

AL, BNP leaders

FROM PAGE 1
Jatiya Press Club.

BNP Standing Committee Member Moudud Ahmed alleged the government had become desperate to win the Gazipur race.

"In order to ensure victory of the ruling party-backed mayoral candidate, partisan people have been appointed as presiding officers, assistant presiding officers and polling officers," he told a discussion organised by National People's Party yesterday.

Reacting to BNP's allegations, Tofail Ahmed, member of AL advisory council, said, "We have lost the elections to four city corporations held in free and fair manner. We will not do anything that taints the image gained by holding the previous free and fair elections."

The BNP had taken part in those polls where they are certain to win, he said, at a press briefing at AL chief's political office at the

capital's Dhanmondi yesterday.

"The party [BNP] is trying to make the [Gazipur] polls controversial by raising different questions as it knows the city is historically an Awami League stronghold," Tofail said.

AL Presidium Member Mohammad Nasim alleged the BNP, resorting to falsehood, was conspiring afresh centring on the polls.

"If BNP wins it hails election as free and fair, and if it defeats it brings allegation of vote rigging. You [BNP] have to come out of this culture," he said at a press briefing at Sirajganj.

Mirza Fakhrul said the election commission will have to take the responsibilities if any disgraceful event erupts in Gazipur. "Still there is time. Take steps to deploy army," he called upon the Election Commission.

"We would initiate the movement to topple the

government from Gazipur if any rigging takes place," he added.

On the other hand, Tofail said the opposition blamed its failure in the 2008 general election on the army and will do the same if it is defeated in the Gazipur city election.

Suranjit Sengupta, another AL advisory council member, at a discussion at the capital's Institute of Diploma Engineers, he said the BNP demands troops deployment and at the same time propagates abroad tarnishing the image of the army.

Meanwhile, BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission, alleging the Gazipur returning officer announced the election results will be published a day after the voting.

RO Motiar Rahman refuted the allegation. The results will be published the way they have always been published, he added.



Traders burn wires of scrapped ships beside a cropland to collect copper. They hardly care about the environment or the soil. The photo was taken yesterday at Barobkunda of Sitakunda in Chittagong.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS



No scope of dumping wastewater

Bepza reacts to Star photo

The Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) yesterday in a statement said it differs with the June 21 photo caption of The Daily Star that said industrial wastes are dumped by Chittagong EPZ factories.

The statement read the photo was taken from outside the Chittagong EPZ area. The fact is industrial wastewater (effluent) from different enterprises are collected centrally through a network located inside the Chittagong EPZ and properly treated by Central Effluent Treatment Plant. The treated water is then discharged into a channel connected to the sea. There is no scope of dumping of wastewater.

Moreover, the effectiveness of the treatment is jointly monitored by Department of Environment and Bepza regularly. The authority also confirms that after treatment, discharged water does not contain any toxic materials that can contaminate the environment. Most probably, foam seen in the photograph, was formed due to turbulence of flow.

Banking services

FROM PAGE 16
However, the service seemed to be a hit. The card holders were withdrawing and sending money from one post office to the other as the transfer cost was very low.

Deputy Post Master General Zakir Hossain Nur said one could withdraw or transact cash up to Tk 5 lakh using the card. "It costs only Tk 5. There is no hidden or annual charge," he said.

A few government and private organisations were also disbursing employees' salaries, donations and allowances using the cards under pilot projects.

"It is becoming popular as there is no middlemen in this process and the card holders themselves can withdraw their cash," said SSS Bradra, additional post master general.

He said they were planning to open 25 more co-branded ATM booths this year. "About 1,200 co-branded booths will be established on the premises of important post offices across the country within the next three years," he told The Daily Star.

The co-branding of Bangladesh Post Office and Sonali Bank was part of the post office's initiative to serve people using technology.

BGMEA blames int'l politics All eyes on Gazipur

FROM PAGE 16
Kalpona Akter second on the list of factors that "came to light after the hearing [at the US Trade Representative's Office]."

"Labour conditions were sixth and fire incidents seventh. If the Rana Plaza building collapse or the Tazreen fire had been the factors behind the suspension, they would have topped the list," he said.

The United States had overreacted by suspending the duty-free access of Bangladeshi products to its market, he observed. "We are continuously making progress in the sector. Therefore, the US decision was not right."

