



Police search the bag of a passenger, *left*, on a BRTC bus before it left Kamalapur depot yesterday. Military personnel control traffic on Dhaka-Chittagong highway, *middle*, in the capital's Jatrabari area yesterday. In the wake of political violence and blockades, the government has ordered operation of the state-run buses under police protection, *right*.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAO

Vandalism of vehicles on

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its adjoining areas in Old Dhaka.

At least three pedestrians were injured when some youths riding on two motor-bikes exploded crude bombs at Ananda Bazaar near Dhaka University campus around 8:30pm.

In Mymensingh, Jamaat-Shibir activists hurled crude bombs at the village home of Jatiya Party (JP) Presidium Member Rawshan Ershad and the district office of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) early yesterday.

Pro-blockade activists also damaged five battery-run rickshaws and set fire to a cotton-laden pickup and a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in the town around 8:00pm.

Jamaat-Shibir activists exploded two petrol bombs at JSD office at Gangadas Guha Road around 12:30 am, and within 10

minutes they hurled two crude bombs at Rawshan's home, nearly half-a-kilometre away from the JSD office.

Some furniture of the JSD office were damaged in the fire, said Sadek Hossain, general secretary of the district JSD unit.

Meanwhile, a clash between blockaders and police at Charpara in the town left at least 10 people injured. Pro-blockade activists from a procession ransacked a microbus and four auto-rickshaws at Charpara around 2:00 pm.

As police chased them, the blockaders hurled brick chunks at the law enforcers, said OC Sarwar.

Police fired 38 rubber bullets and lobbed seven teargas shells to disperse them. The blockaders also torched a truck at Morakhola in the town, reports our

Mymensingh correspondent.

In Chittagong, pro-blockade supporters set alight a Dhaka-bound truck at Badamtali in Mirsarai upazila around 7:20pm, reports our district correspondent.

In Natore, at least 10 activists of Awami League and BNP were injured in a clash between them at Hoibotpur bazar in Sadar upazila.

Later, BNP activists set fire to three motorbikes and four bicycles and also vandalised 10 shops of AL activists.

In Gaibandha, a chase and counter chase took place between Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists and police on Rangpur-Bogra highway at Dreamland around 12:30 noon.

At least seven people were injured in the incident. Police arrested two JCD activists from the spot.



ACC retracts

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Badiuzzaman said at his office in the capital yesterday, "It has nothing to do with the upcoming elections."

He added that the commission is going to start scrutinising the newspaper reports, and then it will look into the affidavits the candidates have made about their wealth.

"Finally, the commission will issue notices asking the contestants for their complete wealth statements."

Meanwhile on Friday, rights body Transparency International Bangladesh criticised the commission for Shahabuddin's comment and urged it to launch an inquiry soon.

Shahabuddin had made the remark when journalists drew his attention to a report that compares the wealth statements submitted ahead of the 10th general elections with those submitted ahead of the ninth elections.

Their wealth increased from two times to 107 times within the period, as shows the report published by The Daily Star on Thursday.

AL blushes, asks EC

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The AL's objection came in the wake of media reports, based on the candidates' wealth statements published on the EC's website, that many AL leaders have made quite a fortune over the past five years.

For example, former state minister for water resources Mahbubur Rahman now owns an astronomical 2,865 acres of land from only 20 acres five years ago.

Five years ago, Nuran Fatema, wife of Environment Minister Hasan Mahmud, was a homemaker having assets worth Tk 60,000. But since, she has had some miracles working for her to make her a Tk 13.74-crore woman. That is a 2,290 times rise.

AL leader and former state minister for LGRD and cooperatives Jahangir Kabir Nanak and his wife have together earned Tk 7.3 crore in the past five years. The couple now has wealth worth Tk 8.28 crore, up from Tk 97.84 lakh before the December 29, 2008 election. Of the total wealth, Nanak's wife owns Tk 5.07 crore, which was Tk 52 lakh at the time.

Such unexplained accumulation of wealth by the elected representatives has made the public curious as to how someone could become so rich so quickly.

The EC is now scrutinising the law to see if the AL's objection is valid.

