

Manikganj-4 by-polls on Apr 19

By-polls in Manikganj-4 constituency of the Jatiya Sangsad will be held on April 19, according to an announcement made by the Election Commission yesterday.

According to the election schedule, the last date for submission of nominations to the returning officer and the assistant returning officers is March 20.

The nomination papers will be scrutinised on March 21 while the last date for withdrawal of candidature is April 2.

The deputy commissioner of Manikganj has been made the returning officer while upazila nirbahi officer of Sadar and upazila nirbahi officer of Singair made assistant returning officers for conducting the polls in the constituency comprising Putail, Bhararia and Hatipara unions of Sadar upazila and Singair upazila.

Meanwhile, a two-member inquiry committee comprising judicial officials has been formed to investigate allegations of violation of the election code of conduct and vote frauds.

It will submit recommendations to the Election Commission for necessary actions.

Ten women receive Anannya award

Award giving ceremony of Anannya Top Ten 2005 was held yesterday recognising the outstanding contribution of women in different sectors in the society.

Women for their role in ten distinct fields including social welfare, entrepreneur, organisation, technology, journalism, painting, micro credit programme, law and human rights and sports received the award this year.

Dr Zobaida Hannan received the award for her contribution in social welfare. She has been working for education, health and legal aid for the poor and helpless women in Comilla.

Monjulika Chakma who is working for promoting the indigenous garment industry and created employment opportunity for hundreds of indigenous women received the award for entrepreneurship.

Dr Halima Khatun for her contribution in education, Noorjahan Bose for women organisation, Asma Huque for technology, Shumi Khan for journalism, Najli Laila Mansoor for art, Shamima Khaton for her exemplary success in micro-credit programme, Sara Hossain for law and human rights and Molla Sabira for weight lifting got the Anannya Award.

Economist and Professor Anisur Rahman and women leader Hena Das handed over the award at a gathering at the Liberation War Museum in the city.

"Women in Bangladesh who has been working for social welfare and to establish human rights are mostly out of the scene. Anannya is taking them forward by encouraging them and it will also be a source of inspiration to others," said Hena Das.

Tasmima Hossain, editor of the fortnight magazine Anannya, said though a good number of girls have been coming out from educational institutions with brilliant results, they are lagging behind in employment sectors, as government is least attentive in this case.

"If there is not enough employment opportunity for women, their empowerment will be hindered," she added.

Among others women leader Shirin Akhter, Hamida Hossain, Khushi Kabir, Advocate Sultana Kamal, cultural activist Sara Zaker, Rokeya Mannan and Sara Hossain were also present.

Govt announces 40 pc DA for newspapermen

The government has announced 40 percent dearness allowance for journalists, press workers and general workers of newspapers and news agencies with effect from July 1, 2005.

The newspapermen will receive the dearness allowance amounting to 40 percent of their basic salaries, but not over Tk 5,500, said an official handout yesterday.

This allowance will later be adjusted with the salary structures to be fixed by the 6th Wage Board formed by the information ministry.

The handout also said this pay hike would not be applicable for those organisations which have been paying 40 percent dearness allowance.

Journalists and press workers working with consolidated salaries will also receive the dearness allowance, the handout added.



Family members of slain former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria and members of the civil society line up in front of Kibria's residence at Dhanmondi in the city yesterday as part of the 'Blue for Peace' programme demanding that the masterminds of the killing be brought to book.

\$ 300m Saarc Dev Goals launched

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A five-year ambitious programme of Saarc Development Goals (SDGs) was launched in Dhaka yesterday as a step towards making the South Asian nations free from abject poverty.

A fund of 300 million US dollars would be spent to implement the programmes in the areas of livelihood, health, education and environment.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan formally inaugurated the SDGs prepared by the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) of which Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui is the co-chair.

Morshed Khan said the Saarc finance ministers will meet in Islamabad at the end of March or early April to finalise the mechanism of mobilising funds for Saarc Development Fund (SDF) and its spending.

"Once the SDF comes through, we shall see a Poverty Alleviation Fund operational under the Social Window," he said at the inauguration ceremony at state guesthouse Padma.

The foreign minister said the South Asian leaders at the 13th Saarc summit in Dhaka in November last year committed to reducing poverty in participatory manner, ensuring food security, guaranteeing livelihood, improving health care, ensuring quality education and enhancing environmental security.

Dr Kamal Siddique said the SDGs made 22 recommendations -- eight for livelihood, four for health, four for education and six for environmental sectors.

