

Campaign ends

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of the ruling coalition mayoral candidate Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin in Laldighi Maidan.

On the other hand, a troop of central leaders of the main opposition Awami League and its allies joined rallies in all the 41 city wards to pep up public support for Nagorik Committee candidate, incumbent Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury.

After the public gatherings, both Mohiuddin and Mir Nasir continued mass contact across the city until midnight.

Meanwhile, troopers from armed forces, paramilitary rifles and Armed Police Battalion took position in the city and started patrolling the major thoroughfares since yesterday afternoon. Police and ansars are posted at the polling centres, where ballot materials have already arrived.

Military officers on election duty talked with the locals yesterday, assuring them of maintaining peace and providing full security to voters during the polls.

MOHIUDDIN ALLEGES RIGGING SCHEME

The opposition-backed mayoral candidate, Mohiuddin Chowdhury, yesterday alleged the administration is scheming to doctor the election results in favour of the four-party alliance candidate.

Talking to reporters at his residence, Mayor Mohiuddin said his supporters, including minorities, are being intimidated by ruling alliance activists. He also accused his chief rival of plotting to cast fake votes by hired outsiders.

Returning Officer Golam Qudus however rejected outright any bias of the administration towards the ruling alliance-backed candidate. The Election Commission is working neutrally to hold a free and fair election, he said.

But, many locals echoed the incumbent mayor's allegations and said the ruling alliance partner Jamaat-e-Islami plans to bring outsiders to its strongholds outside the city and from Cox's Bazar to cast fake votes tomorrow.

BALLOT SETTING
The May 9 Chittagong City Corporation election has emerged as the most spectacular local government election since the independence, drawing keen attention of all political quarters and with hordes of government and opposition heavyweights joining the campaigns.

The month-long canvassing ending yesterday has been almost peaceful except a lone incident on Friday night in which rivals stabbed Sabuktagin Siddiqui Mokki, a ward commissioner candidate. There was no report of clash between the supporters of the two major rivals during the campaign.

During the last one month, the city had a festive look, with candidates and their supporters moving door to door seeking support, distributing leaflets, taking out colourful processions,

Busy bees at poll

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Similar optimism about victory of the other main mayoral candidate was perceived at a camp in Sholoshahar area for the BNP-backed ruling alliance candidate Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin.

The CCC polls virtually made the port city vibrant with enthusiasm everywhere on the final day of the polls campaign yesterday.

"There is no alternative to Mohiuddin for development of Chittagong," said Amir Hossain. Yousuf, Shafi and other volunteers at the camp echoed him.

They mentioned that in their polling centres - Bagmonirum boys' and girls' high schools -- AL candidates had always won by a big margin. In the 1994 mayoral polls, Mohiuddin defeated Mir Nasir by 2,000 votes, and in the 2001 parliamentary elections, AL candidate MA Mannan got 17,000 votes more than BNP's Abdullah Al Noman.

They said they will vote for Mohiuddin again for his immense contribution to the development of Chittagong, including their localities. He waived holding tax and didn't impose any new tax. Whenever any problems arose in their areas, he helped them immediately. He is a friend in need, they added.

On Mir Nasir, they said that during his tenure as mayor in the past and now as minister, he did

nothing for the development of Chittagong.

"Neither Mir Nasir nor any other ruling alliance ministers ever visited our locality. So, there is no reason to support him," Yousuf said.

They like Mohiuddin more as a person than as an AL leader, he added.

MIR NASIR'S CAMP

In a Sholoshahar camp for Mir Mohammad Nasir, his supporters said he is sure to emerge victorious in the mayoral race.

They work for him for his loyalty to the ideals of founder of the BNP late president Ziaur Rahman, and not for any gains, said Karimul Mostafa Lavlu and Md Yasin, two BNP men who are in-charge of the camp.

Mir Nasir is honest and sincere, and he made remarkable contribution to the development of the port city during his 31-month stint as mayor in the past, they said.

