



Environment and Forest Minister Anwar Hossain Manju with former US vice-president Al Gore at the climate change summit in Paris yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Most mayoral candidates

FROM PAGE 1
Of them, over 40 mayor aspirants are businessmen and the rest 20 are farmers, fishermen, teachers and lawyers. At least four hopefuls did not mention any profession.

The last Dhaka south and north city corporation elections held in April also witnessed a dominance of businessmen. Around 67.2 percent councillor aspirants in Dhaka north and 71.28 percent in Dhaka south were businessmen, according to a report of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Sujan), an organisation working on good governance.

The Daily Star also found that some BNP-blessed mayor candidates have criminal cases against them. However, some AL-backed hopefuls were also accused in criminal cases but they had either been acquitted or the cases had been withdrawn.

For instance, BNP-endorsed candidate Abdur Razzak Ashish, a mayor hopeful in Sherpur municipality, is accused in over a dozen cases.

BNP's AK Mostafa Salauzzaman Opel in Lalmonirhat's Patgram munic-

ipality is facing seven cases and his party mate SM Nazrul Islam in Barguna municipality is facing four.

Mayor aspirant from BNP, Firoz Ahmed, in Mymensingh's Ishwarganj municipality is facing two criminal cases and Shahidul Islam in Mymensingh's Muktagachha municipality facing six.

The situation is different in the case of AL's candidates. AL's Habibur Rahman in Mymensingh's Ishwarganj municipality was accused in 10 cases. Some of the cases were withdrawn and he was acquitted in others.

Shamsul Haque, an AL-backed candidate in Matiranga municipality of Khagrachhari, faced seven cases. But he has been acquitted in all.

It was also found that many mayor hopefuls provided information carelessly in their affidavits, which resulted in inconsistencies.

Mohidul Islam, a BNP-blessed candidate in Darshana municipality, claimed that he had 46 bighas of land. But according to his affidavit, he earns only Tk 1 lakh annually.

Abu Taher Fazle Rabbi, an AL-

nominated candidate in Sonargoan municipality in Narayanganj, claimed that he is a lawyer but he did not mention how much he earns practicing law.

Rafiquddin Bhuiyan, an AL-blessed candidate in Mymensingh's Nandail municipality, mentioned that he owns 35 tolas of gold, which he astonishingly claimed to be worth just Tk 25,000.

Talking to The Daily Star, former Election Commissioner M Sakhawat Hussain said the returning officers should scrutinise the affidavits more carefully.

Elections to 234 municipalities will be held on December 30, marking the start of the country's first local government polls on party lines.

CLIMATE CHANGE EU to provide Tk 68cr for most vulnerable countries

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Union will provide a grant of €8 million, equivalent to Tk 68 crore, to build resilience to climate change and related disasters in the most vulnerable communities of Bangladesh.

The EU has decided to support resilience building through the Global Climate Change Alliance + Flagship Initiative (GCCA+), which aims to strengthen dialogue and cooperation among the developing countries vulnerable to climate change.

Starting early 2016, a new four-year project will be implemented by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), said a press release.

The project titled "Support for Enhancing Communities' Resilience to Climate Change and Related Disasters" will seek to strengthen the capacities of households, communities and local authorities to establish inclusive local planning and community-based adaptation actions; and enrich the national policy dialogue by facilitating sharing of information and best practices from the most vulnerable communities.

The project is in line with national policies and priorities.

The community-based adaptation actions will be financed through grants to local government, and grants to local civil society organisations. Both will be allocated against performance criteria, the press release added.

The Action will directly benefit 200,000 households in the hard-to-reach areas of Bangladesh.

"The poorest and marginalized people of vulnerable areas of Bangladesh suffer the most from the effect of climate change," said EU Ambassador Pierre Mayaudon.

He said the EU acknowledged the efforts of all stakeholders in Bangladesh to adapt to climate change and reduce the impact of disasters.

Bangladesh is rapidly growing and just became a lower middle income country and therefore timely investment in low-carbon and climate resilient development can generate jobs and growth, Mayaudon said.

He assured that the EU will continue supporting these efforts through transfer of technical and financial assistance as part of a joint response on

Woes of women commuters

FROM PAGE 1
A baseline study on 800 women and girls and 400 men and boys shows 86 percent women face derogatory comments from bus drivers and conductors. In the 2014 survey done by ActionAid Bangladesh, 37 percent respondents said the number of women-only buses in the city was inadequate.

