

Cumilla seal Super Over

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the table with no realistic chance of making it to the play-offs, equalled the 140 for nine posted by Cumilla when they failed to sneak in a double off the final delivery of the game.

Sylhet could only muster seven runs in the Super Over as Mujeeb kept it tight after being hit for a four off his very first delivery. Cumilla, who had lost Soumya Sarkar, got over the line with the penultimate delivery when David Wiese took a single after smashing a four off the previous delivery.

Before that, Shohag Gazi smashed a 31-ball 52, laced with three fours and four sixes, to help Sylhet recover after a bleak start. Although Gazi fell in the 17th over to a Mujeeb delivery, the match was dragged to the very last ball. With two wickets in hand and 15 required off the last over, Naveen Ul Haq smashed two boundaries off the first two Al- Amin Hossain deliveries before falling to a

run-out off the next ball. The match went into the Super Over when Monir Hossain failed to complete a double, being run-out with the final ball.

Before bowling an excellent Super Over, it was Mujeeb who returned impressive figures of four for 12 to help Cumilla's cause.

Earlier, Cumilla's 42-run opening stand between Stiaan van Zyl and Upul Tharanga ended when the former fell in the fifth over after scoring a 12-ball 10. Tharanga scored a team high 31-ball 45 with the next best contribution coming at the death from Mahidul Islam as the right-hander played an unbeaten 14-ball 19 to help his side post a modest total. Sherfane Rutherford was the pick of the bowlers for Sylhet, returning figures of three for 19. Gazi, who shone with the bat, was also impressive with the ball as the off spinner returned figures of two for 23 in three overs.

JP aspirant crashes out

DNCC AND DSCC ELECTIONS 2020			
Name of posts	Nomination forms collected	Nomination forms submitted	Nominations cancelled
Mayor	18	14	1
General Ward Councillor	1,875	834	41
Women Ward Councillor (reserved)	367	191	4
TOTAL	2,260	1,039	46

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while the DSCC returning office found valid the nominations of 434 general and 100 reserved ward councillor aspirants.

Returning officers Abul Kashem and Abdul Baten of the DSCC and DNCC urged all the candidates to abide by the electoral code of conduct. They also warned that stern action would be taken against any violation of the electoral code.

According to EC statistics, although over 2,200 aspirant candidates collected nomination forms for the city polls, less than half of them submitted those to the commission.

KAMRUL'S NOMINATION CANCELLED

RO Kashem said the nomination of JP candidate Kamrul was cancelled as his name was not on the voter list.

According to the electoral law, a mayor hopeful must be a voter of the city corporation area.

Kamrul in his reaction said he would file an appeal with the Dhaka divisional commissioner seeking a reversal of the RO's decision.

Any candidate can lodge an appeal with the appellate authority against the returning officers' decision by January 5.

Ten DNCC mayor aspirants had collected nomination forms, but seven of them submitted those.

The EC declared valid the nominations of Awami League's Atiul Islam, BNP's Tabith Awal, Communist Party of Bangladesh's (CPB) Sajedul Huq Rubel, Islami Andolan Bangladesh's Sheikh Md Fazle Bari Masud, Progressive Democratic Party's Shahin Khan and National Peoples Party's Anisur Rahman Dewan.

Speaking to reporters later, Tabith Awal said validation of his nomination was a primary victory for the BNP as he came to know that some vested quarters were trying to disqualify him from the polls.

Sajedul Huq said ensuring a level playing field didn't necessarily mean ensuring it only for the AL and the BNP nominees, rather it should be ensured for all candidates.

"The CPB is participating in the polls

as part of its fight to restore democracy in the country," he added.

Meanwhile, RO Kashem said they have cancelled the nominations of 15 general and two reserved women councillor aspirants.

A total of 374 general ward councillor aspirants submitted nominations for 54 posts in the Dhaka North City Corporation and 89 candidates for 18 reserved women councillor posts.

MAYOR HOPEFULS IN DSCC

DSCC RO Baten said they declared valid the nomination papers of all the seven mayor candidates.

They are AL's Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, BNP's Ishraque Hossain, JP's Mohammad Saifuddin, Islami Andolan Bangladesh's Abdur Rahman, Bangladesh Congress' Md Akhtaruzzaman, National People's Party's Bahrane Sultan Bahar and Gonofront's Abdus Samad.

