



DHAKA MONDAY APRIL 22, 2024

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XXXIV No. 93

BAISHAKH 9, 1431 BS

www.thedailystar.net

SHAWWAL 12, 1445 HJRI

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## RELATIVES IN UZ POLLS

# AL chief's directive for MPs largely unheeded

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

Awami League lawmakers' urge to tighten their grip on the grassroots seems to be prevailing over the party president's directive to have their family members and close relatives withdraw from the upazila parishad polls.

With today being the last day for withdrawing candidature in the first phase of the polls, only one relative of a state minister quit the race.

Many candidates related to MPs are hellbent on running. They are ignoring not only the AL chief's directive but also threats of punitive organisational actions.

"If any close relative of any minister and MP don't comply with the party directive, we will be compelled to take organisational actions against them," AL presidium member Kazi Zafarullah told The Daily Star.

The AL directed the lawmakers and ministers to make sure none of their family

members or relatives run in the upazila polls, which are to be held in four phases with the first one being on May 8.

Lutful Habib, the brother-in-law of State Minister for Posts, Telecommunications, and Information Technology Zunaid Ahmed Palak, withdrew yesterday from the race for Singra upazila parishad chairman.

For other relatives and family members of MPs and ministers, repeated phone calls are being made by AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader and organising secretaries.

The warnings of organisational action seem to have little effect. Some of the relatives of MPs vowed to stay in the race while others said they believed the party would go soft on them once the race ended.

"Eighth May! We were there, we still are, and we will be there," read a Facebook post of Shabab Chowdhury two days after Quader called his father Ekramul Karim Chowdhury, AL lawmaker for Noakhali-4, to make sure Shabab quit the race for

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A mother trying to cool down her three-year-old son with a portable fan at the capital's Mugda Medical College Hospital where the boy is admitted with breathing problems and fever. The country is baking in extreme heat, with several districts seeing temperatures of 40C or more. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



If any close relatives of any minister and MP don't comply with the party directive, we will be compelled to take organisational actions against them.

AL presidium member KAZI ZAFARULLAH



## 5 factors that kept BNP off upazila polls

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP boycotted the upazila elections for five reasons, chief among which is its belief that the ruling party will control the polls, said party insiders.

Initially, the party thought that it would go soft on its leaders running as independents but decided against it because of the reasons.

The upazila election would be held in the national election model and that was why the ruling party did not nominate anyone for chairman posts, the insiders said, adding that just like the national polls some "ruling party independents" will run to make the polls appear competitive.

"None will be elected without the government's signal. If we join the polls, it will give nothing but legitimacy to the election," said a senior BNP leader.

Secondly, the BNP believes joining the upazila polls would be a betrayal to the people who boycotted the national polls responding to the party's call just a few months ago.

"The BNP cannot ask the people now to go to the polling centre... It may hurt the sentiments of the people," a senior leader said.

Thirdly, if the BNP stays away from the polls, turnout would be poor -- sending a message across the nation and abroad that without the party's participation, polls will be lopsided and unacceptable.

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## EID RUSH ROAD CRASHES

# BRTA finds 10 reasons, shoulders no blame

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority has identified 10 factors contributing to the sharp rise in the number of deaths in road crashes during the Eid holidays.

It linked drivers and pedestrians with nine causes and mentioned the absence of road dividers as the 10th.

The BRTA, however, shrugged off its own liability and cleared other agencies from the responsibilities at a time when thousands of unregistered and unfit vehicles are being operated right under the noses of the authorities concerned.

After three major road crashes took place just last week, it was found that either the vehicles involved had no fitness clearance or route permit, or the drivers had no valid licence.

"...If you want to blame us, you can," BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said responding to a reporter during a media briefing at the BRTA headquarters.

The briefing was on road crashes during the Eid holidays, the steps taken by BRTA and the overall road safety issues.

He said the BRTA took different measures to "gift a congestion free Eid", but two major road crashes have marred its success.

