

## AL won't contest N'ganj by-polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League last night decided not to nominate any candidate for the by-polls to the Narayanganj-5 parliamentary constituency to be held on June 26.

Instead, it will extend support to the Jatiya Party candidate in the constituency that fell vacant after the death of JP lawmaker Nasim Osman on April 30.

The decisions were made at a meeting of the party's parliamentary board chaired by AL President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Gono Bhaban.

Nasim, presidium member of the main opposition Jatiya Party, was elected uncontested in the January 5 general election.

The JP may nominate Nasim's widow Parvin Osman to run for the by-election.

Sources said former convener of Narayanganj district unit AL SM Akram may also contest the by-polls with the support of local AL men.

The present political situation and sensational abductions and killings of seven people in Narayanganj came up at the discussion, according to sources.

## Fakhrul, Moudud

FROM PAGE 1

Police filed the case against the 29 BNP men and 1,200 unknown persons accusing them of obstructing law enforcers from discharging their duties, attempting to kill them and hurling crude bombs to create panic in Shantinagar and Malibagh areas of the capital on March 2, 2013 during the BNP-led opposition's street agitation programme. The case was lodged the same day.

DB Inspector Fazlur Rahman, also the investigating officer (IO) of the case, claimed that he found "evidences of the charges" against the accused.

Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Abdullah Al Noman, Barakatullah Bulu, Amanullah Aman, Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annee and Moazzem Hossain Alal are among the other accused.

Of the accused, 21 BNP leaders and activists including Moudud, Fakhrul earlier secured bail for different terms from different courts in this case.

The IO prayed to the court for issuing arrest warrant for the other eight accused that are currently in hiding.

Many senior BNP leaders have been indicted in some other cases of arson, blasts, vandalism and attempting to kill law enforcers.

Police filed those cases against the BNP leaders during the opposition's movement last year and their earlier agitations for a caretaker government to oversee the 10th parliamentary elections.

## Sundarbans

FROM PAGE 20

Division, said the cause of the fire could not be known.

Requesting anonymity, a forest official said the fire might have originated from a cigarette butt.

Meanwhile, a three-member probe committee, headed by Abul Kalam Azad, assistant conservator of Chandpai range, was formed yesterday to find the cause of the fire and to estimate the damage.

It has been asked to submit report to Amir Hossain within three working days.

According to some probe reports on previous fire incidents, fires broke out in the low-lying areas of the southern and northern parts of Sharankhola and Chandpai ranges because of heat wave and strong winds towards the end of spring and beginning of summer every year.

## Syria breaks rebel siege on Aleppo central prison

AFP, Beirut

Syria's army has ended a year-long rebel siege of Aleppo central prison after a fiercely fought battle for the strategic prize, a monitoring group said yesterday.

"After a siege of nearly 13 months by Al-Nusra Front and Islamist rebels, regular armed forces backed by pro-regime fighters were able to break the siege of Aleppo central prison," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Tanks and armoured vehicles entered the prison grounds and intense celebratory gunfire was heard inside the sprawling complex, Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

The army's advance in the area around the prison in northern Aleppo had "cut a path for essential supplies to rebel fighters between areas they control and the Turkish border," Abdel Rahman said.

## INVITING MODI

# PM likely to send envoy next month

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali or prime minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi is likely to go to India soon to formally invite Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina is expected to send her special envoy carrying a letter in the first week of next month, after she returns from a four-day visit to Japan from May 25, diplomatic sources said.

The PM will also visit China from June 6 to 11.

Dhaka has already given New Delhi an impression that it will be ready to host the new Indian PM anytime this year, the sources said, seeking an-

nymity.

Hasina in a letter to Modi already said, "I hope that you would find my country your second home and first destination for your official visit abroad."

Sources said Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, who has been nominated to represent Hasina at Modi's oath-taking ceremony on May 26, was expected to meet senior BJP leaders to discuss Modi's visit and other bilateral issues.

Meanwhile, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee on May 11 invited his Bangladesh counterpart Abdul Hamid to visit India. Hamid accepted the invitation and thanked Pranab for inviting him, sources said.

## NSA BULK DATA COLLECTION

# US House passes landmark reforms

AFP, Washington

The US House of Representatives yesterday passed landmark reforms curbing bulk collection of Americans' telephone records, the first step toward restricting intelligence-gathering by the National Security Agency since Edward Snowden divulged the secret program last year.