Earlier, eight mayor aspirants had collected nomination forms.

The RO said they cancelled nominations of 26 general ward councillors aspirants and two reserved women councillor hopefuls.

Talking to journalists following the scrutiny of nominations, Taposh and Ishraque called upon the voters to exercise their franchise on January 30.

"There will be a festive mood during the polls. I urge everyone in Dhaka south city area to cast their votes," Taposh said.

Ishraque also urged the voters to go to polling centres. "It's your rights. You should elect your representatives directly."

In Dhaka south, a total of 460 aspirants submitted nominations for 75 general ward councillor posts and 102 aspirants for 25 reserved women councillor posts.

COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE HELD

A BNP-backed councillor hopeful was arrested from the capital's Tikatuli area around 4:30pm yesterday in old cases filed against him, reports UNB.

Bangshal police arrested Tajuddin Ahmed Taj who submitted his nomination to the EC to contest for the ward-32 councillor post in the DSCC polls.

HC orders probe

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the health secretary and the director general of Directorate of Health Services to form a committee and conduct an enquiry into the allegations of negligence of NICRH authorities in using and preserving the equipment for treatment in the hospital.

The committee has been asked to submit a probe report before the court in 30 days.

In the rule, the court asked the authorities concerned of the government to explain why the reported negligence of the NICRH authorities should not be declared illegal.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman passed the order and issued the suo moto rule following a report titled "ICU on sickbed" published yesterday in The Daily Star.

The retirement facilities of Moarraf Hossen will remain suspended until the HC disposes of the suo moto rule, Deputy Attorney General Amit Talukder told The Daily Star.

SC lawyer Barrister Manoj Kumar Bhowmick placed The Daily Star's report before the HC bench seeking necessary orders.

The report revealed several cases

of irregularities at the country's lone specialised public hospital for cancer treatment.

The report said the NICRH, situated in Mohakhali, is the go-to place for patients in the low-income bracket. According to an International Agency for Research on Cancer report released last year, about 1.08 lakh people die of cancer, while 1.5 lakh people develop the disease every year in Bangladesh.

More than 12 years ago, the NICRH authorities had purchased eight high-end ventilators for its Intensive Care Unit. But the Artificial Respiratory Ventilators (ARVs), the basic device required to properly run an ICU, had never been installed, depriving the critical patients of the services they are supposed to receive at the ICU.

The lifesaving devices -- each bought for Tk 70 lakh at that time -- are now left uncared for in a corner in the ICU.

According to The Daily Star's report, a central oxygen system was set up more than three years ago, but the ventilators were not installed. To make matters worse, the motherboards of the ventilators have been stolen in the meantime, rendering the machines dysfunctional.



People sit atop sacks of waste on a truck in the capital's Gabtoli. The sacks do not seem to be tied properly and may topple any time, taking those sitting on top with them. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'It's not possible to do everything overnight'

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"Our scheme will save everyone. The outstanding loans will not race ahead. We will know who the genuine businessmen are."

He went on to cite the case of a businessman who took a loan of Tk 97 lakh from a private bank in 2012. In 2014, he repaid Tk 1.10 crore. But, the bank is still demanding Tk 1.73 crore after waiving off Tk 40 lakh of interest.

The businessman does not have the capacity to pay the bank anymore and is now going through health problems because of the anxiety stemming from this outstanding loan with the bank.

"I get very upset when I hear such cases. What is the point of earning and expanding your balance sheet this way? What is the point of increasing assets at inflated rates? It is not good to charge so much."

When asked if it is correct to fix the interest rates for banks in a market economy, Kamal was dismissive. "In the name of quantitative easing, didn't the US, the biggest proponent of free market, print papers?"

But, he feels he has cracked a win-win situation for all.

Sonali, Janata, Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank and their ilk give out loans at 5 percent interest under many schemes, he said.

"They get those funds from the government. If they can, why can't the private banks? We will give them those funds now. If they get money on the cheap, why will they not give out loans at low interest?"

