

Same old formula

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was supposed to elect the entire central committee.

The national council's outcome raises a question whether voting rights of councillors can be delegated to others.

Contacted last evening over telephone, eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said voting rights can be delegated to others in a private company where the largest shareholder has the controlling authority.

"Similarly, our political parties seem to function as privately owned companies where the top leaders exercise the power of ownership."

Hence, it is not surprising that a councillor delegates his/her voting rights to the "absolute owner of the party", he added.

AL leader advocate Rahmat Ali, who was the chief election commissioner at the council, also acknowledged that voting rights cannot be delegated.

When his attention was drawn to the council's decision, he said the councillors exercised their voting rights by empowering Sheikh Hasina and Syed Ashraf to choose other leaders of the central committee.

Rahmat Ali also claimed the way he conducted the election session in the council contradicted neither the party charter nor the RPO.

Interestingly, hours before being re-elected, Syed Ashraf, also the LGRD minister, in the inaugural session said the country will be run as per the constitution and the party as per its charter.

The last council in July 2009, too, elected Hasina and Ashraf as the top-most leaders and gave them authority to pick other office bearers.

But it was expected that the party would honour its own charter and the RPO by

holding elections to all the posts in a new beginning of the intra-party democracy.

The AL's 2008 electoral manifesto "the charter for change" had also pledged steps to establish democratic principles within the party.

The main opposition BNP in its national council on December 8, 2009, followed the path taken by AL.

It re-elected Khaleda Zia chairperson and authorised her to pick other office bearers and members for the national executive and standing committees, ignoring the party charter that stipulates election to the posts.

Yesterday, after the inauguration of AL national council at the historic Suhrawardy Udyan in the morning, the council session to elect new leadership began in the afternoon at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh.

The election procedures began after Sheikh Hasina had dissolved the central committee she had been heading since the 2009 council.

Hasina's cousin Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, a presidential member of the just dissolved central committee, proposed her name for the president post and Syed Ashraf supported.

And she was elected unopposed to lead the age-old political party for the next three years. This is the seventh time in a row she becomes the party chief.

"I sought to know if there is any alternative proposal. I found no response. Then I declared her elected," Rahmat Ali told The Daily Star.

The process was same for electing the general secretary.

Mahbubul Alam Hanif and Jahangir Kabir Nanok, two joint general secretaries of outgoing central com-

mittee, respectively proposed and supported Ashraf's name for general secretary.

Rahmat then moved to hold polls to other posts.

"I asked councillors how you will like to hold the elections to other posts. In response, the councillors proposed the newly elected president and general secretary be empowered to choose leaders to complete the formation of the central committee," he said.

"And I went by the councillors' decision. I did everything as per the party's constitution."

The entire procedure annoyed many councillors who expected that elections would be held to other posts.

Talking to The Daily Star after the election session, many of them alleged that the proposal to empower Hasina-Ashraf was made and supported in line with the party high-command directives. Nobody could oppose it.

Immediately, after his re-election, Syed Ashraf said the president and general secretary were elected on crimes against women. That was in contrast to the pitched battles protesters fought with police last weekend.

The six suspects held in connection with the attack on the student on a New Delhi bus were charged with murder following her death, police said. The maximum penalty for murder is death.

Authorities, worried about the reaction to the news of her death, deployed thousands of policemen, closed 10 metro stations and banned vehicles from some main roads in the heart of New Delhi, where demonstrators have converged since the attack to demand improved women's rights.

Sheikh Hasina at the election session declared that she would consult the general secretary and other senior leaders to complete the formation of the central committee, he said.

"I don't think any major change will come in the new central body," Ashraf said, adding that some new faces will be included while some from the immediate-past committee will be dropped.



Indian protesters hold candles during a rally in New Delhi late yesterday, after the death of a gang-rape victim.

PHOTO: AFP

Victim dies

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New Delhi and other cities across the country to keep the pressure on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government to get tougher on crimes against women. That was in contrast to the pitched battles protesters fought with police last weekend.

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said in a statement. "I hope that the entire political class and civil society will set aside narrow sectional interests and agenda to help us all reach the end that we all desire - making India a demonstrably better and safer place for women to live in."

The woman, beaten, raped and thrown out of a moving bus, had been flown to Singapore in a critical condition by the Indian government on Thursday.

"She was courageous in fighting for her life for so long against the odds but the trauma to her body was too severe for her to overcome," Kelvin Loh, chief executive officer of the Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore said in a statement announcing her death from multiple organ failure.

The government has chartered an aircraft to fly the student's body back to India, along with members of her family, TCA Raghavan, the Indian high commissioner to Singapore, told reporters.

