



Workers unloading coal from a cargo in Chat Ghat of Khulna's Rupsha yesterday. Shipped in from Indonesia, the fuel for furnace are supplied to brick kilns. Each labourer unloads 180-200 such buckets daily, earning TK 4 for each.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## CUSTODIAL DEATH OF SULTANA JASMINE HC rule on Rab action remains unresolved

ASHUTOSH SARKAR



Sultana Jasmine, 41, a land office employee in Naogaon, was picked up and detained by Rapid Action Battalion on March 22 last year. She died in Rab custody at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital two days later.

Rab officers told doctors Jasmine had suffered a fall. Jasmine did not have any cases against her at the time of detention. She was sued under the Digital Security Act a day after being picked up for allegedly "siphoning off money from job seekers using a Facebook account".

"She died due to torture in Rab custody. She had an injury mark on her head. Before detention, she was perfectly healthy," her son Shahed Hossain Saikat, a student of Chittagong University, had said.

On April 5 last year, the High Court bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Muhammad Mahbub Ul Islam issued a rule asking the authorities to explain why Jasmine's detention without a case should not be declared illegal and unconstitutional.

Nine months later, the rule remains unresolved due to reconstitution of the hearing jurisdiction of the HC bench, and no further action has been taken by the court.

The court at the time also asked the government to show causes as to why it should not be directed to take action against the Rab members who had detained her. The bench also directed the cabinet secretary to form a high-powered committee, including the chief judicial magistrate of Naogaon and a judicial officer nominated by the district judge, to investigate the incident.

Jasmine's "murder" in Naogaon tarnished the image of the country, Rab and the government, Rab director general M Khurshid Hossain reportedly told the parliamentary standing committee on the home ministry on April 5 last year.

"The [local] camp was involved in it. The battalion or the headquarters knew nothing," he said.

**THE TIMELINE AFTER APRIL 5**  
The government's probe body submitted its report on August 17 last year to the HC.

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On October 15 last year, the HC bench termed the probe committee's report vague and unsatisfactory as it failed to give any description of her arrest or any specific findings. It also set November 29 last year for the rule hearing.

However, as jurisdiction of the bench concerned has been reconstituted by the chief justice as a routine work, the HC is yet to hold hearing on the rule and deliver its verdict on the issue, said Deputy Attorney General Samarendranath Biswas.

It is uncertain when the HC will hold a hearing on the rule and deliver its judgement, as neither the attorney general's office nor the petitioner took any extensive move for quick disposal of the matter.

**WHAT CAN HAPPEN NOW**  
If the petition and the rule are presented, another HC bench with the appropriate jurisdiction can hear and resolve the matter, said Samarendranath.

However, he said he has not yet received any instruction from the authorities concerned.

Manoj Kumar Bhowmick, the petitioner, said if the bench led by Justice Farah Mahbub is not granted jurisdiction to hear the matter again, he plans to file the petition before another HC bench in a few days.

## Will strengthen ties with east and west Says Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud

AGENCIES

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said he would work to further strengthen Bangladesh's relations with both eastern and western countries.



"The prime minister entrusted me with the responsibility of foreign ministry. We will move the country forward and brighten the country's image, and improve relations with the east and the west," he said.

He made the remarks after laying wreaths at the portrait of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhanmondi 32 along with the newly formed cabinet members.

He also said all the ambassadors and high commissioners in Dhaka, including those from the US, UK and the European Union (EU) congratulated the newly elected government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"Look, yesterday [Thursday] at the swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected government's cabinet at Bangabhaban,

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Veteran election observers, Jasmine Tully and Abdul Mobarak, both former civil servants with extensive experience in the Election Commission, share their insights on the recently concluded 12th parliamentary election in interviews with The Daily Star's Baharam Khan. Jasmine is a former additional secretary to the EC. She joined civil service in 1984 and retired in 2016. Mobarak retired from the civil service as a secretary in 2005. He served as an EC from 2012 to 2017.

## Voter turnout can't be over 25pc

Says former EC additional secretary Jasmine Tully

The Daily Star (DS): How do you view the 12th parliamentary election?

**Jasmine Tully:** This year's election took place within one party, with everything pre-organised and presented to the voters. Voters had no real choice in the election.

**DS:** What's your observation about election day?

**Jasmine:** The situation at the polling stations from morning till 2:00pm seemed consistent with the information provided every two hours by the Election Commission. According to the data, some places reported an eight percent turnout, others



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However, the information (on voter turnout) provided at the end of the election was a bit surprising. Voters' presence required to reach a 40 percent turnout was not evident at the polling centers.

Through the eyes of the media, we have observed the whole election day. After 2:00pm, no pictures suggested a significant voters' presence that can result in an increase in the percentage (of voter turnout). On the contrary, polling stations appeared even emptier in the afternoon.

**DS:** How acceptable is this election given the participation of 28 parties?

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## It was the best election ever

Says former election commissioner Abdul Mobarak

The Daily Star (DS): What's your opinion of the 12th parliamentary election?

**Abdul Mobarak:** This election is the best election I have ever seen. The first point I would like to mention is that ballot papers were sent on the morning of election day to prevent ballot stuffing the night before.

**DS:** The main opposition didn't even participate, was there a need for ballot stuffing?

**Mobarak:** Vote rigging and ballot stuffing can occur even without the participation of the main opposition party. Many



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**DS:** Do you mean to say ballot stuffing was a common practice in past elections?

**Mobarak:** Yes, ballot boxes had been stuffed in many places in past elections. They say, "might is right". Candidates have often used brute muscle power for ballot stuffing.

**DS:** Is this a fact for the previous election (11th parliamentary election) as well?

**Mobarak:** We can't blindly deny the incidences of unfairness in the previous election. I can't just deny the facts because I hold

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## 'One-party fascism' starts with formation of new AL govt Alleges Rizvi

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday termed the newly formed Awami League government the darkest regime in the country's history.

This government exhibits elements of "one-party fascism", said Rizvi.

"The journey of the darkest regime in Bangladesh's political history started yesterday [Thursday] after the swearing-in of dummy MPs based on dummy results of a dummy election held with dummy candidates, dummy voters, dummy polling agents, and dummy observers," he said.

The BNP leader made the remarks while speaking at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltn central office, which was his first in-person press briefing since October 28, as the central office reopened on Thursday.

He said the people of the country and the democratic world have rejected the "fascist" regime of Sheikh Hasina by boycotting the dummy election held on January 7.

"They also turned down the results, the oaths, the parliament, and the government," he added.

Hasina formed the government at an unprecedented speed by hastily issuing the gazette and swearing immediately after the fake election and before the end of the term of the 11th parliament, Rizvi said.

The BNP leader said the country's people have

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A car drives amid shoppers inside the capital's New Market yesterday afternoon. Following a petition, the High Court imposed restrictions on all kinds of vehicle inside the market in 2018. However, the signboard itself is being used for advertising while authorities concerned turn a blind eye to the menace.

## ROHINGYA REPATRIATION Dhaka seeks proactive role of ASEAN

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Ambassador to Myanmar Md Monwar Hossain has expressed his hope that the ASEAN Chair will continue to play a further positive role to facilitate repatriation of more than 1 million displaced Rohingyas to their homeland.

The Rohingyas fled from Rakhine state to Bangladesh in 2017 to escape a Myanmar crackdown on them.

Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chairman Alounkeo Kitikhoun met with Ambassador Monwar Hossain at the Bangladesh Embassy in Yangon yesterday and discussed the areas of cooperation.

Kitikhoun was appointed as special envoy to Myanmar as Lao PDR assumes Chairmanship of ASEAN from January 1.

This is the first visit

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