

BNP favourite wins Pirganj upazila polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

BNP-blessed chairman candidate Noor Mohammad Mondal won yesterday's polls to Pirganj upazila parishad, which is part of the parliament constituency Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had won in the January 5 national election.

Mondal bagged 74,942 votes while Awami League-backed AKM Chhayadat Hossain got 70,877 votes. An Awami League's rebel candidate got 13,872 votes.

The voting was held peacefully amid festivity with 60.78 percent voter turnout.

Election to Pirganj upazila was supposed to be held on February 19 in the first phase of upazila polls along with 97 other upazilas. But the election was deferred as the by-polls to Rangpur-6 constituency had been scheduled for February 20.

The by-election was eventually not held because Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury was elected unopposed from the constituency after Hasina had vacated it.



Voters queue up at Osmanipur Govt Primary School polling centre in Pirganj upazila of Rangpur around 9:00am yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Khaleda slams JCD leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night criticised top leaders of pro-BNP student body Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal for their failure to wage an anti-government movement in the capital.

In her disappointment, the BNP chief told the Chhatra Dal central and Dhaka University unit leaders that she would dissolve the existing committees there and form new ones with fresh faces.

In a two-hour-long meeting at her Gulshan office, Khaleda enquired about their roles between October 2013 and January this year. Khaleda sharply reacted when some Chhatra Dal leaders tried to defend themselves.

"I have information about what you did and where you were during the anti-government movement," a Chhatra Dal leader quoted her as saying.

'Shootout' a govt bid to conceal truth Says BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday said the death of a convicted militant in a "shootout" with the police was "a government bid to conceal the truth" behind the snatching of three convicts.

It also claimed the government was "staging a mysterious drama" to divert local and international attention from the second phase of the upazila polls slated for Thursday.

Rakib Hasan Russell, the JMB militant, was recaptured five hours after he was snatched along with two other JMB convicts from police custody on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway on Sunday. He was killed in Mirzapur of Tangail early yesterday.

BNP acting secretary general Fakhru Islam Alamgir said much information on the militants could have been gleaned from Rakib.

"But instead of doing so, he has been killed in crossfire. This means the government wants to suppress something," Fakhru told reporters after placing wreath at the grave of late president and BNP founder Ziaur Rahman in the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

He said the killing of the JMB man had given rise to many questions in people's mind. "What is the mystery behind this?" he asked.

Expressing concern over the

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88 more

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Malaysian National News Agency Bernama reported that the police arrested 5,508 illegal immigrants and 59 employers of different nationalities.

Of them, 2,156 are Indonesians, 786 Myanmar, 596 Bangladeshis, 589 Filipinos, 355 Nepalese, 276 Indians and 242 Pakistanis, Sakib Kusmi, deputy director general of the immigration (control) department, told Bernama.

"A total of 5,261 illegal immigrants were also deported to their country of origin," he added.

The workers were detained as they did not have valid work permits or had overstayed their visas, and violated the immigration act, Sakib mentioned.

Let students live

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since February 12, demanding the recovery of the 11 halls and staff quarters located in different parts of Old Dhaka from the grip of grabbers.

More than 2,000 students -- some wearing black badges -- took to the streets around 11:00am and started demonstrating before the press club. They chanted slogans against the illegal occupation and demanding the removal of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Lalbagh division DC for Sunday's police action against the students.

Activists of the university unit Chhatra League, the pro-Awami

League student body, and some left-leaning student organisations have been behind organising the protest, which strengthened by the participation of general students and teachers, said some students.

Addressing the programme, Prof Ali Akkas, president of Jagannath University Sikkhak Samiti, said the protest would continue until the demand was met.

Protesting Sunday's police action against the demonstrators, the Sikkhak Samiti yesterday again demanded the removal of Lalbagh division DC Harunur Rashid and Kotwali Police

Station's Officer-in-Charge Moniruzzaman.

Shariful Islam, president of the university unit BCL, announced that a rally would be held on the campus today.

"We will start a two-day mass signature campaign from Tuesday and submit the signatures along with a memorandum to the education ministry on Thursday, seeking retrieval of the halls," he said.

At least 50 people, including teachers and students, were injured as police charged truncheons and fired rubber bullets to disperse a demonstration on Sunday.

Firefox aims to power

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Mozilla sought to show off the success of its system, launched a year ago to prise open a market in which Google's Android was at the heart of 78.4 per cent of all smartphones sold last year and Apple's iOS in another 15.6 per cent, according to figures from technology research house Gartner Inc.

On the eve of the opening yesterday of the four-day Mobile World Congress

in Barcelona, Spain, Mozilla announced the commercial launch of seven new devices using Firefox OS including Chinese handset maker ZTE's smartphones Open C and Open II, as well as a range of Alcatel OneTouch tablets.

