# Play active roles in city polls

PM asks AL advisers, blasts rights bodies for their silence over BNP-Jamaat's atrocities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed members of the Awami League Advisory Council to play active role in the upcoming city corporation elections in Dhaka and Chittagong.

At a meeting of the body at Gono Bhaban, Hasina, also the AL president, directed the party leaders to form an election steering committee comprising 1,000 pro-liberation people to counter the 100-member committee formed by pro-BNP professionals.

"You [advisers] have acceptability in the society and you can play roles in the elections," the PM was quoted as saying by an AL adviser.

Apart from the city polls, different organisational issues, "BNP-Jamaat's violence" and execution of war criminal Muhammad Kamaruzzaman were discussed at the meeting, the adviser told The Daily Star.

Hasina came down heavily upon "some human rights organisations" of the country and called them "extreme opportunists" for their silence during the "violence by BNP-Jamaat alliance"

in the last three months.

"So many people were burnt alive. Isn't it violation of human rights?" Hasina said.

"None of the human rights organisations uttered a single word when Khaleda Zia was killing people through arson attacks ... How could they keep mum at that time?

"They don't look into human rights issues. They are just extreme opportunists," she went on.

When the marauding Hefajat-e-Islam men were driven away from the capital in 2013, some rights bodies came up with "made-up figures" of casualties and made a hue and cry, Hasina said. "But when the BNP-Jamaat men are killing people in the name of movement, they remain silent.'

She, however, did not mention any organisation's name.

All the arsonists, masterminds and financiers of the recent violence will be hunted down and aptly punished so that none dares to do the same in future, Hasina added.



are sold in high numbers in Pahela Baishakh fairs held throughout the country. The photos were taken on Thursday.

**MIRZA SHAKIL** 

## Baishakh brings hope

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Unlike the festivities during Eid or Puja, Pahela Baishakh is an occasion for people from all walks of life, irrespective of religion, race or creed. People generally buy panjabi, fatua, sari and salwar kameez for the festi-

"It is an important season for us as customers generally buy locally-made clothes for the occasion," said Azharul Haque Azad, president of Fashion Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh that represents more than 50 boutiques.

Last season, fashion houses across the country raked in around Tk 1,500 crore in sales, up 10 percent from the previous season, he said. "But this year, we will be happy to

just have a repeat of last year's sales volumes -- we are not even hoping anything better than that."

Fashion houses and boutiques registered around 60 percent year-onyear drop in sales during the January-March period, mainly for political unrest, said Azad.

This year, deadly violence on the streets has frightened customers and shutdowns hit everybody in the supply chain, including the handloom owners, he added.

The sector has incurred losses of around Tk 1,000 crore in the last three months due to the political turbu-

lence, according to Azad. The country has now around 50 lakh weavers, he said, adding that the volatile political environment has particularly affected the small weavers

as boutique owners cut their productions by half during January and February.

The political situation influences people's purchasing sentiment, said Azad, who is also the managing director of Shada Kalo, a leading fashion house. The prolonged political unrest,

which has choked off regular income, has forced many businesses and individuals to dip into their savings, which has severely affected their purchasing power, he said. Many non-resident Bangladeshis

usually come to the country and buy locally-designed attire to celebrate Baishakh. Such arrivals are not being expected this year for the political unrest, said Rouf.

At present, the country has around 4,500 fashion houses that sell locally produced attire with a yearly turnover of Tk 6,000 crore, according to the president of Fashion Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh.

Of the annual sales figure, Pahela Baishakh's clothing sales account for 25 percent and the month of Ramadan another 50 percent, he said.

that has 14 stores across the country, said cotton clothes are the most popular ones during this season.

He said the price of clothing did not Professionals. soar this year. "We have made products targeting the middle-class people."

Rang is now selling each piece of

panjabi at Tk 800-3,500, sari Tk 850-5,000 and salwar kameez Tk 1,500-5,500, said Das.

Several financial institutions have also engaged in promoting sales during Baishakh by partnering with the leading fashion houses, a move which is expected to boost sales.

