



Khulna City Corporation goes to polls tomorrow. In their final push to woo voters, Awami League mayor candidate Talukder Abdul Khaleque and his BNP counterpart Nazrul Islam Monju are seen campaigning hard yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

AL men dominate, BNP men lie low

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electioneering openly? We are in fear," added Mona.

With only a day to go for the high-voltage battle of ballots, both Khaleque and Monju yesterday traded blame for plotting to snatch ballots and carry out vote rigging.

Voicing concern at a press conference yesterday, Monju alleged that the ruling AL men are intimidating voters and BNP men to prevent them from going to polling centres.

He also doubted whether voters would be able to cast ballots freely in tomorrow's polls.

The AL camp, however, rejected the allegations.

Making a counter-allegation during the electioneering yesterday, Khaleque claimed that the BNP is making preparations to snatch ballots and rig votes by engaging its cadres.

Meanwhile, police said more than 10,000 personnel of the law enforcement agencies and the Border Guard Bangladesh have been deployed in the city to ensure foolproof security for tomorrow's polls.

Sonali Sen, spokesperson for Khulna Metropolitan Police, told this newspaper that they have put in place a three-tier security arrangement so that voters can cast ballots in a congenial atmosphere without any fear.

Sonali, also additional deputy commissioner of the KMP, further said the law enforcement agencies have already set up checkpoints at all nine entry points to the city.

"Nineteen platoons of the BGB have started patrolling the city roads. We are also conducting raids in different areas."

She also mentioned that law enforcers were arresting the accused in criminal

cases, and all police stations, intelligence agencies and patrol teams were kept on high alert.

Since yesterday morning, campaigners for Khaleque brought out processions one after another and paraded the city's main roads, seeking votes for "boat" -- the electoral symbol of the AL mayoral candidate.

They flooded the roads around Picture Palace, Society Intersection, Shibbari, Gollamari and Sonadanga areas.

SM Kamal, chief election coordinator of Khaleque, said people came out on the streets voluntarily to express support for the AL-nominated candidate.

Khaleque was elected mayor in the 2008 election with the backing of the AL.

While speaking to these correspondents, some of the voters doubted whether the city election would be held in a free and fair manner.

"We are in doubt whether voters will

be able to cast ballots freely," said Reaz Ahmed, an employee at a private firm, in the city's Basupara area.

However, Md Yunus Ali, returning officer for the KCC polls, said, "We have taken adequate measures to hold the city corporation elections in a free, fair and credible manner."

He said their 31 vigilance teams comprising an executive magistrate each have been monitoring whether the electoral code of conduct is being followed properly.

"They will take legal action if any candidate violates the code," added the RO.

Besides, 10 teams of judicial magistrates will be assigned on the Election Day to take immediate action in case of breach of the code.

In their final attempts to woo voters, mayoral and councillor hopefuls used emails, phones and the social media as

the 19-day-long electioneering ended at midnight.

In emails to many of the voters, Monju wrote, "I seek your blessings, and vote. To have a better Khulna, I seek your support in the May 15 mayoral election."

Khaleque's supporters also sent emails to voters, seeking votes and blessings.

The candidates also carried out campaigns through social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter.

Meanwhile, both the AL and the BNP brought allegations against each other of distributing money in different areas of the city, especially in slums, to buy votes.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ehtesamul Haque Shaon, office secretary of Khulna city BNP, ruled out the allegation of distributing money to buy votes.

Advocate Saiful Islam, president of

Khulna city AL, also refuted similar allegations against the AL camp.

"Our candidate has huge popularity. Why will we distribute money?" he asked.

Tomorrow's election will be the first partisan election in the KCC since its formation in 1984.

In this battle of ballots ahead of the next parliamentary polls, around four lakh voters in the KCC are set to cast ballots to pick their mayor and 41 councillors for five years.

BNP-backed Moniruzzaman Moni now holds the post of mayor.

Only one AL-backed candidate -- Khaleque -- had been successful in securing the post of mayor since the KCC's formation.

This time, the BNP is taking part in a major election with its Chairperson Khaleda Zia in prison.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2018 UNHCR to mark it in Rohingya camps

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will celebrate the World Refugee Day 2018 in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar on June 20 to raise global awareness for global responsibility for refugees.

