

Hard to assess candidates' polls expense

Says CEC
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad yesterday said it was a difficult task to figure out the exact amount of candidates' electoral expenditure.

"We have already asked the contesting candidates of the recently held city corporation elections to submit their expenditure statements. We will be able to know about that after getting the statements," he said while briefing reporters at the media centre of the Election Commission (EC).

The CEC made the remarks when his attention was drawn to a Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report that claimed mayoral candidates of April 28 city polls had spent up to 21 times more money than the ceiling of the polls expenditure set by the EC.

"It is difficult to figure out the exact amount of expenditure. All reports are not accurate. But we will look into it," he said.

As per electoral laws, all contesting candidates must submit their election expenditure statements within 30 days of gazette notification.

Therefore, the candidates will have to submit the statements by May 29.

In response to the TIB's report that claimed the elections were not held in a free and fair manner, the CEC said, "We have got a report of the TIB. We will see it and take the findings in consideration."

Two organisations, which monitored the elections, submitted their observation reports to the commission. These reports mentioned that polls were held in a fair manner except for some stray incidents, the CEC claimed.

The CEC briefed reporters following a meeting on law and order situation ahead of the by-polls to Magura-1 constituency to be held on May 30.

'Robber' killed

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under Shibganj upazila of Bogra.

Acting on a tip-off, a Khetlal police team rushed to Moheshpur village where some robbers, including Hazrat, were preparing to commit a robbery, blocking Joypurhat-Bogra highway by placing logs around 11:40pm, said Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Khetlal Police Station.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the criminals opened fire. Police returned fire, triggering the "gunfight". After the "gunfight", Hazrat was found dead. The others fled, the police official added.

Police claimed that some sharp weapons were recovered from the spot. A case was filed.

The curious

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years, reached a level so untenable that the Rohingya are faced with only two options, to remain and risk annihilation or flee. The current exodus of those seeking asylum is just one manifestation of genocide."

Referring to the large-scale state-sponsored violence against the Rohingyas that left "over 200 Rohingyas dead, hundreds of homes destroyed and the displacement of 120,000 people into what can only be described as detention camps", she has also said, "The Burmese state, without any challenge from opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, has institutionalized discrimination against the Rohingya, allowed hate speech to flourish, encouraged islamophobia and granted impunity to perpetrators of the violence."

Pointing to the recent international outcry over the issue, Sara Pierra has noted, "It was only at the urging of reporters on Monday that a spokesman for her opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), addressed the issue ... But nothing has come directly from the party's leader. Aung San Suu Kyi herself has previously justified her reluctance to speak out on the issue of the Rohingya, even when pressed to do so during Buddhist-Muslim clashes that swept through the country in 2013."

Green in her article considers Suu Kyi's silence as a calculated political move to secure the votes of the Buddhist majority population in the national elections to be held later this year.

She says, "The entire Rohingya population has been disenfranchised, ahead of elections to be held later this year, and thus they hold no electoral power. It is true that to speak out against the genocidal persecution of the Rohingya is likely to lose her many votes among the Burmese Buddhist majority ..."

Star invited

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the spot for a solution, who asked various questions to the reporter.

"Oh, you are from The Daily Star. Don't you know that The Daily Star is not allowed to the prime minister's programme? You get out of here right now," the SB officer said.

The reporter left the spot without further discussion.

Trial run today

FROM PAGE 1
In December last year, a joint survey found some roads on both sides of the borders in poor condition and immigration and customs facilities inadequate. Those are improving now.

FBCCI President Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed sees this direct bus service as an enormous opportunity for businesses.

"Connectivity or man-to-man contact always has a direct impact on trade and commerce. So, the direct communications between Dhaka and Guwahati will open up a new window for Bangladesh and the northeast part of India," he told this newspaper yesterday.

The route falls in one of the Asian highway routes that run through Benapole, Jessore, Kanchpur, Dhaka, Sylhet and Tamabil.

