

## Labour suffer losses in local votes

AFP, London

Tony Blair, in his last electoral test as British prime minister, saw his Labour Party suffer losses in Scotland and Wales yesterday as results filtered through in local and regional elections. But although opposition parties made some gains in municipal councils in England, the full extent of its loss of support was not clear with many results not expected until later Friday.

Some 39 million voters are having their last say on Blair and his government, which has suffered a polls slump because of opposition to the war in Iraq and a series of scandals that have dogged his administration.

The result will also be the inheritance of Blair's likely successor, finance minister Gordon Brown, and a political barometer ahead of the next general election, which is due by May 2010 at the latest.

In Scotland, the fight to be the largest party in the 129-member Scottish Parliament was a two-way affair between Labour and the Scottish National Party (SNP), which wants an end to the 300-year-old union with England and Wales.

Early results showed a swing towards the SNP, which ousted Labour from key seats in Dundee West and Central Fife, which are both in the backyard of Brown, a Scot.

The SNP also secured a hugely symbolic victory in Glasgow Govan given the area's industrial, ship-building past and working-class roots.

As results trickled in, SNP leader Alex Salmond, who won in Gordon, north-east Scotland, predicted Labour would suffer its lowest share of the vote since 1922, striking a blow to support in its traditional heartland.

"There's a wind of change blowing through Scottish politics. That's evident from the results that we've seen so far," he said.

In Wales, where voters were choosing a new 60-seat Welsh Assembly, the party failed to wrest back control of Blaenau Gwent, and lost leafy Cardiff North to the Conservatives.

In England, where about 10,500 seats were up for grabs in 312 councils, it was unclear how much of a victory had been scored by the main opposition leader David Cameron's Conservative Party, despite some significant early gains.

The Conservatives took control of Gravesham council in Kent, which was the last local authority Labour ran on its own in south-east England.

Labour also lost overall control in Blackburn, where former foreign secretary Jack Straw is the British parliament representative. Candidates said Iraq had dogged

them while out campaigning in the largely Muslim area.

Analysts say Labour could lose between 600 and 700 local council seats, while the SNP could grab the lion's share in the devolved Scottish parliament, which has limited powers in areas like health, education and transport.

The Conservatives are trying to secure an electoral bridgehead for their return to power at the national level, which they lost in 1997 to Labour.

They have overtaken Labour in opinion polls since reform-minded Cameron became leader 18 months ago, vowing to transform the party into an electable force capable of challenging Labour for the centre ground.

But they are still struggling to make gains in northern English cities.

Much of Labour's political energy and the country's attention is focused on Scotland because of the SNP's strong challenge and pledge to call a referendum on independence by 2010.

Labour's prospects are better in Wales, where polls and council-by-election evidence suggest support for nationalists there may have peaked.

Local polls are being watched with interest on the ground, but in London all eyes are on Blair, who is expected to announce his resignation next week.

## 13 Natore BNP men sued for 'extortion'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Natore BNP General Secretary Shahidul Islam Bachchu and 12 others have been sued on charges of extortion.

Anwar Khan Mukim, owner of Meraj Hardware in the district town, filed the case against Bachchu, also a close associate of detained former deputy minister Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu, and 12 others with Sadar Police Station on Thursday night.

Anwar alleged that Dulu's terrorist wing commander Dewan Shahin and his accomplices picked him up from his shop on September 3, 2006 and took him to Bachchu's chamber at Kanaikhal.

Anwar further alleged that Bachchu at gunpoint forced him to put his signature on a bank cheque for Tk10 lakh and asked him to give the money.

Anwar said he drew the amount from Janata Bank local branch and gave it to Bachchu.

Anwar in his case stated that he did not file the case at that time fearing attack on his life.

## Police raids 4 DU halls

DU CORRESPONDENT

Police raided four halls of Dhaka University (DU) early yesterday in search of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) men who took part in separate processions violating the state of emergency.

Police raided SM Hall, Muhsin Hall, Jasimuddin Hall and Ziaur Rahman Hall from around 12:15am to 2:00am but could not arrest any wanted person.

