



Injured BNP candidate for Dhaka-3 Goyeshwar Chandra Roy speaks at a press conference at the party chairperson's Gulshan office in the capital last night, hours after he came under attack during campaigning in Kadamtali of Keraniganj. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Four days to polls, violence rages on

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around 6:30pm when he asked them to clear a road they were blocking for campaign. In Chattogram, at least two policemen were hurt after being attacked allegedly by BNP activists.

In another development, police detained more than 250 BNP and Jamaat men on criminal charges in different districts since Monday night. With them, around 1,000 BNP and Jamaat leaders and activists have been arrested since December 10.

In Dhaka, senior BNP leader Goyeshwar and his supporters came under attack by AL men during campaign at Chunkutia in the evening, witnesses and BNP sources said.

Goyeshwar suffered injuries in his head and was undergoing treatment at Islami Bank Central Hospital at Kakrail, Aminul Islam, personal assistant of the BNP leader, told The Daily Star.

But Sha Migan Shafiur Rahman, superintendent of police in Dhaka, said Goyeshwar was heading towards Kadamtoli in a procession when the AL candidate was holding a meeting there.

At one stage, activists of both parties started pelting brick chips at each other, he said. "I heard that Goyeshwar sustained injuries during the incident. Police brought the situation under control."

In the port city, supporters of BNP candidate for Chattogram-4 hurled several petrol bombs and crude bombs on supporters of Didarul Alam, the AL candidate from the same constituency, at one stage of a clash between the two sides, said witnesses.

The clash began around 11:00am when both camps were campaigning in Jahanabad area of Sitakunda.

Police and local AL leaders claimed that BNP men swooped on the AL procession with sharp weapons and hurled two to three petrol bombs and some crude bombs without provocation.

Four AL men -- Abu Saleh Shamsuddin, Saddam Hossain, Mohammad Raihan and Tayeb Uddin -- were injured in the blast. Three of them with minor burns were being treated at Chittagong Medical College Hospital, said police.

Didarul Alam blamed BNP and Jamaat-Shibir men for the attack.

BNP candidate for the same constituency Ishaque Quader Chowdhury denied the claim.

He alleged that AL men obstructed them and asked them to stop their campaign in the area. "At one point, they attacked us."

In Savar, BNP candidate for Dhaka-19 Dewan Mohammad Salauddin alleged that AL men attacked his Savar residence early hours of yesterday, vandalised two CCTV cameras and threw brick chips.

But Ali Haider, Savar upazila unit general secretary of the AL, said his party men had nothing to do with the attack.

In Mymensingh, around 50 people, including two journalists, were injured when alleged AL men attacked the campaign of BNP candidate from

police in Bharuakhali area yesterday.

The attack followed the arrest of a man named Mostafa from a tea stall at Bharuakhali Bazar in the afternoon. In response, a large number of BNP men led by Bharuakhali union parishad chairman Shafiqur Rahman came to the spot and attacked the police, said Iqbal Hossain, additional superintendent of police of Cox's Bazar.

Police arrested two people in this connection, he said.

In Shyampur of Dhaka, supporters of AL-led grand alliance candidate



An alleged Awami League supporter vandalises a car of the convoy of the BNP candidate for Manikganj-2, Moinul Islam Khan Shanto, in Harirampur upazila's Diabari area around 12:30pm yesterday. Surprisingly, a case was filed on the day accusing the BNP candidate and 54 others of vandalising an AL office. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Mymensingh-11 Fakhruddin Ahmed Bachhu at Bhaluka Bazar in the evening. Bacchu escaped the attack unhurt.

AL candidate for the same constituency Kazim Uddin Ahmed Dhanu declined to comment about the incident and hung up the phone.

Firoz Talukder, OC of Bhaluka Police Station, said they rushed to the spot hearing the news and dispersed the clashing groups by firing blank shots.

In Fatikchhari of Chattogram, Islami Front candidate Sayed Saifuddin Majibhandari came under attack twice at Bibirhat and Monir Community Centre yesterday.

Saifuddin blamed grand alliance candidate for the same constituency Najibul Bashar Majibhandari for the attacks, which Najibul denied.

In Cox's Bazar, at least three people, including two policemen, were hurt when BNP men allegedly attacked

attacked some supporters of Jatiya Oikyafront candidate from Dhaka-4 Salahuddin Ahmed.

Police and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel standing nearby were silent spectators during the attack that left several people injured, witnesses said.

