



The 20kg of gold, worth around Tk 10 crore, police found raiding a warehouse in Sadarghat of Chittagong early yesterday. There were 120 gold bars and over 100 jewellery items.

PHOTO: STAR

Electricity for all soon: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said it would not take that much time to provide electricity to every household.

"Around 70 percent people are now getting electricity. Inshallah, it wouldn't take that much time to make it [electricity] available to the rest of the households," she said.

The PM came up with the assurance during her introductory speech before the senior officials of power, energy and mineral resources ministry at its conference room.

Hasina, also in-charge of the ministry, asked the officials to give special emphasis on Palli Bidyut Samities to provide electricity to rural areas.

Mentioning that her government has already identified 21 sites for economic zones, the PM suggested undertaking a specific plan to set up power plants in those zones.

Turning to economical use of electricity, Hasina said, "If the mass awareness is created on the rational use of electricity, then consumption of electricity would come down along with electricity bills."

She mentioned that her government had undertaken multifaceted steps so that 100 percent households could have electricity coverage.

The PM also underscored the need for utilising solar power, especially in char, hill and island areas as well as in educational institutions.

She talked about the subversive acts unleashed by the BNP-led 20-party alliance over the last three months like setting fire to power plants and killing engineers.

"If a politician has passion, care and love for his or her countrymen then that politician cannot unleash such destruction," she said.

Hasina, also chief of the ruling Awami-League, asked the officials to make sure that the existing power plants run more efficiently while the old and dilapidated ones are phased out.

About the regional power cooperation, she said some 500MW of power was being imported from India through the Bheramara-Bahrapur transmission and grid substation line.

A process was also underway to import 600MW more, including 100MW, from Agartala, she added.

Parties push hard

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In Chittagong, AL lawmakers MA Latif and Shamsul Hoque along with one of their personal secretaries went to the Returning Officer's office around 4:20pm yesterday with some applications for nomination withdrawal.

Three pro-AL councillor candidates were waiting outside the RO's room at the time.

Talking to The Daily Star, they said they were worried that the MPs might submit their withdrawal applications although they wished to run.

Asked, Latif said they only accompanied some party men, who went there to withdraw their candidacies.

He denied that the party coerced anyone into quitting the race. He claimed the party "requested" the rebels to withdraw and many did. There are 10 wards in his constituency and the party managed to ensure single candidate in seven of those.

Returning Officer Abdul Baten said the two MPs came to him to examine some applications of withdrawal, saying that the candidates were waiting outside.

The BNP has managed to field single candidate in more than 30 of the 41 wards in the port city. It shared 10 councillor posts with its ally Jamaat.

City BNP President Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said they did not impose their decisions on the ward leaders. Rather, the councillor candidates were nominated by the ward units.

AGGRIEVED AL MEN

After withdrawing candidacies, many councillor aspirants expressed their grievances, saying they were "compelled" to quit the race.

"There is no scope for multiple Awami League candidates to run. So we asked all the rebels to withdraw and most of them have followed our directives," said AL leader Abdur Razzak.

He added if anyone wanted to do politics with the AL, he must follow party instructions.

'I'M THE BEST'

This correspondent spoke with at least 15 councillor aspirants from the AL, who withdrew candidacy, at the office of the returning officer of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) at Agargaon.

They claimed none of them withdrew willingly and that the party forced them to do so.

Syed Ahammad Pine, joint general secretary of AL's Mohammadpur thana unit and a councillor aspirant of ward 31, said he quit the race following instructions of Disaster Management and Relief Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Food Minister Qamrul Islam.

"This newspaper could not verify his claim.

"Though I've pulled out, I think I'm the best candidate in this ward," he said.

MA Qayyum, general secretary of ward 22 under DNCC and a councillor

aspirant, said he was compelled to withdraw nomination as the party extended support to another aspirant.

In Chittagong, Jahir Ahmad Chowdhury, a councillor candidate from ward-30, alleged some senior AL leaders, including three from central committee, and local lawmakers Latif and Shamsul had forced him and several others to sign some papers to quit.