The Asian highway is a network of 1,41,000km of standard roadways crisscrossing Asian countries and linking them with Europe was conceived in 1959 with an aim to promote development of international road transport in the continent.

A good number of Bangladeshis visit Shillong and Guwahati regularly. There are also people who are relatives living across the borders and they visit each other often. But they suffer a lot as there is no direct bus service.

Currently, the journey on the route is time-consuming as travellers have to change transports at different points before reaching their destinations.

"The direct bus service will reduce the travel time by three to five hours," said BRTC manager at Kamalapur Bus Depot Nayeb Ali.

"Initially, there may be fewer passengers but we hope to get sufficient

passengers on this route because many people from Bangladesh visit Shillong," he added.

This will be the fourth cross-border transport service between the two countries.

Of the existing ones, both the bus and train services between Dhaka and Kolkata are getting expected passengers but the Dhaka-Agartala service is not, officials said.

On this route that opened in 2003 the BRTC operates one or two trips per month for a lack of passengers, said Nayeb Ali.

The Dhaka-Kolkata bus service launched in 1999, on the other hand, is popular among Bangladeshis who travel to Kolkata for medical, tourism and other purposes through this route.

Four 40-seat buses run on this route every day, except on Sundays. Of them, two operate from Bangladesh and two from India, said Almas Ali, deputy general manager (operations) of BRTC.

Private bus operator Shyamoli Paribahan is the operation partner of BRTC that has set Tk 3,400 for a round trip through Dhaka-Kolkata route.

Bangladesh Railway has been operating Moitree Express on Dhaka-Kolkata route since April 2008. Two trains -- one from Bangladesh and one from India -- operate on the route six days a week.

"The service has drawn good response from passengers. More than 90 percent seats are filled up in every trip," said an assistant director of the railway.

The railway has a plan to introduce train services from Khulna to Kolkata via Dhaka, he added.

Bin Laden fixated

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"The focus should be on killing and fighting the American people and their representatives," the late al-Qaeda figurehead wrote.

The letter was among thousands of files found by US Navy SEALs on May 2, 2011 when they descended on Bin Laden's hideout in the Pakistani garrison town of Abbottabad and shot him dead.

US intelligence agencies have now declassified more than 100 of these documents taken from Bin Laden's archive, after lawmakers ordered the move and critics accused the CIA of withholding material.

AFP was given exclusive access to the documents ahead of their release, and they have since been posted online by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Jeff Anchukaitis, spokesman for the office, said the release of "a sizeable tranche of documents" was in line with President Barack Obama's call for "increased transparency."

It was also in accordance with a law obliging the spy agencies to review all the Bin Laden material for possible release, he said.

The documents released are English translations of the originals, and AFP had no way to independently verify the materials or the accuracy of the translation.

The release came shortly after US journalist Seymour Hersh alleged that Washington's official account of the hunt for Bin Laden and the raid that led to his death was a lie.

But CIA spokesman Ryan Trapani said the declassification had been planned for at least a year and had not been intended as a response to Hersh's report.

From strategic and theological discussions to the mundane details of domestic funding and security measures, the documents show the man behind 9/11 preoccupied with once again attacking the West in spectacular fashion.

Mindful of drone strikes taking out senior jihadist figures, Bin Laden frequently refers to security headaches and advises against communicating by email.

He scolds his followers for gathering in large groups and frets about a microscopic bug being inserted in his wife's clothes.

He lays out plans to groom a new cadre of leaders, and his associates discuss arrangements for smuggling Bin Laden's favorite son and likely heir, Hamza, to Pakistan.

The spy agencies also released a list of English language books and articles

found in Bin Laden's compound.

The "bookshelf" of PDF files showed the al-Qaeda leader was particularly interested in France's economy and conspiracy theories -- including those questioning accounts of the 9/11 attacks.

Intelligence officials said the texts suggested Bin Laden was possibly planning to strike at the French economy in hopes of triggering a wider collapse in the West.

