

BCL votes

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told The Daily Star about the result today at around 1:30am although the pro-Awami League student organisation was yet to officially announce it.

Later, immediate past and newly elected central leaders of the pro-Awami League student body selected Mehedi Hasan Mollah the president of its Dhaka University unit and Umar Sharif the general secretary.

Yesterday, the central committee election was held from 2:00pm to 8:30pm at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre under supervision of AL leaders Obaidul Quader, Jahangir Kabir Nanak and AFM Bahauddin Nasim.

Around 2,400 councillors from 87 organisational units cast their votes in a transparent ballot box to choose the president and the general secretary for the next two years.

Although unofficial, two panels -- one led by Sohag and Nazmul and the other by Masud and Rahat -- were considered major contenders for the posts.

Former BCL president Liaqat Sikder was backing Sohag and Nazmul, while Masud-Rahat panel was blessed by outgoing president Mahmud Hasan Ripon, sources say.

Several thousand Chhatra League activists started joining the council from early morning at the council venue. They chanted slogans in favour of their favourites throughout the day.

The candidates were busy begging votes from the councillors.

"I am happy to get the opportunity to elect my leaders through direct vote. I hope the new leadership will build the organisation based on Bangabandhu's ideology," Rakib Sarkar, a councillor from Gazipur district unit BCL, told The Daily Star.

Talking to reporters, Obaidul Quader, also a president member of AL, said the result would be announced shortly after the completion of vote count last night. He said the election was conducted in the most transparent way.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday inaugurated the two-day council of the organisation that was once her party's student wing.

The last council was held in April 2006 and this is the second time in a row the 29-year age bar is imposed to ensure that none but students lead the student organisation.

And yesterday was the third time it went to voting.

Sheikh Hasina, also the AL president, was strict about the age limit despite repeated request from a section of former BCL and current AL leaders for an extension.

She rather instructed Chhatra League to fix maximum age of a leader at 27 years at its next council and 25 years after that.

No more

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The local government, rural development and cooperatives ministry is yet to specify the spots.

The act has a provision for stringent punishment including fines for violating the law. The authorities concerned will be empowered to direct the responsible parties, companies or persons to remove those from walls, sources in the ministry said.

City corporations and municipalities are responsible for keeping their neighbourhoods clean. They sometimes face difficulties in taking actions due to the absence of specific law.

Enacting law would not be enough to stop this nuisance, observed Akbar Ali Khan, former adviser of a caretaker government. He however lauded the government's move and insisted creating awareness among the people.

A lot of political parties, student organisations, professional institutions and private businesses of the country normally cover walls of both public and private establishments with graffiti and posters to gain support for their respective campaigns.

The last caretaker government first took cognisance of the matter and issued an ordinance to prevent this kind of activity.

Even the Election Commission imposed a ban on candidates and political parties to refrain from pasting posters on the walls during electioneering. But the practice returns once the elections are over.

Population

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told The Daily Star that most of the successes on the population issue are attained on papers. But the real picture is different.

The country saw population increase by 2.22 crore in the period from 2001 to 2011, 2.12 crore from 1991 to 2001 and 3.16 crore from 1974 to 1991, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

As per reports of various international organisations including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the country's population is around 160 million. However, results of the national population census conducted this year are yet to be published.

Compared with the country's land, it has a huge population, said MM Neazuddin, director general of the Directorate General of Family Planning.

The issue of population is at the top of the government's priority list, he said. Manpower and budget allocation for the national family planning department have been increased over the years.

"We are hopeful that we would meet our goal," he noted.

Meanwhile, government and non-government organisations across the country observed the day through different programmes.

The health and family planning ministry held a programme around 10:00am at the city's Osmani Auditorium. AFM Ruhul Haque, health and family planning minister, was present there as the chief guest.

