

WEALTHS SURGE

No wonder they are desperate to get elected

Says Debapriya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

When someone is elected, their wealth seems to increase at an exponential rate, said eminent economist and policy analyst Debapriya Bhattacharya yesterday.

He said this citing affidavits of candidates of the 12th parliamentary polls.

Many of the runners are seeking re-election.

He emphasised a correlation between the rate of wealth growth and electoral success, and said, “This is why people are now desperate to be elected because elections offer a better way to gain access to state resources than civil rights.

“For individuals, whose wealth have increased 500 times, has the taxation seen a proportional surge? Has the National Board of Revenue ever scrutinised this issue?”

He made the remarks at a media briefing titled “Citizen Agenda for Inclusive Development and Equity”, organised by Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, at the capital's BRAC Centre.

Debapriya, who is also the convener of the platform, further said the commitments outlined in the previous election manifesto were not assessed and the government failed to acknowledge them as well.

Similarly, there was no review of this election's manifesto while the criteria for future evaluations have not been established, he said.

He highlighted a lack of public interest when the manifesto was introduced.

The economist urged the young generation to work for a change.

Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, presided over the programme and criticised the lack of political will to take action against those who have gained wealth inconsistently.

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Gopal Das, 74, using foam to ensure oil does not leak out from the oil drums that would be sent to a Dhaka oil factory from Barishal city's Port Road. His job -- ensuring that oil leakage does not occur – earns him 3-4 litres of cooking oil per week. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

14 killed in Ukrainian strike on Belgorod

Says Russia; death toll from Friday’s attack on Ukraine reaches 39; Poland says Russian rocket entered its airspace

AFP, Moscow

Russia said yesterday that a Ukrainian strike killed at least 14 people and injured 108 in the city of Belgorod, a day after Russian strikes killed dozens in Ukraine.

Belgorod lies about 30 kilometres (19 miles) from the border with Ukraine and has been repeatedly targeted by what Russia says is indiscriminate shelling by Kyiv's forces.

Unverified footage showed debris strewn across the street and smoke billowing from burnt-out cars in the city's centre, while a large blast can be heard in dashcam footage posted on social media.

AFP was not able to immediately verify the circumstances of the blast.

“According to updated information, 12 adults and two children were killed in Belgorod. Another 108 people, including 15 children, were injured,” Russia's emergencies ministry said.

President Vladimir Putin has been briefed on the incident, the Kremlin said, while the Russian defence ministry warned the attack would “not go unpunished”.

The attack came as rescuers in Ukraine continued to search through rubble Saturday after Russian strikes killed at least 39 people the day before, in one of the fiercest attacks since the early days of the conflict.

Schools, a maternity hospital, shopping arcades and blocks of flats were all among the buildings hit in Friday's barrage, which

triggered international condemnation.

Ukraine's military estimated Russia had launched 158 missiles and drones on Ukraine and 114 of them had been destroyed.

Air force spokesman Yuriy Ignat told AFP that this was a “record number” of missiles and “the most massive missile attack” of the conflict, excluding the early days of constant bombardment.

“Work is still underway to eliminate the consequences of yesterday's Russian attack,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

January 1 will be declared a day of mourning in the capital Kyiv, where at least 16 people were killed, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Bombaypara in Narail: a sex trafficking hotspot

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Jamrildanga in Narail, said it is common for these girls to return home after a span of one or two years.

“During their return, these girls often take one or two girls with them to Bombay for employment. This practice has created a sense of unity and mutual support among the villagers, prompting them to affectionately refer to the locality as Bombaypara,” he said.

The Daily Star found a woman named Mohona, who was in the midst of preparations to embark on a journey to Mumbai, leaving her two children under the care of her husband.

“I got a job offer from two women in Khararia village. They assured me of my success and good earnings,” she said in May.

Pakhi, the sex worker in Pune, said one of the most popular Bangladeshi brothel managers runs around 25 brothels, housing as many as 100 Bangladeshi girls. Most of them are from Shingsholpur area of Narail.

THE MONEY TRAIL IN INDIA

“Earlier, we used to see that the traffickers or their partners would bring the survivors right from the village to the destination,” said a source in Mumbai, who has been aiding law enforcers in conducting raids, searches, and rescue operations since 2006.

The person, requesting anonymity, said, “Now, they bring the girls to the Bangladesh border, cross the border at night in areas with less vigilance, and then they either bring them to the destination or keep them in some villages around the border till the deal is finalised. So, there are multiple people at different stages – multiple buyers and multiple sellers.”

According to the source, these deals are all settled by cash payment.

“We witnessed girls aged between 11 and 14 years old being trafficked from Bangladesh, and the proportion is not less than 30 percent,” the person told The Daily Star.

SM Azharul Islam, a programme manager of Rights Jashore, said the tactic these days is to force the trafficked girl to marry a Bangalee man to ensure legal stay in India.

“Once the marriage is completed, the girl is handed over to a brothel or a flat and forced to do sex work,” explained Azhar, who has been rescuing trafficked girls for over a decade.

Azhar said the person who first convinces a girl to travel to India receives Tk 15,000.

