



Voters standing in long queues at Cheuakhali Dakhil Madrasa polling station in Charzabbar union of Noakhali yesterday. A man, top right, stamping ballot papers at Galua High School polling centre in Rajpur of Jhalakathi while youths stand guard. Motorbikes of supporters of an independent chairman candidate are burnt and thrown into a pond during an attack made by supporters of an Awami League rebel in Haridhali of Paikgachha in Khulna.



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH/STAR

BB FUND HEIST RCBC fires Deguito, deputy

THE INQUIRER, Manila

Yuchengco-led Rizal Commercial Banking Corp fired its Jupiter branch manager Maia Santos-Deguito and her deputy Angela Torres today, citing violations of bank policies and procedures as well as falsification of commercial documents.

"Other branch and bank officials are expected to be meted out various sanctions ranging from termination to suspension in the coming days when the internal investigation is expected to be completed," RCBC said in a statement on Tuesday.

The termination was effective Tuesday, March 22.

The bank claimed that Deguito and Torres had breached the rules and facilitated the alleged laundering of \$81 million of remittance now being investigated by the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee and other government agencies like the Anti-Money Laundering Council.

"Appropriate charges in court will be filed by the bank against Deguito and Torres by next week," the bank said.

10 killed in UP violence

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and one each in Jhalakathi, Netrakona and Sirajganj in polls-related violence. Most of the dead were ruling party supporters, our correspondents reported citing locals.

Yesterday, 712 UPs went to the polls, held on the party lines for the first time. The Election Commission (EC) initially had planned to conduct elections to 730 UPs yesterday but it had to postpone the polls in 18 places due to legal complications.

There had been concern over violence in the polls as deadly clashes erupted in the run-up to the elections in many places over the last several days. The BNP, Jatiya Party, Workers Party of Bangladesh and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal had voiced concerns over the fairness of the elections.

Overcoming all fears, a huge number of voters turned up at the polling stations to exercise their franchise in the polls, considered the most competitive of all elections. The turnout of women voters, in particular, was noteworthy.

Despite massive violence and irregularities, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed said the elections were held in a free, fair and peaceful manner except for some "isolated incidents of irregularities".

The AL spoke along the same line. The BNP, however, described the polls as "a farcical election under a partisan Election Commission".

AL-backed chairman candidates seemed all set to clinch a landslide victory in the polls. As of 12:30am, this newspaper got the results of 324 UPs. The ruling party candidates won 262 chairman posts while BNP secured 21 and Jatiya Party two. Independent contenders and candidates backed by other parties won the rest 39 chairman

posts. Elections to 643 UPs are slated for March 31 in the second phase and 681 UPs on April 23 in the third phase. Around 2,200 unions will go to polls in three more phases till June.

Chairman aspirants are contesting the elections with their party symbols, while member hopefuls are taking part in the polls without official endorsement from any party.

VIOLENCE, IRREGULARITIES
Around 8:30pm in Mathbaria, the presiding officer of the Safa Degree College centre under Dhanisafa UP declared void 800 ballots, all of which reportedly had stamps on the AL's 'boat' symbol, saying the ballots did not have his signature on them, according to locals.

Hearing the news, several hundred AL activists armed with locally made weapons from the nearby areas besieged the centre, they said.

Executive Magistrate Kazi Ziaul Baset said a group of 600-700 people waylaid the presiding officer around 8:30pm when he under the escort of police and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members was going to the office of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer from the centre with election result sheets, reports UNB.

"The mob tried to swoop on the presiding officer and snatch the result sheets," he said.

At one stage they attacked the presiding officer as he tried to prevent them, the magistrate added.

Later, the magistrate ordered the law enforcers to fire shots in order to bring the situation under control. Police and BGB members then fired 29 shots, Baset added.

Walid Hossain, superintendent of Pirojpur district police, said, "The people on whom the BGB opened fire were obstructing [polling officials]

from carrying ballot boxes [to the UNO office]. They also attacked the officials with sharp weapons."

