

Kamal Majumder slated

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Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) in a statement condemned the incident and termed it an "un-forgivable offence".

Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), a human rights organisation, in a statement said the incident will seriously hamper freedom of press, and freedom of expression.

"This kind of attitude goes completely against the electoral pledge of the current government of ensuring freedom of the mass media and newspapers. The attitude is disrespectful to freedom of expression, and also suicidal for the ruling party," TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said in a media release.

He also said by preventing journalists from covering corruption at Monipur school, and by attacking journalists the member of parliament acted against democracy, and undermined the parliament. He questioned Kamal's credibility as a representative of the people.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman demanded exemplary punishment for persons involved in the assault.

TIB also demanded a ban on involvement of lawmakers in school management committees to block chances of corruption in schools.

Meanwhile, journalists formed a human chain in the capital yesterday demanding punishment for Kamal and the others who assaulted the reporters.

At the human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club, they also demanded proper investigation of the incident, and urged transparency in the probe committee already formed by the education minister.

The demonstrators also urged the prime minister to take necessary action against the ruling party lawmaker.

Jatiya Press Club General Secretary Syed Abdal Ahmed

condemned the incident and said the government must ensure security of journalists to ensure freedom of the press.

Abdul Jalil Bhuyian, general secretary of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, said such an attack on journalists is a nasty interference in the mass media, and journalists should unite to protest this kind of incidents.

Around 200 journalists including Dhaka Reporters' Unity President Shakawat Hossain Badsha and Rtv News In-charge Lutfur Rahman Shikder joined the human chain.

KAMAL'S MEDIA CONFERENCE

Kamal Majumder also held a media conference yesterday in Shawrapara branch of Monipur school where no written statement was given to journalists. The venue was packed with Kamal's supporters leaving very little room for journalists. Some schoolboys and teachers of the school were also in the conference room.

At the briefing Kamal denied assaulting the female reporter, and termed the uproar about the incident 'a conspiracy hatched by Jamaat-e-Islami'.

"I did not beat anyone, even after that if you are aggrieved, I apologise," he said.

He said when the reporter and the videographer of Rtv were scuffling with teachers, he caught the female reporter's hand to stop the scuffling. But the video was edited to misrepresent the incident, claimed the lawmaker.

"I have become old enough and also escaped death. Now do you think I have the strength to twist someone's hand?" he asked the journalists.

He said he submitted Demand Order letters to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid

seeking their permission to charge extra

Tk 20,000 as donation money for admission of new students to Monipur High School since new branches of the school are not listed for the government's monthly payment order (MPO).

"We wanted to run the school according to public private partnership model," he said adding that he did not get any answer from the prime minister or the education minister.

He said about 75 percent of the teachers in Monipur High School and College are Jamaat supporters and Tuesday's incident was a Jamaat conspiracy to destroy the school's reputation.

GDS FILED

Two separate general diaries were filed with Mirpur police in connection with Tuesday's incident.

Osman Goni Babul, a correspondent of Rtv filed one GD while the other was filed by Farhad Hossain, principal of Monipur school, said Kazi Wazed Ali, officer-in-charge of the police station.

The OC said they started an investigation of the allegations made in the GDs.

Riya

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someone suffocated her by pressing her mouth with his or her hand. The report also revealed she had been hit on the abdomen with a heavy object.

Ishrat Jahan Riya, daughter of Rozina Begum from Hazaribagh, was found dead on the staircase of the centre around 12:00 noon. She went missing from the outpatient department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at 10:30am.

Police arrested a part-time DMCH attendant in connection with the incident.

Schools warned

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Later at a media briefing, Nahid said his ministry has identified some of the institutions which are charging additional fees, sometimes in the name of donations.

A committee is working on it, and action will be taken based on its report.

On Tuesday, ruling Awami League lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder assaulted a female journalist of a private television channel when she went to Monipur High School and College to make a report on charging extra admission fees at the institution. The lawmaker heads its managing committee.

At yesterday's meeting, the heads of the schools present were asked to give their views on extra admission fees and also on coaching by teachers.

According to meeting sources, Principal of Monipur High School and College Farhad Hossain said the managing committee and teachers fixed the fees.

