

## Polls to be held on time despite disruptions

Says home minister

STAR REPORT

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said the national elections will be held on time and steps have been taken by the government to make the elections free, fair, and impartial.

An evil force wants to destabilise the country and disrupt the elections. Efforts will be taken to make the election acceptable by preventing them, he said.

He came up with the remark while addressing the Awami League's peace and development rally at Kanaikhal in Natore.

A proper election atmosphere will prevail soon after the EC declares the schedule, he said.

"The people are eagerly waiting to cast their votes for boat. They are waiting to make the prime minister victorious again," he said.

He also said the AL does not depend on any foreign force to come to power.



The "Joy Bangla Chattar" will be inaugurated at Bijoy Sarani in the capital today. The chattar was constructed by Bangladesh Army. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Fix power, water bills based on area, income

PM tells last Ecneec meeting of this term; 44 projects approved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed to fix area and income wise electricity and water bills to reduce government subsidy.

The PM directed this during the last meeting of the Executive Committee on the National Economic Council (Ecneec) in the present term of the government, Planning Minister MA Mannan said while briefing journalists.

"While a cleaner gets electricity and water at subsidised rates, Mr Mannan as a minister also gets those at the same rate, which is not justifiable," the minister quoted the PM as saying.

The PM said this is why bills of water and electricity have to be fixed area-wise, income-wise and family-wise, and directed the authorities concerned to take initiative in this regard.

The country has to come out of the subsidy gradually, she added.

The planning minister said it may not

be possible to start working on all the projects approved at yesterday's Ecneec meeting as the Election Commission could announce schedules for the next parliamentary election anytime.

In that case, the next government will start implementing the projects, he added.

At yesterday's meeting, 44 projects with a total cost of Tk 39,344 crore were approved, of which, Tk 7,579 crore will come from foreign funds.

Regarding the approval spree of projects ahead of the national election, Planning Secretary Satyajit Karmaker said the projects which were approved yesterday were not related to the election.

"Fourteen of the total projects are revised ones. If those were not approved then their implementation might have stopped," he said.

Besides, eight are foreign-funded. If those were not approved then their loan agreements might have been cancelled, he added.

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## SCRAPPING OF 16TH AMENDMENT SC defers hearing to November 16

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday deferred the date to November 16 to hear a review petition challenging a High Court verdict that scrapped the 16th amendment to the constitution, which empowers parliament to remove its judges for incapacity or misconduct.

The SC was scheduled to hear the six-year-old review petition yesterday.

A five-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan passed the deferment order after petitioner's Advocate-on-Record M Ashrafuzzaman sought adjournment of the hearing.

The government filed the 908-page review petition on December 24, 2017 outlining 94 grounds on which this court may consider the government's prayer for restoring the 16th amendment.

The HC in May, 2016 declared the 16th amendment unconstitutional as it found the changes went against the principles of the separation of powers and the judiciary independence.

The government later filed an appeal against the HC verdict. The SC upheld the HC verdict.

## Asleep in KL, accused of bombing in Magura

Expats, journos, teacher among those indicted in 'ghost' cases

AZIBOR RAHMAN and SHARIFUL ISLAM

Alamin Kazi of Magura's Shalikhha, an expatriate businessman in Malaysia, was in deep sleep at his Kuala Lumpur residence at 4:30am on November 3.

However, as per a case filed at Shalikhha Police Station, he hurled crude bombs at police and carried out subversive activities in Shalikhha's Talkhari area with BNP men during that very time.

Meanwhile, Rajib Shikder, hailing from the district's Mohammadpur upazila, has been an expatriate in Bahrain since he left the country on September 1.

But according to a separate case filed by Mohammadpur police on November 1, Rajib was among activists of BNP and like-minded parties who hurled crude bombs on the road in front of Adarsha Noorani Hafezi Madrasa and Orphanage in the upazila at 11:55pm on that day.

