



Damaged houses and broken branches of large trees after a tornado swept over five unions of Munshiganj's Sreepur upazila early yesterday morning. At least 300 houses and shops were destroyed and 15 people injured by the 5-minute twister.

PHOTO: FARHANA MIRZA

DU SENATE ELECTION

Pro-AL teachers split with eye on VC post

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The next election to the vice-chancellor panel of Dhaka University was the main reason behind the split in the pro-Awami League teachers' Blue Panel over the May 22 senate election, teachers said yesterday.

Tension was growing on the campus over filing of nominations by two factions of the panel.

The tenure of VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique will end on August 24.

As per the Dhaka University Order 1973, the VC shall be appointed by the chancellor for a period of four years from a panel of three teachers. He shall be nominated by the university senate, and be eligible for a re-appointment for a second term.

Sources said as the VC's tenure was nearing the end, a section of teachers, particularly a top leader of the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA), started lobbying political circles to get their blessings to be the next VC and make sure that Arefin doesn't get included in the VC panel again.

However, another section of teachers wanted the present VC get a reappointment to maintain a congenial educa-

tional atmosphere on the campus.

Some 1,500 teachers are eligible to cast their votes in the May 22 election.

Meanwhile, none of the two Blue Panel factions -- one led by its Convenor Prof Nazma Shahin and another by DUTA President Prof Maksud Kamal -- withdrew their nominations although the last date for withdrawing candidacies expired on Sunday.

Yesterday, teachers of both the factions started campaigning on the campus.

The convenor of the Blue Panel at the science faculty held a meeting with around 150 teachers at the faculty to introduce the candidates of the Nazma-led panel and to explain what they should do during the election.

At one stage, a group of teachers from the other faction went there, but they were not allowed to take part in the meeting, said Prof Muhammad Samad, a candidate of the Maksud-led panel.

Against this backdrop, the Maksud-led faction in the afternoon distributed leaflets among teachers, seeking cooperation from them. The leaflet listed some reasons for fielding another panel in the election and pointed out

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Eye lenses get cheaper

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product details would include the maximum retail price. The products would have registration numbers, expiry date, and the country of origin.

"... an overall control will be established in this sector," he said.

Since the products would be under the DGDA scanner, they would be safe, efficient, of good quality, Amin said.

Uncontrolled prices of lenses had been affecting patients for a long time. According to ophthalmologists, some hospitals were charging exuberantly taking advantage of patients not knowing the actual prices.

Partha Pratim, whose father had the surgery six months ago at a city hospital, told The Daily Star that he had bought

the lenses for Tk 7,500 each. He said the lenses would have been much cheaper had the surgery been done now.

"Earlier, the lenses were sold at much higher prices and the new prices will be affordable," said Shawkat Ara Shakoore Milly, a professor at Community Ophthalmology of National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital.

Sources said syndicates active in government hospitals used to charge patients more for a lens. The patients used to be deprived of proper lens at the proper price.

Apart from this, there were syndicates who brought substandard lenses from India and China and labelled them "Made in USA" to charge more.

According to the Bangladesh

National Blindness and Low Vision Survey 2000, the age standardised blindness prevalence rate is 1.53 percent and thus, there are approximately 675,000 blind adults (30 and above age group) in the country.

The report also said Cataract was the predominant (79.6 percent) cause of bilateral blindness.

Cataract is a very common disease in Bangladesh. Cataracts occur when changes in the lens of the eye cause it to become less transparent, cloudy, blurry, and misty.

The purpose of the lens is to bend (refract) light rays that come into the eye to help the person see. Having a cataract can be like looking through a foggy or dusty car windshield. Things may look

blurry, hazy or less colourful.

"During cataract surgery, the cloudy natural lens is removed and replaced with a clear artificial lens. That lens is called an intraocular lens (IOL). The only way to remove a cataract is with surgery," said Milly.

She also said every year approximately two lakh people undergo cataract surgery.

"This [reduced prices] will definitely be a big relief to the patients and doctors," said Milly.

Zahidul Islam, lens importer and owner of ZAS Corporation, said patients would now have more options in choosing lenses of different prices, which was not possible earlier as doctors used to prescribe a package that included the surgery, lens and hospital fees.

Shafat's bodyguard, driver arrested

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the Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested Rahmat in Gulshan-1 around an hour later.

With them, four of the five accused in the case, filed with Banani Police Station for raping two private university students in a city hotel on March 28, has been arrested.

Shafat, the prime accused, and Shadman Sakif, who introduced the girls to the "rapists", were arrested in Sylhet on Thursday. Nayem Ashraf alias Halim, the other accused, is still on the run.

Briefing reporters at the Rab Media Centre in the capital's Karwan Bazar last night, Rab-10 Commanding Officer Jahangir Hossain Matubbar said the victims were forced to take alcohol before being raped.