But Mohiuddin, mayor for the last 10 years, has done little for the development of Chittagong, and their areas, both said.

Mostafa, a voter at Abdul Jalil School centre, said Mohiuddin is Number-1 voter at this centre located close to his residence but he suffered defeat at the centre in the previous polls.

Rigorous checks

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As an alternative, he said, Rehab could either make a set of recommendations to the government concerning the regulatory body or form its own body to check the whole construction process of only Rehab projects.

Likewise, the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) could also form a body to check the buildings under its purview.

Others suggested forming a high-powered body to use modern technology for identifying vulnerable buildings, which are at risk of collapse from tremor jolts or earthquakes.

Such measures would be a vital corrective to the weak regulatory system of Rajuk, said Kamaluddin, speaking as the seminar's chief guest.

"Our main problem is immorality and dishonesty," he said, citing pervasive bribery in the design approval process administered by government agencies and the discrepancies between design and implementation in the construction process.

Rehab President Dr Toufiq M Seraj said most of the buildings belonging to Rehab members follow

the Building Code, but added, "But I am sure some 45 thousand building units added every year, besides some 5 to 6 thousand by Rehab in the city, do not follow the code."

Other experts noted that forty to fifty percent of buildings in the city's most posh areas Gulsha and Baridhara also do not follow the Building Codes.

Seraj suggested that Bangladesh address these problems by following the example of developed countries in using the technology of 'thermal photography' to detect structural vulnerabilities. He also noted that other countries have instituted proper repair systems to strengthen buildings, saying Bangladesh can easily do the same.

The urgency of stricter building oversight was made evident by Lieutenant Colonel Shaheed,

EC finds polling centre shifting illegal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday directed the Returning Officer (RO) for Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) polls to restore a city school's status as a polling centre as it finds the RO's relocating the polling station illegal.

The RO had shifted the polling centre from Saint Mary's School in Chawkbazar area to Hazi Mohammad Mohsin College without taking permission from the EC, said sources.

A full commission meeting headed by Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed after reviewing the gazette regarding the polling centres that was published last month observed that the RO and the deputy election commissioner of Chittagong division had shifted the centre at their own discretion, said a meeting source.

Earlier Nagorik Committee backed by main opposition Awami League had lodged a complaint with the EC against shifting of the polling centre. ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury is contesting the polls as the Nagorik Committee-backed mayoral candidate.

The Committee leaders opposed the move to shift the polling centre as they consider Hazi Mohsin College area as a Jamaat-e-Islami stronghold. That a good number of voters in Chawkbazar area belongs to minority community, might have been another rationale behind the relocation decision, Mohiuddin camp believes.

The EC at yesterday's meeting also discussed allegations against polls observer National Democratic Foundation (NDF), and asked the officials concerned not to issue any organisation with more than 30 cards in accordance with the guidelines on polls observers.

Nagorik Committee alleges that NDF has plans to field 600 workers of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the student wing of the ruling BNP, as polls observers.

The EC expressed its satisfaction over law and order. "Overall situation is good and we hope it will get even better after deployment of army," Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali yesterday told The Daily Star after the meeting.

Nasir poster

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The letter which was written on the JP pad reads: I know well from my past experiences the hurdles that have to be overcome to carry forward the aviation sector. It seems to me 'unimaginable' the way you have achieved progress and prosperity in the sector overcoming all the limitations.

JP's election symbol plough was also on the poster.

JP Chairman HM Ershad, meanwhile, described the use of his personal letter to Mir Nasir in the election campaign as unfair and uncivilised. He said that he wrote the letter as a matter of courtesy a year ago.

"I did not support anyone in the Chittagong mayoral elections. What he (Nasir) has done is not fair."

Narrating the background of the letter, the former president said Mir Nasir travelled with him on a Biman flight in 2004, and after arriving in Dhaka, the state minister for civil aviation showed him the development works carried out by his ministry at Zia International Airport.

