

CITY CORPORATION ELECTIONS 2013

Slum votes may decide next Khulna mayor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The two key mayoral runners are trying to enlist the support of the slum dwellers, who account for about 34 percent of the total votes and are likely to determine, along with around 41,000 fresh voters, the next mayor of Khulna City Corporation.

Both BNP-backed candidate Moniruzzaman Mony and Awami League-backed Talukder Abdul Khaleque have attached top priority in their campaign schedule for visiting the slums every day to seek votes of the day labourers, factory workers, transport workers, rickshaw-van drivers, and shrimp factory workers.

They are committing to both the low-income people who populate 651 slums of the city and the newly enrolled voters to bring about radical changes in the city. There are more than 1.48 lakh voters in the slums, while the total number of voters is over 4.4 lakh.

A group of workers at Crescent Jute Mills, who live in the slums, recently told The Daily Star that they would vote for the mayoral candidate who would think about their fate.

Mamun, Sirazul, and Amena, used to work at Dhaka Match Industries in Rupsha area, which has been closed for the last four years. They said they were passing their days with great difficulty, and they would vote for the person who would consider their plight.

Some dwellers of the Labonchara slum area identified waterlogging and the muddy roads as the main problem in the area. They said they wanted the fundamental problems to be solved and would vote for the candidate who would take care of these.

"We want a green, clean, modern and IT based city," said Mousumi Chowdhury, a new voter, who is also the second year student of electrical and electronic engineering at Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (Kuet).

Saima Zaman, a third year student of environmental science at Khulna University, also a new voter, said, "I want to see Khulna as a WiFi zone and a drug-free society."

In 2008, there were a little more than 3.99 lakh voters in the city.

Meanwhile, outgoing mayor Khaleque and Jatiya Party-backed mayoral contender Shafiqul Islam Modhu yesterday vowed to establish a children-friendly environment in Khulna city.

Addressing a "meet-the-children" at the Rupsha Ava centre, they said they would protect children's rights, especially those of the underprivileged children, and provide education to slum kids.

National Children Task Force organised the programme with support from Bangladesh Shishu Academy, NGO World Vision, and Manusher Jonno Foundation.



Police search a motorcyclist yesterday at Jaikhana Ghat in Khulna city. Security in and around the city has been tightened due to the upcoming city corporation polls.



Bahadderhat flyover construction work, supervised by Bangladesh Army, going on in full swing yesterday in Chittagong city. The supervision was given to the army after some of its girders collapsed on November 15 last year killing at least 12 people.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

NEW BUDGET

Allocation for health sees mere 1.49pc rise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Tk 9,495 crore budgetary allocation for the health sector for 2013-14 fiscal year is only a mere 1.49 percent increase from the last one.

Health spending this year shrunk to a mere 4.26 percent of the budget, the lowest in a decade.

Commenting on the declining trend of the health budget, healthcare sector experts commented that the decrease in health sector spending will force general people to go to private healthcare service providers and hence more money has to be spent from their pockets.

Considering the current inflation rate, the proposed amount will translate into lesser health services for the poor, let alone any improvement, they told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Although money allocated for health increased, much of it will be spent in giving salary increments to people

employed in the sector," Prof Rashid-E-Mahbub, former president of Bangladesh Medical Association, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"This will leave little for providing services to the people who cannot afford private healthcare facilities," he said.

The proposed health budget apparently ignored the fact that prices of many essential medicines have gone up in the last few years, added Prof Rashid-E-Mahbub.

While increasing the health allocation is of utmost importance, making sure that the fund goes where it is needed the most is also crucial, he insisted.

"Moreover, due to bureaucratic tangles, it takes around seven to eight months for the allocation to reach most of the upazilas.

"This hampers its proper utilisation as the unused fund must be returned before the next budget," he said.

Dipu Moni shares views with foreign envoys

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni yesterday exchanged views with ambassadors and heads of missions from South Asia and Asean countries on various issues including holding dialogue among the country's political parties for an election-time government.

As a part of briefing the foreign diplomats in separate groups, Dipu Moni discussed a number of recent developments concerning Bangladesh.

