

COAL SCAM

PM's adviser warns of tough action

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prime minister's Energy Advisor Tawfique-e-Elahi Chowdhury yesterday said stern action would be taken against those involved in coal misappropriation in the Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd (BCMCL).

"[The] prime minister has taken a firm stance on this issue," he told deputy commissioners, (DCs) while discussing various issues relating to power and energy at the annual DC conference at the Secretariat.

He added that the PM has asked for stern action to be taken against all those who took part in the scam.

"No one will be spared," he told journalists, after coming out of the three-day annual conference that began yesterday.

Tawfique said there would be load-shedding in the northern region for a temporary period since the Barapukuria coal-fired power plant in Dinajpur was shut down due to a fuel crisis.

The crisis surfaced after the mysterious disappearance of 1.42 lakh tonnes of coal, worth about Tk 227 crore, from the BCMCL yard.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday issued restrictions against leaving the country on the Managing Director of BCMCL Habib Uddin Ahmed and three other high-ups.

The three are: Abul Kashem Prodhania, general manager and the company secretary, Abu Taher Md Nuruzzaman Chowdhury, general manager (mine operation) and Khaledul Islam, deputy managing director (store).

A letter signed by ACC's Deputy Director Shamsul Alam was sent to the emigration police, asking them to take necessary measures in this regard, confirmed ACC's Public Relations Officer Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya.

Their names came up after the coal scam surfaced in the media.

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A view of Purbo Manda Ideal College in Naogaon's Manda upazila. Two examinees of this college took this year's HSC exams, but they both became unsuccessful. The photo was taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: STAR

Pakistan votes

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But the mammoth deployment coupled with a recent decision by election authorities to grant military officers broad powers inside polling centres has stirred fears of possible manipulation.

The military presence is just the latest controversy in a bitter campaign season that has seen accusations of "pre-poll rigging", the expansion of hardline religious parties, and a string of bloody militant attacks that have killed more than 180 people, including three candidates.

Despite the controversies and bloodshed, political parties continued to crisscross the country in the final days before the polls, holding dozens of rallies in key battleground areas.

The contest has largely been distilled to a two-party fight between jailed former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's incumbent Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party, and cricket legend Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf.

Pakistan. We should give him a chance," said Muhammad Wasim, 32, pointing to what he described as the success Khan's party has had in governing northwestern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province.

Others cited the improvements in infrastructure under the PML-N in the sprawling city in the east of the country, vowing to stick by the party hit by several corruption convictions ahead of the election.

"They have served the masses, they have put an end to... (power cuts) and given us better facilities including roads, transport and education," said shopkeeper Muhammad Nawaz, 45.

Political parties held their final rallies Monday night -- before campaigning was suspended -- in a last-ditch attempt to energise voters.

"I am giving this task to all of you: wake up early on the 25th and cast your vote," Khan told thousands of PTI faithful in Lahore.

In southern Punjab, PML-N leader Shabbaz Sharif -- the former premier's brother -- said victory was "certain".

"Despite all the odds, PML-N is winning the July 25 polls," he was quoted as saying by Pakistani media.

The PML-N has accused the powerful military, the country's most powerful institution, of manipulating candidates and the media ahead of the vote in a bid to push out the party and install a pliant government, with Khan seen as the likely beneficiary.

Activists and think tanks have also widely decried a "silent coup" by Pakistan's generals.

It is unlikely that any of the main three parties will win a majority.

Imran Khan, whom both PML-N and PPP say are favoured by military, is wary of governing with the established parties.

"If we have to make a coalition with either of the two main parties, then it means we can't bring about any major reforms," said Khan, who as captain led Pakistan to victory in the 1992 Cricket World Cup.

The military, which has ruled Pakistan for nearly half of its 71-year history, denies any effort to influence the election.

The divisive campaign is likely to complicate any coalition negotiations after the vote, if they are necessary.

Whoever wins the election, analysts predict, will be weak enough to have his strings handled from Army HQ.

