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## Holding local govt elections first will delay nat'l polls

CEC fears some proposed reforms may curtail EC's independence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If local government elections are held before the national polls, it would not be possible to meet the deadline set by the chief adviser for the parliamentary elections, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said yesterday.

"At least one year will be needed to hold phase-wise local government polls," he said while addressing an event organised by the Reporters Forum for Election and Democracy at the EC office.

The CEC also criticised some proposals of the Electoral Reform Commission, saying there is no doubt that the EC's independence will be curtailed if these recommendations are implemented. If the EC's independence is compromised, the prospect of a free and fair election can be affected, he added.

Speaking about a timeframe for the polls, Nasir noted Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus said the next general election could be held at the end of this year or in the first half of next year, depending on the reforms political parties agree to.

Prof Yunus also said his government was simultaneously preparing for national and local body elections.

Nasir said preparations for the national elections must be completed by October if the polls are to be held in December. If new laws are introduced, completing the preparation for polls by October will become a significant challenge.

He mentioned that tasks like demarcation of parliamentary constituencies and political party registration are time-consuming. The EC received numerous applications for delimitation, but it is unable to start working on them due to legal issues, he said.

"Still, we are confident. We have to overcome these challenges. We are

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

- ② CEC says local elections may take a year to complete
- ② EC needs to finish preparation by Oct to hold nat'l polls by Dec
- ② CEC says local govt polls not its constitutional responsibility
- ② EC yet to know about electoral regulations, how polls will be held



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Students of seven colleges affiliated with Dhaka University blocked the Science Lab intersection on Mirpur Road in the capital's Dhanmondi last night. The protesting students subsequently engaged in chases and counter-chases with Dhaka University students and threw brickbats at each other near the New Market area. Later, law enforcers arrived at the scene and hurled tear shells and sound grenades to disperse the protesters.

## JUDICIAL REFORM HC benches in all divisional cities recommended

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The Judiciary Reform Commission recommends decentralisation and expansion of the judiciary by establishing permanent High Court benches at every divisional city and civil and criminal courts at upazilas.

HC benches at divisions will shrink the pile of pending cases and help people get justice without much delay.

Since the 55 HC benches are all housed at the Supreme Court buildings in the capital, people who file litigations have to travel to Dhaka to attend the hearings. The HC currently has 5.77 lakh pending cases.

The reform commission also recommends adding a provision to the constitution for the appointment of the most senior judge of the Appellate Division as the chief justice. This will reduce the president's discretion in the matter.

According to a summary report of the recommendations, a nine-member commission led by the chief justice should be formed for the appointment of properly qualified individuals as Supreme Court judges. The nine-member body will ensure the minimum number of Appellate Division judges at seven.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## US-funded projects stare at fund crunch

WFP's food delivery service at Rohingya camps to go on

PORMOL PALMA

US-financed development projects across Bangladesh are set to face a fund crunch as USAID notifies them to stop work in line with the policies of US President Donald Trump.

While the policies raise serious concerns for development projects across the world and threaten to shut down many UN interventions, the World Food Programme will continue its food delivery service at the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar.

A USAID memo to implementing partners asking them to stop work right away also states that "no further assistance shall be disbursed in a manner that is not fully aligned with the foreign policy of the President of the United States."

According to the UN, out of total \$852.4 million requirement for the Rohingya in 2024, donors provided \$548.9m, and the US provided \$301 million or 55 percent.

The US has provided nearly \$2 billion as

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Police action against teachers of Swatnara Ebtedayee madrasas -- primary level educational institutions under the madrasa board -- in the Shahbagh area yesterday. The law enforcers charged truncheons and used water cannons to disperse them as they were heading towards the Chief Adviser's Office to submit a memorandum seeking the nationalisation of all such registered institutions. Story on page 3.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Renewed violence in Myanmar has forced around 80,000 more Rohingyas to take shelter in Bangladesh since August last year, worsening the already precarious situation in Cox's Bazar camps, shows a recent study.

Conducted by the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC) and the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), the study delved into the worsening living conditions, gender-based violence, and security concerns in the refugee camps.

The study titled "Gendered Violence and Insecurity in the Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh: New Insights and Ways Forward" was presented at a workshop in a city hotel yesterday.

Highlighting the challenges of managing the influx, Ferdousi Shahrir, director general of the

### FINDINGS

- ② Armed groups recruited 3,000-5,000 men from camps in first half of 2024
- ② These groups use sexual violence, forced marriages as tools of control
- ② Gender-based violence deeply entrenched in camps

foreign ministry's Myanmar Wing said, "Many refugees enter Bangladesh through remote and poorly monitored areas. People running for their lives find ways to cross the border, especially in regions where our presence is limited."

