



Illegal migrants arrive in a dinghy at a naval base after they were rescued by Libyan coastguard in the coastal city of Tripoli on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

AL to warm up

FROM PAGE 1
Now in power for the second consecutive time, the AL wants to formally start its preparations for the parliamentary polls with campaigns for city corporation elections.

The ruling party, however, is informally doing some groundwork for the next national polls. It has taken measures to resolve intra-party conflicts, conduct a survey to identify potential MP candidates and draft the party's election manifesto.

AL President Sheikh Hasina in the last three months addressed several public rallies in some district headquarters where she urged people to vote for her party.

Last night, she told the AL Parliamentary Party Meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban that party lawmakers unpopular in their constituencies would not get party tickets in the next general polls. And she already made a list of who would get the party nominations.

"I have made a list of those who will get nominations and who will not. I will not take anyone's responsibility and I already warned some MPs about their bad performance," an MP quoted the party chief as saying.

She said surveys were being conducted every six months to know about their performance, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

The AL chief also said the BNP would take part in the next polls and asked her party lawmakers to take preparations for the elections.

"In the last election, many of you were elected uncontested, but this time election will be tough," Hasina was quoted by an MP as saying.

She asked the lawmakers to work to narrow the gap between the grassroots leaders and activists and visit unions to build strong relationship with the party men there ahead of the elections.

Eleven independent MPs participated in the meeting as they had decided to join the ruling party.

A total 16 MPs were elected without any party ticket in the January 5, 2014, elections and most of them were AL rivals and had beaten ruling party candidates.

In the January 5 polls, a total 153 MPs were elected uncontested and of them 127 were from the ruling party.

The AL had 276 lawmakers, including 42 women MPs elected in the reserved seats, according to the Parliament Secretariat.

With the 11 joining, the AL now has 287 MPs.

The lawmakers are: Yussuf Abdullah

Harun of Comilla-3, Abul Kalam Azad of Gaibandha-4, Kamrul Ashraf Khan of Narasingdi-2, Shirajul Islam Mollah from Narasingdi-3, Salim Uddin Tarafder of Naogaon-3, Rezaul Haque Chowdhury of Kustia-1, Tahjib Alam Siddique of Jhenaidaha-2, Shawpan Bhattacharjee of Jessore-5, Haji Mohammad Salim of Dhaka-7, Abdul Matin of Moulvibazar-2 and Razee Mohammad Fakrul of Comilla-4.

FOCUS ON CITY POLLS

Insiders say party leaders in some recent meetings discussed plans centring on the city polls.

They also shared thoughts to identify the reasons behind the debacle in Comilla city polls, held on March 30, said meeting insiders. In that election, the BNP-backed candidate defeated the AL man by more than 10,000 votes.

The leaders identified intra-party feuds as the reason behind the loss in Comilla and decided to resolve its internal problems in seven cities -- Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Barisal, Mymensingh, Rangpur and Gazipur.

They found that five of the seven city units are dogged by internal conflicts.

In Mymensingh, Municipality Mayor Ekramul Haque Titu is locked into a feud with Religious Minister Motiur Rahman. It might affect the maiden Mymensingh City Corporation polls.

There is a rift between Gazipur district AL President and Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq and Gazipur-3 MP Rahamat Ali.

Relations between Gazipur city AL President Azmat Ullah Khan and General Secretary Jahangir Alam is also not good enough.

The party is split in Khulna into two factions -- one led by district AL President Harun-or-Rashid and the other by General Secretary SM Mostafa Rashidi Suja.

Barisal is dominated by district AL President Abul Hasnat Abdullah. Patronised by Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu, followers of former city mayor late Shawkat Hossain Hiron are against Hasnat but they are not so strong.

Recently, leaders at a meeting of Barisal city AL demanded party backing for the unit's joint general secretary, Sadik Abdullah, son of Hasnat, in the mayoral polls.

There is apparently no feud between Sylhet city AL President Badar Uddin Ahmad Kamran and General Secretary Asad Uddin. But both of them are mayoral aspirants.

The situation is same in Rajshahi. City AL President AHM Khairuzzaman Liton apparently has no enmity with

General Secretary Dablu Sarkar. But both want to run for mayor.

In Rangpur, amid feuds between the high-ups of district and city units, already four AL aspirants for the mayoral post have started campaigning. Mayor Sharfuddin Ahmed Jhantu is not in good terms with the party.

Central AL leaders want city polls to be held in phases. They think the party could not concentrate on elections in Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal in 2013 as those polls were held at once.

"Our candidates were defeated in Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal as those elections were held on the same day. So there should be at least one month's gap after every city election," said a secretariat member of the AL, who was present at the meetings.

