

## Three buses torched in 90 minutes in city

### BNP, allies to enforce 12-hr blockade today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Arsonists torched three buses in the capital's Dhanmondi, Mirpur, and Gulistan in the span of just 90 minutes last night, on the eve of BNP's dawn-to-dusk blockade.

A moving bus was set ablaze by arsonists on a motorcycle around 9:45pm, in front of Dhanmondi 9 on the Mirpur Road, Dhanmondi Police Station Officer-in-Charge Parvez Alam told The Daily Star.

Police seized the motorcycle, however, the miscreants fled the scene.

In Mirpur 13, a parked bus of Trust Transport Services was set on fire around 10:30pm in front of Farmers Bank, said Kafrul Police OC Farukul Alam.

On information, two fire engines went to the spot and brought the fire under control at 10:52pm, said Ahsan Habib, duty officer of Fire Service and Civil Defence control room.

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Fire service personnel dousing the flames on a Rajanigandha Travels bus minutes after the vehicle was torched in the capital's Gulistan around 9:15pm yesterday.

PHOTO: BANGLADESH FIRE SERVICE

## EC decides to withdraw 2 OCs over negligence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday decided to withdraw the officers-in-charge (OCs) of Shaikupa and Harinakundu police stations in Jhenaidah as they were found to be neglectful in discharging their duties.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the commission in light of the reports of the district returning officer and the superintendent of police, EC Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath told reporters after the meeting.

In a letter, the EC directed the senior secretary of the Public Security Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs to take the necessary measures to withdraw the two OCs and appoint suitable officers in their place.

## Elderly man's body found underneath bridge

UNB, Gaibandha

Police recovered the body of a 61-year-old man's body from underneath a bridge in the Nakaihat area on the Gobindaganj-Gaibandha road yesterday.

The body was recovered around 11:30am.

The deceased was identified as Dhirendranath Saha, of Choto Narayanpur village in the upazila, confirmed Gobindaganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge Shamsul Alam Shah.

The process of filing a case over the matter is underway, added the police official.

According to his family, he went missing a few days ago, and a case was filed at the police station on Friday, said the OC.

## 12 hurt in pre-polls violence in 4 dists

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union Jubo League, and one of his associates, Mohammad Waliullah, 28, were sent to Dhaka for better treatment as their health deteriorated, police said.

The injured said Rezaul and his associates were returning home after conducting a campaign for AL candidate ASM Feroz in Patuakhali-2.

When they reached Sabupura village around 10:00pm, their rival group attacked them with sharp weapons, iron rods, and sticks, leaving the six injured.

Bauphal Police Station OC Sonit Kumar Gayen said they did not

receive any complaint in connection with the incident.

In Faridpur, supporters of independent aspirant AK Azad for Faridpur-3 alleged that the supporters of AL nominee Shamim Haque attacked them in Biren Sahar Mor area of Sadar upazila around 8:00pm on Friday, leaving five injured.

Khokon Mallik, one of the injured, said Shahidul Islam Mojnu, chairman of Ishan Gopalpur union, led the attack.

Mojnu, however, denied the allegation.

Kotwali Police OC Shahidul Islam said no complaint was filed in this

regard.

In Natore, the supporters of the AL candidate for Natore-1 allegedly assaulted a supporter of an independent aspirant in Majhgram village of Lalpur upazila around 10:30pm on Friday.

AL nominee Shahidul Islam Bakul, however, said he was not aware of the incident.

Lalpur Police Station OC Nasim Ahmed said he received a written complaint. Legal actions will be taken if the allegation is found to be true, he added.

[Our district correspondents contributed to this report.]

## Loan scams ate up Tk 92,261cr in 15 years: CPD

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Though there is no government data on capital flight, many foreign research organisations say that about \$7-\$8 billion is flying out of Bangladesh every year, and some of the embezzled funds are included in the capital flight, Rahman said.

“So, huge reforms are necessary in the banking sector.”

And yet, in the amended Bank Company Act, the tenure of a director was increased by three more years to 12 years by going against experts' recommendation to bring it down to six years, he added.

“The banking sector is in the grip of crony capitalism. The crony capitalists have used banks as vehicles for reaching their goal of financial oligarchy,” Khatun said.

The vested groups are using the regulators to frame policies and regulations that are beneficial to them, she said.

The regulatory bodies such as the Bangladesh Bank and the other finance-related regulatory bodies are captured by the vested groups.

“If things continue this way, the necessary reforms will not happen. Only a selfless and strong political leadership can venture into taking the difficult path of reforms.”

Though the government is saying that the reforms will be taken after the election, questions remain about whether it would really happen.

A participatory election would have ensured the political intention needed for reforms of such scale, Khatun added.

Bangladesh's banking sector has consistently demonstrated vulnerability, primarily because of a lack of good governance and a dearth of reforms, according to the CPD.

“Its weaknesses have been consistently exposed through the high loan default rates and sub-par performance across various indicators. This inherent fragility presents significant risks to the overall economy. Regrettably, the government's commitments to safeguard the banking sector remain unmet.”

Considering recurrent instances of fraudulent activities and irregularities, the actions implemented by the government have been insufficient, Khatun said in a presentation.

## Will halt vote if we get even one complaint: CEC

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said while exchanging views with aspirants in Barishal.

A total of 35 independents and nominees from different parties are running for the six constituencies in Barishal.

“Strictly abide by the electoral code. Help us. And please step away from the notion that power-play is a must for winning.... We don't believe it, and you certainly shouldn't,” he said.