"We are also enabling a whole new category of smartphone, priced around \$25 (18 euros), that will bring even more people around the world

online," said Mozilla chief operating officer Jay Sullivan.

The entry-level smartphone would rely on integrated circuits made by Chinese electronics manufacturer Spreadtrum, he said.

"Firefox OS is off to an amazing start. We launched our first smartphones in July, and have since expanded into 15 markets," Sullivan said.

Questions still unanswered

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But the family members of some slain army officers believe the reasons that have been cited at different times to explain the mutiny are not the real ones.

After an investigation that took a year and four months, the Criminal Investigation Department found that the mutiny was staged based on some pent-up resentment among BDR soldiers regarding some of their demands.

CID's Abdul Kahar Akand, also the investigation officer of the case, in his post-investigation briefing said the investigation could not find any political or foreign link to the bloody mutiny.

"We do not think it was only for corruption (which is not true) and demands that such a large number of officers were killed," Nehrin Ferdousi, widow of Col Mujibul Haque, Dhaka commander of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) "fair price shops" programme, run during the term of the last caretaker government to curb price hikes of essentials.

Corruption in the programme is alleged to have been the main reason for the mutiny.

"Why the killing of the officers was

done out of sheer brutality and who were behind it are questions among many of us who have lost our husbands," she added.

"We want to know the real reason. It is the demand of many of us," Nehrin said, adding that corruption takes place at personal and organisational levels, but no such killing had ever taken place centering around it.

Following the verdict of the carnage case on November 5 last year, Dr Royena Matin, wife of another slain officer, Lt Col Inshad Ibne Amin, told reporters like Nehrin that she wanted to know the real reason behind the mutiny.

The negative attitude among the general BDR members towards the army officers, and their discontent over unfulfilled demands may be identified as the primary cause of the mutiny, said the national probe committee, formed by the government following the February 25-26 massacre, in its report.

"Analyses of these demands give the impression that such small demands cannot be the main cause of such a heinous incident," mentioned the report of the committee headed by

former secretary Anisuzzaman Khan.

It also suggested more investigation by professional investigators.

"When such an incident occurs, it might discourage foreign investment in the country," Md Akhtaruzzaman of the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court observed in his verdict.

"Those who had pulled the strings from behind possibly thought of how the country could be weakened," he added.

The judge also pointed out that there might have been security, diplomatic, economic, political and social motives behind the massacre in Pilkhana.

Asked about the questions raised by the family members of the slain officers and the observations of the court, Abdul Kahar Akand yesterday told this correspondent, "It is not possible for us to make any hypothetical comment. We have mentioned what we have found in our investigation."

A Dhaka court on November 5 last year slapped the death penalty on 150 members of the erstwhile Bangladesh Rifles, now Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and two civilians for their role

in the massacre of 74 people, including 57 army officers, at the BDR Pilkhana headquarters.

It also sentenced 161 others, including ex-BNP lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and ward-level Awami League leader Torab Ali, to life imprisonment for involvement in the carnage.

Some 277 of the altogether 846 accused were acquitted while the rest were given different terms of imprisonment. The BGB has taken up elaborate programmes to observe the death anniversary of the officers martyred in the bloody mutiny at its regional, sector and battalion headquarters and other establishments today.

The programmes include recitation from holy Quran after Fajr prayers and offering prayers at all mosques and border outposts seeking the salvation of the departed souls, said a BGB press release yesterday.

Besides, representatives of the president, prime minister, state minister for home, chiefs of the three services and BGB director general will place wreaths at the Banani Military Graveyard, where many of the slain officers were buried.

The oldest

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The discovery alters our understanding of the early stages in Earth's formation, and shows that a crust formed on its surface significantly quicker than previously thought.

To put it in context, the solar system itself only came into existence around 4.56 billion years ago, meaning it took at most 160 million years for our planet to develop a crust.

Writing in the journal Nature Geoscience, a team of experts from the University of Wisconsin said their findings showed that early Earth was a more hospitable place than previously thought - and that there is no reason life could not have appeared around 4.3 billion years ago.

The Earth itself formed as a ball of molten rock 4.5 billion years ago, and Wisconsin geoscience professor and report lead John Valley said their findings support the notion of a "cool early Earth" where temperatures were low enough to sustain oceans, and perhaps life, earlier than previously thought.

"One of the things that we're really interested in is: when did the Earth first become habitable for life? When did it cool off enough that life might have emerged?" Prof Valley told the Reuters news agency.

The discovery that the zircon crystal, and thereby the formation of the crust, dates from 4.4 billion years ago suggests that the planet was perhaps capable of sustaining microbial life 4.3 billion years ago, Valley said.

"We have no evidence that life existed then. We have no evidence that it didn't. But there is no reason why life could not have existed on Earth 4.3 billion years ago," he added.

