

# 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 Daily Star.

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 Rahmani Masud, former joint secretary Begum Tahmina Ahmad and Brig Gen (retd) Abul Fazal Md Sanaulah.

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.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

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

## 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 added.

“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 goals.

“We are waiting every moment for our leader [Tarique] to join us. Once 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

Tellihat 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 off the ground.

“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 the cable.”

Khandaker Mahmudul, deputy general manager of Mymensingh Palli Biddiyut 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 four-member probe body, headed by its additional district magistrate, to investigate the accident.

## BB’s leniency to blame for ailing banking sector

FROM PAGE 1

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 capital.

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 BB.

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 coal-based power companies for the next five years. It gave the no-objection certificates for the Orion power plant loans.

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 director.

Bashundhara Group, one of the 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.

In this case, Bashundhara Group media adviser Mohammad Abu

Tayeb told The Daily Star that the 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 inspection.

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.

However, BB spokesperson 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 of 10 of them was above the ceiling set for a single borrower.

“Since the central bank itself 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 BB.

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 added.

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 loans.

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 (ABB).

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 essential commodities amid Ramadan and for the power sector because power is very important for the country, said Khan, also a former MD of Mutual Trust Bank.

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

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

## Police seek to stop use of 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 from the home ministry and Police Headquarters, decided to procure lethal firearms including 7.62mm rifles.

Senior officials then justified the procurement saying such weapons were necessary for 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 colonial-era legislation designed to suppress dissent.

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.

The committee will also 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 years and those assault rifles were to guard police stations in war-like situations or any other emergency.

However, the use of weapons in crowd control began on a limited scale in 2012 and 2013 and it continued to increase during Awami League’s

## Lalon Mela cancelled over threats

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 from a religious group”.

Muktidham Ashram and Lalon Academy in Madhya Narsingpur under Kashipur Union Parishad was scheduled to organise the two-day event from Friday evening.

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.

But instead of providing security, local authorities imposed restrictions, said the organisers.

Fakir Shah Jalal, founder of the 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 hold the event indoors without loudspeakers, we were denied permission,” he said.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6