Replying to a question, he said there is no conflict between the UN MDGs and Saarc Development Goals. MDGs will be implemented through respective national policies of the governments like PRSP while SDGs will be implemented at regional level, he added.

He said \$ 300 million is now available to implement the SDGs, the mechanism of spending will be decided at the next Saarc finance ministers' meeting in Pakistan.

In reply to a question, Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman said militancy could be effectively tackled if the level of poverty could be reduced in the region.

Saarc Secretary General Chenkyab Dorji and Commissioners of ISACPA of Saarc countries were also present.

Sixteen districts of North Bengal yesterday reeled under a 338 MW load shedding against a gross average daily demand of 630 MW, as 125 MW Barapukuria and two 100 MW and 71 MW power units at Baghabari remained shut down.

"The situation is unlikely to change until two Baghabari units start power generation by mid-March," said Rajshahi zonal PDB Chief Engineer Molla AKM Akhbar.

The power outage eased slightly in the early hours when one of the two 125 MW coal-fired power units at Barapukuria resumed. Another unit that started operation on test in January tripped at the end of February.

Besides, one of the two 45 MW Westmont power units started producing 40 MW on Wednesday.

According to sources at Load Dispatch Centre, Rajshahi zone consisting of 10 sub-stations at Ishwardi, Naogaon, Natore, Rajshahi, Bogra, Chapainawabganj, Pabna, Shahjapur, Ullapara and Sirajganj received 204 MW against a total demand of 416 MW.

Rangpur zone of six sub-stations at Palashbari, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Sayedpur, East Sadipur and Thakurgaon got 88 MW against a total demand of 214 MW.

Of the huge power cut, Rajshahi city alone had to witness about 37 MW load shedding against 45 MW demand.

PDB sources said Sirajganj, the electoral constituency of the state minister for power, has been out of load shedding following his order.

North reels under power outage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Following is the text of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's address to the nation over radio and television channels last evening.

Dear countrymen, Assalamu Alaikum, I have come here to speak before you today in the backdrop of a special event. You know, there are some events that turn the course of history of a country. These can be accidents and good events. Like the destruction of Twin Tower on 9/11 in New York that changed the course of history in the United States of America. The whole of United States became cautious about terrorism and conducted operations to nab the terrorists not only in their own country but also abroad.

You know, the mastermind of bomb-terrorist in the name of holy Islam in Bangladesh, Shaikh Abdur Rahman, was arrested in Tilagarh in Sylhet today (Thursday).

Before that you came to know from various TV channels that the members of the security forces had encircled the house where Abdur Rahman was hiding. You have watched live on TV how the members of the security forces have tackled Abdur Rahman and his associates. As a sequel to that Abdur Rahman was nabbed.

Dear brothers and sisters, I firmly believe that the arrest of Abdur Rahman will be identified as revolutionary positive event in the history of Bangladesh. So, I want to speak about the significance of this event.

You have seen in the past few months that all the members of the security forces in the country were engaged in nabbing the terrorists risking their own lives. It is a hard task -- specially when the resources in Bangladesh are limited and modern detection equipment such as CCTV is almost absent. Despite that, you have seen in the last few months the police and Rab were successful in arresting the mid-junior level to mid-level bomb terrorists. Some of them were given punishment.

With regard to curbing terrorism, I appealed to you that you will be our eyes and ears. I said Bangladesh cannot afford to buy so much CCTV. You will be our CCTV.

The raid in Sylhet has been successful, as you had responded in a massive way to our appeal.

You had responded to that call of mine in various ways. We have received many information from you through telephone, letters and at personal level. You people have become the 14 crore CCTV of the alliance government. I thank you, congratulate you.

Dear countrymen, After coming to power this time we have taken several specific and effective steps with a view to improving law and order. These steps include Operation Clean Heart and subsequent constitution of Rab (Rapid Action Battalion). Efficient and honest members of the Armed Forces and Police are at the leadership of this Rab.

Comprised of police and armed forces, this extremely dependable Rab has been engaged in the task of your security.

But it is a matter of regret that a quarter becomes active in criticism on the question of necessary use of the members of the armed forces in important task in the interest of the country.

But whenever it becomes necessary for the country, the armed forces must be deployed following natural disaster like floods and cyclone and after building collapse or industrial accident. During the election to national parliament, our armed forces performed that task and their just role earned wide appreciation both at home and abroad.

They are deployed in a limited scale and for a specific time to safeguard law and order in the country -- like Operation Clean Heart and now as partner in Rab.

