

IRREGULARITIES HC orders withdrawal of 4 polls officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the authorities to immediately withdraw four polls officials of the Gaibandha-5 constituency, including a UNO, as they were allegedly involved in irregularities during a by-polls held on October 12, 2022.

The officials are Isahaq Ali, upazila nirbahi officer of Shaghata, who was an assistant returning officer of the by-polls; Md Sadequzzaman, Shaghata upazila agriculture officer; Md Ahsan Habib, secondary education officer of the upazila; and Belal Hossain, Phulchhari upazila primary education officer.

The Election Commission and the deputy commissioner of Gaibandha have been asked to comply with the order.

The bench of Justice Md Iqbal Kabir Lytton and Justice SM Maniruzzaman passed the order after Farjana Rabbi Bubli, an independent for Gaibandha-5 (Saghata-Phulchhari), filed a writ petition seeking necessary directives.

The four were involved in irregularities in the Gaibandha-5 by-polls, ABM Altaf Hossain, the petitioner's lawyer, told The Daily Star.

They supported Awami League nominee Mahmudul Hasan Ripan in that by-polls and they are doing the same now, he said, citing the petition.

Bubli submitted an application to the EC on January 1 to withdraw the four officials from all process for holding the January 7 election, but the EC did not take any action, Altaf said.

Yesterday, the HC also issued a rule asking the government and the EC to explain in four weeks why their inaction to take appropriate measures pursuant to the application should not be declared illegal, the lawyer added.

The EC stopped the by-election saying that the situation went "out of control" due to widespread electoral irregularities.



Police detain a BNP activist in front of the party office at Barishal city's Ashwini Kumar Hall Chatter yesterday. Law enforcers foiled the BNP's leaflet distribution programme there and picked up seven party activists. The programme is a part of the party's "non-cooperation movement" to mobilise support for the boycott of the January 7 polls. Story on page 5.

PHOTO: STAR

HINDENBURG CASE Adani wins court relief on scrutiny

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday said the Adani Group does not need to face more investigations beyond the current scrutiny of the market regulator, a major relief for the conglomerate hit hard by a US short-seller's allegations of wrongdoing.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has been probing the Adani group, led by billionaire Gautam Adani, after Hindenburg Research in January last year alleged improper use of tax havens and stock manipulation by the group. The Adani Group denied those

allegations, but Hindenburg's report still chopped \$150 billion off its stock market value. Though some investor confidence returned in recent months as Adani won the backing of bankers and investors, the Hindenburg saga and the regulatory scrutiny have weighed on the group's business dealings and reputation.

The Supreme Court, which was ruling on cases brought by public interest litigants seeking a special investigation team to probe the matter, said "the facts of this case do not warrant" such a change, even though the court had the powers to transfer the investigation.

Imran charged with contempt of election commission

REUTERS, Karachi

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan was charged with contempt of the election commission yesterday, his lawyer Naeem said, a move related to allegations he made derogatory remarks about the chief election commissioner.

The 71-year-old former cricket star has been embroiled in political and legal battles since he was ousted as prime minister in April 2022. He has not been seen in public since he was jailed for three years in August for unlawfully selling state gifts while in office from 2018 to 2022.

"The Election Commission indicted Imran Khan in the absence of lawyers," Khan's lawyer Haider Panjutha wrote on social media platform X.



Taiwan detects four Chinese balloons ahead of election

AFP, Taipei

Four Chinese balloons were detected moving across the median line separating Taiwan from China, with three flying directly above the island, Taipei's defence ministry said yesterday.

A graphic released by the ministry showed three balloons headed northeast above Taiwan after appearing "southwest of Ching-Chuan-Kang", home to a military airbase in the western city of Taichung.

The lowest altitude measured for one of them was 12,000 feet (3,658 metres).

Tuesday's balloon incidents came less than two weeks before the self-ruled island will hold a pivotal election and was the second consecutive day such objects were detected above Taiwan.

The ministry began reporting them for the first time in December, publicly identifying six incidents.

It said yesterday it was "closely monitoring and will take appropriate measures" on the balloons, depending on the "nature, altitude and possible hazards of the targets".

US closely following case against Prof Yunus

FROM PAGE 1

"My full solidarity with my dear friend, Nobel laureate and social justice champion Prof Muhammad Yunus. The baseless conviction handed against him in #Bangladesh for alleged labour violations is yet another example of the government's vendetta against its critics," she said in X (formerly Twitter) yesterday.

"The unjust conviction must be immediately reversed."

Irene Khan, a UN special rapporteur who was at the court on Monday, told AFP that the conviction was "a travesty of justice".

"A social activist and Nobel laureate who brought honour and pride to the country is being persecuted on frivolous grounds," she said.