Principal of Motijheel Ideal School and College Shahan Ara Begum also expressed similar views. And she added that various development activities are going on at their institution, and that is why they could not take the fees fixed by the government.

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Meanwhile, according to some guardians, Monipur School and College is charging Tk 25,100 and Tk 27,000 for admission in class I -- Bangla and English sections. It is charging Tk 20,000 to Tk 25,000 for admission in class VI to IX.

Viqarunnisa Noon School and College is charging Tk 12,200 for the Bangla section and 14,100 for English section; Motijheel Ideal School and College Tk 13,700 for Bangla section.

Vote banks

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victorious. All of them have had a long-standing dispute with Afzal over local politics, locals said.

However, the lawmakers -- Bahauddin Bahar, AHM Mostafa Kamal (Lotus Kamal) and Whip Mujibul Haque -- expressed confidence that Afzal would win, as he had been "blessed" by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself.

Talking to The Daily Star, a local AL leader said Afzal Khan's son was involved in an attack on a party rally in Comilla where Lotus Kamal was present. He is also a long-time rival of Bahauddin Bahar, the AL leader added, preferring anonymity.

Bahar, elected from Comilla town, is so influential that many believe Afzal can win only with his support.

Rebel AL candidate Noor-ur-Rahman Tanim, known to be a close aide of Bahar, might be an obstacle to Afzal Khan's victory, some say. Others say relations between Bahar and Tanim have not been good in recent times as it had earlier been.

Local leaders said Anisur Rahman Mithu, another rebel candidate from the party, is backed by Whip Mujibul Haque. Mithu even used Mujibul's house for his election campaign.

The whip, however, said party men had been working together for Afzal's victory.

Besides these equations, two vote banks -- minority community and Sadar (south) area -- will play a vital role in today's election.

Of the total 1, 69,273 voters, about 47,000 voters of Sadar are mainly controlled by Bahar and former BNP lawmaker Monirul Haque Chowdhury.

Bahar and Monirul have good terms with Monirul Hoque Sakku, the Nagarik Committee-backed mayoral hopeful.

Monirul Haque has already extended his support to Sakku, and if Bahar just remains silent, most of these votes will go to Sakku's box, locals said.

In addition, some 50,000 votes of the minority community might be split between the camps of Afzal and Tanim.

However, singer Asif Akbar, also a local BNP leader, said Sakku would bag a large number of these votes.

Connectivity

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from those who favour boosting road and railway connectivity with India.

Hasina went ahead with improving ties with New Delhi amid criticisms that Dhaka's friendly overtures have not always been reciprocated by it.

India's decision to allow duty-free access for Bangladeshi garments, round-the-clock access to Tin Bigha corridor and the signing of \$1 billion loan deal were overshadowed by New Delhi's failure to sign a promised deal with Dhaka on the sharing of the Teesta water during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's much-hyped visit to Bangladesh in September last year.

The Indian move to build a dam at Tipaimukh on the Barak river not far from Bangladesh's Sylhet district has triggered more protests in Bangladesh testing the diplomatic nerves of Hasina and her advisers.

Critics say the dam will greatly harm Bangladesh's rivers and ecology, which India denies.

However, not all were lost with India.

Dhaka and New Delhi have signed a landmark land boundary agreement to exchange the enclaves, adversely possessed lands and for demarcation of 6.5 kilometre undemarcated border, problems the two countries have inherited since the British rulers left the sub-continent in 1947. The two countries also signed thousands of pages of documents on strip maps between them.

While Bangladesh forged greater relations with India, its ties with Pakistan, another regional power, has hit the lowest point. There have

hardly been any exchange of high-level talks and visits between the two countries in the past three years since Hasina's Awami League-led Grand Alliance came to power in 2009.

In a sign of growing tension, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni used her first meeting with the newly-appointed Pakistani High Commissioner Afrasiab Mehdi Hashmi to ask Islamabad to offer a formal apology to Dhaka for the genocide the Pakistani military committed during the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. The meeting took place on November 20 last year at the foreign ministry.

The United States has been another major focus of Bangladesh's diplomacy in the past three years.

Even though the removal of Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus from his Grameen Bank upset Washington, Hasina's strong policy of zero-tolerance for terrorism earned her appreciation from the western powers.

