

Police raids send BNP men fleeing



BNP activists being put into a prison van after they were picked up in Khulna city yesterday morning ahead of the Khulna City Corporation polls on Tuesday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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BNP men and arrested 56 of them, the party alleged, adding that the law enforcers' move panicked BNP leaders and activists in the district.

Many party men have fled their homes to avoid arrest, BNP leaders told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Sonali Sen, additional deputy commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP), said they were launching drives to arrest "listed criminals" to keep the election environment congenial.

Without coming up with the number of the arrestees, she said police were not detaining BNP men alone. "We are arresting leaders and activists of other parties as well so that people can cast their votes without any disturbance".

Meanwhile, the mayor candidates from the ruling AL and the BNP engaged in a war of words yesterday, heating up the political arena in Khulna ahead of the polls on Tuesday.

Apart from the two leaders, mayor candidates from Jatiya Party, Communist Party of Bangladesh and Islami Andolon Bangladesh were also campaigning in full swing.

Khulna is the third largest city in

the country and about 4.93 lakh people would vote to elect the mayor and 41 ward councillors in the election.

As many as 148 candidates are vying for 31 councillor posts while 38 women are contesting for 10 reserved ward councillors' posts, said sources at the returning officer's office.

The KCC election, ahead of the parliamentary polls likely in December, has been a prestigious issue for the AL and its archrival BNP. According to many political analysts, the local body election is also a test for the Election Commission to prove its acceptance and capability ahead of the national polls.

WAR OF WORDS

At a press conference at his home yesterday, BNP's mayor choice Nazrul Islam Monju alleged that police were arresting his party men as part of the government's evil design to keep the BNP away from campaigning.

Providing a list of "detainees", the BNP leader alleged that Khulna police in the last 20 days since April 22 have held 74 BNP men.

Monju, who had suspended elec-

tioning for four hours on May 3 protesting the "detaining" of his party men, urged international observers to come and monitor the election atmosphere in Khulna.

He also alleged that his rival candidate from the AL, Talukder Abdul Khaleque, was using police to win the polls by harassing BNP men as he had failed to woo voters. He further alleged that AL "cadres" were threatening his supporters to stop them campaigning.

Hours later at another press conference, the AL said everyone in the city knew that Monju was an "outlaw and member of a militant organisation".

"His attitudes mirror the behaviour of [executed war criminal] Salauddin Quader Chowdhury," AL leader Harunur Rashid, chairman of Khulna Zila Parishad, said at the programme.

"Monju's statements prove that he is a patroniser of militant and terrorist outfits," he added.

In such a situation, cocktails exploded in at least 10 points of the city on Friday night.

Meanwhile, talking to The Daily Star, a BNP leader, wishing anonymity, said he is haunted by the fear of

arrest. "The indiscriminate arrest of BNP men has panicked us all".

Several other BNP men said police were not letting hotels to accommodate the party men who went there from other districts ahead of the polls.

On the other hand, KMP yesterday asked those who live outside Khulna to leave the city by today. It made the move to avoid any unwanted situation during the election, said an official from the KMP.

CAMPAIGN

With just a day remaining for the campaign, candidates were passing busy time going from door to door, seeking votes.

The mayor aspirants sought votes on the roads with the use of megaphones. They also distributed leaflets and manifestos with their electoral pledges among the city people.

Yesterday, both the rival candidates from the AL and the BNP completed campaigns at all the 31 wards, said their respective election agents.

AL candidate Khaleque and his supporters yesterday visited different spots in KCC area, including ward 31, seeking support and votes for "boat", his electoral symbol.

Monju during electioneering urged people to cast their votes in favour of "sheaf of paddy" to "restore democracy and rule of law".

RISK CENTRES

Returning Officer Md Yunus Ali said out of total 289 polling stations, 226 are "risky". Talking to The Daily Star, he also said 10 executive magistrates and 31 magistrates would work to thwart any untoward situation on voting day.

A total of 2,978 voters in two centres would cast votes using Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), he added.

'REIGN OF TERROR'

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that a reign of terror had been established in Khulna city to ensure the ruling party mayoral candidate's victory in Tuesday's election.

"Our leaders have returned from Khulna as there's a law that all the outsiders must leave the election areas before 72 hours of the voting. But now a reign of terror has been established there," he said at a discussion arranged by Doctors' Association of Bangladesh (DAB) at the Jatiya Press Club.

Ex-PM Najib hit

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political earthquake, which toppled an increasingly authoritarian regime that had ruled the country for six decades.

