

Faridpur-1 by-polls

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Abu Zafar, said local sources. Candidate of the IOJ leader has exposed a rift within the ruling four-party alliance when IOJ lawmaker Mufti Shahidul Islam participated in electioneering for Sharafat Hossain.

On Saturday, ruling BNP activists attacked an election rally of Mufti Sharafat Hossain and occupied the podium at Madhukhali.

The other candidate in the run is Krishok Mohammad Sadek, standing for his 43rd election, with a record of security deposit forfeiture in all previous elections.

The Faridpur-1 constituency comprising Madhukhali, Boalmari and Alfadanga upazilas fell vacant after Kazi Sirajul Islam, who was a elected member of parliament on Awami League ticket, joined BNP on June 4 by crossing the floor.

Ruling BNP at first nominated him as alliance candidate, but the party high-ups were forced to change the decision as local BNP leader Shah Abu Zafar had declared to contest the poll as an independent candidate.

The by-poll lost its attraction after the change in nomination.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission (EC) has wrapped up its preparations for the election.

The voting will start at 8:00am

and will continue till 4:00pm without any break. A public holiday has been announced in the constituency to enable the voters to exercise their right to vote.

Members of the army and other law enforcement agencies will be deployed in the area, starting from today. Mobile and striking teams drawn from Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Armed Police Battalion (APBn) will constantly patrol the polling areas and be placed in important places.

Mobile and summary courts in the polling centres will instantly try the false voters during the polling.

A magistrate will accompany each of law enforcers' teams.

Vehicular movement in the polling areas will be restricted during the polling hours to ensure peaceful elections.

A ban has been imposed on movements of motorised vehicles, launch, and mechanised boats, taking effect from midnight today to go on till midnight the following day.

Faridpur-1 constituency has 3,22,298 voters and 146 polling centres. A total of 1,994 officers—146 presiding officers, 616 assistant presiding officers, and 1,232 polling officers—are tasked with conducting the polls, the EC sources said.

Pickpocket's

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walking and the pickpocket followed him diligently. The man stopped beside a wall and put down his bag. He stood there for some time and then strolled away about 100 yards in the crowd. The pickpocket's heart started beating fast, but he was confused. He now had an easy booty, but he could still see the bearded man standing over there.

Should he make the move and take away the bag? Is the bearded man a plainclothes man setting a trap to catch pickpockets?

From the corner of his eyes, he saw the bearded man watching the other way. Now is the time, and he advanced quickly to pick the bag up. And boom. He almost fell to the ground as the bag went off with a big bang.

There was confusion and panic all around. The pickpocket knew the bag contained a bomb. This time he was more curious to know who this bearded man was. He sprang up on his feet and looked around. The bearded man was fast vanishing into the crowd. The pickpocket followed him immediately.

For two kilometers, he did not let the bearded man out of his sight. He was now at Bakal Islampur area of the town. The bearded man entered a house there.

Satisfied, the pickpocket went straight to the police station and told his story. Police immediately rushed to the Islampur residence and caught the bearded man.

Within an hour of the serial bombings, police had a bomber in their net. Later, the bearded man, Nasiruddin Dafadar, was the first to admit that Jama'atul Mujahideen was behind the attacks.

The pickpocket still roams the court premises, hunting for prey.

2nd blowout

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29, submitted its report yesterday to Mahmudur Rahman, advisor to the energy ministry, at his office.

The first blowout that took place on January 7 this year had burned out about 1 bcf gas worth around Tk 13 crore.

The committee observed that the gas of the sun-surface level of the main reservoir was not damaged and the field has a recoverable reserve of 447 bcf gas. Of the total, 268 bcf is a risky reserve while the rest is safe for production, the committee said.

"The blowout mainly hit the gas at flare and surface levels burning it out," says the probe report. The total damages together in the first and second blowouts will be around 3 bcf.

Dr Tamim said his committee made the loss-assessment on the basis of scientific data and pragmatic method. He assured that the government will win if it claims compensation from Niko.

He, however, said the damages were estimated keeping it in mind that the drilling for a relief well will be completed by October 15 and the gas leakage will be sealed by this time. But if the relief well is not ready within the stipulated timeframe, the amount of damages will increase, he added.

Earlier, another enquiry committee, headed by Dr Anwarul Azim, had held the Canadian operator, Niko, solely responsible for the second explosion.