Before he was killed, Bin Laden wrote of plans for an elaborate propaganda blitz to mark the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

And among the material posted by US spy agencies was an unreleased video in which Bin Laden appears to stumble delivering a speech.

But the documents also highlight deep divisions among the militants over how to wage their terror campaign.

Bin Laden warns that conflict with regimes in the Middle East would distract the extremists from hitting hard at what as far as he is concerned is the real enemy -- America.

"We should stop operations against the army and the police in all regions, especially Yemen," he writes.

Al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq, which would later morph into the Islamic State group -- and which now increasingly overshadows al-Qaeda -- also comes up in the documents.

Bin Laden and his then deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, receive a scathing rebuke in a letter from some Iraqi supporters, who demand they denounce the bloodletting in Iraq.

In a letter dated May 22, 2007, the Jihad and Reform Front warns Bin Laden that God will hold him to account "for blessing the work done by the al-Qaeda in Iraq organization without disavowing the scandals that are committed in your name."

Bin Laden writes of the need for large-scale terror operations, even though some of his deputies are finding it difficult to organize mass attacks with drones overhead and US eavesdropping.

One document recently declassified in a terrorism trial in New York but not released on Wednesday quotes Abu Musab al-Suri, an al-Qaeda veteran, who advocates going after smaller targets of opportunity as a more realistic approach, officials said.

"Bin Laden at the time of his death remained focused on large-scale operations while other al-Qaeda leaders believed smaller operations, or inciting lone terrorist attacks, could

Meet the shy monkey

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According to IUCN, the population trend of Slow loris is decreasing. Until 2007, the IUCN Red list had listed the species as data deficient though in 2008 it classified the species as vulnerable and noted that "the species is predicted to decline by more than 30% in the next three generations over its entire range due to continuing hunting pressures and loss of habitat."

All species of slow loris (Nycticebus spp.) are now strictly protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) under Appendix I, which bans international trade of the animal for commercial purposes. Though we are studying its behaviour on a small scale, major and urgent steps must be taken for its conservation. Therefore, we request the Forest Department, IUCN and other organisations to take immediate steps for conserving it and preventing any further decline of its population.

The writer is a student of the zoology department at Jagannath University.

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63 senior govt officials transferred

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a latest reshuffle in the civil administration, the government yesterday transferred 63 senior officials to new offices.

The officials include 20 additional secretaries, 26 joint secretaries and 16 deputy secretaries. Some of them were officers on special duty and got new postings.

The Ministry of Public Administration issued separate gazettes in this regard.

UK's Cameron outlines new laws to tackle immigration

AFP, London

British Prime Minister David Cameron will propose new laws to control immigration in a speech Thursday, including giving police the power to seize wages earned by illegal immigrants.

In his first speech on the issue since winning this month's general election with a surprise majority, Cameron said his centre-right Conservative government would include a new immigration bill in next Wednesday's Queen's Speech.

This is when Queen Elizabeth II reads out the new government's legislative programme at the ceremonial state opening of parliament.

"The truth is it has been too easy to work illegally and employ illegal workers here," Cameron will say, according to extracts of his speech released in advance by his Downing

Metro rail

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minute, enabling a commuter to travel from Uttara to Motijheel in just 38 minutes which now takes around two hours on a normal day.

A total of 24 such trains would carry 60,000 passengers every hour to both directions and drastically cut the number of private cars on the streets, Mofazzel continued.

The metro rail will have stations at 16 points of the city -- including at Uttara, Pallabi, Mirpur, Kazipara, Shewrapara, Agargaon, Rokeya Sarani, Bijoy Sarani, Farmgate, Sornagora Hotel, Shahbagh, Doel Chattar, Topkhana Road and Motijheel.

The metro rail will have noise barriers and vibration-free tracks and thus be environment-friendly, he said.

The entire alignment would be divided into four segments and as many contractors would be hired for simultaneous construction, he went on.

The relocation of utility service lines would go on simultaneously as well, Mofazzel added.

