



B1 Not supporting Tk 23,000 minimum wage 'shameful'



P11 Key factors after U19 success



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Running train set on fire in city; 4 killed

Police say they are looking into CCTV footage to identify saboteurs

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Mainuddin Manik, an attendant of Mohanganj Express, was closing the door of a carriage when he saw the flames in the coupling between the Ja and Jha carriages.

He grabbed a fire extinguisher and started spraying the fire retardant. But it was of little use because the train was moving fast towards Kamalapur station and the gusts of wind spread the fire within moments.

It was 4:55am, almost one and a half hours before daybreak, and there were nearly 40 travellers in the carriage titled Ja.

After the fire was doused around 6:30am near Tejgaon station, firefighters brought the bodies of four people including a three-year-old boy from one of the three burnt carriages of the train.

Officials identified three victims as Nadira Akhter Poppy, 35, her son Yeasin, 3, and Bashir Dhali, 60. They were residents of Netrakona. The other victim was burnt beyond recognition.

Investigations are underway to

determine the cause of the fire, but suspect it was an act of sabotage.

Manik said, "People started screaming and running in utter confusion and panic when they saw the fire. Since the fire was coming from one side, they all scurried towards the other."

"Then I called the train manager on the phone and told him to stop the train."

The train stopped near Tejgaon station which is over 8 kilometres away from Cantonment station where the fire was first noticed.

When Rahad Ahmed, the manager who was alerted by Manik, was asked why the train was not stopped earlier, he said, "I informed the train guard about the fire and the guard told the driver. It took some time to deliver the message and stop the train as the passengers were running and screaming and we were busy controlling the crowd."

Another attendant, Nazrul Islam, was in the carriage behind the one in which

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Charred interior of one of the three burnt carriages of Mohanganj Express. Officials say the fire that killed four people before daybreak was likely to be an act of arson as the BNP and several other parties enforced hartal yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

AL's polls campaign begins from Sylhet today

Hasina to address rally in Chowhatta

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina is set to flag off the party's electioneering today with visits to the shrines of saints Shahjalal and Shah Paran in Sylhet.

She will arrive here in the morning and then offer prayers at Hazrat Shahjalal's mazar followed by Hazrat Shah Paran's mazar.

She will then attend a public rally, organised by Sylhet district and city units of the AL, at the Government Alia Madrasa ground in the city's Chowhatta area at 2:00pm.

The ground and stage are all set while the roads that will be used by the prime minister's motorcade have been decorated.

Several AL leaders said the organisers are expecting a crowd of over 10 lakh.

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CANDIDATES' AFFIDAVITS

Asset values that don't fail to amuse

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and ZYMA ISLAM

One hundred forty-eight bhoris (1.72kgs) of gold worth Tk 40,000! Twenty bighas of land worth Tk 2,000! A five-katha plot in Barishal worth Tk 400! And a Baridhara flat worth Tk 1.3 lakh!

As bizarre as it may sound, these were actually mentioned in the affidavits of some candidates seeking to become lawmaker.

According to his affidavit, Nuruzzaman Ahmed, social welfare minister and ruling Awami League candidate for Lalmonirhat-2, owns 25 bighas of land worth Tk 31,500, just about two months' minimum wage of a garment worker.

AL-sponsored candidate for Rangpur-2 Abul Kalam Ahsanul Hoque Chowdhury also owns 25 bighas of land. In the affidavit submitted to the Election Commission, he said the land is worth Tk 70,000.

Like them, many candidates listed down their high-value assets at such a low price that triggers laughter. The Daily Star has randomly analysed the affidavits of about a dozen aspirants whose stated asset values could only be real in a bygone era.

Affidavits are written statements confirmed by oath, and falsification in them are a punishable offence both in criminal laws, by up to three years in jail, and in election laws, by up to cancellation of nomination.

MP candidates are required to submit an affidavit containing eight personal and financial information while filing for nomination.

The Supreme Court in a landmark verdict in 2007 asked the EC to collect the set of information, and make them public.

The EC later incorporated a provision in the Representation of the People Order (RPO), the legal framework for holding parliamentary polls, to this effect.

However, discrepancies in the affidavits are glaring.

ASSET VALUES FROM A BYGONE ERA
Zahid Faruk, state minister for water resources and AL candidate for Barishal-5, has a flat in Baridhara DOHS, whose value was shown Tk 1.3 lakh. In this upscale neighbourhood, the monthly rent of some flats can be way more than the minister's stated flat value.

