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16 PAGES PLUS LIFE STYLE : Tk 15.00



P10
In Focus:
South Asia's
languages and
dialects



P7
US's Austin visits
Kyiv in gesture
of support for
Ukraine



P6
Comedians
use humour as
crutch to stand
up for Palestine



P11
Kiwis to
arrive
today

112 BNP men sentenced in a single day

STAR REPORT

With a little over a month and a half to go until election day, 112 leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations were sentenced in Dhaka and Rangpur yesterday in cases filed over political violence.

They were convicted in five cases filed between May 2013 and September 2018 in connection with torching of vehicles, vandalism, assaulting police, and preventing law enforcers from discharging their duties.

The courts have been convicting BNP activists and leaders in recent days, but yesterday's figure was the highest in a single day, defence lawyers said.

At least 14 BNP leaders and activists, including Joint Secretary General Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel, Information Affairs Secretary Azizul Bari Helal, and Volunteer Affairs Secretary Mir Sarafat Ali Safu, have been sentenced to 18 months in prison in a case filed with New Market Police Station in January 2015.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Ataullah issued arrest warrants against the 14.

The magistrate also sentenced 25 BNP leaders and activists, including executive committee member Habibur Rashid Habib, Jubo Dal President Sultan Salah Uddin Tuku and its former president Saiful Alam Nirob, to two years in a case filed with Paltan Police Station in October 2017.

They were convicted in five cases filed between May 2013 and September 2018 in connection with torching of vehicles, vandalism, assaulting police, and preventing law enforcers from discharging their duties.

Nirob was in the courtroom, but the 24 others were absconding for whom the magistrate issued arrest warrants.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Sheikh Sadi sentenced seven BNP leaders, including Nirob, to 30 months in a case filed with Tejgaon Police Station in May 2013.

Nirob was present during the delivery of the verdict, while the other six are on the run.

The same magistrate sentenced 62 BNP men to three and a half years in a case filed with Bangshal Police Station in September 2018.

Khandaker Akhter Hamid Khan Paban, son of late BNP secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain, is among the convicts.

The convicts, who are ward-level leaders and activists, were absent during the verdict delivery and the magistrate issued arrest warrants for 68 absconding convicts in the two cases.

"My clients did not get justice," said defence lawyer Syed Zaynul Abedin Mesbah.

He said that of the 33 prosecution witnesses, only five, including the complainant and investigation officer, testified. "But they failed to narrate the incident specifically. So, all the accused were deprived of justice," said Mesbah.

He said the prosecution failed to exhibit evidence seized from the scene.

"We will appeal," said Mesbah.

Golam Akter Iqbal was among the 62 convicted. His lawyer said Iqbal was not involved in politics.

"My client is now 72 years old and has been suffering from different ailments, including diabetes. He is now quite unable to move," his lawyer Kajol Roy told The Daily Star.

She said none of the five witnesses mentioned her client's name.

According to the case statement, a group of BNP leaders and activists illegally gathered in front of Hotel Sufia (Pvt) Ltd at Nawab Katra in the city's Bangshal area around 2:20pm on September 13, 2018. At one stage, they vandalised shops, assaulted policemen, and prevented them

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



A double-decker in flames after unidentified people torched it in the capital's Mirpur-10 area around 2:30pm yesterday, the second day of BNP's 48-hour nationwide hartal. Passengers managed to get off the bus unhurt. Firefighters put it out after about 10 minutes.

PHOTO: COURTESY BY FIRE SERVICE

Bail hard to come by for BNP ranks

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

Mehedi Hasan was in Kuwait when Jatrabari police filed a case on July 30 over political violence in the area the day before. Police named 99 people, mostly BNP leaders and activists, in the case, and Mehedi was not among them.

The 29-year-old man from Cumilla returned home on August 30, according to immigration documents.

Yet police arrested him on October 27 from Jatrabari in the case that says he and other accused illegally gathered on the road under Matuail footbridge, set fire to three to four buses and attacked on-duty police.

After his lawyer produced the immigration papers, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Nurul Huda Chowdhury granted him bail on November 6.

Mehedi is among the 3,067 people, mostly BNP leaders and activists, arrested from different parts of the capital in 259 cases over political violence and produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka

between October 18 and November 8.

The cases were filed between November 2017 and November 2023 with the 50 police stations under Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Except for Mehedi, only three other people sued in these cases got bail. They are Azahar Hossain, 59, Anowar Hossain Anu, 45, and Kamal Hossain, 38.

All three are BNP leaders and activists, and they were granted bail either considering their age or health issues, court records show.

None of the rest 3,063 has been granted bail yet, although many of them submitted bail petitions, multiple lawyers involved in dozens of these cases told The Daily Star.

More than 20 police officials at CMM court said almost all the accused produced at the court immediately before and after the October 28 BNP rally have been sent to jail. Many filed bail petitions, but those were rejected.

One police officer who supervises the cases of one police station said most detainees held

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

- 259 political cases filed in city from Nov 2017-Nov 2023
- 3,067 produced before courts in these cases from Oct 18-Nov 8 this year
- Most of them BNP leaders and activists
- BNP top leadership yet to get bail

JP polls-bound but won't say it

RASHIDUL HASAN

Jatiya Party is selling nomination forms and preparing for the polls even though it claims it has not decided to join the election.

Party insiders said the JP was delaying the announcement on taking part in the January 7 election so that it could have a leverage while bargaining with the Awami League over securing polls-related benefits.

The BNP and its allies have said that they would boycott the elections if the government did not resign and the elections were not held under a neutral polls-time government.

Almost all senior JP leaders, including Chairman GM Quader, Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnun, and Senior Co-chairman Anisul Islam Mahmud, collected nomination forms from the chairman's Banani office yesterday.

Speaking to reporters at the office, Chunnun said, "We have started selling nomination forms, but we are yet to make the final decision on running."

The JP was observing the election environment, he

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

"The party chairman will decide on participating in the election before November 30, the last day for filing nomination forms."

Mujibul Haque Chunnun
JP Secretary General

CASES UNDER DSA

'It feels unreal to be free'

Says Khadija after walking out of jail

ZYMA ISLAM

The phone number of Sirajum Munira, the elder sister of Khadijatul Kubra, a Jagannath University student who was in jail for over 14 months in DSA cases, flashed on the screen of this correspondent's mobile.

From the other end came the words: "Hello, it's me Khadija." Then a pause and she adds, "It feels unreal to be free!"

After six unsuccessful bail petitions, Khadija got out of the jail around 9:15am yesterday and was finally on her way back home in the capital's west Monipuri Para.

But not before serving time for an offence where the only prima facie evidence against her was the fact that she was present -- silently so -- in a webinar where another participant made contentious remarks about the government.

"I cannot explain to you what it will feel like to embrace my mother again," she said with palpable excitement.

They had met several times over the past 14 months as Khadija flitted in and out of the court for hearings. However, each time her hands were bound, or she was flanked by a horde of cops.

Inside the prison, meetings with family members happened with barricades in between and under the strict watch of the guards.

"There were women inside the prison who really cared for me, but nothing can be compared to the feeling of being able to embrace my sister right at the jail gate after getting out."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



Jagannath University student Khadijatul Kubra walks out of Kashimpur Central Jail yesterday, after over 14 months of incarceration in two cases filed under the Digital Security Act.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

BUSINESS

Dollar rate for import remains on paper

Importers have to pay higher than the uniform rate that bankers have been fixing for the past several months in an effort to curb volatility in the forex market.

Bankers said the foreign exchange market has gone out of control because of the scarcity of greenback. Some banks are offering higher rates to attract remittance, they said.

STORY ON B1