

# NILPHAMARI-4 JP leader 'asks' followers to support BNP candidate

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Jatiya Party Central Committee Vice President and local lawmaker Shawkat Chowdhury has allegedly been directing his followers to campaign for his rival BNP candidate Amzad Hossain Sarker ever since his nomination for Nilphamari-4 was cancelled.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, JP member and Shawkat's torch-bearer Md Rezaul Haque Filip said, "We are now working for the 'sheaf of paddy' according to our leader Shawkat's directives."

He added that even though Shawkat had a strong base in the area and maintained close contact with the voters and party activists, he was deprived of the nomination. The party high-ups instead gave the nomination to JP Chief HM Ershad's nephew Adilur Rahman Adil, who is "quite unknown to voters and had made no contribution to the party".

However, when asked about giving such directives, Shawkat said, "I have nothing to do if my followers choose to campaign for the 'sheaf of paddy' symbol. Everybody has the right to make their own decision."

"I no longer want to continue politics with cheats and liars," he said, hinting at JP's high command.

Earlier Shawkat was involved with BNP politics but left the party following a feud with Md Amzad Hossain over the post of upazila unit secretary. He joined JP prior to the 10th parliamentary election in 2014. Later, he was elected uncontested as a lawmaker and became a whip in parliament. He was also made vice president of JP's central committee.

Shawkat had earlier drawn attention of journalists when he openly alleged that Ershad and then JP Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hawlader extracted money from him a number of times.

## Star journo

FROM PAGE 1  
can't say how the case was filed," he told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"You better talk to the OC," Akter, president of Kastovanga union unit of Swetchhasebak League, a pro-AL organisation, said in reply to a query.

Yunus Ali, officer-in-charge of Kaliganj Police Station, said, "He [Akter] filed the case on behalf of Awami League men. They filed the case and we recorded it."

The official denied the allegation that the police made Akter sign a paper. "I will talk to him and check if anyone forcibly took his signature. Why would I take his signature?" he said.

"A case has been filed. If the accused are found not guilty, why will we arrest them? ... Those found innocent will be dropped from the case after probe."

The case was filed with Kaliganj Police Station on Sunday hours after a story sent by Azibor was run by this paper under the headline "Fear of attack, arrest grips BNP candidates in Jhenidah."

According to the case statement, the accused wielding sharp weapons, sticks and bomb-like objects attacked the AL campaign office in Jamtola area Sunday morning and vandalised and torched it before fleeing away.

And it happened right before the eyes of Akter, reads the statement.

But talking to this newspaper, the complainant said he was not present during the incident but arrived there learning about it from others over the phone. "I do not know who set fire to the AL office."

During his conversation with The Daily Star, Akter wanted to know the name of Jhenidah correspondent of this paper.

When told that it's Azibor Rahman, Akter said, "I do not know him at all." Asked about the other named accused in the case, he questioned, "How can I say who were made accused in the case?"

About the case, Azibor said, "This is completely a false and baseless case. I do not even know the location of the campaign office."



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses an election rally, organised by Dhaka South Awami League, in the capital's Kamrangirchar yesterday.

# 7 candidates attacked

FROM PAGE 1

Kushakhali union parishad AL President Nurul Amin said that it was the BNP men who attacked the AL supporters.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Abul Kalam Azad of Chandraganj Police Station said law enforcers went to the spot and fired shots in the air to disperse the feuding groups. He claimed that two policemen were injured.

In Potti area of Shariatpur's Goshairhat upazila, Apu and 25 of his supporters were injured when attacked by allegedly AL men.

Syed Nasir Uddin, general secretary of Goshairhat AL, claimed that ruling party men were not involved and speculated that it could have been the result of BNP's internal conflict.

Moudud in a press conference yesterday alleged that AL men carried out the attack in Notun Bazar area of Kompaniganj. Five of his supporters were injured and two vehicles were vandalised in the incident.

Noakhali AL organising secretary Mizanur Rahman in a separate press conference at Kompaniganj claimed that Moudud was lying to get favours from the administration.

Kompaniganj OC said he did not know about any attack on Moudud.

At least five BNP men were injured when alleged AL men attacked BNP candidate Chhobi and her supporters when they were campaigning in Tebaria Bazar area of Natore.

Natore AL Joint Secretary Mortuja Ali said they did not know anything about the attack.