Yunus and three other top officials of Grameen Telecom were sentenced to six months' imprisonment in a labour law violation case.

The four have denied the charges and were granted bail pending appeals.

A parliament of 'all stripes' on AL's mind

FROM PAGE 1

There are no AL nominees in those constituencies.

In Bogura-4, ex-BNP leader Ziaul Haque Mollah seems to have the support of AL and Trinamool BNP men even though Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal leader and current MP Rezaul Karim Tansen has the

boat symbol.

In Bogura-1, former BNP leader Mohammad Shokrana has the AL grassroots support, not the AL nominee and current MP Shahadara Mannan.

JP Senior Co-Chairman Anisul Islam Mahmud is competing for Chattogram-5. He has the local AL

support even though two AL leaders are running as independents. The party earlier withdrew its candidate to help Anisul bag an easy win.

Similarly, JP leader Masud Uddin Chowdhury, the incumbent MP of Feni-3, has the AL support, not the so-called AL independent Haji Rahimullah.

Bacchu at large as arrest warrant ever elusive

FROM PAGE 1

The court is scheduled to hold the hearing of the cases from January 24 to 27.

"We are expecting the court will take cognisance of the charges and issue arrest warrants against them," he added.

About Tk 4,500 crore was siphoned out of the state-owned BASIC Bank between 2009 and 2013 when Bacchu chaired its board, according to a Bangladesh Bank investigation.

On July 14, 2014, the central bank forwarded the investigation report to the ACC with details on how the amount was embezzled from the bank through shell companies and dubious accounts.

Between September and November 2015, the ACC filed 59

cases implicating 146 persons over the embezzlement, from which the bank is yet to recover.

Bacchu, who was a member of parliament from Bagerhat-1 constituency with Jatiya Party's nomination in the 1986 general election, was not among the 146.

His name was included when the ACC submitted charge sheets in 58 cases with the trial court this year.

Between August and October, Bacchu sought anticipatory bail in all the cases. He maintains that he is innocent and was implicated without any material evidence.

On October 23, Judge Asaduzzaman of the court found flaws in the investigations and summoned the five investigation officers to appear before it for their

explanations between November 19 and 26.

But the cases were not heard further as the judge took a sick leave for a few days before the court went for a month-long annual vacation on December 1.

None of Bacchu's petitions with the High Court for anticipatory bail has been moved before the court yet.

AM Masum, principal counsel for Bacchu, told The Daily Star on November 17 that his client is not communicating with him about moving the bail petitions.

Syed Mahsib Hossain, a filing lawyer for Bacchu, said his client has instructed not to move the bail petitions at this moment as he is indisposed to appear before the court.

Vote as you will but don't cause trouble

FROM PAGE 1

will be a milestone in the country's democratic history.

Through this election, the path of the country's economic advancement would widen further, she added.

Hasina said people have to vote peacefully for their favourite candidates. "Here, no individual can resist another. I don't want any confrontation."

"So, please vote as you like. But I don't want any kind of disturbance," she said.

The AL chief said no untoward incident should occur and everyone should show utmost patience.

Talking about the candidates, Hasina said although the AL has fielded its candidates, it has also allowed the party's other aspirants to run.

Later, the premier talked to a cross section of people from the five districts and the one upazila. She

also witnessed colourful cultural programmes organised at the rally venues.

The AL president kicked off her party's campaign from Sylhet-1 after

Hasina said although the Awami League has fielded its candidates, it has also allowed the party's other aspirants to run.

offering prayers at the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Paran (RA) on December 20.

She addressed an election rally at the Government Rajendra College ground in Faridpur on Tuesday and introduced the AL nominees in

Faridpur, Rajbari and Magura to the audience. She sought votes for them.

On January 1, Hasina addressed another campaign rally at the Kalabagan Krira Chakra ground in Dhaka.

The premier on December 30 addressed rallies in Tungipara and Kotalipara, her electoral constituency. On her way back to Dhaka, she spoke at another rally at Kalkini of Madaripur.

On December 28, the AL chief virtually addressed six election rallies in Jamalpur, Sherpur, Kishoreganj, Narsingdi, Chandpur and Bandarban from the party's Tejgaon office in Dhaka.

She visited Rangpur on December 26 and addressed election rallies in Taraganj, Mithapukur and Pirganj upazilas.

AL sources said Hasina is scheduled to conclude her election campaign through a rally in Narayanganj today.

Hasina to address the nation today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to address the nation about her party's election manifesto at 7:00pm today, said a press release issued by AL Office Secretary Biplab Barua yesterday.

Jubo Dal leader dies in Bagerhat jail

UNB, Bagerhat

A Jubo Dal leader who reportedly fell sick in Bagerhat district jail died on Tuesday at a hospital in the district.

