

SHUT-UP GAFFE

Dr Kamal expresses regret

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Oikyafront leader Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday expressed "sincere regret" for his sharp reaction to some reporters' queries regarding the combine's position on Jamaat-e-Islami.

"If my words hurt or embarrassed anyone in anyway, I sincerely regret that," he said in a statement.

On Friday morning, Kamal, along with other leaders of the opposition alliance, paid homage to the martyred intellectuals at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in the capital's Mirpur.

When asked by a reporter about the participation of some Jamaat leaders in the December 30 polls despite the cancellation of the party's registration, he apparently lost his temper.

How much have you been paid to ask these questions? Who pays you to ask such a political question at such a place?" he asked the enquirer.

When the question was repeated, Kamal asked the reporter to "shut up".

In the statement, Kamal explained, "Standing at the altar of the memorial, I was talking about how we achieved our independence after losing so many meritorious sons. That is when I was suddenly asked about Jamaat's position in the Jatiya Oikyafront."

Kamal said he initially responded humbly by saying he didn't want to make a comment on the issue at that moment and repeated this answer the second time he was asked the same question.

"But when I heard the word 'Jamaat' for the third time from the

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CEC sees

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Dr Kamal Hossain "unfortunate and unexpected".

His comments come at a time when reports of polls violence have hit headlines across the media in the last few days.

Yesterday, candidates and their supporters in Dhaka, Noakhali, Satkhira, Jhenidah, Sherpur and Dinajpur were attacked and barred from taking part in campaigning.

Responding to a query from a reporter, the CEC said no one would be allowed to telecast the polling live and use mobile phones inside the voting booths. However, journalists can take photographs there, he added.

Huda said the media can telecast live from the corridor or the premises of the polling stations.

Requesting journalists to enter polling stations in limited numbers, he said such instructions have been given so that the presiding officers can discharge their duties properly.

Asked about the EC's measures against polls violence, Huda said they were receiving complaints about attacks and violation of the electoral code of conduct and forwarding those to the electoral enquiry committees.

"We will take action based on investigation reports of the committees."

About the arrest and harassment of opposition candidates and their supporters, he said the EC would send a letter to the home ministry today or tomorrow asking it not to harass candidates and people with politics links and arrest anyone without a warrant.

On Friday's attack on the convoy of Jatiya Oikyafront leader Dr Kamal Hossain near the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in the capital, the CEC said the attack on the eminent personality was "unfortunate and unexpected".

"It was a criminal offence and it will be investigated as per law. They [BNP and Jatiya Oikyafront] have lodged a complaint over the incident. We will send it to the election inquiry committee concerned for probing," he said.

PUNISH ATTACKERS: BNP

The Jatiya Oikyafront yesterday demanded arrest and exemplary punishment of the attackers of Dr Kamal Hossain's convoy.

In three letters to the EC, the alliance also asked the commission to withdraw the Siraganj superintendent of police and officer-in-charge of Siraganj Sadar Police Station following Friday's attack on BNP candidate Romana Mahmud (Siraganj-2).

Besides, it urged the EC to take steps over the attacks on BNP leaders and their supporters across the country ahead of the December 30 election.

BNP Joint Secretary General Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal handed over the letters to EC Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed.

Meanwhile, Left Democratic Alliance in a letter to the EC yesterday said its candidates were facing obstacles in conducting electioneering in different constituencies.



ASM Abdur Rob, a leader of the Jatiya Oikyafront, addresses yesterday's rally in Tongi.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

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Get ready to guard polling stations

Oikyafront asks its activists

STAR REPORT

The Jatiya Oikyafront yesterday urged its leaders and activists to form committees to guard polling stations across the country during the December 30 election.

"Form a 100-member guard committee with locals for each polling station. The members will take position in the polling stations and will not leave before the voting ends," ASM Abdur Rob, a top Oikyafront leader, told a roadside rally near Oikyafront nominee Salahuddin Sarkar's home in Tongi.

He urged the leaders and activists to wake up early on the voting day and go to the polling stations to inspect ballot boxes.

"Take an oath that you will give your life but not leave the polling stations without the result."

BNP supporters chanted slogans demanding the release of Khaleda Zia. "Cast your vote for 'sheaf of paddy' for the release of Khaleda Zia."

AL runs at full throttle

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three, out of six, constituencies in Khulna yesterday.

There was an uneasy calm and many kept themselves carefully away from campaigning or even discussing the December 30 polls.

A cross section of locals said those who support the BNP or the Jamaat-e-Islami have either kept themselves away from campaigning or have started electioneering for the AL to "avert police trouble or harassment".

There were plenty of campaign offices and posters of AL candidates but hardly any of BNP candidates in Sonadanga, Ship Bari Intersection, Moyla Pota, Rupsha, Jail Khana Ghat, Picture Palace Crossing, Bakshi Para in Khulna-2; Rupsha Ferry Ghat, Elaipur, Noyhati, Kajdia, Ghat Bhogh, Lockpur, Sheikhpura, Shaili, Goara, Palerhat and Senerhat

in Khulna-4; and Full Bari Gate, Mohsin More, Daulatpur, Baikari, Galkhali, and Pabla in Khulna-3 constituency.

In Khalishpur area, where some factories are located, the number of posters of BNP candidates was higher than it was elsewhere in the city.

Almost no one was talking about the election at markets and tea-stalls in the areas where people are often heard discussing political matters.

Many avoided talking to these correspondents when approached for comments on the polls. Some did say that everything was going well and that the AL candidates were going to win.

However, after some chit-chat and following repeated assurances that they would not be in trouble of any sort, a number of the constituents

said people were publicly saying that the AL candidate would win and that they would vote for AL candidates, but given the chance to cast their votes, they would vote for the BNP candidates.

"I used to support the BNP, but now I am an Awami League man as I do not want any trouble," said a smiling tea vendor at Rupsha Ferry Ghat on Friday.

He said their shop owners' association leaders had asked him to join a campaign procession of AL candidate Abdus Salam Murshidi that day. All 200 shop owners of the association would close their shop at 2:00pm and join the procession, he had said.

He said, "In any procession of AL candidate you will see, let's say, 5000 people. In reality, 2,000 of them are BNP men. They will vote for BNP

candidates like me."

Similar comments were made by others these correspondents spoke to in Daulatpur, Sheikhpura, Sonadanga, and Fulbari Gate.

Another tea-stall owner at Kajdia Bazar of Rupsha, said in the locality there was no festivity centring the election.

"People who come to my stall show no interest in the election," the shop owner said.

Sheikh Salauddin Jewel of AL and Nazrul Islam Monju of BNP are contesting in Khulna-2 (Sadar and Sonadanga) constituency; Abdus Salam Murshedi of AL and Azizul Bari Helal of BNP in Khulna-4 (Rupsha-Terokhada-Digholia); Begum Monnujan Sufian of AL and Rokibul Islam Bokul of BNP (Khalishpu-Daulatpur-Khanjahan Ali) are contesting Khulna-3.

Barishal yet to catch polls fever

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running in Barishal-5 and posters of AL, BNP, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh aspirants are visible in the constituency that has 10 unions and the city corporation.

AL candidate Zaheed Farooque and BNP candidate Mazibur Rahman Sarwar are struggling to get party men working for their campaigns.

Local BNP leaders, who failed to secure party tickets, are yet to join Mazibur's campaign.

Former army man Zaheed had been somewhat detached from politics since his defeat in the 2008 national polls and is finding it hard to organise his campaign in a constituency the BNP held from 1991 to 2008.

Before offering the Jummah

prayers on Friday, Zaheed and Mazibur paid tributes to martyred intellectuals at the Muktijuddho Falak in Barishal city.

Zaheed later held small rallies in Sayestabad, Shaheberhat, and Tongibaria unions but no major election activity was seen inside the city corporation area.

These correspondents found two offices of the Awami League, at ward-19 and at Natunbazar, closed around 3:00pm on Friday.

Mostafa, a trader who works near the ward office, said, "The office has no people as the campaign is yet to gain momentum."

A shopkeeper in New Market area echoed Mostafa.

"You will see campaigning by horn

speakers only. Face-to-face vote seeking has not started yet."

No polls activity was seen on Sadar Road, Hospital Road, and College Road – the thoroughfares of Barishal city.

Meanwhile, the BNP camp has unity issue.

Party insiders said Bilkis Jahan Shirin, organising secretary of Barishal BNP, Ebaidul Haque Chan, president of Barishal district (South) BNP, and Ahsan Habib Kamal, and former BCC mayor were reluctant to campaign for Mazibur after failing to get party tickets.

Shirin yesterday said Chan could be sick but the rest of them would be on the campaign trail of Mazibur.

Mazibur, lawmaker of Barishal-5 in

2001-2006 and also a former BCC mayor, claimed that the BNP leaders in Barishal were united and would work for him. They were deciding on campaign strategies and observing the AL campaign, he said, adding that his campaign would shift gears within two or three days.

He alleged that AL men had threatened his men in Kashipur and Sayestabad and the Election Commission was not playing its due role.

Golam Abbas Chowdhury Dulal, president of AL Barishal city unit, brushed aside Mazibur's claims and said, "Raising allegations is like a routine work for them. They are saying this just for the sake of saying something."

Written by hand, driven by heart

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a trail of destruction -- were all over the then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

And in the ruins, resistance against the brute Pakistani force was growing in every nook and corner, with thousands taking up the arms and a few others embracing weapons of a different kind to liberate their beloved nation.

One day, a group of young people in a small village in Nawabganj felt the need of a publication to unite the locals against the murderous army.

They launched *Saptahik Bangladesh* to spread the flames of freedom among the people of the greater Bikrampur.

In its 70-day life-span, the weekly mirrored the tumultuous days of 1971 and published local and international reports about the Liberation War.

"I cannot explain how difficult it was to publish a newspaper at the time. We were living on our nerves every moment as we published the newspaper," said Mizanur Rahman, a freedom fighter entrusted with the task of editing and publishing the weekly from a secret place.

Mizanur, now a 73-year-old businessman, talked with The Daily Star at his Eskaton office about the extraordinary episode of his life.

"I was a teacher and people in the area used to respect me," said Mizanur, who passed matriculation from a school in Kolaroa of Satkhira in 1965 and joined Churain High School in Nawabganj as a teacher in 1969.

The crew involved with the newspaper was at risk of being attacked all the time, he said.

His colleague and fellow freedom fighter Abdus Salam took the risk and left for Dhaka on what he now thinks was October 23.

"Salam returned and came to my home the next day with the reams of paper, printing ink, stencils and other materials. It felt like we had achieved our first victory."

The next challenge was to manage a cyclostyle -- a device that makes stencil copies with its small-toothed wheels on a special paper -- which was necessary to print the newspaper.

Headteacher of the school Shaktipada Chowdhury made the job easy. He gave the school's cyclostyle to the publishers.

The office of the newspaper was set up at a room in Mizanur's rented house. The first issue was published on October 31.

All the writers used pseudonyms. Mizanur became Kirti.

The printer's name of the weekly showed Kirti as the editor and Torit as the printing device. The newspaper was published and circulated by Biplobi Parishad.

Shahidullah Khan was the news editor and Abdul Baten was the chief reporter. Kaikobad and Mohammad Israfil were the sub-editors and Rafiqul Islam and Niranjan were reporters.

Each issue had Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's speeches printed just below the masthead. The paper, except the first four issues, had a sketch of Bangabandhu beside the masthead and a map of Bangladesh beneath it.

The content mostly depicted the struggle of people, brutalities of the Pak forces, and stories of successful operations and victory of the freedom fighters at different fronts.

The newspaper's editorial, columns, international news and poems were a huge source of inspiration for the common people, he said.

"I used to write a column titled *Drishtikone* and *Mukjodhhar Dairy Theke* under my pseudonym."

Mizanur became seriously involved with politics in 1965 when he enrolled in Munshiganj's Haraganga College, a famous institution at the time.

At least 10 teachers of his school would collect news from local and faraway places. Two others were dedicated to collect international news about the war from the radio.

Apart from the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, they used to collect reports from the BBC, Voice of America and Akashbani.

"We all were young and our emotions ran high. We used to give a portion of our salary for the expenses of bringing out the newspaper. A number of local people would also donate money sometimes."