Text of Khaleda's address to nation

BSS, Dhaka

I know, those who want welfare of the country, right to choose their representatives and want peace and discipline in the country, will welcome this role of the armed forces. What kind of demand is it that the armed forces of the country, which performs most praiseworthy role in the UN Peacekeeping Force to maintain world peace, cannot be allowed to work for maintaining peace and discipline in their own country?

Dear countrymen, Look at police, Rab as well as the alliance government's cautious move to save the countrymen from dangerous terrorist activities.

When incidents of terrorism took place during the tenure of the previous government, the BNP leaders and workers were harassed and tortured directly. They were made responsible. They were implicated in false cases.

But the alliance government did not follow the wrong path of torturing the opposition. We tried to understand why this kind of terrorism is taking place? Who are doing this? Where is the source of this terrorism? What are the political and religious aim of this terrorism? We have evaluated all these factors patiently and became successful.

We have got the blessings of Rabbul Alaminn the merciful and received total support from the countrymen. We sought the cooperation of the opposition in resisting these bomb terrorists. We have requested them and said all the political parties have to work together to save the country from such a great danger. They did not respond to our call. Rather they went on blaming. I call upon them again today to get mentally prepared to work together in the greater interest of the country rising above petty differences.

Dear brothers and sisters, Today I want to tell the countrymen, keep faith on the government. We have already been able to eliminate the social terrorism from the country. Now we have advanced toward curbing terrorism conducted in the name of politics and religion. People of Bangladesh have proved that they are religious but they do not give shelter to those who indulge in killing in the name of religion. They do not support terrorism. People of this country are religious, but they are not afraid of facing terrorism.

We have proved again how to face violence and crisis. I admit unhesitatingly that there are many more problems in the country. You keep faith on us. InshaAllah, we shall be able to resolve all problems one after another.

At the end, I want to recall today those unfortunate victims who died untimely in bomb attacks. I pray for peace and salvation of their souls and speedy recovery of those injured. I pray for happy and peaceful life of you all and unhindered progress of Bangladesh.

Thank you. Allah Hafez Bangladesh Zindabad

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Attempt to kill JU journalist

JU CORRESPONDENT

A gang of unidentified miscreants tried to kill the Jahangirnagar University (JU) correspondent of the Prothom Alo by setting fire to his room after locking its door from outside on Wednesday night.

The gang set fire to the room of Nur Siddique, a master's student of drama and dramatics, at Al Beruni hall through the window half an hour after he went to bed at 2:00pm.

The miscreants first set a bed near the window on fire and then locked the door from outside while Nur was sleeping on another bed in the two-bed room.

The fire soon engulfed half of the room and smoke filled the air, suffocating Nur who woke up only to find the door was locked. Hearing his scream, Sohel, a master's student of geology, along with others rushed to the scene and rescued Nur and extinguished the blaze.

Nur, however, did not receive any injury. Mosquito-curtain, window-curtain, bed cover, quilt and two pillows were burnt in the fire.

"The miscreants made such attacks on me as they are dissatisfied over my professional activities," said Nur in his written complaint submitted to the vice-chancellor.

The university authorities filed a general diary with Ashulia Thana police in this connection.

"We are taking the incident very seriously," said VC Prof Khandakar Mustahidur Rahman.

Jahangirnagar University Teachers Association, Jahangirnagar Shangkritik Jote, Jahangirnagar University Journalists Association, Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum and Bangladesh Chhatra League condemned the attack and demanded punishment of the persons responsible.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday said a silent revolution has taken place in the society with the significant contribution of women to every sector.

He was speaking as chief guest at a discussion organised by Women Development Foundation (WDF) at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city.

It was organised to mark International Women's Day to be observed on March 8.

Moudud called upon women-folk to fight against all discriminations that still exist on their way to progress.

Adviser on commerce ministry Barkat Ullah Bulu said our women are working not only for their self-development but also for other women in the society.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said micro-credit has contributed significantly to women development in the country.

Women Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh (WEAB) President Nasrin Awal Mintu also spoke on the occasion.

Later, WDF awarded 'Enlightened Women Award' to Rabeya Khatun, Rani Hamid, Captain Yasmin Rahman, Rokia Afzal Rahman, Kabori Sarwar, Salima Sabiha, Taraman Bibi, Hena Das, Sabina Yasmin and Farida Parveen for their commendable contribution to different sectors.

'Fight communalism to form secular govt'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Central leaders of Ekatturer Ghatak Dal Nirml Committee (Forum for Secular Bangladesh) yesterday called upon the pro-liberation forces to fight against communal elements to materialise the dreams of the martyrs by establishing a secular state.