But the reforms, backed by the White House, lost the support of

civil liberties groups and tech companies like Google and Microsoft, after the Obama administration demanded changes that critics say watered down strict limits on collection of phone records and other personal data.

Despite an eruption of controversy in the run-up to the vote, Republicans and Democrats largely got behind the reforms, approving the legislation 303-121.

# Khaleda for probe

FROM PAGE 1

standards".

Mentioning that armed forces officers had been leading the Rab, she said, "Therefore, the controversy over Rab activities is putting the image of the country's armed forces at stake".

Khaleda claimed her government had formed the Rab to combat militancy and serious crimes. "But it is now being used to terrify people and suppress opposition movements."

The government was using the elite force to oppress the opposition, she alleged.

She demanded that all leaders and activists of the BNP, who were picked up allegedly by law enforcers, be returned alive.

The BNP chief also urged the government to ensure that no arrest was made by personnel in plainclothes and any arrest should be made in the presence of a witness and, if possible, a magistrate.

Referring to the gruesome killing of Phulgazi upazila chairman Ekramul Haque, Khaleda said media reports and the victim's family suggest that it is the people of Awami League who killed him. However, members of the same party now are creating chaos in Feni following the murder.

However, she did not say anything about the police obstruction on holding the programme at the IEB.

Families of seven BNP men, who have been allegedly picked up by law enforcers and have remained missing ever since, met the BNP chairperson at the programme. Leading citizens, including Professor Piash Karim and Dilara Chowdhury, also spoke at the discussion.

The programme was scheduled to start at 3:00pm at the IEB. However, a

police team headed by Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, went to the IEB around 11:00am and asked the BNP leaders and activists, who were preparing the venue, to leave.

At one stage, the IEB authorities were forced to lock the main entrance of the auditorium at around 11:30am.

Shibli Noman, assistant commissioner (Ramna zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, who was there, said the BNP was barred from holding the programme as it did not have permission.

BNP leaders Barkat Ullah Bulu, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee and Abul Khair Bhuiyan then went to the DMP commissioner around 2:20pm to seek permission but, according to sources, could not meet him.

According to the BNP chairperson's adviser Jainul Abedin, the party had applied to the DMP on Wednesday morning for the permission but did not receive any response.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir with others left the IEB area around 3:45pm, fearing arrest when police brought a prison van at the venue.

Fakhrul alleged that the law enforcers "illegally and undemocratically" foiled the programme.

"The government's undemocratic attitude has been exposed through this," said the BNP spokesperson.

Eminent lawyer barrister Rafiqul Haque came to the IEB to attend the programme around 3:40pm only to find the venue under lock and key.

Criticising this, he said the government should not display such behaviour as it violates the fundamental rights of the people.

# Gulf regimes aid Sisi to ensure own security

AFP, Dubai

Leading Gulf monarchies are staunchly backing Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, Egypt's presidential frontrunner, in the hope that their generous financial help will bolster his campaign to crush the Muslim Brotherhood and indirectly secure their own regimes.

"An absence of stability in Egypt means instability in the Gulf," says Emirati political science professor Abdulkhaleq Abdulla.

Sisi "represents Egypt's only national institution that is capable of restoring stability" in his country, situated across the Red Sea from Saudi Arabia, he explains.

Since the Sisi-led military ousted elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi last July, the new authorities banned his Muslim Brotherhood, arrested its leaders and cracked down on its followers in a campaign that has killed more than 1,400 people.

On May 5, Sisi said the Brotherhood, also banned in many Gulf countries and designated as a "terrorist organisation" by Saudi Arabia, was "finished" in Egypt and would not return if he is elected.

Those were encouraging words for the absolute monarchs in the Gulf, who relations with Egypt deteriorated

dramatically during the rule of Morsi, elected following an Arab Spring-inspired uprising that long-time Saudi ally Hosni Mubarak.

As the Brotherhood gained prominence in several Arab Spring countries, Saudi Arabia watched cautiously, while the UAE launched an unprecedented crackdown down on Islamist activists on its soil.

In January, it jailed a group of 30 Emiratis and Egyptians for terms of three months to five years for forming a Muslim Brotherhood cell.

At the same time, disagreement over the Brotherhood has soured relations with fellow Gulf Cooperation Council member Qatar, the only Gulf country to back Morsi.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain all withdrew their ambassadors from Doha in March. Saudi Arabia and the UAE accused gas-rich Qatar of offering refuge to Muslim Brotherhood figures, among them dissidents from their countries.

