

# Many BNP leaders want to contest nat’l polls

## Quader claims they are secretly making preparations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader claimed yesterday that while the BNP said it would not participate in the elections, many of its leaders are secretly preparing for polls.

“Although Mirza Fakhrul said that the BNP would not take part in the elections, there are many leaders like Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan (expelled BNP leader) in their party,” said Quader while addressing a peace rally in front of AL central office in the capital’s Gulistan.

Obaidul Quader claimed that the BNP does not want to participate in the election as it knows it will lose.

“BNP has started hatching conspiracies centring the election as they know that Sheikh Hasina’s victory in the national polls is inevitable. They want to create controversy by not taking part in the election,” he said.

He further said, “There will be no result by hatching any conspiracies,” adding that all the local government elections, including the city elections, would be held on time.

# Eid holidays extended by a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government decided yesterday that April 20 would be included in the Eid holidays, and thus extended this year’s holidays by a day via executive order.

Cabinet Secretary Md Mahbub Hossain informed journalists about the development after the weekly cabinet meeting at the Secretariat.

Before the executive order, Eid holidays were supposed to be from April 21-23. There will be a holiday on the occasion of Shab-e-Qadr on April 19, and April 20 was supposed to be a working day.

To extend the holiday, the government declared April 20 a holiday too and so the five-day Eid holiday will begin on April 19.

Holidays will be extended by one more day to include April 24 if there are 30 days of Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr is celebrated on April 23.



Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken hold a meeting in Washington early today (Bangladesh time). Momen told reporters earlier that he was visiting the US to discuss ways to advance the Bangladesh-US ties on key fronts over the next five decades.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

# BATTLE FOR BAKHMUT

## Russian forces using ‘scorched earth’ tactics

### Says Ukraine; Avdiivka also in Moscow’s sights

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russian forces are pressing attacks in Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region, focusing on two cities and pounding Ukrainian positions with air strikes and artillery barrages, Kyiv said yesterday.

The commander of Ukraine’s ground forces said the Russians were destroying buildings and positions in besieged Bakhmut in what he called “scorched earth” tactics.

Russia’s assault on Bakhmut, a small city in Donetsk at the edge of a chunk of Russian-controlled territory, has for months been the focus of the biggest battle of the war, now in its second year.

Ukraine’s Armed Forces General Staff said on Sunday fighting was heaviest along the western approaches to Bakhmut. The Russians were also targeting the city of Avdiivka, it said.

Yesterday, ground forces commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskiy said the defence of Bakhmut continued. “The situation is difficult but controllable,” he said in comments quoted by Ukraine’s Media Military Centre.

Moscow is sending in special forces and airborne assault units to help their attack as members of Russia’s private mercenary Wagner group are now exhausted, Syrskiy said. Wagner mercenaries have spearheaded the Russian assault on Bakhmut which has left it largely in ruins.

“The enemy switched to the so-called scorched earth tactics from Syria. It is destroying buildings and positions with air strikes and artillery fire,” Syrskiy said. Ukraine’s general staff said Russian forces had made unsuccessful advances on areas west of Bakhmut and at least 10 towns and villages had come under Russian shelling. The Russians

had also made no headway in attacks on Avdiivka, it said.

As the battles ground on, US media outlet CNN reported that Ukraine had been forced to amend some military plans ahead of its long anticipated counter-offensive because of the leak of US documents.

US officials are trying to trace the source of the leak of dozens of secret documents. They detail an array of topics, including information on the Ukraine conflict.

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# PM likely to fly

FROM PAGE 1

the third terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, and the special economic zone at Arahazar.

From Japan, Hasina is scheduled to travel to Washington DC to celebrate 50 years of partnership between Bangladesh and the World Bank.

The event will take place at the World Bank headquarters in Washington DC on May 1.

Bangladesh became the largest recipient of funding from the WB’s International Development Association (IDA), which provides concessional financing to poor nations, making the multilateral lender the country’s largest external funder with more than a quarter of the total foreign aid the country receives.

Bangladesh currently has the largest ongoing IDA programme, with a total of about \$16 billion in 56 projects.

From the USA, the PM will visit the UK and is scheduled to participate in some social gatherings.

She is scheduled to return to the country on May 4.

# JP to take part

FROM PAGE 1

the golden jubilee of Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad.

