

## 25 elected unopposed in first phase of upazila polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 25 candidates – six for chairman posts, nine for vice chairman posts, and 10 for vice chairman posts reserved for women – have been elected unopposed in the first phase of the upazila polls.

“They were the sole candidates in the posts they were vying for, so after their candidacies were approved through a scrutiny of their nomination papers, the returning officers concerned declared them winners yesterday [Tuesday].” Election Commission Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath told The Daily Star.

Consequently, elections won't be necessary in four upazilas – Bagherhat Sadar, Munshiganj Sadar, Madaripur's Shibchar, and Feni's Parshuram – as the chairmen, vice chairmen, and female vice chairmen in these four upazilas have all been elected unopposed, he added.

Similarly, uncontested chairman candidates in Gaibandha's Saghata and Natore's Singra were also declared winners, eliminating the need for elections for these two positions, the EC official also said.

A total of 1,588 candidates will contest in the first phase of the elections to 150 upazilas. Of them, 554 will vie for chairman posts, 605 for vice chairman posts, and 429 for vice chairman posts reserved for women.

Meanwhile, the EC said that the fourth phase of the elections to 55 upazilas will be held on June 5.

Election Commission Secretary Md Jahangir Alam declared the schedule after a meeting of the commissioners at the EC office in the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

He said that the last date for submission of nomination papers in the fourth phase is May 9, scrutiny of the nomination papers will take place on May 12, and the last date for withdrawal of candidacy is May 19.

In this phase, voting will be held in two upazilas using electronic voting machines (EVMs) and ballots will be used in the remaining 53 upazilas, he further said.

The upazila elections will take place in four phases.

A total of 161 upazilas will go to polls on May 21 in the second phase, and 112 upazilas will go to polls on May 29 in the third phase.



In the absence of cooling appliances, some slum-dwellers of Barishal city's Rasulpur have opted for a natural option to stay cool amid the ongoing heatwave. Banyan trees develop accessory trunks from adjacent prop roots that allows the tree to spread outwards indefinitely, making it a perfect shade from the sun. The tree actually blocks sunlight so efficiently that no other plants can grow under it. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

### CLIMATE, WEATHER DISASTERS

## Asia hit hardest in 2023: UN

AFP, Geneva

Asia was the world's most disaster-hit region from climate and weather hazards in 2023, the United Nations chief yesterday, with floods and storms the chief cause of casualties and economic losses.

Global temperatures hit record highs last year, and the UN's weather and climate agency said Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace.

The World Meteorological Organization said the impact of heatwaves in Asia was becoming more severe, with melting glaciers threatening the region's future water security.

The WMO said Asia was warming faster than the global average, with temperatures last year nearly two degrees Celsius above the 1961 to 1990 average.

“The report's conclusions are sobering,” WMO chief Celeste Saulo said in a statement.

“Many countries in the region experienced their hottest year on record

in 2023, along with a barrage of extreme conditions, from droughts and heatwaves to floods and storms.

“Climate change exacerbated the frequency and severity of such events, profoundly impacting societies, economies, and, most importantly, human lives and the environment that we live in.”

The State of the Climate in Asia 2023 report highlighted the accelerating rate of key climate change indicators such as surface temperature, glacier retreat and sea level rise, saying they would have serious repercussions for societies, economies and ecosystems in the region.

“Asia remained the world's most disaster-hit region from weather, climate and water-related hazards in 2023,” the WMO said.

The annual mean near-surface temperature over Asia in 2023 was the second highest on record, at 0.91 degrees Celsius above the 1991-2020 average, and 1.87 C above the 1961-1990 average.

### GRAFT ALLEGATIONS

## HC asks ACC to submit report on ex-IGP Benazir after two months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to submit a progress report on the enquiry into reported allegations of corruption against former Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed, his wife and two daughters, before it after two months.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Kazi Ebadot Hossain passed the order following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Md Salah



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## Man dies after fainting on Dhaka road

He is believed to have died of heatstroke

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 56-year-old man died after falling ill and fainting while he was walking down the road in Dhaka's Gulistan area yesterday morning. He is primarily believed to have died of heatstroke due to the excessive heat, police said.

Alamgir Sikder, a resident of Kazla area in the capital's Jatrabari, worked at a printing press in Mirpur.

The incident happened around 10:30am as the man was walking down the slope of Mayor Hanif Flyover, said Shah Alam, a sub-inspector of Wari Police Station.

All of a sudden, he fell ill and fainted. Pedestrians took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead around 11:00am, he added.

Marcelina Sarker, a medical officer in the emergency department, said, “The cause of his death, such as heatstroke, can only be confirmed through an autopsy.”

Doctors warn that extremely hot weather can lead to heatstroke. When the body is exposed to high temperatures, its internal temperature rises rapidly. To cool down, the body sweats, losing both water and minerals. This can lead to an imbalance in electrolytes, causing fainting and even convulsions. In severe cases, heatstroke can damage the kidneys and lungs, and even be fatal.

