

Man takes yaba in DB office, photo goes viral

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A photo of a man taking yaba in Barishal DB office went viral yesterday, drawing criticism from different quarters.



Nasiruddin Mallik, assistant commissioner of Detective Branch of Barishal Metropolitan Police, said acting on a tip-off, the DB police detained Moudud Karim, of Barishal Sadar upazila, on Thursday night from Beltala area of the city.

Eight yaba tablets were recovered from his possession during the search, he said.

During interrogation at the DB office, Moudud was asked to show how he took yaba. When he was showing that, a member of DB team captured it on smart phone and uploaded the picture in Facebook, the police officer claimed.

In the photo, a handcuff was seen dangling from Moudud's right hand. Sub-inspector Delwar Hossain of the DB team has been warned for posting the photo on Facebook, the official added.

Moudud was sent to jail after he was produced before a Barishal court yesterday afternoon.

A case was filed under the Narcotics Control Act with Barishal Kotwali Police Station, the DB official said.

Rice prices to go down in a week

Says commerce minister

UNB, Gopalganj

Rice prices will come down within a week, newly appointed Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said yesterday.

He also blamed the recent price hike on the "shortage" of transport for two to three days during the December 30 election.

The minister made the remarks while talking to reporters after paying tribute to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by placing a wreath at his grave in Gopalganj's Tungipara.

Tipu said he along with Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder sat with rice mill owners, traders and others concerned on Thursday when they promised to reduce the rice prices.

He said the price of coarse rice remained steady although there was a rise in that of the fine one. "Our target will be to keep the prices of coarse rice stable as the common people of our country consume it," he said, adding that they were also trying to control the prices of fine rice.

Tipu said there is a huge amount of paddy and rice stocks in government silos. "The stocks are higher

SEE PAGE 12 COL 2

OIC greets PM on her re-election

BSS, Dhaka

Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Yousef Al-Othaimeen yesterday extended his warmest congratulations to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on her re-election as the PM of Bangladesh.

"On the auspicious occasion of your re-election as the prime minister of Bangladesh for the third term in a row, I have the honour to extend to Your Excellency, on behalf of the OIC and on my own behalf, our heartfelt congratulations and warmest felicitations," said a press release.

Al-Othaimeen said the clear mandate granted to Hasina by the Bangladeshi electorate is indicative of their trust in her leadership and vision for a developed Bangladesh.

"I am confident that with your wisdom and proven experience, you will continue to steer the affairs of your country in the years ahead to realise the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh for peace, unity and development."

He said, "I look forward to working closely with Your Excellency on issues of mutual interest. The OIC stands ready to extend all possible support to Bangladesh in its endeavors for economic progress and marching towards prosperity."

Low gas pressure

FROM PAGE 16

manage the distribution.

Director (operation and mines) of Petrobangla, who is also named Contacted Md Kamruzzaman, dismissed the claim and said they were actually getting inadequate supply.

Left candidates' eyewitness accounts of polls

FROM PAGE 1

threatened them.

Complaints about these acts of violation of the electoral code of conduct were met with mere assurances with no follow-up action from deputy commissioners, superintendents of police and designated people from the Election Commission, they said.

Azizur Rahman, CPB candidate for Satkhira-1, said they were not allowed to say anything against the government during the polls campaigns.

He also alleged that AL men had attacked his two street rallies on December 16 and 18.

Azizur further said seven to eight youths from local AL office snatched the microphone from him while he was giving a speech at a rally on December 21.

Many of the candidates alleged that AL men on motorbikes had often surrounded opposition rallies in a threatening manner, leading to dispersal of rally participants.

Abdus Sattar, Revolutionary Workers Party of Bangladesh (RWPB) candidate for Barishal-5, said eight activists of the party were injured in attacks while distributing leaflets in Barishal Sadar.

On the election day, all his polling agents were picked up around 10:00am and released around 4:00pm when the voting ended, he added.

Alfaz Hossain, Socialist Party of Bangladesh (SPB) candidate for Rajshahi-1, said he had been forced into a black car after he finished electioneering around 6:00pm on December 27. Those who were inside the vehicle identified themselves as intelligence agency members.

He said they took him to a restaurant where he was threatened.

Around 2:00am the following day, he was dropped off at the spot from where he had been picked up, he added.

Reazul Islam Razu, CPB candidate for Dinajpur-4, said he got a phone call around 11:00pm on December 28. "Don't deploy any polling agents. If you do, you will face harassment," he quoted the caller as saying.

LDA candidates alleged that casting of ballots had actually begun the night before the election day.