Bangladesh, which has already provided shelter to over 1.2 million displaced Rohingyas, remains committed to working with regional and international partners to address the crisis, she said.

Ferdousi also noted the role of Malaysia and China in ongoing diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis.

At the workshop, Mohammed Mizanur Rahman, refugee relief and repatriation commissioner, said many refugees are resorting to informal labour to support their families since each of them gets a meagre allowance of Tk 16 per day.

"Many Rohingyas are involved in salt cultivation in southern Bangladesh and deep-sea fishing in the Bay of Bengal," he added.

The study points out escalation in gender-based violence in the camps, with physical assault, sexual abuse,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## SOARING AIRFARES Artificial crisis puts migrants in trouble

60,000 tickets to KSA blocked by unscrupulous agents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Airfares on different routes, particularly the Middle Eastern countries, have soared by two to three times due to an artificial crisis fuelled by an uncontrolled market system and inadequate monitoring by the authorities.

For instance, it now costs about Tk 1.90 lakh to go to Saudi Arabia, up from Tk 45,000 to Tk 50,000 previously, according to data from the Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB), which represents around 4,000 registered travel agencies.

In contrast, it costs Tk 55,000 to Tk 60,000 to go to Saudi Arabia from Kolkata, a short flight from Dhaka.

"Some unscrupulous groups are selling tickets at three to four times the actual fare after creating an artificial crisis," said ATAB President

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

## Students of DU, 7 colleges clash late into night

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of students of Dhaka University and its seven affiliated colleges chased each other past 1:30am today.

The college students began protesting in the evening and it soon led to a stand-off between them and DU students late into the night.

As the groups clashed with each other close to midnight in the Nilkhet area, police used stun grenades and teargas to prevent violence from escalating.

Several students sustained minor injuries.

DU in a statement said all classes and exams has been suspended for today.

The college students blocked the Science Lab intersection on the Mirpur Road in the evening.

Their demands include separate admission exams for the affiliated colleges and abolition of quotas in the admission test.

Some of them told reporters that when they met DU Pro-VC Prof Mamun Ahmed to ask when their five-point demand would be met, he misbehaved with them. They blocked the intersection in response to that.

Dhaka College student Abdur Rahman told The Daily Star, "He humiliated our students and drove them out [of his office]. If the teacher apologises publicly, we will leave the road."

Contacted, Pro-VC Mamun Ahmed said, "Around 50-60 students of seven Dhaka University affiliated colleges came to my office. I asked them to send two representatives instead. At that time, they all forcibly entered the office room."

"I sternly told them if they wanted to behave like a 'mob', I won't address their concerns," he added.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner (New Market zone) Tarique Latif said in the evening that at least

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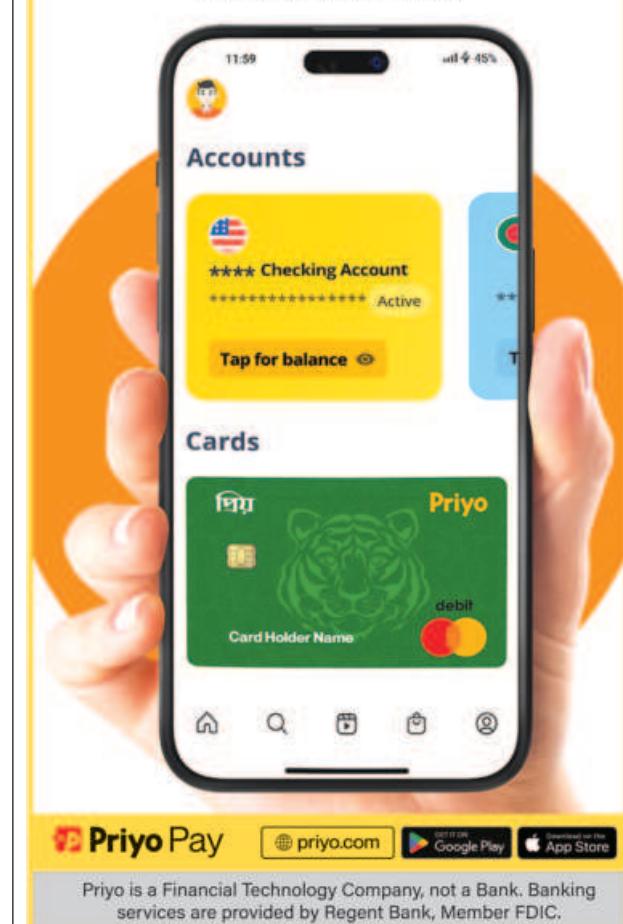
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