Lalon Mela

over threats

from a religious group".

event from Friday evening.

said the organisers.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

The annual Lalon Mela could not

be held in Narayanganj this year as

the district authorities denied the

organisers permission amid "threats

under Kashipur Union Parishad was

scheduled to organise the two-day

Devotees and Baul singers from

across the country came to join the

Mahati Sadhusanga and Lalon Mela, a

gathering of Bauls and festival to pay

tribute to mystic poet Fakir Lalon Shah.

local authorities imposed restrictions,

ashram and academy, said, "All

arrangements had been made, but

the administration did not permit

the event, citing threats from some

members of the Muslim community.

"Even when we promised to

But instead of providing security,

Fakir Shah Jalal, founder of the

Muktidham Ashram and Lalon Academy in Madhya Narsingpur

cancelled

New CEC, election commissioners to be sworn in today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newly appointed Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin and four other election commissioners will take oath at the Supreme Court today.

Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed will administer the swearing-in ceremony at the Judges' Lounge, Supreme Court Registrar General Aziz Ahmed Bhuiyan told The

President Mohammed Shahabuddin appointed former secretary Nasir as the new CEC and four others as election commissioners under article 118 (1) of the constitution.

The four new election commissioners are former additional secretary Md Anwarul Islam Sarker, former district and sessions judge Abdur Rahmanel Masud, former joint secretary Begum Tahmida Ahmad and Brig Gen (retd) Abul Fazal Md Sanaullah.

The Election Commission (EC) had been vacant since September 5 when members of the previous commission, led by Kazi Habibul Awal, resigned. The EC had never been vacant for this long since it was founded in 1972.

Awal and the other commissioners were about halfway through their five-year tenure.

On October 29, the government formed a six-member search committee led by Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division to come up with the names of two individuals for each EC membership.

The interim government, formed after the ouster of the previous Awami League regime in August, has constituted six commissions to bring reforms to the election system and other fields.



The Dhaka South City Corporation is knocking down a secondary transfer station, a waste storage facility, to expand the Sadarghat-Gabtoli Beribandh Road into eight lanes. The photo was taken in the capital's Hazaribagh yesterday.

hold the event indoors without loudspeakers, we were denied permission," he said.

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Election delay

FROM PAGE 1

The longer the delay in holding the election, the greater the problems will be in public health, education, farming, business, judicial system and administration — problems that began during the autocratic rule," he said.

Speaking from London, Tarique highlighted the importance of a free and fair election held without any bias towards a particular group.

"Why are the BNP and other parties repeatedly talking about elections? Because we believe that today's interim government can hold a fair and impartial election. Only through such an election can the true representatives of the people be elected," he said.

Elected representatives can play a vital role in parliament and initiate steps for the country's welfare, he

"The interim government talks about reforms, but all reforms can only be implemented if true representatives are elected through polls.

To change the fate of the nation, genuine public representatives are needed, and for that, elections are

essential." Speaking at the event, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir expressed optimism about the party's leadership and future

"We are waiting every moment for our leader is with us, we believe no obstacle will stand in our way. We

will overcome everything and be victorious," he said. Calling on the youth to play a vital role in shaping the nation's future, Fakhrul said only a representative

parliament can confront conspiracies and guide the country forward. "Elections are necessary because conspiracies and plots are being hatched in all directions now. Only the people can confront these conspiracies," he said.

Picnic trip

FROM PAGE 1

Telihati union around 11:00am.

Locals said double-deckers do not usually ply that particular road. Almost all the vehicles passed the

area safely, but one of the buses came into contact with a high-voltage overhead power line.

The entire body of bus was electrocuted.

The three students attempted to jump off the bus but were electrocuted after they came in contact with the vehicle's body, said Shamim Ahmed, a local who witnessed the incident.

The three died on the spot, while the 15 injured were rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital and are in critical condition, said Joynal Abedin Mondal, officer-in-charge of Sreepur Model Police Station.