Another senior leader said the party wants Rangpur or Mymensingh to be the first to go to polls among the seven cities.

Elections to the four city corporations on June 15, 2013 saw AL-backed candidates defeated by BNP men. Within a month, the party had bitter experience in Gazipur polls on July 6.

However, AL-blessed candidate achieved victory in the maiden Rangpur City Corporation election, held on December 20, 2012.

The mayors were elected for five years.

BNP insiders say the party is not worried about selecting candidates for city corporation elections. It is the BNP men who are now in office of the five city corporations and they already proved their popularity in the mayoral elections.

The party is concerned whether the Election Commission will stay neutral while holding the polls, said sources.

"We have participated in all the previous local government elections. We might take part in the city corporation elections as well if everything remains okay," Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the party, told The Daily Star.

[Our correspondents from the districts concerned contributed to this report]

RMG owner

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has been snatched. The police have started investigation to arrest the criminals.

Additional Superintendent of Police of Gazipur Russell Sheikh and Additional Police Super (Sadar Circle) Sakhawat Hossain have visited the spot. The CC cameras in nearby buildings were being examined.

Mahmud Chowdhury, standing committee member of the party.

The party plans to combine "3Gs" -- good policies, good governance and good government -- to run the country.

A policy on the appointment of judges to the country's apex court would be proposed in the vision.

In order to encourage accountability among public representatives and government institutions, the BNP wants to make the tax ombudsman functional.

The party was also working on finalising the formula of an election-time assistive government, and the party chief would unveil the formula soon. Later, it would call upon the government to hold talks to settle the issue, party insiders said.

The BNP boycotted the January 5 election in 2014 demanding election under a non-partisan interim administration.

Narcotics

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Based on that, the ACC chief ordered a drive against 17 top drug peddlers. Unfortunately, all those addresses were found inaccurate.

"I want to give one month's time to the narcotics department. Please give us the accurate addresses.... We want that those who made money through this illegal business, their property will be handed over to people," Iqbal said, adding that there was an order from the top of the government to crack down on drug business.

While giving his speech, DNC DG Salauddin avoided saying anything about the drug traders' list.

However when questioned about the issue, he said he would need a month's time for making himself fully aware of the matter to comment.

At this point, the ACC chairman once again took the microphone and said that controlling drug business was not the business of the anti-graft body. Rather, it wanted to take action against those behind the illegal business through investigations into their properties and income sources.

When he urged the audience to give information, if they had any, about drug peddlers, one man asked Iqbal why his organisation was not arresting Bodi.

The ACC chief said, "It is better not to mention any name in public. It is not like that we did not arrest anybody. It is not possible only by the ACC or the DNC."

Awami League lawmaker from Cox's Bazar Abdur Rahman Bodi's name was on a list of suspected yaba smugglers, prepared by the Department of Narcotics Control in 2014. His three brothers, brother-in-law and some other relatives have also been listed as traders of the contraband drug.

Bodi, however, all along denied the allegation.

Reshuffle

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to Oman Sheikh Sikendar Ali will be made Bangladesh ambassador to Libya.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner in Mumbai Samina Naz has been promoted and appointed Bangladesh ambassador to Vietnam.

PIA pilot sleeps

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Hashmi was off from flying duty due to the investigation under way, but refused to share any further details.

Another first officer, Mohammad Asad Ali, who was under training, was also in the cockpit.

Hashmi, an instructor, gets paid over Rs 1,00,000 each month to train pilots, and was supposed to train Ali Hassan Yazdani during the flight. However, instead of performing his duty, Hashmi went for a quick lie-down, the report said.

The flight was carrying over 305 passengers - 293 in the economy class and 12 in the club class.

The development has surfaced at a time when a top PIA official, facing serious allegations of corruption, left the country on Saturday after he was given a special exemption by the Interior Ministry to fly abroad for a month even though his name is still on the country's no-fly list.

Bernd Hildenbrand, the suspended CEO of the national flag carrier is under investigation on charges of corruption amounting to billions of rupees. The Federal Investigation Agency is probing the corruption charges against him.

No fuel price

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Reading out scripted answers following lawmakers' queries in parliament, he said the taka to dollar exchange rate was also increasing regularly.

Global market prices have been rising for the last one year, he said, adding that the lowest price was seen in January 2016 when the average cost per barrel was US\$ 33.85, rising to US\$ 66.03 in April 2017.

He said BPC still owed the government Tk 27,419.81 crore in loans as it incurred losses earlier selling fuel at subsidised rates.

