

BNP has no right to jeopardise polls: Suranjit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Minister without portfolio, Suranjit Sengupta, yesterday said the main opposition BNP had no right to jeopardise the next national polls.

"Whether to participate in the polls is their decision but they must not keep people from casting their votes," he said over BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's recent statement that BNP would not let the next general polls take place.

The next national elections will be held in due time and in manner and in conformity to the constitution, he said.

The senior Awami League leader was addressing as chief guest a discussion, "Ongoing Politics: Free-Fair Elections Guided by the Constitution", organised by Jonotar Protasha in the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

Refuting the opposition's rejection of the Supreme Court verdict on the caretaker government system, Suranjit said, "The judiciary should not be treated as a political opponent."

He also stated that the World Bank's decision to finance the Padma bridge project was the government's success.

**INDIGENOUS, MINORITY COMMUNITIES
Recent attack patterns same**

Says Rashed Khan Menon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The recent patterns of attacks on indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and on people of the religious minority are the same, said Rashed Khan Menon, convener of parliamentary caucus on indigenous peoples, yesterday.

In this regard, he cited the recent attacks on indigenous people in Rangamati and Joypurhat and on religious minorities in Satkhira and Dinajpur.

A vested quarter is behind these attacks, he said, suggesting lawmakers to step forward to address these incidents.

"The lawmakers from areas populated by indigenous people should remember that indigenous people are also voters," he added.

Menon was addressing a discussion, "Engaging parliamentarians in indigenous peoples' issues", in the Parliamentary Member's Club auditorium in the compound of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Indigenous peoples' leaders, arriving from different parts of the country to join the discussion, said though indigenous people voted for the lawmakers of the ruling alliance government, the latter were never found in times of need.

"We do not see these lawmakers when we need them," said a leader of the Santal community, Anil Marnadi.

Sanjib Drong, secretary general of Forum for the Indigenous People of Bangladesh, presenting a keynote, said the country's indigenous people were now "awakened" and raising voice for their rights.

But the indigenous people will not win the fight without the help of democratic and progressive forces, he said.

Promode Mankin, state minister for social welfare, said the government was not the enemy of indigenous people and had the intention to take steps for their betterment.

Prof Mesbah Kamal, coordinator of the technical committee on the caucus, delivered his welcome speech while Fazle Hossain Badsha MP and Information Commissioner Prof Sadeka Halim also spoke at the discussion.



With Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindu community, less than a month away, craftsmen devote themselves in making tableaux of the Hindu goddess Durga in a workshop in Sadarghat area of Chittagong city. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Influential people continue to blatantly encroach on the river Shitalakkhya in the name of sand business. The photo was taken from near Kanchpur bridge recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

CHT transport strike called off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Transport Workers Oikya Parishad called off its day-long strike in the hill districts yesterday afternoon as police and district administrations assured it of holding a meeting to discuss its six-point demand.

Nazrul Islam, assistant superintendent of police (ASP), told The Daily Star that all deputy commissioners, ASPs and forest officers from the hill districts would sit with the workers' body before October 1.

The parishad President Abdul Mannan confirmed this.

The organisation's demand includes an end to illegal toll collection and harassment of truckers and construction of a terminal for freight vehicles in northern Chittagong.

Despite sporadic protests in the past against the harassment and illegal toll collection by police, the government paid no attention to resolve the issue, said Mannan.

Traffic was disrupted on the roads in northern Chittagong and the three hill districts Bandarban, Khagrachhari and Rangamati in the morning due to the sudden strike.

BNP to mourn Sayeed Iskander's passing away today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition BNP will observe mourning day across the country today to mourn the death of party chairperson's younger brother and former lawmaker Maj (retd) Sayeed Iskander.

Besides reciting from the Holy Quran, black flags will be hoisted and party flags kept half-mast at party offices across the country, said a press release.

Sayeed Iskandar, president of party's Feni district unit and member of BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia's advisory council, passed away on Sunday at a New York hospital after a long battle with cancer.

His body might be brought to the country on Wednesday, it said.

BNP Central Committee Vice Chairperson M Morshed Khan, Bangladesh Jatiya Party chairman and lawmaker, Andaleev Rahman Partha, BNP leader Tariqul Islam, among others, condoled Iskander's death.

Ctg craftsmen busy preparing for Durga Puja

MINHAJ UDDIN, Ctg

With Durga Puja, the largest religious festival of the Hindu community, just round the corner, craftsmen of Chittagong are busy meeting deadlines in making tableaux of the Hindu goddess Durga.

This year the four day festivities and religious rituals, from September 20 to 24, will be organised in over 230 puja mandaps, excluding some 30 private ones, in the city, said Timir Baran Chowdhury, president of Chittagong City Puja Udjapon Parishad.