Despite public frustrations, the EC, ACC and NBR have failed to take action against accumulation of illicit income disproportionate to legitimate sources.
— Dr Iftekharuzzaman

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal's wife owns an eight-storey building in Gulshan-2, another posh residential area. The value was shown Tk 35 lakh.

Narayanganj-5 lawmaker and Jatiya Party candidate Selim Osman's wife has a 4,265-square feet flat in Dhanmondi, one of Dhaka's classy residential areas. Its value was shown Tk 13.1 lakh.

State minister for power, energy and mineral resources, Nasrul Hamid Bipu, stated the price of his Baridhara flat is Tk 32 lakh.

Abdul Hafiz Mallik was the AL pick for Barishal-2. Later, the ruling party shared the seat with its 14-party alliance partner, Workers Party.

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Ex-Evaly CEO Rassel freed from prison on bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mohammad Rassel, the former chief executive officer of the controversial e-commerce platform Evaly, was yesterday released from Kashimpur prison on bail.

Rassel and his wife Shamima Nasrin, also a co-founder of Evaly, were arrested by Rab on September 16, 2021, during a raid at their Mohammadpur home after a customer filed an embezzlement case against them with Gulshan Police Station.

Later, five other embezzlement cases were lodged against the couple with Dhanmondi Police Station and the court.

Nasrin was freed from jail on April 6 last year.

Shahjahan Ahmed, senior jail super of Kashimpur Central Jail, confirmed Rassel's release to The Daily Star.

Evaly, which has yet to deliver goods worth hundreds of crores to its customers and pay its vendors, has resumed operations on October last year.



Mother held on to child as they burned to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As soon as other passengers on Mohanganj Express screamed "fire", Nadira Akhter Poppy grabbed her three-year-old son, held him to her chest and ran in an attempt to get out of the train carriage and escape the fire.

However, trapped in the billowing smoke, the mother and son could not make it out. They burned to death in the blaze.

When rescuers recovered four dead bodies from the train, Nadira's son Yasin was still nestled into her chest.

Yasin's uncle Delwar Hossain Titu said, "Nadira couldn't get off the train on time and both of them died... She was still holding on to her child when rescuers found their bodies."

Four people, including the mother and son, were killed after arsonists torched the Dhaka bound train from Netrakona near the capital's Tejgaon area around 5:00am. Three carriages were burned before the fire service could douse the flames.

The four were put in bodybags and taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue. Even there, Yasin and Nadira were not separated.

The two, accompanied by seven other family members and relatives, were returning to

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BUSINESS

NON-RESIDENT DEPOSITS Bangladesh falls behind peers

Bangladesh has become the laggard among four South Asian countries when it comes to attracting deposits and investments from its nationals living abroad, according to a report of the World Bank.

The country has a stock of \$1.34 billion as deposits from non-resident Bangladeshis. Pakistan has a stock of \$3.7 billion.

STORY ON B1



BNP, allies plan to keep people from vote

May go for social media campaign, leaflet distribution

MOHAMMAD AL MASUM MOLLA

The BNP and like-minded political parties are likely to start campaigns on Friday to dissuade voters from casting ballots on January 7, said party sources.

They will open the campaigns with distribution of leaflets to discourage voters from going to the polling centres so that the election can be proved to be a "lopsided contest" locally and internationally.

The BNP's top leaders held several virtual meetings with the party's former and prospective MP candidates to draw up the campaign strategy.

"Amid hartals and blockades, public engagement programmes like distribution of leaflets or social media campaigns will be carried out to discourage voters from going to the polling centres," said a BNP standing committee member wishing not to be named.

According to sources, a top BNP leader in a virtual address today will call upon the

people to boycott the polls. The leader may announce fresh agitation programmes.

"The party high-ups will deliver important speeches tomorrow [today] and make important announcements regarding the movement programmes," Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, senior joint secretary general of BNP, said.

Party sources said when the movement would reach its peak at the end of December, the party may urge the people not to go to offices, and not to operate personal vehicles and factories.

"A non-cooperation movement may start from the end of December. However, the decision is yet to be finalised," a senior BNP leader told The Daily Star.

The BNP has enforced a series of hartals and blockades since October 29 to press home its one-point demand - resignation of the government and general election under a non-party neutral administration. Many BNP leaders believe that holding

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