

France braces

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surveys taken since the April 22 first round have given a clear lead to Sarkozy -- with the gap widening in the last days of the campaign.

Some 44 million people can take part in the election, which offers a clear choice between two starkly different programmes of right and left.

Sarkozy, the 52-year-old head of the ruling Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), is proposing a radical economic agenda based on tax-cuts, limits to trade union powers and incentives to work harder.

Royal, 53, who is the first woman to have a serious chance of becoming French president, favours measures to safeguard the country's system of social protection and state intervention to create jobs.

The winner will take over from 74-year-old Jacques Chirac, president since 1995.

Both candidates are seen as representatives of a younger generation of politicians, promising new ideas to tackle France's runaway national debt, high unemployment and the festering discontent in high-immigration city suburbs.

Polling booths open at 8.00 am Sunday and close 12 hours later, with normally reliable projections due out immediately. Voting was taking place a day early in France's overseas territories in the Americas.

Sarkozy and Royal came first and second in the multi-candidate round of the election, with 31.2 percent and 25.9 percent of the vote.

The two-week second round campaign has focussed on the 6.8 million people -- 18.6 percent of the vote -- who chose the defeated centrist Francois Bayrou on April 22.

Bayrou has refused to give an endorsement to either candidate, though he has made it clear that his personal preference is for Royal. It

was far from certain that his supporters would follow his lead.

The highpoint of the campaign was Wednesday's televised debate between Sarkozy and Royal, which was watched by some 20 million viewers.

Royal showed an unexpectedly aggressive streak in the head-to-head -- at one point accusing Sarkozy of "political immorality". Her attacks won high praise from supporters, but surveys subsequently showed most voters found Sarkozy the more convincing.

Continuing to trail in the polls, Royal launched a fierce personal assault on Sarkozy Friday, saying his election would provoke violence in the high-immigration suburbs that were the centre of riots in 2005.

Referring to his "dangerous candidacy," Royal said she had a "responsibility to issue an alert over the risks ... regarding the violence and brutalities that will be triggered across the country. Everyone knows it but no one says it. It is a kind of taboo."

Sarkozy responded that "never in the history of the Fifth Republic have such violent and threatening comments been heard. Saying that if you vote for a candidate there will be violence is simply to reject the right to democratic expression."

French newspapers Saturday were banned from reporting polls or comments by either candidate, but several noted the gloomy atmosphere inside Royal's camp.

Le Parisien newspaper said that Royal's campaign "is ending in a surreal ambience ... you can cut the atmosphere at PS headquarters with a knife."

The left-wing daily Liberation said that "the hypothesis of defeat began to take hold Friday. Only the candidate herself seems to keep the faith."

Hasina to fly in

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calling for reforms now are being somewhat ambiguous."

"If reform implies changes in the leadership then that should happen through a ballot within a party. If it suggests shifts in a party's policies or constitution or any other area then those too should come systematically."

"The Awami League has a tradition of forming committees on such matters before every council. The committees place their recommendations before the councillors who, in turn, give their opinions and it all lead to final decisions."

"As the indoor politics is banned now the party cannot form any committee or hold a council. How come you bring about reforms with the ban in place?" she questioned.

"I did not volunteer to be the party's president, and neither did my father make me the party chief when he was alive. The Awami League made me its president in my absence," Hasina argued.

About her initial task on return, she said, "I will meet my party members and leaders. We have a Trust that runs a hospital. Many families of the ones dead or injured in political persecution get financial help from the Trust. But all these have slowed down due to my absence and they must resume shortly."

Sheikh Hasina had left for the US on a personal tour on March 15 and was supposed to return on

Dhanmondi roads made one-way from today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) today will start enforcing one-way traffic on a number of city streets in Dhanmondi residential area from 7:00am to 9:00pm in its effort to ease traffic congestion.

DMP will enforce a ban on honking horns on various rickshaw-free city streets along with a few streets in Dhanmondi as well to curb noise pollution.

At Dhanmondi yesterday, DMP personnel were seen making preparations for effective enforcement of the traffic rules set to be imposed from today.

If found guilty of honking horns in the no-honking zones without any justifiable reasons, undercover police will fine motorists with upto Tk 200.

The one-way restrictions on vehicular movement in Dhanmondi will not be applicable on holidays. The one-way streets in Dhanmondi will also be considered no-honking zones.