Intelligence sources said the raid was also aimed at arresting the three JCD men who beat up a journalist at SM Hall on Thursday.

One outsider picked up from Muhsin Hall during the raid was later freed.

Sources said police and intelligence agencies working on the campus prepared a list of JCD and BCL leaders and activists who violated the state of emergency.

JCD took part in a procession on the campus on March 8 after the detention of Tarique Rahman, BNP senior joint secretary general.

BCL also did the same on 22 April in Shabbagh protesting against the government steps to prevent Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina's return to the country.

The raid was conducted on information that some outsiders were staying in the dormitories, Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shahabgh Police Station, said.

He declined to admit that the raid was part of any 'special search'.

## Extortion case against Ilyas Ali goes to DB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The extortion case filed against former BNP lawmaker Ilyas Ali and two others has been transferred to the Detective Branch (DB) for investigation.

The other accused in the case are vice-president of the BNP Biswanath upazila unit Siraj Khan and assistant general secretary Abul Hossain.

Immediately after filing of the case, police arrested Siraj Khan at his house at village Dashghar at midnight on April 27. On the following day, he was produced before a magistrate's court that sent him to jail at Hajat.

Asab Uddin, a close associate of Awami League (AL) leader and former upazila Chairman Mubibur Rahman, filed the case with Biswanath Police Station on the night of April 27.

The complainant, Asab Uddin, was a candidate for the post of chairman in Daulatpur Union Parishad election scheduled for February 25, 2003.

In the case, Asab alleged that Ilyas Ali, who was also the former convenor of Sylhet district BNP, called him to his (Ilyas) village home on January 31, 2003 and demanded Tk 20 lakh, otherwise, he would not be allowed to contest the polls.

Asab further stated that Siraj Khan and Abul Hossain later took Tk 5 lakh from him on behalf of the former lawmaker.

## Wahed

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November 16, 1985, Wahed added.

DLRS however did not pay him his salaries and other benefits for the period between November 17, 1985 and January 19, 1988 (two years, two months and four days), prompting him to file a petition with the Ministry of Land.

The Ministry of Land sought opinion on the matter from the Ministry of Law. Following positive response from the law ministry, the land ministry in a letter on August 14, 2005 asked the director general (DG) of DLRS to take necessary measures for paying Wahed his overdue salaries and benefits for the period.

The land ministry also issued three letters to DLRS asking its DG to take necessary actions and pay Wahed's salaries and pension.

"It has been almost two years since the land ministry directed the DLRS office to pay me my back pay, but nothing happened yet," said Wahed, now a senior citizen.

Monindranath Roy, deputy director (admin) of DLRS, told The Daily Star on April 18 that he had joined the office on deputation only three months ago and he needed to be acquainted with the case.

"We need the file where the documents of the departmental case are preserved for settling the issue. However the section concerned, in response to a show-cause notice served earlier, said they had not received such a file," he said.

"I asked Abdul Wahed's son to provide us with references regarding the departmental case."

Wahed however said he does not have any reference of the departmental case. He only has the High Court verdict on the case and copies of the land ministry orders asking DLRS to pay him his salaries and pension.



Water from leaked Wasa pipeline pours out at the broken part of a road at Kaptan Bazar in the capital. The photo was taken yesterday.

## C'wealth chief

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government must keep the people of Bangladesh informed.

"In this context, he called for the government to put out a roadmap leading up to inclusive and credible elections. Since then the government has committed itself to elections no later than the end of 2008," said the press release.

In his discussions with Hasina, McKinnon reaffirmed the Commonwealth's support for elections and the return to parliamentary government in Bangladesh as expeditiously as possible.

He also recognised that there were issues that needed to be addressed in organising these elections and ensuring a sustainable democracy in Bangladesh.

McKinnon stressed the Commonwealth's readiness to assist Bangladesh in every possible way in the electoral process.

Hasina told McKinnon that the caretaker government and the Election Commission (EC) have said they need 18 months to prepare the voter list but it is too long a time for holding the next election.