The government slashed prices twice, on April 1 and 25, last year following a slump in the international market, he noted.

Replying to a supplementary question, Nasrul said the Norwegian government has no investment in the coal-fired Rampal power plant project.

"The Exim Bank of India is investing in the project which has no relation with the Norwegian government. It is their (Exim Bank) consideration whether they will take assistance from Norway's sovereign wealth fund in the project," he added.

Norway's sovereign wealth fund, the world's largest, has taken Indian industrial giant Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd out of its investment portfolio due to environmental concerns, the Norwegian central bank said on May 5.

Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd has been targeted because it is building the coal-fired power plant near the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forests.

To another query, he said army personnel have been deployed in 10 important power plants.

82 Chibok girls freed

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No details were given about how many suspects were released or their identities.

But AFP understands three Chadian nationals, allegedly senior commanders under Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, were handed over.

Military and civilian militia sources in the town of Banki, on the border with Cameroon, said the girls left for Borno state capital Maiduguri on board six military helicopters at 6:10 am (0510 GMT).

"One of the girls was carrying a baby with her, a boy of less than two years," said the source on condition of anonymity.

The presidency said the teenagers would be brought to Abuja to meet Buhari, who was swept to power on a promise to defeat Boko Haram, whose insurgency has killed at least 20,000 people in Nigeria since 2009.

Shehu Sani, a Nigerian senator who has been involved in previous negotiations, said the talks lasted for "three to four months".

The government would now look to secure the release of the remaining hostages, he added.

SYMBOL OF THE CONFLICT

Boko Haram fighters stormed the Government Girls Secondary School in the remote town of Chibok on the evening of April 14, 2014 and kidnapped 276 teenage girls who were preparing to sit high school exams.

Fifty-seven managed to escape in the hours that followed but the remaining 219 were held by the group.

Boko Haram's Shekau claimed in a video message that they had converted to Islam.

The audacious kidnapping brought the insurgency to world attention, triggering global outrage that galvanised support from the former US first

lady Michelle Obama and Hollywood stars.

The girls have become a symbol of the conflict. Last month, parents and supporters marked the three-year anniversary of the abduction, describing the situation as an unending "nightmare".

But they said previous releases had given them strength.

Enoch Mark, a Christian pastor whose two daughters were among those kidnapped, said of the latest releases: "This is good news to us. We have been waiting for this day."

"We hope the remaining girls will soon be released."

Patrick Yousef, the deputy regional director for Africa at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), confirmed the group "facilitated the safe return" of the girls as a "neutral intermediary".

The Swiss government was also involved, Nigeria said.

Military and civilian militia sources in Banki said the girls were brought back to the town in ICRC vehicles late on Saturday afternoon and stayed in the military barracks there overnight.

Boko Haram has used kidnapping as a weapon of war, seizing thousands of women and children, and forcibly recruiting young men and boys into their ranks.

In a less publicised attack in November 2014, some 300 children were among about 500 people kidnapped from the town of Damasak, on the border with Niger, in the far north of Borno state.

Most are still missing.

On Friday, Britain and the United States issued a security alert warning of a Boko Haram plot to kidnap foreigners in the Banki area, which led to the suspension of aid flights to the town Saturday.

Japan still remembers

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Japan Airlines aircraft with 156 passengers including 14 crew members had been circling over the Tejgaon Airport seeking permission to land.

Mahmud was sitting next to the president and CMLA General Ziaur Rahman. He handed over the note to Zia who instructed him to go to the airport and handle the situation.

Mahmud got in touch with the hijackers from the airport control tower after he reached the airport.

Five armed members of the Japanese Red Army (JRA) led by Osamu Maruoka had hijacked the Paris to Tokyo DC-8 aircraft soon after it took off from Bombay after a short stopover.

He tried to convince the hijackers that they should land somewhere else as the country was new and might not be able to provide the services they might ask for. But the hijackers ignored his suggestion and landed anyway, Air Vice-Marshal (ret'd) AG Mahmud said in a recent interview with The Daily Star at his Gulshan residence.

"It was just the beginning of a 105-hour-long hostage drama," the 83-year-old Mahmud said recalling the incident 40 years later.

It was Mahmud's untiring efforts and negotiating skills with both the Japanese government and the hijackers, 130 passengers were released before the hijackers left Tejgaon Airport with 26 passengers on November 1.

They later landed in Algiers, the capital of Algeria. A couple of days later, rest of the passengers were released, AG Mahmud said.

The Japanese government has nominated Mahmud to be awarded their highest civilian award "The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star" for his dedicated efforts. The award would be handed over to him on May 9 in Japan.