Enamul Hoque and Abdul Berek, pro-AL candidates in ward-37 and ward-40, made the same allegation.

However, all the three are still in the race.

At a meeting at Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Tuesday, they were allegedly forced to sign a paper that read they would "pull out and abide by the party decision".

Latif admitted that the meeting and the signing took place, but claimed the

DHAKA NORTH	WITHDRAWN	REMAINING CANDIDATES
Mayor	3	16
General Councillor	182	277
Reserved Councillor (women)	37	88
DHAKA SOUTH		
Mayor	4	20
General Councillor	201	386
Reserved Councillor (women)	49	95
CHITTAGONG		
Mayor	0	12
General Councillor	54	212
Reserved Councillor (women)	1	61

party did not create pressure on anyone. "We just tried to convince them."

MAYORAL ASPIRANTS QUIT

Seven mayor aspirants, including BNP leader Abdus Salam, former AL lawmaker Sarah Begum Kabari and sacked Jatiya Party chief's adviser Bobby Hajjaj quit the race for Dhaka city polls yesterday.

After their withdrawal, 36 mayor hopefuls are now in the race -- 16 in Dhaka north and 20 in Dhaka south.

Actress Kabari, who had submitted nomination papers to run in Dhaka north, told reporters that she quit on instructions of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Bobby Hajjaj, who too had intended to run in Dhaka north, withdrew his nomination, claiming he lost his faith that the Election Commission could hold a free and fair election.

"The election commission has failed to do anything visible to earn trust. My supporters are facing difficulties... it's a pressure on me. That's why I've decided to quit the race," he told a press conference at his Banani office yesterday.

Japan to pledge 20% greenhouse gas cut: report

AFP, Tokyo

Japan will promise to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent from 2013 levels ahead of a global summit on climate change this year, a report said yesterday, despite uncertainty over post-Fukushima energy policy.

The government will likely announce the new target at the Group of Seven (G7) summit in June in Germany, the leading business daily

Nikkei reported, citing unnamed government sources.

In a separate report, Kyodo News said Tokyo will set a target of cutting gas emissions "by at least 20 percent by 2030, from 2005 levels."

Japan is one of the few leading polluters that has not yet declared a target on emission cuts, as the world works towards a new framework for combating climate change, to be finalised at December's COP 21 gathering in Paris.

3 suspected robbers beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushiya

Locals beat three alleged robbers to death in Meherpur Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The dead are Faruq Hossain, 36, son of Abdur Razzak, and Rafiq Hossain, 42, son of Nazer Ali, of Chokshyamnagar in the upazila; and Shariful Islam, 33, son of Ayub Ali of Juginda village in Gangni upazila.

A gang of five to six men entered Rajapur village around 12:00am. Seeing the unknown faces, farmer Bhashan Ali, who was working in his paddy field, asked them to inform him about their identities. Following this, the gang became angry and beat up Bhashan, according to police.

The farmer then informed his family and relatives about the matter through his mobile phone. Bhashan's relatives along with other villagers surrounded the area and started to chase the gang.

The "robbers" blasted five hand-made bombs in order to escape. But the mob caught three of them, said police.

The villagers then beat them up mercilessly around 1:00am. One of the gang members died on the spot, and two others were critically injured.

On information, police rushed to the spot and took the two "robbers" to Meherpur General Hospital where on-duty doctors declared them dead.

A pistol and a bullet were found in possession of one of the dead, said Azbahar Ali Sheikh, Meherpur additional superintendent of police.

The three were involved in robbery in the district, the police official added.

Obama and Castro to break Cold War ice in person

AFP, Panama City

US President Barack Obama and Cuba's Raul Castro will have a historic face-to-face encounter at the Summit of the Americas this week, breaking the ice after decades of glacial relations.

The image of US and Cuban presidents sitting across from each other at the 35-nation summit for the first time after decades of Cold War-era animosity will be the highlight of the gathering in Panama on Friday and Saturday.