Prof Syed Modasser Ali, adviser to the prime minister; Capt (Retd) Mujibur Rahman Fakir, state minister for health and family welfare; Yuki Suehiro, in-charge of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); and MM Neazuddin also addressed the meet.

Earlier on the day, the ministry organised a colourful procession from National Shishu Academy to Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

As the world population is expected to cross 7 billion this year, UNFPA and its partners are launching a campaign called "7 Billion Actions" aiming to engage people, spur commitment and spark actions to the opportunities and challenges presented by the world.

SEX CASE

Police quiz

Strauss-Kahn accuser

AFP, Paris

French police yesterday questioned a French writer over her claim that former IMF boss Dominique Strauss-Kahn tried to rape her in 2003, in a case that could wreck his hopes of a political return.

Judicial officials said detectives from the Paris violent crimes squad interviewed Tristane Banon, 32, who in 2007 publicly accused Strauss-Kahn of trying to force himself on her "like a rutting chimpanzee".

Sexual assault

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Metropolitan Magistrate's Court ordered to send him to jail.

Porimol was arrested on July 6 from Keraniganj outside the capital on the allegation of violating the girl at his Badda coaching centre on May 28. The arrest came a day after the student's father filed a case against him with Badda Police Station.

On July 7, a Dhaka court placed him on remand for five days. Porimol made the confession on the fourth day.

As the accused does not have a lawyer, the Star correspondent could not get any of his versions.

The school authorities dismissed him on July 5 following protests of a large number of students and guardians against him. They also demanded his exemplary punishment.

Viqarunnisa Principal Husne Ara Begum in a written statement said the school authorities took prompt action after they received a written complaint from the victim.

"The undesirable act committed by Porimol at his coaching centre is unforgivable. We also demand exemplary punishment to him," she said.

She sought cooperation from students and guardians to restore the educational atmosphere at the institution for the upcoming examinations starting from July 19.

Cabinet

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The approvals came at the weekly cabinet meeting at Bangladesh Secretariat with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The anti-human trafficking act has been enacted in conformity with the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, prime minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told newsmen after the meeting.

The other punishment for human trafficking will be a life term or a fine of Tk5 lakh or both, he noted adding, the government alone cannot stop human trafficking without cooperation from other countries.

The council of ministers emphasised collaboration between public and private organisations to stop the crime.

The Anti-terrorism Act, 2009 has been amended further to prevent terrorism like killing, threatening, carrying or possessing illegal arms and ammunition, abduction, creating panic, using Bangladesh's soil for carrying out terrorist activities in or outside the country, mentioned the press secretary.

Bangladesh would not allow an inch of its soil for terror activities against any of its neighbours, the premier told the meeting.

The cabinet also gave the nod to private companies to set up duty-free shops at international air, sea and land ports in the country.

Bomb rips

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nearly 70 kilometres off Assam's main city of Guwahati, said a police spokesman.

Four coaches of the train derailed on impact trapping scores of passengers.

Outlawed insurgent outfits United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) are active in the region. But none has yet claimed responsibility for the blast.

Wires and other materials used to trigger the explosion were recovered from the site, a senior police officer said.

"There was a loud explosion and it was total chaos soon after. The coach I was in skidded off the track and fell into a marshy land with waist-deep water. Somehow, we managed to come out of the coach," Jiten Das, one of the injured passengers, told TV channels.

One of the compartments was pitched at least 20 metres off the track on impact, said Dhanmoni Das, a local rescue worker.

More than 100 people were rescued and whisked off to nearest hospitals by bicycles, motorbikes, and private vehicles, said Rubul Ali, who volunteered for the rescue operation.

Meanwhile, all incoming and outgoing trains to Assam have been suspended after the blast.

A joke indeed

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general ATM Azharul Islam said the government is plotting to turn the country into Pakistan. It is persecuting the opposition leaders and workers like dictator Ayub Khan did in the then Pakistan.

