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Even at the last moment, the Awami League managed to get Jatiya Party chief HM Ershad to support Ajmat.

But all its efforts seemed turned out to have been in vain.

In the early hours of today, very few Awami League leaders were reachable for comments. Upset, many of them left the Awami League district office by 9:00pm. The Daily Star tried to contact at least 10 local leaders over the phone but none of them picked up the call.

Contacted, Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif said the party would come up with a formal reaction today.

Awami League leader AKM Mozammel Huq, election coordinator for Ajmat, termed the results unexpected.

"The religion card has influenced national politics. We will analyse all these factors in the future," he said.

Party presidium member Obaidul Quader blamed organisational weakness, behaviour of party men, and local and national issues for the defeat.

He said people do not remember the successes of a government but they do remember manners and behaviour of ruling party leaders and workers.

Although the defeat at the Gazipur city polls has put the Awami League in an awkward situation, it will give the party a chance to do what is needed and be successful at the general elections, Quader told The Daily Star at Black Rose Hotel, where around 50 leaders of the Awami League and its front organisations were holding meetings regularly on the Gazipur city polls.

Meanwhile, Awami League leaders yesterday alleged that the BNP in a planned way was trying to make the Gazipur City Corporation polls controversial.

"As with the four city corporation polls, the BNP raised allegations of vote rigging to say that free and fair elections were not possible under the government," said Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed at a press briefing at the party chief's political office around 2:00pm.

A few hours after his briefing, party Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif alleged that the opposition was trying to "misguide" people through spreading falsehood about the Gazipur city polls.

"All previous elections held under this government's tenure were free and fair and people realised that. The BNP has intentionally resorted to falsehood over the election to confuse people," he said.

The lights were out at the Awami League central office around 10:00pm last night as disheathered leaders and workers left for home early.

## Gazipur polls

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said the election was held in a fair and neutral way, and that no significant irregularities were found.

Although city corporation election is a local government election, it turned into a battle of ballots between two political parties, the observer added.

Fema, another observer group, said the election was peaceful and no violence or clashes had taken place during the voting.

It said the turnout of voters was high. People were seen standing in long queues to cast their votes.

As there were three different types of ballot papers for mayor, councillor, and reserved women seats, the voting went slow, it added.

"One measure to assess the fairness of an election is that willing candidates should be able to contest -- this benchmark was compromised in the GCC polls as Jahangir Alam, a rebel candidate from the ruling AL was ostensibly pressured by his party to withdraw from the race even after date of withdrawal of candidature," the press release read.

# Solar plane takes off on last flight of US journey

AFP, Washington

The experimental Solar Impulse aircraft departed Washington early yesterday en route to New York on the final leg of its US tour aimed at showcasing the promise of clean energy, organisers said.

The plane, which runs on four electric propellers powered by an array of solar cells mounted on the plane's 63 meter wingspan, lifted off just before dawn from Washington Dulles International Airport at 0846 GMT.

At the controls was Swiss pilot Andre Borschberg, who has taken turns with compatriot Bertrand Piccard on different legs of the flight across the United States.

The Solar Impulse takeoff was broadcast live on the organizer's website, live.solarimpulse.com.

"Nine months of preparations and two months into the Across America mission - it almost seems

untrue that it's all coming to an end," the organizers said on their website.

The single-person plane is expected to arrive at New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport Sunday, July 7, around 2 am (0600 GMT).

Piccard, speaking to the team's in-house media group, said he hoped they could get permission to fly over New York while there is still light, and let residents of Manhattan and New Jersey get the "spectacular" view of the giant plane.

The aircraft is powered by 12,000 solar cells and flies under cover of darkness by reaching high altitudes during the day and gliding downward over long distances by night. It uses no fossil fuels.

Drawbacks include the tiny cockpit, vulnerability to turbulence and the lack of a toilet, so the pilots must relieve themselves by using an empty plastic water bottle on solo flights that rou-

tinely last 20-24 hours.

