

Akramuddin's panel leads

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association group continued hours past midnight.

Vote counting in the biennial election to the nation's apex trade body started at 7:00pm yesterday, less than two hours after the polls were closed.

A total of 1,816 votes were cast in the election, Awami League lawmaker Ali Ashraf, chairman of the election board, told reporters.

The voters went to the polls to elect 30 directors who -- along with 18 nominated directors (nine each from chamber and association groups) -- will choose a president for the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry tomorrow for a two-year term.

Of 1,611 voters in the association group, 1,433 cast their votes; and 383 ballots -- out of 390 -- were cast in the

chamber group.

The voting began at 9:26am at the Federation Bhaban in Motijheel and the three-member election board announced the closure of the polls at 5:20pm yesterday.

The election, however, had been scheduled to begin at 9:00am and end at 4:30pm.

"Since we started the election late, we also closed it late," Ashraf said.

"The election was held peacefully as no major untoward incident took place. I was not under pressure from any quarter during the election."

A total of 63 candidates contested for the posts of 30 directors -- 15 each from chamber and association groups -- under the banner of two panels.

Kazi Akramuddin

Ahmed, chairman of Standard Bank, and a member of the ruling Awami League's advisory council, won clear backing from the government for his panel.

On the other hand, Annisul Huq, a former FBCCI president and a popular face in the business community, threw his weight behind the Ganatantrik Parishad, but did not contest the election.

In the Ganatantrik Parishad panel, Abu Alam Chowdhury was the leader of the association group and Dewan Sultan Ahmed headed the chamber group.

According to rules, this year's FBCCI president will be chosen from the association group as the incumbent president was selected from the chamber group two years ago.

"The election is being held peacefully. Everyone is

voting spontaneously," Akram said after casting his vote at 4:20pm.

After the primary results of the chamber group, a jubilant Monowara Hakim Ali, who represented Chittagong Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the election, said: "I am very happy to be elected."

"Now I will be able to complete my unfinished tasks."

Also the president of the chamber, Monowara Ali said she came to know about the problems of different chambers in the country during her election campaign. "I know not only their problems, but also their potential."

"I may not be able to solve all their problems, but I would be happy if I could solve at least some of them."

Egypt judges slam

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Egyptian justice," Club chief Ahmed al-Zind told the club's general assembly, as furious judges chanted "The people want the downfall of the regime."

Protesters tried to storm the High Court where the judges were meeting but were dispersed when police fired tear gas.

Earlier, anti-riot police fired tear gas to disperse anti-Morsi protesters camped out in Cairo's Tahrir Square as Western governments voiced growing concern over the political crisis.

The Supreme Judicial Council denounced Morsi's constitutional declaration

as "an unprecedented attack on the independence of the judiciary and its rulings", while the Judges Club of Alexandria announced "the suspension of work in all courts and prosecution administrations in the provinces of Alexandria and Beheira."

And they "will accept nothing less than the cancellation of (Morsi's decree)," which violates the principle of separation of powers, club chief Mohammed Ezzat al-Agwasaid.

The president already held both the executive and legislative powers, and his Thursday decree puts him beyond judicial oversight

until a new constitution has been ratified in a referendum.

The measures are valid only until the new constitution now being drafted is adopted, and supporters argue they will hasten what has been a turbulent and seemingly endless transition to democracy.

In Cairo, a statement by some 20 "independent judges" said that while some of the decisions taken by the president were a response to popular demands, they were issued "at the expense of freedom and democracy."

Morsi has ordered the reopening of investigations

into the deaths of some 850 protesters during the 2011 uprising, and hundreds more since.

New prosecutor general Talaat Ibrahim Abdallah said new "revolutionary courts" would be set up and could see former president Hosni Mubarak, his sons and his top security chiefs retried "should there be new evidence."

Mubarak and his interior minister were sentenced to life over the killing of protesters in last year's popular uprising against him, but six security chiefs were acquitted in the same case sparking nationwide outrage.

9 workers killed

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Centre for Women and Child Health, said they received the bodies of four female workers. They were identified as Moriyum, 25, Morsheda, 26, Mousumi, 26 and Nurunnesa, 30.

A male worker, identified as Maruf, 22, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 10:00pm.

The identity of the four other dead could not be known immediately as relatives took away their bodies from the spot, said OC Badrul.

Eight other workers with head, hand and leg injuries were undergoing treatment at DMCH.

The injured were first rushed to the Centre for Women and Child Health for treatment. "We treated 53 while 10 were referred to different hospitals in Dhaka as their condition was critical," said Harunur Rashid.

Director General of Fire Service and Civil Defence Abu Naim Mohammad Shahidullah, told reporters at the spot that the fire might have originated from an electrical short circuit. However, he added, nothing could be said for sure before a thorough investigation.