The no-honking zones include Airport Road from Shaheed Jahangir Gate to Uttara and Abdullahpur, Kemal Ataturk Avenue up to Phoenix Bhaban via Gulshan 1 and 2, from Gabtoli to Ajampur via Russell Square, from Bijoy Sarani to Mohammadpur Traffic Office, from Hotel Sheraton to Kakrail intersection, from Matsya Bhaban to Rainbow crossing, from Science Laboratory intersection to Matsya Bhaban and from Matsya Bhaban to Golapshah Mazar via old High Court intersection.

April 23. She reached London on April 19 while the previous day the government issued a press note imposing a ban on her entry into the country.

Later on April 25, the interim administration withdrew the press note in the face of pressure and criticism both at home and abroad.

Referring to the latest arrests of her personal staff Saifuzzaman Shikhar and Gazi Golam Dastagir, an AL nominee for the cancelled January 22 polls, she said, "I've heard that they are being tortured into saying that I had given nominations for money."

Meanwhile, AL acting president Zillur Rahman said due to emergency and the ban on political activities, the party will not arrange any public reception for her at the Zia International Airport tomorrow.

"Our working committee leaders want to receive her at the airport and we've already sought permission from the government," he added.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said the government has wanted a list of those who would receive Hasina at the airport. The AL will give a list of around 100 people including members of the advisory council, presidium and working committees.

Indoor politics

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also criticised civil society leaders for their present role regarding the much-talked political party reforms issue and "flattery" of the caretaker government.

"He [Obaidur Rahman] took the uneven path of politics not for his personal gain, but to make this country independent," said Law Commission Chairman former chief justice Mostafa Kamal.

"He was very modest and amiable in his behaviour. He had the quality to attract people towards him," hesaid.

Addressing the present caretaker government, BNP leader Shah Moazzem Hossain said, "Why are you doing politics when you have banned political activities including indoor politics?"

The BNP leader who joined the party last year condemned the present role of civil society.

Making an oblique reference to Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, Moazzem Hossain said, "Now you have run away as you have understood what politics is."

Criticising the civil society, Workers Party leader Rashed Khan Menon said, "Now you are vocal about the reforms in politics but when we were vocal in this regard, you were silent."

BNP leader Nurul Islam Monjur criticised both of the major political parties BNP and Awami League for not practising democracy inside the party.

Urging the caretaker government to lift ban on indoor politics, BNP leader Selima Rahman said, "How will the parties start reforms if the ban on political activities is not lifted?"

Without mentioning the caretaker government, BJP leader Shamim Al Mamun said, "Do not handle all the matters, do your specific job and arrange the election soon.

BNP leaders Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Shah Muhammad Abu Jafar, Moazzem Hossain Alal, Jukta from leader ASM Abdur Rob, poet Al Mujahidi, and wife and daughter of late Obaidur Rahman also addressed the meeting.

Iskandar

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Conference Centre in the capital.

"The process of inducting him [Sayeed Iskandar] should have been transparent," he said replying to a query about reforming political parties. The BNP leader said before bringing reforms to the party, reform should be defined properly.

He emphasised that leaders and activists from all levels have to demand that the party chief brings reforms to BNP. He also said any reform in BNP must be brought internally without any external pressure.

Another former education minister and Awami League's (AL) Advisory Council Member ASHK Sadique emphasised on bringing reforms to party constitutions, and on area based elections for electing party leaderships so that councillors may elect them without being influenced. He said the present system of electing leaderships is expensive as all councillors have to be brought to the capital, who also need to be accommodated for five to six days.

Refuting allegations that AL President Sheikh Hasina was made the party president dynastically, Sadique said she was elected president by the party itself while she was in exile.

BBC Bangla Service in conjunction with BBC World Service Trust organised the discussion. BBC's Walur Rahman Miraj and Masud Hasan Khan produced and moderated the event respectively.

Taking part in the discussion, Maj Gen (ret'd) Syed Muhammad Ibrahim said the two major party chiefs could hand over leaderships and responsibilities to two competent persons of the respective parties, as, in his words, both the chiefs have been leading the parties since 1981 and 1982.

Bangladesh Mohila Parishad General Secretary Ayesha Khatun emphasised on changing the top leaderships of BNP and AL and said party councillors, leaders and activists have to play key roles in bringing internal reforms to both the parties.

