

Rebel the trouble

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the cliffhanger that developed in the polls of Barisal, Khulna, Rangpur and Rajshahi.

This will also tell which camp is on top two years after the Awami League-led grand alliance assumed power.

Rebel candidates, however, appear to be a pain in the neck for both the camps. Top echelons of the parties have even threatened to expel the rebels if they do not withdraw from the race and support party-backed candidates.

In the first phase of polls held last week in four divisions, AL-backed candidates won 40 out of 121 mayoral posts and pro-BNP candidates won 47. The rebel candidates from AL bagged 13 and BNP six. The results reflect a close fight between the two parties.

Awakened by the poor performance by party-backed candidates in the first phase, AL held the rebels responsible for losses in around 50 municipalities in the four northern and southern divisions.

AL leaders claimed that they have so far been able to tame 45 rebels, out of 129, in the three divisions that are to go to polls. They said those rebels have quit the race and are now backing the pro-AL candidates.

Boosted by the results of the first phase of polls, BNP is now more serious and have stepped up election efforts. It too is facing the rebel problem. It blamed losses in 24 municipalities during the first phase on rebel candidates chipping away party-backed candidates' votes.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia has directed senior leaders to talk to the rebels and convince them into backing off and work for party-backed candidates.

The BNP-supported candidates are still facing competition from at least 75 rebels in today's and tomorrow's polls.

Even though non-partisan in nature, the local body elections see political parties picking candidates and throw their weight behind those candidates.

Security measures in the municipalities, which are going to polls, have been beefed up and in several centres where violence is being feared, Border Guard Bangladesh and army personnel will be deployed.

AL harsh on rebels

As many as 129 AL rebels will still be on the ballot papers challenging party-backed mayoral candidates in 66 municipalities of Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions.

In Dhaka division, there are 42 rebels in 23 municipalities, 76 in 33 municipalities of Chittagong and 11 in 10 municipalities of Sylhet.

There are four AL-rebels each in Gopalganj and Tungipara municipalities, considered the backyard of AL President Sheikh Hasina.

The AL's efforts, spearheaded by General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam, HT Imam, and Hanif, to defuse the situation had achieved

little, party sources said. They said the steps were taken following Hasina's directives. They claimed they managed to get 45 rebels to back off. Many of them, in Mymensingh, Noakhali, Habiganj and Brahmanbaria, have announced over megaphones in their areas that they are no more in the race and are supporting pro-AL candidates.

"We have tried our best to neutralise our rebels. For today, there is no time to withdraw..." AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said punitive organisational action would be taken against the rebels considering on the gravity of the violation of party orders.

AL insiders said many grassroots leaders violated party orders to withdraw and warnings of punitive organisational action and threats of expulsion.

For instance, AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam and party adviser HT Imam talked to Munshiganj AL president and general secretary to persuade the president's son to withdraw and support the party-backed candidate.

But they did not pay any heed, AL insiders said, adding that stern organisational action would be taken against both after the polls.

Either AL top leaders or local lawmakers are sheltering the rebels for their own interests, said insiders preferring not to be named.

BNP being persuasive
After the first phase of voting, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia on Friday and Saturday asked party's standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan and Senior Joint Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir to strengthen efforts to tame the rebels.

There are over 75 rebel mayoral candidates in BNP who are contesting along with party-backed candidates in municipalities of Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong, according to party findings.

BNP has so far expelled 10 rebel candidates in the three divisions for not supporting the party-backed mayoral candidates.

"Madam [BNP chief] even asked us to provide rebel candidates with the money they had already spent for their campaigns," a BNP top leader told The Daily Star last night requesting anonymity.

The party chief also asked senior leaders MK Anwar, Brig Gen (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah and Ilias Ali to defuse internal disputes and discipline the rebels.

"Madam [BNP chief] even asked us to provide rebel candidates with the money they had already spent for their campaigns," a BNP top leader told The Daily Star last night requesting anonymity.

The party chief also asked senior leaders MK Anwar, Brig Gen (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah and Ilias Ali to defuse internal disputes and discipline the rebels.

Contacted yesterday, Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said they could have won at least 24 more mayoral posts in the first phase of polls if there were no rebels there.

MK Anwar, convenor of BNP's municipality election monitoring cell, told The Daily Star that it is difficult to rein in the rebels when there are only hours to go before polls.

Anwar, also the party's standing committee member, said, "We are trying to convince our rebel candidates to stop their electioneering from a moral point of view."

Moudud Ahmed, another standing committee member, said, "We are trying to persuade the rebel candidates to support party-backed candidates."

Late last night BNP expelled six district-level leaders of the party for breaching party norms and lending support to a mayoral candidate in Manikganj's Dhamrai municipality.

The party in this regard issued a press release, signed by its joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed.