During primary interrogation, Billal also told the Rab that the girls were forced to take contraceptives as well, he said.

The accused tortured a male friend of the girls. Billal made the youth hold some yaba tablets and filmed him with his mobile phone camera. Later, he threatened the youth that he would brand him as a yaba trader if he told anyone about the rape, said the Rab official.

The arrestee deleted the video after the case was filed on May 6. Rab officials, however, said they would try to recover the video, which could be a vital piece of evidence.

Billal said Shafat asked him to hide in a washroom of a hotel room and film the rape of one of the girls. He, however, claimed that he just pretended that he was filming it, Jahangir said, adding everything would become clear once all the accused were quizzed together.

The Rab official said Billal reached Nawabpur area from Sylhet around



Rahmat Ali Billal Hossain

3:00pm yesterday and went to a local hotel. Later, he rented a room introducing himself as Sujon. Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-10 raided the hotel and arrested him.

He came to Dhaka to consult a lawyer. "He [Billal] is also one of the witnesses to the incident," the Rab CO said, adding that the rapes seemed pre-planned.

In primary interrogation, Billal, however, did not say anything about the weapon, which according to the girls, was used by the bodyguard to hold the victims at gunpoint during the rape, Rab officials said, adding, they would hand Billal over to the investigation officer.

Rahmat was arrested by the DB around 7:00pm, said Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of the DMP.

A shotgun and 10 bullets were recovered from his possession, Masudur said. Further details about the arrest were not available immediately.

Meanwhile, investigators, quizzing Shafat and Sakif, said they were trying to recover data from their mobile phones. A day after their arrest on Thursday, a Dhaka court placed Shafat on six-day remand and Sakif on five-day remand.

Invited to Shafat's birthday party on March 28, the two girls went to The

Raintree Dhaka hotel in Banani around 9:00pm. After the party ended around midnight, Shafat and Nayem raped them in two rooms, alleged one of the two girls who filed the case.

The driver filmed the rape, the bodyguard intimidated the victims while Sakif refrained from informing the hotel authorities about the incident that night, she alleged, adding all the five accused were drunk at that time.

The plaintiff did not mention the name of the bodyguard in the case. Later, Shafat's family said his name was Azad.

According to the victims, the driver and the bodyguard took the girls to the hotel that night from their homes. After the rapes, the bodyguard also went to the girls' homes on several occasions in a bid to keep an eye on them.

DC Shaikh Nazmul Alam of DB (north division) had told this correspondent that the accused, except Nayem, fled to Gazipur together after the case was filed in Dhaka.

Later, they went to Narsingdi and then to Sylhet, where they changed their positions frequently. Shafat and Sakif were arrested in a police raid on a house in Pathantula area of Sylhet city.

Meanwhile, National Human Rights Commission Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque yesterday said the state must ensure the security of the two girls.

"It is the duty of the state to provide them with security. Police must ensure their security. If there is any negligence, they will have to bear the responsibility," he told journalists at the commission's office in Karwan Bazar.

The commission will be with the two girls during their legal fight, he

said, adding the probe body formed by the NHRC would submit a "complete report" to the commission either towards the end of this month or at the beginning of next month.

Initially, the team had five members but two more members were added to it later to facilitate the probe, he added. Meanwhile, customs intelligence asked the owners of Apan Jewellers and The Raintree Dhaka hotel to appear before its office tomorrow.

"The owners will have to appear in our office with all their documents [of their business] around 11:00am on Wednesday," Moinul Khan, director general of the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID), told The Daily Star.

The Apan Jewellers' owners have been summoned a day after CIID launched drives simultaneously at the brand's five outlets in Gulshan, Uttara, Mouchak and Shimanto Square.

Apan Jewellers authorities could not provide valid documents of all the gold and diamonds in the stores, Moinul Khan, director general of CIID, said after the drive.

Customs intelligence officials carried out the raids amid allegations that Ahmed Shafat, son of one of the owners of Apan Jewellers, bragged about being a gold smuggler to the victims.

The CIID is looking into the sources of the gold and diamonds and investigating whether any taxes were dodged.

On Sunday, a team of the CIID raided The Raintree Dhaka hotel and seized 10 bottles of liquor from a room. The hotel doesn't have any licence for selling liquor. It has so far collected Tk 8.37 lakh in VAT from customers, but paid only Tk 9,326 to the government, the CIID official said.

Mint and herbs help

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Previously, the family genuinely struggled as their land was not utilised well. Nowadays son Sohel Rana studies in class nine while daughter Rozina Akhter is studying for her Higher School Certificate. All the family members help out in the small garden that makes the children's education affordable.

