

Trump tells evangelical voters they have God on their side

AFP, Miami

US President Donald Trump wooed crucial evangelical voters Friday with a speech in Florida where he told them God is “on our side” ahead of this year’s elections.

Trump -- who despite three marriages, sexual assault allegations and a controversial business history has made himself a champion of right-wing Christians -- promised “another monumental victory for faith and family, God and country, flag and freedom.”

“I really do believe we have God

on our side,” Trump told the crowd at the King Jesus International Ministry mega church in Miami.

This was Trump’s first campaign rally of the year and sets him up for what will be a tough fight against his Democratic challenger in November.

Trump, who also faces a looming impeachment trial in the Senate, arrived on stage at the church to be blessed by several television pastors.

“Every demonic altar that has been raised against him will be torn down,” prayed Paula White, frequently portrayed as Trump’s spiritual advisor.

New poison in ‘old bottles’

FROM PAGE 1

Rayhan too was arrested by police earlier that year but got bail within a month.

He and a dozen other dealers, backed by local political leaders, are now active in Anwarpur, Chanpurand Chhoto Kuripaika -- three villages in Akhaura, bordering India.

They are adopting new strategies of drug trade and smuggling. They fill the bottle with a cocktail of Indian cough medicine Eskuf, sugar syrup and a few drops of an energy drink to sell it as Phensedyl.

That’s why empty plastic bottle of contraband Phensedyl is sold at around Tk 100 in villages of Akhaura and Brahmanbaria. The condition is that it has to be unscratched and the seal of the cap cannot be broken.

While an intact bottle of real Phensedyl costs Tk 1,200 in the border area, this counterfeit one is available at Tk 800.

Eskuf, which is banned in India, also has popularity among junkies in the district. It sells at about Tk 500.

“Once I was fishing with a net in a pond that I took on lease. I found hundreds of Phensedyl bottles filled with water, but seals of the caps were intact,” said Kazi Anwar Hossain, a fish trader of Taragan village.

Md Alamgir, a scrap trader in Narayanpur intersection of Akhaura, said he was doing the business for 20 years. Even a year back, he used to sell 60 bags full of empty Phensedyl bottles every month but now he hardly gets one or two bags.

‘RED SIGNAL’

Around 3:00pm on October 8. Chanpur village.

The Star correspondents saw a youth walking on the zero line though it is prohibited. Interestingly, he was wearing a red gamchha (towel) over his jeans.

Noticing onlookers, he just threw a small plastic sack into a dense bush nearby and started walking away.

A local source, who was accompanying the correspondents, called out to him, “We are not from the administration; we are here to buy Eskuf.”

The youth in gamchha then turned around.

Coming closer, he said he could arrange some but the cost will be Tk 500 per bottle.

But why he was wearing a gamchha over the jeans?

In reply, he said it is a signal for their counterparts in India that the border is clear now and they can throw the narcotics to this side.

About the payment, he said most of the time they hurl the bundles of money across the border fence. “We often send Bangladeshi taka but sometimes we pay in US dollar if there is a big consignment.”

According to the database, police recovered 7,813 bottles of Phensedyl and 5,637 bottles of Eskuf in the district in 2018.

In the first nine months of last year, the district police recovered 3,073 bottles of Eskuf and 2,136 bottles of Phensedyl.

During this period, a total of 1363 cases were filed for narcotics charges and police arrested 2,119 people for drugs smuggling and selling.

In 2018, the figure of arrest was 2,051, and around 1,577 cases were filed on narcotics charges, reads the database.

About the use of Phensedyl and Eskuf, Prof Mujibur Rahman of the medicine department at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said if anyone continuously takes cough syrup without prescription, he would become addicted to it.

“The person will gradually lose the ability to lead a regular life,” Prof Mujibur told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

HOUSES ON ZERO LINE

Around 5:00pm. October 9. Bautola, a bordering village in Akhaura.

A police informant source took these correspondents to the village from near Akhaura land port on a CNG-run auto-rickshaw.

Near the border, he pointed to

some houses built on the Indian side’s zero line, and said a number of Indian nationals have built those to bring and keep narcotics, including Phensedyl and Eskuf.

The smugglers then sneak the contraband items into Bangladesh when they find lax vigilance on the border.

Md Hanif Mia is one of those Indians who have a house on zero line in Bautola area of Akhaura. He is known to be involved with the narco syndicates.

Talking to The Daily Star later in late November, Rasul Ahmed Nizami, OC of Akhaura Police Station, said narco traders and carriers often take shelter in the houses built on the zero line.

Police have nothing to do about it as they are not allowed to go there, he added.