Shaikat Mollah, a polling agent of the RWPB candidate for Pabna-1, said he himself witnessed casting of ballots at three polling centres in the constituency on December 29 night.

The candidates said ballot stuffing on December 29 night became evident when presiding and polling officers around noon on the election day declared at many centres that they ran out of ballot papers.

They further said it was found that most of the centres were taken over by AL leaders and activists by noon.

At Edward School centre in Mymensingh-4, AL men fired shots in the air around 10:30am.

Panicked, voters ran in different directions, leaving the centre deserted. AL men then took control of the centre and stuffed ballot boxes, said Emdadul Haque Millat, CPB candidate in the constituency.



A part of the audience at a mass hearing on alleged irregularities during the national election. The event was organised by Bam Gonotantrik Jote, an alliance of left-leaning parties, at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Ballot boxes were stuffed by AL men in 136 out of 176 polling centres in Mymensingh-4, he claimed.

Tapon Basu, who contested the polls on the CPB ticket from Pirojpur-1, said he couldn't vote because his vote had already been cast.

"I got just one vote from the voting centre where 10 of my family members are voters," he said.

Ballot stuffing also took place during the "lunch break" when the gates of polling centres were closed, said SM Ahsan Habib, SPB candidate for Dhaka-17.

Coercion and threats continued even after the voting, the candidates alleged.

There was a huge gap between the number of votes cast, which the candidates learnt from their sources, and the final results announced at the deputy commissioners' offices, they pointed out.

"It is the most tainted election ever in Bangladesh's history," said Ganosamhati Andolan Chief Coordinator Zonayed Saki, a candidate for Dhaka-12.

The casting of 30-50 percent votes the night before the election day, filled ballot boxes, stuffing of ballot boxes in public and inconsistent figures of vote counts -- all these made the polls questionable, he added.

Manabendra Deb, CPB candidate

for Gazipur-4, alleged that his sister went to cast vote around 8:30am at a local polling centre but faced obstruction from the ruling party men. They put pressure on her to vote for "boat".

He further said the ruling party men violated the electoral code of conduct in various ways, but the authorities did not look into the matters. They only took action against activists of other parties.

Zahid Hossain Khan, CPB candidate for Tangail-2, said he visited 21 out of 127 polling centres in his constituency on the election day.

"Presiding officers were not found in some centres. At one centre, polls officials started the vote count around 2:20pm. When asked about such anomalies, the officials concerned did not give any satisfactory answer," he said.

Haradhan Chakrobarty, SPB candidate for Feni-3, alleged that his supporters and party activists were barred from entering polling centres while some were beaten up.

The night before the election, many voters were warned not to go to polling centres while a house of minority family was torched "centring the election", he alleged.

SPB candidate for Rangpur-4 Sadek Hossain said he visited at least 30 polling centres on December 30. At one of the centres, he caught a person red-handed with six ballot papers while

casting fake votes.

"I took him to on-duty police personnel but they asked me to let him go," he said.

SPB candidate for Laxmipur-4 Milon Krishna Mandal alleged that he was informed on the morning of the polls day that about 60 percent votes in his constituency have been cast illegally on the previous night.

Another SPB candidate, Uzzal Roy of Sylhet-1, said voters were barred from entering the Sylhet MC College polling centre after 10:00am.

Police baton-charged his party men without any provocation at a centre in Malanichhara while his polling agent was driven out of Bachhaipara Government Primary School centre, he added.

Opu Dasgupta, SPB candidate for Chattogram-11, alleged that his polling agents were forced out of centres while the presiding officer at a centre was found "confined" to a room.

"Asked about the situation, he [the presiding officer] replied that he was unable to do anything," Opu said, adding that only ruling party men were at the centre after 11:00am.

CPB candidate for Sirajganj-3 Mostafa Nurul Amin alleged that on the night before the polls day, ruling party men took control of a centre in his village while a police sub-inspector was casting fake votes in the middle of night.

No step was taken to prevent it though complaints were made to the deputy commissioner, who was the returning officer, he said.

Addressing the public hearing, CPB leader Ruhin Hossain Prince said they had formally invited the Election Commission secretary and National Human Rights Commission chairman but none of them attended the event.

However, some local and foreign polls observers were present, he mentioned.

Mohammad Shah Alam, coordinator of the LDA, said they wanted to come up with specific allegations of electoral anomalies at the grassroots level.

He further said the LDA will exchange views with people on the findings and hold a daylong meeting of the alliance members on January 15 to decide the next course of action.

Alleging that the December 30 polls did not reflect people's will, he demanded dissolution of the 11th parliament and an election under "a neutral polls-time administration".

Shah Alam also said the alliance will wage a movement for fresh parliamentary polls under a "caretaker government".