"We will check the law and decide," CEC Kazi Rakiuddin Ahmad said yesterday. "It is [making the statements public] is nothing new. It has happened during the last election."

Talking to The Daily Star, one election commissioner on condition of anonymity said under the RPO the EC must collect the information but was not bound to make those public.

Contacted, former CEC ATM Shamsul Huda, who led the EC to see this significant electoral reform, said they did not find anything wrong with making candidates' particulars public during the 2008 polls.

The EC then did it as per the SC verdict, he said, adding: "What the present Election Commission is doing, it is the right thing to do."

Meanwhile, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman strongly criticised the CEC's remark that the commission would examine the law about making the candidates' information public. "This is very much unacceptable and contradictory."

He added if the EC stopped making public the particulars of the candidates, it would encourage those who had already accumulated huge wealth abusing their offices.

"This will encourage the culture of impunity and the Election Commission will also be held responsible for this," he noted.

But MK Alamgir justified their objection, and said: "The statements we submitted to the commission are the ones we have given to the tax office."

"If any rival candidate disputes or doubts about our wealth, he can ask for a copy. But statements cannot be made public in a wholesale manner."

According to him, the wealth statements are submitted to the commission for scrutiny, and that the court can see those if the situation arises.

But Shamsul Huda and Iftekharuzzaman dismissed Alamgir's argument, saying it was the apex court that ordered the EC to make the candidates' particulars public.

The order first came from the High Court following a petition by some lawyers in 2005. The Appellate Division of the SC then upheld the

INFO FOR MANDATORY DISCLOSURE

- Copy of educational record
- Accused or not in any criminal offence at present
- Past criminal record, if any, its judgment
- Description of profession
- Probable source of income
- Statement of own and dependents' property or debt
- Promises made during the past polls and their status
- Loan amount received jointly or solely or by dependents

order in December 2007.

According to the verdict, the EC must make public eight particulars about the candidates. The particulars include a candidate's educational record; past and present case record and the judgment, if applicable; and the wealth statement.

The EC later incorporated a provision in the Representation of the People Order (RPO), the law that regulates parliament elections, to ensure implementation of the verdict.

Experts say making these particulars public is vital to bringing transparency in the election.

Qamrul Islam

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has no cash, bank deposits, properties or gold ornaments.

In 2008, Toyeba, apart from her monthly income, had Tk 5,000 in cash and Tk 10,000 in the bank, according to the statement Qamrul submitted ahead of the last polls.

Qamrul had wealth and properties worth Tk 16.67 lakh in 2008 and now he has assets worth Tk 1.34 crore.

The state minister now owns a building he valued at Tk 10.75 lakh, which is incredible considering construction cost and prices of land in the country. He, however, did not mention where the building was but said he earns Tk 1.08 lakh a year renting out floor space/shops/flats/houses.

He had no cars in 2008 but now he owns a vehicle worth Tk 61.65 lakh, the wealth statement said.

Qamrul earns Tk 5.73 lakh a year from his job as state minister and Tk 93,304 by appearing in talk shows on TV.

The state minister had Tk 4.32 lakh in cash ahead of the last election which has dropped to Tk 3 lakh, according to his two wealth statements.

He had prize bonds worth Tk 20,000 but now he has none. In 2008, he had 30 tolas of gold but in this month's statement he said he has only 10 tolas gold worth Tk 1 lakh.

He had Tk 3.88 lakh in bank deposits and now he has 18.14 lakh in the bank.

In 2008, Qamrul had only four kathas of non-agricultural land which he got for Tk 3.61 lakh. In this year's statement he did not mention how much land he owns but said it was worth Tk 29.98 lakh.

AL, BNP unite in human chain

Protest attack on Noor's motorcade

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

In a rare show, archrivals Awami League and BNP yesterday protested the recent killings in the district and vowed to resist the killers in future.

Leaders of the two parties made the vow at a human chain organised by Tupamari union unit AL at Ramganj Haat in the morning, to protest the Jamaat-Shibir attack on AL lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor on December 14.

Speaking on the occasion, both the AL and BNP leaders stressed the need for working together regardless of party affiliation to maintain peace in the area.