According to the 58/C of the BNP constitution, the leaders were expelled for breaching discipline, the press release said.

BNP trio sued

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funds and property during the BNP-led four-party rule.

ACC Chairman Golam Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday, "We received some major allegations from the parliament secretariat against some former lawmakers one year ago. We have investigated those and filed the cases."

Sircar, allegedly used three vehicles in addition to his entitlement and took about Tk 40.93 lakh as additional fuel allowances in between 2001 and 2008.

Akhtar Hamid used two vehicles and took around Tk 58.71 lakh, while Delwar used one vehicle and took about Tk 36 lakh as fuel allowances allegedly in addition to their entitlement.

Akhtar allegedly used the government vehicles even for the then BNP senior secretary general Tarique Rahman's political tours and took fuel allowances for that.

A parliamentary body investigating alleged irregularities of the trio also recommended that the House recover Tk 1.33 crore from them and deposit it to the national exchequer.

ACC Deputy Director Akhteruzzaman filed the three cases with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station in the capital.

Delwar told The Daily Star yesterday, "We will go to the court for justice. The government is harassing us in different ways including filing cases against BNP leaders."

The anti-graft body conducted the investigation on the basis of a parliamentary panel's probe report against the three.

Placed before the House on July 9 last year, the probe report said Sircar and Delwar also drew about Tk 27.86 lakh and Tk 6 lakh as medical allowances.

The ACC filed cases against 45 politicians including these three high profile BNP leaders from January 1 to November 30 last year, sources say.

As many as 778 people were accused including 434 government employees, 82 private sector employees and 32 businessmen during the period.

Road crashes

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School and a resident of Basherpole at Konapara in Demra, while Afaz Uddin, 55, a resident of Konabari in Gazipur sadar.

Monir was crossing Demra Road at Basherpole around 7:30am when a vehicle hit him and ran away leaving him dead on the spot, said Officer-in-Charge Nurul Mottakin of Demra Police Station quoting locals.

Duty officer of the police station said the victim's family did not file any case and took the body without postmortem.

Monir used to work at a refrigerator workshop in the area, said the OC.

Police and victim's family members, however, could not ascertain where Monir was going at that moment.

Meanwhile, a truck hit and critically injured Afaz around 7:30am in front of Jatrabari Wholesale Market.

Locals rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he succumbed to his injury at about 8:30am.

Afaz was standing by the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Jatrabari when the accident occurred, witnesses said. The truck was pulling backward and hit Afaz unaware.

The truck driver escaped the scene, police said.

Some relief, more doubt

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Saturday, Communication Minister Syed Abul Hossain said it seeks to ease the traffic congestion in the city.

The idea is that those using private cars for sending their children to schools will opt for this special bus service. This, in turn, will keep many cars off the streets easing traffic jams.

It was not clear on the first day if this goal will be achieved. But there are already doubts.

This correspondent boarded a 52-seat school bus at Dhanmondi Road-27, and found only 12 passengers including guardians on it. They usually travelled by public buses. And none of them were users of private cars.

Ahsanul Hoque, principal of Engineering University School and College said without controlling private cars it would be difficult to reduce traffic congestion.

"The government will have to take initiative in this regard, and will have to find out an effective formula," he said.

Another principal of an English medium school at Dhanmondi, speaking anonymously, said a school has an average 5,000 students, most of whom live in Dhanmondi and surrounding areas. For them the bus service will not be useful. "Car owners don't want to send their children by bus," he said.

But public transport users welcomed the special service.

Haider Hossain Khan, guardian of a grade 5 student of Government Laboratory School said this service will help those who use the chaotic public transport to take children to schools. Some said they will be able to send the children to school unaccompanied.

But shortcomings emerged even on the first day.

Drivers at Pallabi BRTC bus depot, the starting point of the service, pointed to traffic congestions just outside it.

"There are too many minibuses causing traffic snarls just outside the depot. This delays our departure," said one driver.

The Daily Star's photographer followed a school bus from Mirpur-11 to Shyamoli. He found hardly any passenger on board

along this segment.

Talking to some commuters he found that the school students had already left on other means of transport because of delayed arrival of the special bus.

The photo journalist also saw some buses pick up common passengers on down journey when school students were not travelling.

Even if this service is designated for schools, senior students from colleges are also welcome.

Isat Rahman, an honours student of Eden Women's College, commuted by one of the buses on the first day. She was happy. "Normally public buses do not take passengers from College Gate stoppage, but this special bus has a stoppage here and I got on it," she said.

This special service was launched after the education ministry failed to convince Dhaka's major schools that they should have their own bus services for students. There were concerns about security of the students.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid welcomed the service. "We are encouraging guardians to use the school buses, and it will ensure safety of the students," Nahid told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, the communication minister said his ministry plans to purchase 155 single-decker buses from South Korea, and 100 air-conditioned buses and 300 double-deckers from India.