Witnesses said some youths, who took position near Salahuddin's house with police and BGB men since morning, swooped on a group of Salahuddin's supporters soon after they came out of his Shyampur house around 1:00pm.

The attackers beat and kicked the supporters of Salahuddin. They even trampled the victims who fell to the ground until journalists arrived at the scene to take photos, they added.

Around half an hour later, Salahuddin, along with 50 to 60 supporters, tried to come out of his house, but was barred.

BNP candidate

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now. When my people tried to campaign, they were attacked. At least 12 loudspeakers were vandalised," he alleged.

A check post was set up on December 13 at the entrance of the island -- Guptochora Ghat -- where people disembark from water transport.

It has been operational since then. But when on-duty police officials there were asked about their activities, they refused to make any comment.

BNP leaders alleged that police arrested anyone who came to the island and, on condition of no return, expelled BNP activists and leaders off the island.

At least 20 thousand BNP activists have been driven out of the island, Pasha claimed.

During a two-day long stay at the island, this correspondent did not witness any campaigning by the BNP candidate. No posters or banners were seen anywhere either.

Gazi Hanif, senior joint convener of the upazila unit Jubo Dal, told The Daily Star the check post at Guptochora Ghat was strongly monitoring who was entering and exiting.

Firoz Khan, a convening committee member of Sandwip BNP, told The Daily Star they had been blockaded. They can't stay home at night or come

out in the day fearing police arrest, he said.

"Sandwip has strong support for BNP. But the situation now does not allow us to campaign. If voters can go to polling centres, they will vote for the 'sheaf of paddy'," Hanif said, adding, "Let alone us, the candidate himself cannot come out from his home to campaign."

Speaking to The Daily Star over phone, Mahfuzur Rahman Mita, the AL candidate for the constituency, said people will vote for the "boat" because the upazila saw unprecedented development work in the last 10 years.

"Tk 1,092 crore had been spent for the development work in Sandwip," he said, citing the example of the availability of electricity in the upazila since September this year.

About the allegations raised by the BNP candidate, he said Pasha's party men were locked in a factional feud and no one from his camp attacked or vandalised their campaign.

"Their fight [amongst themselves] is to blame for the attack," he said.

On the other hand, Md Shahjahan, officer-in-charge of Sandwip Police Station, said, "The check post at Guptochora Ghat has been set up to prevent outsiders who police believe could jeopardise the electoral environment."

Mexico power couple killed in helicopter crash

AFP, Puebla

The governor of the Mexican state of Puebla and her husband, a senator and former governor, were killed on Monday in a helicopter crash, the country's president said.

"My deepest condolences to the relatives of Senator Rafael Moreno Valle and his wife, governor of Puebla Martha Erika Alonso," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador wrote on Twitter.

"I assume the commitment to investigate the causes" and "tell the truth about what happened," Lopez Obrador wrote.

The helicopter's two pilots and an assistant to the senator also died in the crash.

The aircraft went down 10 minutes after taking off in the Santa Maria Coronango area of Puebla, and the cause of the crash is still unknown.

Alonso was sworn in as governor on December 14 after an electoral tribunal certified her victory in July polls.

She was the first woman to occupy the position in Puebla, where her husband was governor from 2011 to 2017.

According to the local constitution, the state legislature will have to appoint an interim governor and to call an extraordinary vote that must be held in three to five months.

BNP, Jamaat

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Tarique Rahman is founder of Light House, and pro-BNP Adilur Rahman is involved with Bangladesh Manobadhikar Somonnoy Parishad.

Talking to The Daily Star, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, executive director, Coast Trust, said, "HT Imam is a gentle man. But he misunderstood us."

"As a pro-Liberation War force, we have been cooperating with the pro-Liberation War government, Awami League."

He also said BNP-Jamaat in 2008 and recently had complained against them "for favouring the AL".

"As questions have been raised against us, we are considering not getting involved in election observation activities," he added.

AL REQUESTS TO EC
A delegation of ruling AL yesterday urged the EC to allow journalists to use motorcycles during the election so that they could cover the polls better.

The delegation, led by AL central leader M Akteruzzaman, met EC Secretary Helaluddin Ahmed at the Nirbachan Bhaban.

After the meeting, they told reporters that they also urged the commission to stay alert about criminals cloning phone numbers of EC and admin officials to misdirect field-level officers.

The BNP and Jamaat men were attacking AL activists and police and were using black money in their campaigns, the delegation claimed. They said

Jatiya Oikyafront and BNP-Jamaat were using black money to buy votes.