Indeed, in his media briefing the following day, he announced that 50 percent of the government funds, which were almost exclusively in the hands of state banks, will be kept with private banks to provide them a steady supply of funds.

"It's a fool-proof system. Banks had an important role in our development, in halving our poverty rates. They will never face losses -- I will make them stronger."

He also means to help banks recover loans from willful defaulters like Hall-Mark Group and has even thought up a plan.

"We will try to take out their cases from court. Many of them have 3-4 members of the family in jail and their properties are going astray. We will try to bring one of them out on bail -- maybe the women first -- so that they can sell off their assets. From jail, they can't do anything and the government is the eventual loser in all this."

He will sit with the stakeholders soon and work out a scheme for willful defaulters, who might have to pay 25 percent down payment to regularise their loans.

"We are not taking the matter lightly. We might have to look at the issue from a human viewpoint."

Asked for a timeframe for this plan, the youthful-looking 72-year-old was surprisingly candid: "Does anything happen according to timeframe in Bangladesh?"

His sideswipe is not without reason.

When he became the finance minister, he was assured that all tools needed to implement the much-delayed VAT and Supplementary Duty Act 2012 from this fiscal year will be ready.

"I was assured by the finance secretary that we have the allocation and we will get the machines and scanners as and when needed."

But that has not been the case.

"It's one thing to plan and another to execute. I thought it would be so easy. But now I know that is not the case. Those who were working on it never said anything negative or asked me to back out from the July 1 roll-out."

He blames this for the flagging tax collection in the first four months of the fiscal year as the value-added tax is the biggest source of revenue for the exchequer.

"Now that I know what the situation is I will be very hands-on. Hopefully we will see some results over the next six months," he said, adding that he will sit at the National Board of Revenue premises for two days a week from now on.

His plan is to install the 10,000 electronic fiscal devices that have arrived -- out of the requisite 2 lakh -- at places with high sales turnover like in supermarkets to set the ball rolling.

He will also recruit 1,000 to oversee VAT and income tax collection this year.

The initiatives are expected to yield 10-12 percent collection growth of the NBR come the end of the fiscal year.

Over the next four years, he plans to recruit 25,000 in total for the revenue authority. They will assess whether the individuals have the capacity to give income tax and ask them to file returns. At the same time, if people are paying less tax, they will look into it too.

They will try to convince those people but there will not be any harassment, he said, adding that he will assign people up to the upazila level and set up multiple tax offices in the economically flourishing places.

"I'll collect tax from those who have the capacity to pay -- they cannot get away without paying any tax. Even if it's a little they will have to pay. To start off they will pay less and then gradually increase."

These two avenues will have to shoulder the burden for mobilising revenue for the government: customs will be cut some slack as an expansive list of duty waivers has been offered for the mega projects and to spur industrialisation.

"No country in the world gives as much exemptions as us. It was not possible to collect any revenue from them what we imported thus far in the fiscal year."

Were those duty waivers not in place, Bangladesh's tax-GDP ratio

would have been 14 percent and not the existing 9.2 percent, which is one of the lowest in the world, according to Kamal.

Some of the exemptions are necessary but some will be reviewed too, he said, while citing the case of the power sector to further his point. At the onset, the power sector was given a host of exemptions; but they are slowly being withdrawn.

"At the moment, employment generation is more important for us than revenue generation. If we seek applications for 1,000 vacancies, 25,000 show up. If we can't give them employment, what's the point of the government? We would have failed in our responsibilities."

But, a restructuring of the tax administration to get it up to speed with modern times -- and particularly automation -- is definitely on the cards.

"It's not possible to do everything overnight," he said, adding that the reforms he will be ushering in will eventually pay off.

Kamal, who was in the textile business previously, also seems to have devised a plan for garment exporters, who have been crying out for devaluation of the local currency to give them a competitive edge.

He is emphatically against the possibility of devaluation, an idea which has been pushed by economists and exporters alike. "I will not devalue as we are import-dependent. We will die!"

But in keeping with his alternative thinking, he is planning to give garment exporters Tk 5 extra for every dollar of their export receipts.

He has dispatched men to India, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Thailand -- all Bangladesh's competitors in global apparel trade -- to get first-hand knowledge of whether those countries' governments are giving this benefit to their garment exporters to give them a leg up.