Abul Hasnat, additional superintendent of police (sadar circle) of the district, said law enforcers went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

BNP candidate Priyanka yesterday alleged that 19 of her supporters were injured when AL men attacked them in Chughurkandi Bazar area of Sherpur.

AL candidate of the same constituency Atiur Rahman Atik claimed that it was the AL men who were attacked by BNP supporters.

OC of Sherpur Sadar Police Station said a running battle was fought by the two groups but no one filed any com-

plaints.

Around 10 BNP men were injured and a vehicle was vandalised when the motorcade of BNP leader Lutfor was attacked allegedly by AL men in Atharodana area of Tangail's Ghatail upazila.

Dilruba Ahmed, assistant returning officer and UNO of Ghatail, said she had sent police to the spot after hearing the news of trouble.

Shahidul Islam, coordinator of the local AL candidate's campaigning team, denied the allegation of AL men's involvement and said the BNP candidate was spreading rumours to tarnish the image of his party candidate.

In Narayanganj, alleged AL men attacked Monir Hossain when he was campaigning near the main gate of Rupayan Residential Area in Fatullah upazila.

Narayanganj city AL Joint Secretary Sha Nizam said no AL men attacked Monir.

Mohammad Shajalal, inspector (investigation) of Fatullah Model Police Station, said he did not get any complaints.

Meanwhile, in Narsingdi, two people beat up Bahauddin Milton, personal secretary to BNP standing committee member and party nominee for Narsingdi-3 Abdul Moim Khan on Palash upazila nirbahi officer's office premises around 12:30pm.

In Pabna, at least 10 people were injured when AL and BNP men clashed over electioneering in Sagarkandi Bazar area of Sujannagar around noon.

In Chandpur, another 10 were injured in a clash between supporters of he AL and the BNP in Haimchar upazila.

In Barishal, 10 AL men were injured in an attack allegedly carried out by BNP men in Pourshavar More area in Banaripara upazila.

So far, motorcades and campaigns of at least 45 candidates of Jatiya Oikyafront and 20-party alliance have been attacked allegedly by AL men, according to media reports. Over 1,050 people, mostly BNP men, have been injured in the electoral violence since campaigning began on December 10.

The army was deployed across the country yesterday to help ensure a peaceful atmosphere and maintain law and order for the December 30 polls.

Our correspondents in Chattogram, Mymensingh, and Jhenidah reported that Jatiya Oikyafront candidates and their supporters were gearing up their campaign activities after the army was deployed.

**KHAGRACHHARI**  
Minutes after the election camp of Nutan Kumar Chakma, an independent candidate backed by United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), was vandalised and torched, gunmen opened fire at Pujgang Mukh Bazaar just a kilometre away.

Chikko Chakma, 24, a tea-stall owner from Lendia para, and Sohel Rana, 35, a road construction worker of Dohazari in Chattogram, were killed.

The UPDF claimed that Chikko was its supporter and in a statement to the press alleged that the attacks were carried out to "unleash a reign of terror in the hills and influence the polls by panicking people".

The UPDF blamed Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samity (reformist) for the killings and the attack on the election camp.

Tawhidul Islam, assistant returning officer and the UNO of Panchhari upazila, said regional groups trying to establish supremacy was the reason for the gun attack.

He told The Daily Star that the incident was not related to the upcoming polls. "I am not aware of any vandalism or torching of any camp in another area since I only visited the place of the gun attack."

Locals said seven to eight armed men went to market around noon and shot Chikko from close range killing him on the spot. Sohel, who was working on the road nearby, was shot during that time and he died of his injuries later.

Minutes before the shooting, another group of 10 to 15 men, some carrying firearms, attacked the election camp and torched it. They fired several shots during the incident, said a local wishing anonymity.

Nurul Alam, officer-in-charge of

Panchhari Police Station, claimed that the killings were not related to the election. He said it was due to conflict between groups.

The OC said police reaching the spot found nobody there. They recovered the bodies from the scene.

Conflicts of regional political parties led to 43 people being killed in Khagrachhari and Rangamati in one year. **JOURNOS ATTACKED**  
About 12 journalists covering the election and campaigns were injured and 16 vehicles they were using were vandalised in Nawabganj when unidentified criminals attacked them at a guest house close to the Nawabganj Police Station.

At least 40 journalists and support staffers of Jamuna TV and Bangla daily Jugantor were staying at Shamim Guest House in Kolakopa Bandura area, said Jugantor's Senior Reporter Sirajul Islam.

