

All we see is violence, not battle for votes

Says Mahbub Talukder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Crime and violence have become an integral part of the Union Parishad elections, said Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukder in a statement to the media.



He said such violence will continue to escalate unless the culture of giving party nominations in UP elections does not stop.

Law enforcement agencies have to intensify their efforts to counter election violence, he said, adding, "It is imperative to investigate the clashes to discover ways to ease the crisis.

"Now in the battle for votes, we only have battles, but we do not have votes," he opined, adding that violence and elections cannot go hand-in-hand.

Talukder visited several polling stations in Savar yesterday and expressed his frustrations to journalists on spot.

His visits included the polling stations at Ashulia School and College and Ashulia Primary School around noon.

Talukder said there were no people anywhere at the polling centres.

Votes were cast in front of presiding officers and there were people peering in and saying who cast vote for whom, he said.

"But no action was taken. Police and Rab personnel were present at the spot but no one was saying anything. What election are we conducting?" a frustrated Talukder told journalists on the spot.

Asked what action would be taken regarding election irregularities, he said, "I have given the responsibility to the returning officer. He will act as he sees fit."

In his written statement to the media, he also said that many parliamentarians violated the election code of conduct and that it was not possible to do anything about them apart from issuing letters.

"Many have completely disregarded those letters. To take more stringent action, we need stricter implementation of the law, but unless the election process is reformed, that cannot be done," he said.



Two passengers waiting for a local bus in a new bus stand at Dhanmondi-15 in the capital. The Dhaka South City Corporation erected the new stand, which also has a route map for the convenience of passengers. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

All including BCL must be alert

PM warns none to be allowed to play with people's fate as she addresses event marking the student body's founding anniversary

UNB, DHAKA

No one will be allowed to play with the fate of the people of Bangladesh anymore, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

"All, including Bangladesh Chhatra League and other associate bodies [of the Awami League], have to remain alert so that the hyenas cannot play ducks and drakes with the fate of the people," she said.

She made the comments while addressing a function marking the 74th founding anniversary of the Bangladesh Chhatra League at Krishibid Institute.

The prime minister joined the programme virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

She hoped that the pace of development that the government has achieved in the last 12 years would always be maintained.

The premier asked the BCL leaders and activists to make the organisation stronger in a well-organised way for facing challenges in the coming days.



"The fourth industrial revolution is on. The BCL has to prepare its leaders and activists to cope with the situation and avail of the opportunities with proper education and training."

Al Nahian Khan Joy, president of Chhatra League, presided over the programme conducted by its acting general secretary Lekhak Bhattacharya.

At the beginning of the programme, a one-minute silence was observed in honour of all those martyrs who laid down their lives

in the August 15 carnage, Language Movement, Liberation War in 1971 and all other democratic movements.

A documentary on Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was screened at the programme.

The prime minister also inaugurated the Matribhumi Library set up at the BCL central office virtually.

Former BCL leader Abdur Rahman also spoke at the programme.

Chhatra League, the country's largest student organisation with a heritage of struggles and successes, came into being on January 4, 1948, as advised by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hasina said the BCL leaders and activists who want to establish themselves as political leaders have to move forward with an ideology and honesty towards prosperity.

"In this evolving world, you have to keep up the pace and have a specific goal with which you will be able to lead the country to fulfil the dream of the Father of the Nation," she said.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE Government mulls committee to deal with UN queries

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government is considering the formation of an inter-ministerial committee to deal with the UN queries on enforced disappearances.

Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury, secretary (west) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, discussed a proposal in this regard at an inter-ministerial meeting yesterday.

The move came right after the US imposed sanctions on Rab and its seven current and former members.

Officials of the foreign, home and law ministries, Rab, DGFI, and NSI were present at the meeting, held at the foreign ministry.

"The purpose of the committee would be to meet regularly and prepare responses to the UN queries on enforced disappearances," said a foreign ministry official, seeking anonymity.

The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances of the UN sends the government lists of enforced disappearances from time to time, the official added.

"We want to have a regular meeting on the issue and prepare a comprehensive response to the UN," the official said.

In August last year, Human Rights Watch urged the UN to lead an independent investigation into the alleged disappearances of the government critics and others by the Bangladeshi security forces.

The government, however, has been denying the allegations for long.

The rights watchdog listed 86 victims, providing profiles and details of each case. It said they remained missing, mainly blaming the Rab.

