

CEC vows level playing field in polls
Opens law-and-order cell, EU to deploy 200 observers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin yesterday said the EC will ensure a level playing field, with no staged elections this time.

The CEC made the remarks in the morning while speaking to reporters after visiting the nomination appeal booths set up at the commission's Agargaon office in the capital.

When his attention was drawn to allegations that independent candidates are being harassed while collecting signatures from one percent of voters, the CEC said the EC is the appellate authority.

Decisions taken by returning officers, if nominations are rejected, can be appealed to us. Or if a nomination is accepted and any candidate wants

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Passengers wrapped in warm clothes wait for trains at Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka amid bitter cold, as the capital recorded a minimum temperature of 12.5°C yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Govt eases data localisation rules
Jail terms scrapped, financial penalties remain



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has largely removed data localisation requirements for technology companies from the Personal Data Protection Ordinance and scrapped jail terms for violations by tech firms, including global giants such as Meta and Google.

The amendments were approved at a meeting of the advisory council in Dhaka yesterday.

Under the revised ordinance, only data related to government-designated Critical Infrastructure (CII), as defined in the Cyber Security Ordinance, will be required to be stored within Bangladesh.

The blanket requirement for technology companies to keep local copies of user data has also been eased.

Under the original ordinance, gazetted in November last year, technology companies were required to store at least one synchronised real-time copy of data inside Bangladesh.

Under the amendment, this requirement will now apply only to restricted personal data, for which at least one synchronised real-time copy of cloud-stored data must be kept within the country.

The amendment also revises the punishment provisions. Previously, violations of the ordinance -- including breaches of personal data or infringement of users' rights -- could result in both imprisonment and financial penalties.

The revised ordinance removes the provision for

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3 Chinese nationals held for running illegal iPhone plant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives have arrested three Chinese nationals for allegedly running an illegal iPhone assembly plant in the capital's Uttara and Nikunja areas.

The arrestees were identified as Tan Jian, Wu Jun, and Dong Hongwei.

During drives conducted on Wednesday, DB officials seized 363 iPhones of various models, a large cache of spare parts, machinery used for assembling phones, eight bottles of foreign liquor, and Tk 26,000 in cash, said Mohiuddin Mahmud Sohel, deputy commissioner (DB) of Mirpur Division, at a press briefing at the DMP Media Centre yesterday.

He said a gang had been operating this clandestine operation for a year and a half, evading taxes and deceiving customers by selling assembled phones as original products.

Acting on a tip-off, a detective unit conducted a drive at a house in Sector 13 of Uttara West around 3:30pm. They arrested Tan Jian and seized 58 iPhones from him.

Based on information provided by him, the team raided a house in Nikunja-1 around 5:30pm, where they arrested Wu Jun and Dong Hongwei and discovered a 'secret lab'. Police recovered another 305 iPhones, spare parts, and assembly machinery from the Nikunja residence.

When asked if any Bangladeshi nationals were involved, the DB official said they had found the names of some locals during the preliminary investigation. "However, we cannot disclose the names at this moment for the sake of the investigation."

Police said legal action against the arrestees is underway.

Ensure effective execution of RTI law

Speakers urge govt, parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at an event yesterday urged the government and political parties to ensure effective implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) law, noting that citizens' access to information remains limited despite the law being in force.

They said transparency, accountability and citizen participation are essential to strengthening democracy, and stressed the need for coordinated action among the media, civil society and citizens to make the RTI law more effective.

Policy experts also called on all political parties contesting the February 12 election to include specific commitments to the RTI Act in their election manifestos so that access to information becomes a governance priority.

The remarks were made at an event titled "Strengthening Democracy through Right to Information: Launch of The RTI Citizen Platform and Dialogue on Engaging Political Parties to Advance the Right to Information", organised by Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB) at a hotel in the capital.

"The citizens are the true owners of the state. They have the right to access information because it is the source of power. But in many cases, the government does not provide information properly," said Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman.

He urged the government to

activate the Information Commission by appointing its commissioners and to ensure that officials disclose their income and assets.

Highlighting gaps in government compliance, he said, "Officials are supposed to disclose their income and assets, but this has not been done fully. Government departments have often failed to keep their commitments."