"I never find it too long," Piccard earlier told AFP. "When you are in the most revolutionary airplane, and you know that so many people are following your flight, so many people support your message about clean energy, it is just awesome to be in that plane."

The current model, the HB-SIA, is soon to be phased out as the Swiss team prepares to make test flights of the second-generation aircraft, the HB-SIB next year.

Piccard said the next plane will be 10 percent bigger, with more power, reliability, an auto-pilot function and a toilet so that pilots can make the four to six day long trips that will be part of its journey across the world in 2015.

The plane's American trip is just the latest in a series of groundbreaking flights across different parts of the world, including Europe and Africa.

# Turnout not as expected

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Election officers and locals say the turnout was not satisfactory yesterday mainly because garment workers, who make up a major portion of voters, left the areas Thursday night getting two days' holiday. Secondly, the voters who migrated for jobs are still on the list.

At Laxmipura Purba Para Hossainia Madrasa centre around 3:45pm, Presiding Officer Nurul Amin told this correspondent that the total number of voters in his centre was 3,408 while 1,400 had cast ballots.

Most of the voters in the area are "floating" garment

workers. Whenever they have a day off, they go to their village homes, he added.

At Chandon a Government Primary School, Presiding Officer Hasan Hafizur Rahman said the attendance at his centre was as low as 59pc since a majority of the voters had left the area to take up jobs elsewhere.

The presiding officer at Salna Islamia Fazil Madrasa said only 1,550 voters from a total of 2,796 had showed up at this centre. As in Chandon a school centre, many voters have migrated elsewhere for reasons of employment.

Mahmuda Akhter, a

garment worker, told this correspondent that the garment workers were reluctant to take pains to go to the polling centres. They even do not collect new voter ID cards when they change residence.

Presiding Officer Abu Salek at MA Majid High School said out of a total of 2,000 voters, only 1,125 could make it to the polling centre. He said most of the voters were male and lacked enthusiasm.

Md Omar, a polling officer at the centre, said many could not cast their ballots as their names and numbers in the voter slips supplied by the candidates were wrong.

## SRIKAIL GAS FIELD

# Experimental drilling begins in well-3

OUR CORRESPONDENT,

Comilla

Experimental drilling at the third well of the gas field in Muradnagar upazila of Comilla district began yesterday.

Hossain Monsur, chairman of Petrobangla, formally inaugurated the drilling yesterday afternoon.

He said it would be possible to produce 20-25 million cubic feet of gas per day

from the well.

Experimental drilling at the first well of the gas field started on March 8 this year.

The gas field consists of five wells, and the total cost of the project is about Tk 13.97 crore, Monsur added.

The Petrobangla chief also said the gas produced from the well would be supplied to the national grid within a couple of days, and

about 97 percent of the gas would be used in the power sector.

State-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Ltd (Bapex) is working in the project with Russian gas company Gazprom.

Abdul Baqi, managing director of Bapex, and Alamgir Hossain, general manager of the company, among others, were present at the inauguration.

# Iraq bombings kill five

AFP, Baghdad

Bombings north of Baghdad yesterday killed five people, including a police officer, police and doctors said, a day after attacks across the country left 23 dead.

A roadside bomb killed four people west of the northern city of Kirkuk, while another bomb in Tikrit, also north of the Iraqi capital, killed a police officer and wounded two others.

The attacks come a day

after 23 people died in a string of attacks across the country, including the bombing of a Shiite religious hall.

Iraq is grappling with a protracted political standoff within its national unity government and months-long protests among its Sunni Arab minority.

Analysts and diplomats worry that the standoff is unlikely to be resolved at least until general elections due next year.

With the latest violence, attacks have killed over 160 people and wounded more than 400 in the first six days of July, according to AFP figures based on security and medical sources.

Iraq has seen a surge in violence since the beginning of the year, coinciding with ongoing protests in the Sunni Arab community that analysts and diplomats say have boosted recruitment to Sunni militant groups and given them room to manoeuvre.