They also condemned the killing of five people in the area recently and said they would not let such incidents happen again.

AL leaders present at the human chain include former union parishad chairman and Vice-president of Sadar upazila unit Nazrul Islam Shah, union unit Vice-president Babul Hossain Chowdhury and its Assistant Secretary Mihir Kumar Roy.

BNP leaders who spoke on the occasion include Tupamari union unit General Secretary Manju Shah, Organising Secretary Samsuddoha Shah, unit Chhatra Dal Vice-president Imran Hossain Chowdhury and Sadar upazila unit president of Zia Parishad Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

8 info voters' right to know

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before a casting of votes. It was the judiciary that had come forward following a petition filed by some lawyers.

The High Court, in a verdict in May 2005, ordered the disclosure of eight-point particulars, including the wealth of each candidate contesting in the parliamentary polls. The HC also directed the EC to make public the eight-point particulars, including educational qualifications and police records, moves that would help voters pick the right candidates. The Appellate Division in December 2007 upheld the HC verdict. Thus, it has become binding on the EC and others to follow the verdict during the parliamentary polls this time around.

In line with the apex court's verdict, the Representation of the People Order (RPO) was amended before the 2008 polls, incorporating

a provision making it mandatory for every individual willing to contest the parliamentary election to submit the particulars in affidavits along with application-seeking candidacies.

The AL at the time did not find anything wrong with the system before the 2008 polls. The party was not in power immediately before seeking a popular mandate at the 2008 election. The BNP was in power in between 2001-2006 and it found things going wrong with the HC verdict. So, reportedly on the advice of some leaders of then outgoing ruling BNP, an unknown individual filed a petition with the Appellate Division seeking a stay order on the HC verdict. And interestingly, the Appellate Division stayed the operation of the HC verdict weeks before the January 22, 2007 cancelled election, triggering a huge outcry. The BNP did

not like to disclose the particulars of its candidates before the election, afraid of the truth behind their wealth and assets becoming public knowledge.

The situation, however, changed in the period of the past caretaker government-led by Fakhruddin Ahmed. The apex court in December 2007 vacated the stay order and upheld the HC verdict. On the suggestion of the EC, the interim government brought about amendments to the RPO to implement the apex court verdict.

Now, the AL has adopted a stance against a disclosure of the wealth statements of their candidates. The reason is clear. Some AL ministers and MPs' wealth statements published in different newspapers have triggered a huge outcry over the question of whether they made

their huge assets legally or unlawfully within a period of five years. According to their wealth statements they submitted in the run-up to the 2008 polls, they did not have so much then. Yet there is a strong perception that many candidates did not disclose their real wealth and assets.

The EC had earlier proposed making a provision for punishing individuals over furnishing false information or concealing any information in the nomination papers or in the affidavits. But the AL-led government did not agree to the proposal.

Yet a disclosure of their huge assets might have embarrassed the AL high command when they are close to an easy two-thirds majority at the one-sided January 5 election. Amid such a situation, the AL delegation met the EC with

the demand for stopping the publication of wealth statements.

For establishing good governance, the AL in its electoral manifesto announced before the 2008 polls also promised to make public every year wealth statements and sources of income of the prime minister, ministers, MPs and their family members. But the AL in the last five years did not live up to its promise. Citizens could not know about their wealth and assets.

Now, people are being informed about the candidates. But unfortunately, more than half of the voters have already been denied their voting rights as the candidates in their constituencies were elected unopposed. And in the remaining constituencies, the election appears to be one-sided, making voters certainly less important in the political game.

Shamsul Haque Tuku

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and properties but now it is an astounding Tk 4.35 crore.

His movable assets were worth Tk 2.73 lakh in 2008 but now they are valued at Tk 1.36 crore now, an increase of 50 times.

His wife had wealth worth Tk 41.62 lakh in 2008 and now she has about Tk 1.51 crore, an increase of more than three and a half times, according his wealth statement submitted to the Election Commission this month.

The annual income of the state minister has increased 7.41 times in the last five years and his sources of income have also widened.

In 2008, Tuku had earned Tk 2.05 lakh from his law practice and he had no other sources of income. But now the state minister earns of Tk 15.19 lakh annually from agriculture, house rent, share and deposit and salary.