"Out of courtesy, I wrote him a letter to thank him as he took me around the airport," Ershad said. "But, he cannot use that letter for his campaign and I did not extend my support (to him)...this is unfair and an uncivilised way of conducting election campaign."

Campaigners at the Enceel Bhaban, the main election office of Mir Nasir, said that Ershad wrote the letter to Nasir on January 12 in 2004.

Quayum

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24th IGP of the country, the first police chief from the cadre service.

After joining the Bangladesh Civil Service (police) in 1973, he served as the superintending of police of Noakhali, Rajshahi, Naogaon and Sylhet.

He also served as an additional commissioner and commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), deputy police commissioner in the headquarters and detective branch, deputy inspector general (headquarters) and principal of Sardah Police Academy.

He was lastly serving as the SB chief as an additional IGP.

Born in Pakhimara village in Bakshiganj upazila of Jamalpur in 1948, he obtained honours and master's degrees in economics from Dhaka University in 1968 and 1969.

Quayum received training from Bramsil Staff College in the United Kingdom.

Earlier on April 7, the government in a dramatic reversal appointed Additional Inspector General of Police Hadis Uddin as the new IGP. The government had then bypassed its earlier decision to appoint Quayum the police chief after the tenure of Ashraful Huda ended.

The government had originally planned to appoint Hadis, who is in its good books, as a secretary, sources said.

But it shelved the move following objections by the establishment ministry, who said the additional IGP is equivalent in status to a joint secretary, the sources added.

They said Hadis was made IGP, which is equivalent to an additional secretary, to clear way for making him a secretary.

Tagore's 144th birth

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a vital place in the world literature.

The cultural affairs ministry and different socio-cultural organisations throughout the country have chalked out elaborate programmes to celebrate the day.

Bangla Academy will arrange cultural functions and discussions today and tomorrow featuring the poet's literary works and songs at the Academy auditorium.

Local administrations in various parts of the country including Shilaidaha of Kushtia that cherishes memories of the poet, will organise colourful programmes to mark the occasion.

Newspapers will publish special articles and radio and television channels will air special programmes marking the anniversary.

Born into the distinguished Tagore family of Jorashanko in Kolkata, West Bengal in 1861, Rabindranath Tagore was 14th among the children of Debendranath Tagore, a well-known Hindu reformer and mystic, and Sharada Devi.

Very enthusiastic about literary pursuit from his childhood, Rabindranath started writing from his childhood and gradually curved an immortal niche for himself in the history of Bengali literature.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina have issued separate messages conveying deep respect to the memories of the poet.

The president in his message said Rabindranath is the name of an immense surprise. There is no branch of literature where he did not contribute. He himself is an institution. He, the philosopher poet, was a versatile genius. The president said the philosophy of Tagore's poetry should be followed for the welfare of humankind.

The prime minister said Rabindranath's extra-ordinary genius brightened the Bangla language. Every Bangla speaking individual is grateful to him for his contribution to the language.

She termed the songs of Rabindranath Tagore which are the national anthems of Bangladesh and India bridge of relationship between the two countries.

Sheikh Hasina said philanthropist Rabindranath was always

against tyranny, injustice, jealousy and narrowness. His literary treasure and philosophy of life are great refuge for the Bangladeshes.

The main function to mark the day will be held at Shilaidah, Kushtia. Health minister Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain will be present as the chief guest at the two-day long ceremony.

BDNEWS adds: A three-day long festival began yesterday at Patisar Rabindra Kachari Bari in Trair upazila under Naogaon district. Education Minister M Osman Farruk inaugurated the festival.

Sacked

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Mazid was removed for one year in accordance with Clause 46 of the Bank Companies Act 1991. The clause empowers the central bank to remove a MD if it finds him involved in activities harmful to depositors' interests.

However, Article 2 of Clause 48 of the Bank Companies Act 1991 provides that sacked chief executive of a bank can appeal to the BB board but its decision will be final. Article 3 of Clause 48 of the Act says no party can challenge the final BB action in any court, tribunal or other authorities.