Hasina still needs to work hard to heal the bruises Dhaka's relations with Washington have suffered over the Yunus issue. Diplomatic circles here say US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is delaying her trip to Dhaka because of Dhaka's maltreatment of Yunus, a recipient of America's highest civilian honour.

The foreign ministry has so far failed in its efforts to arrange a bilateral meeting between Hasina and US President Barack Obama. In her recent meeting with Dipu Moni, the US secretary of state urged Bangladesh to ensure that the media and NGOs are

allowed to work freely.

On multilateral plane, Bangladesh was elected to different important bodies in the UN system, including the Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

Dhaka has also been at the centre of the global negotiations on climate change and its impact on the disaster-prone countries. Vulnerable to global warming, Bangladesh has been active in pushing the developed nations to create the climate fund and disburse the money so that countries like it can cope with the change.

Dhaka's role in UN peace-keeping continued to be appreciated.

Regionally, Bangladesh's dispute with Myanmar on the Rohingya refugee issue has remained unresolved even though Dhaka's diplomats are hoping for an early solution following Hasina's recent visit to that country.

Dhaka has also moved for international arbitration on its maritime boundary disputes with India and Myanmar.

The foreign ministry deserves credit for the repatriation of thousands of Bangladeshis from Libya at the start of the anti-Gaddafi protests. But Dhaka, according to diplomatic observers, has made little progress in expanding the manpower market in the Middle East, the traditional destination of its manpower, and Malaysia.

Dipu Moni made over 100 often costly foreign visits in the past three years aiming to strengthen bilateral ties and promote multilateral diplomacy amid doubts over the benefits Bangladesh gained.

Teachers

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ministry, was also asked to come up with recommendations on how to prepare a reply to a High Court (HC) rule that asked the government to explain why it should not be directed to stop the teachers working for coaching centres and enact a law in this regard.

On October 17 last year, the HC issued the rule following a writ petition filed by Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Obhobhabak Oikya Forum, a platform of guardians.

Secretaries to the Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Division and ministries of education and law, director general of directorate of education and heads of 14 prominent schools and colleges in Dhaka, including Viqarunnisa Noon School and College and Motijheel Ideal School and College, have been made respondents to the rule.

Yesterday's decision was made public after a two-hour inter-ministerial meeting at the education ministry conference room in the Secretariat. The education secretary, representatives of the cabinet division, prime minister's office, law ministry, home ministry, different directorates of the education ministry and heads of most of the 14 schools were present in the meeting.

"We are collecting information on the teachers and have asked the schools to give a list of their teachers involved in coaching business," Nahid said emerging from the meeting. The committee will collate the lists and take necessary actions against the teachers involved in coaching business, he added.

The minister said they did not initiate the venture with a view that the problem would vanish overnight.

"It is true that students need not go for coaching if schools ensure complete education in the classroom. And for this, we need cooperation from all," he said. The minister also urged teachers to give more time after class to the weaker students.

He, however, observed that teachers get involved with coaching business for financial solvency. To address this problem the government has increased salaries of teachers and will do so in the future, said Nahid.

ADB to provide

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unreliable supply have perpetuated underdevelopment of nearly half the population living below the extreme poverty line of \$1.25 a day.

"Energy shortage is the most critical infrastructure constraint on Bangladesh's economic growth," said Kandiah.

"Greater access to clean, reliable power will bring multiple benefits such as increased economic activity and new opportunities in agriculture, manufacturing and other businesses which will benefit the poor, including women," he added.

The project will fund the replacement of five aging generation units at Ashuganj power station with a new energy-efficient combined cycle power plant using natural gas as the fuel source.

It will also finance a 5MW solar photovoltaic generating system that will connect with the national grid and a hybrid wind, solar and diesel system on the island of Hatiya.

Streetlights will be installed or retrofitted with solar and light emitting diode technology in the cities of Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet.

The Islamic Development Bank will co-finance with \$200m for the project with Bangladesh extending over \$81m for the total cost of \$581.2m, said the statement.

Phani skips

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all events looking very lively. Phani yesterday did not attend any of the four Police Week meetings where he was supposed to be the special guest.

