



"We are abusing plastic because it's so cheap. But this has consequences in the environment, in the oceans, to our health."

UN Environment Chief Inger Andersen



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## A strong message for ruling party

AL nominee's defeat in Gazipur exposes internal feud, organisational weakness in its bastion

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Azmat Ullah Khan's defeat to a 62-year-old woman with no political background has dealt the Awami League a major blow, sending a message to the ruling party about rifts in its grassroots.

The surprise win of Zaida Khatun, the mother of suspended Gazipur mayor Zahangir Alam, in Gazipur City Corporation election has caught many AL high-ups off guard because the party exerted all its strength to ensure Azmat's victory.

Several central leaders believe Gazipur city election has demonstrated how internal feuds can lead to defeat even in a city known as the party's citadel. They also think the party should spend some time for self-reflection and learn a lesson from this election before moving forward.

AL's election loss in Gazipur, which along with Faridpur and Kishoreganj is known as an AL bastion, also shows the state of the party's popularity just seven months before the national polls.

The central leaders think the time has come to focus on the organisation itself and to bring discipline within the party through resolving the feuds before the general election.

The AL formed a 28-member committee of central leaders to coordinate the election campaign in Gazipur. But the committee members had not done enough, allege several leaders.

As a political party, the AL is an expert in setting election strategies that work, they say, adding that no other political party can even come close in terms of organising.

But during different elections over the last 14 years, administration officials and law enforcers played a vital role in securing victory for the AL, party insiders say.

That's why the AL leaders took the victory in Gazipur city election for granted and didn't put in much effort.

In October last year, the role of government officials was brought to question by Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman who told a meeting with deputy commissioners and superintendents of police that many officials were not acting impartially while discharging their duties.

"Gazipur election result is a fitting answer to the party's overconfidence. It assumed an easy victory and failed to keep in mind the people's anti-government and anti-Awami League sentiments," a central leader of the party told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

The rifts and feuding groups are present in almost every district committee of the AL, he added.

However, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader at an event yesterday said Gazipur election was free and fair, and it was a victory of democracy.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

With her daughter Parvin asleep in her lap, Sabina dozes off on a mobile brick crusher as she, along with her fellow workers, travels to a construction site at Sirajdikhan of Munshiganj from Dakshin Keraniganj in Dhaka. The workers seem oblivious to the risk of accidents. The photo was taken recently.

## ANTI-GOVT AGITATION Over 50 hurt as AL, BNP activists clash

BNP leader Nipun Roy Chy suffers head injuries in Keraniganj; Vice-chairman Noman's motorcade attacked in Khagrachhari

STAR REPORT

At least 55 people, including a central BNP leader, were injured as activists of the Awami League and the BNP clashed in Dhaka's Keraniganj and Khagrachhari town yesterday.

The BNP said at least 30 leaders and activists, including central executive committee member Nipun Roy Chowdhury, were injured in the incident in Keraniganj. Nipun was taken to a Dhaka hospital with head injuries.

Meanwhile, a motorcade of BNP Vice-chairman Abdullah Al Noman came under attack allegedly AL men in Khagrachhari when he was going to attend a rally there.

The event was organised as part of the party's demonstration in some districts across the country yesterday to press home its 10-point demand, including resignation of the government and national polls under a non-partisan government.

In Keraniganj, a procession of Jubo Dal was heading towards the party office from Jinjira Chatgaon area to join a rally around 10:45am, said witnesses.

As the procession was passing by the local AL office, activists of the AL and BNP started chanting slogans. At one stage, the clash broke out between the two groups.

## 12 expelled BNP leaders elected as councillors

A CORRESPONDENT, GAZIPUR

At least 12 expelled leaders of the BNP and its associate bodies have been elected ward councillors in Gazipur city.

They are among the 29 expelled leaders, who took part in the councillor polls on Thursday.

The 12 are Faisal Sarkar (ward-15), Shaheen Alam (ward-19), Shahidul Islam (ward-20), Sobder Hasan (ward-22), Mahbubur Rashid Shipu (ward-24), Mojibur Rahman (ward-25), Hannan Mia Hannu (ward-26), Hasan Ajmal Bhuiyan (ward-28), Nazrul Islam Khan Biki (ward-40), Sultan Uddin, (ward-42) Ahmed, Safiuddin Safi (ward-48), and Abul Hashem, (ward-55).