For example, MasterCard has already launched a flat discount of 10 percent for all its debit and credit cardholders, which can be used at the individual outlets of leading brands such as Nipun, Shrishty, Kay Kraft, Anjan's, Rang, Banglar Mela, Sadakalo, Bibiana and Nogordola.

This campaign is expected to boost Baishakhi sales as well as promoting electronic payments in the country, Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager of MasterCard Bangladesh, said in a statement.

Aarong, which has 13 outlets across the country, is also offering 10 percent discount on purchases made through American Express cards, said Rouf.

Many customers, however, have not yet finalised whether or not to buy clothes for Pahela Baishakh.

"Even though I bought a salwar suit Soumik Das, managing partner of for Baishakh last year, this year I have Rang, another leading fashion house not gone out much except for work because of the fear of violence," said Anashua Ananga, an economics lecturer at the Bangladesh University of

"I might decide to buy clothes this year if the situation improves," she

## Polls campaign gaining pace

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Prof AFM Yusuf Haider, a member of the platform's steering committee, said on behalf of the BNP-backed mayoral candidates they would make leaflets and manifestos public tomorrow.

The Andolon released the names of the councillors it is backing in the polls to the two city corporations in Dhaka yesterday afternoon.

The ruling Awami League in their campaign would mainly highlight the government's development activities in Dhaka and service delivery like uninterrupted power and gas supply.

They would also use the BNP-Jamaat's violence and petrol bomb attacks in recent times to woo voters.

The AL would start distribution of

leaflets among the voters today, sources said. "We have almost completed the formation of election centre commit-

tees [to help voters] in consultation with local MPs," said Faruk Khan, international affairs secretary of the AL. AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury said Faruk

and Abdur Razzaque, in-charge of AL's team in Dhaka North City Corporation, would be countering Khaleda's speeches on the elections. AL President Sheikh Hasina would

also be countering the BNP chief's political statements, he added.

Pro-liberation forces including artists, cultural personalities, poets, writers, singers, film stars, and even cricketers would be engaged in wooing voters for AL favourites, Khalid added.

### TABITH STARTS CAMPAIGN

Tabith Awal and M Manjur Alam Manju, BNP-blessed mayor candidates for DNCC and Chittagong City Corporation, formally launched their campaigns yesterday three days after their main rival candidates began theirs.

Eldest son of businessman Abdul Awal Mintoo, Tabith offered Jum'a prayers at Karwan Bazar Ambar Shah Mosque before starting his campaign.

"I hope all will extend their cooperation and support," he said.

Manjur yesterday went to different areas in Chittagong and addressed street rallies.

"In the last five years, I have tried to work for the people and development of the city. I want to continue the development and ensure amenities to the people," he said.

### BNP MEN STILL SCARED

BNP mayor aspirant of Dhaka South City Corporation Mirza Abbas and many BNP-backed councillor candidates did not appear in person at the returning officer's offices to get their

### MAYORAL CANDIDATE & SYMBOL DHAKA NORTH CITY CORPORATION

Annisul Huq (AL) Table clock Tabith Awal (BNP) Bahauddin Ahmed Charka (Spinning wheel) (Jatiya Party) Mahi B Chowdhury Eagle (Bikalpadhara Bangladesh) Nader Chowdhury (JSD) Peacock Elephant Abdullah Al Kafee (CPB) Zunayed Saki Telescope (Gansanghati Andolan) Erad Ahmed Siddiqui Gourd Kazi Shahidullah Hilsa fish AYM Kamrul Islam Cricket bat Anisuzzaman Khokan Dish antenna Moazzem Hossain Khan Majlish Flask Shamsul Alam Chowdhury Leopard Sheikh Shahiduzzaman Matchbox Orange

#### Zaman Bhuiyan DHAKA SOUTH CITY CORPORATION Abu Nasher Muhammad Charka

(Spinning wheel)