One of the meetings Phani missed was with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her office.

Contacted, Phani told The Daily Star last night, "I could not attend the functions because I had to remain busy in my office with some of my emergency tasks."

On Tuesday at a closed door meeting of top ranking police officials from all over the country and the home minister, Phani said there is a long list of allegations against the police department's recent performance. When he was giving the list of allegations, his junior colleague Benazir angrily shouted out, "I want to respond!"

State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku and Inspector General of Police Hassan Mahmood Khandker had to interject and calm Benazir down to carry on the meeting.

President's talks

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Commission. "We made the call for free, fair and neutral parliamentary elections," Habibur Rahman Talukder, general secretary of KSJL, told journalists after their talks with the president at Bangabhaban.

The president began holding dialogues with political parties on December 22 for appointing a new chief election commissioner and election commissioners.

General Secretary of BSD Khalequzzaman said that talking to the president, they stressed the need for restoring the caretaker system as people have confidence in non-partisan government.

KSJL proposed formation of a search committee with people holding various constitutional posts including the chief justice to find out new faces for the new Election Commission.

BSD's proposals included increasing the number of election commissioners to eight.

Comilla city polls

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voting machine.

A total of 1, 69,273 voters, including 86,074 females, are on the voters' roll to elect their first-ever city mayor from among nine candidates and 36 ward councillors, including nine reserved female councillors' seats, from among 287 contestants.

The two leading mayoral candidates are Afzal Khan, who is backed by the ruling Awami League, and Monirul Hoque Sakku, backed by Nagarik Committee. Both of them are confident of victory. However, the fear is that tension will run high in the "risky" centres, especially those near the houses of the candidates with past criminal records.

At least 70 candidates, including the two mayoral frontrunners, have a past tainted with criminal history, according to election officials and the candidates' affidavits submitted to the Election Commission (EC).

The EC has identified 47 centres as vulnerable and has taken special measures to ensure peaceful voting in those centres, election officials have said. All the 65 centres will be kept under webcam surveillance.

Sixty-five presiding officers, 421 assistant presiding officers and 842 polling officers will be on election duty.

Returning Officer Abdul Baten said the authorities were alert to the possibility of sabotage and that they had already foiled an attempt at "subversive acts" by arresting two people.

Police and Rab arrested at least seven people for their alleged involvement in distributing money to influence voters at Ranibazar in the city yesterday.

A mobile court jailed three of them for two months each on charges of distributing money to woo voters to vote for Sakku. The three are Abul Kalam Azad, Abdur Rashid and Dulal.

Sakku, however, denied his involvement with the incident and termed it "propaganda" against him.

The returning officer himself intercepted a private car at Dharmapur yesterday and challenged the passen-

gers who identified themselves as journalists of Prime Minister's Office but failed to produce their identity cards.

Senior Judicial Magistrate M Syedur Rahman Gazi sentenced two of them -- Towhid Hasan and Imran -- to six months' imprisonment each on charges of their attempt to carry out "subversive acts".

Documents recovered from the two include a list of criminals of different wards, councillor candidates, city's prominent people and voters.

Meanwhile, Sakku yesterday alleged that a conspiracy was on to occupy some polling centres to keep voters, particularly women, from voting.

He also alleged that some policemen and the supporters of his opponent were intimidating his men.

His rival Afzal Khan, however, expressed satisfaction over the role of the local administration and the EC.

But Noor-ur-Rahman Tanim, a rebel mayoral candidate from AL, accused the administration of bias.

"Some people in the government are out to make the election controversial. They are harassing my supporters and activists by police," he told at a press conference at his house last night.

Jatiya Party-backed mayoral hopeful Ahmed Selim said that Sakku was violating election codes.

Afzal is scheduled to cast his ballot at Modern School centre, Sakku at Shoilu Rani Govt Primary School and Tanim at Monoharpur Govt Primary School.

Election officials said 1,200 Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel, more than 2,000 police members, 150 members of Bangladesh Border Guard and Armed Police Battalion, 27 executive magistrates and nine judicial magistrates will work throughout the day to ensure free and fair voting. They will be on election duty till tomorrow.

They added they would take additional measures to maintain calm in and around the risky polling centres.