

RAID IN RUMA 1 KNF member killed; arms recovered: ISPR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A member of Kuki Chin National Front was killed in a raid by an army patrol team in remote Munlai Para area of Bandarban's Ruma yesterday, said a press release of Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate.

The release, signed by ISPR Assistant Director Rashedul Alam Khan, said the team also recovered arms, ammunition, and other equipment used by the armed group.

A joint drive is underway to arrest those who were involved in the robberies of Sonali and Krishi banks in Ruma and Thanchi on April 2 and 3. Members of BGB, Rab, police, and Ansar are taking part in the operation, coordinated by the army.

China to strengthen Maldives ties after election Says its foreign ministry

AFP, Beijing

China said yesterday it would seek to strengthen ties with the Maldives, after pro-Beijing President Mohamed Muizzu's party celebrated a landslide win in parliamentary polls in the strategic Indian Ocean nation.

The Maldives, known as a luxury tourist destination with its white sand beaches, also straddles key east-west international shipping routes — with the election win bringing the archipelago deeper into Beijing's sphere of influence.

Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) secured more than two-thirds in the 93-member parliament on Sunday.

"China is willing to work with the Maldives to maintain traditional friendship (and) expand exchanges and cooperation in various fields," foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said yesterday.



A motorcyclist going against traffic hit two pedestrians on Panthapath near Square Hospitals yesterday afternoon, leaving one of them injured. Bikes going the wrong way on streets has become a common phenomenon.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Workers across the globe increasingly at risk: ILO

REUTERS, Geneva

More than 70 percent of the global workforce is exposed to risks linked to climate change that cause hundreds of thousands of deaths each year, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said yesterday, adding governments would need to act as the numbers rise.

Workers, especially the world's poorest, are more vulnerable than the general population to the dangers of climate extremes such as heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, and hurricanes because they are often the first exposed, or exposed for longer periods and at greater intensity.

As climate change accelerates,

governments and employers are struggling to protect employees, the ILO said in a report.

"A staggering number of workers are already being exposed to climate change-related hazards in the workplace, and these figures are only likely to get worse," the report entitled "Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate" said in its conclusions.

"As (the hazards) evolve and intensify, it will be necessary to re-evaluate existing legislation or create new regulations and guidance."

Some countries have improved heat protections for workers, such as Qatar, whose policies came under scrutiny ahead

of the 2022 soccer World Cup.

However, rules to govern other dangers like growing pesticide use for agricultural workers are less common.

"We do have some (countries) that already limit exposure to high temperatures and also limit exposure to air pollution, but we rarely have occupational exposure limits set for the other hazards," said Manal Azzi, ILO Senior Specialist on occupational safety and health.

The share of global workers exposed to the most widespread hazard, surging temperatures, has risen by around 5 percentage points over the last two decades to 70.9 percent, the report said.

DU student drowns in university swimming pool

OUR CORRESPONDENT, DU

A first-year student of Dhaka University's philosophy department died while bathing in the university swimming pool yesterday.

Soad Haque, 19, was declared dead by the doctors of the emergency department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 2:00pm.

Soad drowned in the swimming pool adjacent to the central playground of DU around 1:30pm. His classmates later took him to DMCH.

Shohag, one of the students who took Soad to the hospital, said that a large number of students were bathing in the pool in the afternoon.

They were doing laps in the pool. After a while, everyone gathered around the pool's edge, but Soad was not there.

"We realised that Soad had drowned," he said, adding that Soad was immediately taken to DMCH.

According to Soad's classmates, he knew how to swim.

Inspector Bachchu Mia, in charge of DMCH Police Outpost, said the student was brought to the hospital in an unconscious state. The doctors later declared him dead.

His body has been kept in the morgue, he said, adding that the incident is being investigated by Shahbagh Police Station.

Upazila AL president lands in jail for assaulting journo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Awami League president of Kutubdia Upazila unit in Cox's Bazar and his brother were arrested yesterday and later landed in jail on charges of assaulting a journalist.

Aurangzeb Matbar, 55, president of Kutubdia Upazila AL and his younger brother Mujahidul Islam Selim were sent to jail after they were placed before the district court on Sunday afternoon.