UNHCR Chief Filippo Grandi is expected to visit Bangladesh to attend the celebrations of the day and as well as to see the Rohingya situation and discuss the issue with the government and other stakeholders.

This will be Grandi's third visit to Bangladesh in less than a year since he visited the Refugee camps on July 8-10 and on Sept 23-26 in 2017.

Grandi is the 11th High Commissioner for Refugees who was elected by the UN General Assembly on January 1 last year to serve a five-year term until December 31, 2020.

His visit reflects the importance of the world's largest refugee crisis in the country and Bangladesh has been hosting over 1.1 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals for years.

Of this figure, more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh since Aug 25, when attacks by Rohingya militants in the Rakhine state triggered a Myanmar military crackdown that the United Nations has branded "a text book example of ethnic cleansing."

Diplomatic sources say Filippo Grandi's visit will draw the global attention to the plight of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees, who have been forced to flee their homes to escape persecution, killings and sexual violence in Rakhine State.

Grandi, who in July called for Myanmar to grant Rohingyas citizenship of the country, also asked a Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh what it would take for him to return. The refugee said Myanmar needed to restore citizenship and fundamental rights of the Rohingyas.

During his visit in September, Grandi said the solution to the Rohingya crisis is granting them Myanmar citizenship and put emphasis on implementation of the citizenship verification process "efficiently and rapidly" which will help unblock all remaining barriers to a solution.

Late last month, the United Nations said that the lives of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees hang in the balance as they face 'life threatening' hazards due to the monsoon and cyclone seasons which threaten to destroy their makeshift camps in Bangladesh.

The United Nations migration organization - the International Organization for Migration (IOM) - appealed in a statement, released on April 27, for urgent financial aid to

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The tailback on Chittagong-Dhaka highway stretched around 114km from Sitakunda to Comilla yesterday. The traffic would not move an inch for hours on end, leaving passengers and transport workers exhausted without food and sleep. With nothing else to do, many transport workers, like this truck driver, were seen sleeping by their vehicles. The photo was taken near Mirsharai in Chittagong at 3:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Flyover chokes highway to Ctg

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congestion, which stretched around 114km from Sitakunda of Chittagong to Chouddagram of Comilla yesterday morning.

The Dhaka-Chittagong highway, the busiest in the country, sees occasional tailbacks. But the ongoing congestion began on Wednesday after a portion of the four-lane highway was closed at Fatehpur of Feni for constructing a railway-overpass in the area, said Rafique Ahmed Mazumder, traffic inspector of Fauzderhat Highway Police outpost of Chittagong.

Also, the other side of the highway in that area is in a bad shape due to rain and excessive pressure of vehicles, which worsened the situation further, he said.

The situation improved slightly in the evening after the authorities started diverting the Chittagong-bound vehicles to an alternative route in Fatehpur.

Meanwhile, the Inter-District Bus Owners Association had called for a strike from today demanding a solution, but later lifted it on assurance from Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader that things will improve soon.

The association leaders also had a meeting with Additional Commissioner (Traffic) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police Kusum Dewan at the latter's office.

They called off the strike after the meetings.

"The communications minister has promised that the work would complete in 25 days. On the basis of the

assurance, we've suspended our strike," said Kafil Uddin, general secretary of Inter-District Bus Owners Association.

"If the situation does not improve, we will announce our strike again," he added.

"What's the point of operating vehicles? They remain stuck for 18 to 24 hours on the way," he said, adding, "Our drivers and helpers cannot sleep, they cannot take food and drinks for long hours... It is inhuman."

Earlier in the day, Obaidul Quader regretted the public suffering.

He told reporters at the secretariat that one lane of the overpass at Fatehpur would open tomorrow and the entire work would complete before the Eid, due in the middle of next month.

THE SUFFERING
Many transport workers were seen sleeping on the highway beside their vehicles, as bus passengers looked exhausted without food and sleep.

Ambulance driver Humayun Kabir, who was carrying a patient with heart condition from Chittagong to the capital yesterday, said he was stuck for 13 hours. "The patient is suffering badly."

Firoz Alam, a covered van driver, said he started from Chittagong Port for Savar on Thursday evening. It took him 18 hours to cross around 60km from Sitakunda to Feni.