Not only Rajib, the headteacher of a local secondary school and three local journalists are also among the 199 named and 100-150 unnamed accused in that case.

Sub-inspector of Shalikhha Police Station Rezaul Kabir and SI of Mohammadpur Police Station Md Mustafizur Rahman separately filed those cases.

The narratives in both cases are identical. On information, police teams reached the spots when BNP and like-minded party men hurled bombs at the law enforcers and fled the scene, said both documents.

Police seized unexploded crude bombs, scotch tape, pieces of iron, and bamboo sticks from the spot, the cases read.

Alamin is 29th among the 157 named accused in the case filed by Shalikhha police. Some 100-130 unidentified others are also shown accused in the case.

**I flew back to Kuala Lumpur on January 6 this year from Shalikhha, and since then I have not returned to Bangladesh. Yet I heard that a case was filed against me.**

ALAMIN  
An accused expat

**What a farce! I am now 76 years old. How come I went there at that late hour and blasted crude bombs?**

WAHAB BISWAS  
An accused

"I flew back to Kuala Lumpur on January 6 this year from Shalikhha, and since then I have not returned to Bangladesh. Yet I heard that a case was filed against me," Alamin told The Daily Star over WhatsApp on Wednesday from Malaysia.

"I have a grocery shop here in Kuala Lumpur, and I also do different construction works on sub-contracts," he said.

"I was never involved with politics. I used to do some social work in Shalikhha, as my earnings are good here. Out of jealousy, someone may have instigated police to file the case against me," Alamin said, adding that he contacted local police, who assured him that they would clear his name from the charge sheet.

Contacted over WhatsApp, Rajib Shikder said, "Once I was involved with Chhatra Dal,

but now I have no link with politics. I now work as a food delivery man in Bahrain's capital, Manama."

AKM Nasirul Islam, headteacher of RSKH Secondary School (accused no 159), journalists Md Rasel Mollah (accused no 187) and Wahab Biswas (accused no 167) also claimed they were neither involved in politics nor with any such incident.

Journalist Palash Hossain (accused no 165) could not be contacted.

"What a farce! I am now 76 years old. How come I went there at that late hour and blasted crude bombs?" Wahab Biswas said.

Magura district BNP convener Ali Ahmed also confirmed that the headteacher and the three journalists do not hold any party posts, adding that he was not aware if they were supporters of the party.

Biplob Reza Biko, president of Mohammadpur upazila press club, said the three journalists are not involved in politics.

Contacted, SI Mustafizur Rahman declined to comment and advised contacting the station's OC.

OC Md Borhanul Islam said they arrested seven accused from the spot, and the case was filed against 199 named accused as per their statements.

"If police do not find involvement of anyone during investigation, their names will be cleared from the charge sheet," he added.

He also said expatriate Rajib's name was mistakenly printed. In fact, the accused is his brother, Sajib.

SI Rezaul also refused to make any comment regarding the case filed accusing Alamin.

OC Mosharrar Hossain of the police station, however, admitted that it was a mistake, as they did not have enough time to verify, and said it would be corrected.

## ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

## A reflection of existing political crisis: experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The current economic vulnerability of Bangladesh is a reflection of the country's existing political crisis and wrong government policies, said experts at an event yesterday.

"If political crisis prevails in the country, it impacts different fields including the economy," said Fahmida Khatun, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue.

She said this while addressing a webinar on "Repression, Movement and Economy: Pathways to Bangladesh", organised by Forum for Bangladesh Studies (FBS).

The regulatory bodies cannot work independently when they have to work under political pressure, she said, adding that while she believes the regulatory bodies have efficiency to work and take right decisions regarding the correction of economic crises, it is not possible due to political involvement. There are a lot of problems in the financial sector and it needs time and sacrifices to resolve the crises, she added.

Ali Riyaz, distinguished professor at the politics and government department of Illinois State University, said there is no scope to ignore the country's economic vulnerability.

