

17 hurt as followers of AL candidates, independents clash in 3 districts

STAR REPORT

At least 17 people were injured in clashes between supporters of the ruling Awami League-nominated candidates and independent aspirants in Faridpur, Jamalpur, and Jashore yesterday.

In Faridpur, three people were injured as supporters of AL-nominated Shamim Haque and independent AK Azad locked into a clash in the town's Mahmudpur area around 2:00pm.

Among the injured -- Asad Molla and Ayyub Molla were admitted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College Hospital, while Roni Molla was admitted to Faridpur General Hospital, said Kotwali Police Station OC Shahidul Islam.

In Jamalpur, four people were injured in a clash between supporters of AL's pick Mahbubur Rahman Helal and independent Abdur Rashid near the Sarishabari Press Club area in Sarishabari upazila around 2:00pm.

Witnesses said that following an altercation over electioneering, two people -- one a supporter of Helal and another of Rashid -- called their fellow supporters and locked into a clash.

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, said Sarishabari Police OC Musfiqur Rahman.

In Jashore, independent candidate Ashrafal Alam Liton said he and his 10 supporters came under attacks by the supporters of the AL-nominated Sheikh Afil Uddin in Chhota Achra village under Sharsha upazila around noon.

Additional Superintendent of Police Belal Hossain said police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Contacted, Sharsha Upazila unit Jubo League President Wahiduzzaman Wahid, a close aide of Afil Uddin, denied the allegation and said none of their fellow supporters were involved in the incident.

In Pabna, an AL leader said that there won't be any polling agents, except AL-nominated candidate's agents, in a polling station on voting day.

Noor Islam Mintu, joint general secretary of Mondutosh union unit AL under Bhangura upazila, made the statement at a meeting with his fellow partymen at Mallikhan village on Sunday night.

"...Voting will be held for the boat symbol of Mokbul [the AL-nominated candidate]. No other people or polling agents of other candidates will be able to stay here. We will occupy the Mominpara polling centre."

When contacted yesterday, Mintu said, "It was a slip of the tongue," he claimed.



The myth of WINTER IN DHAKA

PHOTO: STAR

MH HAIDER

Do not believe the textbooks! As far as Dhaka is concerned, there are only two seasons: summer and monsoon. "This time it will be different" -- many Dhaka-ites prophesise every mid-November wishing for a cold winter. However, as is always the case, it is wishful thinking!

Game of Thrones has given the world an adage: "Winter is coming". Well, winter comes and goes elsewhere, but not in Dhaka!

Winter seems to be making an appearance nowadays in the capital but rest assured this appearance will only be a cameo. Nevertheless, for those who do not mind putting a pause amidst the rush of the metropolis, subtle hints of the season are all around us. Sure, in Dhaka, winter may not be as "loud" as it is in some of the snowy cities of the world; nor is it serene like the rustic countryside of Bangladesh. There are, however, little signs that would tell you that winter has indeed arrived.

I first get the feeling that this season is around the corner when I hear the Maghrib adhan before 5:30pm. The shortening of the day, to me, is the first signal that winter is on its way; no fog in the early morning or no worthy drop in temperature. Sweaters and jackets

are still tucked in some forgotten corner of the wardrobe not to be taken out anytime soon.

Soon after, however, you see badminton courts on the streets and empty plots. Children and adults who are otherwise glued to the screen playing video games take up the racket, demarcate lines on the hard pitch of the neighbourhood street, light it up with bulbs, and play game after game until late at night.

Somewhere around this time, countless pithawalas take their seats on the roadside -- inconspicuous, but busy -- selling bhapa pitha and chitai along with bhortas.

Then in no time, you begin attending barbeque parties which signals, to me, that winter has arrived. The underprivileged people huddle around a small fire in a desperate attempt to find some warmth -- another sign, albeit distressing, that winter is here.

I spend a few minutes on the balcony before retiring for the night, recapping the day that has been and the many challenges Dhaka shall throw again tomorrow. I am accompanied by an





Running train set on fire in city; 4 killed

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Manik was. He said there were around 20 passengers in his coach.

"When I saw the fire, I told them to go to the next carriage. I took an extinguisher and tried to use it, but there was smoke everywhere. I tripped and fell.

"Then, I crawled to a door and opened it. I held the handle, stood on the step, and called the manager to stop the train," he said.

Nazrul said even after the train became stationary, the fire continued to spread as firefighters were slow to respond.