Raushan said the JP as the main opposition party was playing a constructive and effective role in and outside parliament.

Mentioning that Jatiya Sangsad is the centre of parliamentary democracy, she said the JP’s job is to act on behalf of the people, participate in discussions on public interest issues and play a role in formulating laws.

“As an opposition party, we are carrying out our duties properly.”

The JP leader said there might be differences of opinion in politics and ideological differences, but there cannot be any difference in making parliament the focal point of democracy and development.

“Therefore, the Jatiya Party as an opposition party is trying earnestly to make parliament effective,” she added.

# US preaches democracy but does otherwise

FROM PAGE 1

“Article 70 has given protection to democracy alongside strengthening it to reach its benefit to the people. But a few of our [parliament] members are against the article as they are unable to play the game of seating and unseating a government,” she said.

A few parliament members are expressing concern over article 70 due to their inexperience, she said, referring to the unseating of the governments formed after 1946 and 1954 elections mainly due to floor-crossing.

Earlier, participating in the discussion on the proposal, Deputy Leader of the Opposition GM Quader spoke about revoking article 70.

**AL GOVT CHANGED FATE OF PEOPLE**

The PM said she, like the people of

the country, believes that the AL government has been able to change the fate of the people as it has been in power for 14 years in a row.

“Now the difference between village and city has narrowed ... We are providing civic amenities to every village,” she said.

The premier raised a comparative picture regarding the socio-economic development in many indicators between 2006 (at the fag-end of BNP-Jamaat regime) and 2022.

She said the poverty rate declined to 20.5 percent in 2022 from 41.51 percent in 2006, the extreme poverty rate to 10 percent from 25.1 percent, the child mortality rate per thousand births to 21 persons from 84, and the mother mortality rate per 100 thousand births to 161 from 370.

Grameen Bank, got millions of dollars.

“He [Yunus] runs social businesses in a place like the US and makes investments at home and abroad. Have they [the US] ever questioned from where the MD, who used to draw salaries from the government, got millions of dollars? They didn’t,” she said.

“Now we have to hear their [US’s] words about corruption and the fight against corruption. We have to hear their words about human rights,” she said.

Hasina said those who laundered money sucked from the poor became owners of hundreds of crores of taka and got an international award. They tried to destroy democracy in this country and played ducks and drakes with the people’s fate, she added.

“They say that the Awami League government didn’t give anything [to people] after assuming power and that the country has been destroyed.”

# WEST BANK RAID

## Palestinian teen killed by Israeli forces

AFP, Jericho

Israeli forces killed a Palestinian teenager and injured two other people in the West Bank yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry said, in what the army described as a raid to arrest a “terror suspect”.

It comes amid surging violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent days, coinciding with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, Jewish Passover and Christian Easter.

Mohammed Fayez Balhan, 15, was killed after being shot “with live occupation (Israeli) bullets in the head, chest and abdomen”, the ministry said.

An earlier statement said two people were injured by “occupation (Israeli) bullets”.

The Israeli army confirmed its forces were operating in the Aqabat Jaber camp near Jericho, saying soldiers were working “to apprehend a terror suspect”.

According to the army, soldiers responded with live fire after “suspects opened fire toward (soldiers), hurled explosive devices and Molotov cocktails”.

A suspect was taken in by security forces, the army added.

# Man killed in his sleep by younger brother

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A man died after his throat was slit, allegedly by his younger brother, while he was asleep at home in Manikganj’s Singair upazila early yesterday.

Abu Raihan, 27, of Vakum Fakirpara village, was killed by his younger brother Roman, 24, who is now on the run, said Singair Police Station OC Syed Mizanur Islam.

Family members said Roman was in a feud with his family, including his two brothers. On Sunday night, the three brothers went to sleep in the room they shared around 9:00pm.

At one stage, Roman slit Raihan’s throat and fled, police and family members said.

Raihan was declared dead after he was taken to a local hospital, OC Mizanur said.

The body was sent to Manikganj Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

# Fishing in Kaptai Lake banned for 3 months

UNB, Rangamati

The local administration in Rangamati has imposed a three-month ban on netting, marketing, and transportation of fish from the Kaptai Lake starting April 20.

The decision was taken yesterday at the office of the Deputy Commissioner in the interest of proper natural reproduction and development of carp fish in the lake.

Rangamati Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Mizanur Rahman issued the notice after a meeting at the DC conference room.