Sheikh Fazle Bari Mawsud

Masud Nossain

A S M Akram	Cricket ba
Advocate Mohammad	Facil
Ayub Hossain	Eagl
S M Asaduzzman Ripon	Orang
Dilip Bhadra	Elephan
Bazlur Rashid Feroz	Tabl
Mashiur Rahman	Leopar
Mirza Abbas (BNP)	Mu
Mohammad Shafi Ullah	Peacoc
Chowdhury	
Mohammad Sayeed Khokon (AL)	Hils
Mohammad Saifuddin (JP)	Sof
Md Akhteruzzaman	Gour
Md Abdur Rahman	Flas
Md Abdul Khalek	Cak
Md Golam Mowla Rony	Rin
Md Zahidur Rahman	Lapto
Md Baharane Sultan Bahar	Shir
Md Rezaul Karim Chowdhury	Table cloc
Md Shahidul Islam	Bu
Shahin Khan	Shi

electoral symbols, fearing arrest. Mustafizur Rahman, president of BNP's Airport thana unit and a councillor aspirant of Ward-1 of the DNCC, sent a representative to collect his symbol.

He is accused in several cases.

"Many candidates did not go today [yesterday] fearing arrest, as they have cases filed against them," he said.

Nasima Banu, wife of Abdus Shahed Montu, president of BNP's Sutrapur unit and a councillor aspirant of DSCC Ward-44, said, "As he [Montu] is behind bars, I sent one of my brothers-in-law to the office of the

bol." However, a few candidates showed

returning officer for getting the sym-

up at the RO's office in person. Akhter Ali, former president of BNP's Ward-22 unit, and a councillor

aspirant in the same ward of DNCC, went to the RO's office with two of his supporters. "As there is no case filed against me,

I have no problem regarding movement. If I can campaign until the electioneering ends, I hope to win," he said.

NO FAVOURS FOR ABBAS

When AL-backed DSCC mayor candidate Sayeed Khokon and five other candidates demanded "hilsa" as their electoral symbol, the returning officer asked the candidates to solve the issue through talks.

As none of the candidates moved for solving the issue, Khokon requested other aspirants to let him have the symbol since his father, Mohammad Hanif, had used it in his mayor elections.

The other aspirants agreed to let go of their claim on the symbol.

However, BNP-backed Mirza Abbas and five other mayor candidates wanted "elephant" as their symbol and the returning officer in this case too requested them to talk.

When Abbas' representative asked the other candidates to let Abbas have "elephant", they refused.

Lawyer Sanaullah Miah, on behalf of Abbas, later requested the returning officer to allocate "mug" for Abbas.

AL-backed Annisul Huq in the DNCC got "table clock" as his election symbol while his rival BNP-backed Tabith got "bus".

### **BNP WANTS ARMY**

Convener of Dhaka Adarsha Andolan Prof Emajuddin Ahmed yesterday demanded that the Election Commission deploy the army seven days prior to the elections in Dhaka.

At a seminar in the Jatiya Press Club, he said it should be done so that voters could cast their votes and the campaign could be run safely.

"We as well as the BNP have taken the city corporation election as a challenge, and an opportunity has come to us to teach the government a good lesson," said the former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University.

He asked the young leaders and activists of the BNP to keep an eye on polling centres and ballot boxes after casting their votes.

"You will carry out your responsibilities. Our victory is certain."

## Morocco bus crash kills 31

AFP, Rabat

Schoolchildren returning from a sports competition in Morocco were among 31 people killed yesterday in a head-on collision between a truck and a bus that caught fire, officials said.

The accident in southern Morocco is the worst in the North African kingdom since September 2012 when a bus plunged into a ravine, killing 42 people. MAP news agency, quoting officials,

said at least 31 people were killed and nine injured, two in serious condition, mangled wreckage of a bus on fire. in Friday's early morning collision Medias 24 news website said 14 near the city of Tan-Tan. youths who had taken part in a

"A majority of the victims are children aged eight to 14," a regional official from the sports and youth ministry told AFP.

Several private media outlets gave a toll of at least 40 dead.

They said the bus was transporting the young athletes and their coaches from a competition in Bouznika, a beach resort in the north between the capital Rabat and Casablanca. Pictures posted on YouTube and on

several news websites showed the

national sports event involving Moroccan schools were on the bus, accompanied by three adults.