Three people -- Sohel, 25, Shahdat, 30 and Quamrul, 25 -- were killed on the spot and two others -- Solaiman, 26 and Billal, 16 -- died on the way to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital, Officer-in-Charge Khandakar Mustafizur Rahman of Mathbaria Police Station said at 1:25am today.

A local journalist said Sohel and Shahdat were nephews of AL-backed chairman candidate Harunur Rashid.

Four others with bullet wounds were undergoing treatment at a local hospital, according to police.

In Cox's Bazar, two people were killed when police fired shots to disperse the supporters, loyal to two UP member candidates, as they swooped on election officials to snatch the ballot boxes at Teknaf upazila after the vote counting.

The deceased were identified as Abdul Gafur, 36, and Mohammad Shafiq, 22, said Masud Munshi, sub-inspector of Bahachara Police Investigation Centre of Teknaf Police Station.

Police, however, declined to make any comment on the incident.

According to witnesses, the polling officials came under attack in Mondartal area around 7:30pm on their way to the Teknaf upazila headquarters after counting the votes. This prompted the policemen to open fire on the attackers.

In Netrakona, an AL activist was shot dead in a clash between the supporters of two chairman candidates during vote-counting at Aaura Government Primary School centre in Khaliajuri Sadar UP.

The dead was Golam Abu Kawser, brother of AL-backed chairman candi-

date Golam Abu Ishak, said Additional Superintendent Khan Mohammad Abu Naser of Netrakona police.

Kawser was killed in a clash with the supporters of his brother's rival candidate Josef, the police official said.

However, Ariful Islam Falak, another brother of the deceased, claimed Kawser was killed in police firing.

In Jhalakathi, a man was beaten to death and five others were injured during a clash between two member aspirants at Kalianda Government Primary School centre in Nabagram UP.

The deceased was identified as Abul Kashem Sikder, 55, brother of Chunnu Shikdar, one of the member aspirants.

At Kaparkathi Government Primary School centre in the same union, a voter was shot after Ansar personnel on duty fired bullets to contain a clash between supporters of two chairman aspirants.

Incidents of violence were reported in almost half of the 279 voting centres under 31 UPs of the district. At least 35 people were injured in the incidents.

The BNP-endorsed chairman candidates in all the UPs of Jhalakathi except in one boycotted the polls, alleging vote rigging by the ruling party men.

Our Jhalakathi correspondent visited 15 polling stations and found ruling party men had captured all the centres. Incidents of clashes took place at all the 15 centres and police opened fire in most cases. Polling at eight centres was temporarily suspended following the incidents.

The correspondent came under attack by the supporters of AL candidate Awar Hossain Mujibor Mridha. They snatched his camera and broke it when he was taking photographs of

them stuffing ballot boxes at Boro Kaibottokhali Government Primary School centre in Rajapur upazila.

In Sirajganj, a woman died during a clash between supporters of two member candidates outside the Jayanpur Government Primary School polling centre under Dhangara UP in Raiganj upazila after the vote counting ended at 9:00pm.

The victim was identified as Nuanai Begum, 60.

At least 10 people were injured in a gunfight between supporters of two chairman candidates during the counting of votes at Teghoria polling centre in Paradah union under Mirpur upazila of Kushtia upazila.

In Noakhali, an assistant presiding officer and a polling officer were injured after supporters of two rival chairman candidates traded gunshots at a polling centre in Char King UP under Hatiya upazila over capturing the polling station around 9:00am. They were taken to the upazila health complex, said police.

In Bhola, at least 200 people, including police and women, were injured in clashes at different polling stations in seven upazilas, local sources said.

Nine candidates backed by the BNP and an AL rebel aspirant boycotted the elections there, alleging "massive" vote rigging and ballot-box stuffing.

Thirty-six UPs went to elections yesterday in the district and polls to seven of them were suspended.

"Incidents of violence took place in 40 polling centres in the district," said Moniruzzaman, superintendent of Bhola police.

Besides, violence and electoral irregularities were reported in many UPs of Satkhira, Laxmipur, Barguna, Comilla, Sherpur, Barisal, Munshiganj and Jhenidah districts.

