

Boy killed in chemical drum explosion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Brahmanbaria*

A boy was killed and a workshop owner seriously injured after an empty drum that previously contained chemicals exploded in Ashuganj upazila of Brahmanbaria yesterday.

The incident occurred around 11:45am at Loknath Workshop in Lalpur Bazar of the upazila.

The deceased – Rayhan, 12, from Chanpur village in Raipura upazila, Narsingdi, worked at a nearby workshop in the area.

According to locals, the workshop owner, Loknath Das, was cutting an empty drum with a grinder machine when the explosion occurred. The drum had remained sealed for a long time, and flammable gas is believed to have accumulated inside it.

As the grinder was cutting through the drum, it exploded with a loud bang. At that moment, Rayhan was passing by the workshop carrying metal sheets. Shrapnel from the drum struck him in the head, leaving him critically injured.

He died on the way to Brahmanbaria General Hospital. Loknath Das was admitted to the same hospital with serious injuries.

Md Saiful Alam Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Ashuganj Police Station, said police visited the scene after receiving information. “The exact cause of the explosion is being investigated, and legal action is underway,” he added.



Nilufa Begum collects paper and other recyclables from a garbage heap in Khulna. To earn a living, she gathers old paper, cartons, plastic, and other reusable materials from dustbins, roadside dumps, and vacant lots across the city every day. She sells them to scrap shops and earns around Tk 150-200 daily. The photo was taken in the Rupsha Notun Bazar area of Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Hasnat slams

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Ahead of the February 12 election, the alliance held three public rallies yesterday in Feni, Laksham, and at Cumilla Town Hall, with Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman attending as chief guest.

Criticising the media, Hasnat said, “Dear media colleagues, it is deeply unfortunate that even after July, some media figures have not stopped acting as brokers.”

He added, “I have seen reports written by agencies published directly by DBC, Ekattor, and Somoy TV. Ownership may have changed, but their character has not. We will once again bring you before the people’s court, InshaAllah.”

He accused the media of reserving all tough questions for NCP leaders, while showering praise on a particular party.

“All the world’s questions are directed at us: ‘Where does our income come from? Where do we buy our shirts? How are our political

programmes organised?’ These questions are for us, not for a certain political party,” he said.

Turning to the administration, Hasnat said, “You do not need to serve any political party – not Jamaat, BNP, or NCP. Your accountability is to the people of Bangladesh. If you steal votes, conduct ‘night-time elections,’ or usurp the people’s mandate, you will be accountable to your own children.”

Addressing the police, he warned, “Earlier, senior officials used you to secure their own positions. Do not allow yourselves to be exploited anymore. Stand for justice and fairness. The people of Bangladesh will stand by you.”

Hasnat, however, said that the media and administration are essential to a happy, prosperous, and developed Bangladesh.

“We are not your enemies. We want your accountability to be people-oriented, not party-oriented,” he added.

Civil servants cannot push for ‘yes/no’

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people an opportunity to express their opinions on the changes that have taken place in the country since July 36. Some will vote ‘yes’, others ‘no’. This decision rests solely with the voters,” he said.

Referring to confusion in some areas, the secretary said the matter has now been clarified by the EC and urged all government officials and employees to strictly follow the directives.

For several days, government officials and machinery had been actively seeking support for a “yes” vote in the referendum on constitutional reforms outlined in the July Charter.

However, citing relevant laws, the EC on Thursday said government officials are not permitted to campaign for either “yes” or “no”, warning that such activity would constitute a punishable offence.

Meanwhile, the Chief Adviser’s Press Wing debunked claims circulating on social media that a “yes” vote would allow the interim government to continue for another six months.

“Disinformation is circulating on Facebook regarding the referendum scheduled for February 12. Multiple posts claim that if the result is ‘yes’, the Yunus government will hand over power after six months,” the press wing said in a statement posted on CA Press Wing Facts’ verified Facebook page on Thursday night.

The claim was shared along with a photo card from Independent Television quoting Prof Ali Riaz, vice chairman of the National Consensus Commission, with the headline: “After the election, members of parliament will act as a Constituent Assembly for 180 days.”

In fact, Prof Riaz had said that from the first day after being elected, parliament would perform its normal functions, including forming a government, running the state and preparing the budget.

“However, fundamental changes are needed to remove the existing constitution from the path of fascism. For this purpose, the elected members will take a separate oath and complete the reform process within 180 days,” he said.

The press wing clarified that Prof Riaz did not say the interim government would remain in power for 180 days. Rather, the responsibility would lie with the elected members of parliament.

It also cited the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, which states that if the referendum result is “yes”, parliament will

have a dual role, with elected representatives serving simultaneously as members of parliament and as members of the Constitutional Reform Council.