Geo-technical examinations of soil at 120 points along the 20-km proposed alignment are done with the laboratory test results pending, said Nurul Islam, safeguard expert of the metro rail project.

The topographical, traffic and geotechnical surveys for the metro rail are also nearly done, he said.

Hideo Omori, team leader of consultants' consortium, who worked in metro rail projects in Delhi and Jakarta, said: "I am making use of experience in building metro rails in this region and the progress of Dhaka metro rail so far is extremely good."

The first tender for pre-qualification to procure 24 locomotives, 144 coaches and equipment for the depot was floated early January.

Nippon Koei Limited of Japan leads the consortium of consultants that include Nippon Koei India Ltd, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Ltd, Mott MacDonald Ltd India, Mott MacDonald Ltd UK and Development Design Consultants Ltd Bangladesh.

Japan will provide Tk 16,600 crore of the project's total cost as soft loan while Bangladesh government will bear the rest.

3 war crimes

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the investigators found involvement of the 16 in crimes against humanity committed in 1971 while probing another war crimes case against three men from Maheshkhali.

The three are Mohammad Rashid, Salamat Ullah Khan and Moulavi Zakaria.

Rashid, 84, a former BNP lawmaker of Cox's Bazar, and Salamat, 80, a senior BNP leader in the district, were arrested on March 1 following warrants issued by the same tribunal. Zakaria is fugitive.

Prosecutor Tapos Kanti Baul said the investigators found primary evidence against the 19 over the alleged involvement in crimes including murder, torture and confinement.

Meanwhile, the prosecution yesterday submitted a progress report on the investigation into the allegations against Rashid, Salamat and Zakaria and later sought more time to complete the probe.

The tribunal asked the prosecution to submit another progress report on the matter on July 22.

Merkel sets tough tone for EU summit with eastern partners

AFP, Riga

German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday cautioned the EU's eastern partners not to expect too much of the bloc while warning Russia to mend its ways over Ukraine if it wanted to rejoin the international community.

At the same time, Merkel, who has played a key role in searching for a peaceful solution to the Ukraine conflict, made clear Russia had no reason to fear closer ties between the 28-nation bloc and six of its Soviet-era

satellites.

"The Eastern Partnership is not aimed against anyone, especially not against Russia," Merkel told the German parliament before leaving for the two-day summit in the Latvian capital Riga.

"We will not accept thinking in terms of spheres of influence in the Europe of the 21st century," she said, adding that the six states did not face an "either-or" choice between Russia and the EU.

Remove 'political' billboards

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He said he travelled from Delhi to Agra by road, but did not see any "political billboard or poster" anywhere. "But the big cities, including Dhaka and Chittagong, are covered with political billboards and posters. Seeing these, I feel ashamed," Quader said.

"Why these billboards? Are these for publicity? This is not publicity but propaganda. Are those that people don't like and ruin the beauty of the city be called publicity?" he questioned.

"Why everybody's pictures need to be hung? Can anyone become a leader by hanging pictures?"

"We fail when we fail to understand people," he said referring to repeated defeats of the pro-Awami League lawyers in the bar council polls.

"We have to come out of this culture of setting up political billboards," he said, adding that he would soon sit

with the mayors of Dhaka to discuss how to remove those.

Quader said he already spoke to the mayor of Chittagong City Corporation in this regard. "I told him that his first priority should be to solve waterlogging and then remove billboards."

Regarding the under construction Dhaka-Chittagong highway, the minister said Dhaka-Chittagong four-lane highway would be upgraded to a six-lane one. An announcement in this regard might come during the Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh at the end of this year.

Dhaka University Vice-chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, BSMMU Vice-chancellor Prof Kamrul Hasan, barrister Amirul Islam and Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, among others, spoke at the programme.

Govt to bring Bangladeshi

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Kamal said the home ministry, the foreign ministry and the overseas employment ministry would take measures to bring them back home.