AL candidate quits race

STAR REPORT

A ruling Awami League union parishad chairman candidate in Barisal's Mehendiganj upazila yesterday boycotted the election, bringing allegations against the AL rebel candidate of capturing polling stations, stuffing ballots and driving away his agents.

Abdul Kader, the AL-nominated candidate in Dori Charkhajuria union, alleged that the AL rebel aspirant, Mostafa Bari, with the blessing of local AL MP Pankaj Devnath occupied most of the polling centres and drove away his polling agents from there in the first hour of voting, reports our Barisal correspondent.

Kader told The Daily Star that he filed a complaint with the Election Commission around 9:30am, but the EC did not pay any heed.

Around 10:00am, the AL candidate announced his boycott of the polls.

When asked, Pankaj denied the allegation of interfering.

"The Awami League candidate [Kader] may have his own problem for which he has boycotted the election. I am not involved in the politics of the union parishad, which is in a remote char area."

The rebel candidate, Mostafa Bari, couldn't be contacted for comment.

Tigers expect

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against Australia at the same venue on Monday, when they lost by three wickets.

According to Bangladesh vice-captain Shakib Al Hasan, who attended the pre-match briefing yesterday afternoon, if they can correct those small mistakes they stand a chance to upset the Indian juggernaut.

A pragmatic Shakib said that if Bangladesh are to do something better in their next two games, they need to score heavily in the first six Powerplay overs. With Soumya Sarkar so far failed to express themselves in the first six overs, scoring only 32 in the last game when this kind of wicket generally produces between 45 and 50 at least.

This is an area where Bangladesh desperately need to improve with the return of Tamim, who has hit the first ton of the tournament in the qualifiers against Oman. Besides, those who are contributing in the team should contribute a bit more so that they can put up a decent total for their bowlers to defend on a wicket where, according to experts, 170 is a par score.

The bowling may have suffered in the absence of Taskin, but with the return of Mustafizur Bangladesh have got something that other teams in the competition can only envy. A few have criticised Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza for bowling just one over against England. They were also critical of his pace or the lack of it and his handling of the bowlers. But they are definitely short-sighted and simply forgot that without his four-over spell against the Netherlands Bangladesh perhaps would not have made it into the tournament proper.

He may bat at number eight but if anybody took notice, his two crucial fours took Bangladesh to the Asia Cup final only a couple of weeks ago, and there were his small yet crucial knocks in the qualifiers. Let the detractors say whatever they feel like, if Bangladesh are to do something special today Mashrafe and his motto will again hold the key: "play hard and aggressive cricket and contribute, small or big for the cause of the team because T20 is all about those contributions."

Responses from NY banks were sluggish

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The central bank is still pursuing the matter through the bank's anti-fraud department, said the document.

Wells Fargo & Co. responded on the same day it received the SWIFT message from the BB, informing that the beneficiary bank of the two payments instructions that went through was Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC) of Manila.

A total of \$81 million was channelled through the three banks -- \$26 million through Wells Fargo, \$25 million through Citibank and \$30 million through the Bank of New York Mellon. The funds finally ended up at

an individual account through RCBC.

"The fact of the matter is that these three banks' anti-money laundering system failed grossly in this instance," said a senior BB official seeking anonymity.

The BB official said the global anti-money laundering body, the Financial Action Task Force, stipulates every bank has a responsibility towards every transaction that goes through it.

"As per the rules, the banks involved in the heist should have been more careful. They should have asked why millions of dollars are being sent to a personal account," he added.

In contrast, the BB received prompt

cooperation from the Pan Asia Banking Corporation of Sri Lanka, as a result of which the full \$20 million that was remitted could be remitted.

Earlier on March 8, Finance Minister AMA Muhiut said the BB would file case against the New York Fed as it was responsible for the stolen funds.

The BB document said the central bank was reviewing multiple processes to "prepare grounds to lay legitimate claim for loss of funds with the FRB New York".

Mirza Abdullah Baqui, special superintendent of police, yesterday said the Criminal Investigation Department will investigate whether

the New York Fed followed the correct due diligence procedure.

"We will take cooperation from the FBI," he told The Daily Star.

