

Not a city of fear

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Echoing Noor Jahan's view, other women voters also said safety and security while moving around in the city are their main demand.

There could be arguments that their demand for security and safety has more to do with law enforcement agencies rather than the city corporations.

But Rumana, a resident of Lalmatia, poignantly put this demand into perspective. "We expect our mayors and councillors to take immediate measures to install powerful street lights so that we can feel comfortable moving around at night."

There are roads in Lalmatia that remain dark at night, making her feel unsafe, added Rumana, who works in a private company.

Shahida Quader, a homemaker in Khilgaon, also calls for a safe environment in her locality so that women and female students can move around safely, especially at night.

Awareness campaigns on public safety issues and mobilising local people to ensure it collectively is a responsibility of councillors, as clearly defined in the City Corporation Rules 2012.

The city corporation authorities will have to make all footpaths free of encroachers and improve street lighting to ensure pedestrian mobility, and that of women in particular.

They will also have to play a vital role in coordinating with law enforcement personnel at the local level to ensure security of women, said some of the voters this newspaper spoke to.

A 2017 poll by the Thomson Reuters Foundation listed Dhaka as the seventh worst megacity for women. It was also listed as the fourth most dangerous city in the world in terms of sexual violence faced by women.

Another major demand The Daily Star heard was safe, secure and hassle-free public transport for women.

According to a 2017 Brac study, 94 percent of women commuting on public transport experience some form of sexual harassment.

So far, several women-only bus services and ride-sharing apps have been introduced. However, these are limited in routes and passenger reach -- there are only 15 buses dedicated for women.

Apart from security concerns, the women voters also highlighted other civic amenities they desperately need.

Uninterrupted utility services such as gas and water, for instance, are problems they want public representatives to pay greater attention to.

Shahina Akhtar, a resident of Jatrabari, said scarcity of safe drinking water, waterlogging, and mosquitoes are common problems in her locality.

"I do not want much from our mayor or councillor. I just want to be able to stay home comfortably," she said. She added that the mayors should take proper steps to reduce the prices of essentials, citing the high prices of vegetables this winter.

Shaheda Ferdousi, a resident of Jhikatola, said women need more public toilets. "While on the move, we do not find any public toilets. This is not just an inconvenience but a health hazard," she said.

Rina Rani Chakraborty, a physician living in Gopibagh, demanded proper maintenance of roads and a solution to waterlogging in her area.

"Even after light rains, we face severe waterlogging. Public representatives should take proper steps to solve this," she said.

Shahnaz, a garments worker who lives in Adabor, said she cannot go to the local councillor or mayor for their assistance as she remains busy with work for most of each day, but wants a good person to be elected.

"We do not have any expectations from them other than a city where we can move around safely," she said.

MORE REPRESENTATION

Shaheda also advocated more female representation in local government.

"Women face multiple problems in their daily life. But we do not feel comfortable going to the mayor or male councillors. They could easily go to a woman councillor with their problems," she said.

"This is why empowering women councillors of reserved seats is important."

There are 43 reserved seats for women -- 25 in Dhaka South and 18 in Dhaka North -- in the two Dhaka city corporations.

Fouzia Moslem, acting president

of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, a non-political and voluntary women's organisation, called for councillor aspirants for reserved seats for women to raise their voices for equal participation in the decision-making process.

At a programme in Dhaka on January 12, Fouzia said a female councillor for the reserved seat has to work in three wards against the single ward of a male councillor.

In this context, women councillors cannot ensure their due role in development activities as they are deprived of equal government funds and a proper working environment, she said.

At the event, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad also called for the mayors of the two city corporations, once elected, to work towards making Dhaka a women-friendly city. It urged them to increase public transport facilities for women, make footpaths clean and pedestrian-friendly, and provide sufficient hostel facilities for working women.

WHAT THE CANDIDATES OFFER?

Atiqul Islam, AL's mayoral candidate for Dhaka North, in his manifesto pledged to create a modern, women-friendly mass transit system, and set up women-friendly healthcare centres in the DNCC's extended areas.

Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, AL-backed mayoral aspirant for Dhaka South, said in his manifesto that adequate hostels for women and students and daycare centres will be built, and a 24/7 helpline and app activated.

Ishraque Hossain, BNP's mayoral pick for South, in his manifesto promised separate bus services for women, safe housing and transport facilities for garments workers, and sufficient public toilets for women.

BNP-backed Tabitha Awal, who is running for mayor of North, in his manifesto pledges to ensure public safety by installing CCIV cameras on each city street.

Occupy

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DU Proctor Prof AKM Golam Rabbani said, "All of our principles and objectives are one and the same -- assisting everyone contesting with the symbol of boat."

"It is our responsibility to get our favourite candidate Barrister Taposh elected for the establishment of a beautiful Dhaka. We cannot imagine any candidate but him become the mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation."

The programme was chaired by DU Teachers Association General Secretary Prof Nizamul Haque Bhuiyan.

Addressing the programme, Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said if he got elected, the city corporation building would be open for residents round-the-clock.

AL ward councillor nominee Asaduzzaman, BCL President Al-Nahian Khan, General Secretary Lekhak Bhattacharya, DU BCL President Sanjit Chandra Das, and General Secretary Saddam Hussain were present at the programme.

Ex-bureaucrats

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over the incumbent ACC Chairman convening such a meeting.

Inviting people holding a constitutional post is unethical, he said.

He also said such initiative just before the Dhaka city elections might send wrong messages.

"Anyone can form an organisation and it's his/her right. But organisers should think about the acceptability and universality before forming such an organisation," the former cabinet secretary told The Daily Star, adding that the organisers should have invited all former secretaries before undertaking the initiative.

Shailendranath Majumder, a former secretary, presided over the meeting where a 15-member convening committee was formed to discuss how the organisation would be formed.

Besides, another five-member sub-committee, led by former principal secretary to the prime minister Abul Kalam Azad, was formed to prepare a draft constitution for the organisation.

Former education secretary Sohrab Hossain told The Daily Star that the retired secretaries actually gathered for a reunion.

He said that they could not invite all the former secretaries in the meeting as that they did not know the whereabouts of everyone.

DSCC will be a tourist destination

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yesterday, ruling AL advisory council member Amir Hossain Amu, also a lawmaker, addressed the unveiling event of Taposh's manifesto.

According to the electoral code of conduct, no MP and cabinet members can take part in any local government election related activities.

In his manifesto, Taposh yesterday said the areas surrounding the Buriganga and Shitalakhya rivers will also be revamped.

"If elected, I will construct museums and art galleries in collaboration with everyone and revive both Old Dhaka and the city," he said.

Some roads will be dedicated for fast vehicles, some for medium-speed vehicles and some for pedestrians only, he said.

He will introduce a hop-on hop-off bus service, he added.

"We will also hold crash programmes to control the Aedes mosquito population and prevent dengue

outbreaks."

There will be roads for fire trucks and the city corporation will have its own team of firefighters.

There will be enough women's hostels equipped with round-the-clock helplines and an app for the service seekers, he said.

"I will ensure all basic civil amenities within 90 days of taking office."

He added: "We will not allow any service providing organisation to dig a road until three years after it was repaired."

He said the footpaths would be free from hawkers and illegal occupants.

"We will take new projects to develop the newly added 18 wards of DSCC and will ensure modern facilities for the residents."

He also promised not to raise holding taxes and said proper management could generate revenues for the DSCC.

"The DSCC will be the first autonomous organisation to rid itself of corruption."



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is greeted warmly by children at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre during the inauguration of the 2020 Bangladesh Development Forum yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

Iraq weighs larger Nato role to replace US-led coalition

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq is considering a larger role for Nato at the expense of the US-led coalition, Iraqi and Western officials told AFP, after an American drone strike on Baghdad that sparked outrage.

The January 3 strike which killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani and a top Iraqi commander was

condemned by Baghdad as a breach of its sovereignty and of the coalition's mandate, which focuses on fighting the Islamic State (IS) group.

Iraq's parliament swiftly voted in favour of ousting all foreign troops -- including the 5,200 US soldiers -- and the coalition's anti-IS operations were indefinitely suspended.