Some 20,000 people who depend on fishing in the district will get food assistance during the ban period through a special Vulnerable Group Feeding card.

Every year, the government imposes a three-month ban on fishing, marketing and transportation of fish from Kaptai Lake aiming to ensure the natural breeding of fish.

# Schoolboy dies after crashing bike into parked lorry

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A tenth-grade schoolboy died after he crashed his motorcycle into a parked lorry in the Charpara area on Mymensingh-Haluaghat road in Mymensingh’s Phulpur upazila around 9:00pm on Sunday night.

Shanto Mia, 17, son of Saidul Islam of the upazila’s Kaziakanda, was a student at Phulpur Pilot Model High School, said Abdullah Al Mamun, officer-in-charge of Phulpur Police Station.

Locals rushed him to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead. The body was sent to the hospital’s morgue for autopsy.

A case was lodged with the police station in this connection.

# ‘We want your observers’

FROM PAGE 1

forward; they must commit to hold a free, fair election.”

Momen stated that there was a discussion on freedom of the press in Bangladesh. “We have said that the Digital Security Act is not to curb freedom of the press. Bangladesh Awami League believes in freedom of the press.”

The other issues which were discussed in the meeting include the rights of Ahmadiyya and other minority communities and Rohingya repatriation.

Starting at 12:30am (Bangladesh time), the meeting lasted for about 20 minutes, AZM Sajjad Hossain, minister (press) at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, told The Daily Star.

Momen reached Washington on Sunday for the meeting and briefed journalists on the objectives of the meeting, reports UNB.

He said Bangladesh wants to improve its ties with the United States to strengthen trade relationship.

“We have been maintaining a very good relationship with the

USA,” he told reporters, adding that he was visiting the US to discuss ways to advance the Bangladesh-US ties on key fronts over the next five decades.

Responding to a question, the minister said he would raise the issue of Rashed Chowdhury, a convicted killer of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was moving freely in the United States.

“This is a country of the rule of law. We hope the US will not be a shelter for killers,” Momen said.

# Even BRTA, police figures don’t tally

FROM PAGE 1

analysing, and reporting crashes in Bangladesh is cumbersome, error-prone, time-consuming, and unfit for analysis and benchmarking,” the World Bank observed in an appraisal report in 2021 prepared for financing a road safety project in Bangladesh.

“Poor quality and unreliable data on crashes, deaths, and injuries impede proper road safety management,” said the WB.

At least 24,954 people were killed in road crashes in the country in 2016, according to a World Health Organisation report published in December 2018.

According to the police, 2,463 people were killed in 2,566 road crashes in 2016.

The WB has already approved a loan for a Tk 4,988.14 crore project on road safety. Under the project, among other works, a road accident database will be developed.

**THE DIFFERENCES**

According to the BRTA data, 333 people died in 322 road crashes in January while 303 were killed in 308 road accidents in February this year.

But the police report says 279

people were killed in 280 crashes in January while 263 people died in 277 road accidents this February.

Jatri Kalyan Samity, a passenger welfare platform, said 585 people were killed in 593 road accidents in January and at least 467 people died in 447 road crashes in February.

The organisation’s data is based on newspaper reports. It said the number of crashes and deaths could be higher as many accidents go unreported while many die of injuries which too are not reported.

Contacted, BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said they collected their data through their offices across the country and verified those with police and district administration data.

Asked about the mismatch with police data, he said police data is based on the cases filed over the accidents, but many injured died in hospitals later.

“We include the hospital data and that’s why our number may be higher than that of police,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

“Definitely, we will use our data for official purposes and will evaluate our target on the basis of

our data.”

This correspondent tried to contact police officials concerned for comments but could not reach them.

Saidur Rahman, executive director of Road Safety Foundation, said the government agencies should make better efforts for accurate data.

“In absence of real data, the authorities will not be able to take proper preventive measures to reduce road crashes,” he said yesterday.

At least three road safety campaign platforms in January this year published their reports saying that the number of both road crashes and deaths went up last year compared to 2021.

Road Transport and Highways Division Secretary ABM Amin Ullah Nuri at a programme on January 15 blasted the road safety campaigners for publishing “fabricated” reports on crashes.

He said the reports were creating confusion among the people and tarnishing the country’s image abroad and announced that the BRTA will publish reports on road accidents from now on.