In other words, the statement said, the elected representatives, not the interim administration, will function as the government.

According to the order, once constitutional reform is completed within 180 working days from the start of the parliamentary session, the Constitutional Reform Council will be dissolved. From then on, parliament will cease to have a dual role and elected members will function solely as MPs.

“There is no indication in the order that the interim government would remain in power for 180 days,” the statement said, adding that it clearly refers only to the temporary dual role of parliament.

People will show ‘red card’

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where “the king’s son becomes king, and the minister’s son becomes minister.”

Shafiqur made the remarks while addressing a campaign rally as the chief guest at Feni Government Pilot High School ground yesterday.

Hinting at the BNP and incidents of political violence across the country, he said, “We are seeing hot-headed behaviour in various places. If you lose your cool in winter, what will you do in the month of Chaitra [summer]? Keep your head cool. Show some respect to the July fighters... Respect those who stood firm before bullets, risking their lives. If you can show that, there will be no room for hot-headedness.”

From the rally, Shafiqur also promised that if the Jamaat-led II party alliance comes to power, it will hold talks with India to resolve Feni’s flooding problem.

“We respect them and hope they will respect us as well. Through fruitful dialogue, we will find a peaceful solution, InshaAllah.”

Shafiqur also spoke about Abrar Fahad, a Buet student beaten to death by Chhatra League activists on October 6, 2019, for criticising several Bangladesh-India agreements, including a water-sharing understanding involving the Feni River. “He (Abrar Fahad) spoke for you and the country. That is why those who are allies and agents of hegemony could not tolerate him,” he said.

The Jamaat chief vowed to replace hereditary politics with meritocracy.

“Just because someone is born in a royal family does not mean he will become king, and being born in a minister’s family does not mean he will become

minister. Only those with merit will be selected for such responsibilities.

“We want a Bangladesh where even the child of a rickshaw-puller, through the development of his or her talent, can one day become the prime minister. That is the Bangladesh we want to build.”

Around 12:15pm, Shafiqur flew by helicopter from Feni to Noakhali, where he joined another rally organised by the II-party alliance at Zila School ground.

There, hinting at the BNP, he said, “Those in whose hands the people are not safe even before coming to power, and who are involved in extortion and other

municipality in honour of the woman who was gang-raped on the night of the 11th national parliamentary election in Subarnachar, voting for a specific electoral symbol.

Describing Jamaat-e-Islami as the most persecuted political party in recent times, Shafiqur said, “We have been harassed with cases, killed and forcibly disappeared. We will not harass anyone with false cases like this... InshaAllah, they [Jamaat activists] will not do so in the future either.”

In the afternoon, Shafiqur attended a third rally at Adarsha Samad Government High School in Lakshmipur district town.

Referring to local demands, he added, “Lakshmipur once had Asia’s largest fish breeding centre. It was destroyed through theft and plunder. We will revive it.”

Addressing a rally in Laksham, he said, “To build a fascism-free Bangladesh, people must choose those who have the courage to fight fascism. By the grace of Allah, Jamaat-e-Islami has that courage.”

On the issue of government salaries, Shafiqur said it is difficult for government officials and employees to live with dignity on their salaries.

“As a result, they are compelled to resort to corruption... We will ensure a dignified pay scale for them.”

At the day’s final rally at Cumilla Town Hall ground, the Jamaat chief pledged that, if elected, Cumilla would be upgraded to a division and an airport built in the district.

Jamaat Naye e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher and Hasnat Abdullah, NCP leader and the II-party alliance candidate for Cumilla-4, among others, also addressed the rally.

Only 78 women in polls, a third with family

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Of the 78 women candidates, 61 have been nominated by 30 political parties, while 17 are independents.

Election Commission data shows that women with family or marital ties to prominent political figures consistently fare better than those without such connections.

“The electoral process in Bangladesh remains deeply male-dominated,” said Jesmin Tuli, former additional secretary of the Election Commission and a member of the Electoral Reform Commission.

“In Bangladesh, most women leaders or members of parliament have risen through family influence. The number of women who have struggled up from the grassroots is very small. Very few female leaders have gradually built themselves up from university life through fieldwork,” she told The Daily Star.

“Our social and family structures are also responsible. Parents in middle-class families generally do not want their daughters to enter politics. Politics has not yet become safe for women; in fact, it remains unsafe,” she added.

The Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972, requires political parties to reserve at least 33 percent of committee posts for women, including at the central level. Yet almost all parties have failed to meet this obligation. In 2021, the Election Commission extended the deadline to 2030.

At least 30 parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Islami Front, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Jonotar Dal, Bangladesh

Sangskritik Mukti Jote, Bangladesh Congress, Jatiya Party (JP), Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, Bangladesh Nationalist Front and Bangladesh Jasad, have fielded only male candidates.