He said around 10:30pm, 30 to 35 people covering their faces with scarves stormed the guest house and attacked the journalists and staffers of Jamuna TV and its sister concern Jugantor.

In the 20-minute attack, they ransacked several rooms on the third floor and later vandalised about 16 parked vehicles, he said.

He claimed that the journalists were confined to the guest house and that Shamim Khan, Dhamrai correspondent of Jugantor, was missing since the incident.

Sushant Sinha, special correspondent of Jamuna TV, echoed Sirajul. Sinha, who was at the guest house, said they called the local UNO and the OC for help which did not arrive.

Jugantor staff reporter Yasin said the attackers were armed with iron rods, hockey sticks, and sharp weapons.

The Daily Star called the superintendent of police of Dhaka and the OC of Nawabganj Police Station for comments but they did not pick up their phones.

Quamrul Hasan, sub-inspector of Nawabganj Police Station, was seen on Jamuna TV to have arrived at the scene later to collect evidence and was heard saying that they would look into the matter.

# AL pacifies rebel, BNP concerned

FROM PAGE 16

Awami League and administrator at the Munshiganj District Council. He served Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the chief security officer.

But yesterday, Fahria started campaigning for Mrinal, ending the tussle that was tearing apart the AL campaign.

Meanwhile, the campaign for BNP candidate Abdul Hye, who has accused AL activists of tearing down his posters and vandalising his office, hoped that deployment of army personnel yester-

day would help them campaign.

"Now that the army has been deployed, we will get a chance to boost our campaign," said Hye.

He said his Jubilee Road office was vandalised by AL men. "We could not carry out electioneering due to attacks by the AL men. The local administration is also assisting them," he claimed.

**M u n s h i g a n j D e p u t y**  
Commissioner and Returning Officer Shailla Farzana said her administration was determined to ensure a level

playing field.

Regarding the allegations, she asked the BNP to come up with a written complaint and proof. "If they can show proof, then we will take action," she said.

BNP's office on Jubilee Road was found locked yesterday. Hye was seen instructing his men outside the polls-time office of the BNP and Jatiya Oikyafront in Mukhtarpur.

"Be it at a tea stall or a bus station, people used to talk about the election. But this time, we are not seeing that

happening," said Ahmad Ali, a rice trader who lives in Mukhtarpur Bazar.

"The AL supporters are bringing out processions every day but there is hardly any activity of the other candidates," said Md Nayan, a salesman at an electronics shop in Munshiganj Sadar Market.

Ruhul Amin Bhuiyan of Islami Andolan Bangladesh and Sheikh Md Kamal Hossain of Communist Party of Bangladesh are the other contenders in the constituency.

# Air tickets difficult to come by

FROM PAGE 16

The airlines officials also said ticket price on those routes for the next 25 days has almost doubled due to the high demand.

"Going on vacation at different tourist spots during holidays with family members has become a trend. Many people no longer spend their holidays at home. They like to travel to different

tourist destinations depending on their financial condition," said Shakil Meraj, general manager of Biman's public relations wing.

He added that improvement in people's financial condition as well as competitive and reasonable prices of air

tickets has considerably boosted international and, in particular, domestic air traffic.

Monirul Hasan, a banker living in the capital's Azampur, said he would go to Cox's Bazar late this month as his children's school would remain closed at that time.

He said he would travel by air as travelling by road takes a long time and is tiring.

For tourism, December to January is considered the peak time, a global phenomenon when the demand for air tickets reaches its zenith due to Christmas and New Year celebrations. This is also time for school vacation.

Domestic air traffic has increased significantly in the last few years. According to Kazi Wahidul Alam, an aviation expert, the number of domestic air passengers has increased by about 64.73 percent in the country in the last five years.

In 2013, the number of domestic air passengers was 648,019, which has

increased to 1,067,537 in 2017, he added.

Among the popular domestic tourist destinations, Cox's Bazar tops the list.

The four airlines jointly operate 10 flights daily to the beach city. Novo Air operates five flights, Biman and US-Bangla two each and Regent one. But both Biman and US-Bangla operate Boeing 737 that can accommodate 162 passengers against Novo Air's 68-seater ATR 72-500.

Two years ago, Novo Air operated three flights a day, Biman two and US-Bangla one with a smaller 74-seater Dash-8.

All four operators have increased their flights on other domestic routes as well due to increased demand.