[The Daily Star could not independently verify the allegations that were raised at the hearing]

Cruising

FROM PAGE 1

Journey Plus, a local tour operator, submitted the application on behalf of Assam Bengal Navigation.

The move brings to mind the memory of the British era in the Indian subcontinent when people from the East and West Bengal as well as Northeastern India could travel by steamers.

Captain Showkat Sarder, general manager (marine) of Bangladesh Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), said there was a steamer service on Assam-Goaland-Narayanganj-Kolkata-Elahabad route during the British rule.

"It was a 10-day trip. And as far as I know, it came to a halt after the partition in 1947," said Showkat, who studies the routes of steamer service in the subcontinent.

Officials said passenger and cruise services could be operated through all the eight coastal and eight inland routes between the two countries.

For now, cruise operators have shown interest to use Kolkata-Haldia-Raimongal-Chalna-Khulna-Mongla-Kawkhali-Barishal-Hizla-Chandpur-Narayanganj-Aricha-Sirajganj-Bahadurabad-Chilmari-Dhubri-Pandu-Shilghat (Assam) route, stretching 1,535km, according to BIWTC officials.

Tour operators said the cruise service will considerably increase cross-border movement. It will also attract tourists from other parts of the world.

At the moment, the two countries register movement of more than 15 lakh of their citizens a year, according to the Indian High Commission in Dhaka and immigration office.

Taufiq Rahman, chief executive of Journey Plus, said they planned to sail from Northeastern city of Guwahati and enter Bangladesh through Chilmari river port. On the way, tourists can visit some historical places, including the Jamindar Bari of Rangpur and the Baudha Bihar in Paharpur, a world heritage site, before

anchoring in Dhaka.

The vessel will then resume its journey towards the Southern region. On its way, it will pass all three big rivers -- Padma, Meghna and Jamuna -- and touch Chandpur, Barishal and port town Mongla, before entering the Sundarbans on its way to Kolkata.

"It's likely to be a 17-day package, he said, adding that they planned to operate a cruise in April-May for an experiment.

"The prospects are very bright, given Bangladesh is a riverine country. We also hope to attract a large number of European tourists," he said.

"Because of the cruise service, tourists will get to go to Kolkata through the Sundarbans."

Rahman, also a director of the Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh, urged the government to build the required infrastructures for customs, navigation, immigration and other facilities to facilitate their operations.

SK Mahfuz Hamid, chairman of Coastal Ship Owners Association of Bangladesh, said opening of passenger and cruise services will create a big opportunity for the private sector of both countries.

"Thousands of people of Bangladesh and India will take the cruise to see the Sundarbans instead of travelling by air or other means," he said.

Commodore Syed Ariful Islam, director general of the shipping department, said his office was ready to allow cruise vessels on the coastal waters.

"We are yet to receive any formal proposal from private cruise service operators," he said, adding that an Indian enterprise showed interests initially, But nothing is official yet."

Two BIWTC vessels -- MV Bangali and MV Madhumoti -- have the potential to operate as cruise vessels in the coastal and inland waters between the two countries, he said.

"These vessels can operate if they [the BIWTC] take an initiative," he said.



A structure being built by Myanmar in the no-man's land in Bandarban's Ghumdhum area violating international law.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Myanmar building

FROM PAGE 1

Rohingyas and locals in Ghumdhum expressed concern that the agricultural land and the no-man's land would be submerged if the structure was built.

Dil Mohammad, a Rohingya leader in the no-man's land, said they would not be able to live there in the rainy season if the concrete structure was built.

"The construction of the structure in the no-man's land is a threat to our security. The Myanmar army could use it as a patrolling station," he told The Daily Star.

Earlier on many occasions, Myanmar army had deployed troops to the bordering areas and opened fire at the Rohingyas, according to media reports.

In recent weeks, the Rohingyas living in no-man's land have faced growing threats from Myanmar soldiers, who have stepped up



patrol along the barbed-wire border fence near the camp in Bandarban's Tambru and ordered the Rohingyas to leave the area over loudspeakers.

The majority of nearly 700,000 Rohingyas who escaped violence in Rakhine settled in Cox's Bazar camps in Bangladesh, but a smaller number insisted on staying in the buffer zone between the borders.

The Rohingyas in no-man's land depend on the aid agencies for their survival. Bangladesh law enforcers don't allow them to get into its territory, except for a few, for shopping in Tambru Bazar to buy daily essentials.

Human Rights Watch in an earlier report said Myanmar forces have laid landmines during attacks on villages and along the Bangladesh border, posing a grave risk to Rohingyas fleeing atrocities.