

Foes within a headache in Sylhet too

STAR REPORT

All three major political parties are going to face internal rival issue in Sylhet division as nomination seekers substantially surpass the number of constituencies.

Ruling Awami League has around 96 nomination seekers and the BNP 72 in the 19 constituencies in the division. Some 38 aspirants are seeking nomination from Jatiya Party and eight from Jamaat-e-Islami.

In Sylhet, Finance Minister AMA Muhith, who was elected twice in 2008 and 2014 from Sylhet-1 constituency, had earlier said he would not run.

His brother former diplomat Abdul Momen is among several others vying for the party ticket there.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser Khandaker Muktadir and BNP central committee member Dr Shariar Hossain Chowdhury are vying for nomination in this seat.

As Jatiya Party does not have any strong candidate here, its local activists want party chief HM Ershad to contest the poll.

Jamaat is also in the race with its Secretary General Shafiqur Rahman

SEE PAGE 13 COL 3



Awami League Organising Secretary Mesbah Uddin Siraj addresses his supporters at the entrance to the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal (RM) in Sylhet city. The lawmaker aspirant started campaigning for the upcoming parliamentary polls after offering prayers at the shrine. He wants to contest the election either from Sylhet-1 or Sylhet-3. Inset, posters pasted on a boundary wall in the city's Chouhatta area seeking votes for MP aspirants. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Thousands to face forced migration

New study on sea level rise finds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Up to 200,000 coastal people may be forced to migrate annually to the country's inland areas to find alternative livelihoods due to climate change induced salinity and sea level rises, according to a new study.

Researchers from International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Ohio State University jointly conducted the study examining for the first time the complex relationship between flooding, soil salinity, rural livelihood and migration, along with providing some adaptation strategies.

The study, "Coastal Climate Change, Soil Salinity and Human Migration in Bangladesh" was conducted last year and was based on two different datasets collected in 2003-2011 and 2005-2010.

Coauthored by IFPRI's Valerie Mueller from IFPRI and Joyce Chen from Ohio State University, the study was released yesterday.

It shows how increased soil salinity from rising sea levels would compel nearly 140,000 coastal residents to migrate to another location within their district, while nearly 60,000 would move to alternative districts,

SEE PAGE 12 COL 4

Magic lamp in Sylhet

FROM PAGE 1

Even Jatiya Oikyafront, the recently launched alliance of the BNP and several other parties, which chose Sylhet city for its first public rally today, is likely to nominate a strong candidate -- Sultan Mohammad Monsur, a former AL leader.

At least five AL men are trying to get nomination for this constituency as Muhith indicated that he might not run in the next polls.

Muhith's younger brother and former diplomat Abdul Momen, former Bangladesh Bank governor Mohammed Farashuddin, former election commissioner Sohul Hossain, and AL central organising secretary Mesbah Uddin Siraj are also vying for AL tickets of this seat.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser Khandaker Muktadir and BNP central committee member Shariar Hossain Chowdhury are in the race for nomination. However, BNP grassroots want Tarique Rahman's wife Zubaida Rahman to contest the polls from this constituency.

The BNP leaders are optimistic about Sylhet-1 as they think back-to-back wins of BNP's Ariful Haq Chowdhury in the mayoral election of Sylhet City Corporation (2013, 2018) indicate good chance for its candidate.

As Jatiya Party does not have any strong candidate there, its local activists want Chairman HM Ershad to run from Sylhet-1.

Jamaat's central secretary general Shafiqur Rahman is also likely to run from Sylhet-1 under the BNP-led alli-

ance or as an independent candidate.

Sylhet division has more interesting facts.

All the previous finance ministers -- Saifur Rahman and Shah ASM Kibria -- and incumbent AMA Muhith are from this division. Saifur and Muhith became finance ministers twice and Kibria once. Saifur won Sylhet-1 in 2001 while Muhith won the seat in 2008 and 2014.

