

Second phase of Indian polls today

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

More than 194 million people are eligible to vote in the second phase of Indian parliamentary polls today when the biggest chunk of 140 of the total of 543 MPs are elected from among big names of politics including Rahul Gandhi (Congress), Sharad Pawar (NCP) and Sushma Swaraaj (BJP).

The second phase of the five-round elections covers 13 states and federally-administered territories.

Also, the elections to assemblies in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa will be completed tomorrow.

Rahul Gandhi is seeking re-election from the Gandhi family pocket-borough of Amethi in Uttar Pradesh, Pawar from the newly created seat of Madhya Pradesh and Swaraaj from Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh.

Other prominent candidates include federal ministers Ramvilas Paswan from Hajipur in Bihar, Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath from Chhindwara constituency in Madhya Pradesh and Sushil Kumar Shinde in Maharashtra and Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (Vaishali, Bihar).

A total of 2,041 candidates, including 121 women, are in the fray in this round. The states to be covered are Andhra Pradesh 20 Lok Sabha seats, Assam 11, Bihar 13, Goa two, Jammu and Kashmir one,

Fertility doctor

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happen," he said, quoted by the paper.

"If we intensify our efforts, we can have a cloned baby within a year or two, but I don't know whether we can intensify our efforts to that extent."

Zavos's work is widely condemned by mainstream fertility experts, who question whether the technique, which also raises complex ethical questions, is safe.

Although other scientists have created human cloned embryos in test tubes to extract stem cells for research, Zavos has broken a taboo by actually putting them inside women's wombs.

He said he has also produced cloned embryos of three dead people, including a 10-year-old girl called Cady who died in a car crash in the US. The child's blood cells were frozen and sent to Zavos.

The doctor, a naturalised US citizen born in Cyprus, is thought to have carried out the procedures in a secret laboratory somewhere in the Middle East to escape the US ban on cloning.

He uses the same technique as was used to clone Dolly the sheep, the first mammal to be cloned from an adult cell.

High-profile

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neighbouring countries to track down the Bangladeshis who fought as Mujahideens in Afghanistan.

Secretaries of home, LGRD and Cooperatives, law, education, religious affairs, information and social welfare ministries, and the inspector general of police, director generals of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and heads of various intelligence agencies have been made members of the committee.

The state minister said major bomb blasts, grenade attacks and killings in the country will be given priority as investigation into the cases had been diverted to other direction in the past.

He said the home ministry will produce a complete report on militancy in the next cabinet meeting.

Earlier the home ministry placed a report on militancy twice before the cabinet but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina rejected the report on both occasions terming it incomplete. She asked the ministry to come up with a complete report.

Tension again

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The 135 Rohingya could not be sent back due to non-cooperation of Myanmar government.

Sources said Myanmar embassy in Dhaka gave one way passport to 65 Rohingyas out of 135 for sending them home. But the military junta of Arakan state in Myanmar is refusing to take them.

Riot over power

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"The crisis has prevailed for last five to seven years. The government will prevent with a strong hand if anyone tries to destabilise law and order situation over the power and water crisis," the minister told reporters.

He made the observations when his attention was drawn about outrages over power outages and water crisis in different areas of the country.

Sohel Taj said additional security measures would be taken for electricity and Wasa offices where law and order may deteriorate for an outcry.

The minister alleged that "a vested quarter is instigating actively" to disturb law and order situation of the country.

"Legal action will be taken against the instigators," he added.

Sohel Taj advised people to keep patience as the government is trying to solve the twin problems.

Meantime, State Minister for Power Shamsul Haque Tuku yesterday said the government has no control over the erratic electricity supply, a chronic problem.

"We do not have any control on the electricity as we do not have control on storm or cyclone-Sidr," Tuku told reporters after a meeting with a visiting Chinese delegation at power ministry.

This comment came from the power minister at a time when people in different areas come out to the street and lay siege to highways to press their demand for power supply.

PM performs

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Earlier, the premier arrived at Jeddah from Riyadh by a special aircraft. Prince Khalid Al Faisal, governor of Makkah, received Hasina on her arrival in Jeddah.

From Jeddah, she went to Makkah by road at 11:45pm. The prime minister is scheduled to stay in Makkah yesterday and offer prayer at the Haram Sharif.

Land registration

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They will have to pay Tk 18 lakh. To evade this tax, many show the price much lower at Tk 50,000, he added.

Muhtib believes if the tax is reduced substantially the buyers would not resort to dishonest practice. The unified system will also spare the buyers of harassment for shuttling to four points.

Deccan move

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The Challengers could score only 160 for eight despite a classy 48 off 27 balls by Rahul Dravid, who became the tournament's top scorer, and 50 off 30 balls by Virat Kohli.