# Strong quake hits Indonesia's Sumatra

AFP, Jakarta

A strong 6.0-magnitude quake struck off Indonesia's Sumatra yesterday, US seismologists said, just days after a tremor on the vast island killed dozens and left thousands homeless.

No tsunami warning was issued and there were no reports of damage after the quake struck at a shallow depth of just 23 kilometres (14 miles) off the southwest coast of the vast island, said the US Geological Survey.

US seismologists initially said it was a magnitude 6.4 quake, then revised it down to a 6.0 quake.

The epicentre was close to the remote archipelago of Mentawai. In 2010, a 7.7-

magnitude quake triggered a tsunami that left more than 400 people dead on the island chain.

Suharjono, an official from the local meteorology, climatology and geophysics agency who goes by one name, said Saturday's quake was unlikely to have caused damage and there was no threat of a tsunami.

"Judging from the quake's magnitude and the distance from the epicentre to the land, I don't think the quake will have a significant impact," he said.

"There's little potential to cause damage," said the official, saying that it was felt mildly by people in two provinces on Sumatra.

The Pacific Tsunami

Warning Center did not issue a tsunami alert.

It came after a 6.1-magnitude inland tremor on Tuesday struck Aceh, on Sumatra's northern tip, flattening buildings and sparking landslides in the mountainous interior of the natural disaster-prone province.

So far 35 people have been confirmed dead from Tuesday's quake and some 15,000 left homeless, according to the national disaster agency.

In 2004, a quake-triggered tsunami left more than 170,000 people dead in Aceh, as well as tens of thousands more in countries around the Indian Ocean.

## AL bastion

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the 1991 parliamentary polls.

AL-backed Ajmat Ullah Khan, who won all three consecutive mayoral polls in Tongi municipality since 1995, has tasted his first defeat this time.

His defeat has added to the tally of the AL's failures in local polls.

During the tenure of the present government, nine city corporations have gone to the polls so far. AL-backed mayoral aspirants were defeated in all except in the Rangpur City Corporation polls.

BNP-backed mayoral candidates won in seven cities. AL leader Selina Hayat Ivy, who contested the Narayanganj city corporation polls without her party's support, won the election by defeating the AL-backed mayoral aspirant.

The defeat in the four city corporations in June came as a shock to the AL high command and government policymakers, who termed it a wake-up call before the next parliamentary polls.

But it had precious little time to recover enough to fight back in Gazipur. And thus the party faced another big defeat at the hands of its rival in a brief span of three weeks.

In his instant reaction, BNP-backed candidate Mannan said the BNP would win all elections in the coming days.

He said the AL government's misrule, its repression of Hefajat-e-Islam and support for atheists were the main reasons behind his success.

"We were confident about such an outcome," BNP leader Hasan Uddin Sarkar told The Daily Star last night at Mannan's election office.

He said the election results proved that people in Gazipur had rejected the AL-led government.

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader, who is also an AL presidium member, said the election results in Gazipur had landed the AL in an awkward situation.

He said many local and national issues and the party's weaknesses were among the reasons for the debacle at the Gazipur polls.

"It is an opportunity to learn from the defeat at the Gazipur polls. If we can utilise this opportunity, we will be able to avoid defeat in the next parliamentary election," said Quader.

## 10 injured in Gazipur post-poll violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 10 people were injured in a spate of post-poll violence in different areas of Gazipur City Corporation last night.

Some of the injured were taken to Gazipur Sadar Hospital and they were either stabbed or beaten up, hospital sources say.

Hasan Ajmal Bhuiyan, unofficially declared councillor of Gazipur ward-28, told The Daily Star at least five were injured as his rival's men carrying sharp weapons attacked a victory procession of his supporters in Harinal area around 11:10pm.

Several clashes and scuffles took place between supporters of councillor candidates in front of different polling centres in Tongi, sources said.

Abul Kalam Azad, officer-in-charge of Tongi Police Station, admitted that an incident of scuffle was reported. However, no one was arrested in this connection.