Minu, Bulbul

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On December 26 last year, police constable Siddhartha Chandra Sarkar, 23, and eight of his peers sustained splinter injuries after suspected BNP-Jamaat men hurled a bomb at a police patrol van in Rajshahi area of Rajshahi city.

Siddhartha succumbed to his injuries at Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka that night.

Sub-inspector Saiful Islam filed the two cases with Boalia Police Station accusing some 87 BNP and Jamaat men of the murder and obstructing policemen from discharging their duties.

Other accused in the cases include district BNP president Nadim Mostafa, acting city Jamaat ameer Zahangir Hossain and its assistant secretaries Emaj Uddin Mondol and Mainul Hossain.

Rebels refuse to budge

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To this end, district and upazila-level leaders of the two parties held a series of meetings with rebels. The high commands of the parties also stepped in, but failed to produce any results in most cases.

"We tried to persuade the rebels into quitting the race but failed. We will take organisational action against them," said Salahuddin Ahmed, general secretary of Cox's Bazar district AL.

In the district's Moheshkhali and Chakaria upazilas, four AL rebels are contesting for the chairman posts. The BNP has a rebel only in Moheshkhali.

The rebels, however, have their reasons for running.

"The party has not extended support to me. But had the party backed me, it would have secured an easy win," said Abdullah Al Mamun, a BNP rebel vying for the chairman post in Bagha upazila of Rajshahi.

He is the sitting vice-chairman there.

The BNP high command has asked its district units to keep up their

efforts until polling day, sources said.

"Since it is a local government election, we are not directly interfering in it. But we asked the grassroots leaders to work for the party-backed candidates," Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, BNP joint secretary general, told The Daily Star yesterday.

On rebels, he said the party had directed the grassroots leaders to continue their efforts to persuade the rebels to step aside.

The AL meanwhile has stepped up its efforts to this end. But in many areas the efforts came to nothing due to the interference of some MPs and even ministers, sources said.

"In many upazilas, ministers and lawmakers are backing their own candidates instead of backing the party-sponsored aspirants. It is one of the major obstacles to selecting a lone candidate for each post," said an AL organising secretary, requesting anonymity.

Asked, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, himself an organising secretary of the party, said they were trying their best to get rid of the rebels. "I hope the number [of rebels] will come down in

the third and fourth phases."

Yesterday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is also the AL president, asked Communications Minister Obaidul Quader to act as a coordinator in dealing with the party rebels. At the cabinet meeting, Hasina said the rebels must be managed in order to avoid further debacle in the local elections.

In the third phase, 83 upazilas go to the polls on March 15.

Yesterday was the last date for a withdrawal of candidacies in this phase, but rebels of both the parties in many upazilas did not do so.

A total of 629 aspirants had filed nominations for chairman posts, 598 for vice-chairman posts and 321 for female vice-chairman posts.

Of them, 169 chairman aspirants, 133 vice-chairman aspirants and 33 female vice-chairman aspirants withdrew their nominations yesterday.

After the withdrawal and cancellation of nominations, 434 chairman contenders, 437 vice-chairman contenders and 282 female vice-chairman contenders will run in the race.

Longer the escape

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Mirzapur, Tangail in the early hours yesterday.

The law enforcement agencies are continuing their drives to arrest Salehin and Mizan but could not succeed until filing of this report at 8:00pm.

The government has announced a Tk 5 lakh bounty on the duo.

Former inspector general of police (IGP) Nurul Huda thinks Salehin as a JMB policymaker will try to coordinate organisational activities, while Boma Mizan might help other militants execute subversive operations.

"They are all potential threats and capable of creating trouble," he told The Daily Star, urging the government to beef up its watch on militant operatives across the country.

Rab Media Director Wing Commander ATM Habibur Rahman suspects if the two snatched convicts remain at large, militants might try to revive the outfit's network which needed years of crackdown operations to destroy.

"As a Shura member of JMB, Salehin was in a decision-making position and played the lead role in different attacks," said the Rab official.

On the other hand, he said, Mizan had once been the head of the JMB's

military wing and well-known for his bomb-making expertise.

"He has special training in making bombs and was involved in many bomb attacks," said the Rab media director, adding that Mizan had also been involved in militant operations outside the country.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a cabinet meeting yesterday directed the home ministry and law enforcers to arrest the two snatched convicts as soon as possible.

She said the borders had been sealed off to ensure that the two JMB convicts did not flee the country.

Expressing dissatisfaction over transporting such "dangerous" militants with only three to four policemen on guard, she directed that security be beefed up in prisons, especially while transporting militants to and from the courts, said meeting sources.

Hasina also told the cabinet that Sunday's incident had proved that militants were still active in the country.

"Law enforcement and intelligence agencies were conducting coordinated drives to catch the snatched convicts. We hope to recapture them soon," Home Secretary CQK Mustaq Ahmed told The Daily Star last night.