According to a police complaint, on Friday afternoon, Awami League leader Aurangzeb and his relatives attacked Mizanur Rahman, the Kutubdia upazila correspondent of the daily Bangladesh Pratidin and private channel Asian Television and took their belongings.

On Saturday night, the journalist filed the case in which Aurangzeb was made the main accused.

Subsequently, police arrested Aurangzeb and his brother from their residence in Nazar Ali Matbarpara area of Baraghop union at around 3:30pm, said Kutubdia Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mohammad Golam Kabir.

Dhaka rolls out the red carpet

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Hasina, reports BSS.

This is the first visit to Bangladesh by an emir of Qatar since 2005, when Emir Shaikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani had visited.

President Shahabuddin welcomed the emir with flower bouquets at the airport.

A 21-gun salute heralded the emir's arrival as he disembarked the aircraft, reports BSS.

He was also given a guard of honor while the national anthems of the two countries were played, after which the emir inspected the parade ground.

Today morning, Emir Sheikh Tamim and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will hold a bilateral meeting at the Prime Minister's Office, followed by a one-on-one meeting.

The emir will then attend an official lunch, to be hosted by President Shahabuddin at the Bangabhaban.

Recognising the friendship between Bangladesh and Qatar, a park, currently under construction, at Balurmath of Kalshi in Mirpur and a road from Mirpur ECB Chattar to

Kalsi Flyover will be named after Emir Sheikh Tamim.

The visit is considered significant given the shift in global geopolitics, the Middle East crisis following the Iran-Israel conflict over Palestine, and the eagerness of the both countries to boost trade.

On Sunday, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Qatar Emir are likely to discuss the Iran-Israel conflict.

In the recent years, Qatar has emerged as a mediator in various global crises. Bangladesh too has been vocal in stopping the Israeli attacks on the Palestinians and the genocide in Gaza, he said.

During the emir's visit, Bangladesh and Qatar will sign six agreements on the avoidance of double taxation and fiscal evasion; cooperation in legal matters; shipping; mutual investment promotion and protection; exchange of prisoners; and the formation of a joint business council.

The two countries will also sign five MoUs on manpower, port management, higher education and scientific research,

cooperation in youth and sports, and cooperation in diplomatic training.

Bangladesh expects petroleum-rich Qatar to play an important role in ensuring its energy security. Bangladesh currently imports LNG under an agreement signed last year for 1.5 million tonnes of the gas annually for 15 years.

Bangladesh may seek LNG under deferred payment during the bilateral meeting.

Currently, around 400,000 Bangladeshis work in Qatar, while the bilateral trade is over \$3.6 billion.

Hasan Mahmud said Bangladesh would seek investments in various sectors, including in renewable energy and financial sectors, port management and more, and to send more skilled manpower, export ceramics, leather products, garments and pharmaceuticals.

A foreign ministry official said Qatar is eager for port management in Chattogram and Matarbari.

"We expect the Qatari emir's visit to be a milestone in our relationship," Hasan Mahmud said.

Unfazed, AL MPs breach party directive

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with party orders, ignoring threats of punitive actions. The AL issued similar warnings ahead of local government elections before, but later had to declare general amnesty to the leaders who ignored the directives.

The AL even amended the provisions for expulsion in its charter to force the grassroots to comply with its decision. But it did not yield the desired results.

The ruling party is still hopeful that the relatives and family members of the MPs, now on the ballot for the May 8 polls, would quit the race and endorse an AL leader running as an independent. The AL is not formally fielding any candidates.

DEFIANCE

Many MPs ignored repeated calls by the party to implement its directives.

AL MP Mohammad Ali of Noakhali-6 chose his son Ashik Ali over his brother and incumbent chairman of Hatia upazila Mahub Morshed Liton.

Sources said that Ali ensured Liton did not run. Ali also fielded his wife Ayesha Ferdous who withdrew yesterday along with Jatiya Party candidate Mushfiqur Rahman.

Ashik is to be elected unopposed. Shabab Chowdhury, son of AL lawmaker for Noakhali-4 Ekramul Karim Chowdhury, kept his word that he would stay till the end in the race for Subarnachar upazila chairman.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader had called Ekramul to get his son to quit. But now Shabab, 30, with no post in AL, will be challenging Noakhali AL president and three times Subarnachar upazila chairman AHM Khairul Anam

Chowdhury, 75.