The Gulf's monarchies share concerns about the Brotherhood's brand of grass-roots activism and political Islam, which could spread across the region and undermine their authority if the group were ever to rule the Arab world's most populous country for any length of time.

# Cheated, tortured



PHOTO: STAR

**The jobseekers, who fell victim to human trafficking in Iran, leave Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on their return yesterday morning.**

FROM PAGE 20

(UAE) at different times with the promise of lucrative jobs in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Greece.

The 13 men were picked up separately and taken to Iran where they were confined inside different rooms of the same house. Here their passports, documents and any little money they had on them were confiscated.

The traffickers then forced the men to contact their families in Bangladesh to pay ransom for their release.

Ali Ahmed was held captive for the longest period among the res-

cued thirteen. He had worked in Dubai for four years when he was promised a better job in Saudi Arabia by this gang in January 2013.

"I was unconscious for three days at a stretch after the traffickers beat me up inhumanly when I refused to pay the ransom. They smashed two of my fingers and stopped providing me the little food they used to provide earlier," Ali told The Daily Star after his arrival at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday.

"Finally I had to call my family and ask them to pay Taka three lakh within three days for my release. I cried and tried to explain to my cap-

# Police torture

FROM PAGE 20

to get a rickshaw to go to their house at Niribili.

"Three policemen came to us; one caught Ripon from behind and slapped him while another two took me to a makeshift hotel and kept me seated there," she said, adding they beat and forced her husband into their pickup van.

Sathi told The Daily Star that the cops demanded Tk 1 thousand from her and she was trying to arrange the money. Later, a relative named Kabir informed her that Ripon had been admitted to Gonoshasthaya Kendra hospital.

"I rushed to the hospital and saw my husband dead."

Meanwhile, a three-member committee led by Shyamol Kumar Mukherjee, additional police superintendent of Dhaka, has been formed to investigate the incident, officials say.

Sheikh Badrul Alam, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station, said Assistant Sub-Inspector Md Anwar Hossen and constables Md Emdadul Haque and Md Ruhul Amin were on duty in Nabinagar area at that time.

"As the family members brought an allegation of police torture, a second inquest was done by a magistrate," Badrul said.

# Confusion

FROM PAGE 20

The issue was discussed at length during Modi's telephonic conversation with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who not only requested him to visit Bangladesh but also to consider Dhaka his "second home", the report quoted an unnamed source as saying.

However, highly placed sources at the foreign ministry and the Indian High Commission in Dhaka told The Daily Star that there was no confirmation from New Delhi of the visit.

It is nothing but media speculation because Modi is yet to take the oath of office, they said.

"Obviously Modi's Dhaka visit as well as signing of the Teesta water sharing deal will get importance, but you have to give some time to the new government to set its priorities," a source in New Delhi told this correspondent by phone.

Though the Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party has an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha, he must convince West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to agree with the deal, as water is an issue on which the agreement of the state concerned is necessary.

Modi may also convince north-eastern Indian state Sikkim's Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling to share Teesta waters with West Bengal as the Teesta river originates in Sikkim and flows through West Bengal, said the source in India.

# Mother raped

FROM PAGE 1

Officer-in-Charge Abdul Mannan of Gangachara Model Police Station, quoting the victim, said Hasan had been stalking her for a while.

"Hasan allegedly tried to rape the victim once before when her husband was away. However, she raised a hue and cry and neighbours came to her rescue," he said.

The villagers had caught Hasan but his cronies took him away from the villagers' grasp, sources said.

# Criminals kill

FROM PAGE 1

back home.

Majid might have been strangled, said Manjurul Haque Akanda, officer-in-charge of Raipur Police Station.

Police recovered the bodies and sent those to Laxmipur Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies.

The motive behind the killings could not be known.

tors that my family didn't have the capacity to raise this money but they paid no heed," said Ali who hails from Comilla.

"The traffickers threatened to kill me if the ransom was not paid," he said.

His family paid Tk 1.5 lakh through a B-Kash account to a local contact of the traffickers after one month of Ali's confinement. However the traffickers did not release him after this, forcing him to continue working as he had to since his entry to Iran in January last year.

Zakir Sardar went to UAE from Khulna in 2012 to work as a cleaner. In January this year he was lured by the same gang with the promise of better job in Iraq.