He thanked the European Union for assuring Bangladesh that it would not cancel the GSP privileges.

The recent tragedies such as the Tazreen Fashions fire

and the Rana Plaza building collapse have prompted the government to undertake a number of steps to improve labour conditions.

These include the introduction of a new wage structure for garment workers and the approval of the draft Labour (Amendment) Act, 2013.

However, the US has deemed them insufficient.

"There are many issues in the labour law that will go against the industry," Atiqul said. "Still we want the law to be approved as soon as possible for the sake of the industry."

The BGMEA chief did not directly answer the question whether opposition leader Khaleda Zia's write-up published in a US newspaper influenced the suspension.

However, he said, "Any negative campaign against the country and the sector is unacceptable. The politi-

cians will have to convey a positive message instead."

Bangladesh should find out new export destinations and add more products to the export basket, he said, as the US and the EU receive 87 percent of its exports, with ready-made garments occupying the lion's share.

"We also need to go for high-end products," he noted, adding that the building collapse occurred at a time when high-end garment producers had started to show interest in sourcing more products from the country.

Atiqul said international partners such as the EU should formulate a code of conduct that the industry can cope with.

The EU will meet in Geneva on Monday to formulate an agreement called "European Compact" outlining compliance for Bangladesh's garment industry.

FROM PAGE 1
party that will gain strength far exceeding the candidate's personal victory.

Voters will also pick 76 councillors in today's election.

For the ruling AL, today's battle, which comes hot on the heels of its humiliating defeat to BNP in the four city polls on June 15, is a chance of turning around.

Party leaders are hopeful about a win because Gazipur is considered an AL stronghold. Its candidates have always done well here in all parliamentary polls since 1991.

In the 2008 national elections, the AL took all the five seats in the district, defeating the opposition candidates with big margins.

The BNP won two seats in 1991 and one in 2001 here.

But the resounding victories of the BNP-backed mayoral candidates in Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet have already been a boost for

the main opposition party.

The BNP wants to win here too to further demonstrate its claim that the AL-led government has lost popularity.

The opposition camp in its campaign has used people's anti-incumbency sentiment and government's failure in handling some key national issues.

Yet, the Gazipur polls may not be fully comparable with the battles in the four cities.

In 2008, AL-backed mayoral contenders won in the three cities -- Rajshahi, Barisal and Khulna -- that are considered BNP stronghold. In this 2008 election, however, BNP did not back its candidates.

Sylhet city appears to be a constituency of swing voters where local AL leaders had been serving the city people as mayor for long. But in the June 15 election, people voted for change.

However, to win the Gazipur election, the opposition highlighted national issues like stockmarket debacle, Hall-Mark scam, railway-gate scandal and the alleged graft in Padma bridge project. It did the same in the four city election campaigns.

The BNP candidate and his supporters portrayed these issues as government failures, in efforts to woo voters.

Religion, too, has been used in the Gazipur campaign, but with a difference.

In the four city polls, the religion card was used only against the AL-backed mayoral candidate with BNP and Hefajat-e Islam using people's religious sentiments to buy votes.

In Gazipur, Hefajat men got divided; its men working for both the AL and BNP-backed mayoral aspirants.

To depict themselves as pro-Islamic, AL leaders have tried to counter the propa-

ganda against them through publicising some efforts taken by the government on religious issues.

In efforts to secure the mayor's office, the AL had even forced its rebel mayoral candidate Jahangir Alam to quit the race and work for Ajmat.

And in the last moment, the AL has also been able to have Jatiya Party chief HM Ershad support Ajmat.

Both the AL and BNP-backed mayoral hopefuls had met Ershad, seeking his "blessing and support".

Another important factor to look into in today's polls is the garment workers living in the city.

Of some 10.26 lakh voters in the city, around 3.5 lakh are garment workers, who are considered to be the deciding factor in the battle.

To sway them, both the candidates promised to do a lot more for them.

Campaign, informally

FROM PAGE 1
employees to vote for the candidate they were backing.

Even though Friday was the weekend for garment workers, owners kept their garment factories open yesterday supposedly to persuade their workers to vote for their candidates.

"I have asked my workers to vote for the Awami League-backed candidate," a garment factory owner who is also a leader of Awami League's youth wing Jubo League told The Daily Star.

