

Loss that can never be compensated

FROM PAGE 1 excruciating pain still haunt him, flashing across his mind every now

and then. "Often in my dreams I see my son burning in pain. I cannot sleep," said Ramjan. "He was burnt in front of my eyes and I just can't forget that scene. When I walk in the streets, I see him walking along with me, smiling sometimes. But I feel scared to drive

again," Ramjan told The Daily Star at

his Kaliakoir home in Gazipur.

Due to Monir's repeated pleas, Ramjan had brought his son to Dhaka to show him the city he had never been to. He had hardly imagined that it would be his last trip with his son.

Monir was burnt inside his father's covered van while returning home from Gazipur on November 4, 2013, when pro-hartal pickets set fire to the van at Gazipur Chowrasta with the onset of then BNP-led 18party alliance's 60-hour shutdown across the country.

With over 95 percent burns, Monir died at the Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery of Dhaka Medical College Hospital on November 7.

do with politics; he had nonetheless petrol bomb attacks in 2013, accordfallen prey to the mindless violence that the country saw before the onesided January 5 national polls last

The family earlier in 2011 had lost their daughter, Mukta Ara, in a road accident. Monir's death only dealt a double blow, forcing his father to abandon his occupation.

His mother Monowara Begum often feels sick thinking of Monir. Very often she finds herself feeling his son's clothes and schoolbag. "Sometimes I call out his name mis-

takenly," Monowara said. The family faced financial hardship after Ramjan had given up driving. "Now I make my living by growing vegetables in a small land near my home," he said.

He, however, received a cheque of Tk 5,00,000 as compensation from a local lawmaker last month. But he could not say who exactly had given the money.



Monir, however, was not the lone her three-member family and bear victim of many forms of street violence that took place throughout 2013 and intensified before the January 5 elections last year. According to statistics given by

the Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, at least 30 people died in burn injuries during pre- and postelection related violence. More than 200 such victims were

treated as out-patients and at least 115 as in-patients at the institute, said Partha Sankar Pal, resident surgeon of the institute. Some findings of The Daily Star

also give a similar picture. At least 29 people were killed and 92 suffered The fifth-grader had nothing to critical burn injuries from arson and ing to news items of the paper during

On the occasion of the first anniversary of January 5 polls, The Daily Star reached out to some of the victims' families who have been forgotten by the people who are supposed to take care of them.

The political violence centring the national elections not only took valuable lives but also impoverished their families. Every family has stories of loss and hardship.

Take Morzina Begum for instance. All was going well for her until her husband, Asad Gazi, 40, driver of a CNG-run three-wheeler, died on November 15, 2013, due to burn injuries he had suffered when pickets attacked his vehicle in Savar on



Ramjan

works as a domestic help but her earning is inadequate to run

bleak.

November 3.

With Asad's

death, the

ehole family's

future looked

Morzina now

Once a

the school expenses of her two chil-

"It is becoming increasingly difficult for me to manage my family with this meagre income. My children cry for a hearty meal and new dresses. But I cannot fulfil their demands. It has become unbearable," she said with a choked voice.

She had already spent Tk 1.13 lakh for her husband's treatment at the burn institute. Of the total amount, Tk 40,000 was given by the prime minister's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy while the rest she managed by mortgaging the valuables she had.

Morzina lives in a small house at Mirhazirbagh at Jatrabari where the rent is Tk 1,600. She is yet to repay the mortgage money.

"After his [Asad] death, many people assured me of assistances. But none showed up in the last one year. Can you tell me where I should go? ... we don't do politics then why should we suffer for it?" she said.

Montu Chandra Pal also died the same day as Asad Gazi. Montu, a goldsmith, sustained 90 percent burns on November 10 after pickets in the capital's Laxmibazar had set alight a human hauler he was travel-

The death turned his wife's world upside down. His widowed wife Sanchita, aged around 25, also lost her child only four days into his birth. Now she lives all alone at her

father's house at Pagla in Narayanganj Already saddled with poverty, her father Parash Pal, who lives on mak-

ing idols of Hindu goddesses, does

not know what to do with his daugh-

"None from her [Sanchita] inlaws house came to see her in the last one year. All the time she remains silence at home," he said.