Contacted, Akmal Hossain, general manager of Mymensingh Palli Bidyut Samity-2, said the cable was set up along the road and was around 15 feet

"It [the cable] has been there for around 20 years ... Double-decker buses aren't supposed to ply the road. We're investigating the incident to know how the bus came contact with

Khandaker Mahmudul, deputy general manager of Mymensingh Palli Biddyut Samity, said the overhead cable generates 11,000 volts of electricity.

"The bus might have come into contact with the cable when it was at the edge of the road to make way for another vehicle coming from the opposite direction," he said.

Gazipur Deputy Commission Nafisa Arefin said the district administration has formed a fourmember probe body, headed by its additional district magistrate, to investigate the accident.

BB's leniency to blame for ailing banking sector FROM PAGE 1 Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central bank itself" Taylob told The Daily Star that the "Since the central

conglomerate dominated the board of the Shariah-based lender too.

S Alam also took Tk 10,449.45 crore from Janata, which was 451 percent of the state lender's paid-up

Three state-run banks -- Janata, Agrani and Rupali -- had approved Tk 10,579 crore in loans for a power plant of Orion Group far exceeding their limits thanks to policy relaxation by

The three lenders were able to approve such a big amount for Orion as the central bank had in November 2022 relaxed section 26-kha (1) of the Bank Company Act-1991 that states loans given by a bank to a single borrower shall not exceed 25 percent of the bank's capital.

The BB relaxed the rule for coalbased power companies for the next five years. It gave the no-objection certificates for the Orion power plant

However, the loans were later cancelled following an application by the business group.

Orion secured approval for the syndicated loan based on the coal project's financial credibility and without any undue influence, said Salman Obaidul Karim, its managing

Bashundhara Group, one of the our leader [Tarique] to join us. Once country's largest conglomerates, availed Tk 2,726 crore as loans in 2022 from five state-run banks Sonali, Rupali, Janata, Agrani and Bangladesh Development Bank under special consideration from BB for its gold refinery project.

All of them except Bangladesh Development Bank exceeded the single borrower exposure limit.

The scam-hit Janata bank, which is in deep trouble, approved the highest Tk 883 crore for the project.

Besides, Bashir said he had to pay

a bribe of Tk 20 crore to the road

authorities for digging up the road to

an opportunity for you [the business

leaders]. Come to us with business

proposals and solutions and not just

problems -- we will sort those out

about 200 factories have shut their

operations and another 300 factories

are on the way to shutting shop within

the next year, said BCI President

in Bangladesh on the basis of the

availability of local gas and fast-

those,

else is expensive here -- the land,

infrastructure, development, bank

financing cost and speed money. But

now, we have learned that we don't

have gas or the prices are very high

as well. An uncertain situation has

Chowdhury went on to blame

the foreign currency devaluation,

liquidity crisis in the banking sector,

lower imports of liquified natural gas,

restrictions on the opening of letters of

credit and a lack of good governance in

the National Board of Revenue for the

about 1,040 million cubic feet a day

(mmcfd) while they are getting around

500 mmcfd, said Ijaz Hossain, former

dean of engineering at Bangladesh

University of Engineering and

Technology (BUET), in his keynote

The industries' demand for gas is

everything

The industries were established

Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury.

In the first nine months of the year,

"That will not happen now. It's

lay the 40km gas pipeline.

unitedly," he added.

learning labour.

"Except

emerged."

situation.

infrastructure of the gold refinery project is ready now and they are waiting for the machinery to arrive.

Banks have given loans to the project after proper assessment and

In some cases, the banking regulator allowed the state-run lenders to exceed the exposure limit due to political pressure or pressure from influential quarters, said BB officials.

BB spokesperson However, Husne Ara Shikha told The Daily Star recently that the waiver from the single borrower exposure limit was given by the central bank to some clients for special purpose and special interest.

This type of waiver is given in case of many large projects," she added.

Deshbandhu Group recently applied to the BB to relax the single borrower exposure limit to import essential commodities ahead of Ramadan.

The state-run banks are hostage to a few clients due to the frequent violation of exposure limit, industry insiders said.

A lender's risk increases when a single customer gets a large portion of the loans, sometimes even more than the client's capital, they added.