A pro-BNP garment factory owner said he too asked their workers to vote for the BNP-backed candidate.

The two garment factory owners said there were 200-250 factories in Gazipur which are owned by pro-ruling party and pro-opposition men.

Factory owners, workers and intelligence agencies sources claimed that a large amount of money had been distributed yesterday and on

Thursday night among workers and staffs of factories to buy votes.

Returning Officer Matiar Rahman, however, said they had not received any formal complaints in this regard.

The votes of the garment workers are a big deal in this election. Of the 10 lakh or so voters, 3.5 lakh are garment workers and many believe they would be the deciding factor in today's polls.

Yesterday, Ajmat and Mannan offered their Juma prayers at mosques in Tongi and sought votes and blessings from the devotees.

A number of Hefajat-e Islam and Jamaat-Shibir men were seen seeking votes and support for Mannan at different mosques.

Campaign for Mannan via texting was also going on.

Awami League men and a small number of people of different religion-based organisations asked people to vote for Ajmat at different

mosques.

Ajmat offered Juma prayers at Tongi Municipal Jame Masjid with a good number of his followers. Mannan offered his prayers at Tongi Bazar Jame Masjid.

Mannan yesterday went to Tongi, 25km from his Salna home, as Tongi is considered to be Ajmat's stronghold.

Both the leaders spent some time in the mosques and exchanged greetings with the devotees.

Meanwhile, during a press conference at his Tongi electoral camp after Juma prayers, Mannan alleged that Ajmat was trying to influence the poll using ruling party lawmakers and leaders.

Supporters of Ajmat were spreading black money, alleged Mannan and warned that people of Gazipur would not accept the result, if it went against him.

He said the election environment was congenial until

Thursday night.

"Today's environment is not good. Ajmat Ullah Khan was present at the time of distribution of election materials at the National University," Mannan said accusing Ajmat of buying votes.

Mannan talking to the press yesterday did not go down well with the returning officer.

Returning Officer Matiar Rahman during a press conference at the Gazipur Bangataj Auditorium said Mannan had violated the electoral code of conduct by holding a press conference on the day before the polls.

He, however, said they would take necessary actions after investigation.

Meanwhile, there was a three-kilometre-long traffic jam between Joydevpur intersection and Shivbari as several hundred vehicles carrying law enforcers, deployed for the election, were kept on the road haphazardly.

Singer Bipul

FROM PAGE 16
a son and a daughter. Bipul had been suffering from lung cancer since 2010.

His body will be kept at the Central Shaheed Minar from 11:00am to 12:30pm today so that people could pay tribute.

He will be cremated at the Postagola Cremation Ground.

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, a radio broadcasting centre, was set up by the Bangladesh government in exile during the Liberation War in 1971.

Bipul, a noted folk artiste, was among those who used their creative abilities to inspire the nation during the war.

He was also a member of the troupe "Bangladesh Mukti Sangrami Shilpi Shangstha" which travelled to and performed at refugee and freedom fighter camps during the war.

Led by noted Tagore song exponent Sanjida Khatun, the troupe fought the war in the cultural arena. Bipul joined the squad in August 1971, and remained with it till the end.

The troupe's main intention was to raise funds for the guerrillas and alleviate the misery of the countless refugees who lived in camps set up in India.

After the war, Bipul continued his musical journey in the country through countless live performances.

He later joined Bangladesh Betar as a music producer, and formed a troupe named Mallika Sangeet Samaroh. He also served as a teacher for folk music at Chhayanaout.

A number of artistes and cultural organisations expressed their grief over his death.

PCJSS man

FROM PAGE 16
United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) for the killing.

Contacted, the UPDF's press and information Secretary Niran Chakma brushed aside the allegations brought against his party.

Umang might have been killed in the internal feud of the PCJSS, he observed.

Japan to stand

FROM PAGE 16
The diplomat pledged Japan's continued support to improve workers' safety and rights.

On June 27, the US suspended Bangladesh's eligibility for trade benefits under the GSP programme citing insufficient progress towards reforms on worker rights and safety standards.

Fast Retailing Company Ltd owns Japan's casual clothing chain stores Uniqlo, Maruhisa, Yokohama Tape, TM Textiles, NI Teijin, CHORI, FVG and Onward Holdings Co.

