



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's motorcade passing the Saat Rasta-Holy Family Hospital section of the Moghbazar-Mouchak Flyover after she inaugurated it yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

PM for strong road network

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by the private sector, causing sufferings to people, she observed.

She recalled the initiative of the previous BNP-Jamaat government to abolish the BRTC bus service following the suggestion of a donor agency. "But returning to power, we've taken various measures to strengthen the BRTC.

"If we leave the sector to private owners, they'll hike fares as per their wish and people will suffer. That's why we've given importance to the railway sector and created a separate ministry for it," the PM told the function.

Hasina said the government has been working hard to improve the waterway communications through capital dredging and maintenance-dredging of the country's rivers.

The government has taken steps to

improve the communication network with the neighbouring countries as well, she added.

Referring to the nagging traffic congestion in the capital, she said her previous government, after assuming office in 1996, had taken up various projects to ease traffic jams, but unfortunately those were not continued by the successive government.

Shyama Prosad Adhikari, chief engineer of Local Government Engineering Department, made a presentation on the project, which he said was implemented as part of the Strategic Transport Plan for Dhaka.

LGRD Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh Abdullah HM Al-Mutairi and LGRD Secretary Abdul Malek also spoke on the occasion.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Civil Aviation Minister Rashed Khan Menon, mayors of Dhaka north and south city corporations Anisul Haque and Sayeed Khokon were present.

Earlier, the premier opened the first part of the Moghbazar-Mouchak Flyover. She opened the 2.11 km part of the 8.7 km flyover to traffic through unveiling a plaque.

The flyover is being built in three parts -- from Holy Family Hospital to Tejgaon; Kakrail to Rampura; and Mouchak to Bangla Motor -- in an effort to ease traffic congestion in the city's northern and southern parts.

The project, which was scheduled to be completed by December last year, started in 2013 instead of the original schedule of 2011. The PM laid the inauguration stone of the project on February 16, 2013.

Indo-Bangladesh border to be sealed to keep off intruders

Says Indian home boss

PTI, Duliujan, Assam

Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh has said the NDA government will completely seal the Indo-Bangladesh border within a reasonable time-frame to stop illegal immigration from Bangladesh, even as he accused Congress of having failed to check intrusion.

Addressing a series of election rallies in Assam, he also took a dig at Congress Vice-President Rahul Gandhi for accusing the BJP of fomenting riots in Assam and said it was during the Congress rule that maximum number of riots took place, be it the Nellie killings in Assam in 1983 or the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984.

"The Congress-led governments ignored illegal immigration for years and they did not take any effective step against it. We need a state government in Assam which cooperates with us in curbing illegal immigration. Assam has only 263km of border with Bangladesh. It will be sealed with the active cooperation of the state government," he said.

"Intruders have been continuously entering India since the day Bangladesh was created. Intruders are coming to India through the Indo-Bangladesh border. What is the reason, why didn't you [Congress] stop them? Why didn't you completely seal the Indo-Bangladesh border?" he asked at an election rally in Duliujan.

"We just need some time and we will seal Indo-Bangladesh border completely so that no Bangladeshi intruder can come in," he said.

Fakhrul may never forget the day

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1:00pm.
But the BNP leader was released around 6:00pm after his lawyers obtained his bail on health grounds.

Earlier, Fakhrul surrendered to the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate's Court around 11:45am in line with the Supreme Court directives and sought bail in the two cases filed with Paltan Police Station.

The court rejected his bail prayer and sent him to jail.

At that time, the BNP was holding a press conference at its Nayapaltn office to announce the party chief's decision to appoint Fakhrul as new secretary general.

Party leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi made public the decision around noon.

Meanwhile, Fakhrul was taken to jail after the court denied him bail.

Around 3:00pm, his counsels moved to the same court, which had turned down his bail prayer, for reconsidering its order on the grounds of his sickness.

The court granted Fakhrul bail around three hours after he landed in jail.

The BNP leader came out of prison around 6:00pm. His wife Rahat Ara

Begum and senior party leaders received him at the jail gate.