At the border, syndicate members receive and guide the girls, using motorbikes to navigate the treacherous path.

“The transport worker responsible for carrying the girl to the border receives Tk 10,000. Then the person who receives and shelters the girl gets between Tk 10,000 and 15,000,” he said.

The houses on the border that shelter the girls, receive Tk 3,000 for the service, he said, adding, “The girl needs to stay in the house until the border is

‘green’ for the illegal crossing.”

The carrier nowadays charges Tk 15,000-20,000 for taking the girl to India often under the nose of the security forces, said Azhar, the NGO worker.

“Similarly, the host on the Indian side receives Tk 10,000-15,000 for keeping and transporting the girl to rail stations for the journey to Mumbai,” he said.

Azharul further said the transport worker in the rail service receives Tk 7,000 for taking the girl to Mumbai and providing security.

“Finally, the person who receives the girl in Mumbai and sells her to the brothel gets around Tk 3 lakh,” Azhar added.

According to the source in Mumbai, some Bangladeshi people are now living in Pune and different districts of Maharashtra as Indians, and a section of them was found involved

“We have multiple cases where we found that the victim managed to flee from the brothel and tried to get help from local police. But the police instead of extending support informed the brothel managers and then handed over the girls to the brothel again.”

Whip’s motorcade

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their supporters were involved.

Additional Superintendent of Police Ariful Islam said police have found evidence of vehicle vandalism but are still investigating the reported gunfire.

In Dhaka, an intra-party clash during the election campaign of Awami League candidate Ferdous Ahmed resulted in 15 people being injured in Hatirpool.

Dhaka City AL's Ward-18 unit Labour Affairs Secretary, Mosharaf Hossain Raja, said their procession was attacked by Central Road Unit AL President Imam Hossain Manzil and his supporters yesterday at 1:45pm.

The clash left four to five people injured.

Khandaker Jalal Uddin Mahmood, inspector of New Market Police Station, said no complaints were filed over this incident.

In Cumilla-7, at least five supporters of AL candidate Dr Pran Gopal Datta were stabbed allegedly by supporters of independent candidate Muntakim Ashraf Tito near Gollai Complex area under Chandina upazila yesterday around 7:00pm.

However, Titu denied the allegation. He filed a police complaint alleging that his motorcade came under attack by AL-nominee's supporters at Chayakot area under the same upazila around 6:15pm.

In Shariatpur-2, supporters of the AL candidate AKM Enamul Hoque Shameem allegedly attacked at least 20 supporters of independent candidate Khaled Shawkat Ali in the Bashtola area of Naria upazila yesterday around 5:00pm.

Naria Circle ASP Ahsan Habib said if the independent candidate filed a complaint, police would look into it.

Independent candidate Khaled Shaikat Ali said, “Just as we took out a procession in Bashtola, supporters of the boat symbol hurled cocktails at us. A splinter from the explosive injured our supporter's eye. The attackers also beat my supporters with blunt weapons.”

AL candidate's election coordinator refuted the allegation.

In Naogaon-6, Chowdhury Golam Mostafa Badal, the election coordinator of independent candidate Omar Faruk, was allegedly stabbed by supporters of AL candidate Anwar Hossain yesterday morning.

Contacted, Anwar Hossain denied the allegations. Police detained three individuals, said Atrai Police OC Jahurul Islam.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to the report.]

PDB incurs record losses

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on April 4. In fiscal 2021-22, 7,644 GWh of electricity came from the neighbouring country.

About 2,987 GWh was purchased from quick rental power plants, which cost PDB Tk 3,743.9 crore.

Altogether, PDB spent Tk 96,084.9 crore for purchasing 88,450 GWh of electricity last fiscal year.

That electricity was sold to six distributors for Tk 50,858.25 crore.

PDB's average purchase cost last fiscal year was Tk 11.33 per KWh, up 28.2 percent from a year earlier. It sold electricity to distributors at the subsidised rate of Tk 6.70 per kWh after twice hiking the rate during the year.

The government furnished Tk 39,534 crore as subsidy last fiscal year, up 33.3 percent year-on-year.

“We have been telling the government since 2012 to get rid of the subsidy-based situation. If the same system continues, the losses will continue,” said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

The main reason behind PDB racking up huge losses year after year is the government's weakness in negotiating contracts with the power producers.

“The power plants are making huge profits under these kinds of contracts and PDB is making

losses. All those contracts need renegotiation,” said Mansur, also a former economist of the International Monetary Fund.

Under the existing contracts, power producers get a certain fee even if they do not generate any power, in an arrangement that can be viewed as similar to the house rent that a tenant pays to the landlord every month as per the tenancy agreement regardless of whether they stay in the property or not.

This fee is called the capacity charge and it guarantees that the PDB will have the electricity from the power plants when the need arises.

While the annual report did not disclose the capacity charges paid to the power plants in fiscal 2022-23, Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, told the parliament in September that the government paid Tk 104,926 crore as capacity charges from 2009 to June this year.

Bangladesh's energy generation model, especially the one used to purchase power from independent power producers, is not only weakening the PDB but is also hurting the overall economy, according to Moazzem.