AL Assistant Secretary for international affairs' sub-committee Abdus Sobhan Golap, who is accompanying Hasina in London, informed The Daily Star last night over telephone of Hasina's conversation with the Commonwealth secretary-general.

Hasina said the EC could have initiated either updating the voter roll or preparing of the voter identity cards in six divisional headquarters as pilot projects by this time.

She urged McKinnon to take measures so that the caretaker government and the EC shorten the 18-month time for holding the election. Hasina also urged him to send election observers to Bangladesh to watch the EC activities to increase its transparency.

Golap said the overall political situation of Bangladesh came up in the meeting and Hasina alleged

that those who are speaking of reforms are not defining the content of it.

McKinnon wanted to know if Hasina might face any complications after returning home. In reply, Hasina firmly said she must return to her people and face any consequences, including the "false and fabricated" charges against her.

**AL LEADERS HOLD MEETING**  
Senior AL leaders meanwhile held a meeting last night at General Secretary Abdul Jalil's Gulshan residence.

Talking to The Daily Star, some of the leaders however said they went to see Jalil as he returned home from Singapore after a medical check-up.

Sources said the leaders discussed different aspects of Hasina's return including giving her a mass reception although senior leaders did not reach a consensus over it.

Sources said Jalil talked to an influential adviser of the caretaker government about Hasina's homecoming and conveyed him the decision that only leaders of the party's central working committee will be present at the airport to receive her.

The adviser set a few guidelines for the AL leaders including restriction on chanting party slogans and mass gathering. Later, Jalil conveyed the message to Hasina, the sources added.

Hasina will be directly taken to her Sudha Sadan residence from the airport.

AL leaders Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Matia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Syed Ashraf Islam, Mukul Bose, Sabur Hossain Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan, Abdul Mannan Khan and Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin were present at the meeting.

## Greenhouse gas

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Coming out of the meeting, delegates said science appeared to have trumped politics especially opposition from booming China, which wanted language inserted allowing for a greater buildup of greenhouse gases in the environment before action would be taken.

Beijing, the second-largest emitter after the United States, and its supporters had argued that moves to make deep cuts in carbon dioxide emissions risked stifling its spectacular economic growth, delegates said. But the final report included mention of a stringent emission target from an earlier draft.

Zhou Dadi, a Chinese author in the report and a researcher at the country's top planning agency, denied China had "opposed" the key findings and was only working to improve the text.

"The Chinese government was constructive and was contributing to making the report reflect the science," Zhou said. "We are not threatened by the report."

Delegates had wrestled over how to share the burden of cutting emissions, how much such measures would cost, and how much weight to give certain policy measures, such as advanced nuclear power, an option supported by the United States.

For many delegates, the strongest message was that reaching the lowest targets could be done at less than 3 percent of the global gross domestic product by 2030 or 0.12 annually.

That compares favorably to global economic growth that every year has averaged almost 3 percent since 2000. The damage from unabated climate change, meanwhile, might eventually cost the global economy between 5 percent and 20 percent of GDP every year, according to a British government report last year.

"I would say it (the GDP estimates) looks like a reasonable risk to take, compared to the impact of projected climate change," said Jayant Sathaye, a scientist at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California.

The report follows two studies by the IPCC earlier this year warning that unabated greenhouse gas emissions could drive global temperatures up as much as 11 degrees by 2100, triggering a surge in ocean levels, destruction of vast numbers of species, economic devastation in tropical zones and mass human migrations.

Even the most stringent efforts outlined in the report, however, would not prevent suffering. An increase in temperatures to 3.6 degrees could still subject up to 2 billion people to water shortages by 2050 and threaten extinction for 20 percent to 30 percent of the world's species, the IPCC said.

Environmental groups said the report demonstrates the world can afford to battle global warming and must do so immediately.

"This is a roadmap that the IPCC is delivering," said Hans Verolme of WWF International. "It's time for the politicians to do more than just pay lip service to the issue of global warming, and to stop climate change before it's too late."