The body was taken from the hospital to a Hindu undertaker in Singapore and hours later, lying in a gold and yellow coffin selected by Indian diplomats, the body was driven in a hearse to the airport.

Despite efforts to cordon off the city centre, more than 1,000 people gathered at two locations. Some protesters shouted for justice, others for the death penalty for the rapists.

Political leaders vowed steps to correct "shameful social attitudes" towards women in the world's biggest democracy.

"The need of the hour is a dispassionate debate and inquiry into the critical changes that are required in societal attitudes," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

severe punishment for the rapists. Protests were also held in the cities of Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai.

"For some reason, and I don't really know why, she got through to us," well-known columnist Nilanjana Roy wrote in a blog yesterday.

"Our words shrivelled in the face of what she'd been subjected to by the six men travelling on that bus, who spent an hour torturing and raping her, savagely beating up her male friend."

Sonia Gandhi, the powerful leader of the Congress party, directly addressed the protesters in a rare broadcast on state television, saying that as a mother and a woman she understood their grievances.

"Your voice has been heard," Gandhi said. "It deepens our determination to battle the pervasive and the shameful social attitudes that allow men to rape and molest women with such impunity."

The victim and her male friend were returning home from the cinema, media reports say, six men on their bus beat them with metal rods and repeatedly raped the woman. Media said a rod was used in the rape, causing internal injuries. Both were thrown from the bus. The male friend survived.

The six suspects have all been arrested and are in custody. The attack has put gender

issues centre stage in Indian politics. Issues such as rape, dowry-related deaths and female infanticide have rarely entered mainstream political discourse.

Analysts say the death of the woman dubbed "Amanat", an Urdu word meaning "treasure," by some Indian media could change that, although it is too early to say whether the protesters calling for government action to better safeguard women can sustain their momentum through to national elections due in 2014.

The outcry over the attack caught the government off-guard and it was slow to react. It took a week for Singh to make a statement on the attack, infuriating many protesters who saw it as a sign of government insensitivity to the plight of women.

The prime minister, a stiff 80-year-old technocrat who speaks in a low monotone, has struggled to channel the popular outrage in his public statements and convince critics that his eight-year-old government will now take concrete steps to improve the safety of women.

"The Congress managers were ham-handed in their handling of the situation that arose after the brutal assault on the girl. The crowd management was poor," a lawmaker from the Congress party said on condition of anonymity.

The revenue income of DoE was Tk 31 crore until 2009 that dramatically soared to Tk 109 crore by the end of 2012. It happened as both the number of DoE clearance holders after paying fees and realisation of fines went up during this period.

The DoE started penalising major offenders on "polluters pay principle" and realised fines in significant amounts since August 2010. The move earned the environment ministry a good name.

Munir was transferred to Bogra from Chittagong Port in a similar manner in December 2007 as he went tough as a magistrate of the sea port against corruption by powerful ministers and lawmakers.

Among some outstanding achievements of his dutifulness was recovery of 150-acre high-value public land worth Tk 1,500 crore from illegal occupancy during his service.

In Bogra, he as an additional deputy commissioner of revenue took up a crusade against corruption in the land administration defying political interference.

During his two and a half years in service there, he raised the collection of land revenue to Tk 16 crore against the previous record of Tk 2.16 crore a year earlier, according to official sources.

He disbursed Tk 31 crore as land acquisition compensation among the affected land owners without harassment and settled 55,000 land mutation cases without bribery.

Md Shahjahan, director general in-charge of DoE, said he heard of the government order but did not yet release Munir, as he did not receive any instruction yet.

The DoE might request the environment ministry for review of the transfer order, he added. Official sources say the environment ministry may keep on with the official if it desires so for the sake of public interest.

A lesson for Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 1
women in the neighbouring country. The rape raised a unanimous demand that actions be taken to strengthen laws against sexual violence.

"Incidents like rape and gangrape are frequent in our country too," said Salma Ali, executive director of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA). Except for some individuals and women rights activists, no one protests such crimes and discrimination against women in Bangladesh, she added.

A significant change was necessary in the perspective of the man-dominated society to ensure women's safety, a number of women rights activists told The Daily Star yesterday. Tougher legal measures should also be taken.

Thousands of Indians joined protests yesterday in a mass outpouring of grief and anger after the victim died in Singapore. Protesters marched in central Delhi and other major cities, demanding that no one else was made victim of such barbarism.

After the incident, Indian President Pranab

Mukherjee expressed "deep distress" while Congress President Sonia Gandhi asked for swift and immediate action.