In late October, Lt Col Gulam Kabir, commanding officer of Border Guard Battalion 25, said those houses were built on the Indian side, and they have no authority to visit there.

“But we are expressing our concern to Indian Border Security Force and working to improve the situation.”

He added, “We are trying our best and keeping our vigilance in the bordering area. The situation is improving.”

PATRONS?

In the police list, Abdul Hannan Swapan, chairman of Akhaura North Union Parishad, is a social worker playing a major role in the surrender of drug dealers.

But narco sources claimed that he is one of those running the illegal business. His nephew Saddam Bhuyan was arrested on October 25 from Azampur area of Akhaura over drug smuggling.

He is operating a gang of 100 people to control the trade, claimed the sources. Swapan, however, refused to comment on this allegation. He asked these correspondents to talk to local law enforcers and visit the area.

Sources also claimed Swapan is backed by his uncle Abul Kashem Bhuyan, chairman of Akhaura upazila.

Contacted, Kashem admitted that some of his family members are involved in narcotics business.

“There are some narcotics traders in Akhaura upazila, including my brother’s son Kajal Bhuiyan. But we have already taken steps to make them surrender to police,” he told The Daily Star in November.

Asked about Swapan, he said it’s the political rivals who are bringing false allegation against Swapan. “Even a section of people are spreading negative propaganda against me to tarnish my image.

OC Nizami said he doesn’t know what Swapan used to do earlier but now police have nothing against him.

Kashem also doesn’t have any criminal record as per police file and he is helping arrange the surrender of drug dealers, said the OC.

Around 50 to 60 narcotics traders of Akhaura have already communicated with police for surrender and officials are now working to arrange the programme soon, added Nizami.

In November, Md Alamgir Hossain, additional superintendent of police, said a major challenge in combatting narcotics trade in the district is the accused walk out of jail on bail months after they are arrested.

They get involved in the trade again and again but police are aware of the issue and working to solve it, he said.

Asked about political leaders’ involvement, he said none will be spared, no matter what’s the identity.

The Daily Star called OC Nizami again on Thursday to get the updates.

“The situation is better now as we are taking stern action regarding narcotics trade, no matter who is involved in the business,” he said, adding that police registered around 29 drug cases in December.

Asked about the allegations against local public representatives, he said they are taking action on the basis of police intelligence list. “If anyone’s name is not on the list, how would we take action?”



This trail in Chzanpur village of Akhaura upazila Brahmanbaria leads to the airport of India’s Agartala. The trail is used by smuggles to bring in Phensedyl from India and traffic people to the country.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOY



Bangladesh Chhatra League’s new President Al Nahian Khan Joy, left, and General Secretary Lekhak Bhattacharjee, centre, giving Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a bouquet at a programme marking the 72nd anniversary of the pro-AL student organisation at the Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Move ahead with proper values, ideals

FROM PAGE 1

Since the removal of Rezwanul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and Golam Rabbani from the BCL top posts over extortion allegation last year, Nahian and Lekhak had been serving as their substitutes.

Yesterday afternoon, Hasina presented the two with full responsibility of Chhatra League.

Hasina said the country’s future leadership must emerge from the meritorious and bright students, reports UNB.

It is not possible to build leadership without ideals, values, and honesty, she said, adding that Chhatra League should be imbued with these virtues.

Hasina also criticised those military

rulers and autocratic governments who had grabbed the state power illegally.

She said Ziaur Rahman used the meritorious students by giving them arms and money, and ruined their lives, the UNB report says.

The PM said she had seen brilliant students used as armed cadres and militants during the tenures of Ziaur Rahman, HM Ershad and Khaleda Zia to secure their power, it says.

Former BCL leaders Tofail Ahmed, Khaleq Mohammad Ali, and Obaidul Quader were also present in the programme, reports our correspondent.

The AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader urged the incumbent BCL leaders and activists to restore the

organisation’s lost glory.

“For whatever reason, the reputation of Chhatra League has been diminished. Those who were involved in Abrar murder and insulting a principal in Rajshahi, are not needed in the organisation,” he said.

The road transport and bridges minister also urged the BCL activists to follow the footsteps of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The programme was inaugurated by the prime minister through hoisting national flag with the national anthem playing on the background. A colourful cultural programme followed the inauguration ceremony.

Bangladesh Chhatra League came into being on January 4, 1948 by the advice of Bangabandhu.

DU yells, ‘Period not a dirty word’

FROM PAGE 1

perception and make people aware that menstruation is normal and natural, and not a disease or a condition, and most importantly, ‘period’ is not a dirty word,” she added.