While the meeting will mark a major milestone -- no Cuban leader has attended a Summit of the Americas -- the two sides have yet to reopen embassies and lingering differences have been evident at negotiations that started in January.

A major sticking point has been Cuba's inclusion on a list of state sponsors of terrorism.

The White House indicated this week that the State Department was in the "final stages" of deciding whether to recommend Havana's removal from the list, and that Congress would then have 45 days to decide whether to override the decision.

"We're trying to get it done quickly," a US State Department official told AFP on condition of anonymity. In another sign of warming ties, the US State Department said Secretary of State John Kerry could meet with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez on the sidelines of the summit.

Kamaruzzaman seeks time

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plead for his life. He also said a magistrate would be sent to the Jamaat leader "after a short while" to know about his decision.

However, late at night, the minister claimed he did not say Kamaruzzaman must decide about the clemency by yesterday.

"I told that a magistrate would go today [yesterday] and ask him [Kamaruzzaman] whether he would seek presidential clemency. If he seeks mercy, an arrangement would be made. If he doesn't, there would be another arrangement," he told BBC Bangla Service.

He added that he did not know whether the magistrate went to the jail.

The magistrate did not go to the jail as of 8:00pm, said police sources. Despite repeated attempts, the jail authorities could not be reached for an update.

Law Minister Anisul Huq said the convict would be given "a few hours" to decide about asking for mercy.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, on the other hand, said the convict would have to be given "a reasonable time" for this.

The defence lawyers of the convicted Jamaat leader too said their client should be given reasonable time to think about the matter. Moreover, they said, the jail authorities had not set any time for him to seek mercy when they told him about the Appellate Division upholding his death penalty.

The jail authorities were also silent about their next steps regarding Kamaruzzaman's execution.

The execution of the Jamaat assistant secretary general has been the talk of the

country for the last four days. Many, especially those from Sherpur, where he committed crimes against humanity in 1971, expressed dissatisfaction over the "delay" in his execution.

Kamaruzzaman, a key organiser of infamous Al-Badr force in greater Mymensingh, was sentenced to death by the International Crimes Tribunal-2 in May 2013, for war crimes, including mass killings in Sohagpur of Sherpur.

The SC upheld the death sentence awarded to him for the mass killing in Sohagpur. But the convict sought review of the judgment which was rejected on Monday by a four-member SC bench headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha.

Yesterday, five counsels for Kamaruzzaman met him in Dhaka Central Jail around 11:00am as fixed by the prison authorities since the convict on Wednesday wanted to meet his lawyers to decide on the presidential clemency.

Coming out of the jail, Shishir Manir, one of the lawyers, said their client wanted to know about the provisions of relevant laws over seeking clemency and informed them that he would decide after giving it more thought.

Asked how long Kamaruzzaman might take, Manir said though there is no specific timeframe to seek mercy, his client should be given a reasonable amount of time as the matter involves his life.

As per the jail code, a convict gets a week to ask for presidential mercy after the jail authorities communicate the death warrant to him or her. The death-row inmate is executed between 21 days and 28 days after receiving the SC

order.

The law minister, the attorney general and the defence lawyer said this provision would not be applicable for Kamaruzzaman following an SC verdict on the review petition of Abdul Quader Mollah, an executed war criminal.

The law minister told The Daily Star in the afternoon that Kamaruzzaman would be given a few hours to seek mercy.

As per the SC judgment on the review petition of Abdul Quader Mollah, it is clear that the provisions of the Jail Code would not be applicable regarding execution of a war criminal, he said.

Asked when the death sentence would be carried out, he said, "The home ministry knows it very well. Contact them."

The Daily Star could not get in touch with the state minister for home for his comment last night despite several attempts.

Meanwhile, the attorney general told reporters at his office, "The reasonable amount of time does not mean seven days.

"The reasonable time might be the period that needs to write a mercy petition to the president."

