

Torun League leader killed in Jessore bomb attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

An organising secretary of district Torun League, a pro-Awami League organisation, was killed, and a district Jubo League leader was seriously injured in a bomb attack in Palbari area of Jessore on Sunday night.

The dead was identified as Sheikh Monirul Islam, 36, from Police Lines Talikhona area, while the injured was Santosh Ghosh, 36, from Puraton Kosba area.

A K M Azmal Huda, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said a gang of miscreants hurled a bomb at Monirul and Santosh, while they were in the Palbari area waiting for transport, around 11:45pm.

Locals rushed to the spot, rescued the two, and took them to Jessore General Hospital. Monirul died on the way, while Santosh is currently under treatment there.

Locals said the attack took place due to the on-going conflict between

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The countdown

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the official last date for submission of provisional squads, but due to the time difference around the world, we will probably have to wait a few more hours to get a clear picture of which players made the cut to the provisional squads of the 32 teams set to compete in the greatest show on earth from June 14 to July 15.

The FIFA World Cup is the time that people all around the world wait eagerly for and every four years they get to see their football icons in action and partake in the joys and heartaches that the beautiful game unfurls over the span of a month.

Bangladesh, despite being a cricket-crazy nation, is not immune to the craze and hysteria of football's showpiece event. On the contrary, the love and passion for the global game reaches such an extreme level during this time that all other sports and events take a distinct back seat.

The passion is evident in flags of favourite teams fluttering on rooftops and balconies, in storms in teacups, television talk shows and binge-watching the games all through the night.

With exactly 30 days left to the start of the tournament, we start our countdown from today with articles, features and analyses of the FIFA World Cup and the 32 teams that will be part of it.



Election fever grips Khulna City Corporation with posters and banners of candidates flooding every street in the city. Top right, polls officials set up electronic voting machines or EVM at a polling centre. Bottom right, law enforcers take ballot boxes to another voting centre. The photos were taken yesterday.



PHOTOS: AMRAN HOSSAIN

AL, BNP set for tough contest

FROM PAGE 1

Election Commission and the law enforcers yesterday claimed they were all set to hold the polls in a free and fair manner ensuring a congenial atmosphere.

Both the camps of the AL and its archrival BNP looked to have summoned all their strength to seal victory in the prestigious polls that would be a test of popularity ahead of the general elections likely in December.

The parties believe win in those elections would also boost their morale to a great extent and they would be able to go for the Jatiya Sangsad polls with an upbeat, according to political analysts.

A defeat could be the opposite. Also, a win for the AL candidate through irregularities will taint the government's image and strengthen the BNP's demand for the parliamentary polls under a non-partisan government, they said, adding the election would also be a test for the EC to prove its acceptance and accountability ahead of the December polls.

With 4.93 lakh voters, Khulna city corporation area is considered a stronghold of the BNP. Its leaders won three of the four mayoral polls there since the first elections in 1994.

During field visits, The Daily Star correspondents yesterday saw that the entire Khulna city was flooded with posters and banners of the AL mayor

candidate and the councillor aspirants.

Although illegal, there were "polling offices" of the AL on different streets of the city.

Like on Sunday, almost no BNP men was seen on the streets yesterday to work for their mayor candidate.

Amid such a situation, many voters expressed doubt whether the voting would be fair.

ALLEGATIONS

BNP leaders alleged that their posters and banners were torn by the ruling party men -- an allegation rejected by the AL.

They also alleged that AL men, desperate for a win, were trying to capture polling stations yesterday to go for ballot stuffing today.

Talking to The Daily Star, at least 10 BNP-backed ward councillors alleged that AL men along with some policemen were intimidating their polling agents and their family members so that they don't come out of their home today.

"We are in fear whether our polling agents, workers and voters will be able to go to the polling centres," BNP's mayor candidate Nazrul Islam Monju said at a briefing at his party office.

He said police detained at least 18 BNP men yesterday, taking the total number of party men held ahead of the polls to 154.

He further alleged that police in Khulna were not letting hotel owners to

accommodate BNP men. However, the case was different for AL men.

Monju, who was elected a lawmaker in the 2008 national elections, expressed fear that AL men would fake fights in front of polling centres today

LAST FOUR POLLS

1

WINNER IN 1994

Shaikh Tayebur Rahman

2

WINNER IN 2002

Shaikh Tayebur Rahman

3

WINNER IN 2008

Talukder Abdul Khaleque

4

WINNER IN 2013

Moniruzzaman Moni

to have them vacated for ballot stuffing.