With 10 more mandaps being set up in the city than last year, craftsmen are working round-the-clock in some 15 workshops devoted to making figures of the gods.

A visit revealed that most of the workshops were situated in Sadarghat Kalibari, Bosh Goli, Nalapara, Nitthanondo Dham, Hazari Goli, Patharghata Gangabari and Dewanji Pukur Lane.

Apart from the local ones, craftsmen from Shariatpur, Faridpur, Gopalganj, Netrakona and even India arrived months before to prepare the installations.

Each workshop can annually create 10 to 40 installations. Each installation usually comprises the main female goddess Durga, revered as the mother of the universe, astride a lion killing the buffalo demon Mahesha and flanked by her four children.

The children are Laxmi, goddess of wealth; Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge; Kartik, the god of beauty and warfare; and Ganesha, the god who initiates everything good.

The craftsmen said the demand for the cheaper "oriental" idols was higher than that of the traditional ones this year while there were also some orders for electronic ones.

The traditional idols are the most commonly found. They are firstly sculpted out of straw and bamboo and then covered with several layers of clay and mud.

The figures are then coloured and the master craftsman paints the eyes of the idols, known as Chakkhudan, symbolising the gods inhabiting the figures. The idols are then decked in ornamented saris, jewelry, flowers and brightly illuminated.

The installations are finally completed

with a decorated arched backdrop embellished with traditional drawings.

The process is same for the "oriental" ones, but the accessories are sculpted from clay. Prices can vary depending on the size, design, detail and accessories, ranging from Tk 15,000 to Tk 70,000.

The electronic ones differ by the fact that their hands and heads can move but cost much higher, ranging from Tk 70,000 to Tk 3.5 lakh.

Dulal Pal, owner of Sadar Ghat Kali Bari, one of the popular workshops, has been making idols for over 40 years.

He says the "oriental" idols are increasingly gaining popularity for being diverse, colourful and cheap.

This year he is happy to have made 35 idols with ten craftsmen in his workshop. Only three of the installations are the traditional ones while the rest are "oriental".

However, not all of the workshop owners are optimistic about their profits this year. Some are even in fear of making losses. Some of them put the blame on some puja mandaps for hiring craftsmen from outside the city and India to make the idols.

Satyanjan Pal, owner of a workshop at Patharghata Gangabari and involved in the business for some 40 years, said he had got orders for only ten idols this year.

"It is not economically viable to run the workshop when you have around 10 craftsmen working, but only get orders for ten installations. I may not be able to continue running the workshop next year," he said.

The owners said they paid the craftsmen Tk 8,000 to Tk 20,000 per month based on the range of their skills.

Meanwhile, the themes of some mandaps have changed with the demands of the customers.

"Pancha Bhoot", the theme of Gosail Danga Soshan Kali Mandir, is based on ghosts while "Seven Planets" of Hazari Gali Puja Udjapon Parishad will depict the solar system and "Earthquake" of Sotish Babu Lane is based on natural disasters.

The preparations reach a culmination on the day of the immersion of the idols in rivers, looking forward to the future for a new beginning full of hope.

**CTG SHRINE LOOT
Ex-Rab man surrenders to court**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Flight Lt (sacked) Sheikh Mahmudul Hasan, one of the seven accused in a case filed over the robbing of a Chittagong shrine, surrendered before a Chittagong court and obtained bail yesterday.

Mahmudul had failed to appear before the court by September 12, the date his earlier bail expired, and the court had issued an arrest warrant against him, said Sub-Inspector Shamima Khatun, posted at Chittagong Court's general record office.

Yesterday Mahmudul's lawyers told the Chittagong Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court that he had been ill and the court granted him bail till October 14, the next hearing date of the case, she said.

As per the case statement, members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in plain-clothes stormed the shrine, Talsara Darbar Sharif, in Anwara upazila on November 4, 2011.

Keeping Pir (spiritual leader) Ahammed Safa Shah confined to a room at gunpoint, they broke open three cupboards and looted Tk 2.07 crore kept in six travel bags.

Four months later, a driver of the shrine, Idris Ali, filed the case with Anwara Police Station accusing 10 Rab men and two of their informants.

Police submitted the charge sheet to a Chittagong court on July 26 accusing the seven, including Mahmudul, who was an officer of Rab-7, and the then Rab-7 commanding officer Lt Col (sacked) Zulfiqar Ali Majumder.

The Rab authorities had sent both the officers to their respective forces after a departmental investigation found the accusations against them to be true.

Obituary

METRO DESK



Shahanara Yasin, wife of late Lt Col (ret'd) ABM Yasin, passed away in Boston, USA on Sunday.

She was the eldest daughter of late Khan Bahadur Ansari Ali, says a press release.

She left behind her son, son-in-law, daughter, daughter-in-law, grandchildren, great grandchildren, brothers and sisters, a host of relatives and friends to mourn her death.

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