Talking to reporters at the gate, the new BNP secretary general said he would perform his duty with honesty and sincerity.

He thanked BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for giving him the charge of secretary general.

Later in the evening, he met Khaleda and greeted her with a bouquet of flower at her Gulshan residence in the capital.

Fakhrul, who had served as BNP senior joint secretary general for two years from 2009, was made acting secretary general after the death of party secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain in May 2011.

Strong opposition from a section of party leaders, particularly Khaleda's elder son Tarique Rahman, appeared as an obstacle to his becoming secretary general, according to party insiders.

They said Tarique, who had earlier questioned Fakhrul's sincerity, finally consented to the party's move to make Fakhrul secretary general.

Fakhrul faced a large number of cases over political violence since he

took charge as acting secretary general.

He landed in prison eight times and spent 323 days there since 2011. He now faces as many as 80 lawsuits.

On February 29, the SC extended his bail for 15 days in the two cases and asked him to surrender before a lower court within the period.

Earlier on November 24 last year, the High Court granted him bail for three months in the cases.

TWO MORE NEW LEADERS

Rizvi, who served as BNP joint secretary general, was made party's senior joint secretary general, while Mizanur Rahman Sinha was appointed treasurer.

The BNP chairperson would announce in time the names of new leaders for the party's standing and executive committees, Rizvi said at the press conference.

Yesterday's announcement from the BNP came 11 days after its central council.

At the council on March 19, party councillors empowered Khaleda to form its national standing committee, BNP's highest policy-making body, as well as the executive committee.

Arrest warrant issued

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investigation officer showed Khaleda and 27 others fugitives and appealed to the court to issue arrest warrants against them.

The court directed the officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station to submit reports by April 27 on execution of arrest warrants.

The judge asked Khaleda's lawyers to show respect to the court after the IO submitted charge sheet and said no such order would have been passed had she along with others appeared before it seeking bail in the case.

Of the accused, six people, including MK Anwar and Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, are now on bail, while four low-profile BNP activists are in jail.

Detectives on May 19 last year pressed charges against Khaleda and 37 others, mostly her party men, for allegedly carrying out subversive activities through a petrol bomb attack on the passenger bus on January 23 last year.

One person was killed and 30 others were injured in the attack, one of many bomb attacks that the country had witnessed during the BNP-led 20-party alliance's three months' blockade.

On May 6 last year, detectives submitted two charge sheets -- one

for murder and another for bomb blast -- against Khaleda and the other 37 people in another case filed over the same bomb attack.

A day after the January 23 attack, Jatrabari police filed two cases against 68 BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders. The cases were later transferred to the Detective Branch of police.

The other accused facing arrest warrants include BNP leaders Salauddin Ahmed (now in jail in India), Barkatullah Bulu, Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel, Mir Sarafat Ali Sapu, Azizul Bari Helal, Sultan Salauddin Tuku, Khaleda's special assistant Shimul Biswas and press secretary Maruf Kamal Khan.

Hours after issuance of the arrest warrant, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed said the arrest warrant had been issued to mentally weaken Khaleda Zia in a false case.

But it would not be possible to make her mentally weak, said the BNP leader.

Meanwhile, the High Court yesterday started hearing on a petition filed by Khaleda Zia seeking cancellation of the trial proceedings in Zia Charitable Trust corruption case against her.

The bench of Justice Md Ruhul Quddus and Justice Mahmudul Haque also fixed today for resuming the hearing.

On March 9, Khaleda submitted

the petition with the HC challenging the legality of the appointment of Harunur Rashid as the investigation officer, saying that the Anti-Corruption Commission has not published any gazette notice on his appointment.

Under Section 20(1) of the Anti Corruption Commission Act, 2004, the ACC has to issue a gazette notification on the appointment of an investigation officer (IO) of a graft case, she said in the petition.

AJ Mohammad Ali and Raghbir Rauf Chowdhury appeared for Khaleda while Khurshid Alam Khan argued for the ACC.