Tuku's cash in hand has decreased significantly. He had Tk 1.54 lakh in 2008 which is now Tk 3,500. He had a bank deposit of

Tk 19,000 in 2008 which has now become Tk 16.06 lakh.

Tuku and his wife had no bonds, shares, postal savings or cars before 2008. Now they have two DPS and FDR worth more than Tk 1.85 crore and a vehicle valued at Tk 71.40 lakh.

Tuku also accumulated huge immovable assets in the last five years. Tuku had only 3 bighas of arable land 3 kathas of non-agricultural land worth Tk 9 lakh in 2008.

He now owns a 5-katha piece of non-agricultural land worth Tk 49.77 lakh, a house in Pabna worth Tk 10.50 lakh and a flat worth Tk 25 lakh.

He claimed that he got the flat as a gift.

Tuku's wife had a flat valued at Tk 20 lakh before the 2008 election but now she owns a building in Pabna, which the couple claim is worth just Tk 1 lakh, and three flats (1 inherited and 2 donations/HEBA) worth Tk 44 lakh.

In the wealth statements, Tuku mentioned that he has Tk 65.47 lakh in loans, reports our Pabna correspondent.

Fazle Noor Taposh

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have at least Tk70.15 crore, excluding the price of his cars.

The lawmaker now has Tk66.13 crore and his wife Tk4.02 crore against Tk2.31 crore and Tk11.44 lakh five years ago.

Formerly, he had 50 percent stake in a piece of land, a building and 75 percent stake in a 10 katha plot. But his latest wealth statement shows that he solely owns the 10 katha plot which is now worth Tk2.47 crore. Also, he has one Tk1.04 crore apartment and a tea estate/fish farm/rubber plantation worth about Tk12.91 crore.

His wife also has two plots in Dhanmondi worth Tk1.66 crore and a tea estate/fish farm/rubber plantation worth about Tk1.03 crore.

MOVEABLE ASSETS

Taposh, nephew of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in his 2008 wealth statement had showed moveable assets, including cash in hand, deposit in banks, shares and bonds, postal and saving certificates, gold, electronic items and

furniture, worth Tk1.65 crore and his wife Tk9.44 lakh.

But this time around, his affidavit mentions that he owns moveable properties of about Tk47.58 crore and his wife Tk1.12 crore.

The legislator has a cash of Tk6.03 crore in hand against Tk89.5 lakh five years ago. Interestingly, his wife now has a cash of Tk50,000, which was Tk6.34 lakh in 2008.

The AL leader had a bank deposit of Tk1.98 lakh, which has now inflated to Tk6.02 crore. His wife had no money in bank in 2008, but now she has Tk24.73 lakh.

According to his 2008 affidavit, Taposh had 3,300 stocks worth Tk3.3 lakh and his wife had none. But now he holds 3.20 crore shares worth more than Tk32.14 crore and his wife has 7,500 shares worth Tk7.50 lakh.

Previously, the couple had savings certificates of Tk33.70 lakh. Now they have savings certificates worth Tk3.66 crore.

The lawmaker had two cars worth Tk26.75 lakh. The Daily Star could not learn about the vehicles owned now by the MP and their prices as

the scanned copy of his affidavit on the Election Commission's website missed the section.

In 2008, the couple had gold worth Tk6.61 lakh. They now have gold of Tk35.45 lakh. They now own furniture and electronic items of Tk16.85 lakh against Tk7.19 lakh worth of those previously.

In addition to these assets, Taposh has a 50 percent stake in a piece of two bigha 10.5 katha arable land and a commercial building at Motijheel. The lawmaker, however, made no mention of the prices of the land and the building in any of the two affidavits.

SOURCES OF INCOME

Taposh and his wife had yearly incomes of Tk21.89 lakh and Tk2 lakh five years ago. Now he earns more than Tk2.12 crore annually from agriculture, house rent, legal profession, share and savings interests and remuneration as an MP. His wife earns Tk21.39 lakh annually from business and share/savings interests.

He has liabilities of Tk3.37 lakh for house rent now, which was Tk44.99 lakh in 2008.