Meanwhile, AL mayor candidate Talukder Abdul Khaleque at another press conference in Khulna yesterday rejected all the allegations.

He brought a counter allegation against the BNP that its candidate was sure about his defeat and that was why he was gathering the cadres of the BNP-Jamaat and banned militant outfits for

vote rigging.

"My opponent is trying to spread propaganda to raise questions over the election. Why they are in fear? People will vote for them if they had worked for the people and we will accept the results," he said.

Asked about detaining BNP men, the AL leader said law enforcers were arresting ruling party men as well. He, however, could not give any number of such AL men.

He claimed that a level-playing field was ensured ahead of the polls where people would be able to cast their votes without any fear.

At one point, Khaleque, who resigned as an MP to contest the polls, became emotional and said he was committed to serving the people in Khulna until his death.

Several AL leaders accused the BNP candidate of violating the electoral code of conduct.

Talking to The Daily Star, several top officials from the Khulna Metropolitan Police said they were instructed to carry out their election duty impartially.

"We have taken all out preparations to thwart any untoward situation for ensuring a peaceful atmosphere on the voting day," KMP Commissioner Humayun Kabir said.

"Stern legal actions will be taken against the offenders irrespective of their party affiliation."

Another top official from the KMP said, "We have taken special preparations to maintain law and order near the risky polling stations."

Contacted, Returning Officer Md Yunus Ali said they were all set for the polls.

He also said they would stop voting at any polling station if there was any rigging.

Meanwhile, Monju met the RO last night and demanded immediate withdrawal of the KMP commissioner, deputy commissioner of DB in the district and the OCs of the six police stations in the city.

The BNP leader alleged that the police officials were working for the AL candidate and that if they were not withdrawn, today's polls would be farcical.

HC ORDER

The High Court yesterday directed law enforcers not to harass or arrest any political activists in Khulna City Corporation area until the election was over.

The court also issued a rule asking the government to explain in four weeks why the alleged mass arrest of BNP leaders, activists and election campaigners should not be declared illegal.

The HC bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Md Ashrafur Kamal came up with the order and rule in response to a writ petition was filed on Sunday.

ROHINGYA CRISIS

War crimes judges to hold closed talks

AFP, The Hague

War crimes judges will hold closed-door talks next month to discuss whether to allow the launch of a probe into the forced exodus of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar.

Only chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda will appear before the three judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC) hearing on June 20, presiding judge Peter Kovacs said in his Friday order, seen by AFP yesterday.

Some 700,000 Rohingyas have fled Myanmar's northern Rakhine State into neighbouring Bangladesh since August to escape a bloody military crackdown.

In an unprecedented move last month, Bensouda asked judges at the world's only permanent war crimes court to rule whether she can investigate the deportations as a crime against humanity.

It is a legally complicated request, as Myanmar is not a signatory and member of the Rome Statute which underpins the ICC.

Bangladesh is, however, and Bensouda argued that should give her office jurisdiction to investigate the Rohingyas' plight.

She likened deportation to "a cross-border shooting", arguing the crime "is not completed until the bullet [fired in one state] strikes and kills the victim [standing in another state]".

"The chamber convenes a status conference on 20 June 2018, to be held in closed session, only in the presence of the prosecutor," Kovacs ordered.

He accompanied the order with a confidential annex which he said contained issues which Bensouda must address at the June hearing.

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Kremlin breaches international rules

Claims UK intel chief

AFP, London

Russia is committing "flagrant breaches of international rules", the head of Britain's security service claimed yesterday.

M15 chief Andrew Parker said in a landmark speech in Berlin that a March nerve agent attack on Russian nationals Sergei and Yulia Skripal, which also injured a police officer, was a "deliberate and targeted malign activity" on British soil.

Parker, who has a 35-year career in intelligence said the attack is evidence of Russia pursuing an agenda through "aggressive and pernicious actions" and risks making the country a "more isolated pariah".

Russia has denied any involvement in the attack and has challenged Britain to reveal evidence to back up its claim that the Russian state was likely behind it.

Fresh demo over quota

FROM PAGE 1

But the indefinite strike at universities and colleges boycotting all academic activities will go on until the gazette notification is published, he said at a press conference at Shahbagh.

