

'Happy with my dignified life'

Razzak, councillor of Mirzapur municipality, runs a tea stall to earn a living

MIRZA SHAKIL, *Tangail*

Just after saying his Fazr prayers, Abdur Razzak, councillor of Mirzapur municipality of Tangail, opens his small tea stall. He serves tea to customers and at the same time talks to local people to solve their problems as part of his responsibility as a public representative.

A gentle, polite, helpful and honest man, the 38-year-old has set an example in the area and earned respect for his social work.

Razzak has been in the good books of local people since his student life. He passed Secondary School Certificate exams in 1996 from a local school but then stopped pursuing academic education after failing Higher Secondary Certificate examinations.

Razzak's father Nazim Uddin set up the tea stall near the upazila parishad gate at Baimhati in 1990. Eldest among five children of his parents, Razzak began helping his father run the shop from his early age when he used to juggle work and studies.

He was elected councillor of ward no-6 in Mirzapur in December 2015 as he defeated his competitors by a large margin.

Just after Razzak took charge as councillor, his father fell sick and became bedridden following a cardiac arrest. Since then he has been running the stall all alone, family members said.

Razzak keeps no employee at the stall. As tea brews in the kettle, he talks to people on local issues and disputes. He also keeps his seal and pad at the shop for official work.

Local people call him "mombor (member)" out of love and spend time at his tea stall.

"Razzak is really a nice man. He offers me as well as other elderly people in the area tea for free," said Abdur Hamid of Baimhati village.

Trader Profulla Sarkar, of the village, spoke highly of Razzak's down-to-earth attitude even after his being elected as councillor.

"I see no change in his behavior....He has already solved many

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Abdur Razzak, a councillor of Mirzapur municipality in Tangail, at his teashop in Baimhati area of the municipality yesterday. While making and serving tea throughout the day, he also deals with the problems of the people of his area.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Bus fare not fair

FROM PAGE 1

"When there are vacant seats, they [bus drivers] stop wherever they want, be it the middle of the road or at lesser known stops [not designated bus stop]," said Jalal Uddin, a salesman of a shop at Bashundhara City Shopping Complex.

"But when they sense that the passengers are in trouble and there is a shortage of transport, they not only charge more but also don't want to pick up passengers," said Jalal's colleague Mizan Ahmed.

Both of them were in a bus of Meshkat Paribahan that has been running as "sitting-service" since January 1.

Meshkat used to charge Tk 12 from Jatrabari to Farmgate. Now it makes passengers pay Tk 20.

"We didn't want this change. Our MD [managing director] forcibly turned it into a sitting service. You better talk to him," said one of the

owners of Meshkat wishing to be not named.

Talking to The Daily Star, its MD, Sharfuddin Dipu, said he has turned it into "sitting service" to bring discipline among his staff.

Asked why passengers were made to pay more so that he could discipline his staff, he avoided the question and accused passengers of dodging fares frequently.

Many buses charge Tk 10 from Gulistan to Farmgate but Himachal and Swadhin bus service providers charge Tk 25.

According to the BRTA site, the fare should not be more than Tk 8 for the distance in large buses.

ALTERCATIONS FREQUENT

Dhaka Metro's Regional Transport Committee, on September 16, 2015, published on the BRTA website a fare chart for bus service providers following discussions with bus owners.

According to it, the fare for bus

and minibus is Tk 1.7 and Tk 1.6 for per kilometre. The minimum fare was fixed at Tk 7 and Tk 5 respectively.

It is less than two kilometres from Gulshan-1 to Mohakhali but many bus operators charge Tk 10 from passengers during rush hours.

On February 14, Samiur Rahman was returning home from his work in Gulshan on Alif Paribahan. The conductor demanded Tk 10 for the trip to Mohakhali from Gulshan-1.

Samiur protested but the conductor stood his ground. At one point, both attempted to assault each other.

"It's less than two kilometres. How can they demand Tk 10?" said Samiur angrily.

Again, even though conductors have to get a licence from the BRTA, hardly any conductor is found with a licence.

To be eligible to get the licence, a conductor has to have good manners and be at least 18 years old.

When asked if he had a licence, Mojibar, a 17-year-old conductor, looked at this correspondent with surprise. He has been doing this job for two years in Dhaka.

NO FARE CHART

The BRTA has made it mandatory for the bus operators to hang and preserve the fare chart in vehicles.

Travelling in buses of different city routes, this correspondent did not see any fare chart.

Whenever a passenger asked about the legality of the excess fare, bus staff showed their own made-up fare chart.

Vice-President SM Nazer Hossain of Consumers Association of Bangladesh said the representation of the government in the regional transport committee, which gives route permits, was poor and that

most of the posts were occupied by bus owners and transport workers.

Because of their poor representation, the BRTA could not play effective role in addressing the issues, he said.

Echoing Nazer, Secretary General Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury of Bangladesh Enayetullah Welfare Association said most of the bus owners are ruling-party affiliated and that they do not care about the rules.

"Political will is needed to protect the passengers," he said.

Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association Secretary General Khandaker Enayetullah said they have cancelled the registrations of many transport owners with the association and have recommended cancellation of their route permits.

"Law should be implemented strictly to stop the charging of excessive fare," said Enayetullah, also the

vice-president of Dhaka city unit (south) Awami League.

Pointing out that there is no legal basis of "special services", BRTA Director (enforcement) Nazmul Ahsan Majumdar said their four mobile courts regularly check if excess fare was being charged.

Asked why their drives could not stop such practices, he said, "We need cooperation from everyone. If the bus owners and staff comply with the law, it will stop.

"We expect the Road Transport Act to be passed by next June. It has provisions for strict punishment and high fines. After that, I hope the practice of charging high fares would reduce significantly," he said.

According to the BRTA, about 28,264 buses and 10,239 minibuses were registered as of February 2017 with Dhaka city route permits. They can carry about 17.2 lakh passengers on each trip.



Wrapped in a bag, this newborn was left in a skip in the capital's Mirpur Beribandh area. She was found by a woman during the rain yesterday afternoon. The baby was later admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Hospital sources said she was suffering from jaundice.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

BJP wins big in UP

FROM PAGE 1

the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Indian parliament, but also for the next parliamentary elections in 2019 which the party hopes to win for a second successive tenure.

Some of Modi's key reforms, such as a nationwide sales tax, have come unstuck in the Rajya Sabha where BJP lacks majority. The Rajya Sabha comprises members elected by lawmakers in states' assemblies on the basis of proportional representation with the biggest states supplying the largest number of MPs.

With 325-odd seats in the 403-member UP Assembly secured, according to NDTV, Modi's party has now returned to power in the state with a majority no party has ever seen.

It will mark BJP's comeback in the key political battleground state, which sends the largest number of lawmakers (80) to Lok Sabha, after a 14-year gap during which regional parties such as Mulayam Singh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) headed by Mayawati had held sway through their appeals to castes and Muslims.

Modi's closest aide and BJP President Amit Shah, who crafted and implemented BJP's election strategy in UP, credited Modi and his policies for the victory.

"This is the victory of the corruption-free rule and pro-poor policies under the leadership of Modi," he told a media conference at the BJP national headquarters in Delhi soon after the elections results began pouring in as party activists broke into wild celebrations setting off crackers, distributing sweets and splashing colours.

Shah said election results in the four states clearly established Modi as the "most popular" leader in independent India and the people's mandate was a clear rejection of the politics of dynasty, casteism and appeasement, a clear dig at BJP's main rivals in UP -- SP, BSP and Congress.

Senior BJP leader and Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh said the party "has reached new heights in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh and changed the political picture of the country".

Terming BJP's victory "shocking" and "difficult to swallow", BSP supremo Mayawati, a former chief minister of UP, hinted at alleged vote fraud in the elections that were spread over seven phases during the last two months in the five states.

Mayawati suggested that electronic voting machines were tampered with as most of the votes in Muslim-majority constituencies had gone to BJP. Her allegation is unlikely to be taken seriously.

Amit Shah declined to comment on Mayawati's charge and said he "can understand her state of mind" after the defeat in the elections.

A decision as to who will be BJP's new chief minister in UP will be made by the party's highest policy-making forum -- the parliamentary board -- and the legislature party in the state soon, Shah said.

BJP, which had just 47 seats in the outgoing UP assembly, bagged 40 percent vote share in a most riveting electoral contest whose result mirrored the outcome of the 2014 parliamentary elections, which brought Modi-led BJP to

power, when the saffron party had won 73 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats up for grabs in the state.

Interestingly, BJP did not field a single Muslim candidate in this year's assembly polls in UP which has a sizable Muslim population.

The previous best showing by BJP in UP was in 1991, at the height of the sensitive Ram Janam Bhoomi movement, when it got majority on its own winning 221 seats out of 425 in an undivided state. UP was divided more than 10 years ago and the state of Uttarakhand was created out of it.

Senior BJP leader and federal minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, a key aide to Modi, described the election result in UP as "a tectonic shift in the country's politics". He said the first message is that this indicates "it is a bigger wave than 2014 [parliamentary] elections and that too after two-and-a-half-year of Modi government."

Prasad said, "Uttar Pradesh is the 'laboratory of India' and the Bharatiya Janata Party's 'super win has proven Modi's vision.'" BJP General Secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya said the perception that BJP was a party of upper castes has been demolished as all sections of the society, including Dalits and Muslims, voted for it in UP.

"People have decided we accept the verdict," Vijayvargiya said while addressing the media after the election results.

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi acknowledged that the party's defeat was massive.

"Yes, UP is a bad loss, it hurts... I agree that, in UP, we need fundamental restruc-

turing thinking for Congress as a whole. These have to be hard, tough decisions about strategy," he said.

Congress leader Shakeel Ahmad attributed the party's poor show in UP to "public mood" and said its performance would be "scrutinised". He, however, stressed that Congress' gains in Punjab and its likelihood to form the government in Goa, ruled by BJP until before the elections, should not be ignored.