"If they are, we will too."

The move will cost the government Tk 4,000 crore extra, but that may be offset by the surge in foreign currency, like his similar initiative for remitters have done.

In his maiden budget, he allocated Tk 3,500 crore to provide 2 percent cash incentive to remitters -- a move the government credits for the record remittance inflow of \$18.32 billion in 2019.

That budget -- which was long on promises but short on specifics and came across as empty rhetoric -- will be the blueprint for his next four budgets.

"I've prepared the budget for 2041 -- it was a comprehensive budget."

What the country needs to become an advanced nation is in there, he said.

"Whichever areas need reforms are in there. All I need is to implement them. I need to work hard. It's a long road ahead -- and we are just getting started."

Dozens of S Korean MPs charged over parliamentary stand-off

AFP, Seoul

South Korean prosecutors yesterday indicted almost 30 MPs and the leader of the main opposition party on assault and other charges over a two-day parliamentary stand-off.

In an attempt to stop legislation being passed, members of the opposition Liberty Korea party (LKP) lay on the floor linking arms to block access to a committee room, and blockaded an MP in his office for five hours.

Scuffles broke out as MPs of the governing Democratic party tried to force their way into the hall in April.

Seoul prosecutors indicted the LKP leader Hwang Kyo-ahn and 23 of his MPs -- including former parliamentary floor leader Na Kyung-won -- on charges including causing a commotion at the national assembly and illegal detention.

Five Democratic party MPs were indicted on accusations of assault.

Among the 29 accused, prosecutors said 18 will face court trials, including Hwang and Na, while the others are likely to be fined without court proceedings as their offences are considered minor.

The indictment comes three months before a legislative election and if any of the MPs are fined five million won (US\$4,300) or more on conviction, they will be stripped of their seats and barred from standing for re-election for five years.

The LKP said the five-to-24 ratio of charges was "unfair" and "unbalanced", while Na -- who is herself a former judge -- condemned the indictment as "politically retaliatory" and claimed it was "top-down ordered" by the administration of President Moon Jae-in.

Score-setting is ingrained in the country's winner-takes-all political system, with every one of the country's living former presidents either currently in prison or convicted of crimes after leaving office.

The dispute broke out when the governing party and its allies sought to fast-track a series of reform bills, among them setting up a body to probe corruption by high-ranking officials.

Alarming rise

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Prof Arup Ratan Choudhury, founder of the Association for the Prevention of Drug Abuse, also blamed the availability of drugs for the problem.

"Anyone can buy drugs now from home by placing an order over phone or online," he claimed.

Contacted, Soheli Rana, assistant inspector general at the Police Headquarters, said narcotics are now less available than before.

"Besides taking action against the traffickers, police ran many awareness campaigns. As a result, many people are now seeking treatment," he said.

Law enforcers launched a crackdown on drug traders in May 2018.

The Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) yesterday observed its 30th anniversary at the capital's Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

Addressing the event, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said that the young people were particularly at risk because most of the drug abusers were aged between 18 and 35 years.

"We have to rehabilitate those people by providing them with treatment," he said.

The government has allocated Tk 1 crore to incentivise the private rehabilitation centres this fiscal year, he added.

Shahiduzzaman, secretary of Security Service Division, said there are no rehabilitation centres in 23 districts. "We have taken initiatives to establish facilities in these districts," he added.

Referring to the widespread use of yaba, the home minister said yaba trafficking had not stopped because Myanmar didn't keep its promise. "Myanmar promised on different occasions that they would take steps to stop yaba trafficking [into Bangladesh], but they haven't taken any initiative."

He added that the government was working to keep young people away from yaba.

Prof Ratan, who was the chief guest, said availability of yaba was the reason for the increasing number of addicts.

Regarding driving under influence, he said introducing dope tests for drivers can reduce road crashes.

Former housing and public works minister Mosharraf Hossain, also an Awami League presidium member, said liquor and beer are available even in departmental stores in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Many people would stop taking drugs if those drinks are available in stores, he observed.

DNC DG Jamal Uddin said the Narcotics Control Act 2018 has provisions for introducing dope tests during recruitment in government, semi-government and autonomous organisations.