Pori Moni indicted

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against actress Pori Moni and her two associates in a case filed under the Narcotics Control Act.

The two others are Ashrafur Islam Dipu and Kabir Hossain.

All three, now on bail, claimed themselves innocent and demanded justice after Judge Mohammad Nazrul Islam of the Special Judge Court-10 of Dhaka read out the charges to them.

The judge, however, dismissed the petitions submitted for discharging Pori Moni and the two others from the charges.

Earlier in the day, Pori Moni got bail after she surrendered before the court and sought bail as she was already on bail granted by the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court.

During yesterday's hearing, the lawyer for Pori Moni and others accused told the court that Rab neither seized any narcotics nor other substances from their possession and they were implicated in the case.

Opposing the allegation, the prosecution said that the charges brought against them were primarily proved and charges would be framed against them.

The judge fixed February 1 for starting a trial of the case.

Their parties not entirely

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by her side while Taimur is in a tight spot after he irked the BNP for contesting the polls as an independent," he said, adding, "Basically, both the candidates are almost on their own".

Anwar jumped in to add something to the conversation. "The polls environment in Narayanganj city has so far been vibrant. But it would have been much more exciting had Ivy been more active throughout the entire city and Taimur had BNP's full support," he said.

Both the friends agreed that it was too early to predict who will seal the victory.

Several other locals and

sources in the two parties echoed the statement while talking to The Daily Star yesterday ahead of the January 16 Narayanganj city polls, where five lakh voters are expected to choose their mayor for the next five years.

The BNP has recently removed Taimur as an adviser to its chief for taking part in the election defying the party's order. Earlier, he was removed as Narayanganj BNP convener.

When he had started campaigning, he found many party leaders, like district BNP's acting convener Monirul Islam Robi, joint conveners Jahid Hasan Rojel and Abdul Hai Raju, by his side. However, only a few of the

local leaders, including district General Secretary ATM Kamal, are now seen campaigning for him.

Sources said Gias Uddin, a former BNP lawmaker, has a strong vote bank in the city's Siddhirganj area, but he too has not been seen in Taimur's campaign. He, however, was seen seeking votes for his son Golam Sadril, who is contesting for a councillor's post.

Interestingly, Sadril has been busy campaigning in favour of Ivy.

Contacted, Taimur claimed that he was getting support from all local BNP leaders and that they were campaigning for him "from their own positions".

Ivy, on the other hand, is

not getting the influential Osman family and their supporters on board, sources within the AL said, adding that the rivalry between party lawmaker Shamim Osman and Ivy is nothing but an "open secret".

In the 2011 mayoral polls, Ivy defeated AL-backed Shamim by one lakh votes, although the city is known as a stronghold of Shamim brothers, whose grandfather Khan Shaheb Osman Ali was a founding member of the party.

Sources said Shamim's followers have not yet joined Ivy's campaign and rumours have it they are even secretly backing Taimur.

Although Shamim's close aides, including Narayanganj city AL general secretary Khokon Saha, Vice President Chandan Shil and Joint Secretary Shah Nizam, campaigned for Ivy, they were not that active, said the sources.

The Daily Star could not reach Shamim over phone for comments on the matter.

Ivy said, "All the grassroots leaders are with me. Osman family is part of the Awami League. But Shamim Osman is a lawmaker, he cannot participate in election campaigns."

She declined to say anything more. Talking to this daily,

several grassroots leaders blamed Ivy and her followers for "creating division within the party" in Narayanganj.

They said Ivy was active only in Bandar area, not throughout the city.

One leader, wishing not to be named, said, "Ivy has distanced herself from the dedicated and trusted Awami League leaders in the city. She does politics taking along only her followers. She could have easily avoided this."

Anwar Hossain, president of Narayanganj city AL, said although Ivy does not have a great connection with the grassroots, they would do everything possible to make her win as she is the party's choice for the mayor post.

A win for the ages

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toiled hard without success in the first innings but reaped rewards in the second, claiming three wickets.

Ebadot, with his raw pace, was not impressive in the first innings but found his rhythm in the second to irrevocably turn the game Bangladesh's way.

The Black Caps were the second-best team, barring the second session of the opening day. The fifth morning was crucial for both teams. But the home side lost the final plot against a disciplined and hungry pace attack.

They lost their last five wickets for 33 runs -- the kind of collapse often associated with Bangladesh.