There is another distinct feature in this division, comprising Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, and Sunamganj districts. Most candidates

SYLHET DIVISION (19 CONSTITUENCIES)				
1991	1996	2001	2008	2014
AL - 7	AL - 13	AL - 7	AL - 17	AL - 15
BNP - 1	BNP - 3	BNP - 9		
JP - 8	JP - 3		JP - 2	JP - 3
CPB - 1		Jamaat - 1		
Ganatantri Party - 1		Independent - 2		
Islami Oikyalote - 1				Independent - 1

here begin their campaign by offering fateha at the shrines of Hazrat Shah Jalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Poran (RA). It is also a tradition of major political parties to start their campaign in this division this way.

Talking to The Daily Star, leaders of both AL and BNP expressed hope that they would get most of the seats in the region.

Ahmed Hossain, organising secretary (Sylhet division) of AL, said, "As a democratic party, there will be a number of prospective candidates but the

selection board will nominate the best among them. Once the nomination is finalised, all others will work with the nominated candidate and ensure victory of our candidate."

BNP Organising Secretary (Sylhet division) Shakhawat Hasan Jibon, said, "Our party is yet to decide whether we will contest the polls. If we join and the election is held fairly, we will surely win in almost all the seats [in the region]."

Abdullah Siddiqui, organising secretary of Jatiya Party (JP), said the party was yet to decide whether it will contest the polls separately or as part-

ner of the AL. All the JP men will act in line with the party decision. "We believe no one will dare to contest as a rebel ignoring the party's decision."

A large number of expatriates are also trying to get party nominations in the division. There is hardly any constituency in which an expatriate is not looking for nominations.

The AL has 16 potential expatriate candidates while the BNP has 12 in Sylhet division.

Sylhet-6 has the highest number of expatriate ticket aspirants.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid is the incumbent but six expatriate aspirants from AL and JP want to replace him there. Two of them live in the US, three in the UK, and one in Canada.

Sylhet division is also a traditional stronghold of the AL. Even when the party suffered a crushing defeat in 2001, it won 7 of the 19 seats in the region.

The JP did well in 1991, getting eight seats, but its performance kept declining since.

The BNP that formed governments in 1991 and 2001 after winning Sylhet-1 is not strong in Sylhet region. Its best performance in Sylhet was in 2001 when it bagged nine seats. In 2008, it did not get a single seat in Sylhet.

Both the major parties -- the AL and the BNP -- might have to deal with the intra-party rival issue. The AL has around 96 nomination seekers while the BNP has 72 vying for nomination in the 19 constituencies.

One of the reasons for such a large number of candidates is that the grassroots have been against incumbent MPs.

Ruling party MPs have largely been absent in local committee-level affairs. The committees are being run by grassroots leaders and they now oppose the MPs claiming that they are merely placeholders. The expatriate candidates can only deepen this conflict, said the party insiders.

[Our Sylhet correspondent Dwaha Chowdhury contributed to this report.]

ROHINGYA VIOLENCE

Australia slaps sanctions on 5 top Myanmar army officers

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia yesterday slapped travel and financial sanctions on five top Myanmar military officers, accused of overseeing brutal violence against Rohingya Muslims by units under their command, following similar moves by the European Union and United States.

More than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled Buddhist-majority Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh last year, according to UN agencies, following a counter-insurgency operation launched by Myanmar's military after attacks on security posts by Rohingya militants in August last year.

A recent UN report accused Myanmar's military of gang rapes and mass killings with "genocidal intent" and called for its commander-in-chief and five generals to be prosecuted under international law.

Myanmar has denied most of the allegations in the report, blaming Rohingya "terrorists" for most accounts of atrocities.

However Australia, which has previously

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

Prothom Alo alerts readers to rumour

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangla daily Prothom Alo in a statement said yesterday that a rumour was being spread on social media that the paper conducted a survey on barrister Mainul Hosen's objectionable comment about female journalist Masuda Bhatti.

According to the so-called survey, 95 percent respondents supported Mainul's comment.

In fact, the paper did not conduct any such survey. So, there is no question of publishing a result of the survey in the newspaper's print or online editions.

The imaginary survey result, being published or shared on social media in the name of the paper, is false, fabricated and baseless. The Prothom Alo has no connection with this, the statement added.

Muhith says

FROM PAGE 16

would not seek reelection anymore.

"Therefore, this is my last speech in parliament," he added.