Barishal Divisional Commissioner Shawkat Ali presided over the meeting attended by EC Secretary Mohammad Jahangir Alam, Range Deputy Inspector General Jamil Hasan, and Metropolitan Police Commissioner Jihadul Kabir.

Meanwhile,

Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman told reporters at the EC office in the capital that some aspirants would lose their candidacy for breach of conduct and violence.

When a reporter asked him why the EC was failing to make the ruling AL nominees abide by the conduct, he said, “That is not true. We visited different districts and gave local officials some strict instructions which are being followed. We asked for some information, you will see some of our firm decisions if we get the information.”

It's a matter of time that somebody will lose their candidature somewhere, he added.

About the death of a supporter of an independent candidate in an alleged attack by ruling AL activists in Madaripur, he said, “Any death is unexpected. We will see the issue from an impartial perspective. Another incident happened between two groups there several days ago due to personal matters. We first need to know whether the incident happened due to personal enmity or matters related to the election.”

The Election Commission yesterday asked the returning officer in Cumilla to look into the allegation that AL candidate AKM Bahauddin Bahar had humiliated reporters.

The EC wanted to know the findings in 24 hours.

## AL allowed all its aspirants

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Hasina said, “We have to keep the country free from war criminals and terrorists so that the development continues.”

The premier highlighted the successes of the successive AL governments since 2009.

She said the country has changed a lot over the last 15 years because the AL has been in power during this period.

“We have earned the recognition as a developing nation. We will have to advance further.”

The AL president said the January 7 election will be fair, and the people will vote according to their choice.

The rallies, organised by the AL, were held at the Public Library field in Kushtia, Wazir Ali School and College field in Jhenidah, Satkhira

Government High School in Satkhira, Zilla Stadium in Netrakona, and Sheikh Russell Stadium in Rangamati, as well as at the party offices in Bamna and Patharghata upazilas of Barguna.

Senior party leaders were present at the AL's Dhaka office, while party nominees and other leaders attended the event from the six districts.

## Country facing a third election that might

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an acceptable system of holding elections. Who would have thought that this would be a matter of central concern? Our inability to construct a workable system of holding elections has led again to a process in which throughout the decade of the -- it is in periods of cantonment rule -- you had a situation in which the concept of a free and fair election became completely alien to our consciousness.

“And it required a massive political mobilisation to eventually get us back on the democratic path. I remember when I used to meet colleagues from Pakistan, in the course of the 1980s, one of the first things they would always tell me is that how is it possible that after all those years of struggle in Bangladesh, you have ended up being ruled by the cantonment? You can understand this happening in Pakistan, how did it happen in Bangladesh? I must say that I could never provide a very satisfactory answer at that time.

“But then, we went through what we believe was our second liberation and democratic renaissance in 1991. And our expectation was that this would lead to a new age for us. I participated in the first caretaker government at that time under Justice Shahabuddin. Our whole experience was, at that time, a largely experimental experience. We did not really expect nor were we sure how this would work out. But I remember Nikhil Chakravarty, the editor of Mainstream, one of the leading left magazines in India, who came as an election observer, pointing out that that election, of which he was there as an observer, was probably the freest and fairest election he had actually witnessed in his whole life. He was then in his

70s.

“The experience with that inspired the struggle by Sheikh Hasina for establishing a system, institutionalising the system of elections under a caretaker government. And the end result of a two-year political struggle was the enactment of a constitutional amendment for elections under a caretaker government.

“That was a campaign led by the current prime minister and a broad spectrum of the political opposition at that time. And it was in order for that to come about, it required a consensus between the two main parties, the Awami League and the BNP, and that itself was a singular achievement.

“The establishment of a system of elections under the caretaker system, of course, led to the holding of relatively free and fair elections. I mean, people may debate how free or fair elections actually are, but for me, I have two yardsticks for free and fair elections.

“One would be that it is contested by two or three major parties. They confront with the possibility of capturing state power, and because they are major contestants, the outcome of the election process will remain uncertain right to the end.

“The moment predictability is introduced into an election process, you have doubts about the credibility of that process. And of course, the second and most relevant outcome is whether the incumbent government is then displaced and the opposition party then ascends to power. If you look at the elections of 91, if you look at the elections of 96, 2001 and of 2009, in all those cases of elections under caretaker government, the opposition party actually came in office.”

Prof Sobhan also observed how the country progressed in the decades following its independence.

“Looking back 52 years, at the conditions which prevailed at the time of our liberation, and even looking back another 25 years, we should recognise that quite significant transformations have been registered. I identified some of the critical elements of our advance. If you remember, a great deal of the struggle at that time was all about the wide economic disparity which existed.... Now, if you look at the numbers today, our per capita income is about 60 percent ahead of Pakistan. Our GDP, which was again significantly behind Pakistan at that time, I think is also now significantly moved ahead.

“And in many other developmental indicators... we have advanced very significantly. And in some areas, we have even moved ahead of India.... During the Covid period, some numbers were even been presented that our per capita income had even crossed India's and certainly in terms of the progress in our human development indicators, whether we are talking about healthcare, whether we're talking about education, whether we are talking about gender, advancement of women, in all these areas.

“Amartya Sen and his colleagues have actually written and commented on the fact that we have moved ahead of India in these areas. So, Pakistan itself is a long way behind us now. And if you look at the comparison of the trends in the Pakistan economy compared to us, anyone who has talked to Pakistanis recently, particularly economists, are all deeply conscious of how well we have advanced compared to them.”