Fearing a swift withdrawal could

be destabilising, Iraqi and Western officials have begun discussing changes to the coalition's role, according to local officials and diplomats.

"We are talking to the coalition countries -- France, the UK, Canada -- about a range of scenarios," said Abdelkarim Khalaf, spokesman for Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi.

They're bringing in thugs

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Deadline for the electioneering ends this midnight.

THE ALLEGATION

Alleging that the BNP has been bringing in outsiders to Dhaka ahead of the election, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday urged the Election Commission to take necessary measures in this regard.

The polls atmosphere has been good so far, but the BNP hiring outsiders, including criminals, has made us concerned, Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, said at a press briefing at his Secretariat office.

"We have information that on election day, these armed goons can hamper a free and fair election in the name of guarding polling stations," he said.

"The EC can use law enforcers, who are now under its jurisdiction. It should take measures immediately," he said.

Asked about the allegation, BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain termed it "hilarious".

He then accused the AL of bringing 30 lakh outsiders in the capital ahead of the polls. "They are also bringing in arms."

"These people dare to bring in

arms as police will not take any steps against them", he said yesterday, while addressing a press briefing at Ishraque's home in the capital.

'RISKY' CENTRES

Based on police assessment, the DNCC and the DSCC returning officers said 65 percent of the total 2,468 polling centres were "important" and "vulnerable to violence".

According to Kashem, 66 percent of the 1,318 polling centres in the DSCC areas were "important". Baten said 63 percent of 1,150 centres under the DNCC's jurisdiction were "important".

Police have prepared a security plan and categorised the polling centres taking opinions of field level law enforcers and intelligence officials, said sources.

"As a law enforcement agency, we don't use the word 'vulnerable' because it may send a negative message to the people. So we have used the term 'important' and prepared our security plan giving importance to those centres," a top police official said.

There will additional law enforcers stationed in those "important" polling centres, the official said.

A team of 16 law enforcers will be deployed at each polling centres, while a team of 18 will be at a polling station considered as vulnerable.

US, Japan evacuate their citizens

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Arab Emirates (UAE) diagnosed four members of a Chinese family who arrived from Wuhan with the coronavirus.

In many Chinese cities, streets were largely deserted with the few who ventured out wearing masks. Starbucks stores in Beijing required people to have temperatures taken and posted notices saying it was a state requirement to wear masks inside.

"It's my first time here in Asia, I feel very unlucky," said Brazilian tourist Amanda Lee, 23, reluctantly cutting short a trip. "I couldn't even see the places I wanted, like the Great Wall."

There was relief, however, among those evacuated from Hubei province, home to about 60 million people and under virtual lockdown. "I was extremely worried that I was stuck there," said Takeo Aoyama, who arrived in Tokyo on a chartered plane carrying 206 Japanese out of Wuhan, with more flights planned.

Two of the Japanese evacuated had symptoms of pneumonia but coronavirus had not been confirmed, medics said.

The virus is weighing heavily on the world's second-biggest economy. Companies are curbing travel to China, and airlines are cutting flights, with British Airways one of the biggest names in aviation to do so.

Indonesia's Lion Air Group, Southeast Asia's biggest carrier by fleet size, said it would halt services to and from China from Saturday "until further notice".

Meanwhile Kazakhstan, an important China trade partner, announced it would halt cross-border passenger train traffic, suspend regular flights between the neighbours, and stop issuing visas to Chinese citizens

over the coming days.

Airlines from Myanmar and Nepal also announced suspensions of all China routes. Cathay Pacific has reduced flights, citing low demand and the Hong Kong government's response plan against the virus, reports AFP.

In one of the most dramatic measures, the tiny Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea announced no travellers from Asia would be allowed in.

The gambling hub of Macau was virtually a ghost town, while malls and shopping centres in Asian capitals were bare.

Sectors from mining to luxury goods have been shaken. A Chinese government economist said growth may slow to 5% or even lower in the first quarter of 2020 as the crisis hits policymakers, which could impel policy makers to unveil more stimulus measures.