Results are expected in the early hours of Thursday.

Bee scent

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when they perceive a threat to their hive.

A total of 25 of 29 elephants that approached the "showed typical signs of increased alertness, signs of uncertainty, and finally calmly moved away," said the report in the journal Current Biology.

To make sure it wasn't simply the socks but the odour emanating from them, researchers hung similar socks that did not contain the pheromones, and found that elephants were curious about the socks, would pick them up and even taste them at times.

Since some farmers in Africa already place commercial bee hives along their fence lines to protect their crops from elephants, the results suggest there may be a cheaper way to ward off conflicts.

"Our results complement previous studies that have demonstrated that active bee hives can deter elephants from crops for example but may be difficult to implement on a large scale," said lead author Mark Wright, a professor of entomology at the Department of Plant and Environmental Protection Sciences at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

"We hope to extend this work to develop additional tools for sustainable passive management of elephant movements, to augment the current approaches used."

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Ashraf Alam, chairman of the college governing body, said they should have appointed an English teacher immediately for the sake of the examinees as they were not regular students, meaning they had failed in one or more subjects in previous years.

But the college could not recruit anyone for lack of funds, he added.

Progati Model College is one of the 55 institutions that saw zero pass rate in this year's HSC exams.

The Daily Star visited seven such colleges in the last three days and found some common features: all these institutions have big campuses and a good number of teachers, and none of them gets government funds. The teachers don't get salaries regularly and they seldom take classes.

Take Satla Ideal College as another example.

Founded by BNP leader Sorfuddin Santu in 2001, the tin-roof college building on a 2.87-acre plot in Barisal's Ujirpur upazila has seven teachers. But all its 17 students failed the HSC exams.

Students and guardians alleged that the teachers didn't take classes regularly. Classes were held only twice a week after the students filled out forms for the HSC exams.

The principal, Humayun Kabir, started coming to the college less frequently after he became Sholok Union Parishad chairman two years ago.

Contacted, he admitted this, and said all the seven teachers at the college are demoralised as they didn't get the MPO or any government funds since its inception.

"How could I run the college properly if the teachers remain unpaid -- some of them for the last 18 years," Humayun said over the phone.

Several guardians alleged that the teachers at the college didn't take classes regularly. "It's an educational institution, but we seldom see them take classes," said a guardian.

Visiting the college on Monday noon, this newspaper found it almost deserted. There was no student in any of the classrooms. Clothes were hanging from ropes in the corridor and goats were wandering there.

One of the teachers said most of the students live in faraway areas and are irregular. Many of them had failed in several subjects in previous years.

This correspondent managed to talk to one of the students, Shamim, who painted a dismal picture of academic activities at the college.

He passed Dakhil (equivalent to SSC) exams with GPA 4.52 from Rajapur Madrasa.

"I had got admitted to another college, but the Salta union chairman persuaded my family to have me shifted here," he said.

The situation is even gloomier at Naogaon's Purba Manda Ideal College, which recorded zero pass rate in HSC exams for the second time.

Only two students sat for the HSC exams this year and both failed -- one in physics and the other in mathematics. Last year, only one student appeared in the exams, and he too failed.

Set up in Manda upazila in 2004, the college has 18 teachers but no specialised one to teach English. It is not on the government's payroll and is solely dependent on the locals' donations.

During a recent visit to the institution, a correspondent from The Daily Star saw only 15 students attending classes at a tin-shed building. The college authorities, however, said a total of 71 students study in science, humanities and commerce groups there.

Principal Joydul Abedin said HSC examinees from the college flunked mainly because they couldn't attend classes regularly for helping their parents in their work.

"Only poor and weak students come here for admission. It might be another reason for the poor result," he said.

Besides, some of the teachers at the college have become irregular as they are not getting salaries regularly. They have to do alternative work to run their families.

"We lead a miserable life as we don't get any salary from the government. That's why many of us have to either offer private tuitions or work as shopkeepers just for survival," said

Kanak Kumar Gain, who teaches psychology at the college.