As of June of last year, Janata had the highest number of large loan borrowers (67) and the highest proportion of large borrowers that have exceeded the single borrower exposure limit of 25 percent of capital, central bank documents showed.

Sonali had 21 large borrowers and 13 exceeded the single-borrower exposure limit.

Agrani had 55 large borrowers and 20 of their exposure was over the limit.

As of June 30 last year, Rupali had 35 large borrowers and the exposure In this case, Bashundhara Group media adviser Mohammad Abu for a single borrower. of 10 of them was above the ceiling set

"It is very alarming that energy

Due to the expansion of the power

Because of high energy prices

grid, energy consumption in the

domestic sector has increased, which

implies the industrial sector has

and supply disruption, the cost of

production is getting higher, thus

triggering inflation, causing industries

consumption has not increased in the

Doing business gets harder for gas

last two years."

shrunk, he said.

allowed the banks to cross the single borrower exposure limit, there was no need to fix the limit," said Mustafa K Mujeri, former chief economist at the

Such waivers for certain clients are not legal.

The current ailing situation of the banking sector is the reflection of such waivers from rules and regulations, said Mujeri, also the executive director at the Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development.

"Laws and rules are made to be obeyed but what is the logic of having laws and policies when they are not obeyed? The central bank cannot deny the responsibility for the fragile situation of most of the banks," he

At the end of September, the six state-run commercial banks -- Agrani, Janata, Rupali, Sonali, Bangladesh Development Bank and BASIC Bank

together had defaulted loans amounting to Tk 126,111.5 crore, which is 40.35 percent of their disbursed

Of the amount, Janata accounted for Tk 60,489 crore, Agrani Tk 26,891 crore, Sonali Tk 16,623 crore and Rupali Tk 12,738 crore.

The central bank should never allow the exposure limit to be exceeded as it is not meant for good governance, said Anis A Khan, former chairman of the Association of Bankers Bangladesh

Some large borrowers who are getting loans beyond their capacity now are not able to serve the interest

payment of the loans. The single borrower exposure limit can only be relaxed for importing commodities Ramadan and for the power sector because power is very important for the country, said Khan, also a former MD of Mutual Trust Bank.

lethal weapon

FROM PAGE 1

Those rifles have become outdated, and police have periodically modernised their arsenal, introducing advanced lethal weapons like 7.62mm sniper firearms, LMG (Light Machine Gun) and SMG (Submachine Gun) along with Chinese rifles.

In October 2014, a meeting involving various stakeholders, including representatives the home ministry and Police Headquarters, was held to discuss the procurement of lethal firearms including 7.62mm rifles.

Senior officials then justified the procurement saying such weapons were necessary combating criminals equipped with sophisticated firearms, especially in the diverse geographical landscapes of Bangladesh's hilly and plain regions and dreaded militants.

However, during the recent protests, police and other forces used these military-grade weapons widely against unarmed demonstrators.

"Police actions deviated from the existing domestic laws, which themselves fall short of UN standards," said a committee member, criticising the continued reliance on colonialera legislation designed to suppress

The UN guidelines on the use of force by law enforcement state that public assemblies may be deemed unlawful under domestic laws for various reasons, such as failing to meet procedural requirements or violating restrictions.

However, many such reasons, like procedural noncompliance, do not render an assembly unlawful under international human rights law. "...In any case, the mere fact that an

assembly is considered unlawful under domestic legislation does not justify the use of force by law enforcement officials," reads the guidelines.

committee recommend what extent of force can be used when and in what situation.

Before using any force to disperse unlawful assembly, police have to take into consideration the reasons for the assembly and take peaceful means to settle their problems, the official said.

PROCUREMENT AND USE OF ADVANCED WEAPONRY

A number of police officers said the force has had SMG and LMG for many vears and those assault rifles were to guard police stations in war-like

However, the use of weapons in crowd control began on a limited scale in 2012 and 2013 and it continued

rule as people became hostile to the government and police for issues like holding farcical elections and taking hardline on political opponents, they

A meeting in October 2014, including representatives the home ministry and Police Headquarters, decided to procure lethal firearms including 7.62mm

The decision to acquire the weapons was influenced by the events surrounding a Hefajat-e-Islam rally at Shapla Chattar on May 5, 2013 and protests by Jamaat-Shibir men against the trial of war criminals, an official who was in the meeting told The Daily Star recently.