At 92, Mahathir is the world's oldest state leader. The former autocrat previously served as prime minister for over two decades and was a BN stalwart.

But he came out of retirement and defected to the opposition in a bid to unseat Najib over allegations that huge sums were looted from sovereign wealth fund 1MDB, which Najib set up and oversaw.

Since the opposition victory, Malaysia's king has agreed to pardon jailed top politician Anwar Ibrahim -- a former nemesis turned ally of Mahathir -- in a move that could pave the way for him to become premier. Senior members of his party said he was expected to be freed Tuesday.

Speculation had been mounting that Najib might try to flee the country as Mahathir has pledged to investigate the 1MDB controversy if he won power.

As an image of the leaked manifest for a flight on a private jet to Jakarta spread like wildfire online, Najib insisted in social media posts he was only planning a "short break" overseas to rest after the election and would be back next week.

But anger quickly mounted among social media users who accused the defeated leader of seeking to flee, and the immigration department swiftly announced both he and his wife Rosmah Mansor -- unpopular because of her spendthrift ways -- were banned from leaving Malaysia.

Mahathir confirmed he had issued the order to stop the pair leaving.

"It is true that I prevented Najib from leaving the country... he and his wife," he told a press conference.

When asked if the restrictions on Najib were due to 1MDB, Mahathir said: "There are a lot of complaints against (Najib) all of which have to be

investigated... we find that some of the complaints are valid.

"We have to act quickly because we don't want to be saddled with a problem of extradition from other countries."

Earlier, as dozens of people descended on the airport in a bid to stop Najib and Rosmah leaving, riot police were stationed by the gate of the airport where it was believed Najib would enter.

As a white van with heavily tinted windows attempted to pass by, the crowd surrounded the vehicle and it was only allowed to pass after they confirmed Najib was not inside.

After being hit with the travel ban, Najib later announced he was stepping down as chairman of BN and president of its main party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), following the historic loss.

Mahathir also announced the first three appointments to his cabinet -- Lum Guan Eng as finance minister, Muhyiddin Yassin as interior minister and Mohamad Sabu as defence minister.

He suggested Attorney-General Mohamed Apandi Ali, who cleared Najib over 1MDB and shut down domestic probes, was as good as out of a job.

He said restrictions had been placed on people suspected of wrongdoing, adding: "At the moment, we don't have an attorney-general."

Xavier Jayakumar, a vice-president of Anwar's party, said the jailed politician was expected to be released from prison Tuesday.

Anwar was heir-apparent to the premiership until Mahathir sacked him in 1998 and he was subsequently jailed for sodomy and abuse of power.

But in a remarkable turnaround, the pair reconciled and joined forces as allegations mounted over 1MDB and Najib became increasingly authoritarian.

Anwar, now 70, was jailed again in 2015 during Najib's rule and had been due for release next month.

Procession, strike

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He urged the government to punish the perpetrators.

Nurul Haque Nur, another leader of the platform which has been leading popular demonstrations for quota system reform in civil services, said Public Administration Ministry was "joking around" in the name of forming a committee regarding the issue.

"The ministry authorities are claiming that they cannot publish the gazette as they did not get any directive from the prime minister.

"But we all know the premier has said twice that there would be no quota in civil service," he said.

Protesters had announced launching fresh demonstrations after Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiq Alam on May 7 said there was no progress regarding the gazette as officials received no directive from the prime minister.

Mozammel Haque Khan, senior secretary of the public administration ministry, somewhat repeated the same statement the next day.

Mozammel, on Thursday said a proposal for forming a committee was sent to the Prime Minister's Office.

Awami League Joint General Secretary Jahangir Kabir Nanak on April 27 met the protesters and assured them that the government would publish the gazette once the prime minister, who was in Australia at the time, returned.

Following the assurance, the leaders of the quota reform movement postponed their agitation until May 7.

In April, students of public and private universities across the country took to the streets with the demand. Police charged truncheons and fired tear gas shells on the demonstrators on DU campus, injuring at least 163.

The protesters blocked key points in the capital and roads and highways elsewhere.

In the wake of mass protests, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament on April 11 declared that the quota system would be scrapped.

BCLMEN 'ATTACK' PROTESTORS

Some Chhatra League activists of Dhaka University's Bangabandhu Hall allegedly swooped on the protesters last night when they went there to invite students to join their programme today.

Witnesses said some leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, including Nurul Haque Nur and Muhammad Rashed Khan, were briefing students at the dormitory's reading room about their protest procession today.

