

HC upholds RPO clause on party symbols

Parties have to contest polls using own symbols, even if part of alliance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday upheld the amended provision of the Representation of People Order (RPO) that requires political parties to contest national elections using their own symbols, even when they are part of an electoral alliance.

The court discharged the rule it had issued on December 1, asking the government and the Election Commission to explain within 10 days why the provision should not be declared illegal and unconstitutional.

The bench of Justice Fatema Najib and Justice Fatema Anwar delivered the verdict after hearing arguments on the rule.

Petitioner's lawyer Ahsanul Karim told The Daily Star that his client plans to appeal the HC judgment before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, Advocate SM Azmal Hossain Bachchhu, convener of the National Lawyers Alliance (NLA), supported by the National Citizen Party, expressed satisfaction at the HC verdict,

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Children stroll past a pile of burning trash at Kamrangirchar in Dhaka, forced to inhale toxic fumes as they look for a place to play. The smoke from the burning waste poses serious air-pollution and health risks for residents, especially children. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

FOUR CONSTITUENCIES EC officials made ROs for the first time

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

For the first time in history, three Election Commission officials have been appointed as returning officers (ROs) for four constituencies in the upcoming general election scheduled for February 12.

Hours after the announcement of schedules for the 13th national polls and the referendum on the July Charter, the EC appointed 69 returning officers for 300 constituencies.

According to the gazette notification, the appointments include three EC officials, two divisional commissioners, and 64 deputy commissioners.

Dhaka Regional Election Officer Younus Ali will serve as RO for Dhaka-13 and Dhaka-15, Chattogram Regional Election Officer Belayet Hossain Chowdhury for Chattogram-11, and Khulna Regional Election Officer Faysal Kader for Khulna-3.

The divisional commissioners of Dhaka and Chattogram have been appointed as ROs for the remaining constituencies in those two cities. Deputy commissioners will serve as ROs for constituencies under their respective districts.

The EC also appointed upazila nirbahi officers, other government officials, and upazila-level EC staff as assistant returning officers (AROs).

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Bhasani's 145th birth anniv today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Today marks the 145th birth anniversary of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the legendary political leader and visionary who inspired the struggle for an independent Bangladesh.

Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Bhasani Parishad and various social and political organisations will place wreaths at his grave in Santosh, Tangail. A doa and milad mahfil will also be held at the university central mosque after the Zohr prayers.

Born in 1880 in Dhangara village of Sirajganj, Bhasani was the founder and president of the Awami Muslim League, which later evolved into the Awami League.

He also formed the left-leaning National Awami Party.

Bhasani played a key role in the 1969 mass upsurge and led the historic Farakka Long March in 1976, demanding Bangladesh's fair share of Ganges water.

Known as "Mazlum Jananeta" (leader of the oppressed), he spent his life championing the rights of the poor and marginalised. Bhasani passed away on November 17, 1976.

2 mild quakes jolt Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two mild earthquakes were felt in Sylhet early yesterday, occurring just five minutes apart at 2:50am and 2:55am.

According to the Seismic Observatory Centre of the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, the first tremor measured 3.5 on the Richter scale, with its epicentre in Beanibazar upazila of Sylhet.

The second quake, recorded at 3.3 magnitude, originated in Barlekha upazila of neighbouring Moulvibazar district.

Shah Md Sajib Hossain, assistant meteorologist at the Sylhet Met Office, confirmed the information, citing the seismic centre. Despite the late-night tremors, no damage or casualties were reported as of yesterday morning.

'Silence no longer an option'

Speakers express concern over rising rights violations at MJF event, urge citizens to speak out against injustice



PHOTO: COLLECTED

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a dialogue yesterday strongly condemned the recent wave of derogatory remarks and online harassment directed at Begum Rokeya, calling it a stark reminder of the shrinking space for women and dissenting voices in Bangladesh.

They expressed concern over rising human rights violations, noting that women, children, minorities, and other marginalised groups continue to be disproportionately affected.

Speakers urged citizens to speak out against injustice, saying silence is no longer an option.

The dialogue was organised by Manusher Jonno

Foundation (MJF) as part of this year's International Human Rights Day observance and the closing of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. It was held at the MJF Tower in Rupnagar, Mirpur.