They made the call while inaugurating a month-long programme to create awareness against the war criminals in March, the month of Independence, at the local Shaheed Minar in the town.

Forum President Shahriar Kabir was the chief guest while Dr Austin Dacey, director of the Council for Secular Humanism, a US-based human rights organisation, was the special guest.

The forum leaders expressed deep concern over the rise of militant activities across the country.

They said independence and sovereignty of the country is at stake as the defeated forces of the war of Liberation have been carrying out bomb attacks.

They also criticised the government for its indifference to growing fanaticism and militancy.

Shahriar Kabir said war criminals must be brought to trial and communalism should be eliminated from the society.

Dr Austin Dacey said a country cannot progress without democracy that goes futile without secularism.

Later, a colourful procession was brought out with national flag in hands that paraded main streets of the town.

The forum started the month-long programme from Sathkira to drum up support across the country for the trial of the war criminals.

Hedayetul made envoy to Brunei

UNB, Dhaka

The government has decided to appoint Md Hedayetul Islam Chowdhury as the country's high commissioner to Brunei Darussalam.

Chowdhury belongs to BCS (Administration) cadre of 1973 batch. He had his education at the University of Dhaka with BSc (Hons.) and MSc in soil science.

He was the secretary to the Rural Development and Cooperative Division prior to his new assignment.

He is the author of three books for the officers of BCS (Administration) cadre.

BCL-JCD clash leaves 3 injured at JU

JU CORRESPONDENT

At least three Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists were injured in clashes between them on campus on Thursday and Wednesday night.

Akhter, a JCD activist of Al Beruni hall (Ext), was beaten by Mamun and Azad, two BCL activists, inside the hall following a dispute over watching television programme at TV room on 10:30pm.

Soon after the incident, the JCD cadres, equipped with firearms, hockey sticks, rods and lethal weapons, brought out a procession inside the hall and searched for BCL activists throughout the hall. In fear of attack the BCL activists left the hall.

To avenge the attack, a group of JCD activists of Shaheed Salam Barkat (SSB) hall led by Sohel beat up Ananda and Vaskor, two BCL activists, at around 12:30am the same night.

Another group of JCD men led by AB hall general secretary of JCD Mushriur and Sijar beat up BCL activist Mintu in his room at BCL yesterday. They also vandalized room no 804 of the hall.

The hall authorities formed a probe body to investigate into the incident.

Political patrons need to be caught

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calls by different political parties and professional bodies, it has not taken any measures to look into the allegation against a section of ruling alliance leaders of harbouring the Islamists.

Political parties that took part in the prime minister's national dialogue in last December to find ways to combat militancy had recommended instituting a judicial commission to enquire into the allegation.

They also suggested that those who have been accused of sheltering the militants from within the government and the administration should resign for the sake of a fair investigation.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, also in charge of the home ministry, yesterday said none will be spared if found guilty in the investigations.

Speaking at a press conference on the arrest of JMB chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman, he said, "Hopefully, Bangla Bhai and the rest of the JMB operatives too will soon be captured."

Bhuiyan, also secretary general of ruling BNP, said the organisational network of JMB has already been greatly diminished and now after the arrest of Shaekh the outfit would become even weaker.

On the trial of Shaekh Rahman, he said he would be tried in the existing court of law.

About involvement of external forces in the militant activities, the minister said it could be known after interrogation of the JMB chief.

About disclosure of some names by JMB military wing commander Ataur Rahman Sunny, he said the intelligence agencies are digging into the matter.

In the wake of the high-profile capture of JMB supreme, security experts yesterday stressed the need for severing the militants' link with their sources of finance and political patronisation.

"Finance is the main thing behind this sort of criminal activities. It would not have been possible for the militants to carry out the subversive acts without financial assistance and political patronisation from home or abroad," former adviser to the caretaker government Major General (retired) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury

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Obituary

Syed Ahsanullah (Akram), a noted actor and chief officer of AB Bank, died of a cardiac arrest at his East Rumpura residence on Tuesday at the age of 55, says a press release.

He was buried at Banani graveyard.

Ahsanullah played the main roles in two films -- 'Dumuree Phool' and 'Basundhara' directed by noted actor Subhash Dutta.

An 'A' grade drama artiste of the Bangladesh Television, he was also a founder-member of Shatabdi Theatre Group.

He left behind his wife and four daughters to mourn his death.