The Tigers' fans were glued to TV sets early Wednesday morning with the apprehension of a Black Caps rearguard stand and the all-too-familiar Bangladesh second-innings implosion that deprived them of a draw at Wellington in 2017 and resulted in a defeat in Chattogram in 2008.

But this new brand of Tigers dispelled all fears with the same composure they had displayed throughout the match.

Money can open

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They failed in every indicator of good governance. DoE officials lack technical and professional skills. DoE needs to be overhauled," he added.

Factories are categorised green, orange and red to reflect their level of pollution, with factories categorised red being the worst polluters.

Among factories categorised under red and orange, 57 percent were granted environmental clearance by the DoE even though the factories did not submit environment management plans, which is mandatory to apply for the clearance.

TIB found irregularities in a DoE project titled "Clean Air and Sustainable

Environment" in which a total of 293 officials unnecessarily went on 10 foreign tours. One official went on all 10 trips.

It also found proof of DoE officials cancelling fines of polluters and also taking bribes from polluters to allow dysfunctional effluent treatment plants to operate.

TIB also observed that sometimes faulty environmental impact assessment (EIA) is approved as influential polluters linked with top brass of administration and politicians create pressure on DoE officials.

There are also coordination gaps between other government agencies and DoE, which impedes the regular activities of the body as it depends on

law enforcers to conduct drives.

There are also allegations by DoE of not getting cooperation from law enforcers.

The study finds that DoE is more interested in imposing monetary fines on polluters than taking them to environment courts. There is no list of polluters with DoE.

Officials also hurriedly take samples from the effluence released by treatment plants, resulting in faulty reports and polluting industries remaining unidentified, the study found.

The Daily Star tried to reach Md Ashraf Uddin, director general of DoE, for his comment on the report but he did not respond to calls or texts.

10 lives lost to violence

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Rameshwarpur union of the same upazila, said Gabtali Model Police Station OC Zia Latiful Islam.

In Chandpur, miscreants stabbed to death Sharif Hossain, 18, a supporter of member candidate named Zakir Hossain in Kachua's Sachar union, around 3:30pm, said Milon Mahmud, superintendent of police in the district.

A 28-year-old man, a supporter of Awami League's chairman candidate in Haimchar union, was also stabbed to death by miscreants, he said.

In Chatari union of Chattogram's Anwara upazila, Ankur Dutta, 38, a supporter of a member

candidate, Dhananjay Biswas, was critically injured in a clash with supporters of rival candidate Raghunath Sarkar, said SPSM Rashidul Haque.

Dhananjay was rushed to Chattogram Medical College Hospital where he died, said Sub-inspector Alauddin Talukder of CMCH police camp.

In Hashimpur union of the district, a sub-inspector of police, Shahadat Hossain, was injured after followers of independent chairman candidate Mohammed Mozammel tried to occupy a polling centre, said Anwar Hossain, OC of Chandanaish Police Station.

Police fired two shots to bring the situation under

control, he said.

Three journalists were injured when several vehicles were vandalised during Karaldenga union polls in Boalkhali upazila.

In Gaibandha, Abu Taher, 40, was stabbed to death as supporters of two member candidates clashed near Adarsha College polling station in Jumabari union of Saghata upazila, said Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sardar Mostafa Shahin.

A woman, Somela Khatun, 50, was hurt after she found herself in the middle of a clash between supporters of two member candidates in Manikganj's Daulatpur upazila. She died later. Supporters of

independent chairman candidate Delwar Hossain Bepari set fire to a building of Dulukhanda Government Primary School centre in Bhojeshshor union of Shariatpur's Naria upazila in the afternoon, said witnesses.

The attackers fired shots, exploded several crude bombs, even beat up some voters before the law enforcers opened fire to disperse them, said the witnesses.

Presiding officer Abdul Wadud said voting at the centre was postponed as miscreants took away around 3000 ballot papers. Motorbikes of two journalists were also burnt, he said.

Omicron runs rampant

WHO warns of new variants as Covid cases break records around the world

AGENCIES

The US, Britain, France and Australia have all announced record numbers of daily Covid-19 cases as the WHO warned Tuesday that Omicron's dizzying spread increased the risk of newer, more dangerous variants emerging.

Britain breached 200,000 cases for the first time on Tuesday, Australia posted almost 50,000 and France registered more than 270,000, all three countries easily topping their previous records.