Deccan, who finished bottom of the table in 2008, kept a perfect record in the 2009 edition and became the first team to win two matches - equalling their total haul in 14 matches last year.

"It's still early but we're really happy with the work the boys have put in," said Gilchrist.

The Australian and Herschelle Gibbs (11) put on 46 in 3.5 overs to get Deccan off to an ideal start after Gilchrist won the toss and batted on a good pitch in warm weather, which was in contrast to the conditions for the tournament's opening double headers here last weekend.

Gilchrist slammed six fours and five sixes. He and Sharma put on 61 off 36 balls for the third wicket. Sharma also hit five sixes, including three in an over from Anil Kumble, as well as a four in his 30-ball innings.

Fast bowler Fidel Edwards yanked Jesse Ryder with the first ball of the Bangalore innings and the Challengers were in a hopeless position when they slid to 38 for three after 7.2 overs.

Bangalore captain Kevin Pietersen, who made just 11, admitted: "Our batting has let us down in the first six overs every single time and we're going to have sort out it."

Govt to shut

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"The shutdown of CUFL will no doubt lift the power generation but will bring bad news for country's agriculture and farmers in the next Aman or Aush season because we fear our stock of fertiliser may drop drastically and the government will have to import fertiliser at a much higher rate," said Md Shahjahan, manager (operation) of the CUFL.

He said the government on March 15 shut down two out of country's six fertiliser factories at Ghorasal and Polish to increase power production and the closure of another one may cost us badly.

"The CUFL currently produces on average 1,400 metric tons of urea per day against its capacity 1,700 ME. We now get 49mmcf of gas against daily demand of 52mmcf and per metric ton production cost is Tk 10,000. We will consider this amount as a production loss if the factory is closed down," Shahjahan said.

However, PDB Chief Engineer Jyotish Chandra Biswas observed that the CUFL doesn't require gas so badly now as the Boro season is almost over. "So the government should think seriously about the best possible option shutting down the CUFL for the time being," he added.

Sources said the PDB requires around 100mmcf of gas to run its five gas-fired units except the Kaptai plant, but it gets only around 30mmcf to 40mmcf of gas.

BDR men

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April 16 for various reasons. Of them, four committed suicides, six died of heart attack and six died of other diseases in Dhaka and outside the capital, the release said.

It said a total of 352 BDR members died in between 2001 and 2008. Of them, four committed suicides, 14 died of malaria, 38 in road accidents, criminals shot dead 11, 77 died of different diseases, 207 of heart attacks and one by lightning.

The news media are running news from different angles on the matter following deaths of BDR personnel in its different units and establishments after the Palkhaha massacre in the Palkhaha, it added.

In some units incidents of suicide by BDR jawans after the February 25-26 brutalities are on the rise and it seemed that offenders are committing suicide as they fail to cope with mental pressures, the release said.

The commanding officers have been advised to arrange motivational programmes to make jawans aware of the negative aspects of suicide from both religious and social perspectives.

25 BDR JAWANS REMANDED
A Dhaka court yesterday placed 27 suspected BDR mutineers on a five-day remand each for questioning in the mutiny case.

The Investigation Officer (IO) of the case produced them before the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, and prayed for showing them arrested in the case.

The IO also submitted a 10-day remand prayer to quiz them about the carnage but the court granted five days for each.

A total of 1,171 suspected BDR mutineers have so far been arrested in connection with the case.



Satellite image of the city's Bashundhara area where the Group's Chief Ahmed Akbar Sobhan promised to build another stadium for Bangladesh Football Federation ignoring the restriction on building any structure in wetlands and flood flow zones.

Bashundhara Group Rejoinder

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Actually, Bashundhara Group intends to build the football stadiums either on government lands, or by filling up canals or sections of the rivers or the flood flow zones within the project areas, to make it a credential for later, for backing up the company's demand for legitimising its illegal projects, the sources said.

Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, chairman of Basundhara Group, on April 12 during a ceremony for a Tk 4.5 crore deal signing with Bangladesh Football Federation in Kurmitola Golf Club of the capital, promised to give the football federation 10 bighas of land in each of his Bashundhara-Baridhara Project and Riverview Project.

For a decade, illegal housing projects have been destroying protected wetlands and flood flow zones clearly earmarked in DMDE, said experts.

Filling of wetlands and flood flow zones with earth by real estate developers is not only ushering in an imminent environmental disaster, but also is consistently choking the capital with perennial waterlogging and a mess in sewer management, the experts added.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), said certain special interest quarters might have worked as liaison between the immediate past National Sports Council (NSC) chairman, who is also the army chief, and the Bashundhara Group chairman, who is a convicted individual.

Riverview Project has lands that were developed by filling sections of the Buriganga River, protected wetlands, and sub-flood-flow zone, said the experts.

"It is just an attempt to get away with illegality, corruption, and unethical activities, by offering sponsorship for promotion of the country's sports," Prof Muzaffer said.