After receiving permission from the courts and the government, a team of the CID will travel to the US to speak with the New York Fed, he added.

In a report published on the Bloomberg yesterday, New York Fed spokeswoman Andrea Priest said they were not commenting beyond a statement earlier this month.

On March 8, Priest said the instructions to make the payments from the account of BB followed standard protocols and were authenticated by

the SWIFT message system used by financial institutions.

Over at the Philippines, RCBC yesterday fired the manager and deputy manager of the branch through which the illicit transactions took place, citing violations of bank policies and procedures as well as falsification of commercial documents, reported the Inquirer.

RCBC claimed the two officials had breached rules and facilitated the alleged laundering of \$81 million.

A money laundering complaint was also filed at the Philippines' Department of Justice against two more people allegedly involved in the heist, according to Bloomberg.

It was total panic, blood everywhere

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Alphonse Lyoura, who still had blood on his hands following the explosion, told AFP.

He said there was another explosion about two minutes later.

"I helped at least six or seven wounded people. We took out some bodies that were not moving. It was total panic everywhere," Lyoura said.

"I saw people lying on the ground covered in blood who were not moving. At least six or seven people's legs were totally crushed. A lot of people lost limbs. One man had lost both legs and there was a policeman with a totally mangled leg."

Emergency services said at least 11 people were killed in the blast and many others wounded.

The city was already on high alert after the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, a key suspect in the Paris terror attacks in November that were claimed by the

Islamic State group.

'ATERRIBLEMESS'

Jean-Pierre Lebeau, a French passenger who had just arrived from Geneva, told AFP: "We heard the explosion and felt the blast."

He said he had seen many wounded and "blood in the elevator."

"First we were kept together by the police, then they gave us the order to evacuate," he said, recounting the shock on people's faces and a smell seemingly of gunpowder at the scene.

Michel Mpoy, 65, who was at the airport to pick up a friend coming from Kinshasa, said it was "a total mess -- it was terrible."

An employee for the Swissport airport management company described how she looked after a child following the blasts.

"I heard the first explosion and I took a child in my arms and hid him under the counter. Then I gave him to a police-

man," the employee said without giving her name.

"There were injured people lying everywhere and some weren't moving."

At the airport, on the northwest outskirts of the city and not far from Nato headquarters, Jean-Pierre Herman said he was relieved to have got out safely.

Herman embraced his wife Tankrat Pau Tian, who he had just gone to collect from the airport after her flight from Thailand.

"My wife just arrived," Herman said. "I said 'hello,' we took the elevator and in the elevator we heard the first bomb."

"The second exploded just when we got off. We ran away to an emergency exit. I think we are very lucky."

Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, a British journalist living in Brussels, told AFP there had been "total confusion" at the airport, where she was having breakfast before a flight.

"Suddenly staff rushed in and said we

have to leave," she said. "They rushed out and into the main terminal A departures building. Nobody knew what was going on."

"It was total confusion, people were just standing around wondering what was happening."

Another blast about half an hour after those at the airport hit the Brussels metro between the Maalbeek and Schuman stations in the European Union quarter of Brussels, which is also home to major international organisations and companies.

Around 10 people were killed, emergency services said.

SIRENSERVING
AFP journalist Lachlan Carmichael was on the metro and described how his train was halted in the tunnel and then evacuated as it began to fill up with smoke.

A police officer told him: "There are wounded, there are dead, I do not know

how many."

The officer was escorting a woman through a police cordon being put up around the Maalbeek station, with all public transport being closed down.

Another AFP journalist, Cedric Simon, said the situation around the Maalbeek metro station was totally confused, with a cloud of smoke and dust settling over the road outside.

Simon said there were about 15 people lying on the roadside, many with bloodied faces and being treated by medical staff as all Brussels hospitals were put on standby to deal with casualties.

The streets were filled with police cars and emergency vehicles, sirens wailing and blue lights flashing.

Brussels has been on high alert since the attacks in Paris in January, with heavily armed police and then troops put on the streets.

Troops were clearly very watchful as they patrolled outside EU and other