Kamal Hossain Mizan, 43, was a member of Khulna metropolitan unit Jubo Dal, said M A Salam, former president of Bagerhat district BNP.

He was arrested on November 11, last year, in a sabotage case, according to jail sources.

Shankar Kumar Majumder, superintendent of Bagerhat district jail, said Kamal fell sick in the jail around 10:30am yesterday. Following primary treatment at the jail, he was rushed to Bagerhat District Hospital where he died around 11:15 pm.

TRAIN DERAILMENT IN CTG

Probe body formed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Bangladesh Railway (BR) yesterday formed a four-member committee to investigate the cause of the derailment of a coach of a passenger train at Chattogram's Sitakunda.

The early morning derailment of Dhaka bound Chattala Express at Shuklalhat area near the Sitakunda suspended rail communication from the port city to different districts for nearly 4 hours.

Reza Kibria quits Gono Odhikar Parishad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gono Odhikar Parishad convener Reza Kibria has stepped down from the party post last night.

"I have resigned from the post of convener of Gono Odhikar Parishad and submitted my resignation letter to the central executive council," he said in a statement.

"I have also resigned from the party membership and handed over the responsibility of acting convener to party co-convener Colonel (Retd) Mia Masujjaman," Reza Kibria added.

Party's acting member secretary Faruk Hasan also confirmed the development.

Covid cases creep up

FROM PAGE 1

As the infection rate has been rising globally, the World Health Organization, in a recent publication, said the overall risk posed by the variant was assessed to be "low", while the existing vaccines are also enough to offer protection against it.

WHO has already named the J.N.1 as a "variant of interest" or "variant to watch for", as it is spreading fast.

So far, no case of the J.N.1 variant has been reported yet in Bangladesh. But health experts fear that it may come or has already come here as it was found in India.

Earlier on December 20, the Covid-19 infection rate was at 0.66 percent. However, by yesterday, it shot up to 3.98.

Only five people were record with the infection from the beginning of December till the 20th - when five new cases were found.

By January 3, the number of infected people increased to 16.

ABM Abdullah, emeritus professor at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said that those who have been vaccinated will be protected from this new J.N.1 strain, but advised maintaining hygiene rules.

"People complied with hygiene rules, like wearing masks, washing hands, maintaining social distance, during the lockdown. But they aren't interested in those anymore as they aren't scared of the virus anymore."

Professor Tahmina Shirin, director of IEDCR, said, "We are cautious about the new variant... We've taken necessary measures in this regard and increased surveillance at the country's entry points. But people are not following the hygiene rules."

Meanwhile, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 has suggested that the authorities concerned to take necessary initiatives, including issuing instructions to wear masks.

In a statement, signed by its Chairman Professor Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, published early yesterday, it also suggested keeping testing and treatment facilities ready for emergencies.

Besides, the committee also recommended screening travelers coming from abroad.

The NTAC also advised high-risk individuals, such as those with other health issues, to take the fourth dose of the Covid vaccines.

Polls code breach sees twofold rise

FROM PAGE 1

They said the highest 131 violations were reported in Dhaka region followed by Rajshahi and Cumilla regions with 103 and 81 incidents respectively.

Besides, 64 incidents took place in Mymensingh region, 59 in Khulna, 40 in Rangpur, 38 in Chattogram, 28 in Barishal, 24 in Faridpur, and 21 in Sylhet, according to the EC data.

Talking about the violation, Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman said, "Several incidents of violations [of the code of conduct] have been reported this time, but the number is less than those of the previous polls."

In many cases, clashes are taking place over previous enmities, he said.

The electoral enquiry committees were formed for each of the 300 constituencies in line with the Representation of the People Order, 1972. The law stipulates that after conducting an enquiry, the committee shall inform the EC about its findings and may make recommendations.

The commission may issue necessary orders or instructions to the person or registered political party concerned to implement the recommendation.

The EC may fine the person or the registered political party concerned Tk 20,000 to Tk 1 lakh and also cancel the candidature of an aspirant.

In line with the recommendation from an enquiry committee, the EC scrapped the candidacy of independent Md Habibur Rahman Paban (Lakshimpur-1), also a presidium member of Jubo League, for violating the code of conduct.

The commission also fined the AL aspirant for Cumilla-6, AKM Bahauddin Bahar, Tk 1 lakh, and Barguna-1 AL nominee Dharendra Debnath Shambhu Tk 50,000 for breaching the code of conduct.

The EC decided to sue AL's picks Mostafizur Rahman (Chattogram-16) and Abdul Hyece (Jhenaidah-1) for violating the electoral rules.

The campaign for the January 7 polls, which began on December 18, will end at 8:00am tomorrow.