"We're demanding immediate arrest of all BNP-Jamaat cadres involved in terror attacks and violence ... bring them to book ...," Akteruzzaman added.

Kabul

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under his desk for five hours, listening to gunfire and blasts inside his building.

"When the security forces took us from the office, I saw many bodies covered in blood, lying in the corridors," Barekzai told AFP.

At least four militants were killed and more than 350 people freed, officials said. Most of the dead and wounded were civilians, who have borne the brunt of the 17-year war.

"It was a barbaric attack against humanity," interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish told reporters.

It was the deadliest assault in the Afghan capital since a suicide bomber blew himself up in the middle of a religious gathering last month, killing at least 55 people.

President Ashraf Ghani, whose government has been skewered over its security failures, said "terrorists attack civilian targets to hide their defeat on the battleground".

Afghanistan's de facto prime minister Abdullah Abdullah also sounded a defiant note as he blamed the Taliban for the attack.

"Every attack they carry out against our people, our resolve is further strengthened to eliminate them," he said.

But their statements belie the grim reality on the battlefield where the Taliban have the upper hand.

Afghanistan's largest militant group has made significant territorial gains this year as its fighters inflict record casualties on government forces.

The raid followed a tumultuous few days in Afghanistan where officials are reeling from US President Donald Trump's plan to slash troop numbers, which many fear could harm efforts to end the conflict with the Taliban.

It also comes after a major security shake-up in Kabul that has placed staunch anti-Taliban and -Pakistan veterans in charge of the police and military.

Many Afghans are worried that Ghani's fragile unity government would collapse if US troops pulled out, enabling the Taliban to sweep back into power and potentially sparking another bloody civil war.

No room for journalists

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Nawabganj Police Station, dismissed the allegation and said they were investigating the attack. "If any complaint is lodged, we will take steps."

At the briefing, the victims demanded immediate arrest of their attackers.

The journalists also said they were attacked and not permitted to stay hotels so that they could not perform their duties.

Around 10:30pm on Monday, some 30-35 masked attackers entered the guest house close to the police station and swooped on the journalists and staffers, said Abdullah Tuhin, special correspondent of Jamuna TV.

The attack left at least 10 injured and 16 vehicles vandalised. The attackers were armed with rods, hockey sticks and sharp weapons.

It lasted for around half an hour. During the time, several rooms on the first and second floors were also ransacked, Sirajul Islam, Jugantor senior reporter, told the press conference.

The journalists and staffers were also confined to their rooms for around an hour, he added.

Tuhin said they called the officer-in-charge and the duty officer of Nawabganj Police Station several times over phone, but they did not respond.

He alleged that Quamrul Hasan, sub-inspector of the police station, arrived at the scene after the attackers fled.

OC Mostofa said police were sent to the spot immediately after they heard about the incident.

The law enforcers also talked to the injured journalists, but they could not identify any of the attackers, the OC added.

At the briefing, Saiful Alam, acting editor of Jugantor, said the attack on journalists was nothing but "a terrorist attack".

"We cannot imagine that such terrorist attack will be carried out on journalists when they are on the field to discharge their professional duties."

"Why journalists in an independent country will not be allowed to stay in Nawabganj or Dohar?" Saiful asked.

Tuhin said as Awami League men set up an election camp in a room on the ground floor of the guest house on Monday morning, they informed the superintendent of police in Dhaka district of the matter and asked for security, expressing fear of attack.

"The SP then assured us of ensuring safety, but we were attacked," he said.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not contact SP Shah Migan Shafiur Rahman.

Meanwhile, Election Commission Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed yesterday said he was not aware of the incident as neither any newspaper published anything about it nor any official from the administration informed him of the matter.

BNP out of scene

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Inside the house, piles of printed posters were gathering dust at a corner of the balcony.

This is also where a crowd of BNP activists could be seen.

Queried on why they were not hanging the posters, an Oikyafront worker said they had not gotten the chance to do so.

"Our workers cannot go to the field as ruling party men are attacking them. They even attacked my motorcade and injured the president of Jubo Dal," said Md Sharifuzzaman.

Police are also filing cases against our activists, said Sharifuzzaman.

"Actually it seems as though we are contesting against the administration, not the Awami League. If the administration would not help them, they would not be able to stand in front of us," he said.

Police have filed a total of seven cases against BNP men since the election commission announced the polls schedule. BNP men also filed three cases against AL activists, along with filing 12 complaints to the deputy commissioner alleging election code of conduct violations, he said.