At Fatehpur in Feni, traffic police are halting vehicles coming from one side for an hour so vehicles from the other side can pass through. For the next one hour, they open the road for the vehi-

cles of the other side, and it continues alternately, causing the tailback.

Ahsan Ahmed Saikat, a student, went to Chittagong to visit some relatives. On his way back to Dhaka, he was stranded for 10 hours yesterday.

"The bus started from Chittagong at 12:10am and we reached Feni at 10:00am. We reached Dhaka around 3:00pm."

BGMEA SEEKS SPECIAL TRAIN SERVICE

Mahbubul Alam, president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said businesspeople, especially the importers and exporters, are greatly affected due to this tailback on highway.

"Chittagong-Dhaka highway is the lifeline of the country... The traffic flow should be uninterrupted round the clock," he told The Daily Star.

Siddiqur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said they were facing huge loss due to the tailback.

"Owners are continuously complaining to us. They are saying that their orders will be cancelled if they fail to ship their products because of the tailback. This is an unbearable situation," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also demanded the government introduce a special train service on Dhaka-Chittagong route for passenger and cargo service for quick resolution to the impasse.

More than 80 percent of the goods-laden vehicles for export-import ply

through the highway which is known as the economic lifeline of Bangladesh.

Contacted, Zulfikar Ahmed, executive engineer of Department of Roads and Highways, Chittagong, as well as project manager of Chittagong-Dhaka highway four-lane project, said he heard from highway police that some vehicles got out of order in the middle of the road that worsened the situation.

He declined to comment further.

LONG DELAY TO CONSTRUCT THE OVERPASS

Road transport and bridges ministry awarded the work of the railway overpass to construction firm Shipu BPL in 2012.

As the company failed to complete the work in time, the job was handed over to another firm, Al Amin Construction, under the supervision of the army.

But bus and truck drivers alleged that the construction work of the overpass began without keeping good alternative road, leading to the current situation.

The highway has been witnessing tailback since the work resumed in March last year, but the situation worsened when the alternative road was closed a few days ago due to its poor condition.

The Daily Star could not reach the construction firm for comments.

[Our staff correspondent from Chittagong Arun Bikash Dey and Comilla correspondent Khalid Bin Nazrul contributed to this report]

BSF picks up three men for trespassing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Indian Border Security Force picked up three Bangladeshi cattle traders at Paria border in Thakurgaon's Baliadangi upazila early yesterday.

They are Shah Alam, 26, of Taranbari village, Abu Sayeed, 27, of Nayabasti village, and Yeasin Ali, 27, of Taranbari village, of the same upazila.

Lt Col Mohammad Hossain, commanding officer of 50 Border Guard Bangladesh Battalion in Thakurgaon, said a patrol team of BSF Satvita camp picked up the three near pillar-386 along the border around 5:00am as they entered India by cutting barbed wire fence along the border.

In the afternoon, a company commander-level flag meeting was held between 50 BGB Battalion and BSF of Satvita camp near the border. BSF said they detained the three and handed them over to police, the BGB official said.

Gazipur city polls

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be held on May 15. But a sudden three-month stay on the polls by a High Court bench, in response to a writ petition, forced the commission to postpone the election.

A four-member bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain on May 10 scrapped the bar on the city election following separate petitions filed by the EC and the mayoral candidates of both Awami League and BNP.

The SC stayed the HC order for an indefinite period and also asked the EC to hold the polls by June 28 after Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda on Wednesday spoke about difficulties in holding the polls as per schedule.

Earlier on May 6, the High Court stayed the polls for three months following a writ petition challenging inclusion of six mouzas of a union in the city and the polls schedule.

Talking to the Gazipur Correspondent, BNP's mayor candidate Hasan Uddin Sarker expressed his gratitude towards the EC for its decision.

Asking the commission to ensure a level-playing field, he said, "If the Election Commission issues a bar on holding mass campaign during Ramadan, I wish such bars will be applicable for both the candidates."

His rival, ruling Awami League candidate Jahangir Alam, however said he would begin formal mass campaign on June 18.

"The festive mood of election has returned to Gazipur," he observed.

The EC and the candidates from the AL and BNP -- frontrunners for the mayoral post -- filed three appeals with the SC against the HC's postponement order.

The electioneering that began on April 24 was also suspended 10 days before the voting.