

## No legal bar to Pabna-1, 2 election on February 12: SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday ruled that there is no legal obstacle to holding elections in the Pabna-1 and Pabna-2 constituencies on February 12.

The polls in the two constituencies will be held according to the boundaries set out in the gazette issued by the Election Commission on September 4 last year following the delimitation.

Accordingly, the apex court said Santhia upazila will fall under the Pabna-1 constituency, while Sujanagar and Bera upazilas together will form the Pabna-2, court sources said.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury, passed the order after hearing a leave-to-appeal petition against a High Court verdict that had declared illegal the EC gazette notification of September 4 last year, which had attached four unions and Bera municipality of Pabna-1 to Pabna-2.

The SC also stayed the HC verdict till disposal of the appeal against the judgement, sources at the court said.

**Sathia will fall under Pabna-1 while Sujanagar, Bera upazilas under Pabna-2 constituency.**

Barrister Muhammad Nazibur Rahman Momen, Jamaat-e-Islami candidate for Pabna-1, filed the leave to appeal petition on Monday, seeking an order directing the Election Commission to lift its stay on election activities in the two Pabna constituencies.

Barrister Imran Siddiq appeared for Nazibur Rahman during hearing of the leave to appeal petition yesterday.

On January 10, citing an Appellate Division order related to constituency delimitation for the 13th parliamentary election, the EC decided to stay election-related activities in Pabna-1 and Pabna-2 until further instructions.

Earlier, on January 5, the Appellate Division stayed the amended gazette notification issued by the EC on December 24 last year, which redefined the boundaries of the two constituencies. The stay order will remain in force until the hearing of the leave to appeal filed against the HC judgment, the SC had said.



PHOTO: STAR

## Kutukchhari bridge work drags on for 4 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

The construction of the Kutukchhari bridge on the Rangamati-Khagrachhari regional highway has remained incomplete for more than four years despite two deadline extensions, causing severe hardship for commuters on the route.

The road is the only direct link for residents of Kutukchhari, Ghilachhari and Naniarchar upazilas of Rangamati, as well as Mohalchhari and Sadar upazilas of Khagrachhari, to reach Rangamati district town.

With the bridge still unfinished, locals, including patients, students and farmers, are being forced to use a dilapidated, pothole-ridden bypass road and an old, vulnerable Bailey bridge, often risking safety and enduring longer travel times.

A recent visit to the site found that only a couple of pillars have been built, while some rods lay on

the roadside. No other construction materials were visible and not a single worker was present.

Vehicles and pedestrians are seen taking turns to cross between the two ends using the bypass road and the old bridge.

According to Roads and Highways Department sources in



Rangamati, after the Kutukchhari Bailey bridge collapsed in January 2021, a decision was taken to construct a new 81-metre-long bridge.

In July 2022, two firms -- Messrs Sardar Enterprises and Messrs Rangamati Traders -- jointly began

the Tk 14.29 crore project. However, despite the original deadline ending in 2024, there was little progress.

The deadline was extended by one year to 2025, but with only about 45 percent of the work completed, it was extended again until March 2026.

"Transporting critical patients to hospitals or agricultural produce to markets has become extremely difficult due to the incomplete bridge," said Babudhan Chakma, a local resident.

"If the bridge were built promptly, it would have benefitted us all," said Jasim Uddin, a local CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver.

Representatives of the two firms could not be reached for comment despite repeated attempts.

Sabuj Chakma, executive engineer of RHD in Rangamati, said a recommendation would be sent to higher authorities to cancel the contract if the work is not completed within the extended period.

## Mohammed Mohsin passes away

CITY DESK

Mohammed Mohsin, a former ambassador, foreign secretary and assistant secretary general of the OIC, passed away yesterday, said a press release.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held at Gulshan Azad Mosque after Juma prayers today.

From there he will be taken to Siddique Manzil, his ancestral home in Cumilla, for burial.

Mohsin is survived by his daughter, son, son-in-law and grandchildren, great grandchildren and a host of relatives, friends and well-wishers.



## Defence seeks discharge of Joy BNP

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to make decisions. He also said Joy had no authority to issue any order or instruction to Palak.