His remarks belie his party's usual line of rhetoric. Known for its anti-Indian diatribes and politics playing on people's religious sentiment, Jamaat has always accused AL of being subservient to India.

It has hardly ever criticised anything Pakistani in the last 40 years.

Until 2008, this religion-based party, founded in Pakistan in 1941, used to be called Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh. Some political analysts observe that Jamaat had chosen to be named that way because it still considered itself a branch of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan.

However, it renamed itself Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami before registration with the Election Commission during the Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker government rule.

In 1971, Jamaat not only opposed the country's Liberation War but also joined forces with the Pakistan army, which killed three million Bangladeshis and raped more than a quarter million women.

During the war, Jamaat used to describe Awami League and freedom fighters as "Bharoter Char" (Indian stooge), "Hindu," and "enemy of Islam." It has used the same invectives against AL and other secular forces over the last four decades.

In 1971, its former ameer Ghulam Azam said, "Pakistan is the house of Islam for the world Muslims. Therefore, Jamaat activists don't justify being alive should Pakistan disintegrate."

Jamaat's incumbent ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami, who was the chief of Islami Chhatra Sangha, the party's student wing in 1971, said, "Sacred land Pakistan is the home of Allah for establishing His rules."

Measured against Jamaat's historic allegiance to Pakistan, its acting secretary general's comments on Friday are nothing but hypocritical, say researchers and political analysts.

Noted educationist and writer Muhammad Zafar Iqbal told The Daily Star, "Jamaat always lies. They always cheat and confuse people in the name of religion. This is yet another example of their hypocrisy."

Prof Muntasir Mamun, an academician and political analyst, said Jamaat as an organisation has been shattered since the process of war crimes trial began.

"At present, there's no chain of command in their party. Many of their leaders are scared...out of their mind and talking rubbish," said Mamun, also a freedom fighter.

Talking to The Daily Star about his remarks, Jamaat's acting secretary general Azharul Islam said he was just pointing out the "similarities between the Ayub regime and the present Awami League government in terms of torture on people."

The Ayub Khan govern-

ment in the then Pakistan, he observed, used to oppress people through various black laws. They even repressed people in the name of anti-adulteration drive.

"We won freedom from Pakistan and built an independent country so that people get justice. But this government [AL government] is resorting to black laws like the then Pakistani ruler did to oppress the opposition leaders and workers," added Azharul.

"What's the difference between the then Pakistani ruler and the present Bangladesh ruler?" he asked.

The irony is that Jamaat has never criticised the barbaric acts of the Pakistani rulers and the occupation forces. It also has not yet apologised to the nation for its own heinous role during the Liberation War.

When Azharul's attention was drawn that Jamaat leaders always portray Awami League as the party dedicated to serving the interests of India, he said his party did not mention India's name while criticising AL in the past.

His statement, however, does not add up. On plenty of occasions in the past decades, Jamaat described AL as "Indian agent" and warned the public, "Awami League will sell Bangladesh if it comes to power."

Even a few months back, on April 7, in a press release, it said, "This [AL-led grand alliance] government has given up country's interests to India after assuming power with the blessings of imperialist forces."

Half of July goes to hartal

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delivery by ships. "Otherwise I would have lost the buyers," Parvez said.

Like Parvez many garment exporters sent their shipments by air during the hartals.

A commodity importer fears that hartals would have an impact on prices of essentials ahead of Ramadan next month. A glass manufacturer, who has to pay bank instalments regularly, has to suffer as the company cannot collect money from the market during hartals.

Banks also under-perform during hartals.

Hartal has deducted this month's working days significantly. People would get only 15 working days out of 31 days in July, provided there are no more hartals.

Ten of the days this month are weekends -- Fridays and Saturdays. BNP and its allies already observed two days of hartal. Some Islamic parties supported by BNP enforced another 30-hour hartal from July 10 to 11. The National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports also observed a half-day hartal on July 3. There would be a holiday for Shab-e-barat as well.