A renowned economist, diplomat, Language Movement hero and a freedom fighter, Muhith was first Finance and Planning Minister in 1981-82.

He has been the finance minister of the current Awami League government since 2009.

Rift in Hefajat

FROM PAGE 1

police checkpoints, which led law enforcers to swing into action to flush them out in a raid after midnight.

After the incident, 83 cases were filed against 3,416 people, and most of its front leaders went undercover fearing arrest.

However, things would drastically change in the days to come. The Islamist group got close to the AL and the government, getting benefits, including land, according to a number of its leaders.

Hefajat now remains almost silent over its 13-point demand as, insiders say, the government has convinced it to refrain from taking to the streets pressing for those.

The leaders also no longer speak of what they earlier called "brutal action of May 5". The organisation earlier even said the government had carried out "mass killing of its men" in the Shapla Chattar operation, a claim it has never been able to prove.

And Hefajat Ameer Shafi himself has started to praise the government.

Recently, addressing a programme in Chattogram, he said, "I am not an Awami League. People say I have become Awami League. It's wrong. Even if I become Awami League, I have no objection. Because there are people in the Awami League who love religion."

THE RIFT

Sources in the Qawmi madrasa-based organisation said Mohibullah Babunagari resigned from his post on October 3 amid feuds within the party high-ups.

Talking to The Daily Star on Friday, Mohibullah said the decision about the PM's reception was not taken in any meeting and nobody talked with him about the issue.

"Hefajat was formed to materialise its 13-point demand. Now the organisation has no activities to press for those," he added.

Founding naye-e-ameer of Hefajat, Mufti Izharul Islam Chowdhury, told this paper on Friday that Mohibullah had resigned from his post protesting the decision to accord a public reception to the prime minister.

"He [Mohibullah] resigned in protest at the plan to accord a public reception to the PM. Many other leaders support him," he said, mentioning that 150 Islamic scholars had submitted a memorandum to Shafi demanding cancellation of the decision.

"Hefajat has shifted from its 13-point demand, based on which the organisation was formed," he again said, adding there was no protest after the "Shapla Chattar was stained with the blood of Hefajat men".

Recently, unidentified people distributed several hundred leaflets at Al-Jamiatul Ahlia Darul Ulum Muinul Islam in Chattogram's Hathazari, known as the Hefajat headquarters.

The leaflets denounced Shafi's son Anas Madani for using the Hefajat ameer to serve his purposes and questioned why the people who were earlier termed "enemies of Islam" are now being treated as friends.

A number of other leaders alleged that the government "managed" Hefajat, which was very much anti-Awami League at the time of its formation, to keep it from anti-government activities.

However, Mufti Fayzullah, joint secretary of Hefajat, said there was no internal conflict in Hefajat and they are on the right track.

'BANKRUPT'

Hefajat grabbed the spotlight as a force opposed to Gonojagoron Mancha, spearheading the 2013 Shahbagh movement for highest punishment to war criminals. It took the centre stage after the February 15 brutal murder of blogger Rajib Haider.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of Hefajat leaders in Dhaka admitted the Hefajat became "bankrupt" by

receiving undue benefits from the Awami League government.

"We have come to know that some top leaders, including Anas Madani, elder son of Hefajat Ameer Shah Ahmed Shafi, Organising Secretary Azizul Haq and Joint Secretary General Moinuddin Ruhee joined hands with the Hasina government after getting undue advantages," said a Hefajat leader, also a central committee member of Khelafat Andolon, in May 2014.

He added that the government had completed all formalities regarding a lease of 33 acres of railway land to Hefajat.

Wishing anonymity, another Hefajat leader said he has come to know that those leaders even received money from the government as part of an understanding not to act against the administration.

"Due to the opposition of a section of top Hefajat leaders, including those three, we could not launch any major protest programme regarding the May 5 crackdown," said a Hefajat leader.

Talking to this newspaper a few days back, a minister admitted that the government has succeeded to tame Hefajat by giving benefits to some of its top leaders and through negotiations since 2014.

Shafi himself admitted in a programme held on October 1 that some people of Awami League donated a huge amount of money for the development of their madrasa.