"The premier conveyed us a message through the government high-ups that the gazette notification will be published soon and we have full faith in her," Nur added.

However, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed resentment at the quota movement during the cabinet meeting yesterday, said sources.

"I announced the decision to abolish the quota system and it would be implemented. But it needs some time. Staging protests and issuing ultimatum despite my assurance are not logical," Hasina was quoted by a minister as saying at the meeting.

The PM was speaking at an unscheduled discussion participated by several ministers.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed suggested implementing the prime minister's decision immediately and said a vested quarter is spreading confusion over the issue, added the sources.

Briefing the press after the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiqul Alam said there will be a decision soon. "No decision was taken at the meeting over quota system but it is in progress. It might happen in the next few days," he said.

"So far I have heard," he added, "the summary of the proposal over the quota system has already been sent from the public administration ministry [to the Prime Minister's Office] and the decision will be known soon."

At another briefing, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said the quota issue was discussed at the cabinet meeting where the prime minister was suggested: "Abolish the quota first. After one or two years, a decision can be taken through reviewing the outcome of the abolition."

The minister said the PM was very busy in the last few days, which delayed the decision.

On Sunday, the quota reformists called boycotts of classes and examinations in all universities and colleges across the country from today for an indefinite period.

Yesterday, more than 3,000 protesters -- mostly from Dhaka University and other colleges in the capital -- brought out

a procession from in front of the DU Central Library around 11:00am.

They marched towards each faculty and were joined by students who came out of classrooms. Some exams, which started before 11:00am, however continued.

After marching different roads through Dowel Chattar, Shaheed Minar, High Court and Matsya Bhavan areas, the protesters took position at Shahbagh intersection. By afternoon, several hundred more joined the demo.

Around 3:00pm, a team of DB police came to Shahbagh and stayed in front of BIRDEM Hospital for hours. Earlier, a central leader of the BCL, a pro-government student organisation, wanted to cross the intersection on bike, but the protesters stopped him. Some heated exchanges took place between him and the protesters.

The demonstrators vowed not to leave the street until the gazette is published. Traffic was severely disrupted for several hours as no vehicle was allowed to cross the intersection, except for ambulances.

The protesters alleged that the government was dilly-dallying even after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament on April 11 had declared that the quota system would be scrapped.

"We wanted quota reform but the prime minister declared to scrap it. We welcomed her statement. We issued several ultimatums for publishing the gazette notification. But no visible progress was seen even in 33 days after the premier's announcement," said Muhammad Rashed Khan, another joint convener of the platform.

He said they were compelled to take to the streets as many high officials of government made confusing remarks regarding the gazette.

Nurul Huq Nur said the government may keep 15 percent quota after reform but the percentage should not be more than that. "We don't want the scrapping of quota, and students won't accept more than 15 percent."

He hoped that the prime minister will look into their five-point demand, including reducing the quota privilege to 10 percent from 56, for what they have been demonstrating since February 17.

Demonstrations also took place in different colleges and universities across the country.

In Jahangirnagar University, over 300 protesters brought out a procession on the

campus, carrying banners that read "No more delay, issue gazette notification", reports our JU correspondent.

In Chittagong University, quota reformists staged a sit-in on the rail tracks, obstructing the CU shuttle train service since 8:00am. In Rajshahi University, more than 300 students brought out a procession on the campus around 2:50pm, reports our correspondents.

Meanwhile, the official Facebook group of quota reform protest got hacked. Fake profiles were created under the names of the quota demo leaders and made admins of the group.

Contacted by our DU correspondent, Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad Convener Hasan Al Mamun said the group was hacked around midnight. They have created a backup group and were trying to recover the original one.

Earlier on Wednesday, the protesters formed human chains in colleges and universities countrywide and threatened to begin demonstrations from Sunday if the government failed to publish the gazette notification by Thursday.

They called for fresh demonstrations after Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiqul Alam on May 7 said there was no progress on the gazette publication.

Mozammel Haque Khan, senior secretary of the public administration ministry, repeated almost the same statement the next day. On Thursday, he said a proposal for forming a committee was sent to the Prime Minister's Office.

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

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

In early April, students of public and private universities across the country staged massive demonstrations. On the night of April 8, violence flared up on DU campus and police charged truncheons and fired teargas shells at protesters injuring at least 163.

Currently, 44 percent of the public service recruitments are reserved for merit list and 56 percent for various quotas.