The study found that about 13 percent women keep from public transports to avoid sexual harassment.

The government introduced the women-only bus service in 1997 in the capital. Initially, only two buses plied Mohakhali-Tongi route for working women, BRTC sources said.

As of October 2015, there were 16 such single- and double-decker buses. They ply just 12 of the capital's 88 routes, and have a little over 2,000

seats in total. Their service is limited as well. They run twice a day -- between 6:30 and 8:30 in the morning and 5:00 and 6:30 in the evening.

So, the service is of no use to Nusrat Impa. A journalist, she does not have a fixed office timing. As a result, she cannot take these buses although she would prefer it.

Supreme Court lawyer Shamsun Nahar Lovely also cannot enjoy this service when she returns home around 2:00pm.

The single-decker BRTC bus she takes in the morning from Mirpur-14 picks up working women along Mirpur-10, Farmgate, Press Club, Gulistan and Motijheel route. The bus is then parked near Notre Dame College and remains inoperative till evening, when it returns to Mirpur,

picking up women along the way.

Throughout the day, the drivers and helpers (who are women) sit idle.

Despite the seemingly high demand for the service, BRTC Chairman Mizanur Rahman said the female-only buses don't even get filled and are therefore not profitable.

He said they got two to three female passengers at best at every stop. "Most women travel with their male friends, husbands or sons."

The BRTC boss cited the example of the female-only bus service from Ikuria to Abdullahpur. The service on the 7km road on Mawa route opened after the government banned autorickshaws on the highway earlier this year.

"Sometimes, it runs with a single female passenger. On the down trip,

we get five to ten female passengers. But still we are running the service," Mizanur said.

Khandaker Enayetullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity, supported Mizanur.

Transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque said the solution lay in an "organised mass transport system," not in introducing more women-only buses or in reserving more seats for women.

"At present, small companies operate their buses in the city, and the drivers and conductors are not salaried employees. Their earnings depend on the number of passengers they take.

"To drivers and conductors, female passengers are slow to get on the bus and require more room. So, they have negative attitudes towards female passengers," said Prof

Shamsul, who teaches civil engineering at Buat.

In developed countries with organised public transport system, governments hire big companies who run wide and multi-door buses on designated routes.

"This way, women do not have to face harassment while boarding and disembarking the vehicle. Also, there is no crowd inside the bus because drivers there are salaried employees and do not have any incentive for carrying extra passengers," he said.

The government needs to take a long-term initiative to introduce this system and encourage large corporate houses to invest in the sector. This will not only solve the problems faced by female commuters but also ease traffic jam.

Two major parties ignore women

FROM PAGE 1
Although 2,661 women filed nominations to vie for 733 reserved posts of councillors, only around 20 did so for mayoral posts. According to Election Commission statistics.

The AL's nominees for mayoral posts are Jakia Khatun in Panchagarh, Thamina Akhtar in Thakurgaon, Nargis Khatun in Charchat of Rajshahi, Rokhana Mortaja Lily in Gopalpur of Natore, Asanur Biswas in Belkuchi of Sirajganj and Hasina Gazi in Tarabo of Narsingdi.

BNP nominated Shahnaj Akhter for mayor in Laksam Municipality of Comilla. She is the wife of municipality BNP President Humayun Kabir Parvez who has been missing for nearly one year.

A total of 20 political parties registered with the EC are contesting the municipality polls. Of them, seven small parties fielded one mayor candidate each, but none of them were women.

The seven parties are Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Revolutionary Workers Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, Tarikat Federation, Bangladesh Nationalist Front, Pragatishil Gonotantrik Dal and Bangladesh National Awami Party (Bangladesh-NAP).

Following reforms in the electoral

law in 2008, all registered political parties included a provision in their charters stating that they would have 33 percent women leaders in all their party committees by 2020. The move was aimed at empowering women politically.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL presidium member Nooh-ul-Alam Lenin said, "During the selection process, we assessed popularity and competence of our mayor hopefuls as ensuring victory for the party candidates is our main target. Therefore, we didn't consider the gender issue."

AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmood Chowdhury claimed that they didn't discriminate between men and women while picking candidates. "We've nominated our party men who have the best chances of winning."

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said women leaders were not interested in contesting the polls as the country's political situation is "different" now.

"Given the present political situation, the party's women leaders didn't dare to take part in the mayoral polls," he added.

General secretaries of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Workers Party Sharif Nurul Ambia and Fazle Hossain Badsha said they did not pick

enough women for mayoral posts as they received poor response from them.