"Mint is essential for the traditional drink borhani," says Ruhul. "Air plant is used as a remedy for stomach ailments, and pandan leaves and Italian coriander are also in high demand. It's not possible to buy most of these ingredients at the local market and many people pay in advance."

Anowara's efforts have impressed her neighbours. "I have six bighas of land," says Soleman Miah, 48, a farmer in the village. "I grow some mint plants to meet my family's demand but have never farmed it commercially. Although I have more land than Anowara, I can't earn as much as she

can."

Other farmers including Delowar Hossain, 52, have taken advice from Anowara on how to cultivate mint, other herbs and spices, but none have been able to replicate her success. "These plants need tender care," says Delowar, "Anowara really knows how to do it."

"I pay Anowara in advance for mint, pandan leaves and Italian coriander," says local vegetable trader Nur Islam, 38, who has a shop at Goshala Bazar in Lalmonirhat town. "We can sell the mint for Tk 300 per kilogram and sometimes we send it to markets in the capital, when we have orders."

"Only a very few farmers cultivate mint on small landholdings," says Lalmonirhat sadar upazila's agriculture officer Enamul Haque. "They enjoy good marketing facilities. Anowara Begum is exceptional, however. She is the shining example in this area of how to succeed in farming mint and other herbs on a small plot."

Lawbreakers

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As per the proposed law, Shafiq said, drunkenness, begging, gambling, movement by keeping one's injury marks open, carrying meat openly, and urinating and defecating in the open would be considered as punishable offences and the offenders would be fined up to Tk 20,000.

Besides, anyone driving a vehicle on the wrong side and violating traffic rules would be fined Tk 2,000 to Tk 5,000.

Under the existing law, the maximum fine for the aforesaid offences is Tk 50.

Shafiq said the draft law seeks to impose a maximum fine of Tk 10,000 for digging roads in the cantonment areas. For illegal construction of any establishment, the fine would be Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000.

Currently, such offences are punishable with a fine of Tk 100.

Anyone seeking more than three extensions of deadlines for constructing a building would have to pay a fine of Tk 20,000. For more than five extensions, the fine would go up to Tk 50,000.

Under a provision of the proposed law, a lawbreaker would be fined Tk 3,000 to Tk 10,000 for obstructing any government work.

Replying to a question from a journalist, the cabinet secretary said the authorities concerned would jail an offender if he fails to pay the fine.

The cabinet also approved a proposal for ratification of "The Agreement between the Republic of San Marino and Bangladesh on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations" between the two countries.

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and staff after the black missile -- named as the Hwasong-12 -- ascended into the sky in the dawn light, atop a column of fire.

The isolated North is under multiple sets of United Nations sanctions over its nuclear and missile programmes, which have triggered global alarm.

The missile was launched on an unusually high trajectory, with KCNA saying it flew to an altitude of 2,111.5 kilometres and travelled 787 kilometres before coming down in the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

That suggests a range of 4,500 kilometres (2,800 miles) or more if flown for maximum distance, analysts said.

Aside from Pyongyang's space launches, Jeffrey Lewis of the Middlebury Institute of International

Studies in the US told AFP: "This is the longest-range missile North Korea has ever tested."

On the respected 38 North website, aerospace engineering specialist John Schilling said it appeared to demonstrate an intermediate-range ballistic missile that could "reliably strike the US base at Guam" in the Pacific.

"More importantly," he added, it "may represent a substantial advance to developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)".

KCNA said the new rocket was a "perfect weapon" which was "capable of carrying a large-size heavy nuclear warhead".

It cited Kim as saying the North would never succumb to what it called the "highly ridiculous" US strategy of "militarily browbeating only weak countries and nations which have no

nukes".

"If the US dares opt for a military provocation against the DPRK, we are ready to counter it," it said.

STRATEGIC BALANCE
Tensions between the two reached a peak in recent weeks, with Washington saying military action was an option under consideration and Pyongyang issuing threats of its own.

Trump later appeared to hold open the door to negotiations, saying he would be "honoured" to meet Kim and calling him a "smart cookie".

Last week the South elected a new president, Moon Jae-In, who advocates reconciliation with Pyongyang and said at his inauguration that he was willing "in the right circumstances" to visit the North to ease tensions.

But he slammed the latest missile test as a "reckless provocation" and

said dialogue would be possible "only if the North changes its attitude".

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that North Korea's latest missile test was "dangerous", but he warned that Pyongyang was being intimidated and called for a peaceful solution to regional tensions.

"We consider (the missile test) counter-productive, harmful and dangerous," Putin told reporters after an international forum in Beijing.

But, he added: "We must stop intimidating North Korea and find a peaceful solution to this problem."

Pyongyang says it needs atomic weapons to defend itself against the threat of invasion.

In April it put dozens of missiles on show at a giant military parade through the capital, including one that appeared to be the type launched on Sunday.

New missile can carry nuclear warhead