Parash said after Montu's death they went to many places for assistance. Many people also gave them assurance but none have fulfilled their promises.

"I don't know what to do with my daughter... where to go," he sighed.

Al-Amin was happy to go home after sustaining severe burn injuries in his throat. A driver of human hauler, Al-Amin was burnt inside his vehicle on November 5, 2013, and took treatment at the burn institute for four months.

But his return was not much pleasant as he had to start a new battle. He lives in a tiny house now at Hazaribagh with a rent of Tk 6,500.

His family spent Tk 3 lakh for his treatment. Of the total money, he received Tk 1.5 lakh from the government and private donations. He had to borrow Tk 1 lakh from a cooperative society in Hazaribagh and the rest was managed from his family's sav-

To repay the loan, he now works seven days for a private medicine company without any days off.

"My physical condition is not completely well. Yet I work day and night to run my family and repay the loan," Al-Amin said.

Everybody in Al-Amin's family works. His mother works as a domestic help and his aged father pulls rickshaw. His wife and younger sister also contribute by packing locally

"Yet we are finding it very difficult to manage our monthly expenses. don't know when good days will come again or if it will ever come at all," said Al-Amin's mother.

made chocolates.

DB man held

FROM PAGE 16

The six hawkers locked in an altercation with Sajal Chowdhury, manager of a jewellery shop, near the Old Railway Station on Thursday afternoon. Sajal was on his way to Dhaka with the gold bars, said Officer-in-Charge Mohiuddin Selim of Kotwali Police Station yesterday. Sajal rushed to the police team on

patrol and sought help but SI Abul Hossain took Sajal and his alleged attackers to a nearby hotel and at one

stage took the gold bars from Sajal, the OC said. He said Sajal was the manager of a

jewellery shop owned by one Narayn Karmakar on Hazari Lane.

CMP Commissioner Abdul Jalil Mandal said they had so far recovered 23 gold bars from the procession of Abul Hossain. He said he had heard that 28 gold bars were snatched from the two jewellers.

He could not give details about when and where the bars were recovered.

Polls managed

FROM PAGE 1

and both worked effectively. First, it had wanted to keep the BNP

led government had begun the process by hurriedly abolishing the election time non-partisan caretaker government in June 2011. This had opened the door for AL to stay in power during the polls. And it had

away from the election. For this, the AL-

prompted BNP to announce that it would not participate in the election without restoration of the caretaker government.

In a quick response, the AL had rejected the BNP's demand.

Along with its alliance partners, the BNP had started waging street agitations to force the government meet its demand. The government had, however, elected without being challenged. remained rigid on its strategy not to give any concession to the BNP.

The outcomes in the mayoral elections in 2013, before the January 5 election, had made the situation more complicated by prompting both sides to stay firm on their positions.

The ruling AL-backed candidates had faced humiliating defeats in the hands of their rivals supported by the BNP in all the five mayoral battles. Various opinion polls had also showed the BNP's increasing popularity countrywide, exposing the fragile state of the ruling AL camp. All these had made the AL worried about its fate in the national elections if the BNP ran.

Therefore, the AL was determined not to backtrack from its stance on the caretaker government issue. Even it was unwilling to hold talks with the BNP on the caretaker government issue.

Under pressure of the international community, the AL leaders did sit with BNP in a dialogue brokered by the United Nations. But the AL had remained unbent on its stance, ending the talks without success.

On the other hand, the BNP had suffered from having no alternative strategy other than the restoration of the caretaker government. It had finally fallen in the AL's trap and boycotted the polls.

The second feature of the AL's strategy was more innovative.

The government policymakers had known it well that maintaining law and order in 300 constituencies for the polling in the face of opposition's desperate bid to foil it would be a Herculean task and also risky.

Therefore, AL had wanted to ensure sufficient number of parliamentary seats went uncontested to make the polling day less risky from a security point of view. This had also minimised the risk of AL candidates losing in the onesided election.

The AL had reached a compromise with Jatiya Party, Workers Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Workers Party and Jatiya Party (Manju) over sharing parliamentary seats. These parties had joined the Sheikh Hasina-led polls time government and are now in the present government too.