The ACC on August 8, 2011, filed the graft case with Tejgaon Police Station, accusing Khaleda and three others of abusing power in setting up the charity.

The three other accused are Harris Chowdhury, Khaleda's former political secretary; Ziaul Islam Munna, assistant private secretary (APS) of Harris; and Monirul Islam Khan, APS of former Dhaka City Corporation mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka.

All but Khaleda have been absconding.

ACC Deputy Director Harunur Rashid, IO of the case, has already given his deposition to the trial court in the case.

MOVE TO RAISE MPS' PAY

JS body wants PM, Speaker to step in

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday sought the intervention of the prime minister and the Speaker to increase lawmakers' remuneration and allowances to a "logical level", considering their status and expenditure.

In January, the parliamentary standing committee on law sent back a bill titled "Members of Parliament (Remuneration and Allowances) (Amendment) Bill-2016" to the cabinet division, saying lawmakers' remuneration and allowances should be hiked.

But the cabinet division has not yet made any move in this regard, a member of the committee who was present in yesterday's meeting at the Sangsad Bhaban, told The Daily Star.

Briefing reporters at the JS Media Centre, Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the committee, said they decided to talk to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury to realise the lawmakers' demand for increasing their remuneration and allowances.

Suranjit, also a ruling Awami League lawmaker, however, did not elaborate on the issue.

Meeting sources told The Daily Star that the committee assigned Chief Whip ASM Feroz to coordinate the process of solving the problem.

In yesterday's meeting, the JS body finalised four bills aimed at doubling the remuneration and privileges for president, prime minister, Speaker and deputy Speaker, ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers, Suranjit said.

In January, besides placing those four bills, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, who is in charge of the cabinet division on parliamentary affairs, placed the Members of Parliament (Remuneration and Allowances) (Amendment) Bill-2016 in parliament, proposing almost doubling the remuneration and privileges for the MPs.

Meeting sources said according to the proposed bill, an MP would get around Tk 1.20 lakh per month as remuneration and allowances.

Talking to this correspondent, Chief Whip Feroz said an MP usually spends over Tk 15,000 to 20,000 per day on various purposes, including hospitality and giving donations to people in their constituencies.

He said they are hopeful of resolving

Some relief

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become normal gradually, he added.

Bottlenecks at the two ends of the flyover and a three-hour-long demonstration blocking the Shahbagh intersection are also believed to have contributed to the traffic situation.

The Tk 280-crore carriageway would ease the "notorious" traffic situation in this part of the capital, hoped Abdul Baset, who lives at Moghbazar.

"The flyover would have been more effective had it been stretched beyond the intersection near Ramna Police Station," said biker Shahid Shams, who got stuck in the congestion after riding up the flyover from the Saat Rasta end.

The facility apparently has not much eased the peak-hour traffic, said Nurul Islam, a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver. "You can see tailbacks at Moghbazar intersection and on the flyover."

The elevated carriageway, also meant for an overpass at Moghbazar level-crossing, is part of the much-talked-about 8.7km Moghbazar-Mouchak Flyover.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council in January approved a cost increase of the flyover project by Tk 446.2 crore, raising the overall cost to Tk 1,218.9 crore. Tk 85 crore was allocated for a 450-metre extension of the flyover over Karwan Bazaar level-crossing.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the flyover by unveiling an inaugural plaque at the Saat Rasta intersection and later spoke as the chief guest at an inaugural ceremony at the Officers' Club. It was she who had inaugurated construction of the flyover in February 2013.

Tk 280 crore was spent to complete

the Saat Rasta-Holy Family Hospital stretch of the flyover, said officials at the programme.

It cost Tk 14 lakh for each meter of the flyover, they said.

Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain said the section of the flyover would decrease waste of work hours and fuel costs of transports by easing traffic.

Chief Engineer Shyama Prosad Adhikari of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), the implementing agency of the project, said the remaining two sections of the flyover would hopefully be completed by December, much ahead of the June 2017 deadline.

