

EVM to be used in Patuakhali Sadar upazila

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The Election Commission (EC) has decided to use electronic voting machines (EVM) at Patuakhali Sadar during the Upazila Parishad Election scheduled for March 31.

The election will be held that day in seven out of total eight upazilas in Patuakhali and EVMs will be used in all 89 centres of Sadar upazilas.

As part of its preparation, the EC will conduct a training programme on the use of EVM for election officials from March 22 to 26 at Patuakhali Government Jubilee high School, Patuakhali Government Girls' High School and Rashid Kishalay Bidyayatan, said Ziaur Rahman Khalifa, district election officer.

Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam will inaugurate the training programme that will be conducted from 9:00am till 5:00pm, he said, adding that there will also be EVM demonstration sessions for voters at the same locations from March 27 to 29.

Boy dies falling off train roof

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A boy was killed after he fell off the roof of a moving train in Tangail's Mirzapur upazila early yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Dulal Miah, 17, son of Warres Ali of Gonarpara in Shaghata upazila of Gaibandha.

Witnesses and locals said Dulal, a construction worker by profession, was travelling on the roof of Lalmonirhat-bound Lalmoni Express leaving from Dhaka.

Dulal died on the spot after he fell off the train around 3:00am in Swalpa Mohera area.



The charred remains of the houses after Monday's arson attack in Bostabor village in Naogaon's Dhamoirhat upazila. *Inset*, a poultry shed where children and the elderly of the arson attack victim families have been staying at night.

PHOTO: ANWAR ALI

Arson victims still living in the open

37 landless families lived in Bostabor village of Naogaon, but UNO said only 13 families would get housing

ANWAR ALI, from Naogaon

Four days into the arson attack, landless families in Bostabor village in Naogaon's Dhamoirhat upazila are still reeling from the shock of losing everything, but the authorities are yet to arrange a proper shelter for them.

During a visit to the village on Wednesday, the affected people, most from indigenous Pahan community, said their children and the elderly are now staying in a nearby shed built for a poultry farm.

Many of the community members have been spending the nights under trees, while others out in the open.

Only visible step taken by the authorities is a police camp set up at the scene to avert further attack on the arson victims.

Although Jatiya Adivasi Parishad leaders identified 37 landless families, 23 from indigenous Pahan community, to have been affected in the arson attack, Dhamoirhat Upazila Nirbahi Officer Ganapati Roy said they were arranging housing facilities for only 13 families.

"We will arrange housing for some of them at Ashrayan project. Others have their own land and housing," the UNO said.

The UNO also said according to land records, the disputed land of 1.04 acres was given as a permanent settlement to Sirajul Siddiki in 1969 and Sirajul handed it over to Akter Hossain and his son Hossain Mosharrif in 1977.

Mosharrif, a loyalist of local Awami League lawmaker, paid necessary taxes regularly and he had been in possession of the land until the landless people occupied it a year ago, he said.

Rebutting the UNO's claim, Noren Chandra Pahan, organising secretary of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, said the disputed land is recorded as khas land in the RS (Revisional Survey) record of 1972 and no one filed any litigation claiming the piece of land.

"If the land was given as permanent settlement, the record must show it," he said.

Meanwhile, the police arrested Mosharrif after he was made the prime

accused in a case filed over the arson attack.

According to the case, Mosharrif and some 50 other local AL activists set fire to the houses and launched an attack on around 150 members of 37 landless families while they were asleep. At least three members of the landless families were injured in the attack.

Among the injured, Dulali Pahan and Nazma Begum were released from Dhamoirhat Upazila Health Complex, while Shanti Pahan is still undergoing treatment.

Dr Abu Isha M Arifat Imam, resident medical officer at the health complex, said Shanti suffered physical assault and her condition was improving.

Lying in a bed at the health complex with injuries to her right arm and leg, Shanti said, "Here I have a bed to lie down at night. But after I'm released from here, where will I go?"

Since the death of her husband, Ghutu Pahan, three years ago, Shanti was living with her in-laws at neighbouring

Ghasipukur village. Six months ago, she took along her four-year-old son and started to live in a hut on the disputed land.

At the time of arson attack, she was sleeping with her son. "I came out of my hut only to find that several houses were already on fire and people were being chased out."

Trying to escape, she jumped into a pond with her son, but the attackers got a hold of her, Shanti said, adding, "They beat me up with bamboo sticks and were threatening me by saying that they would set me on fire."

She started running again and at one stage, while passing through a paddy field, her son fell off her arms.

Shanti then had no other choice but to stop and save her son from the attackers. "I did not let any of their strikes hit or touch my son. He wouldn't have survived that," said the mother.

While she was undergoing treatment at the health complex, one of her aunts had been looking after her son, Shanti said.

At Bostabor village, a burning smell

still filled the air.

Binu Bala Pahan, mother of three boys, said she was living on the land for a year with her six-year-old son.

"For the last three months, the attackers had been threatening of dire consequences for living on the land," she said. "We told them to provide proof from the court that it was not a khas land. But they torched our houses by pouring petrol."

Unless the members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) rushed to the spot in time, their lives would have been at risk, she said.

Havildar Sha Jahan of Bostabor BGB border outpost noticed the first sign of arson attack around 1:00am on Monday and hurried to the spot with Nayek Subedar Abu Sayeed and 12 BGB personnel.

"I saw the fire high in the sky and heard crackling sounds of burning bamboos," he said, adding that "We then cordoned off the place and saved the landless people."