As per the deal, the AL candidates had withdrawn their candidacies in some constituencies to ensure unopposed victories for the contenders nominated by other parties in the election-time cabinet.

Similarly, those parties had returned the AL the favour by withdrawing their

"We still hope the government will

allow us to hold a rally in the city. If it

doesn't give permission, we will make

all-out efforts to stage a showdown at

and around party's Nayapaltan office,"

Abdul Awal Mintoo, joint convenor of

BNP Dhaka city unit, told this newspa-

chairperson, said party leaders and

activists in every ward and thana in the

city were asked to march towards

Officials at Khaleda's Gulshan office

have been working to that end, said

Nayapaltan at the right time," said

"We are ready and will start for

The BNP high command wants to

Nayapaltan tomorrow morning.

Mintoo, also an adviser to the BNP

the fate of the application.

per yesterday.

sources.

candidates in many constituencies. This deal had benefited them all. Workers Party, JSD and JP (Manju),

despite their previous poor electoral records, had captured some constituencies even before a single vote was cast. Thus, 153 out of 300 parliamentary seats were made uncontested. The unprecedented number of "people repre-

sentatives" were elected unopposed without a single vote being cast. More than half of the 9.19 crore voters were denied their rights to vote. The number of candidates elected unopposed broke the record of the controversial February 15 elections in 1996.

Held amid a boycott by the AL-led opposition parties, that election saw 49 ruling BNP candidates declared

uncontested elections had triggered a huge uproar. Interestingly, AL chief Sheikh Hasina,

who was head of the polls-time government, on December 14 defended the uncontested election and said the nomination papers were withdrawn to ensure a "congenial atmosphere" during the January 5 polls.

nent candidates were forced to withdraw their candidacies to ensure uncontested On contrary, Ershad and some of his

the electoral race. Hasina, however, was unwilling to get

and unprepared, were made to face Hasina in the January 5 polls in Gopalganj-3 and Rangpur-6. Both the JP men moved to withdraw their candidacies following Ershad's

announcement to quit the election. But the two newcomers were not allowed to do so. Ershad had found himself confined to the CMH in Dhaka.

dates were allowed to quit the race even after the expiry of the time to do that in a clear violation of the electoral laws.

from Rangpur-1 and Nilphamari-4 two

This was possible due to complicity of

ment and the AL's desire. for polling on January 5 had lost interests as the election by that time appeared as a "stage managed" game by the AL and its

Not a single vote was cast in more than

Casting of fake votes and capturing polling stations had returned even in the one-sided elections.

AL party men allegedly captured the polling stations and stuffed ballot boxes to show increased voter turnout.

ties. Its silence had helped the AL to "manage" the polls systematically.

upbeat and they will make tomorrow's

trated due to failure of the party's

"March for Democracy" programme

couldn't take to the streets in the face of

tough action by law enforcement

agencies. Even the party chief was kept

same as it was in 2013. We will hold the

rally at any cost," said Mahbubur

said the party has no alternative but to

A number of senior BNP leaders

If the ruling party creates obstacles

The party's district and upazila units

Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, presi-

also plan to hold rallies and bring out

or launches attacks on them, the oppo-

sition may call shutdowns for three

days from Tuesday, they said.

processions carrying black flags.

"The present situation is not the

confined to her Gulshan residence.

before the January 5 election.

BNP leaders and activists got frus-

On December 29, 2013, BNP men

programme a success.

headquarters on December 31 to know asserted that party activists have been

Rahman.

stage a showdown.

Khaleda at office, police outside

FROM PAGE 1 office," said Shamim.

Meanwhile, DB police picked up BNP Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed from party's Nayapaltan central office in the early hours today.

In reply to queries from journalists there, the detectives said the BNP leader was ill and they were taking

him to hospital. Rizvi was whisked away by an ambu-

Party sources said police took him to Apollo Hospitals in the city.

Earlier, a medical team, led by Dr ASM Raihan of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, went to the BNP central office around 11:40pm to examine Rizvi on his request.

