

# EC all set for polls, referendum in Feb

Chief election commissioner tells Yunus

MOHUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Election Commission has wrapped up the bulk of its preparations to conduct the national polls and the referendum, a rare twin political exercise slated for February.

At a meeting yesterday, the EC cleared its final checklist. The election schedule will be announced within this week, voting hours will be extended by an hour, additional secret booths will be arranged where possible, presiding and polling officials will be finalised, and the timeline for dispatching ballot papers to centres has been set.

In keeping with tradition, the commission met head of the government Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at Jamuna yesterday and has sought an appointment with President Mohammed Shahabuddin before publishing the schedule. The Bangabhaban later

- ⌚ Schedule to be announced this week
- ⌚ Voting hours extended by one hour
- ⌚ Additional secret booths will be arranged
- ⌚ EC to meet president on Wednesday

and fair elections, the government will continue to provide all necessary support to the Election Commission. In this long-awaited election, you [the EC] are in the driver's seat. We must reach the desired goal. We are moving forward to present

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confirmed the appointment for Wednesday noon.

During the meeting with Yunus, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said, "All preparations for holding the elections are progressing properly and smoothly. The commission is fully ready to organise both the national election and the referendum in the first half of February."

The Chief Adviser's Press Wing added that the commissioners expressed gratitude for the government's cooperation, and noted that election activities were already visible across the country.

Expressing satisfaction, Yunus said,

"In the interest of free

# 300 companies ask BB for Tk 2 lakh crore loan rescheduling

Tk 26,114 crore debt rescheduled as BB disposes of 900 out of 1,516 applications

MD MEHEDI HASAN

About 300 companies, including top defaulter conglomerates, have applied to the Bangladesh Bank for loan rescheduling or restructuring facilities totalling around Tk 2 lakh crore in the first nine months of the year.

Applicants include S Alam Group, Beximco Group, Nassa Group, Orion Group, Deshbandhu Group, Bashundhara Group, Abdul Monem Group, Tanaka Group, Dandy Dyeing, Bengal Group, Ambient Steel BD, GPH Ispat, Prime Group, Anwar Group, Silkway Group, Shadab Fashion, and Apex Weaving, according to a BB report.

Sikder Group, Diamond Spinning Mills, Mim Group (Alema Textile), SMA Group (AA Knit Spin), BUC Agro, Rising Steel, Bling Leather Products, Ankur Specialised Cold Storage, Sourav Aluminium Works, Intensity Limited and Global Asset have also applied.

The businesses are seeking repayment periods ranging from five to 15 years, with down payments as low as 1 percent to 2 percent and grace periods of up to three years, officials familiar with the matter told The Daily Star.

Against applications seeking the rescheduling of Tk 196,047 crore in loans, banks rescheduled Tk 26,114 crore debts, including Tk 13,747 crore defaulted

- ⌚ Defaulted loans stood at Tk 6.44 lakh crore or 36% of total loans
- ⌚ Tk 4 lakh crore default loans stuck in lawsuits
- ⌚ Defaulted loans concentrated among top 50 borrowers
- ⌚ BB asks banks to reduce bad loans through rescheduling policy
- ⌚ Wilful defaulters also applied for the facility

loans, according to the BB report.

In January, the central bank formed a five-member committee, led by the executive director of the Department of Offsite Supervision, to provide necessary policy support for restructuring or rescheduling corporate borrowers that defaulted due to factors beyond their control.

The committee's process of holding tripartite meetings with borrowing institutions or groups and financing institutions concluded on September 30.

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shadows.

Their story begins before the war. On February 22, 1970, at a rally of the Purbo Bangla Somonoy Committee at Paltan Maidan in Dhaka, young leaders called for an independent, democratic East Bengal.

Mustafa Jamal Haider, 83, recalled to The Daily Star, "We were hounded for giving speeches. Later, the military court sentenced Kazi Jafar and Rashed Khan Menon to seven years, and me and Mahbub Ullah to one."

Even so, the preparations for an armed struggle continued.

Years earlier, from 1965-67, on Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani's instruction, Mannan Bhuiyan, then Chhatra Union (Menon) general secretary, had formed farmers' associations in the villages of Shibpur. When 1971 dawned, he began organising students, youth, and farmers.

On the afternoon of March 25, Mannan Bhuiyan



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Rasheda Begum's son Sohel Rana left home to join the mass protests in Shyampur on July 18 last year and never returned. She was later told he was buried as an identified victim. Holding a photo of his lifeless body, she stood teary-eyed and hopeful to finally find her son's grave at the Rayerbazar graveyard, where the CID yesterday began exhuming the bodies of 114 unidentified martyrs of the July uprising for identification. Story on page 12.

## 'People saw what they did in 1971'

Tarique takes jab at Jamaat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a dig at Jamaat-e-Islami, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said the nation saw how the party killed hundreds of thousands and violated countless mothers and sisters during the Liberation War.