The length of the Banglamotor-Mouchak section is 2.25km and that of the Malibagh-Razarbagh-Shantinagar part is 4km, he said.

The flyover, which will have 50 ramps and earthquake resistant equipment, is being built on 311 single-piers along the central line of the existing roads, which would save consumption the road spaces, he said.

"The entire flyover would help vehicles pass over a total of eight intersections and three level-crossings.

"And it would help ease north-south traffic movement in the capital and traffic bottlenecks at the intersections," said Shyama Prosad.

The project is financed jointly by the Saudi Development Fund, the OPEC Fund for International Development and the Bangladesh government, he added.

The LGED embarked on the flyover scheme in early 2013 with a 2005 layout configuration, ignoring mandatory approval of the Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority.

Fear of violence high

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unopposed. The BNP has no candidate in 79 unions going to the polls in the second phase, according to Election Commission (EC) data.

In many of the unions, the BNP failed to field any candidate as its local leaders are afraid of attacks by AL men, said BNP insiders.

The AL in some districts, including Tangail, has expelled the rebel candidates for "going against party decisions". However, the expulsion has made them more desperate for win, report our district correspondents, quoting some of the rebels.

Many of them have brought allegations of nepotism and irregularities against district unit leaders in picking the party candidates.

In some UPs, BNP-nominated candidates fear that the AL leaders and activists would occupy polling stations, stuff ballot boxes, drive their agents out of polling centres and attack their supporters during the voting.

In the first phase of the polls on March 22, clashes between rival chairman candidates took place in some unions, killing around two dozen people and wounding several hundred others. Also, the voting was largely marred by electoral irregularities and ballot-stuffing.

At that time, violence was reported from the unions of the southern districts -- Satkhira, Barisal, Bhola, Pirojpur, Patuakhali, Cox's Bazar and Jhalakathi.

Several other unions in Cox's Bazar, Patuakhali, Bhola and Barisal go to the polls today.

Union Parishad	639
Chairman aspirants	2,662
Member aspirants	27,757
Elected chairman unopposed	31
Participating political parties	17
Voter	1.12 crores (around)
Polling stations	6,200 (around)

Out of 725 UPs that went to the polls last week, candidates nominated by the AL won in 540 unions, the BNP in 47 unions, and the Jatiya Party in four unions while independent candidates and other parties sealed victory in the remaining unions.

The ongoing UP polls have generated much heat in the political landscape as both the AL and its arch-rival BNP have stepped in the battle of ballots.

The parties have picked their grassroots leaders to compete for chairman posts with their party's electoral symbols -- "boat" and "sheaf of paddy".

In the first phase, the EC suspended voting at 65 polling stations for violence and irregularities. The next day, it asked presiding officers of the centres to file cases against the culprits.

On March 16, the EC asked all the superintendents of police (SPs) and the Returning Officers (ROs) to file

cases against those who violated the electoral rules.

EC officials yesterday could not say how many cases had been filed.

Several dozens of complaints of irregularities have been submitted to the commission, which still remain pending.

The EC has also issued directives to the police and the ROs to take action against anyone involved in committing violence and irregularities during the polls last week.

Apparently, the EC does not monitor the progress of their implementation, said EC officials, wishing not to be named.

At a press conference in the city on March 28, Shushashoner Jannoy Nagorik (Shujan) alleged that although the EC repeatedly said it took sufficient steps to ensure free and fair polls and curb violence, there was hardly anything visible.

Shujan is a civil society organisation that works for good governance in Bangladesh.

Talking to The Daily Star, Tofail Ahmed, an eminent local government expert, said the incidents of irregularities in the first phase reflected the deterioration of the electoral system in Bangladesh.

"It cannot be changed overnight...So, I think there will be no change in terms of irregularities in the second phase," he said.

Elections to around 621 UPs will be held on April 23 in the third phase and 743 UPs on May 7 in the fourth phase. Some 1,400 more UPs will go to the polls in two other phases till June.