Mohamed Azzaz, a health official in the Guelmim-Smara region where Tan-Tan is located, said at least eight people out of the 50 passengers on the bus were hospitalised.

MAP said the accident occurred near the district of Chbika, 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) southwest of Rabat.

Road accidents are frequent in Morocco, where officials say about 4,000 people are killed each year -equivalent to about 11 each day -- in a country of 34 million inhabitants.

### Mother, son

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Obviously, Mainul had no idea that that was the last time he would see his son and wife alive.

Less than half-an-hour later, the rickshaw was hit by a lorry near Matuail Hospital and dragged on the street for some distance. Shakila Ishrat Jhumur and Hamim died on the spot. Ritu was receiving treatment in Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

"He had a tight grip on my shirt collar and was unwilling to let me go," said Mainul seeing the bodies of his wife and son at a mortuary of the DMCH.

Mainul could hardly believe what had happened to his family. "They killed my wife and son," he said in

Relatives thronged the hospital hearing the news. Their wails and crying suppressed the almost always consistent hue and cry of the hospi-

Police seized the lorry and arrested

driver Imran from the spot, said Abdul Awal, a sub-inspector of Jatrabari Police Station. Meanwhile, an oil tanker hit a motorbike on Amulia Road in Demra

yesterday killing Farida Yeasmin, 33, and injuring her husband Abul Hashem.

Hashem was in the DMCH. Police seized the lorry but the

An unidentified youth was also

when he was crossing a road at

Mohakhali Bus Terminal area early yesterday. The incidents happened just a day after 25 people were killed and 23 were

driver fled. killed after being hit by a vehicle

injured as a bus crashed into a tree on Dhaka-Barisal highway in Bhanga of Faridpur.

## Obama, Raul

It was the first meeting between the chief diplomats of the two nations since 1958, a year before Fidel Castro's revolutionary guerrillas

seized power. Kerry and Rodriguez "had a lengthy and very constructive discussion this evening. The two agreed they made progress and that we would continue to work to resolve outstanding issues," a State Department official said in a brief statement.

While the meetings are packed with powerful symbolism, the two countries have a long road ahead in their broader goal of normalizing relations. An Obama-Castro meeting is "part

taking place," said former Cuban diplomat and foreign relations professor Carlos Alzugaray.

of the overall negotiations that are

"This doesn't end with Raul's pres-

ence at the summit, it's the beginning." Obama acknowledged as much on Thursday during a visit to Jamaica, before landing in Panama.

"I never foresaw that immediately overnight everything would transform itself, that suddenly Cuba became a partner diplomatically with us the way Jamaica is, for example," he said. "That's going to take some time."

The US leader may bring to the table a resolution to an old gripe from Cuba, as a senator said the US State Department recommended that he remove Havana from a list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Cuba's inclusion on the blacklist, which includes Iran, Syria and Sudan, has been a major sticking point in negotiations to reopen embassies that closed after relations broke in

Cuba was first put on the blacklist in 1982 for harboring ETA Basque separatist militants and Colombian FARC rebels, restricting the country's access

to global bank credit. Removing Cuba from the terrorsponsor list would not be immediate. Congress would have 45 days to decide whether to override Obama's recommendation.

US lawmakers who have been critical of the diplomatic detente could seize on the review of the list to further attack Obama's Cuba policy.

Cuba has other major demands, most importantly that the US Congress lift an embargo that the communist regime blames for the island's economic troubles.

Washington wants Cuba to lift restrictions on the movement of its diplomats on the island, giving them unfettered access to ordinary Cubans.

The reconciliation appears popular

in both countries. A Marist College poll showed this week that 59 percent of Americans back the diplomatic thaw, while a survey by US pollster Bendixen & Amandi International in Cuba found that 97 of islanders

A meeting between Castro and Obama at the summit will provide a photo opportunity to immortalize the diplomatic reconciliation. The two leaders briefly shook hands at Nelson Mandela's funeral in 2013,

are in favor.

but they now have a chance for more face time. The White House said the two would have time to interact, but the extent of the encounter remains a mystery and could fall short of a for-

mal, bilateral meeting.