The traffickers took Zakir and 11 other Bangladeshis to Bandar Abbas in Iran towards the end of February through the Arabian Sea.

"There I was confined, beaten up and forced to ask my family for a ransom," he said.

His family paid Tk two lakhs into a B-Kash account before the traffickers stopped beating him regularly.

The stories of each of the rescued men are similar. The victims alleged that five Bangladeshis along with some Iranians have been operating this trafficking gang for some time now.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID), the Bangladesh embassy in Tehran and Rights Jessore, an NGO, arranged their repatriation after the Iranian authority rescued them from confinement on March 17.

The body has been sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy, he added.

Contacted, ASI Anwar said, "We found Ripon lying injured on the Dhaka-Aricha highway and rushed him to the hospital, where doctors declared him dead."

The person was not beaten up; rather, he was killed in a road accident, he claimed.

Md Abdullah Al Masud, Ashulia assistant commissioner (land) who conducted the inquest, said there was no major injury mark on the body.

"But light bleeding was found in the mouth and nose."

# Chinese firm gets

FROM PAGE 20

offer saying it was minimum and competitive. It was also closer to the estimate made by four donors including the World Bank (WB), he added.

An evaluation committee headed by Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury and Maunsell AECOM separately evaluated the tender proposal.

Muhith further said for the first time the government was going to implement a megaproject with its own funding and approved it only after being convinced that every process was done in a transparent and proper way.

The minister expressed the hope that an agreement with the Chinese company would be signed by June and a performance guarantee would be taken from them before that as per rules.

Asked about competence of the Chinese company to build such a mega bridge, Muhith told the reporters that the WB-led donors had prequalified the company after they were satisfied about its ability.

Though the minister is satisfied that the job has been awarded at a competitive cost, it is 45 percent more than Tk 8,361 crore estimated by the government in 2009.

He said the total project cost had increased time and again while originally it was Tk 10,000 crore. When talks about financing the project had started with the donors, the cost was

estimated at Tk 23,000 crore, the minister added, saying it would be revised further.

Asked about the rationale behind the increase in cost, he said the cost of Jamuna and other bridges had to be revised three to four times. He cited various complex aspects of the Padma river and said the revision of cost would be more for the new bridge.

He said a supervision consultant would be appointed before CMREC would have started its physical work to supervise the task. He expressed the hope that the cabinet purchase committee would approve the proposal to appoint the supervisor by August.

A contractor for river training, another major component of the project, would be appointed by July, he added.

Earlier on April 25, only one Chinese firm submitted a financial bid for construction of the main bridge by the deadline.

Two other companies -- Samsung C&T Corp and Daelim-L&T JV -- appealed to extend the deadline by another 10 to 11 weeks, but the government did not accept it.

The bridge project hit a snag as the WB in 2012 cancelled its \$1.2 billion credit, saying it had evidence of a corruption conspiracy involving Bangladeshi officials, executives of a Canadian firm and individuals.

# Mozena calls

FROM PAGE 2

Mozena called on the authorities concerned to probe all allegations of human rights violations and abuse of power by law enforcement agencies, and report the findings in a transparent manner.

"This is how law enforcement agencies around the world, including those in my own country, deal with those elements that abuse their power."

Nobody has greater interest in holding accountable those who commit crimes in the name of Rab than those members of Rab who work with integrity and honesty, Mozena said.

He, however, added that the government's support to the training by the Rab Internal Enquiries Cell (IEC) shows the senior leadership of the government was endeavouring to ensure accountability of Rab members.

"It is the bad apples that tarnish the reputation of the entire force," Mozena said.

The IEC, set up in 2012 with the help of the US embassy, arranged the

training aimed at strengthening its effectiveness.

It is now investigating more than 10 allegations against Rab personnel, said Rab Media Wing Director Habibur Rahman.

Rab Director General Mukhlesur Rahman and Deputy Director General (Operations) Col Ziaul Ahsan were also present at the function.

Serious allegations were raised against the elite force early this month after the abduction and killing of seven people in Narayanganj.

As seven bodies, including that of ward councillor Nazrul Islam, were found in the Shitalakkhya river, Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam alleged that some members of Rab-11 had killed them in exchange for Tk 6 crore.

Three Rab officials -- Lt Col Tareque Sayeed Mohammad, Maj Arif Hossain and Lt Commander Masud Rana -- were forced into retirement following the allegation.

They were arrested as suspects on May 17. Tareque and Arif were made