A band of BCL men of the hall, led by BCL hall unit general secretary Al Amin Rahman, attacked them and tried to get them out of the room, claimed a witness wishing anonymity.

The witness said the BCL men grabbed the protesters, dragged

them outside and tore clothes of some.

Nurul Haque Nur told The Daily Star, "We were talking with students. Suddenly, some BCL leaders led by Al Amin Rahman attacked us. They drove us away."

Al Amin Rahman denied the allegation but admitted he asked the demonstrators to leave.

The man

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According to the Australian Red Cross Blood Service, he has helped saved the lives of more than 2.4 million Australian babies.

Harrison's blood has unique, disease-fighting antibodies that have been used to develop an injection called Anti-D, which helps fight against rhesus disease.

This disease is a condition where a pregnant woman's blood actually starts attacking her unborn baby's blood cells. In the worst cases, it can result in brain damage, or death, for the babies.

The condition develops when a pregnant woman has rhesus negative blood (RhD negative) and the baby in her womb has rhesus positive blood (RhD positive), inherited from its father.

If the mother has been sensitized to rhesus-positive blood, usually during a previous pregnancy with an rhesus-positive baby, she may produce antibodies that destroy the baby's "foreign" blood cells. That could be deadly for the baby.

Harrison's remarkable gift of giving started when he had major chest surgery when he was just 14, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service said.

Blood donations saved his life, so he pledged to become a blood donor. A few years later, doctors discovered his blood contained the antibody which could be used to create Anti-D injections, so he switched over to making blood plasma donations to help as many people as possible.

Doctors aren't exactly sure why Harrison has this rare blood type, but they think it might be from the transfusions he received when he was 14, after his surgery. He's one of no more than 50 people in Australia known to have the antibodies, the blood service says.

"Every bag of blood is precious, but James' blood is particularly extraordinary. His blood is actually used to make a life-saving medication, given to moms whose blood is at risk of attacking their unborn babies. Every batch of Anti-D that has ever been made in Australia has come from James' blood," Falkenmire said. "And more than 17% of women in Australia are at risk, so James has helped save a lot of lives."

Two held over Rangamati murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Members of joint forces in special drive arrested Su Autish Chakma, alias Tantu Moni Chakma, a staff member of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti central office, and Kiron Jyothi Chakma, secretary of Kutukchhari union, in the early hours Saturday, said Alamgir Kabir, Superintendent of Rangamati Police.

Tantu Moni was arrested on suspicion, the SP said.

"Law enforcers are conducting drives in various places to arrest criminals behind the recent murder in Rangamati's Naniarchar upazila while security has been beefed up in the upazila. Additional police and army personnel have been deployed in different places," he added.

Meanwhile, in a press release PCJSS demanded unconditional release of its activist.

On May 4, five people were killed and eight others injured in a gun attack on a motorcade of the followers of slain Naniarchar upazila parishad chairman Shaktiman Chakma at Betchhari in Naniarchar upazila.

They came under the attack while on their way to attend the funeral of the slain upazila parishad chairman at his Kukurmara family crematory in the upazila in Khagrachhari.

Advocate Shaktiman Chakma, 55, also a leader of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (MN Larma faction), was shot dead by unidentified miscreants in front of the upazila parishad complex on May 3.

4 'kidnapped' in Bandarban

UNB, Bandarban

Four indigenous people, including the head of a Para in Thanchi, were reportedly abducted yesterday noon.

They are Athui Mong Karbari, 55, head of Tangkhang Para, his wife Apruma Marma, 45, Paichha Pru, 60 and his wife.

Jalal Ahmed, second officer of Thanchi Police Station, said the law enforcers along with members of joint forces were working to rescue the four.

BNP raises question

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We will talk about it later," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, reports UNB.

"Do you know the ownership of the satellite has gone to two people? Now you [government] have to buy its service from them."

The BNP leader was speaking at a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club. The pro-BNP Doctors' Association of Bangladesh (DAB) organised the programme demanding proper treatment of party Chairperson Khaleda Zia and her release from jail, and protesting the recent attack on Dr Samiul Alam Suhan near the capital's Doel Chatter.

Fakhru said though the government sent the satellite to the space, the country's people were going through immense sufferings. "Our farmers are not getting fair prices of their produces while the labourers are not getting fair wages. There is also no measure to preserve the produce of the growers."

Describing the current government as an "unelected" one, he raised question about the validity of the deals it has been singing with different countries.