Bogura-1 AL MP Sahadara Mannan's younger brother Minhazuzzaman Liton, also Sonatala upazila AL president, is in the race for Sonatala chairman while the MP's son Sakawat Hossain Sajal is running for Sariakandi upazila chairman post.

Asibur Rahman Khan, son of AL presidium member and Madaripur-2 MP Shahjahan Khan, is running for Madaripur sadar upazila chairman. Shariful Haque, a brother-in-law of Anwarul Ashraf Khan Dilip, the AL MP for Narsingdi-2, is running for Palash upazila chairman.

A cousin and a nephew of Nilphamari-1 AL MP Aftab Uddin Sarkar are running for the Dimla upazila chairman post, while Pabna-1 MP and deputy speaker Shamsul Haque Tuku's younger brother Abdul Baten is vying for the post of Bera upazila chairman.

Chuadanga-2 MP Ali Azgar Tagar's younger brother Ali Monsur Babu is running for Damurhuda upazila chairman post, while Noor-e-Alam, younger brother of Pirojpur-1 MP and former minister Rezaul Karim, is running for Nazirpur upazila chairman.

When asked about MPs' relatives not withdrawing from the races, AL Joint General Secretary Bahauddin Nasim told The Daily Star, "Some have already quit the race... there is still time for others to leave the scene and endorse other party candidates."

"If close relatives of the MPs remain in the race till the end, time will say what steps we will take against them," he added.

ENSURING UNOPPOSED WINS
The chairman, vice-chairman, and female

vice-chairman in Chattogram's Raozan upazila are to be elected unopposed. This is the second time in a row this is going to happen.

In the 2021 union parishad polls there, members of all 14 unions in Raozan were elected unopposed.

In Madaripur's Shibchar upazila, AL general secretary of the upazila Salim Mia is set to be elected chairman unopposed. His only opponent, his wife, withdrew yesterday.

Shifiatun Haque, daughter of Ayesha Siddika, AL's women affairs secretary in the same upazila, withdrew yesterday. Siddika is set to be elected female vice-chairman unopposed.

BM Ataur Rahman (Atahar), president of Kanthalbari union AL and vice president of Bangladesh Launch Owners Association, is set to become the vice-chairman of Shibchar as his only opponent Moniruzzaman, joint general secretary of the association, quit yesterday. Chairman candidates are set to be elected uncontested in Rangunia under Chattogram, Cumilla sadar, Singra of Natore, Munshiganj sadar and Parshuram of Feni.

According to the Election Commission, 198 candidates withdrew their candidature in the first phase.

Among them, 95 candidates were for chairman posts, 79 for vice-chairman, and 24 for vice-chairman reserved for women, EC Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath told The Daily Star last night.

Now 1,588 people are in the races — 554 for chairman, 605 for vice-chairman, and 429 for vice-chairman reserved for women.

EVM's fate up in the air

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these expensive and sophisticated machines."

He said the EC, whether the current one or the previous one, should be held accountable for this.

"Have the manufacturers given any instructions for preservation of EVMs?" he asked, adding, "It is really unfortunate that none is being held accountable for the wastage of public money."

Asked about the money squandered in the EVM project, Alamgir said, "We're seeking financial support so that we can preserve the machines and save the public money."

He added that they had planned a project to buy new EVMs that also had provisions of building warehouses to preserve and maintain existing and new EVMs.

"But the project was sent back by the authorities concerned."

In August 2022, it was decided that EVMs would be used in 150 constituencies in the January 2024 polls.

EC officials, however, had said they only had enough machines to cover 70-80 constituencies and would need to purchase more to meet the target of 150.

But in January 2023, the government rejected an EC project, worth Tk 8,711 crore, which was to purchase 2 lakh new EVMs and construct 10 facilities to store them.

In mid-February that year, Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF), the lone manufacturer of the EVMs used by the EC, in a proposal said 40,000 of the machines purchased were beyond repair and the remaining 1.1 lakh can be fixed at a cost of around Tk 1,260 crore, said a top EC secretariat official.