The rescuers brought down about 50 workers trapped on the rooftop of the building.

Moinul, a worker of Tazreen Fashion, said, "Around 6:50pm, I was about to enter the factory building when I heard the fire alarm. I saw flames and fumes coming out of the ground floor."

He said some workers managed to come out but many got trapped inside as the fire quickly spread. "I saw many of my fellow workers jumping from the building."

Some workers said there was an emergency exit at the building but they could not use it, as they were not trained to do that.

"About 200-250 workers were on over-time duty on several floors when the fire started at the cotton godown on the ground floor," said Monsur Khaled, chief of crisis management cell of BGMEA.

Three fire-fighting units from EPZ rushed there at 7:15pm. They tried to douse the fire with the help of locals. Twelve more units joined them later.



Beauty Akhter, wife of Ameer Hossain, the alleged mastermind of Parag abduction, is arrested at Gazipur yesterday while suspects Mamun, top, and Al Amin were arrested in the capital.

Kingpin survives 'shootout'

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Around 4:55am yesterday, Deputy Commissioner Masudur Rahman of Dhaka Metropolitan Police sent a text message asking this correspondent to contact DB Inspector Saidur Rahman.

Contacted within minutes, the inspector said, "Ameer was killed in an encounter when we raided a house at Tilargati-Singpara of Tongi around 3:45am.

"After a tip-off, a joint team of DB and Keraniganj police raided a house at Tongi and an incident of shootout took place between them and Ameer."

The law enforcers repeatedly knocked on the door and broke in when nobody responded. Ameer, sensing their presence, opened fire, forcing them to retaliate, he added.

Later, police found Ameer lying in a pool of blood in the room and considered him dead as two bullets had hit him in the chest and head, Saidur added. They sent the "body" to Tongi Upazila Health Complex.

Tongi Police Station officer-in-charge Ismail Hossain said, "As doctors found Ameer alive around 7:00am, they suggested taking him to DMCH."

Police also picked Beauty, her son and domestic help, who were in another room during the "shootout".

Sanwar Hossain, a senior assistant commissioner of DB South, who led the drive to arrest Ameer, said, "We thought Ameer had died in the shooting."

During the gunfight, three policemen -- Inspector Mejbah Uddin Ahmed and sub-inspectors Azizul Huq Miah and Mominul Huq -- suffered injuries as they bumped into stairs and walls while trying to dodge bullets.

Police said now that 42-year-old was alive, he was shown arrested along with his wife Beauty Begum, 32. They also claimed a seizure of two pistols and 85 bullets from the couple's possession.

But according to Rajbari police and Rapid Action Battalion officials Ameer was arrested Tuesday night along with his accomplice Al-Amin at Goalanda in Rajbari. But till yesterday, the police kept on denying the arrest.

Sources said after unofficially keeping him for interrogation, Ameer was taken to his Tongi residence for recovery of his illegal arms. He was shot after the arms and ammunition were found.

On the morning of November 11, an armed gang kidnapped Parag after shooting the kid's mother, sister and their driver when they

were getting into their car for school.

Three days later, the boy was freed at Atibazar in Keraniganj reportedly against a ransom of Tk 50 lakh.

Police and Rab so far arrested 11 persons including Ameer in connection with the kidnap.

AMEER'S VERSION

Ibrahim Sarkar, a local journalist who rushed to Tongi hospital after the "gunfight", told The Daily Star, "Around 7:00am, Ameer started groaning and moving his hands and legs.

"I talked to Ameer after he regained consciousness. He told me that he was not Ameer; he was Moktar Hossain of Munshiganj. He also said police had blindfolded him and fired two shots, pointing weapons at his chest and head.

"Ameer requested me to save his life. He also urged me to request doctors to remove bullets from his body."

Talking to The Daily Star at DMCH, Ameer said, "I am a rich trader. I had no arms in my possession and police fired at me without any provocation."

Asked whether he was arrested earlier at Goalanda in Rajbari, Ameer did not reply and kept silent.

His aide Al-Amin's parental residence is at Goalanda.

Replying to a question over the ransom, Ameer said, "As I am not Ameer. How can I say about it?"

WHAT BEAUTY SAYS

"During my conversation with Beauty at Tongi police custody, she said her husband Ameer had taken the boy [Parag] to their house at Atibazar on November 11," Ibrahim said.

On the night of November 14 after releasing Parag, the Ameer family first went to Jurain and the next day to Tongi. They hurriedly rented a two-room house. Ameer introduced himself as an expatriate to the landlord. He also purchased a television, fridge and furniture.

"Beauty also said her husband had purchased a piece of land last week for Tk 17 lakh with the help of land broker Morshed and Saheb Ali."

She added when Parag was in their captivity, Al Amin had injected the kid with sedative.

Tongi OC Ismail Hossain also said he learnt that Ameer had paid for purchasing a piece of land. He was yet to know the source of the money.