“In fact, one of the macroeconomic challenges we are facing at the moment is because of the import-dependent nature of the power and energy sector.”

As the fossil fuel prices soared for

the Ukraine war, so did Bangladesh's import bills, which gobbled up foreign currency reserves at an alarming rate.

“We have to come out of import-dependent fuels and go for cost-effective renewable energy.”

Overcapacity is another big concern for the power sector, according to Moazzem.

The last fiscal year saw the addition of 3,149 MW of new generation capacity to take the total capacity to 24,911 MW. The highest electricity demand was on April 19: 15,648 MW.

As per the government's plan, reserve energy will exceed 50 percent by next year.

“This should be reduced,” he said, while calling for reviewing the existing contracts with power plants, retiring old and inefficient plants and doing away with quick rentals. All contracts must have the no electricity, no pay clause added in.

He also called for while calling for scrapping the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act 2010, also known as the indemnity law for the power sector.

“Because of the indemnity law, the power purchase agreements are not transparent and we are not able to get competitive pricing. Because of the indemnity law, PDB has to buy expensive power.”

Bangladeshi man, shot by BSF, dies at home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A man was allegedly shot by the Border Security Force (BSF) inside Indian territory at Bichnakandi border area in Sylhet, and later died from his injuries at his home.

The deceased was identified as Kaswar Ahmed, 26, of Dakkhin Bogaliya village, Gowainghat upazila.

Gowainghat Police Station's Officer-in-Charge, Rafiqul Islam, said, “After trespassing Indian territory for unknown reasons, the victim was allegedly shot by the BSF. He was carried to his home, where he succumbed to his injuries.”

Police have recovered the body and sent it to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College for an autopsy.

There will be an investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding his entry into Indian territory and identify the shooter, said the OC.

Faruk Ahmed, assistant director of Sylhet 48 Battalion of Border Guard Bangladesh, stated, “We were not informed of the incident and will be looking into the matter.”

NATIONAL ELECTION

Tourists barred from St Martin’s Island for 3 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox’s Bazar

Cox's Bazar district administration has imposed a three-day ban on tourists visiting Saint Martin Island in preparation for the 12th national election on January 7.

Cox's Bazar Additional District Magistrate, Yamin Hossain, announced the suspension of ship movements on the Teknaf-Saint-Martin route from January 6 to 8.

During this period, all hotels, motels, and guest houses on the island will also remain closed, he added.

Yamin said the stay of outsiders will be restricted in Cox's Bazar from 12:00am on January 6 to 12:00am on January 7, aligning with measures in other districts.

Tarique will be brought back, put on trial

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Noting that Israel carries out bomb attacks on hospitals in Palestine, the prime minister alleged that Tarique is doing exactly the same thing by giving orders from London to launch attacks on ambulances, journalists and police in Bangladesh.

She said such criminal activities will not be allowed.

The premier asked the people to give a befitting reply to the conspirators by casting votes on January 7 in a peaceful manner.

“I want this election to be held very peacefully. Through the January 7 polls, we will give a befitting reply to the conspirators so none can play ducks and drakes with the fate of the people of Bangladesh anymore.”

Hasina, the AL candidate from Gopalganj-3 (Tungipara-Kotalipara), sought votes for “boat”, the party's electoral symbol.

“You go to the polling stations and cast votes in the morning to show the world that we know how to hold the election in a free and fair manner. We can do it.”

Hasina said the BNP leaders who are “killing people by carrying out

arson attacks following Tarique's orders” will have to take the responsibility of murdering people.

FOREIGN MEDDLING IN POLLS WON'T BE TOLERATED

Addressing another campaign rally in Kotalipara, the AL president said Bangladesh will not accept foreign meddling in the January 7 polls.

She warned that the conspirators would face serious consequences.

Bangabandhu's younger daughter Sheikh Rehana accompanied her sister to the rally in Kotalipara from the one in Tungipara.

Without naming any country that opposed the Bangladesh's independence, Hasina said those powers failed during the Liberation War in 1971.

“We will show them that we can achieve victory in terms of economic progress,” she said.

The premier urged the first-time voters not to miss the opportunity to cast votes for her party for the sake of the progress of Bangladesh.

AL advisory council member Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim MP, Sheikh Helal Uddin MP, Sheikh Tonmoy MP, and

AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim, among others, were present.

Later in the day, Hasina and Rehana joined another election rally at Kalkini Syed Abul Hossain University College ground in Madaripur's Kalkini upazila.

Speaking at the rally, the AL chief asked the people to cast votes early in the morning of January 7 as a big turnout of voters is important this time.

She remembered that Syed Abul Hossain, late local lawmaker, had been the communications minister when a false corruption allegation in the Padma Bridge project was brought against the government.

“We have constructed the Padma Bridge with our own finances,” she said, praying for the salvation of the departed soul of Abul Hossain.

Hasina introduced the AL candidates -- Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury for Madaripur-1, Shajahan Khan for Madaripur-2 and Abdus Sobhan Golap for Madaripur-3 -- to her audience and sought votes for them.