The Planning Commission rejected the proposal, citing "the government's financial capacity" in the current global context and so, the government in April refused to give the money required to repair the 1.1 lakh machines.

Currently, 1.05 lakh machines remain out of order.

EVM Project Director Col Syed Raquibul Hasan, blamed the lack of proper maintenance and proper storage facilities for so many EVMs becoming non-functional.

He, however, reiterated that many of them are repairable.

"In many cases, monitors and timers were broken, cables got lost, and fingerprint-matching components and ballot unit buttons were damaged."

WHO TO BLAME

EC Md Alamgir said that, in his

observation, the project taken by the previous commission was faulty as it did not have provisions for preservation, maintenance and trained manpower to handle the sophisticated machines.

"They [the previous Election Commission] used the machines in only six seats in the 2018 national election. They could have piloted and bought the machines in phases instead of procuring 1.5 lakh machines at one go."

In March 2023, the EC issued a tender to rent houses in 64 districts to store the machines, but they found such houses in only 38.

EC officials said they could not rent houses in many of the districts as the owners do not want to rent their homes out to government organisations because they cannot increase rent price frequently.

Meanwhile, many structures, including warehouses, schools and colleges, rented to store EVMs lacked the proper environment to do so.

Former election commissioners Rafiqul Islam and Brig Gen (ret'd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury said they proposed vertical expansion of the EC office at the field level and the renting warehouses with proper environment in areas with no EC office, but their proposal went unheeded.

FUTURE UNCERTAIN

Multiple EC sources said the future of EVM is uncertain as the commission has no plans to chalk out new projects and has not taken any initiative to extend the current one.

Without an extension or a new project, the EC will also struggle to meet the expenses of the rented warehouses at BMTF and other places across the country.

EC officials said that around 1.03 lakh EVMs are now at the BMTF warehouse, and it demanded Tk 97 lakh per month, but the matter is yet to be settled.

On the other hand, there are 46,000 EVMs at other rented houses, educational institutions, and other places, while 1,000 are at the EC office in Agargaon.

EC sources said they spend around Tk 35 lakh per month to keep the machines at 41 districts.

EC Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath said the commission has taken the decision to write a letter to the government, seeking its advice on the future usage of the machines.

About whether the project will get an extension or a new project will be taken, EVM Project Director Raquibul said he was yet to get any such information from the commission.

Heatwaves in April

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four days each year; in 2014, six days; in 2016, two days; and in 2022-2023, three days each.

MET ISSUES ALERT FOR 72 HOURS

The Met office yesterday issued a heatwave alert for 72 hours.

Meteorologist AKM Nazmul Hoque said due to high levels of humidity, the weather feels four to five degrees hotter than it actually is.

The highest temperature this month, 42.6 C, was recorded in Chuadanga on April 21.

Nazmul said that the Met Office yesterday reissued a heatwave alert for 72 hours "so that different government agencies take necessary measures".

"We will issue the alert again as the temperatures may increase from Tuesday," he said.

There is no rainfall forecast for the country except one or two places in Sylhet, Mymensingh and Chattogram divisions.

Congress

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They have also criticised Muslims for their higher birth rates and invoked fears that India's Muslim population would overtake that of its majority Hindus.

India's estimated 200 million Muslims make up the world's third-largest Muslim population. India has a population of 1.42 billion people.

Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said Modi's "deeply objectionable" statement violated sections of the law that prohibit candidates from asking people to vote or refrain from voting for anyone on the grounds of "religion", "community" or "religious symbols".

"We have asked the Election Commission to state that this is the position in law," Singhvi told reporters, urging it to act against Modi in the same way it would against anyone else accused of similar offences.

Russia orders jail term for Meta spokesman in absentia

AFP, MOSCOW

A Russian military court yesterday sentenced in absentia Meta spokesman Andy Stone to six years behind bars for "justifying terrorism," as part of efforts to restrict Western social media platforms in the country.

The largely symbolic ruling came several months after Moscow, which has blocked Meta platforms Instagram and Facebook, put the US citizen on a wanted list.

Judge Roman Kiforenko said the sentence would begin upon Stone setting foot on Russian territory or being extradited to Russia, news agencies reported.