There are hundreds of examples of how hartals kill the economy but they disrupt personal life a lot too. Schools and universities remain closed as a result of the strike.

Hartal is very familiar in this part of the world. It was used by the pre-independence politicians to unite the then East Pakistani population against the government to force it to meet their legitimate demands.

Hartal as a political programme was also observed frequently during the autocratic rule of Ershad. Vehicles were burnt, office goers threatened and industries forced to close during hartals.

"What is the necessity of hartal now?" said Mostofa Kamal, chairman and managing director of Meghna Group of Industries, one of the biggest commodity traders in the country.

He cited the example of Japan which has to go through times of political instability but no hartal is called there for the sake of the economy.

Kamal said the supply chain is being affected by hartal and consequently it would contribute to a price hike ahead of the Ramadan next month.

Bangladesh's external trade stood at \$52 billion (half of the country's GDP) in fiscal year 2010-11 and imports

accounted for \$32 billion of it.

Hartal's cost is huge; affecting businesses through piling of stocks to a rise in bank interest payments. Circulation of money also goes down significantly on the hartal days.

"Our collection of money has gone down to only Tk 35 lakh instead of the regular Tk 120 lakh," said Mizanur Rahman, head of marketing of PHP Float Glass.

Banking business, especially cash transactions, is badly affected by hartals.

"Neither can we bring cash from the vaults nor customers can take the risk to withdraw big amounts on hartal days," said Ahmedul Haque, executive vice-president and head of Karwan Bazar branch of Mercantile Bank.

Now businesses are trying to find ways out of the increasing threat of hartals, which they fear they would have to face more in the months ahead.

A bicycle exporter kept his factories open last Friday to make up for the losses he incurred during hartal. "I've to spend Tk 5 lakh extra to pay the staff," said the exporter.

Like the bicycle exporter, many manufacturers kept their factories open on holidays.

Hartal ends

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Allah" is not restored in the constitution.

The announcement came an hour after the 30-hour countrywide shutdown ended at 12:00noon yesterday.

As part of the fresh programmes, the alliance will hold nationwide agitation and a rally in front of the Baitul Mukarram Mosque on Friday, June 15.

Terminating the hartal "very successful", alliance leaders at a press briefing said that the people spontaneously responded to it.

Responding to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's earlier comment, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon Ameer Shah Ahmadullah Ashraf said, "Certainly we've found the Almighty Allah through enforcing the hartal."

Hasina on Sunday said, "Why don't you find the name of Allah in the word Bismillah? Did you find the word Allah by imposing a 30-hour hartal?"

Earlier, the prime minister in parliament said, "The name of Almighty Allah is

certainly there in the phrase Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim. Can't they find Almighty Allah there?"

Shah Ahmadullah, however, said that they will announce fresh agitation programme from the Friday rally to press home their demands.

He was talking to reporters at the Purana Paltan office of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish (BKM) under whose leadership the 30-hour shutdown was observed.

The hartal was enforced in protest against deletion of absolute trust and faith in Allah from the country's charter through the 15th amendment passed in parliament on June 30.

Islamic Andolon Bangladesh, a major component of the alliance, at a separate press conference threatened of nonstop hartal programme demanding restoration of the phrase.

Meanwhile, the last six-hour of the hartal was observed slackly as the hartal supporters could not take to the streets due to

heavy presence of law enforcers at all key points in the capital.

The law enforcers took position from early morning before the BKM office.

City life was almost normal with a good number of passenger vehicles seen plying the city streets. During the last six-hour hartal yesterday, no untoward incident was reported from any part of the country.

It may be mentioned that activists of only BKM and Islami Andolon Bangladesh, another Islamist party of the alliance, were seen on the streets during the first day of the shutdown.

A handful of leaders of Olama Mashaek Parishad and Bangladesh Jatiya Olama Parishad came out on the streets during the two-day hartal.