## Bomb in bag kills 3 cops in Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

A bomb hidden in a plastic bag exploded at a checkpoint in the Yemeni capital Sanaa yesterday, killing three policemen and wounding a fourth, a security services official said.

The device was planted near a police checkpoint in the north of the capital and detonated as the policemen opened the bag to check its contents, the official added.

# Dumped Australian PM opens up on sexism

AFP, Sydney

Australia's first female premier Julia Gillard has opened up for the first time on the sexism that plagued her leadership and her famous misogyny speech in her final interview before being ousted.

Gillard, an unmarried, atheist lawyer, was dumped as Australia's prime minister by her ruling Labor party last month, almost three years to the day since she toppled Kevin Rudd -- now reinstated as PM -- in a shock coup.

Her time in office was marred by slights on her gender and sometimes violently sexist commentary, including from members of the conservative opposition, prompting a fiery speech about misogyny last year that went viral and earned her global accolades.

The galvanising speech on the floor of parliament saw her become a torch-bearer for women around

the world.

Welsh-born Gillard opened up for the first time at length about the sexism she faced in what would ultimately be her final interview as prime minister, telling author Anne Summers you "wouldn't be human if you had no reaction to it".

Australia's first female leader said conservative leader Tony Abbott had tipped her over the edge, portraying himself as "some convert, or someone with a real understanding about what it's like to face the world as a woman and to feel the weight of that?"

Gillard revealed that she had spoken to former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about the travails of female leadership.

"She said to me that she never really felt that issue about gender when she was a senator. It's when she put herself forward for executive office that she felt it very acutely, and so she talked

about the crack she put in the glass ceiling," she said.

They had also discussed the loss of privacy that came with public office and an "obsessive" media poring over every detail of their past lives, Gillard said, recalling how Clinton advised her "to stand up to it".

She also described her affinity with US President Barack Obama, forged in part over their place as "The First" -- she Australia's first female premier; he the first African-American president.

In remarks foreshadowing her fate just two weeks after the interview, Gillard said the constant leadership speculation which ultimately brought her undone had been the worst aspect of her time in office.

Gillard will not be standing for re-election when Australia goes to the polls later this year after promising to retire from politics if she lost the Labor leadership ballot. Rudd beat her 57 votes to 45.

## Ready to become

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"The trick is to stay focused on the goal," said Taswar.

In addition, Taswar has a variety of interests, ranging from reading books to studying biology.

SHAHBAZ AMIN BHUIYAN Shahbaz took his O-level exams from Saint Francis Xavier's Green Herald School and has the highest marks in geography among all his peers nationwide.

"I owe it to my teacher, who made it sure that I never had to memorise. That teaching method worked well with me," he commented.

However, Shahbaz intends to study economics in future as he believes his professional scopes will be limited if he specialises in geography.

NAFISA ANAM ISLAM Nafisa also took her O-level exam from Saint Francis Xavier's Green Herald School and held the highest marks in Bible studies.

"I was interested in learning about a different religion. Being a Muslim, it added a perspective to how I view people different from me," she said.

Nafisa hopes to excel in business someday and wants to be someone who is tolerant and sensitive about her fellow human beings.

MUNTAHA CHOWDHURY Muntaha, who came from Sunshine Grammar School in Chittagong to receive her award, obtained the highest marks in Bangla in O-level exam in the country.

She said she was previously very weak in Bangla and drew criticism from her peers for having poor knowledge in her mother language. So, she took it as a challenge to improve and did it.

MUHT BIN MUNIM Muht proved to be among the league of the best physics students in the country by scoring the highest marks in his A-level exams.

A student of Sir John Wilson School, Muht achieved 174 marks out of 180.

"I have done well because I was thoroughly groomed by my teachers and took several challenging practice exams," said Muht.

DEBAPRIYA BISWAS The O-level graduate from Sunnysdale School scored the world's highest marks in physics and said confidently it was nothing unexpected since science was his natural talent.

He also got the best marks in chemistry in all over the country.

"In future I want to be a brilliant physicist like Sheldon Cooper from the television series 'The Big Bang Theory'," said Debapriya.