He made the remark in response to what he said were some quarters spreading on social media that "they had seen this party and that party and that it was time to see a different party now".

"But the people of this country had already seen that party in 1971 ... how they killed hundreds of thousands to shield their own interests. They not only killed people, but their cohorts also violated countless mothers and sisters. We must remember this."

The BNP leader was addressing the inaugural ceremony of the party's six-day "Plan to Build the Country" programme at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh auditorium in the capital's Farmgate.

Tarique alleged that a certain party is peddling promises or guarantees – understood by many as tickets to heaven – for political gains. He then stressed that making claims over matters reserved for the Almighty amounts to a violation of faith.

Tarique urged Chhatra Dal leaders and activists to go door to door and tell people that those who preach such notions commit "shirk" – and those who accept them risk falling into it as well.

Again, without directly naming Jamaat leaders, Tarique said they are spreading propaganda against BNP, much like the previous government did.

"We recently noticed a few individuals or parties making those same baseless claims. But here is the question: two of their senior leaders were in our government at that time. Both have passed away. They



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Khaleda undergoes several tests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's condition remains unchanged, with her medical board keeping her under close observation at the capital's Evercare Hospital.

BNP media cell said this last night, quoting the former prime minister's personal physician, AZM Zahid Hossain.

Contacted, BNP Health Affairs Secretary Rafiqul Islam said, "Dr Zubaida Rahman is closely monitoring Madam Khaleda's treatment. She has talked with the doctors on the medical board formed for her treatment."

Sources said several tests were done, and doctors reviewed the results and discussed the next steps for her treatment.

Zubaida yesterday visited her mother in law and spoke with the doctors.

On Saturday, Zahid, said, "Her travel abroad is being delayed, and her health condition will determine when she can go for advanced treatment."

Briefing reporters outside the hospital, Zahid said an air ambulance is on standby for the BNP chief.

"But even though it is

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NCP, AB Party, Rastro Songskar Andolan forge new alliance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After months of talks, National Citizen Party, Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party) and Bangladesh Rastro Songskar Andolan have formed a new alliance ahead of February's national polls.

NCP convener Nahid Islam yesterday formally announced the launch of the alliance, named Gonotantrik Songskar Jote, at a press briefing at Dhaka Reporters Unity in the capital.

Nahid, also the spokesperson for the alliance, made the announcement flanked by AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Monju, Rastro Songskar Andolan President Hasnat Kayum, and others.

The parties' leaders said they are working to expand the combine, with talks underway with Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Rob) and Nagarik Oikya.

A t h o u g h expected to join the coalition, the Gono Odhikar Parishad eventually chose to opt out, according to a UNB report.

"Any party aligned with the spirit of the July uprising or interested in state reform is welcome to join [the alliance]," Nahid told reporters, adding that the alliance was forged to ensure state reforms and economic independence.

"Instead of pursuing reforms, the major parties are consumed by greed for seats in alliance with others ... We have long been fighting for a sovereign Bangladesh. We, the allied parties, will stand together. This is not just an electoral alliance; it is a political alliance."

"We hope this alliance will stay united and contest the polls under one symbol.... This election is not about the mere exchange of power; our goal is reform."

This is not just an electoral alliance; it is a political alliance.

Nahid Islam, NCP convener

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Fifty-three years after independence, many stories of the Liberation War remain untold. Part 4 of this 12-part series turns to Shibpur in Narsingdi, where leftist youths gathered under Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's leadership and carved a fierce chapter of the war.

## Shibpur: A leftist fortress built by the Mannan Bhuiyan Bahini

AHMAD ISTIAK

Across the villages in and around Shibpur in Narsingdi, a fierce guerrilla force rose during the Liberation War. Formed at the initiative of the Purbo Bangla Somonoy Committee of communist revolutionaries and led by leftist student leader Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, it came to be known simply as the Mannan Bhuiyan Bahini.

More than 1,200 fighters took up arms under its banner; in its camps, over 4,000 young men and women drawn by conviction took training. Though rooted in Shibpur, the force's reach stretched from Araiha to Narayanganj to Katiadi in Kishoreganj.

Their exploits echo through books, such as Haider Anwar Khan's "Ekattor Ronangon: Shibpur", Haider Akbar Khan Rono's "Shatabdi Periye", and Mannan Bhuiyan's own "Jibon O Sangram".

This correspondent travelled through Shibpur in August and September, speaking with 30-35 freedom fighters who once moved through that landscape like



TALES OF  
FREEDOM

বিশিষ্ট শিল্পপতি, লীরা ফ্লম অব ইভাস্ট্রিজ -এর  
ম্যালেজিং ডিরেক্টর

কে. এম. আলমগীর ইকবাল

অল কমিউনিটি ক্লাব লিমিটেড (ACCL) -এর

প্রিজেক্ট

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LIRA

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