After a primary check-up, the team said the BNP leader was suffering from gastrological problems and nausea, and he needs bed rest for a few days.

DB police entered the BNP office minutes after the physicians had left. The detectives told Rizvi that they came to take him to hospital.

the idea, they forced him into an ambulance, claimed staffs at the party office.

Though the BNP leader opposed

BNP sources said police searched

the party office around 12:30am, and

then locked it. They, however, didn't sided election as "Victory Day for action.

give details. Talking to The Daily Star, a number of BNP leaders said Khaleda had told senior party colleagues that she would make every effort to join the showdown at Nayapaltan.

On her instructions, officials at her Gulshan office and the central office contacted leaders of the party and its front organisations and asked them to march towards Nayapaltan.

A top leader of a component of the BNP-led combine last night said they were asked to stay near the streets on that day." Nayapaltan area tonight so they could move to the BNP office the following day at short notice. The BNP men have been advised to

apply their "own techniques" to gather there, avoiding confrontations with the ruling party men who are to be on the streets at 16 points in the capital.

The AL formed 16 teams with its senior leaders and lawmakers who will attend rallies at those points.

Instead of holding a rally at one place, the AL has opted for the Friday night. programme to thwart the BNP-led alliance's move to stage a showdown

denouncing the January 5 elections. As announced, the AL will celebrate the first anniversary of the onement agencies would take stern

Democracy". Some AL leaders have already announced they wouldn't allow BNP men to take to the streets tomorrow.

Ministers Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Qamrul Islam, also top leaders of AL Dhaka city unit, yesterday reiterated this after a meeting of the AL-led 14-party alliance in the capital.

Sounding a note of warning for the tion. opposition, Qamrul said, "Don't make any attempt to take to the

He was talking to reporters after the meeting at the AL central office on Bangabandhu Avenue. Law enforcement agencies have

been asked to take necessary measures to foil the opposition's move to stage a showdown. Police have already intensified

in different parts of the country. In the capital, law enforcers have been deployed in big numbers in front of the BNP central office since

their drives against opposition men

State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said if the BNP indulges in any kind of destructive activities, the law enforce-

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Masudur Rahman yesterday said police would take all measures to ensure safety and security of people. The BNP and its allies that boy-

cotted the January 5 polls now plan to

wage fresh agitations this month to force the government to hold an election under a non-partisan administra-It is almost clear to the BNP leaders that the DMP wouldn't give them

permission to hold a rally tomorrow anywhere in the city. On December 22, the BNP applied bank on the party's youth and student to the DMP for permission to hold a fronts for tomorrow's showdown.

rally either at Suhrawardy Udyan or Motijheel or Nayapaltan. But the DMP is yet to respond. To inquire about it, a BNP delega-

tion led by party leader Zainul Abdin Farroque went to the DMP headquarters yesterday but failed to get an audience with any of the DMP high-A police officer informed them that

hundred people from each of the 100 all top DMP officials were busy with preparations for Bishwa Ijtema, and wards in the capital, there will be a big that he would convey the delegation's showdown," said a leader of BNP city unit seeking anonymity. message to the high-ups, Farroque told Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, The Daily Star. The delegation also visited the DMP member of BNP standing committee,

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal President Rajib Ahsan.

A Jubo Dal leader also echoed his words. "If we manage to mobilise at least a

down in the district, denouncing the The ruling AL has also made prepa-

rations to bring out processions across the country.

dent of BNP's Patuakhali district unit, said they were ready to stage a showone-sided election.

The unprecedented number of

But the strategy triggered an electoral anarchy. In some constituencies, oppo-

election of the ruling party bigwigs. party men were not allowed to withdraw their candidacies, forcing them to stay in

elected unopposed. For this, two Jatiya Party men, though they were unwilling

Through compromise, some candi-

For example, two AL candidates were allowed to withdraw their candidacies

days after the deadline for withdrawal of candidacies. Their withdrawal ensured unopposed election of two Jatiya Party

the returning officers concerned, who were field-level senior government officials, and had worked as per the govern-Voters in the remaining 147 seats up

partners.

40 polling stations.

All the time the Election Commission had remained silent about the irregulari-