"We are hoping to get the buses this year which will play a good role in reducing the traffic jam," he said.

When the buses arrive the service will be expanded, and people will enjoy its full benefits by 2012, Abul Hossain said.

The service is available during school days from 6:00am to 9:00am, and from 11:00am to 3:00pm.

The maximum fare from Mirpur to Azimpur is Tk 18, and the minimum is Tk 5 (Azimpur-Science Lab). The rate is Tk 1.50 for a kilometre of distance. Students may buy tickets for six months in advance for Tk 1,400.

PM reaches

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Ambassador to UAE Nazmul Qaunine and high officials of the UAE government received the prime minister at Abu Dhabi International Airport at 12:30pm (local time).

A tiny tot presented a bouquet to the prime minister. Later, she was driven in a ceremonial motorcade to Emirates Palace where she will be staying during her four-day official visit.

Earlier, a special plane of Bangladesh Biman carrying the premier and her entourage left Hazrat Shajalal International Airport at 9:00am.

A 30-member business delegation is also accompanying the premier in her visit to the UAE.

The fourth World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi will be held at Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre. More than 25,000 participants from around the world are expected to attend the summit.

WFES is the world's largest conference and exhibition on renewable and future energy solutions, innovations, investments, policy and vision.

WFES 2011 to be held on January 17-20 will focus on the theme: 'Enabling Future Energy Solutions'.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will address the Heads of State and international delegates at the WFES, a forum that promotes collaboration, innovation and investment opportunities in renewable energy, environment and clean technology.

ADP cut

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orders were issued in six months until December last year, and contractors were paid Tk 4,858 crore.

Different ministries gave explanations at the meeting for not being able to utilise foreign funds.

The Bridge Division said the utilisation of foreign funds was low because of the delay in construction work of the Padma Bridge. However, the use of foreign funds will go up as the work is likely to gather pace in the next six months.

The social welfare ministry said different conditions imposed by the donors were one of the main reasons behind the low use of foreign funds.

The planning minister asked the secretaries of the ministries concerned to sit with the Economic Relations Division secretary, and take quick steps to utilise foreign funds.

Bangladeshi scientist stabbed to death in China

UNB, Gazipur

A Bangladeshi scientist was stabbed to death by an unknown assailant at a dormitory of North-West A and F University campus in Sanji province of China on Friday night.

The deceased was identified as Md Khairul Alam, 32, son of Md Akimuddin of Keshabpur in Jessore.

Khairul, a scientist of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI), Gazipur, was doing his PhD at North-West A and F University.

The assailant stabbed Khairul with a sharp knife leaving him dead Friday night at a dormitory of the university, BARI sources said.

BARI Director General Md Rafiqul Islam expressed his deep shock at the death of Khairul Alam.

Govt trying

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The BNP leader said Awami League leaders including HT Imam, adviser to the prime minister, have ordered administrative officers to work for the candidates backed by the ruling party.

The party reiterated its demand that army personnel be deployed in the polls starting from Tuesday since the election commission (EC) and those in the administration are playing a partisan role.

The ruling Awami League is now desperate to ensure victory of its candidates in the upcoming elections after BNP supported candidates won in the municipal polls in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions, Nazrul said.

He added that AL men are threatening voters and workers of BNP-backed candidates. His party asked for deployment of army men in at least 13 municipalities where BNP candidates fear troubles during the polls.

The municipalities are Chhengar Char and Kachua of Chandpur, Munshiganj sadar, Dewanganj of Jamalpur, Moulvibazar sadar and Srimangal, Nagarkanda of Faridpur, Begumganj and Chowmuhoni of Noakhali, Teknaf of Cox's Bazaar, Gopalpur of Tangail, Rauzzan and Rangunia of Chittagong.

He also reiterated BNP's demand for a recount in Setabganj municipality of Dinajpur, Bhangura of Pabna and Belkuchi of Sirajganj.

BNP standing committee member Goyeshwar Chandra Roy; Senior Joint Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir; Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed, among others, were present at the press conference.

23 BDR men jailed

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of Dinajpur. The Special Court-13 headed by Dinajpur Sector Commander Col Saleh Ahmed, also fined them Tk 100 each.

The court started delivering the verdict at about 11:10am and continued till 11:40am.

The accused sentence to jail are-- Nurul Islam, six years imprisonment; Saiful Islam, five years and a half; Khandakar Md Shahin, Md Zakir Hossain, Md Amir Hossain, Md Abdur Rahman and Kutub Uddin Aibek, five years; Shajahan Chowdhury, four and a half years; Saazol Islam, Azizul Islam, Raihanul Islam, Md Kawsar Talukdar and Yousuf Ali, four years; Tofazzol Hossain, three years and nine months; Md Nazrul Karim, three years and three months; Moktar Hossain, Md Minhaz Mia, Mainul Islam and Abul Kalam Azad, three years; Md Wayechh, two years and a half; Khandakar Mahirul Sultan, one and a half months; Borhan Uddin, one year and Shahadat Hossain, six months.