Chongacha Women's College is another college with zero success rate.

Only a female student had appeared in this year's HSC exams from the institution in Chongacha union of Sirajganj Sadar upazila.

Built on a piece of donated land, the college had begun its journey with 14 teachers and a good number of students in 1991. However, the number of teachers has now come down to only six, thanks to irregular payment of salaries.

The existing teachers are also not taking classes regularly. Because of this, the number of students is declining.

Three students had appeared in last year's HSC exams and only one of them passed. In 2016, five students took the test and two of them came out successful, said Latifur Rahman, principal of the college.

He said many of the teachers changed job as the school had not been brought under the MPO coverage in all these years. "How can anyone work without salaries?" he asked.

Similar is the situation at Durgapur School and College in Gurudaspur upazila of Natore.

Four students appeared in this year's HSC exam and all of them failed, mostly in English. The college has 20 teachers but most of them don't even come to the institution, which doesn't get government funds.

"We started [this college] in 2002 but still our teachers are working without any pay. They have to do various jobs to earn a living," said Yasin Ali, acting principal of the college.

Contacted, Gurudaspur Upazila Secondary Education Officer Hafizur Rahman said it was true that the teachers were not getting salaries, but "they cannot let their students down".

"We will inform the higher authorities about the matter so that they can take necessary steps," he added.

Krishnanagar Abdul Jabbar School and College has a different case.

Thirteen students from the college sat for the HSC exams. However, none of them passed.

The college is situated in a remote

village in Krishnanagar union of Brahmanbaria. The union is known for frequent clashes among people of different villages.

In the last one year, several incidents of murder, arson and looting took place at eight villages in the union. Therefore, the students from the villages could not attend classes for many days, said Ferdousur Rahman, acting principal of the college.

However, sources at the institution said shortage of teachers was also a key reason behind its dismal performance.

Contacted, Comilla Education Board Chairman Prof Md Ruhul Amin said, "We will issue show cause notices to the institutions [in Comilla] with zero pass rate."

The institutions would be given another chance to do well only for the sake of their students. If they fail again, the affiliation of the institutions with the board will be cancelled," he added.

[Our correspondents from Jhenidah, Barisal, Chapainawabganj, Pabna, Natore and Brahmanbaria contributed to this report]

Display fees

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why they should not be ordered to take step so that licences are collected from the authorities concerned for establishing diagnostic centres and clinical laboratories.

Health secretary, DGHS director general, Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council, the inspector general of police and the director general of Rapid Action Battalion have been made respondents.

The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Md Khairul Alam came up with the order and rule after hearing a writ petition filed by Human Rights Lawyers and Securing Environment Society of Bangladesh seeking necessary order so that the private clinics, hospitals and diagnostic centres run well.

The bench fixed October 7 for passing further order on this issue.

Bashir Ahmed appeared for the petitioner while Deputy Attorney General Masud Hasan Chowdhury Parag represented the government.

Act tough on drugs, terror

FROM PAGE 1

with your care....," Hasina said.

The premier asked the DCs to work for the socioeconomic development of people. "Hope, you'll engage your creativity and talents."

Hasina laid out the 23-point directive for the DCs to ensure people's welfare and directed them to be more active in implementing development programmes.

Terming the DCs the representatives of the government at the district-level, she asked them to carry out their responsibilities with the mindset of serving the people.

The PM asked them to know the problems and prospects of their areas in detail and inform the central administration timely. The development plans were prepared on the basis of their reports.

Praising the initiatives of a number of district administrations and police officials for making their districts free from begging, Hasina assured them of providing assistance from her relief fund to make their drive even more successful.

About the steps of her government to set up 100 economic zones across the country, Hasina directed the top divisional and district officials not to allocate any cultivable land for building factories.