BORNALI ROY Bornali took her O-level exams from Willes Little Flower School and is the top scorer in Bangla internationally.

She said this was because she read a lot of books.

"I consider every citizen to be a gem and want to be a doctor. I might go practising in the rural areas if given the chance," she said.

TASFIA MONTAJ CHOWDHURY Tasfia is among the best in the country in chemistry as proved by her score in her A-level exams.

She completed high school from Chittagong Grammar School and is currently pursuing medical studies in a private medical college in the port city.

"I did well in chemistry because of the way my teacher made it fun and easy. He used to explain the daily life applications of chemistry, making it easier for me to learn," said Tasfia.

AHMAD IBRAHIM Ahmad from Maple Leaf International School made the outstanding achievement of scoring the world's highest marks in his biology, human biology and English literature in O-level exams.

"I am mostly self-taught because I rarely ever did classes. However, that is the method that helped me make the best use of my time to study the way I wanted to," said Ahmad.

After his brilliant gains in O-level, Ahmad performed another feat by sitting for seven A-level subjects half a term ahead of finishing Class 12. He also took 12 subjects in his O-levels.

"I took so many subjects because I have many interests and did not know what to choose," he added.

Ahmad wants to be a writer when he grows up.

JAMIL ZAKARIA BHUIYAN Jamil scored full marks in accounting in A-level exam, making him the top scorer of the world.

He studied in Changes School in Narayanganj.

"I took it as a challenge to perform well and spread the name of my school, because the general perception is that only students from the cities do well. I wanted to prove that schools in Narayanganj too have a lot of capability," said Jamil.

INTEKHAB HOSSAIN Intekhab not only achieved the highest marks in his pure mathematics in A-level exam but also was declared one of the highest achievers in the country, having taken seven subjects out of which he got six A stars.

"Studying at the last minute really works for me as it helps me remember things," said the student from Sunbeams School.

Intekhab took seven subjects to boost his college applications and will be attending William's College soon to do a double major in economics and neuroscience.

"I can do a double major because since I took so many A-level subjects, I can finish one major in approximately half the time," said Intekhab.

ZARAT JAHIN QUEEN

Zarat from Mastermind School obtained the world's highest marks in her biology A-level exams.

She looks forward to studying medicine at University of Manchester in the United Kingdom and wants to be a doctor when she grows up.

"Since my father is a doctor, I could have seen the poor state of many hospitals in my country. I have also experienced deaths of my relatives due to inadequate treatment. This made me want to be a doctor," said Zarat.

## Victory boosts

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no-confidence in the government.

Earlier in the day, the BNP made a series of allegations against the government and the ruling Awami League including attempts to rig votes, conspiring to manipulate polls results in favour of the mayoral candidate they backed as voting was going on.

Acting secretary general of the party Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and central leaders Tariqul Islam and Rizvi Ahmed brought various allegations at separate press conferences at BNP's Naya Paltan central office in the capital between 12:30pm and 4:00pm, when voting ended.

Besides, some other senior leaders of the party were busy at the Election Commission bringing allegations of government interference in the polls.

At around 1:15pm, a three-member BNP delegation headed by standing committee member MK Anwar met Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed at his office and informed him of "various anomalies" in the voting.

And BNP leaders Moudud Ahmed and Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury at separate discussions in Dhaka and Chittagong also came up with allegations that the local (Gazipur) administration was involved in attempts to ensure victory of the ruling party-backed Ajmat Ullah Khan.

Moudud said Gazipur polls proved that free and fair election was not possible under the present government, no matter what the result was. The polls also proved that the Election Commission could not act neutrally, he added.

At the press conference, Fakhrul alleged that government officials were found stamping ballot papers and threatening supporters of opposition-backed candidate when they came to cast votes.

"Even an on-duty police sub-inspector at booth 7 of polling centre 249 under Ward-41 was stamping ballot papers," he said. The EC will have to take responsibility for such irregularities in the polls, he added.