"So we are waiting for the election day. We are not quitting... If necessary, we will resist them," Sharifuzzaman, a member of the district BNP convening committee said.

Another Oikyafront candidate, in Chuadanga-2, Mahmudul Hasan Khan Babu, had to leave his constituency for Dhaka due to oppression by ruling party men, he claimed.

However, when asked over phone, Babu said he had gone to Dhaka for some work and would return the next day.

The AL candidate, Selun, denied allegations of using force against the opposition.

"I don't know whether the opposition is conducting their campaign or not; I am busy with my campaign," Selun said.

The lack of pre-election festivity was glaringly present but more worrying was that the general people from Chuadanga and Meherpur seemed to have no interest in discussing the elections.

When this correspondent asked a grocer about the election atmosphere, he showed no willingness to discuss it

Talking to The Daily Star, he asked the journalists to file a case or inform local police, returning officer, BCB or even army personnel of the matter as they were working on behalf of the EC.

Jatiya Party lawmaker Salma Islam, also publisher of Jugantor, is contesting in Dhaka-1 as an independent candidate, failing to get ticket from the AL-led grand alliance. The JP is a component in the combine.

The ruling AL has nominated Salman F Rahman as its candidate in the constituency.

Different organisations, including Dhaka Reporters Unity, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists and Dhaka Union of Journalists, condemned the attack and demanded bringing the perpetrators to book through a fair investigation.

SC may

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lawyers cannot move Khaleda's three petitions before the SC until Election Day. As a result, the BNP chief cannot run for the polls, Khaleda's lawyers told The Daily Star yesterday, seeking anonymity.

Khaleda will not be benefited if the petitions are moved before the SC after the election, one of the three lawyers said.

As the SC is yet to hear Khaleda's petitions that seek stay on the High Court orders, the HC orders disqualifying her for contesting the polls are now in force, he added.

Advocate AJ Mohammad Ali, principal lawyer for Khaleda's case, refused to make any comment regarding this when The Daily Star contacted him over phone.

On Monday, Khaleda filed the three petitions to the SC seeking a stay on the HC orders on her nomination papers' cancellations.

In the petitions, Khaleda prayed to the apex court to direct the Election Commission to accept her nomination papers, to allow her to contest the December 30 polls, and to allocate the "sheaf of paddy" as her election symbol.

The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan passed the order saying if a person was convicted and sentenced to more than two years in prison for moral turpitude, they were not eligible to participate in polls for five years after serving jail term.

On December 11, the HC bench of Justice Rezaat and Justice Md Iqbal Kabir Lytton passed split orders on the three petitions. The next day, the chief justice assigned the bench of Justice Hassan to dispose them.

Khaleda was sent to jail on February 8 after a special court in Dhaka sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. On October 29, she was sentenced in another corruption case, bringing her total jail term up to 10 years.

or even try to guess who would win.

Another college teacher chose to speak but requested that his name not be published as he did not want "any trouble".

"I do not want to talk in favour or against any of them," he said.

On the way to Meherpur, at the banks of the Matha Bhangra river, trucks carried bauls singing songs inspiring people to vote.

Unlike Chuadanga, there were more BNP activists there.

Oikyafront candidate Masud Arun has been conducting election campaign from his office in College Road, Meherpur.

"In the town there is not much problem for our activists. But our campaigners are facing problems in the villages. Almost every day they are facing attacks by ruling party activists."

"I am conducting my campaign every day, but it has become a curse for my men. Police are arresting my people if they join my campaign."

"It seems my popularity is the reason behind the police repression on my party activists," he said.

Arun alleged that in the last month, around 14 cases had been filed against thousands of BNP leaders and activists.

"They are even going the houses of BNP activists at night and arresting them. They [BNP activists] are not able to stay at home," he said, adding that he hoped the police would play an impartial role in the coming days.

He alleged that some police officers were arresting his men only for money. However, he did not raise allegations against his opponent Forhad Hossain Dodul, the candidate of the grand alliance led by AL.

When asked about Arun's allegations against the police, Md Mustafizur Rahman, superintendent of police in Meherpur, said they had rounded up only those who were accused in subversive cases filed earlier.

"We are trying to resist those who can cause anarchy during the election period," he said. All of those arrested had records of creating anarchy in the past, he added.

"We have arrested many ruling party men who were involved in creating nuisance. But they never mention that."