The BB launched the probe on February 14 after the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) on February 12 suspended Premier Bank's Tk 55 crore IPO. The capital market watchdog froze the IPO following the unearthing of 25,000 fake beneficiary owners' (BOs) accounts in its preliminary investigation.

Opposition

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in conspiracies, she told her audience in the southwestern frontier district.

The prime minister said Bangladesh will emerge as a self-reliant country without needing the assistance of anybody if the BNP-led alliance returns to power.

Health Minister Khandokar Mosharraf Hossain, Environment Minister Tariqul Islam, BNP leader Sarwari Rahman, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris

Chowdhury and local MP Mashur Rahman, among others, addressed the meeting.

Tk 800cr planned

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work on civil service reform to rationalise government employment, decompressing the pay scale, establishing a systematic and transparent performance evaluation procedure for merit-based salary increases and promotion, and introducing a tighter link between pay and performance, elaborates the memorandum.

Earlier on April 30, a five-member secretary-level committee headed by Cabinet Secretary Dr Sadaat Hossain in its final recommendation to the cabinet proposed four alternative pay structures with the highest requiring Tk 5,213 crore additional money and the lowest Tk 3,975 crore additional expenditures. The proposed mid-range scales require Tk 4,541 crore and Tk 4,286 crore.

The secretarial committee in its

proposal also noted that, in view of government employees' expectations, resource constraints and living cost, implementing the second highest pay scale with Tk 2,500 basic pay at the lowest and Tk 24,000 at the highest end is the most logical option.

The highest proposed pay scale designates Tk 2,600 at the lowest and Tk 25,000 at the highest end.

The third highest pay scale needs Tk 4,286 crore extra to implement, with the lowest basic pay at Tk 2,450 and the highest at Tk 23,500. And the lowest pay scale proposed has a Tk 2,400 basic at the lowest end and Tk 23,000 at the highest.

The new scale will take a retrospective effect from January this year.

PM orders action

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Fazlul Haque, Mesbahuddin Ahmed and Jamil Osman -- submarine cable Project Director Monwar Hossain, and Lt Col Abdul Khaleque of army and Squadron Leader M Shaukat Al of air force.

In the letter, a copy of which The Daily Star has obtained, the prime minister ordered the ministry to keep the Cabinet Division posted about the progress of this unusual disciplinary action against the serving civil and military officials over a scandalous public procurement scam.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED

The Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) on October 12, 2003 invited turkey bids for installing an optical fibre link from Chittagong to Cox's Bazar as well as upgrading the Dhaka-Chittagong optical-fibre transmission line to connect the country with the SEA-ME-WE4 submarine cable network.

BTB's six-member tender evaluation sub-committee found Canadian Nortel, with a Tk 33.80 crore offer, and German Siemens, who quoted Tk 49.60 crore, as the responsive bidders.

But, the high-powered TEC later dropped Nortel "without any valid reason" and inserted French Alcatel's Tk 36.80 crore bid instead. Alcatel was originally disqualified for technical non-compliance.

According to official records, TEC Member Fazlul Haque objected to his committee colleagues' picking Alcatel in place of Nortel. The telecoms ministry, which took note of Haque's view, asked the BTB to re-evaluate the bid. During the revaluation, the TEC dropped Alcatel and recommended Siemens as the only qualified supplier.

As Siemens' bid was nearly Tk 17 crore more than Nortel's, the lowest bidder, Haque gave a note of dissent to this decision too. This time the ministry ignored his whistle blowing and endorsed Siemens' bid.

The Cabinet Committee on Public Procurement headed by Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman met on March 21, 2005 to scrutinise the deal before forwarding it to the prime minister for a final approval.

The cabinet committee came down hard on the BTB for taking too long a time to process the con-

tract. "Since the project is directly linked with the international submarine cable consortium, unnecessary delay and irregularities would tarnish the country's image," it maintained.

It also questioned the BTB's motive for selecting the highest bid.