The envoys of the Russian Federation and the Holy See were also present, said a press release.

Among issues discussed were Bangladesh's relations with its immediate neighbours in South Asia and nearby neighbours from the Asean region including the initiatives taken by the Bangladeshi government to take relationships with these countries bilaterally and at various regional forums including at Saarc, Bimstec and ARF to higher planes.

Also discussed were the recent political developments in the country, including the ongoing parliament session, preparations for the upcoming general elections and the question of dialogue among all political parties regarding the modalities of an interim government leading up to the upcoming parliamentary polls.

The foreign minister briefed 20 ambassadors and heads of missions about a number of urgent initiatives and measures being taken by the government in coordination with employees, workers and the ILO in a collective effort to improve the working conditions, occupational safety, collective bargaining rights and wages in the RMG sector.

Muhith hurt by opposition' parliament boycott

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dismayed at the continuous absence of opposition lawmakers in parliament, Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday requested the Speaker to exert her influence to do away with the culture of House boycott and assured that they would be behind her attempt.

Muhith has placed all his five budgets in the absence of the BNP-led opposition MPs. This time, the opposition joined the current budget session, but did not attend his budget speech yesterday. This hurts him, he said.

The minister asked the MPs, who attend parliament only occasionally to save their membership, salaries and benefits, to relinquish their responsibilities.

He also put the onus on the Speaker as the government and the ruling party did almost nothing to end the culture in the last four and a half years as per the electoral pledges.

Before the last parliamentary election, the AL promised to take all necessary mea-

sures to make the House effective and change the political culture. It also promised to take steps to formulate a consensual and unanimous charter of political behaviour. But it did not deliver on the pledges, resulting in further deterioration of the political culture including the boycott of parliament.

It is the AL that gave birth to the culture of boycott by being absent in the fifth parliament in 1991-1995 as the opposition. The AL boycotted 135 out of 400 sittings of the fifth parliament to press the then BNP-led government to introduce the caretaker government.

In return, the BNP as opposition bench in the seventh parliament in 1996-2001 boycotted 163 out of total 382 sittings, raising various demands.

The AL did the same in the eighth parliament in 2001-2006 by boycotting 223 of 373 sittings. In the current parliament, the BNP-led opposition MPs boycotted a record 317 out of a total of 374 sittings.

Both AL and BNP boycotters, however, have taken all financial facilities.

Dhaka Wasa dug up Tally Office road in the capital's Rayer Bazar to install sewerage pipes just six months after it had been repaired by the city corporation. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



COLLEGE ADMISSION

Govt policy challenged in High Court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court lawyer yesterday filed a writ petition with the High Court challenging the legality of a government decision to admit students to colleges for 2013-2014 academic year on the basis of their SSC marks instead of admission tests.

Eunus Ali Akond filed the petition praying to the HC to stay the decision and to direct the colleges to admit students to class XI in the same manner it was done earlier at their own processes.

The Ministry of Education on May 16 issued the Admission Policy-2013 saying no college would be allowed to hold any admission test, and two percent seats must be reserved for the ministry employees' children, its subordinate offices, and concerned institutions.

WAR CRIMES TRIAL

Defence claims SQ Chy was in Punjab in 1971

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A defence counsel yesterday tried to establish the alibi that war crimes accused and BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury was attending Punjab University in Pakistan when the Liberation War of Bangladesh was taking place in 1971.

Ahsanul Huq Hena, the lawyer, suggested that Salauddin attended Punjab University between 1968 and December 1971 when he was cross-examining the investigation officer (IO) Nurul Islam. But the IO threw out the claim and said Salauddin had been a student of political science at Dhaka University from 1968 to March 26, 1971.

Nurul Islam, who was cross-examined for about two hours, however, said he could not seize any documents regarding Salauddin's graduation.

Several prosecution witnesses earlier told International Crimes Tribunal-1 that Salauddin was in Chittagong in 1971 and committed different crimes against humanity.

The proceeding of the case was adjourned until June 9. Meanwhile, the tribunal-1 yesterday adjourned the hearing of the charges against Jamaat-e-Islami leader Moulana AKM Yusuf until June 16 after the defence appealed for time.