In her welcome remarks, MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam expressed sorrow and outrage, saying the growing normalisation of humiliation, hate, and abusive language is a violation of human rights.

She said the recent derogatory and obscene comments on social media about Begum Rokeya — a trailblazer of women's emancipation who can no longer defend herself — are unacceptable in any civilised

society.

She questioned the state's silence even when a Rajshahi university teacher publicly made derogatory comments about Rokeya on the day the Rokeya Padak was awarded. Such silence, she warned, signals a worrying decline in social values.

Shaheen Anam said people may disagree with Rokeya's ideology, but that does not give anyone the right to use abusive language. She also expressed concern over the lack of public protest.

She also said rights are not only about protecting one's own freedoms but also about speaking out when others' rights are violated. She stressed the need to recognise

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'An attack on dignity of women'

ASK, Teachers' Network condemn RU teacher's derogatory remark on Begum Rokeya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) and the University Teachers' Network yesterday strongly condemned Rajshahi University physics teacher Khandaker Mahmudul Hasan for calling women's rights pioneer Begum Rokeya a "murtad" (apostate) and "kafir" (non-believer) in a Facebook post.

In separate statements, both organisations demanded the immediate withdrawal of the remarks, calling them hateful and inflammatory.

ASK said Begum Rokeya — a pioneer of Bangalee and Bangladeshi women's awakening whose work shaped the region's education, social thought, and intellectual progress — had been targeted with hateful and provocative comments.

Such remarks, it said, were not only condemnable but also a direct attack on the dignity of women.

Begum Rokeya's educational and social movements liberated Bangalee women from the chains of subjugation and superstition, regardless of religion, caste, or social identity, the statement said.

For such comments to come from a university teacher — who is expected to embody professional ethics and progressive values — is entirely unacceptable, said ASK.

Hate-driven and misogynistic speech from a higher education teacher constitutes a serious breach of professional integrity, it added.

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Election will not be easy Tarique urges party workers to mobilise public opinion in favour

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's existence and sovereignty will be at risk if the BNP's leaders and activists do not take the upcoming national election seriously, said its Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday.

"Dear colleagues, do you remember when I said one year ago that the upcoming election would not be as easy as you thought? Today, my words are slowly being proven right. Only you — each and every member of Bangladesh Nationalist Party — can save democracy and strengthen its foundation."

Tarique's comment came at the closing session of the fifth day of BNP's 'Plan to Build the Country' six-day workshop in the capital. "You have already fought against the conspiracies of fascists and the 1/11 government, and you will be able to face future conspiracies by establishing the foundation of democracy."

The BNP's leaders and workers have been tested through years of oppression and struggle.

"You have held this party through all kinds of oppression and torture, from the conspiracy of 1/11 to the 15 years of conspiracies under the last autocratic government. Now, why can't we face this upcoming election battle?"

He went on to emphasise the importance of reaching voters at their homes and galvanising public opinion for the party symbol, the sheaf of paddy.

"You need to make sure the sheaf of paddy wins." Tarique urged the party's leaders and activists to stay vigilant and present on the ground.

"If the party workers are not on the ground,

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Disclose wealth statements of Asif, Mahfuj Demands students' platform

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Students' Platform has demanded the disclosure of wealth statements of Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain and Mahfuj Alam, both of whom resigned from their posts as advisers to the interim government yesterday.

They also demanded that records of "corruption" happened under the two former advisers' supervision over the last 17 months be made public.

They further said Asif and Mahfuj should not be allowed to contest the upcoming election without a proper corruption investigation.

The organisation formed a human chain formed yesterday in front of the Anti-Corruption Commission headquarters in Segunbagicha.

Former Chhatra Union president Deepak Shil said, "Asif's office had turned into a hub of corruption. A corruption syndicate grew around him and his APS Moazzem. The APS was later removed... and the ACC investigated it. We want to know the progress of that investigation."

Speakers also alleged that the ACC has remained silent about corruption allegations against the personal assistants (PS) of the two former advisers.

They called on the Election Commission and the interim government to bar them from participating in the election.



Farmers harvest ripe Aman paddy in Khulna and then thresh and dry the crop from dawn to dusk, filling the air with the scent of fresh rice. The newly harvested grain is used to make pitha and payesh during the traditional Nabanna festival. The photo was taken at Gangarampur village in Batiaghata upazila recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN