



Some of the nine injured in a fire at a flat in Narayanganj's Fatullah being treated at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. Inset, damaged room of the flat.

# 9 of a family injured in N'ganj fire

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Das, 35, with 30 percent burns; his wife Archana Rani Das, 28, with 19 percent burns; their son Arpit Das, 10, with 40 percent burns; daughter Anamika Das, 15, with 42 percent burns; Shrinath's sister Sumitra Rani Das, 27, with 65 percent burns; her husband Narayan Chandra Das, 40, with 19 percent burns; their relatives Promit Das, 14, with 10 percent burns; Shaon Das, 10, with 42 percent burns; and Shrinath's mother Hari Dasi, 55, with 90 percent burns.

Speaking to The Daily Star, building owner Zakir Hossain's son Zubair Hossain said that he heard people shouting the word "fire" at 6:30am and

ran out of the house. "I saw black smoke billowing from inside the house," he said.

Locals and other residents of the building rescued the injured and first took them to Narayanganj 300-bed Hospital in Khanpur. Doctors there referred them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). They are now undergoing treatment at DMCH's Burn Unit.

Quoting doctors, DMCH Police Outpost Sub-Inspector (SI) Bachhu Miah said four of the nine burnt are in critical condition.

Local resident Sohel Miah, one of the rescuers, said Narayan Chandra was sleeping in the room next to the one in

which the fire started. When he switched on the light, he saw fire in the next room and started shouting. He sustained injuries when he tried to rescue the others. The fire was eventually doused by residents who went to rescue the injured.

Sohel added that all the victims sustained burn injuries and the furniture in the room was also burnt.

Narayanganj Fire service and Civil Defence Assistant Deputy Director Abdullah Al Arefin said, the fuel gas did not explode as the windows of the kitchen were open, adding that a mosquito repellent coil stand was found in the damaged room and they were suspecting the coil started the fire.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS/STAR

# Do-or-die

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The game is scheduled to begin from 5:00pm local time.

The hosts will also be looking to change their strategy from the first T20I in Sylhet, which ended in an eight-wicket hammering after the Tigers' batsmen looked to counterattack the short ball strategy from the Caribbean pacers.

It will be important for the Bangladesh batsmen to provide a solid start and lay the platform for others to cash in on, something that has often landed the Tigers in winning positions in T20Is.

All of the Tigers' top four, including skipper Shakib Al Hasan who scored a 43-ball 61, fell prey to the visitors' short-ball strategy. Tamim Iqbal, Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar were the others who fell while trying to attack short deliveries.

West Indies pacers Oshane Thomas and Sheldon Cottrell, who was the pick of the bowlers with four wickets in the first game, will once again play vital roles.

However, the Bangladesh think-tank are unlikely to make any changes to the playing eleven.

On the hand, the West Indies will be looking to seal the series following defeats in the Test and ODI series. But they will still be wary after losing a T20I series to Bangladesh at home earlier this year despite winning the first game.

The likes of skipper Carlos Brathwaite, Shimron Hetmyer and Nicholas Pooran will surely be pumped up after being picked up in the Indian Premier League auction for handsome sums while in-form Shai Hope will once again be expected to play his part.

The Mirpur pitch has always remained unpredictable and even the Tigers highest total of 193 for five against Sri Lanka earlier this year ended with Bangladesh on the losing side. The chilly conditions are expected to provide some assistance to seamers and the dew factor is also likely come into play, but it will be important to put up a formidable total on the board for a close match.

# EU diplomatic

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Council Secretariat takes the security of its facilities, including its IT systems, extremely seriously."

European Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said the bloc took any report of hacking its systems "extremely seriously" but refused to comment on the detail of the leak.

"What is clear is that no institution or country is immune to these kinds of hacks -- all communications systems have vulnerabilities," he told reporters.

"We're constantly dealing with this challenge, upgrading our communication systems to respond to the threats."

In one cable, the EU's diplomatic mission in Moscow describes the controversial summit in Helsinki in July between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin as "successful (at least for Putin)".

ELITE CHINESE UNIT? Another gives a detailed account of a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in which he rails against Trump's trade tactics, saying the US was "behaving as if it was fighting in a no-rules freestyle boxing match" and vowing not to give in to "bullying".

There are extensive reports on the situation in Ukraine, where a conflict rumbles on between government forces and pro-Russian separatists, including a warning dating from February that Moscow may already have deployed nuclear warheads in Crimea, which it annexed in 2014.

# BNP campaign

FROM PAGE 1  
holding rallies and bringing out processions. AL posters were seen hung almost everywhere.

In a sharp contrast, a district BNP office was found locked and only a few posters of its nominee were seen.

"There were [BNP] posters in some areas of the town, but those were torn down. However, nothing will stop the BNP [from winning] here. It is waiting for the right time to get on the ground and campaign," said a party supporter in front of the office.

Monirul Islam Nupur, general secretary of Jhalakathi BNP, said they were not being able to campaign properly due to "repeated attacks on our candidate by Awami League men".

Alleged Chhatra League and Jubo League men attacked the motorcade of Zeeba on December 13. The BNP leaders and activists came under another attack the same day when they went to the Returning Officer's Office to lodge a complaint.

A similar attack took place in Nalchity two days later, Nupur said.

"Jhalakathi is a BNP stronghold. If we can cast votes freely until noon [on the voting day], we will win," he told The Daily Star.

After restoration of democracy in 1991, the BNP won in the constituency twice, the Jatiya Party once and Amu thrice (uncontested in 2014 and in by-polls in 2000).

This time, the BNP had initially fielded Israt Sultana Elen Bhutto, an ex-MP, as its candidate but later nominated Zeeba, a member of the party's central executive committee.

The change came following demands by some local party leaders, who said Bhutto maintained no contacts with the voters in the last 10 years, said party sources.

Asked whether there was any division within the party over the candidate, Nupur said, "We all are united for the restoration of democracy. Bhutto will also join the campaign soon."

Another BNP leader, wishing anonymity, said they were facing difficulties as Zeeba was comparatively a new face. Besides, Bhutto used to get strong support from her upazila, Nalchity.

Amu and Zeeba are both from Sadar

upazila. The AL and its front organisations in the district denied the allegations and blamed BNP's internal conflict for the attacks.

Khan Saifullah Panir, general secretary of Jhalakathi AL, alleged that they were getting good response from the voters.

He also said the BNP fielded a "daughter of a Razakar" and people would not vote for her.

On Amu being "aloof" from the voters, he said, "Amu comes to his constituency more than any other central leader of other areas and keeps a close contact with the people."

ZEEBA'S FATHER

Dulal Saha, former deputy commander of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad in Jhalakathi, alleged that Zeeba's father Akhter Uddin Ahmed was a Muslim League leader and he worked against the Liberation War.

Akhter was a member of AM Malik's cabinet in 1971.

"He fled the area after the war and went to Saudi Arabia via Pakistan," added Dulal, also an adviser to the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal central committee.

He said the Muktiyoddha Sangsad of Jhalakathi in 2012 had sent a list of Razakars and other Pakistani collaborators to the International Crimes Tribunal. Akhter was named in the list, he said.

"As a freedom fighter, I can't accept the BNP's decision to field the daughter of anti-liberation person," he added.

Speaking to The Daily Star over phone on Monday, Zeeba said her father was not an "anti-liberation element". She said her father became a member of the AM Malek cabinet "to ensure security of the people".

Insisting that her father did not commit any crimes, Zeeba claimed that he got general amnesty declared by the Bangabandhu administration after the war.

According to records, out of 37,000 people sent to jail on charges of collaborating with the enemy, about 26,000 were freed following the amnesty declared on November 30, 1973.

Zeeba claimed that her father had been in Bangladesh until 1974.

# US to pull all its troops from Syria: officials

REUTERS, Washington

The United States is considering a total withdrawal of US forces from Syria as it nears the very end of its campaign to retake all of the territory once held by Islamic State, US officials told Reuters yesterday.

Such a decision, if confirmed, would upend assumptions about a longer-term US military presence in Syria, which US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and other senior US officials had advocated to help ensure Islamic State cannot re-emerge.

Still, President Donald Trump has previously expressed a strong desire to bring troops home from Syria when possible. Yesterday, Trump appeared to declare victory against the group and made clear he saw no further grounds for remaining in Syria.

"We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency," he tweeted.

The timing of the troop withdrawal was not immediately clear and US officials who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity did not disclose details about the deliberations. But one official told Reuters that partners and allies had been consulted.

Two US officials said a decision to withdraw had already been reached but that could not be immediately confirmed. It was unclear how soon a decision detailing any withdrawal plans might be announced.

The Pentagon declined to comment, saying only that it continued to work with partners in the region.

The United States still has about 2,000 troops in Syria, many of them special operations forces working closely with an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF.

The partnership with the SDF over the past several years has led to the defeat of Islamic State in Syria but outraged Nato ally Turkey, which views Kurdish YPG forces in the alliance as an extension of a militant group fighting inside Turkey.

The deliberations on US troops come as Ankara threatens a new offensive in Syria. To date, US forces in Syria have been seen as a stabilising factor in the country and have somewhat restrained Turkey's actions against the SDF.

A complete withdrawal of US troops from Syria would still leave a sizeable US military presence in the region, including about 5,200 troops across the border in Iraq.

# Defy obstacles

FROM PAGE 1  
said Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, an Oikyafront top leader, while speaking at a roadside rally at Daudkandi on his way to Chandina and Soagazi.

He also called upon the voters to ensure the victory of "sheaf of paddy", the electoral symbol of the BNP, through a "vote revolution" on December 30 to free BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia from jail and "restore democracy".

"Cast your votes for 'sheaf of paddy' to bring democracy back, free Khaleda Zia and ensure Tarique Rahman's homecoming," he said.

BNP men started swarming at Phultoli playground in Soagazi hours before the Oikyafront leaders arrived there around 2:15pm.

Yesterday's rallies were the first of the alliance in Cumilla.

Local BNP leaders alleged that they could not conduct election campaign in the area due to police harassment and intimidation by ruling Awami League men.

The locals crowded the venue, getting a chance to raise their voice, the leaders added.

The BNP men were holding placards carrying photographs of BNP chief Khaleda, acting chairperson Tarique Rahman and Oikyafront candidate in Cumilla-10 Monirul Haque Chowdhury.

Women were seen gathering in nearby houses to hear the alliance leaders' speeches.

Fakhrul started his journey for Cumilla from BNP chairperson's Gulshan office around 10:00am.

In his speech at Soagazi, the BNP secretary general said the countrymen did not want to see this government in power anymore, as it destroyed democracy as well as the country. "We all are now united. We will drive the government away from power."

Mentioning that numerous people were victims of enforced disappearance, killing and arbitrary arrest, Fakhrul said people wanted to get rid of the "oppressive government".

In an emotion-choked voice, he sought votes for "sheaf of paddy" for the sake of freedom of the jailed BNP chief.

Fakhrul urged the party men to remain in the election race and not to bow to any danger or fear of arrest. "Go to every house to seek votes till December 30."

Kader Siddique, a leader of Oikyafront and president of Krishak Sramik Janata League, said, "You have to cast votes on December 30 if you want to get your leader [Khaleda] out of prison."

The only candidate of "sheaf of paddy" is Khaleda and the contenders across the country are just her representatives, he said, urging all to vote for

the alliance contestants.

Chowdhury Saima Ferdous, daughter of Monirul, asked party leaders and activists to guard the polling centres on the voting day to bring victory for her father.

"No power is stronger than the power of the mass. We will not be afraid of bullets on December 30," said Saima, also a Dhaka University teacher.

Holding their hands high, the grassroots leaders promised her that they would guard the polling centres on the voting day at any cost.

In Chandina, the Oikyafront leaders campaigned for its candidates Redwan Ahmed and Kazi Mujibul Haque who are contesting in Cumilla-7 and Cumilla-3 respectively.

Speaking at Dr Redwan Ahmed University College ground, Fakhrul alleged that there was no atmosphere of holding the polls in a free and fair manner.

"The election is going to turn into a farce. But people understand this very well. The government's conspiracy and evil design will be washed away in the face of people's united efforts," he added.

Pointing to the rift between Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda and Election Commissioner Mahub Talukder over the level playing field, he said the Election Commission and the government both were "sham".

Kader Siddique alleged that the ruling party men were attacking opposition candidates as they got frightened due to their huge popularity.

BNP central leaders Kamruzzaman Ratan, Mia Mostaq Ahmed, Abdul Awal Khan, among others, also spoke at the rally.

# EC bars

FROM PAGE 16  
Commission has decided.

The EC sent a letter to all registered political parties in this regard yesterday.

The decision came in response to a BNP request, seeking to use Khaleda Zia's portrait on posters of its allies, who are contesting the December 30 polls with the "sheaf of paddy" symbol.

The letter signed by EC Deputy Secretary Abdul Halim Khan said it made the decision in line with the Representation of the People's Order (RPO), the law that regulates national elections.

"Candidates, if they are from registered political parties, can use pictures of only their current party chief on their posters," said the letter.

On Thursday, the BNP sent a letter to the EC seeking its decision if its partners can use Khaleda's portraits on their posters.