Condemning police action on the protesters, political parties demanded a statement from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. In response, Manmohan vowed to take action against this "monstrous crime".

The incident was regrettable, BNWLA Executive Director Salma said, but the way all Indians, especially politicians of both the ruling party and the opposition, responded to that could be a lesson for Bangladesh.

Such protests could force the authorities to be accountable for their actions against assaults on women, she said.

As many as 760 women and children were raped between January and November this year: 188 of them were gangraped while 69 were killed after rape, according to Odhikar, a rights organisation. The number of rapes was 711 in 2011, 559 in 2010, 456 in 2009 and 454 in 2008.

In many incidents, Salma said, victims did not file any case in fear of further

harassment by the rapists or were forced to withdraw cases in the face of threats by influential people.

Rape cases should be tried under the speedy trial act and the government should formulate separate laws for protection of victims and witnesses to ensure justice, she said.

"Moreover, a political commitment is mandatory to stop such heinous crimes."

Ayesha Khanam, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said the incident in Delhi was nothing but an outcome of conservative society existing in entire South Asia, which regards women as inferior to men.

Rape incidents happen in Bangladesh as well but Indian politicians, as opposed to those here, expressed solidarity with common people in condemning the crime, she said.

In separate statements, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Samajik Protirodh Committee, a platform of 67 women, human rights and development organisations, expressed deep shock at the death of the 23-year-old rape victim.

BSF kills 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) gunned down a Bangladeshi cattle trader at Kushampur frontier in West Bengal along the border in Jhenidah early yesterday.

The dead is Anarul Islam, 35, of Pipulbaria village in Moheshpur upazila of the district.

Anarul along with nine cattle traders entered Haripur area in North 24 Parganas of West Bengal around 3:00am, said subedar Sher-e-Alam of Jadavpur camp of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Noticing the intrusion from across the border, members of BSF Kushampur camp opened fire, leaving Anarul dead on the spot.

The other traders managed to take Anarul's body into Bangladesh territory and fled the scene, added Sher-e-Alam.

Later, BGB members recovered the body around 7:30am and sent it to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital for an autopsy.

Mamata plans

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launched a drive to recruit more female officers as a confidence-building measure.

That campaign will start in the capital Delhi, where a 23-year-old student was brutally gang-raped on a bus on December 16, sparking nationwide protests.

The lack of women officers has been widely blamed for the failures of some police forces to thoroughly investigate allegations of sex crimes. Women currently account for less than one in five Indian police officers.

Biting cold grips country

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at Daulatdia terminals till 8:00am yesterday.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports: Mohiruddin, 80, of the district's Gobindapur village died of severe cold on Friday night.

Since Friday evening, around 35 children have been admitted to different hospitals in Gaibandha with cold-related illnesses, according to the district civil surgeon's office.

The district administration distributed 13,228 blankets among the poor and the destitute.

D h a k a - b a s e d Chapainawabganj Samity yesterday distributed 1,000 blankets among the cold-hit poor in the district, our Chapainawabganj correspondent reports.

Munshiganj were suspended from 10:00pm Friday to 4:30am yesterday, said Sirajul Haq, manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) at Mawa.

Six ferries carrying around 100 vehicles were bound to anchor mid-river due to poor visibility.

Over 500 vehicles had to wait at Mawa and Kawrakandi ferry terminals until yesterday morning.

The authorities suspended ferry services on Paturia-Daulatdia route for six hours from 2:00am yesterday, reports our Munshiganj correspondent quoting BIWTC Manager (Commerce) Ashraf Ullah Khan.

As many as 530 vehicles queued at Paturia and 380

at Daulatdia terminals till 8:00am yesterday.

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Tahrir activists

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At one stage, Rab personnel joined with police and rounded up the activists.

A banner and some leaflets were seized from the detainees, said Shahbagh police.

Contacted, Lt Col MM Anisur Rahman, commanding officer of Rab-3, said the Tahrir men usually show up on Fridays, but they gathered yesterday to carry out subversive activities at an Awami League rally at the Suhrawardy Udyan.

The Hizb ut-Tahrir was banned on October 22 in 2009 and since then, over 700 of its leaders and activists have been arrested by the law enforcers.

BNP, allies

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Khaleda's Gulshan office.

The committee reiterated that hartal will be enforced if the government hikes the prices of electricity, gas and water.

Khaleda on December 26 had declared that her party will enforce shutdown and blockade if energy prices go up.

The team also found that the BPC sold jet fuel at lower prices for international flights in 2008-09, though fuel prices went up on the international market at that time. It caused the