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## Bush no more

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However, plenty of other politicians, notably Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, managed to squeeze into a packed and varied field of entertainers, philanthropists, sportsmen and entrepreneurs.

The "artists and entertainers" category includes Hollywood heavyweights Martin Scorsese, Cate Blanchett and heart-throbs Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio, along with fashion model Kate Moss.

Pop sensation Justin Timberlake is named along with Senegalese musician Youssou N'Dour, while former US vice president Al Gore's shift to environmental campaigner got him nominated in the "scientists and thinkers" category.

The list, which is designed to recognise "the men and women whose power, talent or moral example is transforming our world," does not appear in any order or give the magazine's reasons why some people were chosen over others.

The "leaders and revolutionaries" category features Queen Elizabeth II, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni -- in an entry penned by US counterpart Condoleezza Rice -- and Rice herself, appearing for a fourth year running.

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger makes a showing next to Raul Castro, the younger brother of Cuban leader Fidel Castro, Indian Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi and Chinese President Hu Jintao.

Other politicians in the mix include German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Liu Qi, head of the 2008 Beijing Olympics committee.

Besides Rice, US talk show host Oprah Winfrey is the only person to have appeared all four years, featuring in the "heroes and pioneers"

section in an entry written by anti-apartheid campaigner Nelson Mandela.

Other "heroes" include billionaire investor and philanthropist Warren Buffett, rubbing shoulders with tennis champion Roger Federer, footballer Thierry Henry and Chinese online activist Zeng Jinyan.

## 7 JMB men got BRDB loan in Jhalakathi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A high government official yesterday acknowledged that the seven JMB top terrorists who were awarded death sentence received loans from Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB).

Nazrul Islam, a high official of BRDB under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD), revealed this fact while speaking at the chief guest in a discussion meeting of the BRDB field workers of Barisal division at Barisal Auditorium.

Per head Tk 50 thousand was sanctioned as loan for the seven JMB terrorists as per orders of the higher authorities concerned, he said.

He, however, declined to give any details about the time, place, method, and purpose of the loans disbursed.

At that time the recipients were too low profile to be recognised as top terrorists of the future, he said.

Barisal Deputy Commissioner Manzure Elahi was special guest while Khalilur Rahman, deputy director of Barisal BRDB, delivered the welcome address at the programme presided over by BRDB Director General Abdus Sobhan.

## Royal warns

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"It must be the polls. It's so outrageous," Sarkozy said of her comments in an interview with Europe1 radio. "She is getting tense, stiffer, because she feels the ground shifting."

Sarkozy, the former interior minister, is seen as a divisive figure by many on the left and in the high-immigrant suburbs for his tough talk on controlling immigration and restoring law and order.

His description of young delinquents in the suburbs as "racaille" - "rabble" -- turned him into an enemy of the Arab and African residents of the major cities that exploded into rioting in late 2005.

Royal was to travel to Brittany in the northwest on Friday while Sarkozy headed to Haute-Savoie in the southeast to wrap up campaigning in the election to choose a successor to Chirac.

During his final big rally late Thursday, a triumphant Sarkozy urged supporters to help him "create the conditions for a French rebirth" as he appeared increasingly sure of victory.

He drew ringing applause when he defended his use of the word "racaille" during a rally in the southern city of Montpellier.

"People accuse me of encouraging public anger. But who's angry? The jobs? The drug-traffickers? I can assure you: I do not seek to be the friend of jobs. My aim is not to make myself popular among the traffickers and the fraudsters," he said.

In the northern city of Lille, Royal proclaimed that she wanted to bring deep change to France but without the "brutality" embodied by her rival.

Royal said she preferred "a new France, a protecting France, a fraternal France, a competitive France" she said a day after the crucial television debate seen as a last chance to sway voters.

While commentators judged the debate to be a draw, polls showed that a majority of viewers rated Sarkozy "more convincing" than Royal.

Royal urged voters to turn out in force at the polls and "show that

the polls are lying."