He said although private organisations and the media have

said citizens, journalists and civil society must act collectively to demand transparency and accountability.

"Women must have sufficient representation in accessing information, as they are often excluded from decision-making and information rights," she said.

Rezaur Rahman Lenin, researcher and rights activist, said the RTI would not function effectively under the interim government as



Speakers at the discussion yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

helped raise awareness, only about seven percent of people are aware of the RTI law. "We need to expand this further," he said.

Media Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) Executive Director Hasibur Rahman said journalists face multiple challenges, including delays in obtaining information and a lack of institutional support outside the capital.

Manusher Jonno Foundation Executive Director Shaheen Anam

the system is designed to restrict citizens' access to information.

"Without proper implementation and citizen-oriented design, RTI cannot fulfil its role in accountability and transparency," he said.

The event was moderated by RIB board member Asif Munier and featured speakers Quazi Zahed Iqbal of Blast, Javed Arafat of the National Citizen Party, RIB Chairperson Shamsul Bari and Deputy Director Ruhi Naz, among others.



Bijoy Majumdar and his wife Anjana Majumdar dry betel nuts in a field at Adamkathi village in Pirojpur. After drying raw betel nuts purchased from garden owners between Ashwin and Agrahayan, they sell 100 of these to traders at a wholesale price of Tk 150 in mid-Paus. The photo was taken recently.

Musabbir murder aimed at destabilising interim government

Says Fakhrul; BNP issues 24-hour ultimatum to arrest killers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The killing of Sweekhasebok Dal leader Azizur Rahman Musabbir was carried out to put the interim government in a difficult position, BNP leaders said yesterday, issuing a 24-hour ultimatum to arrest the perpetrators.

They warned that failure to arrest the culprits within the time frame would indicate a lack of sincerity on the part of the interim government.

Protesting the murder and demanding the immediate arrest of those responsible, Sweekhasebok Dal announced countrywide protest marches in districts and metropolitan areas on January 10.

"Such horrifying incidents are being repeatedly carried out to put the interim government in a difficult position. So, there is no alternative to suppressing these miscreants with a firm hand," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir in a press release yesterday evening.

"After the fall of the Awami autocratic regime through the student-led mass movement, miscreants have once again become active in creating chaos and instability in the country," he said, calling Musabbir's killing an example of conspiracy.

Fakhrul said to establish democracy and protect people's voting rights, all sections of society must remain united, warning that allies of "Awami fascists" pose a threat to the country's existence.

Earlier in the day, Musabbir's namaz-e-janaza was held

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Defence seeks discharge of Ziaul at ICT
Prosecution urges trial to proceed; ex-army chief named witness

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The defence yesterday sought the discharge of Maj Gen (relieved) Ziaul Ahsan from a crimes against humanity case involving more than 100 alleged enforced disappearances and killings, arguing that none of the three charges is supported by evidence.

Opposing the plea, Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam told International Crimes Tribunal-1 that the prosecution had established a prima facie case and urged the court to frame charges and proceed to trial to ensure justice for the victims' families.

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Shibir sweeps JnUCSU too
'Odommo Jobian Oikya' bags top 3 posts

RAKIB MADBER

The results of the Jagannath University Central Students' Union (JnUCSU) and hall students' union elections were officially announced yesterday, with the Islami Chhatra Shibir and Chhatri Sangstha-backed panel "Odommo Jobian Oikya" winning most posts, including the top three positions.

The results were published through a notification signed by the university's Chief Election Commissioner Prof Mostafa Hasan.

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Jamaat reconstitutes election committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami has reconstituted its "National Election Management Committee" ahead of the 13th parliamentary election slated for February 12.

The committee was formed yesterday with the party's Assistant Secretary General Maulana ATM Masum as convener and Assistant Secretary General Maulana Abdul Halim as member secretary, said a press release issued by the party's central publicity department.

Other committee members include Ahsanul Mahbub Zubair, Moazzem Hossain Helal, Maulana Muhammad Shahjahan, Mobarak Hossain, Md Abdur Rob, AFM Abdus Sattar, Helal Uddin, Nazrul Islam, AKM Waliullah, former additional secretary Khandaker Rashedul Haque, and former senior secretary Md Saifullah.