East West Property has not even submitted any plan to Rajuk yet for its Riverview Project while Bashundhara-Baridhara Extension from F block to L block got only conditional approval on September 25, 2006.

The immediate past works minister Mirza Abbas, at the very end of BNP-led four-party coalition government's tenure, gave a conditional approval to Bashundhara-Baridhara Extension. But it became null and void, as East West Property could not even submit by the stipulated date of September 30, 2008 the layout in compliance with the preconditions set by the National Approval Committee on Private Housing Project during the immediate past caretaker government.

The approval for block A to F (only partially for blocks D and F) of Bashundhara-Baridhara Project was given before the formulation of the land development rules 2004,

Shazneen

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Khatun Minu and Parvin -- were sentenced to death on September 2, 2003 by a lower court as they were found guilty of raping and murdering Shazneen and abetting in the crimes.

After the High Court upheld their death sentences in 2006, the five condemned perpetrators of the offences appealed to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (SC) later that year.

The final verdict of the case now awaits hearing before the Appellate Division of the SC.

Her family has arranged a milad mahfil after Asr prayers at 5:15pm today at her father's residence at House NE (J) 4, Road-83, Gulshan-2, Dhaka.

Shazneen's father Transcom Group Chairman Latifur Rahman and her mother Shahnaz Rahman request relatives, friends and well-wishers to attend the milad mahfil.

10 Hizb-ut

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Jahangir Hossain, Liton Miah, Abdul Hannan, Habib and Shaiful Alam.

Police said the Hizb-ut men would be interrogated on various issues including their activities in the areas, association with other militant outfits and the ongoing militant activities in the country.

A team of Kushtia Sadar police led by Officer-in-Charge (OC) Babul Uddin Sardar arrested 31 members of the outfit last Friday amid a secret meeting.

Police seized books, leaflets and two kinds of powders, which are yet to be identified. A case was filed with Kushtia Sadar Police Station on April 19 in this connection.

According to police, Hizb-ut Towhid, one of 29 Islamic organisations suspected for militant activities in the country, has been operating in the region including Meherpur, Jhenidah, Magura and Chuadanga for last few years.

Earlier, police had arrested at least 100 activists of the organisation in several districts in the region. However, all were released on bail.

Rezaul Islam, investigation officer (IO) of the case said they will start interrogation from today under a special cell in Kushtia.

S.M Mahfuzul Haque Nuruzzaman, Kushtia police super told the daily star that the militants would not be spared. They would be brought to book.

Delwar

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meeting of the sub-committee.

"We found that former chief whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain illegally drew a Tk 6 lakh medical bill. Former speaker Jamiruddin Sircar unlawfully approved it through wrong interpretation of law although the then premier refused to approve it," he said.

The sub-committee chief said before approving the bill, Sircar took an undertaking from Delwar's son and daughter that they would pay back the money if anyone raises question about it or the Supreme Court issues directives to return the money.

"We have enquired into various medical bills of previous years but we did not find such precedent in approving medical bills," Bakr added.

Referring to former deputy speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui's medical bill, the sub-committee chief said, he received treatment in Moscow in January, 2008 and drew a Tk 1.21 lakh medical bill, which was required to be approved by the head of government.

"But the former speaker approved the bill that he was not entitled to do as per the law," Bakr said.

Speaker Abdul Hamid on March 19 formed an all-party parliamentary probe body to investigate the allegations of corruption, misuse of power and financial anomalies against Jamiruddin Sircar.

Afridi scripts Pak victory

AFP, Duhai

Shahid Afridi returned career-best bowling figures and then contributed with the bat to anchor Pakistan's four-wicket win over Australia in the first day-night international here on Wednesday.

The 29-year-old exposed Australia's frailties against spin with a career-best 6-38 to help Pakistan bundle their opponents out for a paltry 168 before hitting a whirlwind 24 to help the team chase down the target in 44.1 overs.

The victory, only Pakistan's second in their last 11 matches against Australia, gave them a 1-0 lead in the five-match one-day series.

Pakistan made heavy weather of the modest run-chase as they lost opener Salman Butt (five) and captain Younis Khan (11) before Kamran Akmal (48) and Misbahul Haq with an unbeaten 30 avoided any further hiccup.

Akmal hit nine boundaries during his 62-ball knock, while Afridi notched five boundaries during his 16-ball stay but Australia made regular inroads, dismissing Shoab Malik (24) and Nasir Jamshed (nine) to keep a check.

Afridi hit two boundaries off Stuart Clark and then took 16 off a Ben Hilfenhaus over before holing out at mid-on to the same bowler.

At 6-152, it looked either way, but Haq kept his cool as Gul (eight not out) hit the winning boundary.