Educationalist Rasheda K Chowdhury said most of the political parties talk about women empowerment, but they act in contrary to what they say.

"It's surprising that even the left-leaning parties, who are more vocal in women empowerment, didn't pick a single woman for mayor," added the former adviser to a caretaker government.

"It's true that we won't be able to change the present situation overnight due to our socio-economic condition. But the political leaders are yet to start the process to bring a change," she observed.

Local government expert Tofail Ahmed said women didn't emerge as public leaders in many areas.

"Females don't want to come out from the comfort zone of contesting for the posts of reserved councillors," he added.

Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), said it was unfortunate that political parties did not properly evaluate women while picking their mayor candidates, although they talk a lot about women empowerment.

"I don't believe that there is a

shortage of competent and qualified women in political parties to run for mayor," she observed.

Meanwhile, women's rights organisations and many candidates yesterday criticised the EC's allocation of "humiliating" electoral symbols to women councilor candidates.

The symbols include gas stove, bangle, chocolate, doll, frock, scissors, handbag, bee, grape and harmonium.

Blasting the EC's decision, Rights body ASK in a statement said women were not born to do the household chores.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad's Gaibandha unit submitted a memorandum to the district administration, asking it to change the symbols.

This was not the first time that the EC allocated such symbols for women candidates. These symbols were also used in the city corporation polls in Dhaka and Chittagong in April.

Amid criticism, the EC at the time said it would consider the issue next time. But it failed to meet its commitment, ASK said in the statement.

It hoped that the EC and the government would take measures to allocate new symbols to women candidates.

However, defending the EC's deci-

sion, EC Commissioner M Shah Nawaz said the symbols would only introduce the candidates to the voters.

The commission had to change electoral rules to comply with the new law on the municipality polls. "We didn't have enough time to discuss allocation of symbols... those symbols were allocated hurriedly," he told reporters at the EC Secretariat.

The EC will be more careful about choosing symbols in future, he added.

SCRUTINY COMPLETED
EC officials said they cancelled nominations of 154 mayor aspirants out of 1,223 on Saturday and Sunday.

Besides, nominations of 572 general councillor aspirants out 9,798 and 156 reserved women councillors out of 2,668 were declared illegal.

'STOP PROJECT APPROVAL'
The EC yesterday sent letters to the planning ministry asking it not to approve any development projects for the municipalities going to polls.

If any development projects were approved now, it might influence the polls, EC Deputy Secretary Shamsul Alam told this newspaper last night.

The commission on December 1 sent similar letters to the ministries of disaster management and relief, food, LGRD, and women and children affairs.

Cables of genocide

FROM PAGE 1
army movement. President Yahya Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and other West Pakistani leaders have left Dhaka, calling off a dialogue with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on power transfer.

Alarmed, the guests wanted to get away quickly but they had to stay back as they found bodies strewn on the streets.

For the rest of the night, they stayed up and watched the horror that was being let loose on Dhaka.

Blood, in his book "The cruel birth of Bangladesh" describes the night: "Together with our house guests, we spent a good part of the night of March 25-26 on the flat roof of the house, watching with horror the constant flash of tracer bullets across the dark sky and listening to the more ominous clatter of machine gun fire and the heavy clump of tank guns. We were able to establish that there was particularly heavy firing in the vicinity of the police lines and the East Pakistan Rifles barracks. We could see many fires burning, some of them in old Dhaka. Our head bearer told us that one particularly large fire was burning in poor bazar area where many of his family lived."

In the following weeks, Blood started sending cables to the State Department about the genocide that was being perpetrated by the Pakistan

army in Bangladesh.

His strongest cable on the massacre in Dhaka was titled "Selective Genocide" in which he wrote: "Here in Dhaka we are mute and horrified witnesses to a reign of terror by the Pak military."

His telegrams were met with silence in the beginning and later with resentment in the State Department mainly because the US was Pakistan's strong ally as a member of Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and also because US was trying to open a diplomatic channel with China with the mediation of Pakistan.

Therefore, the State Department wanted limited distribution of the genocide telegram to a few selected persons on a need-to-know basis. However the telegram was leaked and the US media took it up to raise voices against the genocide being perpetrated in Bangladesh.

Blood's descriptions of the massacres were vivid and exact. He later compiled these telegrams and wrote his book. Although he was scolded for his reports, the US embassy in Dhaka later renamed its library as Archer Blood Library in honour of this brave soul who exposed to the world what the Pakistan army did in 1971.