POLICE BRIEFING

DB and Dhaka district police held a press briefing jointly at the Media Centre of DMP yesterday noon. DC-DB (South) Monirul Islam and Dhaka Superintendent of Police Habibur Rahman, among others, were present.

Monirul Islam trashed the

report of paying of Tk 50 lakhs as ransom. "The criminals released the boy after a technique had been applied. Besides, a pressure was exerted on them by detaining their family members and relatives."

Asked about the motive behind the abduction, he said, "We are not sure yet. They might have kidnapped the boy for ransom, but they did not get time to realise the money. As we have applied a technique, they had to leave their hope for the ransom money."

Over the Rab's claim that it had evidence on the payment of ransom, the DC-DB said, "Any other agency might have got the information. But we have no such information."

He added, "If the investigator of the case feels, he might interrogate those officials who spoke about the demand and payment of ransom money."

Law Commission

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including appointment of legal experts, law professors and researchers as HC judges, were ignored. Traditionally lawyers and lower court judges are appointed to the post.

According to the proposed guidelines, a candidate has to have at least a second class or its equivalent grade in bachelor degree with honours in law from any recognised university or a second class or equivalent grade in master's degree in law or any other subject along with a bachelor degree in law with second class.

Those who have studied abroad must have at least a second class or its equivalent grade in bachelor degree in law from any university recognised by the Bangladesh Bar Council or must have completed the Bar at law.

To qualify for the post, one has to be a district and sessions judge or its equivalent official. He or she has to have positive records, portraying high morality in the whole service period.

Besides, a law professional has to have a record of conducting a number of cases independently at the Supreme Court to become an HC judge.

The Law Commission in August sent six recommendations to the law ministry. The suggestions included scrapping of Article 98 of the constitution that provides for temporary appointment of additional HC judges and judges to the Appellate Division from the HC, as the provision is inconsistent with the spirit of an independent judiciary.

Blast kills 14 in China

AFP, Beijing

Fourteen people were killed and 47 injured when a blast tore through a restaurant in northern China, state media said yesterday, with initial investigations pointing to a gas leak as the likely cause.

The explosion occurred in the city of Jinzhong in Shanxi province, which lies to the west of Beijing, on Friday evening, the official Xinhua news agency said.

Xinhua quoted local investigators as saying that 17 of the injured were in a serious condition.

Portugal pulls bulk of police from East Timor

AFP, Dili

Portugal withdrew the bulk of its police officers from East Timor yesterday as international forces wind up a 13-year mission in Asia's youngest nation, where thousands have died in political bloodshed.

Seventy-five of the officers boarded a Lisbon-bound plane in the former Portuguese colony, among the last of 1,200 UN peacekeepers to return home before the official end of their mission on December 31.

Only around three dozen UN Police remain in the country, including several from Portugal, Australia, Malaysia and Pakistan. Most of them will leave next week and all will have to withdraw by December 31.

International forces began pulling out in earnest last month with Canberra this week saying it was sending home hundreds of troops from the Australian-led International Stabilisation Force (ISF), ending a six-year operation.

Jamaat-Shibir

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capital's Malibagh, they detained six other activists.

At Uttara, police were hit by a hail of brickbats when they moved towards a procession of 60-70 Jamaat-Shibir men on Road 7, Sector 4 around 4:30pm, witnesses said.

After that, police and the marchers chased each other for around 15 minutes.

The law enforcers fired eight rounds of teargas canisters, 18 rounds of rubber bullets and charged baton to disperse the supporters, Deputy Commissioner Nisarul Arif of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Uttara division) told The Daily Star.

Twenty-five activists, three of them injured, were picked up from the spot. No policemen were injured in the incident.

The procession was organised as part of Jamaat-e-Islami's ongoing demonstrations demanding release of its leaders facing war crimes trial.

In Chapainawabganj, 16 people including six policemen were injured during a clash between police and Jamaat-Shibir men at Nachole Bazar.

The injured police personnel are Officer-in-Charge Firoz Ahmed, Officer-in-Charge (Investigation) Sayed Iqbal, sub-inspectors Abdul Momin and Saiful Islam and constables Mamunur Rashid and Helal of Nachole police station.

Firoz was admitted to Nachole upazila health complex and the others were given first aid. Police arrested five leaders, including upazila unit ameer Yahia Khaled, secretary Yakub Ali and Nachole union parishad Chairman Mawlana Rais Uddin.

Police said Jamaat brought out a procession without the local administration's permission around 3:45pm and attacked them with brickbats and sticks. The cops retaliated with teargas shells, rubber bullets and baton charge.

In the Malibagh drive, six Jamaat and Shibir supporters were picked up from Educare Coaching Centre around 5:00pm, following a tip-off, said Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Shah Alam of Ramna Police Station.