In UP's next-door state Uttarakhand, BJP put up a splendid show and won 57 seats in the 70-member assembly while ruling Congress won 11, according to NDTV. Congress Chief Minister Harish Rawat lost both seats to BJP.

In Punjab, Congress won 77 of the total of 117 constituencies while Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party, making a debut in Punjab Assembly polls, was in second position winning 22 seats. The state's ruling Shiromani Akali and its junior coalition partner BJP finished a distant third having won 18.

In Goa, Congress secured 18 seats and ruling BJP bagged 14 of the 40 seats in play. BJP suffered a major setback in the state with its Chief Minister Laxmikant Parsekar having lost to his Congress rival from Mandrem.

In Manipur which has a 60-member assembly, ruling Congress won 28 seats while BJP bagged 21, according to media reports.

Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh won from Thoubal Assembly seat by a margin of 10,400 votes.

Rights activist Irom Sharmila, making her poll debut and taking on Singh, was fourth securing just 90 votes, according to The Indian Express.

World faces

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In just the past two months alone, more than 48,000 people have fled fighting in the Arab world's poorest country, according to O'Brien, as it grapples with a proxy war fought by archrivals Iran and Saudi Arabia.

During recent meetings, O'Brien said senior leaders in both parties agreed to provide continuous humanitarian access and respect international humanitarian law.

He noted that 4.9 million people received food assistance last month alone.

"Yet all parties to the conflict are arbitrarily denying sustained humanitarian access and politicise aid," he added.

"Already, the humanitarian suffering that we see in Yemen today is caused by the parties and proxies and if they don't change their behavior now, they must be held accountable for the inevitable famine, unnecessary deaths and associated amplification in suffering that will follow."

He noted that despite assurances from all parties that he would obtain safe passage to the flashpoint city of Taiz, he was in fact denied access and came under gunfire after retreating to a short distance away.

A total of \$2.1 billion are needed to reach 12 million people with life-saving assistance and protection in Yemen this year, according to O'Brien, who noted that just six percent of those funds have been received so far.

pledging event for Yemen will take place in Geneva on April 25, to be chaired by UN chief Antonio Guterres.

During his visit last week to South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, O'Brien said he found a situation that is "worse than it has ever been."

"The famine in South Sudan is man-made," he added.

"Parties to the conflict are parties to the famine -- as are those not intervening to make the violence stop."

He said more than 7.5 million people need assistance, an increase of 1.4 million from last year. And some 3.4 million people are displaced, including nearly 200,000 who have fled South Sudan since January alone.

More than half the population of Somalia -- 6.2 million people -- need humanitarian assistance and protection, including 2.9 million at risk of famine.

Nearly one million children under the age of five will be "acutely malnourished" this year, according to the humanitarian chief, who also visited the country.

"What I saw and heard during my visit to Somalia was distressing -- women and children walk for weeks in search of food and water," O'Brien said.

"They have lost their livestock, water sources have dried up and they have nothing left to survive on. With everything lost, women, boys, girls and men now move to urban centers."

In northeastern Nigeria, O'Brien said 10.7 million people need humanitarian aid, including 7.1 million people who are "severely food insecure."

BNP rode on India, US to win in 2001

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February 15, 1996, there is no free, fair and credible election."

Referring to BNP's allegation that the government was not allowing it to take to the streets, Hasina questioned, "How'll they do politics if they are scared so much about taking to the streets?"

She also urged people, including the leaders and workers of Jubo Mohila League, to work together to further advance the country with the spirit of the Liberation War and to publicise the government's steps towards women empowerment and

women development.

Describing the history of forming Jubo Mohila League on July 6, 2002, the PM said the aim of establishing the organisation was to create female leadership and empower women.

Bangladesh Awami League Women and Children Affairs Secretary Fazilatunnesa Indira, Jubo Mohila League Senior Vice President Zakia Parvin Moni, General Secretary Apu Ukil and Organising Secretary Ishrat Jahan Nasrin spoke at the programme, chaired by its President Nazma Akhter.

Earlier, the PM formally inaugurated the National Council by hoisting

the national flag and releasing white pigeons.

A one-minute silence was observed in memory of those Jubo Mohila League leaders and workers who laid down their lives in various struggles and democratic movements.

The premier also witnessed a dance performance.

Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader was present. NAZMA, APU RE-ELECTED

Nazma Akhtar and Apu Ukil were re-elected president and general secretary of Jubo Mohila League. Obaidul

Quader announced their names, reports The Daily Star correspondent.

The names of presidents and general secretaries of the organisation's Dhaka city (North and South) units were also declared.

Sabina Akhtar Tuhin and Tahera Khatun Lutfia were elected president and general secretary of Dhaka City (North) unit while Farida Yasmin Jhuma and Nilufar Yasmin were elected to the same posts of Dhaka City (South) unit.

Jubo Mohila League held its first council on March 5, 2004, electing Nazma and Apu to the two top posts.