Riad Mia, the attendant of the carriage titled Chha, also said the flames reached his carriage and burnt it down after the train stopped.

"We helplessly watched. People lost their belongings because of the nearly half an hour delay of firefighters," he said.

However, Nazimuddin Sarker, senior officer at Tejgaon fire service office, told The Daily Star that firefighters were informed around 5:05am and they reached the scene in just seven minutes.

"We found three coaches on fire. We managed to bring the fire under control around 5:30am and completely doused it around 6:45am," he added.

One of four bodies was found in the toilet of the carriage titled Ja while the rest were on the aisle, firefighters said.

A traveller named Nurul Haque jumped off the moving train and received injuries to his head, and legs. He was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Parbat Ali, the master at Tejgaon Railway Station, said, "The train left Mohanganj Station in Netrakona around 11:00pm [Monday] and reached the airport station around 4:50am. Since the train was supposed to go directly to Kamalapur Railway Station the green light was on at Tejgaon.

"But I saw smoke coming out of the carriages around 4:58am and turned on the red light. Seeing the red light, the driver stopped the train."

POLICE SUSPECT ARSON

As the BNP and its like-minded parties enforced a dawn-to-dusk strike yesterday, police believe pro-strike activists set the train on fire.

"It is definitely an act of sabotage," said Anwar Hossain, superintendent of Dhaka Railway Police.

A bomb disposal team of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of police collected evidence from the train.

An officer, requesting anonymity, said evidence suggested that arsonists poured petrol in a carriage before setting it on fire.

Mizanur Rahman, a superintendent at the Police Bureau of Investigation, said the primary suspects are three individuals who boarded the train at the airport station. "We are collecting CCTV footage from the airport and Tejgaon stations."

Ferdous Ahmed Biswas, officer-in-charge of Dhaka Railway Police Station, said a case was filed last night over multiple murders and an act of sabotage.

Railway officials said in November and this month, there were at least 19 incidents of fire on trains and rail lines and eight crude bombs were thrown on the rail lines across the country.

Some of the incidents happened on November 16 in Tangail, on November 19 in Sharishabari, on November 21 in Sylhet, and on December 13 in Rajendrapur.

Railway Minister Nurul Islam Sujan said it is difficult to prevent such incidents as the attackers board the trains as passengers.

Around 2,700 Ansar members will be deployed soon to protect railways, he added.

CCTV INSTALLATION

Police have recently proposed

Bangladesh Railway to set up security cameras at every carriage to combat arson attacks, said Anwar, superintendent of Dhaka Railway Police.

AM Saleh Uddin, joint director general (operations) at Bangladesh Railway, said it is very difficult to prevent sabotage with only three or four GRP members of a train that carries around 700 to 800 passengers.

A five member probe body was formed to investigate the incident with Khairul Islam, divisional transport officer, as the convener.

BNP, allies plan to keep people from vote

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such though programmes frequently have made those largely ineffective.

The party held two rallies on December 10 and December 16 which helped boosting the morale of the rank and file, the leaders added.

Party leaders said during several recent meetings of the party's top leadership with the former and prospective MP candidates, a message was sent to the grassroots that the anti-government movement would continue even if the national election is held on January 7.

Speaking at those meetings, party leaders said the January 7 election is already questionable due to the "drama" over seat sharing between the ruling Awami League and some other political parties.

BNP sources said steps have been taken to intensify the movement based on electoral constituencies.

Saiful Haque, general secretary of Biplobi Workers Party, a platform waging the simultaneous movement with the BNP, said they will urge the people to boycott the polls.

"We will organise a programme to send our message [on boycotting elections] to every houses," he added.

Mother held on to child as they burned to death

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Dhaka after a visit to Nadira's in-law's house in Netrakona. They went there on December 3 after her elder son Fahim's final exams had ended in late November.

Sitting beside his mother when the fire broke, Fahim narrowly escaped as his uncle Habibur Rahman got him out of the train almost immediately.

"My sister was running to safety with Yasin, and I was with Fahim. I managed to exit the train with him but when I tried to locate my sister, the thick smoke had made it impossible," Habibur said.

The five other relatives had gotten off the train at Airport Railway Station, just minutes before the tragedy struck.

Nadira had decided to get off at Kamalapur Railway Station with her brother and sons like she and her husband Mizanur Rahman had decided over phone the previous night. They thought it would be easier for them to reach their home in Paschim Tejturi Bazar in Tejgaon from Kamalapur.