In an oblique reference to the media reports on some recent defence

deals with India, the BNP leader said, "Many deals are being signed. Who has given her [prime minister] the right to ink the deals as parliament is not elected with people's votes?"

Meanwhile, the BNP yesterday announced that it would stage demonstrations across the country tomorrow demanding better treatment of Khaleda and her release from jail.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi declared the programme at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan central office.

He said party leaders and activists would hold demonstrations in all the upazila headquarters and thanas of metropolitan cities.

The BNP chief is now behind bars in a graft case.

Farmers facing

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Boro on two bighas of land taking Tk 16,300 loan from an NGO. He got 31 maunds of paddy and got Tk 17,050 from it.

"I have decided to cultivate vegetables and tobacco from next year," said a frustrated Manos Mia.

Paddy trader Babul Mia, owner of Sahed Ali Auto Rice Mill, said at the beginning of Baishakh rice was sold at Tk 705 per maund. But since then the price has gradually declined.

Jyotirmoy Roy, president of Madhanagar Paddy, Rice Traders Association, said, "Rice is abundant in the market as the commodity is being imported without tax, causing low price."

Swapan Kumar Saha, deputy director of Sunamganj DAE, said, "We have made huge production of Boro this year, but the price has come down. The farmers are now selling paddy in a hurry because of rain."

He expressed the hope that after a few days they would get better price.

Bazlul Majid Chowdhury, president of "Save Haor, Save Sunamganj" movement, said Boro production is huge in the district. When Sunamganj produced around 9 lakh tonnes of rice, the government is going to buy 30,000 tonnes of paddy and 8,000 to 10,000 tonnes of rice.

The volume of purchase is very insignificant compared to the district's production, he observed.

He said the target of rice purchase has to be increased, while the government should fix the price of rice.

Khairul Bashar, leader of Krishak Sangram Samiti, Dharmapasa upazila, said, "If the government does not buy rice from real farmers, the latter will go to the middlemen and face heavy loss."

Two killed

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Siddiqur Rahman and his accomplices opened fire on the detectives around 3:00am. The DB team retaliated, triggering a "gunfight".

Alamgir suffered bullet injuries when he tried to escape from police custody. He was taken to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) where doctors declared him dead, said the official.

In another incident, a team of Kotwali police raided SA Sarker Road area in the town where Mobarak Morshed Milky, a teacher at Mymensingh Zilla School, was stabbed by muggers early Friday.

Police detained a person in this regard but did not reveal his identity for the sake of investigation.

After interrogation of the detainee, the police raided the SA Sarker Road area around 4:00am yesterday.

The "gunfight" took place when Sirajul and his cohorts opened fire on the police team, said the OC of Kotwali police.

Sirajul was injured in the "gunfight" and was taken to MMCH where doctors pronounced him dead.

The bodies were sent to MMCH morgue for autopsy.

Syria fight against IS in Damascus stalls, dozens dead

AFP, Beirut

At least 86 pro-regime fighters were killed in Syria over the past week in battles against the Islamic State group as regime forces push to clear jihadists from their last stronghold in Damascus, a monitor said yesterday.

The jihadists have lost 57 fighters in the clashes in the Hajar al-Aswad district on the outskirts of Damascus since May 5, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Since mid-April, forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad have pounded IS in its last Damascus bastion.

Retaking the area, which includes Hajar al-Aswad and the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmuk, would place the regime in full control of the capital and its surroundings for the first time since 2012.

"The clashes continue. Despite its firepower, the regime has been unable to achieve any significant advance on the ground for a week," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said.

"IS is entrenched in tunnels and underground shelters and it has been conducting counter-attacks since Saturday."

At least 203 pro-government fighters have been killed along with 159 IS jihadists since April 19, according to the Observatory.

Government forces have retaken 60 percent of Hajar al-Aswad, but jihadists still control 80 percent of Yarmuk, the monitor said.

Once a thriving district home to some 160,000 Palestinians and Syrians, Yarmuk's population has fallen to just a few hundred people.

The regime continued to pound the area with air strikes and artillery fire on Saturday, the Observatory said.

IS has been expelled from most of the country since it declared a "caliphate" across large swathes of Syria and neighbouring Iraq in 2014.

But it still holds around five percent of Syrian territory, in eastern and central desert holdouts and on the edge of Damascus.

Syria's war has killed more than 350,000 people since it started in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests before spiralling into a complex conflict involving world powers and jihadists.