



BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir addresses a gathering yesterday at Kaharpura village in Thakurgaon-1 constituency where he is contesting from.

PHOTO: QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

BNP leader killed in raid

Claims party leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi; police deny allegation; victim's family declines to comment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday claimed a city BNP leader had died during a raid by plainclothes men early yesterday in the capital's Vatara area.

He made the claim at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan office. The BNP leader alleged that plainclothes men raided the house of BNP's senior vice president Kafil Uddin in Solmaid area at Vatara thana ward-40 early yesterday.

"In fear, Kafil took shelter on the building's rooftop. At that time, the plainclothes men also tortured his son. Later, they caught Kafil and pushed him off from the rooftop."

Kafil was taken to a local hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Some locals also said Kafil fell from the balcony of the third floor.

During Kafil's janaza, family members said that he had died in an "unexpected" incident. When asked about the details, they refused to comment further on the matter.

Kafil was buried at the family graveyard in Vatara.

Mahfuzur Rahman, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Vatara Police Station, denied the allegation and said he was not aware of such an incident.

No case was filed in this connection, he added.

Afterwards, BNP nominee Shamim Ara Begum visited the deceased's house yesterday morning and said they would inform the matter to the Election Commission.

Dulu among

FROM PAGE 2
In Patuakhali, 20 BNP men were arrested over their involvement in Tuesday's AL-BNP clash.

However, local BNP leaders claimed the number of arrestees were 30.

At least 30 BNP men were injured in Tuesday's clash which broke out as both the parties tried to hold meetings at the same place at the same time.

Anmul Islam Litu, general secretary of the Rangabali upazila AL, filed a case with local police station accusing 45 named and 70 unidentified people after the incident.

In Noakhali, police arrested six BNP men for their alleged involvement with the murder of a Jubo League leader.

Md Hanif, general secretary of ward-9 in Eozbaria union of Noakhali Sadar, was shot dead in Shullokia area on Tuesday afternoon.

Police suspected the bullet was fired from a BNP procession.

However, Abdur Rahman, general secretary of BNP in the district, denied the allegation and said it was a conspiracy against the party.

In Faridpur, police yesterday detained 10 BNP men in connection with a case over the murder of an AL man.

AFM Nasim, officer-in-charge of Faridpur Sadar Police Station, said the BNP men were allegedly involved in the murder of Yusuf Al Mamun, cultural affairs secretary of North Channel union AL.

Another BNP man was picked up by law enforcers in Chattogram, alleged Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, BNP candidate for Chattogram-11.

Police picked up Md Sikander, president of Double Mooring unit BNP, who was also the election coordinator of the party, in front of his home, Khashru said.

However, the Officer-in-Charge of Kotwali Police Station Mohammed Mohsin said police did not pick up anyone from there.

Md Kamruzzaman, additional deputy commissioner of DB north, said he was not informed about the incident.

"We think the CEC is truly embr-

Banks not in trouble

FROM PAGE 16

Quoting newspaper reports, the CPD, in that report, said some major loan scams, involving BASIC Bank, Hall-Mark, Anontex and others, cost 14 banks Tk 22,502 crore in the last 10 years.

There are 59 scheduled banks in Bangladesh. Of them, six are state-owned and they are plagued with around 30 percent NPL (non-performing loans). In the last 10 years, the overall NPL has increased by four times to nearly Tk 100,000 crore, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

Of the loan scams, the major ones involved the state-owned banks. Those include Tk 4,500 crore BASIC Bank scams, Tk 3,000 crore Hall-Mark scandal and nearly Tk 10,000 crore Anontex and Crescent loan scams involving Janata Bank. But none of the board of directors of those banks was held responsible for gross irregularities in their banks.

On Sunday, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal admitted that the problems in the financial sector were results of weaknesses in government supervision.

The banking sector would need major reforms, he said.

The comments came a day after the country's top economists and bankers at the CPD discussion observed that the banking sector was passing through "the worst time ever".

They also gave six recommendations to bail out banks. Those include reformation of the judicial process for speedy recovery of defaulted loans, prevention of board of directors' appointment on political grounds, protection of the independence of the central bank and establishment of an independent commission for banks.

At yesterday's press conference, presided over by ABB Chairman Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Dhaka Bank, the speakers said the country has been achieving over 7 percent GDP growth for the last three fiscal years and, on an average, 6.5 percent for a decade.

Md Obayed Ullah Al Masud, managing director of state-owned Sonali Bank, said, "Considering the volume of loans, defaulted loans are not a matter

of concern for the banking sector."

Lehman Brothers, one of the ancient banks in the US, collapsed 10 years ago, but it did not raise any hue and cry, said Mohammad Shams-Ul Islam, managing director of another state lender Agrani Bank.

"We do not have such a vulnerable situation in our banking sector. Rather, the sector has created a lot of success stories," he said.

Shah A Sarwar, managing director of IFIC Bank, said the CPD's report had not given any clear picture of the calculation method of the funds relating to the scams.

Banks give loans after stringent scrutiny, but repayments depend on the respective banks' risk management system, said Sarwar.

The banking sector is strong enough to tackle small-scale shock, but 25 percent of banks will be in trouble if there is any medium shock, said Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank.

"The bankers are not responsible for the NPL [non-performing loan] as banks disburse loans after scrutinising documents of borrowers," he said.

Adil Islam, managing director of Meghna Bank, said it was a true that some scams hit the banking industry but all defaulted loans did not stem from irregularities.

"Many businesses have become defaulter because of unavailability of electricity and gas in time," he said.

ABB Chairman Rahman said all people involved in the "ecosystem of the banking sector were not angels", and that some wrongdoings might have happened in the banking activities.

But media reports about the financial scams have left an adverse impact on the sector, he said.