Nearly seven million voters who backed centrist Francois Bayrou in the April 22 first round of the election have been counted assiduously by Royal and Sarkozy ahead of the runoff and are thought to hold the key to victory.

But a TNS-Sofres poll showed that 40 percent of voters who backed Bayrou would vote for Sarkozy compared to 35 percent for Royal. A separate CSA poll said 37 percent of Bayrou voters would back the Socialist and 30 percent Sarkozy.

Sarkozy, 52, the son of a Hungarian immigrant, has pushed a right-wing programme based on the themes of work, national identity and law and order.

Royal, an army officer's daughter, has presented herself as a nurturing figure and has proposed a leftist economic programme that would keep France's generous welfare system intact.

## Ukraine rivals agree on early elections

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich agreed Friday to hold early parliamentary elections, signalling an end to a bitter power struggle in the ex-Soviet republic.

"Today we reached agreement in principle on holding early elections," Yushchenko said after meeting with Yanukovich in Kiev, the president's office said in a statement.

Ukraine has been locked in crisis since April 2 after Russian-backed Yanukovich defied an order from pro-Western Yushchenko to dissolve parliament and hold early elections.

Addressing several thousand supporters on Independence Square in central Kiev, Yanukovich confirmed that a deal had been reached.

"We have reached the same conclusion that there is no other way to resolve this crisis than to organise honest and democratic elections," Yanukovich told his supporters in a speech shown on television.

"We are sure that we will win early elections, win against those who were trying to destabilise the country," said Yanukovich, who leads the powerful Regions party.

No date was announced for elections. Yushchenko indicated that a delay of at least two months is expected.

Ukraine has been in crisis since Pirganj upazila, which of the pro-Western 2004 street protests known as the Orange Revolution, which swept him to power, accused his arch rival's coalition in parliament of making an unconstitutional grab for power.

Yushchenko initially decreed that the snap elections should be held on May 27 but issued a second order last week in which he changed the date to June 24, citing difficulties in organising the elections on time.

The prime minister consistently refused to obey the president's orders and brought thousands of his supporters into central Kiev for round-the-clock protests outside key government buildings.

## Militants regrouping

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Sources close to those working on the Islamist groups said the militants have decided to remain clean-shaven and not to wear pajamas or punjabis. They believe this would make it difficult for the law enforcers to suspect them of being militants by the way they look.

Following intelligence reports, the police high-ups have directed its forces down to the district level to be on the alert for the regrouped militants. Accordingly, police in different

## Pak-Afghan 'peace jirga' set for Aug 1

AFP, Kabul

About 700 tribal elders, politicians and other influential people from Afghanistan and Pakistan will meet August 1 for a traditional "jirga" on the Taliban insurgency, the Afghan president said Friday.

An Afghan delegation would travel to Pakistan later this month for more talks on the joint "peace jirga," Hamid Karzai said in a statement after meeting Pakistan's Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao.

"The people of Afghanistan want peace and stability in the area," the president said, stressing the need for cooperation because "terrorism is affecting all of us."

Sherpao said Thursday, after a round of talks about the long-planned gathering, that the two sides were working on the agenda for the meeting, the first of its kind between the neighbours.

The jirga, a tradition in Afghanistan, is intended to involve local people more closely in efforts to end the Taliban insurgency, which has grown steadily since the extremist movement was driven from government in late 2001.

Karzai and Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf agreed to the meeting during talks with US President George W. Bush in September.

Relations between Karzai and Musharraf have cooled as the insurgency has dragged on, with each accusing the other of not doing enough to curb extremist violence growing on both sides of the border.

## Yunus

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professor at Chittagong University while he thanked the students for their assistance during the initial days of his microcredit disbursement programme.

He also said there is a global campaign for giving the poor access to banks. Currently, only two-thirds of the global population have access to banking services, said Yunus.

The 2006 Nobel peace prize winner also informed the audience that at least 90 thousand beggars are currently receiving microcredit loans, but he added that he would never force anyone to take a microcredit loan.

Yunus will fly off to Venezuela on Sunday on special invitation from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, he told the audience.