Apart from five female dormitories -- Ruqayyah Hall, Shamsunnahar Hall, Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall, Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall and Kabi Sufia Kamal Hall -- the vending machines have also been installed at Teacher-Student Centre (TSC), girls’ common rooms at arts, business studies, fine arts faculties and the science faculty library.

Education Minister Dipu Moni inaugurated the launching of the vending machines at a programme at the DU on December 4.

Addressing the function, she said, “Through this initiative, there will be a huge development in safeguarding women’s health. No plan was ever taken up keeping the special needs of women in mind. It is very normal that such a noble initiative has been taken at the place which spearheaded many protests and is the birthplace of many achievements.”

Students and teachers of the university appreciated the move saying that such an initiative would help wage a social movement to raise awareness among all.

Namrata Arpa, a master’s student

of the mass communication and journalism department, said, “Period is a natural process which is connected to motherhood. Yet, people in our country still see it as a taboo, which is sad.”

“Earlier, if any girl was on her period, she would have to face a lot of problems just in getting a napkin. Pads were previously available in the girls’ common rooms, but they were pricey and of poor quality,” said Nahida Akhtar, a fourth-year student of the theatre and performance studies department.

About the students’ initiative, Prof Robaet Ferdous of the university’s mass communication and journalism department, said, “I am glad that such an initiative has been taken... In a patriarchal society, men have created the myth that menstruation is a ‘dirty’ process.”

He said it would help female students with their reproductive and maternal health and hoped that other educational institutions would replicate the move.

“There are many superstitions centring the period and often it is considered ‘filthy’. Even restrictions on a woman’s movement and food habits were imposed. Girls were taught by the family and society to suppress her need to speak about it,” said Prof Sameena Chowdhury, president of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society

of Bangladesh.

Around the country, especially in rural areas, girls are not prepared or made aware about menstruation, which usually starts at puberty. This causes them to face many difficulties and challenges at home, educational institutions, and work places.

She also said, “In rural areas, girls still lack proper practice of menstrual hygiene and a large number of girls use pieces of cloths or old rags during their periods. Such practices can cause serious health issues and may even lead to death.

“A girl’s menstruation cycle starts at the age of 12 to 15. It means school-goers are in need of such vending machines even more. School- and college-going girls still face some barriers in solving the problem, as most of the educational institutions do not have female-friendly washrooms.”

The gynaecologist also stressed using hygienic products and curbing the price of sanitary napkins.

“The sooner we accept menstruation as a normal bodily function, the better it is for our society,” she added.

Speaking to The Daily Star, eminent rights activist Sultana Kamal said, while a lot of myths and taboos surrounding periods has been removed, the cause would be further helped if every educational institution follows the initiative taken at the DU.

Monitoring lapses and indifference

FROM PAGE

by police and Buet’s Accident Research Institute had said earlier.

Kanchan yesterday said at least 4,356 people were killed and 6,953 others injured in 4,702 crashes last year.

As per international standard, the organisation counted 20 percent of the injuries as deaths and put the total number at 5,227, he said.

The actor-turned-road-safety-crusader added that the roads were less dangerous in 2018 when 3,103 crashes claimed 4,439 lives and left 7,425 others injured.

Illiterate and unskilled drivers, faulty vehicles and roads, poor traffic management, callousness of pedestrians, lack of political will, and poor enforcement of law lead to road crashes, he said.

On 2019, at least 198 people were killed and 347 others injured in 162 railway-related accidents.

In waterways, 64 people were killed, 157 others injured, and 110 went missing in 30 accidents, he added.

Over 50 percent of the people killed on roads were pedestrians. The highest, 2,013 accidents involved people being crushed under the wheels, he added.

People’s lack of awareness about traffic laws, use of mobile phones while going across roads, and a reluctance to use zebra crossings and foot bridges led to these crashes, he said.

A large number of drivers and their assistants were killed last year, Kanchan said, adding that 22 percent of the victims were either drivers or their helpers.

At least 648 of the victims were on motorcycles, he added.

With 396 crashes, June was the

deadliest month followed by August with 379 crashes, he said.

The Eid holidays were in those months.

Nirapad Sarak Chai’s data contradicts with what Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said recently. At a press conference on December 31, Quader claimed that the number of road accident has declined and they were working to reduce road crashes further.

BUS, TRUCK, MOTORCYCLE

Buses and trucks were involved in 2,025 crashes while all other vehicles were involved in 2,677, he said.

“So, they [drivers of buses and trucks] need to be trained institutionally to develop their driving skills,” Kanchan said.