Replying to another query, Farruk said the caretaker government is not being able to handle the country's political problems efficiently with days passing fast. He said formation of a national unity government might be a possibility for solving the prevailing political crisis. The present caretaker government might be thinking about it, he noted.

Sadique said only the political parties should decide on the matter of forming a national unity government. The parties should take decisions about the matter after the ban on indoor politics is lifted, he added.

Commenting on Nobel laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus' recent bowing out of politics, most of the discussants said he took the decision based on his sagacity.

They also emphasised on going deep to dig out the reasons behind the rise of militancy in the country even during the state of emergency, and on making the public aware of the reasons. The discussants urged the caretaker government to look into the allegations against the 27th BCS exam properly, and if the allegations are not proven then, not to keep the matter hanging.

Mamun

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In the case filed by Abu Shahed Sahel, coordinator of Aclrl, with Gulshan Police station on Friday, he complained that Mamun had extorted Tk 4.89 crore from him on different dates in cash and cheque in 2004 to 2006.

He could not dare to file any case against Mamun at that time fearing reprisal. And he has now lodged the case as the situation has changed, he said in the FIR.

Six rescued

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an organised woman-trafficking ring.

The rescued are Parbati, 13, and Rupti, 12, both residents of Bandar Tila, Chittagong while Gouri, 35, and her three children Sanjay, 12, Shankari, 13, and Gokul, 14, from Noakhali.

Sources said the traffickers brought the women and children to the capital from Noakhali and Chittagong on Friday. They were supposed to be handed over to a Shahidul in Sakthira before being sent to India.

Apan Das during primary interrogation confessed to human trafficking.

Gouri, wife of day labourer Guru Das in Noakhali, said Apan Das on Wednesday persuaded her to go to Dhaka with a promise of finding her a job in the capital. But after reaching Dhaka, Apan said that they would be better off if they went to India. He also threatened her that he would not let them go back to Noakhali.

Another victim, Parbati, also said that the traffickers brought Rupti and her to the capital promising to find them jobs.

A case was filed with Ashulia Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Act. The rescued will be under police custody till they are sent back to the families.

Deputy-commander of Rab 11 and Assistant Superintendent of Police Solaiman told journalists that Apan Das is a member of an organised woman-trafficking cartel and the law enforcers are working on to capture every one of them.

Judicial body

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complex where he died at about 8:15pm, they added.

But locals alleged that the forces picked up Chelash along with some other indigenous people when they were returning from Mymensingh.

14 Euro Mps

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said the statement. The Daily Star received a copy of the statement yesterday.

About the ongoing state of emergency, the statement said: "for the sake of democracy, we urge the caretaker government of Bangladesh to urgently lift the state of emergency, which has been declared on January 11, 2007 and which, according to the Constitution, can run for a maximum of three months."

The parliamentarians, however, appreciated the government's steps to fight corruption, restore order and reform the institutions, including political parties.

"However, recent reports on systematic oppression and intimidation of party leaders under the emergency rules have caused serious concern. We recognise the responsibility of the caretaker government of Bangladesh to ensure law and order, but urge security personnel to respect human rights and use force only when necessary and in a proportionate manner," the statement added.

Citing the recent ban on the former prime minister Sheikh Hasina to return home after a private visit to the USA as an example, the statement noted that the interim government of Bangladesh ultimately lifted the ban after a couple of days following pressure of the international community.

"We trust that the caretaker government will vouch for her security upon her return to the

country," the lawmakers said.

"We believe it is imperative that all political parties and the caretaker government of Bangladesh work together to ensure the effective protection of the democratic human rights of every individual-- whatever their political persuasion," the statement said.

Those who signed the statement are -- Johan Van Hecke, from Belgium and member of the Legal Affairs Committee, Baroness Sarah Luford, from UK and member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, Istvan Szent-Ivanyi, from Hungary and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Marco Cappaio, from Italy and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Karim Sajjad, from UK and member of the International Trade Committee, Lydie Polfer, from Luxembourg and member of Foreign Affairs Committee, Luisa Morgantini, from Italy and member of the Development Committee, Newton Dunn Bill, from UK and member of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, Jaatzenmaki Anneli, vice chairwoman of the Committee of Constitutional Affairs, Charles Tannock, from UK and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Toine Manders, from Netherlands and member of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, Lapo Pistelli, from Italy and member of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and Bart Staes, from Belgium and member of the Committee on Budgetary Control.