The government also considered their potential use to suppress

The first batch of weapons arrived in 2015 from Italy.

The weapons were intended for specialised units to tackle special situations but not for use against unarmed people, said a retired additional inspector general of police who attended the home ministry

"Such actions are unacceptable and the responsibility lies with those who misuse their authority," he added.

The issue of using lethal weapons indiscriminately came to the fore after the fall of the AL government on August 5 when former Home Affairs Adviser M Sakhawat Hossain on several occasions questioned how such "military grade" weapons were given to police.

Ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy made several Facebook posts claiming that Bangladesh police did not use 7.62mm rifles and claimed outsiders opened fire with 7.62 firearms on the students.

But, purchase documents on the Bangladesh Police's website show police have long been using 7.62 sniper rifles and 7.62mm bullets. The latest such move was made in

March when the Police Headquarters floated a tender inviting bids for buying 50 7.62mm sniper rifles.

Earlier in March 2023, the Police Headquarters purchased 30 7.62 sniper rifles. Officials said the weapons were purchased keeping the January 2024 general elections in mind.

Besides, police procured a large consignment of 15,000 pieces of 7.62mm semiautomatic rifles in September 2019 and August 2018, according to the website of Bangladesh Public

US says committed to 'diplomatic resolution' in Lebanon

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stressed that the United States was dedicated to a diplomatic resolution in Lebanon and urged Israel to improve "dire" conditions in Gaza, in a call

Austin "reiterated US commitment to a diplomatic resolution in Lebanon that allows Israeli and Lebanese civilians to return safely to their homes on both sides of the border" in his call with Israel Katz, according to a

Austin also "urged the Government of Israel to continue to take steps to improve the dire humanitarian the US commitment to securing the release of all hostages, including US Lebanon said Saturday that an

that brought down a residential building and jolted residents across the city killed at least 11 people. Israel stepped up its campaign

against the Hezbollah militant group Lebanon's health ministry says at

least 3,645 people have been killed since October 2023, when Hezbollah began trading fire with Israel in solidarity with its Palestinian ally



to become defaulters and to go out of

business, Hossain added. There are power cuts four to five times a day, said Md Shamsuzzaman, vice-president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters

"There are huge illegal connections in industrial areas, but the distribution companies failed to monitor those," he

The government once encouraged building factories but now those are being shut down, said Sk Masadul Alam Masud of the Bangladesh Steel

Manufacturers Association.

Syed Nasim Manzur, president of the Leather Goods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh, said they have not been able to run a gas generator in the Savar tannery estate.

"The system loss in the gas sector is nothing but theft. There should be exemplary punishment for those who are involved in theft," he said. It was a common practice to get the

public works department officials to

Khan, adviser to the ministry of power, energy and mineral resources. "As a result, the money was invested in unnecessary projects. It's a waste of money," he said, adding that that will not happen during the tenure of the

interim government. Khan said they have taken measures to reduce the energy cost, which includes onshore-offshore drilling

programmes to increase the supply. The gas supply will remain the same until February next year and will increase from March, said Petrobangla Chairman Zanendra Nath Sarker.

"It was imposed on me by the previous government's higher-ups to increase gas supply to the power sector instead of industries. But the industrial sector pays the highest price to us. That will not happen in the coming days."

He demanded speedy approval of development project proposals for the gas sector from the planning division to increase the gas supply from local gas fields.

should be supplied proportionately to all the sectors, said Rezaul Karim, chairman of the Bangladesh Power Development Board.

have a relationship with the ministers or to bribe officials, said Fouzul Kabir

situations or any other emergency.

to increase during Awami League's Procurement Authority.



AFP, Washington

Saturday with his Israeli counterpart.

Pentagon spokesperson.

conditions in Gaza and emphasized Hamas.

Israeli air strike in the heart of Beirut

in late September, targeting its strongholds in Lebanon.