## 3 boys drown in Padma

So far, 9 people have drowned in the river since April 15

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Three boys drowned yesterday afternoon while they were swimming in the Padma river in Rajshahi's Syampur area.

They were identified as Juboraj, Nuruzzaman, and Arif of Bakhrabaj Dakkhinpara area. They were aged between 13 and 14 and all of them were local madrasa students, said Akter Hamid, deputy assistant director of Rajshahi Fire Service and Civil Defence.

With the three boys, a total of nine people have drowned in the river since April 15, the day when the ongoing heatwave started sweeping Rajshahi.

Locals said the boys went missing when they were swimming near the Syampur ghat around 1:45pm.

Informed, the fire service divers reached the scene around 2:00pm.

They recovered the bodies of the children from the river around an hour later, the fire service official said.

## Trade at centre stage between Dhaka, Doha

FROM PAGE 1

Yesterday, Hasina and Al Thani had a one-to-one meeting after the two led their delegations in a bilateral meeting at the Prime Minister's Office.

Prof Delwar Hossain of the International Relations Department at Dhaka University told The Daily Star that Qatari emir's visit a year after Hasina's visit to Qatar and the signing of the new deals has given the already good bilateral relationship a stronger institutional framework.

Qatar, which has a sovereign wealth fund of \$475 billion, is keen on diversifying its trade and investments, while Bangladesh, an emerging economy, is eager to get foreign investments and diversify trade. Both the countries also have diplomatic leverage and the relationship can go a long way if officials of the countries utilise the prospects, he said.

Emir Al Thani arrived in Dhaka on Monday afternoon, 19 years after then Qatar emir Shaikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani visited Bangladesh.

The two countries celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relationship this year.

Apart from the deals on cooperation on ports, maritime transport, promotion and protection of trade and investment, and manpower employment and welfare, five memorandums of understanding were signed.

They are on avoidance of double taxation and prevention of tax evasion; cooperation in the legal field, education, higher education and scientific research; youth and sports; diplomatic training; and establishing a Bangladesh-Qatar joint business council.

The bilateral trade between the countries is more than \$3.5 billion,

with Bangladesh importing some \$2.70 billion worth of LNG, fertiliser and other petroleum products. For Bangladesh, a major stake is the near 4 lakh Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf nation.

The MoU on employment is aimed at enhancing cooperation to address Bangladeshi migrants' problems and creating opportunities for skilled manpower, an official of the expatriates' welfare ministry said.

Bangladesh also wants Qatar's investment in the energy sector, including in renewables.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Hasan Hamud said the issue of supplying LNG under deferred payment might be discussed.

The foreign ministry statement yesterday did not mention any talks on deferred payment.

A foreign ministry official said cooperation between MWANI Qatar and Chattogram Port Authority on ports demonstrates Qatar's interest in investing in port management.

The official said Bangladesh is building a deep-sea port in Matarbari and has other ports. Development of these will be crucial for the country's economy. Qatar can be a major partner in this, he added.

Talking to The Daily Star on the agreement on maritime transport cooperation, Director General Commodore Mohammad Maksud Alam of the Department of Shipping said the trade between Qatar and Bangladesh has increased and there are issues regarding seafarers' free movement, security, and the nations cooperation after any kind of mishap.

“The agreement details ways to provide legal and logistic support,” he said.

Bangladesh last year signed an

agreement with Qatar to send 1,129 members of Bangladesh's armed forces to Qatar. Bangladesh yesterday requested Qatar to implement the deal.

At the bilateral meeting, Hasina appreciated Qatar's remarkable transformation into an advanced knowledge-based multicultural society and its role in mediation and multilateral diplomacy, according to the foreign ministry statement.

The Qatar emir commended Bangladesh for becoming an emerging investment destination and expressed his keenness to explore business potentials in Bangladesh.

He recognised the role of the Bangladesh expatriate community in Qatar's development and responded positively to Hasina's request to recruit more workers, professionals, nurses, technicians, and caregivers from Bangladesh.

Hasina also urged Qatar to ease the visa procedure for Bangladeshi businesspeople.

She offered Qatari investors and businessmen the opportunity to develop tourism in Cox's Bazar and explore investment opportunities in the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Al Thani said he would ask representatives of the Qatar Investment Authority and Qatari business delegations to see the prospects for themselves.

He also requested Hasina to send business delegations to Qatar to explore possible investment opportunities in the Qatari Free Economic Zone.

An avenue, from ECB Circle to Kalshi, and a park in Mirpur were named after the emir yesterday. Al Thani and Hasina witnessed the event via live video feed.

of weak banks, indicating that government funds will be used to purchase the bad loans.

This essentially means that loan defaulters have once again been exempted by using public funds. Given the precarious state of the banking sector and public concerns, the TIB, therefore, emphasised essential reforms in the merger policy.

“These changes must be in line with global norms and experiences as well as the opinions of unbiased and renowned experts in the field.”