Referring to the death penalty against human traffickers in the law, he said stern action would be taken against those who were behind the trafficking.

Vowing to resist human trafficking from the country at any cost, the home boss said, "We would be able to identify the culprits once the Bangladeshis are brought back home."

Kamal claimed that most of the people stranded on boats are Rohingyas, who have been living in Bangladesh illegally for a long time.

The minister also said the government had decided to provide identity cards to boatmen and register boats to prevent human trafficking.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam yesterday said they had got a list of over 1,000 Bangladeshis from the governments of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Besides, lists of small group of people are coming everyday from the countries, he told BBC Bangla last night. He said the lists were given to the home ministry. The ministry forwarded the lists to police who were now verifying their identities.

After the verification process is completed, the Bangladeshis would be brought back home, the minister said, adding that a high-powered team from the Bangladesh government would attend the migrant crisis meeting in Bangkok on May 29.

Regarding death threats issued to 18 eminent persons, including Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Kamal said the intelli-

gence agencies were working on it. "They will be identified and punished," he added.

He said those who killed bloggers and those who issued death threats might not be of the same group.

Threats were issued in order to hamper democracy and the advancement of the country as well as to gag the voices of the pro-liberation forces, he said, adding that those who received death threats would be provided with security.

Replying to a query, the state minister said BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed would be brought back following due legal process.

On charge framing against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in two cases, he said it was up to the judges to decide. "We will implement the judges' decision."

Regarding the government's initiative to bring BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman back to the country, the minister said there were some complexities over this issue as Tarique had sought political asylum in the UK.

The British government needs to think more to give political asylum to a person who is "a traitor, money launderer and a conspirator", he said.

Asked about the progress of issuing MRPs to all Bangladeshi expatriates before the November 24 deadline set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the minister said the international body would extend time, and hence there would be no problem to this end.

Despite some complexities in the previous months, the project was now going on in full swing, he claimed.

BSRF President Shamol Sarkar and General Secretary Siddiqur Rahman also spoke at the programme.

House twice the size

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Woodhouse is regarded as one of Europe's grandest homes.

The 606ft wide South Yorkshire mansion, has a floor space of 124,000sq/ft and an estimated 350 rooms -- but is so big no-one knows the exact number.

In comparison, the average new build in England and Wales has around 818sq/ft, making the giant house 150 times larger.

On the principal floor is a 60-foot by 60-foot marble saloon, which was once dubbed the finest Georgian room in England.

Some suspect it was former owner William Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, the 4th Earl Fitzwilliam, who was the inspiration for the charming character Mr Darcy in Jane Austen's landmark novel Pride and Prejudice.

The 18th Century super-mansion has now been put up for sale with Savills for £8million -- remarkably, the same as a one-bedroom flat in One Hyde Park.

But whoever buys Wentworth Woodhouse will have to spend millions restoring a large part of it which currently sits uninhabitable.

The home, five miles north of Rotherham, was bought in 1999 by architect Clifford Newbold, who spent years working on the property.

age of 88 and the property officially goes on sale this week.

It sits in 82 acres of gardens, parkland and woodland surrounded by the greater park and farmland of the Fitzwilliam Estate -- what was once one of the finest parklands of its age.

Crispin Holborow, director of Savills' Country department, described Wentworth Woodhouse as "a once in a generation sale".

He said: "Homes with this level of history and grandeur don't come up for sale. I've not sold a bigger house and I am not sure there is one. You can't look in every room, but once you have seen a few rooms you have seen enough."

"If many people were to draw their dream house, they would draw Wentworth Woodhouse -- it is the impossible dream home."

"I think it would suit someone like the family who are selling it. They will need to be passionate about architecture, love classic houses and enjoy buying, restoring, and living in a treasure house of England."

"The work the owners have put into Wentworth Woodhouse has been painstaking. Everything has been done in good taste, but it is now time for someone else to take it on."

"Unsurprisingly, there has been a lot of interest and viewings begin this weekend."