experts so that the panel can give guidance to the lenders on the progress, adequacy and fairness of the investigation.

The government refused the conditions and went ahead to build the bridge with its own resources.

In the meantime, the corruption

“This [lack of coordination] is a disease that requires better treatment.”

It was also decided at the meeting that construction works would be done before monsoon, and the city corporations would get prior notice before roads are dug and projects are undertaken. However, similar decisions were made earlier as well.

Besides, it was decided that the prime minister’s opinion would be sought regarding the expansion of DTCA jurisdiction.

The minister once again admitted the roads and transport sector lacked discipline. Referring to the construction of Padma Bridge, metro rail, six lane roads, flyovers, he said, “All these developments will fade if we fail to bring discipline on roads,” he added.

LGRD Minister Tazul Islam, Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, State Minister for Housing and Public Works Sharif Ahmed, Narayanganj City Corporation Mayor Salina Hayat Ivy, secretaries of different ministries and divisions, top police officials, chief of different government agencies and leaders of transport associations took part the closed-door meeting.

allegations were thrown out in a Canadian Court on a technicality and the prosecution decided not to pursue the case further.

At the time of the Padma Bridge tussle, the Washington-based multilateral lender was annually committing to \$1 billion, said the Dutch-Austrian national who is in Dhaka on a three-day tour. In recent years, the WB has been committing to more than \$2 billion a year.

“In IDA19 that just concluded, we committed to \$4.5 billion in two years. Sometimes you find stones in your shoe and you take the stones out and you walk on. You walk together and do more – that is our philosophy,” van Trotsenburg said.

In 50 years, the WB has committed about \$42 billion for 365 projects.

“If there is one project where you don’t continue, you need to put that into perspective. You need to take a long view.”

The WB believes passionately in the development of Bangladesh and improving the prosperity of the nation, he said.

“We have always said that we are going to be a long term partner. In some topics there can be ups and downs and differences – I think one needs to see in the spirit of cooperation.”

1 dead after being hit by train

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A young man was killed, and two others were injured, after being hit by a train at the Brahmanbaria Railway Station in Poniout area on Saturday.

They were playing games on their mobile phones while sitting on the railway tracks with their headphones on.

The dead was identified as Rimjhim, 20. The injured are Arafat Mia, 22, and Al-Amin alias Dipu, 25.

Hatem Ali Bhuiyan, SI and in-charge of Brahmanbaria Railway Police Outpost, said, “The three were on the tracks around 11:30pm. As they had their headphones on, none of them heard the incoming Surma mail train.

“Rimjhim was crushed under the wheels and died on the spot. The others were critically injured ... Locals rescued them and took them to Brahmanbaria General Hospital.”

No Covid-19 death in 24hrs, positivity rate 0.41%

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No Covid-19 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, said a press release by the Directorate General of Health Services.

This means, the total number of Covid deaths in the country remains at 29,441, with the mortality rate at 1.44 percent.

Meanwhile, at least 11 new cases were reported during the same period after testing 2,674 samples across the country, raising the total number of cases to 20,37,444, the release added.

At least 199 patients have recovered during this time, with the number of recoveries now at 19,90,960.

1 killed, 2 injured after sand pile collapses on them

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A worker was killed and two others were injured after they were crushed under a sand pile at a sand unloading station in Tangail’s Bhuapur upazila yesterday.

The dead was identified as Rashedul Islam, 25. Masudul Haque Masud, chairman of Nikrail union parishad, said the incident occurred at Sarpolshia area around 4:00am, when the sand pile collapsed on the three while they were working.

Rashedul died on the spot and the two others were sent to the local hospital.

Faridul Islam, OC of Bhuapur police, said Rashedul’s body was handed over to his family after autopsy.