The telecoms minister also failed to satisfy his cabinet colleagues with the choice that defies all accepted norms. This prompted the cabinet committee to unanimously reject the dubious deal and recommended prosecuting the officials responsible for such gross anomaly.

The prime minister on April 6 approved the recommendation and the Cabinet Division conveyed it to the ministry on April 10.

The ministry, however, preferred to sit on the directive. Finally, after 25 days, on May 5, a three-member committee headed by Additional Secretary of the finance ministry Quamrul Islam was formed to probe the scam. A joint secretary and a deputy secretary of the telecoms ministry are the other members.

RE-TENDER, DELAYS

The BTB meanwhile has re-tendered the optical fibre link project, bids for which open today.

Sources said it would take at least three months to evaluate the bids, get approvals and award the contract. "By then the monsoon will be here and the ground water will gush out once the excavation for cable laying along the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway starts, making the job extremely difficult," said a senior BTB official, requesting anonymity.

The SEA-ME-WE4 submarine cable has already been commissioned well ahead of schedule in Chennai and Colombo. "The consortium has already deferred Bangladesh's commencement schedule to November 1, 2005. But we will not be able to meet even this later deadline under any circumstances," the official admitted.

It means although the 1,262-kilometre Bangladesh segment of SEA-ME-WE4 submarine cable terminates in time at Cox's Bazar, the country will be forced to wait for a quarter or two to access the information superhighway because of the 160km missing link from Chittagong to Cox's Bazar.

EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLINGS

AL holds rallies

across country today

UNB Dhaka

The main opposition Awami League (AL) will hold protest rallies across the country today against alleged extra-judicial killings by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), police and other security agencies.

The rallies will be held in Dhaka and other parts of the country also to protest the latest killing of Meghna Upazila AL joint secretary Hazi Majlul Islam Dud Miah at the hands of Rab.

In Dhaka, the main rally will be held at Muktangan at 4:00pm, party sources said.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil in a statement yesterday urged the party men to join the rallies.

Caretaker chief

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Election Commission (EC), the two leaders said.

"The caretaker government system must be reformed to make it acceptable to all," said Badruddoza.

Responding to a question Dr Kamal said, "People want reforms in caretaker government and empowerment of the election commission in the interest of the country."

Asked why they are yet to specify the reforms, the BDB chief said they will soon put forward reform proposals on caretaker government.

In reply to a question if his party will join the main opposition Awami League's movement for reforms in caretaker government system, he said, "There might be unity on some issues but that will depend on the situation in future."

Dr Kamal, also president of the Gono Forum, suggested that all political parties, including the ruling BNP, should reach a consensus on caretaker government reforms for the betterment of the country.

Both the leaders demanded financial independence of the EC and introduction of voter identity cards to ensure free and fair elections.

The nation is now closely watching how the EC conducts the Chittagong City Corporation elections tomorrow, Dr Kamal said.

He alleged that ministers from the BNP-led ruling alliance are trying to influence the CCC election by using state facilities.

Dr Kamal blamed the state minister for home for 'crossfire' incidents and said he should resign 50 times for his failure to stop extra-judicial killings.

Badruddoza said the government is killing petty criminals to save their godfathers.

On the 'people's manifesto programme' initiated by the BDB and the Oikya Mancha last year, he said, "The programme has not been finalised as yet. We will launch it soon."

MA Mannan, secretary general of the BDB, read out the joint statement of the two parties.

Gono Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik and BDB Organising Secretary Mahi B Chowdhury, MP, were present at the press conference.

One killed

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firearms and nab his associates when they came under fire.

Fakir died in 'crossfire' while making an attempt to escape when the police were exchanging fire with his gunmen at around 3:30am, they claimed.

Police seized a revolver and a gun with 10 bullets.

Fakir was accused of over 20 criminal offences including murder, extortion and rape, the police said. He committed the crimes during the last five years under cover of godfathers loyal to ruling parties, they added.