The outbreak could cut first quarter gross domestic product growth by about 1 percentage point, Zhang Ming, an economist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences - a top government think tank - said in a report published in Caijing magazine.

GAME CHANGER

But in what could be a major step towards taming the disease, scientists in Australia said they had developed a lab-grown version of the coronavirus, the first to be recreated outside China.

"It will be a game changer for diagnosis," said Julian Druce, laboratory head of The Doherty Institute in Melbourne.

The new finding meant scientists could now create an antibody test that would allow the coronavirus to be detected in patients who had not displayed any symptoms.

The United States has said it is

working on a vaccine, but that would take months to develop. Russia is also working to develop a vaccine against the coronavirus.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said about 210 Americans had been flown out of Wuhan. Those on board the aircraft would be screened several times and evaluated on arrival in California, it said in a statement released via the US embassy in Beijing.

A US government official told Reuters 50 diplomats and contractors were among the passengers.

Australia said it would help some citizens leave and then quarantine them on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, best known for housing asylum seekers.

US officials said the White House was weighing whether to suspend flights to China. It was holding daily meetings on the outbreak and monitoring China-US flights as a likely source of infection, sources briefed on the matter said, though it had decided against suspending air traffic for the time being.

The number of cases in China now exceeds its tally of 5,327 infected with the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) coronavirus that killed about 800 people globally in 2002 and 2003.

While some experts believe the new strain, known as "2019-nCoV", is not as deadly as SARS, alarm has grown over its rapid spread and many unknown attributes, such as how lethal it is.

Like other respiratory infections, it is spread by droplets from coughs and sneezes, with an incubation time between one and 14 days. There are signs it may spread before symptoms show.

AL men burn

The Daily Star copies in Cox's Bazar

Protest the daily's report on Bakkhali river grabbing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Cox's Bazar municipality unit Awami League leaders and activists yesterday burnt copies of The Daily Star, protesting a report run by the daily earlier this week under the headline "Bakkhali River in Cox's Bazar: Grabbed by guardian".

The copies were burnt at a human chain programme organised by the AL unit in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office in the district.

Nozibul Islam and Uzal Kor, the president and the general secretary of the unit, led the AL men in burning of the copies.

The report, published on January 27, said Cox's Bazar Municipality Mayor Mujibur Rahman, also general secretary of Cox's Bazar AL, serves in the district's river conservation committee despite the fact that he was enlisted as a river grabber by the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

According to the BIWTA, Mujibur grabbed at least 10,000 square feet of the Bakkhali, a key river in Cox's Bazar, in Natun Baharchhora area of the town.

At the behest of the mayor, another portion of the river in Kosturighat area was being filled up by dumping waste collected from different areas of the town. It was happening despite a High Court order that had asked the municipality to stop dumping waste into the river.

The AL men also brought out a protest procession yesterday, alleging that the newspaper published the report out of animosity against Mujibur.

Asked about the issue, Sharif Jamil, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, told The Daily Star that by burning the copies of the newspaper, the protesters were trying to save a river grabber.

Court denies

baul Shariat

bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A Tangail court yesterday denied bail to baul singer Shariat Sarkar in a case filed over "hurting religious sentiment".

After hearing, Mohammad Shawkat Ali Chowdhury, district and sessions judge, passed the order in the afternoon, said Tanvir Ahmed, court inspector in Tangail.

Earlier, Anisur Rahman Humayun, lawyer for Shariat, prayed to the court seeking his bail, while S Akbar Khan, public prosecutor in Tangail, opposed his bail.

On December 24 last year, Shariat talked about Islam at a "pala gan-er asar" (folk music show) in Dhamrai of Dhaka.

On January 9, Maulana Faridul Islam, an imam of a Tangail mosque, filed the case against Shariat with Mirzapur Police Station under the Digital Security Act, alleging that his speech hurt his "religious sentiment". At that time, locals held a rally in the area, demanding immediate arrest of Shariat.

Mirzapur police arrested him in Mymensingh's Bhaluka the next day and produced him before a Tangail court, seeking a 10-day remand for him. The court placed him on a three-day remand.

On expiry of the remand, police produced Shariat before the same court on January 13 and the court sent him to jail.