According to local sources, Anas Madani, who is a teacher at the Hathazari madrasa, got rich after the incident of Shapla Chattar.

He reportedly built five multi-storey buildings on 20 kathas of land in Eidgah and Chandraghona areas. Local sources say the price of one katha land in the areas was at least Tk 40 lakh during the construction of buildings in 2014.

A two-storey building has also been constructed and soil test has already

been done for a 10-storey building on the madrasa campus, sources added.

Contacted over the phone on Friday, Anas Madani said, "I am in a meeting. Talk to you later." He didn't pick up the call of this correspondent in the next couple of days.

Woman

FROM PAGE 16

shone a torch in her face, she asked them to take it off and check her handbag.

The policemen still kept on intimidating her. As the woman protested their indecent behaviour, one of the cops threatened that they would take her away.

Police finally let her go without checking her handbag.

Many social media users protested police's behaviour.

Seeking anonymity, a deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said the police team leader at the checkpoint, an assistant sub-inspector of Rampura Police Station, was withdrawn from the police station and attached to the deputy commissioner's office after the video went viral on social media.

The incident was apparently captured by one of the policemen in question. The 6:23 minute footage was uploaded on digital media.

Najmul Islam, an additional deputy commissioner of the DMP's Cyber Security Unit, said five policemen were deployed at the checkpoint.

Departmental actions would be taken against those involved in the incident, he told The Daily Star.

Najmul said police were interrogating two cops, who talked to the woman, to know whether any other policeman was involved in the incident.

"We hope and of course you also hope that highest punishment would be ensured through legal process," he wrote in a Facebook post at 8:45pm yesterday.

Oikyafront to hold

FROM PAGE 1

"We are worried over the government's recent activities and we are afraid that the country's smooth political atmosphere will be destroyed," he said in a statement yesterday.

Law enforcers also obstructed the Oikyafront men from campaigning in Sylhet yesterday and took away six megaphones from them, its leaders alleged.

Oikyafront leaders, however, were more worried about a "leaflet-distribution campaign" of Sylhet district and city units Awami League to be held today near the rally venue, they said.

On October 16, the platform had announced the rally for mobilising public support for its 11-point goal and seven-point demand, including an election under a nonpartisan interim government, dissolution of parliament and deployment of army before the polls. The alliance was launched on October 13.

BNP leaders yesterday claimed that police raided the houses of Shahid Ahmed, adviser of Sylhet district unit BNP, Abdur Rahman, member of the same unit, and other party leaders in Tukurbazar, Madina Market and Darshan Dewri areas in the city.

Sylhet BNP General Secretary Ali Ahmed said they could only distribute leaflets while campaigning for the rally due to police obstruction. The law enforcers also stopped 10 vehicles with loudspeakers, he said.

"Police created panic among us by conducting the raid and obstructing our activists from campaigning. But we are ready to make the rally a success," Abul Kaher Shamim, president of Sylhet district unit BNP, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The BNP has taken an all-out preparation for today's programme. A num-

ber of activists and supporters of the alliance from adjoining districts have already gathered in the city and more are expected to turn up at the venue of the rally, starting at 2:00pm.

Security measures have been beefed up.

Contacted, Shafiqur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Jalalabad Police Station, and Selim Miah, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, confirmed the raids, saying those were regular police move aimed at arresting accused in different cases.

However, no arrests were made on Monday night.

The police officials said they stopped the vehicles with loudspeakers as they had no permission for them.

Nikulin Chakma, additional deputy commissioner (traffic) of Sylhet Metropolitan Police, said, "We will not allow any large vehicles like bus inside the city. If the crowd pours into the street, we will divert the traffic to alternative routes."

There has been much drama over the Oikyafront's maiden rally as police twice turned down the platform's application seeking permission. However, the platform got the permission on Sunday.

Ever since its formation, the alliance has been facing criticisms from government high-ups. Dr Kamal, who played a key role in forging the alliance, has been a particular target.

The platform is also struggling to get permission for holding a planned view-exchanging meeting with civil society members and professionals in Dhaka on October 26.

Besides, it had announced rallies in Chattogram and Rajshahi on October 27 and November 2 respectively, but hasn't yet managed police permission for them.