6 more bodies found

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48 hours to report back on the clashes between two groups of picnickers and Ansars on board a launch at the Sadarghat terminal.

The ones recovered yesterday were identified as Shahiduddin, 22, a mineral water vendor, Priyotosh Mondal, 20, vocalist of musical band Love Touch, Suchana Akhter Ruma, 13, of Gandaria, Liton, 22, of Sutrapur, and Indranath Sur, 40. The name of another one fished out of the river near Champatuly at 4:30pm could not yet be known.

Locals recovered the body of Ruma from the water near Farashganj Bridge at 7:00am while that of Indranath Sur was found at 4:00pm after a frantic search by his relatives.

Meanwhile, the body that remained unidentified after recovery on Friday night was known to be of Ganesh Rajbhor, 22, a gardener from Dhanmondi.

"Primarily, no mark of torture was found on the bodies. Viscera reports should confirm if they had taken alcohol or not," said the doctor who performed autopsies on the bodies.

Relatives of the dead complained that the victims would not have jumped off the launch had the Ansars, launch crew and terminal staff not been so hard on them.

Locals and terminal staff alleged that anti-social activities in the name of pleasure trip take place in the Buriganga all too often but the law enforcement agencies do not bother to check the rowdiness.

"The culprits could have been handed over to the police or punished in accordance with

law. But instead the Ansars charged baton and panicked the picnickers into diving into the river," said Tajuddin, uncle of Shahiduddin, one of the casualties.

The south Keraniganj police seized the launch "MV-New Sun-4" yesterday morning and detained Jewel, a tea vendor. The local police have been on duty at the terminal. They were being assisted by a team from Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Sanchita, a relation of one victim, yesterday filed a case with South Keraniganj Police Station in connection with the Friday night's brawl and Ansar action.

Meanwhile, the bodies of four students who went missing in the padma at Louhagor Friday afternoon were recovered yesterday.

They are Shakhawat Hossain Linkon, a first-year student of business administration at East-West University, Morshed Khan and Saiful Islam of Nazrul Islam College, and Fazul Karim Evan of marketing department at Dhaka University.

Legal notice

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comment available from British Airways.

The Bangladesh government blocked Hasina's return from London on April 18, saying she was a national security threat.

Last Wednesday, the government said it was lifting restrictions on her return, backtracking on plans to exile her and her bitter rival Khaleda Zia amid local and international pressure.

Trial of Harris

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directed Harris to submit his wealth statement within 72 hours, but neither he nor any representative submitted the statement on his behalf. The anti-graft body at a meeting on March 29 gave approval for filing of the case, sources said.

CASES AGAINST 3 STATE MINISTERS

The accused of three graft cases are former state minister for planning Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, ex-state minister for civil aviation and tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and his son Helal Uddin, former state minister for labour and employment Amanullah Aman and his wife Sabera Aman.

Earlier on May 3, the court accepted the charge sheets in which the accused had been charged with amassing huge wealth through corruption and abuse of power.

The court directed the jail authorities to produce the accused before it today.

On April 29, the ACC pressed charges against them in connection with the graft cases filed with different police stations.

The investigation officers (IOs) of the cases submitted the charge sheets to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka showing 12 people as prosecution witnesses for each of the cases.

ALAMGIR CASE

ACC Deputy Directors (DDs) Sharmin Ferdousi and Jibon

Krishna Roy, also the IOs of the case, submitted the charge sheet of the case against Alamgir with

Camel jockeys

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be as high as \$5,000 for the injured camel jockeys.

A total of 200 children involved in the camel racing in the UAE had already returned to Bangladesh.

The UAE government has so far paid Tk1,04,000 for their rehabilitation.

The process of compensatory payments started at Barura thana in Comilla last April with handing over of cheques among 13 returned children.

Trans-Asian

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The deadline for signing the agreement by other interested countries was set from November 2006 to December 2008. The countries will have to ink the accord at the UN headquarters in New York.

Chaired by Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed, the meeting also discussed the option for modernising the Trademark Law that was enacted in 1940. "Now the law is not functionally acceptable in line with international guidelines," officials said.