It appeared to be a premeditated attack, Sha Jahan said.



Remnants of tree roots lie at Shakui Land Office premises in Haluaghata upazila of Mymensingh.

PHOTO: STAR

Trees felled as per land official's will

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A land official has allegedly cut down 10 trees on government land without proper permission from the authorities concerned at Shakui union parishad (UP) in Haluaghata upazila.

Md Sahabuddin, official of Shakui Land Office at the union parishad, felled the trees at the office premises for his personal benefits, alleged locals.

UP Chairman Nazim Uddin Ahmed said "The official has recently cut down the trees without informing us."

The land official said four large trees fell upon the roof of the office room long ago and those were felled 10 days ago to avoid possible risk of accident which may happen due to storm in coming season.

Replying to a query, the official said the

other six small trees broke down when the larger trees fell on those. Later, the six trees were also cut down to clear the area, said the official.

He also said he took verbal permission from upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) to fell the trees.

The trees were sold at Tk 1.10 lakh and the money is being spent for development of the land office and making furniture for it, he said.

Contacted, UNO Md Zakir Hossain declined to make any comment on the issue.

Divisional Forest Officer AKM Ruhul Amin said in case of selling out trees on government land, prior permission from the forest department is needed. But the official could not confirm whether such permission was taken or not.

Former Dinajpur Jamaat ameer arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Former ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami's Dinajpur unit and also chairman of Chirirbandar Upazila Parishad was arrested by police yesterday.

Haresul Islam, officer-in-charge of Chirirbandar Police Station, said they arrested Aftab Uddin Mollah, accused in several arson cases, around 11:00am in the upazila parishad compound.

A court sent Aftab Uddin to Dinajpur jail after the law enforcers produced him before it, said the police official.

Man's throat-silt body found in Faridpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Police recovered the throat-silt body of a young man from Dholai Mor area in the district town yesterday morning.

The deceased, Raju Mir, 27, was son of Sohrab Mir of Bhati Luxmipuri area in the town.

Police detained Raju's friend Asif Sheikh, 25, for his alleged involvement in the murder.

Deceased's cousin Azim Hossain said Raju went out of his house on Wednesday evening and did not return home.

Around 2:00am Raju sent a message on his father's mobile that read, "Find my friend Asif, you will find me."

Soon after receiving the message, Raju's family members caught Asif from his house and handed him over to the police.

Officer in Charge of Kotwali Police Station AFM Nasim said following Asif's confession they recovered Raju's body around 6:00am yesterday and sent it to Faridpur Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

UPAZILA PARISHAD POLLS EC directs 3 Tangail lawmakers to leave areas

All the MPs are from Awami League

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday night directed three lawmakers in Tangail to leave their constituencies by yesterday (Thursday) to create atmosphere for a fair election.

The lawmakers, all from Awami League (AL), are Hasan Imam Khan, who is also known as Sohel Hazari, of Tangail-4 (Kalihati), Sanowar Hossain of Tangail-5 (Sadar) and Joaherul Islam of Tangail-8 (Basail-Sakhipur).

The direction was served on Wednesday night to the lawmakers concerned by sending out letters signed by Atiar Rahman, deputy secretary of the EC secretariat, said AHM Kamrul Hasan, district election officer in Tangail.

"We also received a letter in this regard today [Thursday]," he added.

The fourth phase of upazila parishad elections in 12 upazilas of Tangail is scheduled for March 31.

Out of the 12 upazilas, chairman candidates nominated by AL were already elected uncontested in three upazilas -- Dhanbari, Madhupur and Gopalpur.

A tower of violations

FROM PAGE 1

"But on February 23, 2005, they submitted a photocopy of the building's design showing 22 floors. But there was no document to support it," he said.

After yesterday's fire that killed at least 19 people, the Rajuk formed a committee to investigate how the four additional floors were built and whether the building had fire safety equipment, he said.

The original design had an emergency staircase, but the Rajuk chief could not confirm if the building's emergency exit was built as per the design.

Built on an eight-katha plot, each of its floor has 6,000 square feet space for commercial purposes, according to its website.

But there was no fire-protected exits in the building that houses a restaurant, a coffee shop, a branch of state-run Pubali Bank, a buying

house, a freight-forwarding company, and many other firms, said Major Shakil Newaz, director (operations) of fire service.

"We have written to all the building owners on this street, including this one, at least five to six times, asking them to take precautions for fire safety. But no one ever complied," he told reporters after the fire was brought under control around 4:45pm.

The Daily Star could not contact the building owner, SMHI Faruque, for his comment.

Many more buildings along Kamal Ataturk Avenue do not have fire protection, including Banani Super Market, Hotel Sweet Dream and Hadi Tower, according to fire service.

Under the building code, buildings with over 500 occupants must have at least two staircases, and fire exits need to have doors that block out fire and smoke.

Also, the walls must be thick enough to withstand several hours of fire, to protect the people escaping through the fire exit.

Ali Ahmed, the immediate past director general of fire service, said the FR Tower lacked fire safety equipment and its staircases were not well protected against fire.

"As people were frightened and smoke darkened the whole area, especially the staircase, people jumped off the building to save their lives," he said.

People can die from 30 seconds of smoke inhalation, he added.

Witnesses said people broke the building's glass and screamed for help. A number of people jumped from the building to save their lives from the blaze while many others were seen sliding down from various floors using ropes and cables hanging from and around the building.