"It is really surprising and hard to believe that Japanese memory would be so enduring, that they would remember a 40-year-old incident and give recognition with the highest civilian award," Mahmud said with a smile.

"I feel delighted and realise that good work always gets appreciated even if it is done a long time later," he added.

Talking about the incident, AG Mahmud said around six hours after the plane landed at 11:30am, the hijackers identifying themselves as Danke the Hidaka group of JRA first came on aircraft radio and demanded six million dollars in hundred dollar bills and the release of nine JRA members imprisoned in Japan.

"The hijackers also threatened that they would start executing the passengers starting with one Joe Gabrielle, an American banker, if their demands were not met within 12:00pm of September 29," he said.

The next morning a plan to dope the hijackers with food failed as they did not eat it. They only used medicine for energy, he added.

"I then started to prolong the talks as the Japanese government needed time to act," he said, adding his aim was also to weaken the hijackers who were without food and make them surrender.

Five passengers were released at one stage as they fell sick and four more on the third day, he said.

Finally on October 1, Japanese

Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda announced acceptance of the demands saying "human life outweighs the earth." A relief plane with the six JRA prisoners and \$6 million reached Dhaka lead by Japanese vice minister Hajime Ishii, he said.

"I reiterated to Hajime Ishii that our government policy was to find a peaceful solution but he told me that his government wanted all the passengers released before handing over money and the prisoners," said Mahmud.

He said he tried to convince the hijackers but they did not agree initially but later agreed that for every \$1 million 10 passengers were to be released.

"During the time, Ishii talked with the hijackers on radio and the hijackers appeared agitated and the aircraft started to taxi to the relief plane. I feared that might lead to violence. I immediately instructed the airport vehicles to block the aircraft and was able to calm them down after one and half hour long conversation," Mahmud said.

They released 60 passengers but the plane still had 86 more.

He said he convinced Okudaira, a prisoner and the leader of JRA, to convince the hijackers to release others, but they released all but 26 passengers. "I told Okudaira if they didn't release the passengers then no fuel and food would be provided to them and they would be trapped," he said.

"While the hostage drama was on, another dangerous situation was developing inside our own forces," he said, adding that there was a mutiny in Bogra Cantonment on September 28 and the mutineers were moving towards Dhaka.

"On the night of October 1, at about the last stage of negotiation, I was in the office of the DG of civil aviation when some mutinous airmen took me to ground floor of the airport along with group captain Ansaar Chowdhury," he said.

He continued, "One sergeant with an automatic gun opened fire at us and Ansaar dropped dead but he missed me." The air force officers on duty at the airport were shot and killed just before dawn on October 2 but he was saved by a group of airmen, he added.

"While the mutineers were inside the airport carrying out their atrocities, the hijacked plane took off. I was not present at the airport at the time," he added.

Born in 1934 in Feni, Mahmud retired as the Air Chief in December 1977. He later served as the food minister in the government of HM Ershad.

It's murder

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The DC office had earlier formed a six-member probe committee and the investigation body submitted its report on May 3.

The report has already been submitted to the ministries concerned, said DC Mir Khairul Alam who moderated the programme.

The state minister in his speech urged the mill operators to consider the workers' safety first.

The minister said he would urge the industries minister to check all the boilers across the country one by one to prevent such disasters in future.

Iqbalur Rahim, lawmaker from Dinajpur and whip of Jatiya Sangsad, also attended the programme.

Mikail Shipar, secretary to the labour ministry, said every boiler would be checked in Dinajpur within six months.

BNP for clipping

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The party is likely to include all these in its "Vision 2030". BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia would unveil it through a press conference at the city's Westin Hotel on May 10.

"The BNP chairperson will present [before the nation] what the party will do if it is voted to power and how we want to see Bangladesh in 2030," Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir told The Daily Star.

At the party's national council last year, Khaleda Zia unveiled the vision in brief.

The draft of the "Vision 2030" is likely to be placed today before the meeting of the party's standing committee, the highest policymaking body, for finalisation, party insiders said.

The party would introduce a bicameral parliament, maintaining the unitary nature of the country, and restore

the referendum system in the charter, according to the vision.

There would be an upper house of parliament with representatives from different communities, marginal groups, knowledgeable and gifted people from different professions.

Party insiders said the vision might include a proposal on bringing a balance of power between the president and the prime minister by giving the president more authority.

A senior BNP leader seeking anonymity said the "Vision 2030" would ultimately become the party's election manifesto.

There might be a proposal on forming "National Security Council", party insiders said.

"The vision will encompass social, political and economic issues. It will also include external and internal issues of the state and also government institutions," said Amir Khoshru