A committee headed by the industries secretary was formed to prepare a draft of the Trademark Ordinance 2007 in line with the guidelines of the trade related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and the World Intellectual Property Organisation.

The committee has been asked to submit the draft by June 30.

During the meeting, ways of making the government pension process easier and expediting its action were also discussed so that pensioners can get their annuity "timely and smoothly".

The CA directed the authorities concerned to take necessary action in this regard and urged the ministries to prepare separate lists of pensioners of the respective ministries.

Members of the Council of Advisers, the cabinet secretary and the secretaries concerned attended the meeting at the CA's office.

Shibir leader

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managed to flee with the video camera.

Rashid was handed over to Shibganj police. Police later raided his house and seized several objectionable books and documents.

Police said Rashid would be produced before a court today with a remand petition.

Rashid is a first year student of Radhakantapur College and hailed from Pitalitala under Shibganj upazila of the district.

According to a top army official of the camp, an army sentry noticed that Rashid and his associate were taking video footages of the army camp.

"As they were challenged the man, who was shooting, ran away with the video camera," added the official.

Inflation

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transport and other logistical disruption impacted on the overall economic activities during the second quarter of FY 2007.

The reduced rice production indicated a fall in the growth in agriculture, although the central bank had predicted in October that the growth rate for the fiscal year would lie between 6.6 to 7.1 per cent, the quarterly said.

No significant adjustments appear necessary for the industrial or service sectors. The overall output growth for FY 2007 is thus likely to be close to the bottom of the range earlier predicted, it said.

The study said that faster growth of expenditure than revenue pushed the fiscal deficit higher.

It said overall government revenue (both tax and non-tax) and expenditure increased by 10.6 and 27.34 per cent respectively during the period over the corresponding quarter of FY 06.

The expenditure of Annual Development Plan (ADP) also rose by 25 per cent in 2006. Given the decline of foreign assistance, the budgetary deficit has been accommodated by expanding domestic bank borrowing during the first two quarters of the current FY, it mentioned.

The current account balance recorded a strong 38.18 per cent growth in the second quarter, which is much higher than the previous quarter's growth, it said.

The monetary policy measures for the next quarter will have to be well coordinated within administrative and fiscal measures in order to not lose the grip on inflationary expectations while keeping the growth targets in sharp focus.

The central bank study said the anti-money laundering and anti-corruption drives by the present government and the National Board of Revenue's (NBR) move to expand the tax net are expected to yield positive results in terms of revenue gains for the government as well as for National Commercial Banks' (NCBs) solvency through faster recovery of classified loans.

Moreover, the impact of longer term reforms such as restructuring of state-owned enterprises, NCB corporatisation and related steps are likely to lead to greater financial sector stability down the road, it noted.

Drug policy

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export income of pharmaceutical companies is Tk 122 crore only.

The flawed drug policy also failed to identify and ban harmful and redundant drugs and instead of taking strict import control measures, the multinational companies have been allowed free access to the country's drug market.

It lacks a list of essential drugs and there is no specific guideline to protect the country's public health, experts said, adding that instead of taking steps to ensure reasonable and safe use of drugs, the new policy accorded indiscriminate approval for manufacturing and marketing of drugs, and failed to encourage development in the field of traditional medicine.

The policy has no specific guideline for protecting the country's public health and pharmaceutical sector from the onslaught of ETO, GATT and TRIPS, which would be implemented in Bangladesh in 2016 by establishing patent right.

The situation will lead to excessive price of medicines, experts said.

"The drug policy prepared in 2005 goes against the interest of people. It will benefit only the importers and manufacturers,"

said Prof ABM Faroque of the Department of Pharmacy, Dhaka University.

Admitting increased facilities in manufacturing drugs under the current policy, BAPI Secretary General Nazmul Hasan said it provides facilities for foreign manufacturers to produce drugs in this country through technology transfer.

But he claimed that other things in the policy have remained as before.

However, Health Secretary Ehsanul Fattah said a process is going on to form a committee comprising eminent doctors and pharmacists to re-examine the drug policy of 2005.

He said the committee will be completed within a month.

Experts hailed the initiative to review the current drug policy, the stated purpose of which is making the country a drug producing and exporting country, and competing in global market by bringing technological advancement in drug industry.