Mahmudur Rahman said if the loss is calculated in a conservative manner, pricing per mcf (1000 cubic feet) gas at US\$ 2.00, the loss in the second blowout will be Tk 20 crore.

But the ministry has to wait for getting the report of another enquiry committee, assigned to assess the environmental costs of the blowout, which will submit its report by October 30.

Rahman said they will move for compensation claim by October 15.

Media gag

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orders from BNP leaders yesterday.

A number of young BNP lawmakers and leaders accompanied the women aspirants to parliament at the EC and asked them not to talk to the press.

"Don't talk with journalists further... you have already damaged the party's image by talking to the media over the matter," an angry BNP leader shouted at the candidates at the EC conference room.

"Do you want to be an MP or grab a car... why did you speak on the matter to the media?" the young leader asked the party nominees.

"You have broken the chain of command in the party... you shouldn't do that... only Selima Apa (Selima Rahman) will brief the media over any issue," the leader said.

Responding to the young leader, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman, who is also a candidate, said, "I repeatedly asked them not to talk to the media... but they defied it."

She also directly pointed an accusing finger at Helen Jirin Khan, Sultana Ahmed and some others in this connection.

The accused leaders, however, blamed the press for raising provocative questions to extract words on such a contentious issue from them.

Meanwhile, the returning officer declared valid all the 36 nomination papers filed by the candidates of three components of the ruling alliance and Jatiya Party.

She said the present government has resolved a number of problems and referred to the eradi-

Dr Kamal for unity

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Kibria joined politics to fight against wrongdoing and for a positive change in line with the spirit of the Liberation War, he added.

"We, the Bangladeshi nation, got a great opportunity after the Liberation War to the change fate of the country's common people. But the evil and defeated forces thwarted the chance through conspiracy and taking the path of criminality," he said.

Poet Shamsur Rahman, who presided over the programme, said, "Our movement will not stop until the killers of Kibria are brought to book."

National Professor Kabir Chowdhury said, "Ouster of present BNP-Jamaat-led coalition is a prerequisite to root out violence from the country."

"We can't hope that violence and criminal activities will be eliminated keeping the present government in power as they are protectors of criminals," he said.

He urged progressive and pro-liberation democratic political parties to form a greater alliance and formulate national agenda on minimum programmes.

"The parties that already formed a platform under the banner of 14-party have to commit to the nation on what they will do if they come to power," Kabir Chowdhury said.

"These parties will have to pledge that they will establish a secular society in the country," he said.

Former Dhaka University vice chancellor Prof AK Azad Chowdhury said political killings and other types violence have been increasing in the country day by day due to the culture of impunity for the culprits.

"Killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and four national leaders was the beginning of political killing in the country and at the same time the beginning of declaring impunity for the killers," he said.

He urged the political leadership to wage an all-out movement in a bid to form a violence-free Bangladesh.

Journalist and writer Shahriar Kabir blasted the political parties, mainly the opposition, for their

Terrorism

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The two-day talks begin today.

The fate of Sarabjit Singh, held prisoner in Pakistan for the past 15 years after being convicted of spying, became headline news in India after Pakistan's Supreme Court upheld his death sentence this month.

Pakistan says Singh was an Indian spy who carried out four bomb attacks in the northern Pakistani city of Lahore.

His family says he is a farmer who crossed the border while he was drunk and has urged Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to grant him clemency.

Indian political leaders, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, have taken up the case.

Jamal Uddin

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-are likely to be produced before the magistrate today for confessional statements required to net the main culprits behind the abduction of Jamal Uddin on July 24, 2003, sources said.

Both the accused during an interrogation at the Patenga headquarters of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-7 confessed that Maruf Nizam, brother of ruling BNP MP Sarwar Jamal Nizam of Anwara, orchestrated the abduction and killing.

Earlier, the CID had sent video recording of the confessions made by Kala Mahbub and Shahid Chairman at the Rab interrogation and Kanchan Nagar spot from where the skeleton was recovered to Daka.

State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar saw the video recording yesterday afternoon, sources said.

WB mulls

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\$395 million was actually disbursed. Of the \$395 million released, \$300 million was disbursed under the DSC and the ESAC, as the government could meet the WB conditions.

Apart from this \$700 million aid, the WB along with three other donor agencies may also chip in money for implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The joint country assistant programme for this is scheduled to be finalised by December next.

However, a set of conditions will also be put forth for getting the programme's benefits.