Even in those days, the headmaster ensured the regular salary of the teachers every month. "My monthly salary was Tk 160."

Mizanur could not recall the exact amount they would need to bring out the newspaper. But he said one ream of paper would cost around Tk 45 or 50 and a tube of ink Tk 50.

In the initial few weeks, they would print 150 to 200 copies. They increased it to around 400 to 500 copies later. The highest number of copies that they could bring out was around 1,200.

"Starting from the afternoon, we used to print throughout the night."

The price they fixed for each issue hovered between Tk 0.12 and 0.25.

"But we used to distribute the paper for free as well, because our main

objective was to mobilise a strong public opinion about the atrocities and to lift the morale of the freedom fighters."

Mizanur was the Chhatra League president in Munshiganj subdivision unit and senior vice president of Dhaka district unit in 1967.

"We often could not verify the reports and ran those that went in favour of freedom fighters. There was practically no scope to cross check those."

One day, they had to flee to Arial Beel with the cyclostyle as they heard that the Pak force was coming to their area.

"That night, we hid in a boat and published the newspaper from there."

"There were many other challenges including the fear for life, but we continued publishing the newspaper," he said.

He also remembered the time when Tajuddin Ahmed dropped by Churain area one day and delivered an emotionally charged speech, inspiring the villagers.

The prime minister of the then government in exile in Mujibnagar attended an arms training of the freedom fighters at Churain High School playground on March 27, before heading for Faridpur the next day, he said.

The last *Saptahik Bangladesh* came out on January 8, 1972.

Largest

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According to the company, this find exceeds a previous record held by the "Diavik Foxfire," a 187.7-carat diamond discovered at the same mine in 2015 by mining company Rio Tinto. Dominion owns 40% of the Diavik Diamond Mine.

AL takes

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She also said she would clarify her stance on the matter at the party chief's Dhanmondi office within seven days.

Addressing a press conference at the office yesterday, AL Joint General Secretary Jahangir Kabir Nanak said the party had a few rebels in the coming polls and that they were asked to quit the election race by tomorrow and work in favour of the grand alliance candidates instead.

He also said those disobeying the party order would have to face organisational actions.

Some 50-55 AL leaders had submitted nomination papers going against the party decision and around 30 to 35 of them were still actively campaigning, party sources said.

The others quit the race on being persuaded by the AL high-ups, the sources added.

The party has fielded its candidates in 258 constituencies and set aside the remaining 42 seats for its alliance partners.

Of the partners, Jatiya Party got 29 seats, Workers Party of Bangladesh five, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) three, Tarikat Federation two, Jatiya Party (Monju) two and Bangladesh Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal got one seat.

At a press conference recently, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader warned that AL rebels contesting the polls defying the party decision would face expulsion.

The punishment will stay even if they win, he added.

AL President Sheikh Hasina has sent letters to rebel candidates requesting them to withdraw their candidacy and join the AL nominees on the campaign trail.

Oikyafront

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A 10-member delegation, led by Oikyafront's top leader Dr Kamal Hossain, also the president of Gonoforum, will meet the president if they get the appointment, the sources added.

"We will draw his [president] attention to the continued attacks on opposition candidates and activists during electioneering and the mass arrest of opposition activists. We will seek his intervention to improve the situation," Mahmudur Rahman Manna, a top leader of the Oikyafront, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The BNP and the Jatiya Oikyafront have been accusing the government of using law enforcement agencies to arrest and harass their nominees, leaders and activists across the country.

Since the announcement of the election schedule, the BNP has kept lodging complaints with the Election Commission (EC) seeking its action to stop the arrests and harassment.

But according to opposition leaders, this has not helped improve the situation.

Against this backdrop, the Oikyafront leaders have decided to meet the president, who they think can play a significant role in advising the EC to take necessary measures to ensure equal opportunities for all candidates, party leaders said referring to section 5 (2) of the Representation of the People Order (RPO).

The section 5 (2) of the RPO says: "All executive authorities of the government shall assist the commission in the performance of its functions, and for this purpose the president may, after consultation with the commission, issue such directions as he may consider necessary."