The ultimate goal of the present government is to build a happy, prosperous, knowledge-based Digital

Bangladesh, which is free from hunger, poverty, illiteracy, militancy and communalism, she said, adding, "The role of divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners are very much important to this end." State Minister for Public Administration Ismat Ara Sadique, Cabinet Secretary Shafiqul Alam and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office M Nojibur Rahman also spoke on the occasion.

Rajshahi divisional commissioner and deputy commissioners of Naogaon, Chuadanga and Munshiganj also addressed the programme.

23-POINT DIRECTIVE

- Remain careful so that people do not get harassed and deprived of government services while trying to avail these.
- Young people have to be saved from the clutches of drugs and the drive against drugs will continue.
- Discharge your duties with more sincerity to maintain peace, discipline and stability by rooting out militancy, terrorism and communalism.
- Steps should be taken for alleviating poverty through rural infrastructure development, flourishing potential local small and medium industries and generating employment.
- Take the lead role in developing and flourishing information and communication technology.
- Work with public representatives

for establishing good governance at the grassroots level.

- Take steps to increase the rate of female education and bring back the dropped out students in the mainstream education.
- Remain vigilant to protect the government land alongside developing skill and transparency in land administration and management.
- Take all the necessary steps for an uninterrupted supply of fertilizers, seeds, power and fuel to boost agricultural production.
- Create widespread awareness to prevent marketing of adulterated food items and check the unethical activities.
- Strengthen the activities of community clinics further to ensure healthcare services for the poor and underprivileged community.
- Increase mass awareness to protect the environment and ensure proper enforcement of the law and rules relating to it.
- Take the right steps at the right time as per the "Disaster Management Law, 2012" and its related permanent directives for mitigating the impacts of natural disasters.
- Make village courts active to ensure justice for people and reduce the backlog of cases in courts.
- Make active, dynamic and effective all the district-level committees where DCs act as their heads.
- Strengthen the activities like hold-

ing information fair, observing services week aiming to reach the existing services of government offices to the grassroots level.

- Take steps to root out extortion, tender manipulation, muscle flexing and terrorism for maintaining peace in industrial zones and uninterrupted transportation of goods and carrying out export and import.
- Give importance to round-the-clock monitoring of market management and resist any ill-effects that create artificial crises in the market.
- Increase surveillance to stop woman and child oppression and trafficking, dowry, eve-teasing and early marriage.
- Take appropriate legal steps to stop violence, repression and discriminatory behaviour against the women.
- Enhance the facilities of sports, recreation and creative cultural activities in respective districts. Awaken the Liberation War spirit, cultural and scientific mind of children and juveniles.
- Take special steps for the disabled, autistic and underprivileged people.
- Protect the forest areas, rivers, water bodies, animal resources and the beauty of hills in hill districts. Extend all-out cooperation in flourishing the tourism industry, small and medium and cottage industries.



PAKISTAN'S 2018 ELECTION

In numbers

272

National Assembly seats up for grabs

106m

registered voters

171 women candidates

17,000 criminal cases against activists from outgoing PML-N party

371,000 troops deployed

SOURCE: DAWN

"Our predictions are very murky right now," Bilal Gilani, executive director of Gallup Pakistan, told AFP, adding that a huge chunk of voters remain undecided.

"It's still up for grabs."

Recent nationwide polls indicate a tight race, with Khan's party ahead on 30 percent in one survey, compared to 27 percent for PML-N. Sharif's party tops another poll with 26 percent compared to 25 percent for Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI).

To gain a majority, a party needs 137 of the 272 elected National Assembly seats. A further 70 seats for women and minorities are awarded proportionally based on the voting percentages.

At a distribution centre in Lahore, election workers complained of general discord and delays in the delivery of ballot boxes.

"I have been performing election duty for the past 22 years and I have never seen such a disorganised election my whole life," said one worker who asked to remain anonymous, adding that the troops overseeing the process had done little to help.

A day before the polls, voters were largely split in Lahore, the capital of Punjab -- Pakistan's most populous province and long a PML-N stronghold that is being fiercely challenged by Khan's PTI.

"I am supporting Imran Khan because he is the best choice for