

'Will resist anyone trying to influence upazila polls'

Election commissioners say in Barishal, Lalmonirhat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The election commissioners yesterday said they would resist lawmakers and ministers trying to influence upcoming upazila polls in their respective localities.

Action will be taken if allegations of meddling are found to be true against anyone, they also said.

After a meeting with field level administration and election officials in Barishal, Election Commissioner Ahsan Habib Khan warned that no violence will be tolerated anywhere during the polls.

The upazila polls are slated to be held between May 8 and June 5.

"If anyone tries to influence the upazila polls, it will be resisted," he said, adding that the Election Commission is committed to hold free, fair and impartial elections.

"Polling at a centre will be stopped if a single fake vote is found casted, or any untoward incident takes place," he added.

Election Commissioner Rashida Sultana echoed him while talking at a similar programme in Lalmonirhat.

Ahsan and Rashida's comments came after field-level administration and police officials on Thursday expressed concern that lawmakers and ministers trying to influence the upazila polls in their respective localities might pose a serious challenge.

They said this at a meeting with the commission.

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PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

A fisherman casts his net in the Sylhet city's Kushi Khal, brought back to life by the recent rains. The photo was taken yesterday morning.

48-hour transport strike in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Transport owners and workers yesterday called a 48-hour strike across Chattogram from today to press home their four-point demand.

The demands include compensation for buses burnt by the students of Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (Cuet).

The decision was taken in a meeting of Greater Chattogram Public Transports' Owners and Workers Unity.

The association convener Manjur Alam Chowdhury chaired the meeting.

The strike will be enforced from 6:00am today, said Manjur Alam in a press briefing after the meeting.

Meanwhile, two Cuet students were killed and another was injured in a road accident around 3:30pm on Monday when

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CLASH WITH COPS 830 RMG workers sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Industrial Police in Narayanganj yesterday sued 830 ready-made garment workers for attacking police and vandalising vehicles, among other charges, during a clash on April 21.

The clash ensued between police and workers of Abanti Colour Tex Ltd, a garment factory of Crony Group at BSCIC in Fatullah of Narayanganj, when the workers were demonstrating for arrears.

At least 10 police personnel and 50 workers were injured in the clash, including two workers who were bullet hit.

Rafikul Islam, a sub-inspector of Industrial Police-4 of Narayanganj, filed the case with Fatullah Police Station, accusing 30 named workers and labour leaders and 800 unnamed others on charges of obstructing government work, blocking roads, attacking police and vandalising vehicles, said Nure Azam, officer-in-charge of the police station.

According to the case statement, the workers on April 21 blocked Dhaka-Munshiganj road demanding payment of arrears for March. When they were asked to leave the road, the workers, instigated by some labour leaders, attacked police, pelted brickbats, vandalised the police's water-cannon, and caused damage worth Tk 20 lakh.

Police fired 85 rounds of bullets and 13 tear shells to control the situation.

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Most Ctg markets lack fire safety

CCC, CDA and fire service keep passing the buck

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Ctg

Most of the markets and shopping malls in the port city have been marked as "highly risky" or "risky" based on different criteria including the number of staircases for entries and emergency exits, space in staircases, number of fire extinguishers present, availability of fire hydrants, and the capacity of water reservoirs.

However, the authorities concerned, including the fire service, Chattogram City Corporation and Chattogram Development Authority, are all passing the buck to evade responsibilities.

In the survey, carried out last year, the fire service said 42 markets including those in the city's business hubs Riazuddin Bazar and Chaktai-Khatunganj are at grave risk of fire.

The other markets and malls bearing fire risks include: Haque Market, Sajjan Super Market, Bakhteyar Market, Bolir Hat Market, Vera Market, Chaktai Rice Market, Khatunganj, Asadganj, Mia Khan Nagar Market, Naya Bazar Market, Failla Tali Market, Chakview Market, Teri Bazar, Andarkillah Market, Singapore Market in Halishahar and Karnaphuli Market.

Two fires broke out in the Riazuddin Bazar area on February 8 and March 16. No major damage was recorded in the incidents.

Of the total 18,500 buildings in the city, nearly 1,750, including commercial places and residential buildings, are at

high risk of fire, the survey revealed.

The fire service classifies a structure as "highly risky" or "risky" based on different criteria including the number of staircases for entries and emergency exits, space in staircases, number of fire extinguishers present, availability of fire hydrants, and the capacity of water reservoirs.

Over the past several years, fire service officials have been asking the market authorities to upgrade their fire safety

42 markets, including those in the city's business hubs Riazuddin Bazar and Chaktai-Khatunganj, are at grave risk of fire.

measures but none paid any heed to the warnings, said Dinamoni Sharma, deputy director of Chattogram Fire Service and Civil Defense Headquarters in Agrabad.

