



Polls schedule may be recast if BNP joins

Says CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If the BNP decides to participate, the polls schedule can be recast, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal said yesterday.

If needed, if there is a scope to accommodate the BNP, the election schedule can be recast, he told reporters at his office.



Asked if the national election slated for January 7 will be deferred, he said, "The election commissioners said if the BNP joins, the polls schedule may be recast. Nobody said the election will be delayed."

The Election Commission urges the BNP to participate in the election.

"There is still time... If they join, the election will be festive... It will be a blessing for the Election Commission and for the entire nation if the party joins."

The BNP and several other parties say they will not take part in the election unless the government resigns and there is a non-partisan polls-time government.

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

With vehicles plying incomplete and unplanned roads, smog and dust obscure the motorists' view of oncoming traffic at Amin Bazar on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway yesterday. Even just on Friday, Dhaka topped the list of cities around the world with the worst air quality.

BUSINESS

BB hikes policy rate again

The central bank yesterday raised the repo rate by 50 basis points to step up its fight against the persisting higher inflation and increased rates that will make loans costlier and give better returns to savers.

Now, the policy rate will be 7.75 percent, which will be effective from today. Yesterday's increase in the repo rate is the eighth hike in the past 19 months.

The Bangladesh Bank lends money to commercial banks and financial institutions at the repo rate.

"If needed, the central bank will raise the policy and the lending rates further. We also want to stabilise the exchange rate by strengthening our initiatives," said Bangladesh Bank Chief Economist Md Habibur Rahman.

STORY ON B1

Garment workers' minimum pay stays Tk 12,500

Wage board brings down the number of grades to four

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The wage board yesterday finalised the minimum wage of Tk 12,500 despite protests but brought down the number of grades from five to four, in a development that elicited mixed reactions from Bangladesh's 40 million garment workers.

The union leaders remained defiant about their demand for a Tk 23,000 minimum wage.

"This amount is not acceptable considering the current inflation rate and the higher house rent," said Nazma Akter, president of Sammilito Garment Samik Federation.

She went on to demand Tk 23,000 as the minimum salary per month. Md. Towhidur Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Apparel Workers Federation, echoed the same.

"The wage hike is better than nothing but it is still not acceptable to us," he said, adding that the government-formed minimum wage board disregarded the recommendations of many local and international organisations.

The wage board received 174 letters from factory owners requesting a minimum wage of Tk 10,400 a month, while 25 letters came from union leaders of different federations and non-governmental organisations recommending a minimum wage in the range of Tk 23,000 and Tk 25,000.

Sirajul Islam Rony, the workers' representative at the minimum wage board, conceded to the amount proposed by the factory owners on November 7 as the garment sector is passing through a bad time.

Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said he has already directed the owners to take preparations for implementing the new wage structure from December 1.

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TRUCE IN GAZA

Hamas releases 17 more hostages

Red Cross receives Israeli, foreign nationals; US, Hamas for extending ceasefire

AGENCIES

A new group of 17 more hostages, including 14 Israelis and the first American, were freed yesterday from Gaza, on the third day of a truce after seven weeks of war.

The International Committee of the Red Cross confirmed it had successfully facilitated and transferred 17 hostages from Gaza in a post on social media platform X.

Hamas is expected to free a total of 50 hostages in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners in Israel over the course of a four-day pause brokered by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States.

Hamas took about 240 captives from southern Israel in an unprecedented October 7 attack that Israeli officials say killed around 1,200 people, most of them civilians.

In response, Israel has vowed to eliminate Hamas and unleashed an aerial bombing campaign and ground invasion of Gaza that the Hamas government says has killed nearly 15,000 people, also mostly civilians.

Hamas announced in a statement yesterday that it is seeking to extend its four-day truce with Israel should serious efforts be made to

increase the number of Palestinian detainees released from Israel.

Earlier, Biden also said he would like the pause in the fighting to be extended as long as prisoners are being released.

Israel's prison service said 39 Palestinian detainees were released yesterday under the terms of a truce agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

An earlier statement said the released hostages included three foreign nationals who had been handed over to the Red Cross in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas said it freed a hostage who holds Russian citizenship, in response to Moscow's foreign policy in support of Palestinians.

That release was in "response to the efforts of Russian President Vladimir Putin and in appreciation of the Russian position in support of the Palestinian cause", the militant group said in a statement.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday made his first visit to Gaza since the Israel-Hamas war began on October 7, telling soldiers there that Israel will continue until it wins.

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Scientists identify new dinosaur species from footprints in Brazil



REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Brazil's geological service announced a new species of dinosaur, a speedy animal that lived in the desert during the early Cretaceous period.

The new species, called *Farlowichnus rapidus*, was a small carnivorous animal about the size of a modern-day seriema bird, or about 60-90 cm (2-3 feet) tall, according to researchers. The discovery was published in scientific journal *Cretaceous Research*.

"From the large distance between the footprints found, it is possible to deduce that it was a very fast reptile that ran across the ancient dunes," the geological service said in a statement on Thursday.

The early Cretaceous period stretched from 100 to 145 million years ago.

The fossilized dinosaur "trackways," as scientists call them, were first found in the 1980s by Italian priest and palaeontologist Giuseppe Leonardi in what today is the city of Araraquara, in Sao Paulo state.

Leonardi donated one of the footprint samples, found in the so-called Botucatu formation, a group of rocks formed by an ancient dune desert, to Brazil's Museum of Earth Sciences (MCTer) in 1984.

Hope of justice for Rohingyas getting brighter

More nations join the genocide case with ICJ

PORIMOL PALMA

The fight for justice for Rohingyas is gaining momentum with more countries joining the genocide case with the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while the Myanmar military junta that committed genocide against the ethnic group now faces tougher resistance since its coup in 2021.

"This is really good for us. The Gambia will see it isn't alone anymore and the case now gets very strong," said Germany-based Nay Say Lwin, coordinator of the Free Rohingya Coalition, a global organisation.

On November 15, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Britain, and Canada filed a joint declaration of intervention in the case filed by The Gambia in 2019, two years after some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military crackdown.

The six countries cited a "common interest in the accomplishment of the high purposes" of the 1948 convention on the prevention and punishment of genocide.

Meanwhile, Maldives filed a separate declaration.

Tania von Uslar, director-general for Germany's Legal Affairs, said they want to make a contribution in combating genocide and are particularly focused on violence against women and children.

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Palestinians prisoners (wearing grey jumpers) cheer among supporters after being released from Israeli jails in exchange for hostages released by Hamas from the Gaza Strip, in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank early yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

MYANMAR CONFLICT

Armed group seizes border crossing to China

AFP, Bangkok

An ethnic minority armed group in Myanmar has seized control from the country's ruling junta of a lucrative border crossing to China, local media and a security source said yesterday.

Clashes have raged across Myanmar's northern Shan state, close to the Chinese border, after an armed alliance of three ethnic minority groups launched an offensive against the military in October.

The groups have seized dozens of military positions and a town important for trade with China, choking commerce routes for the cash-strapped junta.

An offensive by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) -- one of the three allied groups -- captured the Kyin San Kyawt border gate, a local media outlet affiliated with the group said.