Visiting the DMCH morgue, this correspondent saw an inconsolable Mizanur, his gaze vacant, as he sat near the morgue where bodies of his wife and son were kept.

At times, he was seen placing his hand on his head in deep frustration, agony and resentment.

"I want to cry. But I can't. I can't



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

A bereaved Mizanur Rahman waiting for the bodies of his wife Nadira Akhter and 3-year-old son Yasin in front of the morgue at Dhaka Medical College.

explain what's going on inside me. Everything is ruined," Mizanur, a manager of a hardware shop at Karwan Bazar, said.

Just on Monday night, he went to bed excited to see his sons and wife again after nearly two weeks.

"My wife's world revolved around our sons. How will Fahim survive without his mother?" he asked, confused about what their future would be like now.

Fahim was taken to a relative's house while Mizanur stayed at the morgue.

"Till at least 4:00pm, Fahim kept asking for his mother and brother. We had to tell him they were ill and being treated at the hospital ... I didn't want him to see them dead just yet," said Nadira's brother Habibur Rahman.

However, the bodies were brought back from the morgue around 5:00pm and the family had to let nine-year-old Fahim see his mother and baby brother for the very last time.

The bodies were then taken back to Netrokona for burial.

AL's polls campaign begins from Sylhet today

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Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury, president of Sylhet district AL, said, "We are trying our best to make today's rally the biggest in the history of Sylhet. Activists from all over the division will be joining this historic gathering."

The PM's last visit to Sylhet was on June 21 last year, but no mass rally was organised at that time. The last one was organised on the same

ground in 2018.

After Sylhet, Hasina will join election rallies in other districts either in person or virtually.

Sayem Khan, AL's deputy office secretary, said she will visit Barishal, Gopalganj and Madaripur and join the rallies there in person.

The AL chief will virtually address rallies in Panchagarh and Lalmonirhat in Rangpur division, Natore and Pabna in Rajshahi division and Khagrachhari

in Chattogram division together at 3:00pm on December 21.

She is expected in Barishal on December 29 and will address an election rally in the district town at 3:00pm that day.

Hasina will then visit Gopalganj on December 30 and address a rally in Gopalganj-3 (Tungipara and Kotalipara) constituency. She will address the AL rally in Madaripur-3 the same day.

NATIONAL POLLS

653 magistrates to try cases of irregularities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 653 judicial magistrates have been appointed to take the polls time irregularities into cognisance during the upcoming national election and subsequently hold summary trials in the shortest possible time.

The magistrates will discharge their duties in all 300 constituencies across the country between January 5 and January 9, meaning two days before the polls, on the voting day, and two days after the polls, according to a notification issued by the Election Commission (EC) on December 18.

A magistrate's report regarding any electoral offence they discover while performing their duties will be forwarded to the EC secretariat's deputy secretary (law), it added.

Last month, the EC wrote to the law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry to take necessary steps regarding the appointment of the judicial magistrates on advice from the Supreme Court.

Palli Bidyut worker stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A hired worker of Palli Bidyut Samity was killed and two others were injured as one of their fellows allegedly attacked them over a trivial matter in Patuakhali yesterday.

Subsequently, police arrested one Kawsar in connection with the killing.

The deceased Zahirul, 21, was declared dead when taken to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital.

The injured -- Saiful, 23, and Shakib, 20 -- were taken to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal.

Md Masud, a lineman of the rural electrification board in Patuakhali, said the workers were going to cut tree branches to clear electricity lines like other days.

On the way, Kawsar and Zahirul had an altercation in a car in Basak Bazar area. At one stage, Kawsar stabbed him with a sharp weapon, he said.

Saiful and Shakib were injured as they tried to save him, said Masud.

Patuakhali Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Jasim said legal action will be taken against the arrestee.

Contacted, Tushar Kanti Halder, general manager of Patuakhali Palli Bidyut Samity, said the workers are not their permanent employees. "They work and are paid on a per-day basis."

Man killed, wife hurt in bike crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A man died and his wife was injured in a collision between two motorcycles in Birampur upazila of Dinajpur yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Efaz Uddin, 65, of the upazila's Moyabari.

His wife, Ferdousi Begum, an assistant teacher at Nishibapur Government Primary School in the upazila, was injured in the accident, said Birampur Police Station OC Subrata Kumar Sarkar.