It is currently the world's fourth largest apparel company, whose global sales for the fiscal year that ended on August 31, 2012 stood at 928 billion yen (approximately \$9.5 billion). It operates 1,208 stores in 14 markets.

The firm has decided to divert 30 percent of its annual purchases from China to Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Cambodia, Yukihiro Nitta, group executive officer of Fast Retailing, told The Daily Star.

Japan has been one of the major destinations of Bangladeshi products including shoes, prawn, garments and leather goods. Apparel exports to Japan had picked up after 2008 when Tokyo adopted the China+1 strategy to shift sourcing from China to other nations such as Bangladesh.

Uniqlo plans to bolster its garment sourcing volume from Bangladesh.

Bolivia threatens to close US embassy

FROM PAGE 16
Snowden for asylum.

"Being united will defeat American imperialism. We met with the leaders of my party and they asked us for several measures and if necessary, we will close the embassy of the United States," Morales said. "We do not need the embassy of the United States."

Morales made his announcement on Thursday as the leaders of Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina and Uruguay joined him in Cochabamba, Bolivia, for a special meeting to address the diplomatic row.

At the end of the summit a statement was issued demanding answers from France, Portugal, Italy and Spain. The United States was not mentioned in the statement.

"Europe broke all the rules of the game,"

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said shortly after arriving at Cochabamba airport. "We're here to tell president Evo Morales that he can count on us. Whoever picks a fight with Bolivia, picks a fight with Venezuela."

Maduro said an unnamed European government minister had told Venezuela the CIA was behind the incident.

"We are not colonies any more," Uruguay's president, Jose Mujica, said. "We deserve respect, and when one of our governments insulted we feel the insult throughout Latin America."

Ecuador's president, Rafael Correa, said on Thursday he and other leaders were offering full support to Morales and called the rerouting of the plane an aggression against the Americas.

Cristina Fernandez of

Argentina said Latin Americans treasured freedom after fighting for independence from Europe in the 19th century and then surviving Washington's 20th-century history of backing repressive regimes in the Americas. She demanded an apology for the plane ordeal.

"I'm asking those who violated the law in calm but serious manner, to take responsibility for the errors made, it's the least they can do," Fernandez said. "To apologise for once in their life, to say they're sorry for what they've done."

Morales has said that while the plane was parked in Vienna, the Spanish ambassador to Austria arrived with two embassy personnel and they asked to search the plane. He said he denied their permission.

"Who takes the decision

to attack the president of a South American nation?" Maduro asked. "Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has been abusive by trying to search Morales' plane in Spain. He has no right to breach international law."

Before the meeting, Morales said his ordeal was part of a US plot to intimidate him and other Latin American leaders.

He urged European nations to "free themselves" from the United States. "The United States is using its agent [Snowden] and the president [of Bolivia] to intimidate the whole region," he said.

France sent an apology to the Bolivian government. But Morales said "apologies are not enough because the stance is that international treaties must be respected".

Spain's foreign affairs minister, Jose Manuel

Garcia-Margallo, said his country did not bar Morales from landing in its territory.

Amid the tensions, the US embassy in La Paz cancelled Independence Day celebrations scheduled for Thursday. In the eastern city of Santa Cruz, Bolivian government sympathisers painted protest slogans on the doors of the American consulate.

Bolivia has said it will summon the French and Italian ambassadors and the Portuguese consul to demand explanations.

Morales said he never saw Snowden when he was in Russia, and that Bolivia had not received a formal request for asylum for him. Despite the complaints, there were no signs that Latin America leaders were moving to bring Snowden to the region that had been seen as the most likely to grant him

asylum.

Not all the region's leaders were not expected at the summit.

Brazil was represented by Marco Aurelio Garcia, President Dilma Rousseff's top international adviser. The presidents of Colombia, Chile and Peru, who have strong ties to the US, were not attending.

Colombia's president, Juan Manuel Santos, said earlier on Thursday he supported Morales, but asked other leaders to remain cool and avoid an escalating dispute between Latin America and the European Union.

"We're in solidarity with Evo Morales because what they did to him is unheard-of, but let's not let this turn into a diplomatic crisis for Latin America and the EU," Santos tweeted on Thursday.