New Market, Riazuddin Bazar, Jahur Hawkers' market and its adjacent area are at high fire risk. Thousands of people come to these places every day. The CDA and CCC must launch drives against those who violated the fire safety

guidelines during construction of the buildings, he added.

Contacted, Md Abu Issa Anshary, CDA's Building Construction Committee chairman and deputy chief town planner, said, "Before approving any building design, CDA checks fire safety plans from fire service and other necessary documents from departments concerned. After ensuring the documents, we approve the building construction plan."

"I am unaware of the recent survey of the fire service as they did not communicate with us in this regard. Also, CCC is the responsible authority to check the implementation of fire safety plans in the buildings, not CDA," he added.

He, however, admitted that there has yet been any drive conducted against building owners who violated fire safety rules during construction in recent time.

Mohammed Shaheen-ul-Islam Chowdhury, superintendent engineer (civil) of CCC, said the fire service and CDA should identify the risky establishments and notify the CCC. There is no clear direction on which organisation will supervise the fire safety of buildings during construction or operation, he added.

However, CCC has recently opened a Drainage and Disaster Department to look into the issue, he added.

UPAZILA POLLS

Two AL leaders held for threatening rival candidate's agents

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Detectives yesterday arrested two local Awami League leaders in Jamalpur over allegations of threatening agents of their rival candidate in the upcoming upazila parishad elections.

The arrestees are: Saidul Hasan, education and human resource affairs secretary of Sarishabari upazila unit AL and also principal of Sujat Ali College; Khandkar Motahar Hossain Joy, former Pigna union parishad chairman and a member of the AL upazila unit.

The Detective Branch of police in Jamalpur arrested the two from Jamalpur municipality area around 12:45pm yesterday.

Md Shafiqur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Jamalpur, and Mohammad Shaniazzaman Talukdar, district election officer, confirmed this at a press briefing.

Earlier yesterday, Sakawat Hossain, upazila election officer and assistant returning officer, filed a case against them with Sarishabari Police Station.

At a meeting on April 23, Saidul and Motahar allegedly threatened to break the hands, teeth and collarbones of the agents of their opponent candidate and throw them into the Jamuna river if they would enter the polling centres during Sarishabari upazila parishad elections.

A video clip of their speeches went viral on social media, followed by stern criticism among people in the upazila.

BHASANTEK FIRE

Last injured family member passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another burnt victim from the Bhasantek house fire succumbed to injury yesterday at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, raising the death toll to six.

With 30 percent burns, Liza Akhtar, 18, died around 6:00pm, said resident surgeon Torikul Islam.

Earlier, Liza's younger brother Sujan, 9, younger sister Lamia, 7, mother Surja Banu, 30, father Liton Mia, 48, and maternal grandmother Meherunnesa, 65, died at the institute on different dates.

Sohrab Mia, brother of Liton, said the family hailed from Khagrachhari. They lived in a rented house in Bhasantek. Liza was an 11th-grader at a college in Mirpur and worked at a garment factory.

The fire broke out on the ground floor of the house in Natun Bazar Calvert Road area around 4:00am on April 12. Their neighbour Moyna Begum said early in the morning, Liton lit a mosquito coil, which led to the fire. All other family members were asleep at that time.

The family suspected gas accumulated from a leak in the cylinder caused the fire.

SUDDEN HAILSTORM IN MOULVIBAZAR

Over 100 houses destroyed



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Over a hundred houses were completely or partially destroyed in a sudden hailstorm in Kamalganj upazila of Moulvibazar early yesterday.

More than 50 families are currently living under the open sky after their homes were destroyed. The storm also uprooted many trees, while bamboo thickets, electricity poles and power cables were damaged.

Electricity supply remained snapped for more than 15 hours after the storm till it was restored at around 4:00pm yesterday.

Towabur Rahman, a local union parishad member, said, "More than 100 houses of eight villages under Patanushar union and several more in two villages under Shamshernagar union in the upazila sustained significant damages in the storm, leaving many residents homeless."

Kalam Mia, a victim, said, "My house

was blown away within minutes in the heavy hailstorm. We are now living under the sky. If we don't get any assistance, we will have to be on the streets."


Patanushar UP chairman Oli Ahmad Khan said, "Many families are in dire need of help. The UNO has been informed in this regard."

Golam Farooq Mir, deputy general manager of Kamalganj zonal office of Moulvibazar Palli Bidyut Samiti, said the storm caused extensive damage to the power transmission lines.

"Several poles were broken, while the wires were torn in many places. Work is going on to restore the electricity system," he added.

Contacted, Zainal Abedin, UNO of Kamalganj upazila, said the UP chairman has been asked to enlist the victims, who will receive support soon.

Mohammad Sadu Mia, district relief and rehabilitation officer, said they are working to prepare a list of victims of the storm.



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