Until the reforms are put in place, the implementation of the decisions made in the name of mergers should remain halted, it added.

## Halt bank mergers

FROM PAGE 1

This is a clear violation of the declared policies, he said.

“How fair and reasonable is it to transfer the burden of default loans and forgeries to good banks without first assessing the assets and liabilities of the weaker ones?”

“It appears that the ongoing actions are akin to prescribing paracetamol for cancer treatment.”

On the one hand, the TIB chief said the culture of loan defaults is exacerbated by shielding those responsible for them and forgery under the guise of mergers.

On the other hand, significant attempts are underway to compel good banks to absorb weaker ones.

“This has created an atmosphere of anxiety and restlessness across the banking sector,” he said.

“It is unrealistic to believe that simply merging banks, without ensuring effective accountability-based good governance to address the basic challenges in the banking sector, will resolve the problem or safeguard the interests of clients.”

The TIB criticised the provisions of the merger policy, which permit directors of under-performing banks to return to the board of the stronger bank after a five-year break, as well as the provision for the reappointment of top executives.

“This provision rewards the perpetrators behind the banking

crisis with impunity rather than holding them accountable.”

Furthermore, the provision to maintain the secrecy of irregularities or corruption to be uncovered during the audits of under-performing banks will not only hide financial discrepancies but also hinder the process of holding individuals accountable, according to the TIB.

“Essentially, it means protection for wrongdoings. It is disheartening to witness what is happening in the name of mergers as it shows how defaulters control banks.”

As per the policy, a state-owned asset management company will acquire the non-performing loans

## Most parties shun May 8 upazila polls

FROM PAGE 1

(Zafar), Bangladesh Labour Party, Bangladesh Jatiya Dal, NDP, and a faction of Liberal Democratic Party, says it will not join the race under a “subservient” Election Commission.

Communist Party of Bangladesh and Islami Andolan Bangladesh are also boycotting, citing absence of a congenial atmosphere for holding a free, fair and credible election.

Not only the opposition parties, many partners of the Awami League-led 14-party alliance are also not joining.

Although Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, and some partners of the ruling alliance are in the race, their participation is very poor.

JP candidates are running from six to seven upazilas for chairman post. Only one chairman candidate each from AL allies Workers Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) are in the race, according to party sources.

Jatiya Party (Manju) fielded several candidates for vice-chairman and female vice-chairman posts, but not a single one for chairman post.

One hundred fifty upazilas go to polls on May 8, with 1,588 people are in the races after withdrawal of nomination. Of them, 554 are running for chairman, 605 for vice chairman, and 429 for vice chairman reserved for women, according to EC data.

Most of these candidates belong to AL.

The AL is not allowing any of its candidates to use the party's electoral symbol, reportedly to make the polls participatory.

However, with most of the 44 registered parties boycotting, the election is set to become a race between AL leaders and activists.

In the January 7 national election, only 28 parties fielded candidates.

In the May 8 local polls, Tarikat Federation, Samyabadi Dal, National Awami Party (NAP), Communist Kendra, Gonotantri Party, among others, did not field chairman candidates.

Talking to The Daily Star, representatives of some smaller parties blamed the Election Commission's decision to increase the security deposit for chairman post from Tk 10,000 to Tk 1 lakh for their unwillingness to join the race.

Asked about fielding a single chairman candidate, JSD office

secretary Shazzad Hossain said the number will go up in the later phases of the election.

Bangladesh Tariqat Federation Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandy said they did not make any decision to boycott the election, but his party has no candidate for chairman post.

JP (Manju) Secretary General Sheikh Shahidul Islam said some of their candidates will vie for chairman post in the subsequent phases of the local election.

JP Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnur said many of their aspirants are not running due to the bitter experience in the January 7 national election, especially the biased treatment of the local administration and unruly behaviour of the ruling party activists.

“But as the upazila system is the brainchild of our founder HM Ershad, we cannot boycott the election. That's why we have asked our party men to contest on their own,” he said.

Although BNP is officially boycotting the race, at least 38 former and existing leaders of the party and their relatives are running for the chairman post.

According to the BNP sources, 49 incumbent and former leaders of the party had submitted nominations. On the last day of withdrawal candidature, 11 of them quit, with 38 remaining in the race.

Elections will be held in 160 upazilas across the country in the second phase on May 21. Some 35 BNP leaders submitted nomination papers to vie for chairman post in the second phase.

Although BNP has so far expelled two leaders for joining the race, a BNP leader said they are still not clear how far the party will go in this regard.

BNP and its like-minded parties had also boycotted the last and fifth upazila polls in 2019. AL-nominated candidates were elected chairman in more than two-thirds of the upazilas in that election.

Out of the 473 upazilas, ruling party candidates have won the post of chairman in 320. Of them, 115 were elected uncontested. One hundred forty-nine chairmen won as independent candidates, according to EC data.

Among the other political parties, three members of Jatiya Party and one from Jatiya Party (JP-Monju) have been elected in the chairman post in 2019 polls, EC data show.