Besides, the WB has sent a number of policy notes to the government, suggesting reforms in various sectors, including the public administration, and on the basis of these policy notes new conditions might follow.

However, with the general elections knocking at the door, officials at both the WB and the finance ministry are uncertain about how many of the conditions the government will be able to fulfil.

The WB accounts for a large bulk of the foreign aid Bangladesh has been receiving in recent years. About one-third of the \$1,259 million foreign aid Bangladesh received last year came from the bank.

She mentioned some of the programmes undertaken by the present BNP-led four-party alliance government in education, health and socio-economic sectors.

The prime minister said the government has given importance to the education sector to turn the country's huge population into human resources.

She said the present government has resolved a number of problems and referred to the eradi-

Saarc

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meeting of the information ministers at Birendra International Convention Centre, official sources said.

The ministers are scheduled to hold discussions on airing weekly Saarc news and monthly news programme called FOCUS on state-run radio and TV.

They will also discuss means of enhancing new technology for disseminating information about Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) activities in the seven member states.

Besides preparing the common agenda for information technology (IT) developing globally, the fifth meeting of the Saarc information ministers will also discuss other IT related topics.

The meeting will discuss the plan of action for the development of information sector, which will forward recommendations to the 13th Saarc Summit to be held in Dhaka on November 12-13.

The first ministerial meeting held in Dhaka in 1998 came up with an 18-point action plan for development in the information sector.

Another meeting held in Pakistan last year agreed to implement the plan that calls for observing 2007 as the Saarc Media Year in addition to enhancing multilateral media cooperation to ensure free flow of information.

Bangladesh Information Minister M Shamsul Islam is not attending the meet as he has just returned from abroad after a medical check-up. Information Secretary Mahbubur Rahman is leading the Bangladeshi delegation at the meet, officials said.

According to a message received from Kathmandu, the information ministers from Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have already arrived in the Nepalese capital, while their counterparts from India and the Maldives arrive today.

Union Minister Jaipal Reddy will lead the Indian delegation at the meeting. Reddy would be the highest-ranking Indian official to visit Nepal since the royal takeover in February.

DCC undertakes

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officials at a meeting of the Cleanliness and Mosquito Control Advisory Committee (CMCAC) held yesterday at the DCC conference room.

The civil society representatives at the meeting underscored the need to involve female ward commissioners of the respective areas in the drive so that they can make the housewives aware of the danger dengue may pose.

If the housewives can be made aware to keep their houses and the surroundings clean specially flowerpots, coconut shells and unused tires of vehicles, which are believed to be potential breeding ground of aedes mosquito, dengue can be contained to a great extent, the speakers observed.

Aedes mosquitoes lay eggs in fresh water that is often available in containers like thrown away plastic containers, flower pots and food cans.

CMCAC President advocate Khandakar Mahbub Uddin Ahmed MP presided over the meeting.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said, "The dengue situation is under our control this year. We have almost passed the most dangerous season for dengue." He however acknowledged that he had seen newspaper reports on some dengue patients being admitted to different city hospitals but there was no news of casualty yet.

The mayor said the DCC has enough stock of both larvicides and adulticides to run the mosquito control drive and does not have any financial constraints in this regard.

Among others, State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman,

environmentalist Prof Nazrul Islam of Dhaka University, writer Emdadul Haq Milon, NGO activist Rafiqul Islam Sarkar and DCC Chief Executive Officer M Saifuddin Ahmed, Chief Health Officer Colonel Azizul Haque, Chief Conservancy Officer Sohel Farouque spoke in the meeting.

JS body

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holding a discussion adjourning other businesses of the House to which the ruling party did not agree. A general discussion however was held on the attack, which was boycotted by the AL lawmakers.

The present state of enquiry into the grenade attack and the status of the judicial probe will also be discussed at the committee meeting.

The parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs also held a brief discussion on the present state of the judicial probe report on the grenade attack last month following the demand of the opposition lawmakers.

The law minister at that meeting suggested the AL deputies and the members of the committee raise the issue at the parliamentary standing committee on home ministry as the law ministry does not have the probe report.

The parliamentary watchdog on home ministry held its last meeting on April 28 and did not hold any meeting in the last four months, though the rules of procedure of the Jatiya Sangsads says each committee will sit at least once in a month.

Khaleda conveyed her best wishes to Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson.

She also wished him success in his next assignment at the headquarters in Stockholm.

A delegation of the AL lawmakers recently met the speaker to talk about the issue.

Bomb making

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