Biman, US-Bangla and Novo Air operate on all seven domestic routes -- Cox's Bazar, Chattogram, Sylhet, Saidpur, Jashore, Rajshahi and Barishal. Regent Airways operates only on Cox's Bazar and Chattogram routes.

Biman operates 32 flights (to and from Dhaka) every day in seven destinations with three 74-seater Dash-8

and one 162-seater Boeing 737-800 aircraft, Shakil said.

US-Bangla operates 24 flights (to and from Dhaka) on seven routes with four 164-seater Boeing 737-800 aircraft and three 74-seater Dash-8 aircraft, Kamrul Islam, spokesperson for the airlines, said.

Novo Air, on the other side, operates 44 flights (to and from Dhaka) in five destinations with five ATR 72-500 having 68 seats, Mahfuzul Alam, senior manager, marketing, informed.

Regent Airways operates 30 flights (to and from Dhaka) with Boeing aircraft with a capacity to accommodate between 126 and 183 passengers, an official said.

Wahidul Alam said the number of international passengers have also increased by about 22.1 percent in the last five years.

In 2013, 5,231,580 passengers travelled to different international destinations and the number increased to 6,388,050 in 2017, he informed.

# Dec 30 polls

FROM PAGE 1

The AL chief briefly described various development projects taken by her government in the capital and said the government would construct 10,000 flats for those who were living in shanties to ensure a better life for them.

"They can pay the rent on daily and weekly basis.... Not only the rich, but also the poor people can live in flats. The government will construct flats for them, too."

Hasina said the government would construct elevated ring roads around the capital for speedy movement of vehicles. The five rivers around the city would be dredged to increase their navigability, she added.

Regarding the canal in Kamrangirchar which fell prey to land grabbers, the PM directed the Dhaka South City Corporation mayor, who was present at the rally, to take up a project to recover the water body, ensure sufficient water flow in it and improve the beautification of the canal through constructing walkways on its both sides.

She mentioned that the government was constructing elevated expressways, metro rails and flyovers to ease traffic congestion in the capital. "We're drawing up various plans for the future. We'll construct underground railways in Dhaka and a feasibility study in this regard has already started."

About Dhaka Medical College Hospital, she said a new design for it has been chosen. "If we can come to power again, we'll reshape the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a new way... we'll construct an ultramodern medical college and hospital."

Later, the AL president introduced some candidates of her party and the grand alliance and requested voters to vote for them.

# Christmas today

FROM PAGE 1

Christmas, the biggest religious festival of the Christians, is the celebration of rebirth, new beginning, forgiveness and peace, and renewing relationship with God and human beings.

Decoration of Christmas trees with colourful lights, offering special prayers, distribution of gifts among children and exchange of pleasantries are the main features of the day's festivities.

Christmas carols and hymns will be sung before and after the prayer sessions at churches.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have issued separate messages on the occasion.

The president, in his message, urged all to work together to build a happy, prosperous and non-communal Bangladesh.

In her message, the PM said Bangladesh is a country of communal harmony where people of all religions enjoy full freedom to practice religious rituals.

She expressed the hope that Christmas would further strengthen the relations between the Christians and the people of other communities.

President Hamid will exchange greetings with members of the Christian community at the Bangabhaban today.

The Archbishop of Bangladesh, ambassadors and representatives from foreign missions, distinguished persons of the Christian community, religious leaders and professionals will join the reception.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar and different private TV channels and radio stations will air special programmes highlighting the significance of the day.

# Ousted Pak PM

FROM PAGE 16

The Supreme Court disqualified Sharif from politics for life over the allegations last year, and directed an anti-corruption body to investigate three different charges regarding his family's properties and businesses.

The months-long saga has seen him appear before accountability courts 165 times since September 2017, according to the English-language Dawn newspaper.

In July this year, he was convicted in one case revolving around family properties in London, and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

He was in London at the time as his wife received cancer treatment, but returned to Pakistan days ahead of the election, only to be arrested and imprisoned on arrival.

He was released in September after a court suspended his sentence pending an appeal hearing.

He was acquitted on the third charge, relating to business in Britain.

Sharif has been prime minister three times but power has been a rough ride.

He was first expelled from office in 1993 on suspicion of corruption. He won an election in 1997, only to be ousted and exiled after a military coup in 1999.

He returned to Pakistan in 2007 and took power once more in 2013 until his ousting last year.

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