The BDR personnel looted arms from armoury and revolted against their officers, expressing solidarity with the mineuters of BDR Pilkhana Headquarters in the capital, alleged Nayek Subedar Asaduzzaman, the plaintiff.

The other members of the judges' panel are -- Lt Col Mahfuz Alam and Major Didar Al Latif. Deputy Attorney General Biswajit Roy was also present at the court on behalf of attorney general.

After the verdict, the accused were taken to

3 arrested

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remand, said the officer-in-charge of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station.

With the help of detectives, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police on Saturday night arrested injured ward-41 unit AL president's son-in-law Jahangir Kabir, Swechhasebak League ward unit joint convener Raju and activist Salahuddin.

Investigation officer of the murder case Sub-inspector Nazmul Karim said the arrestees are very close to ward unit AL chief Noor Mohammad. Locals allege they were involved in various crimes including extortion and drug trade.

Police suspect the arrestees were directly or indirectly involved in Fazlul Huq murder. They also believe Fazlul was killed following a dispute between the president and the general secretary of the ward unit AL.

The arrestees during primary interrogation denied their involvement.

Neela Huq, widow of Fazlul Huq, on Saturday night filed a case with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police accusing six unidentified people. Her husband was killed on Friday noon.

Indian SC asks Lafarge to submit project report

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Indian Supreme Court has directed French cement company Lafarge to submit the Detailed Project Report (DPR) of its Bangladesh-based plant in connection with its mining project in Meghalaya.

There have been allegations of irregularities in getting the environment clearance for its operation.

A special forest bench headed by Chief Justice SH Kapadia on Friday directed Lafarge to turn in the DPR that it submitted to the banks for getting loans.

The apex court also directed the Indian government to present a copy of the approval granted for this mining project to Lum Mawshun Minerals Private Ltd, in June 1999.

The SC direction came after senior advocate Shyama Devan, appearing for the residents of Shella village of the Khasi Hills, opposed the stand of Lafarge that it had no knowledge of any forest area in the mining zone.

"Lafarge must have knowledge of the topography. They knew well that it was in the middle of the forest area," said Devan.

Lafarge is defending its mining in the forest area on the basis of a June 2000 report by the divisional forest officer that stated it was a wasteland and there was no forest.

Responding to the proceedings in the SC, Lafarge said in a statement the issues discussed in the court on Friday were largely in line with arguments and submissions made in the court earlier.

The apex court was hearing a plea over the revised environmental clearance given to Lafarge by Indian government on April 19 and 22 last year.

People of Shella village are opposing the clearance given by the Indian environment and forest ministry.

On April 24, the ministry told the apex court that it had cleared the mining project of Lafarge Umiam Mining Pvt Ltd, a sister concern of Lafarge, with some strict riders.

The \$255 million Lafarge Surma Cement project at Chhatak in Bangladesh is wholly dependent on limestone extracted from Meghalaya transported to Bangladesh in a 17-km-long conveyor belt.

New law

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Bangladesh Acid Merchants Association," said the commerce minister at a meeting with the nine-member delegation of the association at his office yesterday.

Acid traders will have to submit their certificates of membership to the district administration for renewal of acid trading licence, he added.

The commerce minister also pointed out, "No acid seller is allowed to import acid without clearance certificate of its association as per the Trade Organisation Ordinance-1961."

"The government is strict on the acid crime," said Khan, "because the criminals usually collect acids from friends or the small traders like battery and jewellery shops who have no licence of using and selling acids at all."

Border killings

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According to human rights body Odhikar, 74 Bangladeshi nationals were killed on the borders last year, and four in the first week of this year.

The home secretary said, "We are seriously discouraging the use of lethal weapons in our bid to save lives of people crossing the border." One can be detained instead of being shot and killed, he added.

Home ministry sources said the killing of a 15-year-old Bangladeshi girl by BSF on Kurigram border, the latest in a series, will be raised at the ensuing talks since Dhaka is highly concerned about it.

BSF shot dead Felani on January 7 while she was returning home from India. Shot in the chest, she died instantly.

Bangladesh has long been taking up the issue of border killings in every forum of talks with India.

"Each time the Indian side assured Bangladesh of putting an end to the menace, but unfortunately the killing spree is on," said a senior home ministry official, seeking anonymity.

Before the home secretary-level talks, a two-day meeting of the Joint Working Group of the two countries begins today. It will take up the long-standing issue of demarcation of land boundary and adverse and undermarked enclaves.