When the tribunal observed that although Joy was an adviser, he did not take steps to prevent the crimes, the defence argued that he held no executive authority.

As the prosecution argued that the internet was shut down to conceal

the atrocities and that the highest number of protesters were killed in the three days following the shutdown, Palak, who was in the dock, said on August 2, during the movement, he had decided to step down in line with the students' demands.

He said he had spoken in favour of the protesters at a cabinet meeting and had informed the former PM of his decision to resign.

Palak also claimed that the internet had never been shut down and the international airport remained operational. The tribunal chair then asked him to sit, saying it would hear him further when necessary.

Following the hearing, the tribunal fixed January 21 for passing an order on

whether charges would be framed in the case.

Meanwhile, the prosecution yesterday sought the highest punishment for all 16 accused after concluding its arguments before the International Crimes Tribunal 2 in a case filed over the killing of seven people, six of whom were later set on fire in Ashulia.

Defence arguments in that case will begin on Sunday.

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He stressed that without ensuring administrative neutrality, a level playing field could not exist.

According to the schedule, election campaigning is supposed to begin on January 22.

"Campaigning should not be happening now. Yet in several areas, candidates, particularly from certain parties, are freely conducting election campaigns," he said, adding that his party activists were not electioneering.

He also called on the EC to ensure security for all party leaders and candidates and demanded the installation of CCTV cameras at polling centres.

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## ICT presses

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water and biscuits. He was taken to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

The second charge relates to the killing of four others on July 19 in the same area.

The prosecution disclosed the identities of eight accused: Habib Hasan; Habibur Rahman; Ashrafuz Azim; ADCs Mirza Salahuddin and Mohammad Towhidul Islam; Uttara East police station OC Muzibur Rahman; and local AL leader Monwar Islam Chowdhury Robin.

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## Sixty more aspirants get back candidacy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sixty more aspirants regained their candidacy yesterday as the Election Commission declared their nomination appeals valid.

The EC heard a total of 104 appeals on the sixth day of hearings against returning officers' decisions to reject nomination papers.

Of these, 29 were rejected, EC Director (Public Relations) Ruhul Amin Mollik said in a press release issued last night.

The commission also declared invalid five appeals filed against the validity of nomination papers. As a result, the candidacies in Pirojpur-1, Sunamganj-3, Jashore-4, Chattogram-14 and Chattogram-7 will remain valid.

Of the 104 appeals heard, 37 independent candidates regained their candidacy, while 17 independent aspirants lost theirs. The commission kept 10 appeals pending for further hearings for various reasons.

Over the last six days, the EC has heard a total of 484 appeals, approving 337 and rejecting 110.

The EC began hearing appeals earlier this month. The hearings, led by Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin along with four other commissioners, will continue daily until January 18.

As of yesterday, a total of 338 aspirants have regained their candidacy following the hearings.

In Pirojpur-1, Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Masud Saidi filed an appeal against BNP candidate Alamgir Hossain. The EC rejected the appeal and upheld Alamgir Hossain's candidacy.

## Syndicate within EC selling NID data: CID

Over 3.5 lakh records accessed in a month; 2 EC staffers held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A syndicate within the Election Commission's National Identity Registration Wing has allegedly been selling citizens' personal data and earning several crores every month, according to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

The CID arrested two EC staffers who are allegedly part of the nexus. They are: Al Amin, 39, a data entry operator at the NID wing under the Director General of the NID Registration Wing; and Habibullah, 41, a computer operator and office assistant at the EC office in Gazaria, Munshiganj.

A team from the CID's Cyber Police Centre arrested Al Amin from Agargaon and Habibullah from the Chandrima area of Mohammadpur on Wednesday, CID officials said.

Briefing the media at CID headquarters yesterday, Deputy Inspector General Abul Basar Talukder said that 1,12,150 NID records were accessed within just one week, while 3,65,608 records were viewed over a 30 day period, citing an internal inquiry by the commission.

"If the data were sold at Tk 300 per record, the accused illegally earned around Tk 11 crore," the DIG said.

The official also said the arrestees, during initial questioning, admitted that they had accessed the NID's core server at the EC Secretariat using OTP transfers and sold citizens' personal data through various social media platforms.