Meanwhile, Awami League leaders won the councillor polls in 43 wards while two independents became winners in two other wards.

After the Election Commission announced the schedules for the polls to Gazipur, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Barishal and Khulna city corporations, the

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## 3 reasons why Zaida won Gazipur polls

Zahangir's close ties with AL men paid dividends

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Development activities carried out by suspended Gazipur mayor Zahangir Alam, his close ties with the local Awami League leaders and activists and the voters' sympathy for him were the main reasons for his mother's victory in the mayoral polls, said voters.

On the other hand, AL candidate Azmat Ullah Khan's poor relations with the grassroots leaders and voters, and the anti-incumbency factor contributed to his defeat, they observed.

Civil society members said although Thursday's city corporation election was peaceful, the voter turnout would have been greater if the stray incidents of violence had not happened during the election campaign.

They said supporters of Azmat had been everywhere in Gazipur city since the electioneering began. They were seen in and outside the polling centres on the voting day.

According to voters, many AL men had no other option



but to campaign for the party nominee as Zahangir was expelled from the organisation for "violating party discipline".

The suspended mayor and her mother filed nomination forms as independents. Zahangir started campaigning for his mother after the Election Commission scrapped his nomination.

"Zahangir was expelled from the party, his nomination was cancelled and his motorcade came under attack when he was campaigning for his mother. These incidents aroused public sympathy for him," Anil Chandra Mondal, a valiant freedom fighter and also a teacher in Joydebpur, told The Daily Star.

He said that people were annoyed by Zahangir's removal from the post of mayor.

Anil said the suspended mayor maintained a close relationship with the people from all walks of life, but Azmat was lagging far behind him.

Unofficial results of the mayoral polls show that Zaida, who bagged 2,38,934 votes, defeated Azmat by 16,197 votes.

A Gazipur AL leader said that many party leaders, who were in Azmat's camp, campaigned for Zahangir confidentially.

Shafiqul Islam, a voter in Gazipur city, said that many people wearing AL badges requested people to vote for Zahangir.

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## BNP to carry on movement until govt quits

Says Amir Khasru

STAR REPORT

BNP will continue its movement until the government steps down and discussion on polls may take place after its resignation, said BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury.

"BNP will not participate in the next general election under the incumbent government as currently there is no environment for free, fair, and participatory polls," he said at a rally in Lakshimpur town yesterday afternoon.

He further alleged that the Awami League has been repeatedly coming to power through vote rigging.

"Murders, enforced disappearances, false cases, and torture could not stop our movements," he said, adding, "In fact, more attacks and arrests will only lead to more movements."

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the new visa policy of the USA targeting Bangladesh's next election has reflected the people's long-standing demand for the restoration of voting rights, reports UNB.

In a statement early yesterday, he also said the main theme of the US visa policy is to ensure all the

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Two women working at a carpet-making factory in Khulna's Boyra Rayermohol area. Bright carpets are being produced after mixing different types of colours with jute yarn. After the closure of jute mills in Khulna, some employees have switched to carpet-making. A machine can manufacture 130 yards of carpet daily and the wholesale price of each yard is Tk 110. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## NEW VISA POLICY US 'heartened' by Bangladesh's response

STAR REPORT

The US state department has said that it was "heartened" that the Bangladesh government welcomed its decision to impose visa restrictions on those who undermine the democratic election process in Bangladesh.

Replying to a question during a regular press briefing at the US Department of State on Thursday, Matthew Miller, spokesperson for the department, said, "I will say that we were heartened by the announcement from the government yesterday that welcomed the steps that we took."

"We believe that democracy is the most enduring means to advance peace, prosperity, and security ... We look forward to working with the Bangladeshi government going forward."

On Wednesday, the US said it would impose visa restrictions on individuals and their immediate family members "if they are responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh".

Miller also said, "I'm not going to speak to what any political party

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