In the first situation report on March 27, Blood wrote: "Indian Deputy High Commissioner told us that about 10,000 Hindus are residing

in Tanti Bazar and Sankhari Bazar Mohallas in Old Dhaka. He said this area has been surrounded by the military and houses have been burnt and people butchered. Large number of casualties feared. Residents fleeing from this area were also not spared."

People of these two neighbourhoods in Old Dhaka still cringe at the nightmare of March 25.

On the same day, US embassy Public Affairs Officer Brian Bell toured the city with a Bangali journalist and gave the following description that Blood cabled to the State Department: "Police barracks at Rajarbagh police camp levelled, apparently by heavy guns. Army occupying camp. Told was two hour battle Thursday night between Army and police with heavy casualties on police side.

"Iqbal Hall at Dhaka University, said be headquarters Awami League student activities and rumored recent days be stocked with firearms and ammo, badly damaged, appeared by mortar fire, dead body lies 10 feet from entrance. Inside burned in places.

Large area on outskirts Old Dhaka gutted. Area contained markets, shops, dwellings, railroad workers' dormitory. Latter building badly damaged: Almost nothing left of others which were flimsy structures. Estimate area gutted about size of two dozen US city blocks."

Just a day later, he reported "Appar-

ently large scale looting, pillaging and murder on part of non-Bengali people against Hindus and Bengalis taking place and Army standing by watching. Last night Hindu village at Dhaka Club golf course burnt. Twelve bodies seen by American warden. Dhaka rife with similar atrocity story."

Blood started collecting stories of atrocities from all sources. American priests at various churches worked as invaluable source of information for him, which he started sending to the State Department in a frantic effort to stir up American conscience so that something could be done to stop the killings but to no effect.

In another telegram he made it clear what the fire he saw on March 25 night was all about: "American priests in Old Dhaka tell us that the Army had been exclusively responsible for all fires in that section on March 25 and 26. The Army's technique was to set houses afire and then gun down people as they fled their homes."

"A well connected Bengali whom we have always considered reliable tells us that he was an eye-witness to the wiping out of family with no Awami League or government connections. He also claims that the Army entered the houses of three or four senior Bengali civil servants of the Government of East Pakistan and killed all the inhabitants."

In his later cables Blood also highlighted the criminality of the Pakistan army by describing how it had aided and abetted looting.

In one cable he wrote: "Pakistani soldiers are reportedly standing by while non-Bengalis (Bihairs) loot Bengali dwellings."

Following the crackdown, a major target of which was the Rajarbagh police line where the Bangali policemen put up a brave resistance to the marauding Pakistan army, Blood saw truckloads of prisoners being taken to the East Pakistan Rifles headquarters at Peelkhana.

On April he cabled: "...US citizens eyewitness to numerous incidents of cold blooded murder of unarmed Bengalis by Pak military.... one of our officers heard steady firing of approximately one shot per ten second for a thirty minute period (at Peelkhana). Our inference was that captured Bengali members of the East Pakistan Rifles were being executed."

Later, he tried his best to calculate how many were butchered that night in Dhaka during the Operation Searchlight.

"The casualty toll at the University was particularly difficult to ascertain, with estimate ranging from several hundred to over one thousand. What was generally believed that the Army plan of attack at the University was to take no prisoners and to kill all students present in the dorms. We saw

traces of two mass graves on the campus, one near Iqbal Hall, the other near Rokeya Hall," he wrote to Washington.

Blood actually sent numerous such telegrams deliberately putting them on high visibility so that the world gets to know about this massacre. But he had to pay for his action. BBC, VOA and All India Radio picked his telegrams and reported on the March 25 massacre citing the American Consul General as the source of information.

This led to a huge diplomatic crisis between Pakistan and the US and the Pakistan foreign ministry called US Ambassador Farland and expressed its deep dissatisfaction over the mentioning of US Consul General as the source of the news.

Actually his cables also came to the notice of US president Richard Nixon. Journalist Gary J bass in his book "The Blood Telegram" wrote about a meeting between Nixon and US secretary of state Henry Kissinger.

He wrote: "Kissinger told Nixon, 'Dacca consulate is in open rebellion.'" Finally in April Blood was asked to request home leave and transfer to State Department.

"In other words, I was being dismissed from my post in Dhacca," Blood writes. "...It came as no surprise after the dissent cable."

However, nine months later Blood was proven correct in exposing the