Besides, he said there are 1.54 lakh licences for drivers of heavy vehicles. But the number of heavy vehicles is 2.61 lakh, meaning 1.07 lakh of the heavy vehicles are being driven by people without the proper licence, he pointed out.

However, the number of people with licence to drive light vehicles is far greater than the number of light vehicles, he said.

On the other hand, the BRTA issued 13.60 lakh licences for motorcyclists against 27.86 lakh registered motorcycles, meaning more than half the motorcyclists do not have licences. Motorcyclists were involved in 19 percent of the accidents last year. It was 21 percent in 2018.

In metropolitan areas, more people now use helmets while riding, but the scenario in rural areas is not so good, he added.

Bangladeshis in Iraq advised to be cautious

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Embassy in Baghdad has advised the Bangladeshis in Iraq to avoid travelling to troublesome areas in the country following the airstrike on an Iranian general.

“The Bangladeshi migrants have been requested not to travel anywhere except their workplaces and residences, and to avoid all sorts of meetings and gatherings if there is no special necessity,” read an embassy press release on Friday.

The instruction was issued following a US air strike in Baghdad on Friday that killed Qassem Soleimani, Tehran’s most prominent military commander.

The 62-year-old general headed Iran’s elite Quds Force, and was regarded as the country’s second most powerful figure after its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The attack, authorised by US President Donald Trump, led to a dramatic escalation in a “shadow war” in the Middle East between Iran and the United States and its allies, mainly Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Immediately after the killing, Iran promised harsh vengeance.

Fury, tears, alarm

FROM PAGE 1

Washington had used “diplomatic measures” to urge Tehran to respond “in proportion” to the strike -- a message Iran’s foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif slammed as a “foolish”.

Zarif also spoke with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, who argued that “the dangerous US military operation violates the basic norms of international relations and will aggravate regional tensions and turbulence,” according to Chinese media.

The strike killed a total of five Iranian Guards and five members of Iraq’s Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary network, whose members have close ties to Tehran.

Among the dead was the Hashed’s deputy Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was a top adviser and personal friend to Soleimani.

Mass ceremonies started in Baghdad yesterday for the dead, with Iraq’s caretaker premier Adel Abdel Mahdi and top pro-Iran figures in large crowds accompanying the coffins.

They were first brought to a revered Shia shrine in northern Baghdad, where thousands of mourners chanted “Death to America!”

Dressed in black, they waved white Hashed flags and massive portraits of Iranian and Iraqi leaders, furiously calling for “revenge”.

The remains were then moved to the shrine city of Karbala and would ultimately end up in Najaf, where the Iraqis will be buried.

The Guards’ remains would be flown to Iran, which has declared three days of mourning and religious rituals.

As head of the Guards’ foreign operations arm, the Quds Force, Soleimani was a powerful figure domestically and oversaw Iran’s wide-ranging interventions in regional power struggles.

He had long been considered a lethal foe by Washington, with Trump saying he should have been killed “many years ago”.

Tehran has already named Soleimani’s deputy, Esmail Qaani, to replace him.

His first order of business was made clear Friday when Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei promised “harsh revenge” for Soleimani’s death.

Abuhamzeh, the Revolutionary Guards commander in Kerman province, mentioned a series of possible targets for reprisals including the Gulf waterway through which about a third of the world’s shipborne oil is exported to global markets.

“The Strait of Hormuz is a vital point for the West and a large number of American destroyers and warships cross there,” Abuhamzeh was quoted as saying on Friday evening by the semi-official news agency Tasnim.

“Vital American targets in the region have long since been identified by Iran...Some 35 U.S. targets in the region as well as Tel Aviv are within our reach,” he said, referring to Israel’s largest city.

Iraqis worry the US strike could unleash a new wave of destabilisation for Iraq, which only two years ago announced it had defeated the Islamic State group.

Abdel Mahdi warned Friday it would “spark a devastating war in Iraq”, while President Barham Saleh pleaded for “voices of reason” to prevail.

Yesterday, the Hashed said a new strike had hit a convoy of their forces north of Baghdad, with Iraqi state media blaming the US.

But US-led coalition spokesman Myles Caggins denied involvement, telling AFP: “There was no American or coalition strike.”

Amid the tensions, the Pentagon said up to 3,500 additional US troops would be dispatched to Iraq’s neighbour Kuwait, to boost some 14,000 reinforcements already deployed to the region last year.

About 5,200 US troops are stationed across Iraq to help fight IS.

They have faced a spate of rocket attacks that the US has blamed on pro-Iran factions and which last month killed an American contractor.

As a result of the tensions, Nato said it was suspending its training activities in Iraq and a US defence official told AFP that American-led coalition forces would “limit” operations.