Asked whether the ABB arranged the press conference to counter the CPD report, Rahman claimed it had nothing to do with that.

Managing directors of Mutual Trust Bank Anis A Khan, City Bank's Sohail RK Hussain, Dutch Bangla Bank's Abul Kashem Md Shirin, Bank Asia's Md Arfan Ali and Islami Bank's Mahbubul Alam, also addressed the event.

'Embarrassed, saddened'

FROM PAGE 1

The EC is going to hold a meeting with top officials of law enforcement agencies to finalise the security plan, including deployment of army as a striking force during election, said officials.

"We have made a primary decision to deploy army as the striking force five days before the voting day," Rafiqul added.

'EC EMBARRASSED'

CEC Nurul Huda said the EC was deeply saddened and embarrassed over violence in Noakhali that left a man killed and the attack on Fakhrul's motorcycle in Thakurgaon during campaigns.

He was briefing executive magistrates on their election duties at the Nirban Bhaban in the capital's Agargaon.

"The value of a person's life is much more precious than an election," the CEC said.

"Don't create any obstacle to election campaign of any candidate," he said, urging all political parties to show tolerance and abide by the electoral code of conduct.

The CEC also directed the magistrates to take steps to avoid any untoward incidents when they would perform their poll duties.

'STOP ATTACK ON BNP MEN'

In a letter to the CEC yesterday, BNP Vice-chairman Selima Rahman demanded that EC take measures to stop attacks by "AL goons" and police harassment of the BNP activists.

She alleged that law enforcers were harassing the BNP activists even after halting the allocation of electoral symbols.

The BNP candidates are not able to take part in electioneering as they are being attacked in different places across the country. "The situation reaches such a stage that we might not be able to appoint polling agents on the voting day," she alleged while talking to reporters.

"We think the CEC is truly embr-

assed because the EC cannot exercise its power."

"If the CEC takes action, the election will be acceptable to all," she added.

After meeting the CEC, the BNP delegation, led by Selima, met the IGP. During the meeting with the IGP, she alleged that the BNP was facing obstacles to electioneering.

She also sought security from police to conduct electioneering safely for the next 18 days. "Our leaders are being arrested. Those who are on bail are also being arrested in old cases."

Selima said the police chief listened to their complaints with attention and assured her of ensuring security and safety of the campaigners in the future.

'AL MEN BEING TARGETED'

In the afternoon, HT Imam, co-chairman of AL election steering committee, alleged that the AL men were being targeted all over the country during electioneering and two of its leaders were killed on Tuesday.

A five-member delegation, led by him, went to the commission and urged it to take action against those involved in the violence.

"We have informed the commission that the main target of the violence centring the election is the Awami League men," Imam, also Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's political adviser, told journalists after the meeting.

He also alleged that BNP supporters also carried out attacks on AL supporters and vandalised their houses in Patuakhali, Phulpur in Mymensingh, Chuadanga, Narsingdi, Manikganj, Gagni in Meherpur, and Shahjadpur in Sirajganj.

Imam said the attack on Fakhrul's motorcycle took place due to BNP's internal feud and no AL men were present there.

The EC is neutral and taking an all-out effort to hold a free and fair election, he added.

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UK PM faces

FROM PAGE 16

is due to leave on March 29, Brexit is in chaos with options ranging from a potentially disorderly no-deal departure to another referendum that could reverse it.

Speaking outside her Downing Street residence hours before the vote of confidence to decide her fate, May said she would fight with everything she had.

The long-running schism over Europe in her party contributed to the fall of all three previous Conservative premiers - David Cameron, John Major and Margaret Thatcher.

May, a 62-year-old vicar's daughter who voted to remain in the EU at a 2016 referendum, told opponents if they toppled her, then Brexit would be delayed or stopped.

"A change of leadership in the Conservative Party now would put our country's future at risk and create uncertainty when we can least afford it," she said.

"I stand ready to finish the job."

A new leader would not have time to renegotiate Brexit and secure parliamentary approval by the end of March, meaning the Article 50 withdrawal notice would have to be extended or rescinded, May said.

May will address lawmakers at a closed meeting before they cast votes in a metal box from 1800 GMT in Committee Room 14 at the House of Commons. The result was due around 2100 GMT.

In a possible sign May might offer a date for resignation after Brexit, her spokesman said the vote would not be about who leads the party into the next election, due in 2022.

'SHE MUST GO'

May could be toppled if a simple majority of Conservative lawmakers vote against her, though a significant rebellion could also undermine her position. However, at least 174 of 315 lawmakers had indicated public support for her by 1420 GMT.

Brexit is Britain's most significant political and economic decision since World War Two, though pro-Europeans fear it will weaken the West as it grapples with the presidency of Donald Trump and growing assertiveness from Russia and China.

The outcome will shape Britain's \$2.8 trillion economy, have far-reaching consequences for the UK unity, and determine whether London keeps its place as one of the top two global financial centres.

The British pound rose to 1.2615 against the US dollar.

May won the top job in the turmoil that followed the 2016 EU referendum but promised to implement Brexit as a way to heal a divided nation. But on Monday she pulled a parliamentary vote on her deal - which seeks to keep Britain closely aligned with the EU after exit - to avoid defeat.

Her trade minister, Liam Fox, said the government might not even put it to a vote unless the EU gave more reassurances on the so-called Irish "backstop", an insurance policy aimed at preventing border controls on the island of Ireland.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the 27 other bloc members would not change a deal the EU spent two years negotiating.

PARTY DIVISIONS

May's predecessor Cameron bet all on the referendum he lost in 2016. Now, having already been weakened by a snap election last year which cost her a parliamentary majority, May also sees her own job at risk over Europe.

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