Alleging that the prevailing economic crisis emerged as all decisions came from partial persons instead of participatory discussion, Riyaz suggested restoring a participatory economy through ensuring participatory rules, politics and election.

He said otherwise, control and repression-oriented rule will affect the economy.

"The country's economy is going through its worst situation in the last 30 years," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director, Policy Research Institute (PRI).

"This severe economic crisis emerged due to wrong government policies, despite the experts having frequently cautioned the policymakers," he noted.

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## MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

## Bangladesh scores poorly in evaluation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh scored miserably in an evaluation by Millennium Challenge Corporation, a US federal foreign aid agency, which concluded that the country failed to control corruption and protect democratic rights.

The ranking, released on Tuesday, drastically harms Bangladesh's chances of receiving access to grants from the MCC's US \$1.07 billion fund.

Since MCC's inception in 2004, it has provided foreign aid of over US \$17 billion to 31 countries in areas including agriculture and irrigation, anti-corruption, education, energy and power, finance and enterprise development, health, land rights, transportation infrastructure, water supply, and sanitation.

Bangladesh has never been considered eligible for MCC funds.

Every year, each candidate country is assessed on 20 indicators broadly covering three areas: ruling justly, investing in people, and encouraging economic freedom.

A percentile ranking, given out of 100, shows how a country performed when compared to others belonging to the same income group. There were 62 candidate countries in the low-income group, including Bangladesh.

"Of the 80 country scorecards created by MCC, 25 countries passed the evaluation," said MCC.

Bangladesh was categorised in the zero percentile in health expenditures category. The country's second-lowest score was in controlling corruption, ranked only in the sixth percentile. Its third lowest score of 11 percent came in freedom of information.

One of the categories Bangladesh passed in is inflation.

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## 'I won't eat without seeing my father'

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Two-year-old Mehreen Akter was seen waiting with her mother in front of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) court in Dhaka for more than seven hours yesterday, just to have a glimpse of her father.

Mehreen, daughter of Shoriful Islam Manik and Tania Begum, was seen crying from time to time, and her mother was trying to soothe her by reciting different stories to her as she yelled "Baba, baba! (father, father)" whenever she spotted a prison van.

After missing her father for five days, Mehreen finally came to court hoping to see him, even if it was for a brief moment.

Her helpless mother had to bring her there, as Tania had been unable to feed her daughter, as she refused to eat anything without seeing her father's face.

While talking to The Daily Star, Tania said, "I came here once before to see my husband, leaving my daughter at home, but she cried nonstop that day. I had no choice but to bring her along with me today."

"She keeps crying and saying she won't eat without her father," Tania added.

Manik is the convener of



Mehreen in her mother's arms waiting to catch a glimpse of her father in front of the CMM court yesterday. Every time a prison van, inset, reached there, the two-year-old started shouting, "Baba, baba!"

PHOTO: STAR

Swechchhasebak Dal ward 100 under Adabor thana, but he and his family lived at Turag Housing in Dhaka Uddan area, said his family members.

Rab arrested Manik from a relative's house on November 3, Tania said.

"My husband is involved in BNP politics. We don't know why he was arrested. Police don't say anything about my husband or why he is in jail," she added.

"I last saw my husband at

Mohammadpur Police Station the day he was arrested. I haven't seen him since. When many BNP leaders were being detained ahead of the rally, he got scared. But all he ever did was work as a photojournalist for a newspaper," she continued.

Meanwhile, Shefali Begum, Manik's 50-year-old mother, was restless to see her son.

She approached all the police cars whenever one pulled up and looked

for her son. For the past five days, she has been rushing to see her son at the police station, court, and jail.

"My son didn't do anything wrong. Can someone please let me know how my son is doing?" said Manik's mother.

"Put me in jail and release my son," she wept.

Apart from the three, there were many others waiting in front of the court, hoping to see their detained loved ones.