Last Tuesday, a head-on collision between a bus and a pickup in Faridpur claimed 15 lives, including five of a family. The bus had no route permit, fitness certificate and tax token, while the pickup carried passengers illegally.

The very next day, a truck ploughed through several vehicles in Jhalakathi, killing 14 and injuring 12. The truck driver did not have the licence required for heavy vehicles.

On Friday, a Raida Paribahan bus rammmed a motorcycle near Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka and killed an engineer. The bus had no fitness clearance and the driver had no valid licence, Rab said.

At yesterday's briefing, the BRTA chairman further said 295 people were killed and 405 were injured in 254 road crashes in 15 days (from April 4 to 18).

In the corresponding period last year, 239 people were killed and 510 were injured in 253 road crashes in 15 days.

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## ENERGY SECURITY Dhaka looks for Doha's greater role Qatar Emir flies in today on 2-day visit

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

D h a k a expects Doha will play an important role in ensuring Bangladesh's energy security as Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani arrives today for a two-day visit.

"Qatar is rich in petroleum and natural gas. So, energy cooperation will naturally be discussed with importance. This visit of the emir will have an important role for improving our energy mix and ensuring energy security," Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud told a press briefing at his ministry yesterday.

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## 3 universities opt for online classes amid heatwave Sweltering heat likely to continue, says Met office

STAR REPORT

Dhaka, Chittagong, and Jagannath universities will hold only online classes from today in a bid to avoid heat-related health risks.

The move comes a day after the closure of schools and colleges until April 27.

Dhaka and Chittagong universities will hold exams in person while JnU postponed exams until April 25 when it will reopen the classrooms.

DU and CU said in-person classes will not begin until further notice.

Dormitories at all the universities would remain open. The Islamic Arabic University also asked its 1,500 affiliated Fazil and Kamil madrasas to hold online classes until April 27.

University Grants Commission acting chairman Prof Muhammed Alamgir said he believed that the universities were making the decisions keeping the students' wellbeing in mind.

Yesterday, the Dhaka Education Board requested

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## BUSINESS

### Unearth real data of bad loans: Rehman Sobhan

Noted economist Prof Rehman Sobhan yesterday said there is no real data on non-performing loans (NPLs) in the banking sector.

Many companies are not repaying their loans and instead rescheduling them year after year and those are excluded from the total default loan amount, he added.

"Unfortunately, we don't know the real amount of NPLs -- partly because of policy failure and partly because of the failure of the regulatory institution (central bank)," Prof Sobhan said.

The veteran economist said the balance sheets of all the banks as well as their borrowing and repayment should be analysed to unearth the real amount of NPLs in the banking sector.

At the end of December 2023, Bangladesh's banking sector had NPLs worth Tk 145,600 crore, around 9 percent of total outstanding loans, central bank data shows.

Prof Sobhan said that the government had promised to publish a list of the top 100 defaulters in the country, but it did not do so.

STORY ON B1



Traffic hardly moves on a street near the Kakrail intersection in the capital as Dhaka returns to business as usual after the Eid and Pahela Baishakh holidays.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Pro-China party wins the Maldives vote in landslide

AFP, Male

The party of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu yesterday won control of parliament in an election landslide, results showed, with voters backing his tilt towards China and away from regional powerhouse and traditional benefactor India.

Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) won 66 of the first 86 seats declared, according to the Elections Commission of Maldives results, already more than enough for a super-majority in the 93-member majlis, or parliament.

The vote was seen as a crucial test for Muizzu's plan to press ahead with closer economic cooperation with China, including building thousands of apartments on controversially reclaimed land.

The PNC and its allies had only eight seats in the outgoing parliament, with the lack of a majority stymieing Muizzu after his presidential election victory in September.

The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) -- which had previously had a super-majority of its own -- was headed for a humiliating defeat with just a dozen seats.



Mohamed Muizzu

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