The AG said Kamaruzzaman would be executed as per the direction of the government under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973. Section-20(3) of the act says: "The sentence awarded under this act shall be carried out in accordance with the orders of the government."

Contacted, Farman Ali, senior superintendent of Dhaka Central Jail, said, "It is a sensitive issue. I would not say anything."

Goal a modern Ctg

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mayor office in 2010 defeating three-time mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury.

"If re-elected, my prime objective will be to make Chittagong a world-class city with all modern amenities," said the businessman-turned-politician in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on Wednesday.

Manjur started as a ward councillor in 1994 and survived three consecutive elections. He also earned trust of the then mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury to the extent that Mohiuddin made Manjur acting mayor nine times in his absence.

After Mohiuddin's arrest during the army-backed caretaker government in 2007, Manjur ran the city corporation as acting mayor for two years.

However, the relation soured in 2010 when Manjur, who was known as an Awami League supporter, wanted to contest the mayor polls against Mohiuddin.

With the BNP's support, he clinched a surprise victory against AL-heavyweight Mohiuddin in the election. He also became an adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia later.

So, how would he assess his tenure as the CCC mayor?

"I made 56 promises in my [2010] election manifesto. It's true that I haven't achieved cent percent success in fulfilling the pledges," Manjur told The Daily Star at his Kattali residence in the port city.

"But most of my short-term development projects have been completed and I have been successful to a great extent in executing my mid-term plans and proceeded remarkably to implement the long-term projects."

A total of Tk 900 crore was spent in development work during his tenure. The amount is more than one-third of the total development expenditure the city had made in the last 25 years, he claimed.

He cited the construction of the

1.3km Marine Drive Road from the Third Kamaphuli Bridge to Firingibazar and getting a Tk 293 crore project for digging a new 3km long canal approved as examples of the development work carried out during his tenure.

Addressing waterlogging that plagues the city too often was one of his top pledges. And though Manjur claimed to have been successful in "significantly mitigating" the problem, many city-dwellers think otherwise.

"We have a master plan for a permanent solution to waterlogging and around Tk 3,000 crore is required to implement it. You cannot expect me to solve such a large problem overnight," Manjur said in defence.

"It is a tough job to fulfil all the pledges in a single tenure," he said, appealing to the city people to vote for him once more so that he could complete the incomplete.

He has also been criticised for the city's poor waste management efforts.

And Manjur unhesitatingly blamed it on shortage of manpower and other resources.

"Now one Sebak [cleaner] works for around 3,000 people. This is inadequate for a city of 60 lakh people," he claimed.

According to him, the CCC had 3,100 staff when he took office and in the last five years, he has taken the number to 7,500.

Stressing the need for further increasing the CCC manpower, he said specific promises would be in his election manifesto, to be made public in a day or two.

He was an opposition-backed mayor. Did this cause any obstruction to discharging his duties?

"No, actually. I never faced any noncooperation from the government," Manjur said, holding this as one of his major successes.

Manjur, who bears a relatively clean and neutral image, has frequently drawn

flak from BNP leaders and activists of Chittagong for not staying beside them when the party needed it.

"I cannot say that everything I promised has been done. But I feel good when I see that I have been able to bring transparency and accountability in the CCC and keep it from politicisation and nepotism," Manjur said with a proud smile on his face.

He believes not only new promises, but also his past accomplishments will help him win the April 28 election.

Commute all death sentences

EU asks govt

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Union has called on Bangladeshi authorities to commute all death sentences and to introduce a moratorium on executions as a first step towards definitive abolition of capital punishment.

The call was made following the rejection of Jamaat leader Muhammad Kamaruzzaman's appeal by the Supreme Court challenging the death sentence awarded to him for his involvement in crimes against humanity during the country's Liberation War in 1971.

The EU "reiterates its opposition to the use of capital punishment in all cases and under all circumstances," the EU spokesperson said in a statement issued in Brussels yesterday.

"Capital punishment is not a deterrent against crime and makes miscarriages of justice irreversible," the statement said.