Also yesterday, Jamaat-e-Islami at a press conference announced to hold protest rallies in all divisional headquarters today demanding unconditional release of the party activists arrested during the 48-hour shutdown that ended on Thursday.

Representatives of the companies believe these foreign workers, nearly all of them approaching the end of their work contract, ran off in a bid to get themselves legalised in the amnesty exercise, it said.

Death tears

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cheered him up from the crowd. Having lost the match, Sakhawat exchanged a few words with his twin brother.

The twin brothers parted company as Sakhawat boarded a CNG-run auto-rickshaw with other players to return home. That was the last time he saw his brother alive.

Ferdous along with others rode a truck that plunged into a roadside ditch, said their father Mohammed Wardullah.

Sakhawat was speechless when he saw the bodies of his twin brother and cousin Nur Mohammad at their home at Mandabat village.

Relatives of Saidul Islam, class-VII student of Abu Torab Fazil Madrasa, who also died in the accident, were in mourning at his house at Syed Alivillage.

Hearing the news, Saidul's father Kamal Uddin rushed to Mirersara from the port city. He fainted seeing his son's body in the yard.

Saidul's uncle Abdul Mannan said he panicked when he heard the news of the accident.

"My heart was filled with fear for my son who went to watch the match," said Mannan.

He was later relieved to see his son in the crowd near the scene of the accident.

Omar Faruq, another student of Abu Torab Fazil Madrasa, also escaped the accident as he got down from the truck at Borotakia Bazar to see his aunt about two kilometres away from the scene of the accident.

Thousands of villagers from Moghadia, Khaiyachara, Mayani and Shaikhali unions attended the namaz-e-janaza for the victims after the Esha prayers.

Primary and Mass Education Minister Afsarul Amin, Divisional Commissioner Sirajul Islam, Deputy Commissioner Foyez Ahmad and upazila Chairman Gias Uddin attended the namaz-e-janaza.

KL postpones

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start their registration on July 11 for regularisation or allowing them to get back home without facing penalty.

Later, it postponed the registration until July 18.

Malaysian Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said yesterday the programme could be implemented "soon if everything was in place."

He went on, "As such, I hope that before we start the exercise, all involved, including the illegal workers, employers and third countries (to receive deported workers) are in place so that there are no hiccups later," reports Bernama.

Earlier on July 7 Malaysian newspaper The Star reported that the cabinet decided all the two million legal workers are to be registered in the biometric system before starting on a similar exercise for the irregular ones.

Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the cabinet felt the need for getting the legal workers registered first, especially when there was information that unscrupulous people were trying to make quick cash from the government's intention to have the irregular foreign workers registered.

He said some quarters had planned to "turn the legal workers into illegal ones and make some money from this."

Yassin said, "The employers will be tasked to come out and register their workers, and details of this exercise, including its commencement date will be announced by the home ministry."

Meanwhile, The Star yesterday reported that several hundred foreign workers in the Malaysian city of Perak went missing soon after announcement of the amnesty.

Representatives of the companies believe these foreign workers, nearly all of them approaching the end of their work contract, ran off in a bid to get themselves legalised in the amnesty exercise, it said.

Deceased who were identified: (aged between 10 and 18 yrs)

Saju Chandra Das, Iftekhar Uddin, Mohammad Ferdous, Nur Mohammad, Rajib, Arif, Reaz, Asif, Rony, Sakhawat, Nayan, Titu Das, Shuvo, Jahid, Sujjan, Rupam, Rajib, Ananda, Saidul Islam, Shamsuddin, Mezbah Uddin, Saiful Islam, Shakhawat Hossain.

Injured who were identified: (aged between 12 and 20 yrs)

Md Shuvo, Nazmul Huda, Kajol Chandra Nath, Jewel Barua, Raihan Uddin, Md Arif, Mithun Chandra Das, Pranta, Nayon Sheel, Polish Chakraborty, Muslim Uddin.