14 local groups

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(Fema), Bangladesh Human Rights Commission, Human Rights, Janipor (Jatiya Nirbachan Parjabeekhan Parishad), Odhikar, Democracywatch, the National Democratic Foundation (NDF), Brotee, Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Centre for Human Rights and Development, The Good Earth, Manab Seba Unnayan Sangstha, Ongikar Bangladesh, and the Centre for Protecting Human Rights, according to Election Commission (EC) sources.

A number of international observation groups will also monitor the election, including the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the US Embassy and the British High Commission in Dhaka, according to the EC sources.

Meanwhile, opposition-backed Nagorik Committee candidate and incumbent Mayor ABM Mohiuddin has filed an objection to the NDF involvement with the EC.

Former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) president Assaduzzaman Ripon operates the NDF, which has applied for monitoring the polls with over 600 observers.

However, Returning Officer for the CCC polls, Golam Qudus, has denied receiving an application from the NDF at his office in the port city.

"The NDF might have applied directly to the Election Commission Secretariat in Dhaka," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

25 fall sick in toxic

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Hossain Chemical Complex started emitting gases immediately after it went into a test operation at midnight Thursday. Many people including women and children got sick the same night from breathing the polluted air, said former Union Parishad member of Enayetnagar Abdur Rouf Shukkur.

"Many of the villagers' abdomens were distended with gas while red spots appeared on their skin," Shukkur said.

A number of goats died while many other livestock fell sick shortly after inhaling the poisonous substance. Besides, leaves of the trees have turned reddish, he added.

The locals on Friday morning rushed to the factory and informed the authorities of the toxic fumes. They pleaded with them to shut it down but to no avail.

General Manager of the factory Jamaluddin Biswas said some 500 locals broke into the factory and damaged a microbus, motor cycle, 20 computers, and documents of the factory yesterday morning.

Besides, they rampaged through the rooms that house the Chinese engineers. They broke windowpanes and furniture there. The situation came under control after police had intervened.

Jamaluddin said, "Emission of some gases for two/three days after getting in operation is quite natural, and it does no harms to the public health."

The factory has the approval of the government's environment department and it has professional and experienced engineers to work for it, he said. He alleged that some quarters are trying to mislead the locals with wrong information.

Some of the chemists of the factory said a burner used to produce sulphuric acid got blocked on Friday evening releasing toxic gases.

"However the more threatening was the attack by the locals. The boiler could have burst had the police not controlled the situation," said one of them requesting anonymity.

The Chinese engineers said they feel insecure in the face of widespread agitation.

Scores dead

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that hit Yangon, state television reported.

Authorities blamed the rebel Karen National Union, the Shan State Army-South, and the Karenni National Progressive Party, as well as a government in exile known as the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, state television said.

"Authorities put the blame squarely on the KNU, the KNPP, the SSA south, and the NCGUB as being the perpetrators of the bombs," the official report said.

The KNU, the SSA-South and the KNPP are among the ethnic rebel armies who have not signed ceasefire agreements with the military government, pushing their battle for autonomy for their regions.

An official from Myanmar's military government confirmed four bombs were detonated but gave no casualty count. Hospitals in Yangon were unable to give a death toll, but said over 200 people were wounded.

"I saw these people in a pool of blood. Some of them had their legs and arms blown off," said a man outside the Yangon Trade Centre.

A survivor of the Dagon blast recalled panicked efforts to escape.

"There was an explosion in the Dagon centre, and we were so frightened we ran downstairs to get out," a young woman told AFP.

A witness at Junction Eight said she counted "at least 40 bodies being brought out of the building."

Military-ruled Myanmar has been at various stages of civil war for decades, with government troops battling several ethnic guerrilla armies, but the capital has not seen an attack on this scale in living memory.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks. Staff at Yangon General Hospital said they were inundated with dead and wounded.

"We cannot say how many people are dead, but we have received about 200 injured people," an emergency services official at the hospital said, with the urgent cries of other staff and the wounded echoing in the background.

Several junta officials were seen at the scene of the attacks. Access roads to the bomb sites were blocked by security forces, an AFP correspondent witnessed.