Earlier, Australia were well placed at 95-1 with opener Brad Haddin (40) and Shane Watson (40) before losing eight wickets for 27 runs as batsmen crumbled on the untested pitch at the new Dubai Stadium which Wednesday became the 172nd one-day venue.

Vessel capsizes

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found floating near 11 jetty of the port at about 8:30pm yesterday, said Abu Hasnat, owner of the sunken vessel. The body was sent to his village home for burial.

The officials and rescue teams of Chittagong port and Bangladesh Navy rushed to the scene after the accident and were trying to rescue the sunken vessel, sources said.

Considering the threatening position of the sunken vessel, the port authority suspended operations of vessels to and from the port until further notice to avoid any further accident.

The CPA formed a four-member committee headed by Engr Sirajul Islam, chief ship surveyor of Mercantile Marine Department, to probe the incident and submit its report within two days.

The CPA chairman said they have decided to take extra caution for the safety of the port channel and other vessels.

"Rescuers have been struggling to retrieve the sunken vessel amid high tide," said Ahmed.

Meanwhile, Captain S Arif Mahmud, member (harbour and marine) of CPA, said that they tried to locate the vessel early yesterday when low tide prevailed for sometimes and they hopefully would start the rescue operation during low tide.

43 Tamil rebels die

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government territory. The UN and humanitarian groups called for an immediate stop to the fighting, so more civilians could escape. Over the past three days, the military says more than 80,000 have fled after forces broke through a key rebel embankment protecting their territory.

The Sri Lankan military said it broke through a key rebel bunker in the coastal strip on Monday and that tens of thousands of civilians have been fleeing the area since then. By Wednesday, 81,423 civilians had escaped, the military said.

Troops advanced deep into the zone and captured a part of during fighting with insurgents on Monday and Tuesday, killing at least 43 rebels, said Brig. Udaya Nanayakkara, the military spokesman.

Tamil rebels are cornered into a stretch of about eight kilometers, he said.

Amy commandoes attacked a car carrying rebels and killed four Tuesday, while another four insurgents were killed by commandoes in a separate attack, Nanayakkara said. Other 35 rebels were killed in separate attacks on Monday and Tuesday.

He said government forces also suffered casualties, but did not provide details.

"We suffered casualties because we are not using heavy and long-range weapons. We only use small weapons," Nanayakkara said, accusing the rebels of firing artillery shells.

It is not possible to confirm accounts from the war zone because independent journalists are barred from entering.

Top executive at US mortgage giant found dead at home

Cops suspect 'suicide'

AFP, Washington

A top executive of the troubled US mortgage finance giant Freddie Mac was found dead in his Washington area home yesterday of an apparent suicide, police said.

David Kellermann, acting chief financial officer and a senior vice president of Freddie Mac, was found dead at his home in Vienna, Virginia around 5:00 am, Fairfax County Police Department spokesman Shelley Broderick said.

"His death is under an active investigation. It was an unattended death. There are no signs of foul play," she told AFP.

Local media reports said Kellermann's wife alerted police. Officer Broderick declined to offer further details.

Another Fairfax police spokeswoman, Mary Anne Jennings, told WTOUR radio: "We were called from inside the house to come investigate an apparent suicide."

Freddie Mac's interim chief executive John Koskinen called Kellermann's death a "terrible personal tragedy."

Kellermann, 41, had worked for Freddie Mac since 1992 and was named acting CFO in September, when Freddie Mac and its sister firm Fannie Mae were seized by the government to prevent their collapse.

Ex-MD of CUFL

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remand in connection with the Chittagong arms haul case.

Meanwhile, the National Security Intelligence (NSI) field officer Akbar Hossain was sent to jail after interrogation.

The investigators earlier failed to extract anything remarkable from the CUFL former MD in a three-day remand that ended on March 19 and such failure continued while grilling the NSI officer in remand that ended Tuesday evening.

Akbar was arrested and placed on a two-day remand on Sunday for allegedly hiring seven trucks and a crane for transportation of the ten truckloads of firearms and ammunition hauled at CUFL jetty in the early hours of April 02, 2004.

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Nanayakkara said, accusing rebels of firing artillery shells.

The UN estimates that more than 4,500 civilians have been killed in the past three months and has called for a negotiated truce to allow others to leave the shrinking rebel-held enclave.

On Tuesday, the rebels accused the government of killing 1,000 civilians in their latest offensive a charge the military denies.

Dr Thangamuttu Sathiyamurthi, one of the few doctors working in the war zone, said the bodies of 80 civilians were brought to two makeshift hospitals soon after Monday's raid but said more people were probably buried on the spot.

Fighting continued Wednesday and shells fell near a Roman Catholic church, wounding a priest and killing three civilians who had pitched their tents in the church compound, Sathiyamurthi said.

The military denies targeting the civilians or using heavy weapons at populated areas.

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