BNP LEADER ABDUL ALIM

International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday completed recording the cross-examination of AHM Motasim Billah, the 22nd prosecution witness in the case against BNP leader Abdul Alim.

Alim's counsel Ahsanul Huq Hena completed his cross-examination before the three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan adjourned the case proceeding until June 9. On Wednesday, Motasim, who owned Alokhehla Studio in Joypurhat in 1971, testified that he had taken photographs of Abdul Alim with 26 detained youths and Pakistani military personnel at Joypurhat Railway Station during the Liberation War.

UK urged to press for protection of minorities in Bangladesh

ANSAR AHMED ULLAH

Representatives of the UK chapters of Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Unity Council Europe, and Jagannath Hall Alumni Association urged the UK to pressurise the Bangladesh government into protecting the lives and properties of minority communities.

During a June 4 meeting with Kerry McCarthy MP, shadow minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, they expressed concern over the violence unleashed on minority communities after the International Crimes Tribunal February 28 verdict.

The verdict sentenced Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee to death on war crimes charges. The representatives requested McCarthy to urge the Bangladesh government to introduce a "Minority Protection Act" and form a "Minority Commission" to implement legislations and monitor its effect.

They stated that no Hindu citizen would be left in Bangladesh after 20 years due to their current migration rate from Bangladesh.

They also pointed out that Hefajat-e-Islam's recent 13-point demand was unconstitutional and against the fundamental values and principles on which Bangladesh was established.

Reshma starts new job at Westin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Reshma, who survived for 17 days under the Rana Plaza rubble, started life anew yesterday by joining as Public Area Ambassador at the Housekeeping Department of The Westin Dhaka.

"I used to work in a garment factory but the work environment was not good. Here it is better and I like it here," she told journalists after her orientation at the hotel.

Earlier in the day, Reshma was released from Savar Combined Medical Hospital where she was receiving treatment after being rescued on May 10. The nine-storey building collapsed on April 24, claiming 1,131 lives.

Major General Chowdhury Suhrawardy, general officer commanding of Savar Cantonment, told journalists that Reshma had recovered completely.

"A number of organisations, including many NGOs, showed interest to provide job opportunities but Westin and Sonargaon

officially wrote to us offering her a job. We showed her both offers and she chose Westin," he said.

Reshma said she decided on the Westin offer after consulting her mother and sister and as their facilities were better. She, however, did not disclose her salaries and benefits.

Salina Ali, chairman of Unique Hotel Resorts Limited (UHRL) which brought the hotel to Bangladesh, handed Reshma the appointment letter.

"Reshma won a tough challenge and when we heard that she does not want to work in the garments sector anymore, I decided to make her a member of the Westin team," said UHRL Managing Director Mohd Noor Ali.

The hotel General Manager Azeem Shah hoped that Reshma with her resilience will break the stigma surrounding women working in hotels.

"I pray that the other survivors recover quickly and get good jobs like me," hoped Reshma.



ANTICS OVER BRIDGE TOLL

CJ warns colleague to be careful

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain warned Justice Md Rezaul Hasan to be careful so that the image and dignity of judges are not hampered in any manner, said a source at the Supreme Court yesterday.

It was reported in the media on Wednesday that Justice Rezaul became angry with toll plaza supervisor Asaduzzaman on Tuesday for stopping his car and another vehicle of his entourage for not paying toll while crossing the Bangabandhu bridge.

Later, the vehicles were allowed to leave after the judge of the High Court paid the toll. The judge then asked police to take action against Asaduzzaman on charge of committing contempt of court.

Police arrested Asaduzzaman after a general diary was filed with Bangabandhu Bridge Police Station (West) on Justice Rezaul's instructions. Police then sent Asaduzzaman to Sirajganj jail, according to media reports.

Asaduzzaman got bail from a Sirajganj court yesterday.

The SC source, however, refused to say details of the conversation and when it took place.

Contacted by The Daily Star, SC Registrar AKM Shamsul Islam refused to comment about the matter.

He, however, said Justice Md Rezaul Hasan was on a two-day (Tuesday and Wednesday) leave and he joined office yesterday.