Asked why Jamaat did not nominate any women, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said the party follows a grassroots-based selection process. While men are guided by party instructions, women are given the freedom to decide whether to contest, considering family and personal circumstances.

“We haven’t fielded [women candidates] this time; Inshallah, we’ll do it the next time,” he said, adding that some of the other parties in the Jamaat-led alliance have nominated women.

The BNP, meanwhile, nominated 10 women. At a roundtable titled “Women Leadership in Politics: Crisis and Possible”, BNP Standing Committee Member Selima Rahman said political parties generally do not treat women seriously when it comes to nominations.

“Parties consider that women whose father or brother or husband is a politician have more chance of winning. It is true that not a single woman leader who comes from the grassroots level has been nominated by the party,” she said at the event, jointly organised by Dhaka Stream, Forum for Women’s Political Rights, and Democratic Bangladesh on January 28.

Jesmin Tuli echoed this view, noting that parties prioritise winning seats above all else.

“Women usually do not have the financial resources and muscle power. So parties prefer men. Women who

enter politics through the support of their fathers or brothers are comparatively advantaged. Their families already have workers and networks. This ready-made base increases their chances of winning and makes survival in politics easier,” she said.

FAMILY LINK

All 10 BNP women candidates have direct family or marital ties to senior party figures.

Organising Secretary Shama Obaid is contesting Faridpur-2. She is the daughter of former BNP secretary general and minister KM Obaidur Rahman.

Nayab Yusuf, joint general secretary of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal, is running in Faridpur-3. She is the daughter of former minister and BNP vice-chairman Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf.

Farzana Sharmin of Natore-1, a special assistant to BNP’s Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee, is the daughter of Fazlur Rahman, a four-time BNP MP from the constituency.

Sabira Sultana Munni, contesting Jashore-2, is the widow of former BNP MP Nazmul Islam, who was abducted in Dhaka in 2011 and later found dead.

Israt Sultana Elen Bhutto of Jhalokathi-2, who defeated Awami League heavyweight Amir Hossain Amu in 2001, is the widow of slain lawmaker Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Nadira Akhter of Madaripur-1 is the widow of Shibchar upazila BNP president Mithu Chowdhury.

Afroza Khanam Rita of Manikganj-3 is the daughter of industrialist and former minister Harunar Rashid Khan Monno.

Sansila Jabrin Priyanka

BNP-Jamaat rule

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country fell into a long-term crisis,” he said while seeking votes for Islami Andolan-nominated candidate GM Ruhul Amin in the Gazipur-1 constituency.

“Therefore, there is no reason to trust them again,” he added.

Rezaul said BNP and Jamaat are now advocating the same system against which people had fought during the July uprising.

“Voting for them would not change the fate of the people or bring

real development to the country,” he said.

Claiming that Islami Andolan Bangladesh is the only party working for Shariah and Islam, Rezaul said, “In a country with 90 percent Muslims, only we are fighting for Shariah and Islam with the hand-fan (Hatpakha) symbol. I have come to ask you to vote in favour of Shariah and Islam. Now the decision is yours. At least we will be able to say to Allah that we have delivered the message (dawah) to you.”

12 hurt in pre-polls

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Hatia Police Station officer-in-charge Md Saiful Alam said additional law enforcers had been deployed in the area amid prevailing tension, but no case had been filed yet.

In Bhola’s Lalmohan upazila, one person was injured in a clash between activists of BNP and the Bangladesh Development Party (BDP), a partner in the Jamaat-led II-party alliance, yesterday.

The clash occurred around 11:00am in the College Para area when the two groups faced off while campaigning.

BDP candidate for Bhola-3 Md Nizamul Haque alleged that BNP activists carried out the attack.

Refuting the allegation, Lalmohan upazila BNP president Shafikul Islam Babul Panchayet claimed Jamaat-Shibir activists had attacked them.

Assistant Returning Officer Md Shah Aziz confirmed that one person was injured in the clash.

No complaint was filed with police in this connection, said Oliul Islam, officer-in-charge of Lalmohan Police Station.

In Natore’s Singra upazila, at least three people were injured in a clash between supporters of Natore-3 BNP candidate Anwarul Islam Anu and independent aspirant Daudar Mahmud, also an expelled joint convener of the BNP district unit.

Witnesses said Daudar’s supporters were passing by Anu’s election campaign office in the Bihas area

around 7:00pm when the two groups confronted each other, triggering the clash.

Anu’s close aide Md Tazul Islam alleged that Daudar’s supporters were chanting provocative and offensive slogans in front of their office. He claimed their supporters only chased Daudar’s men away and denied that any physical clash took place.

Daudar Mahmud could not be reached for comment as his phone was found switched off.

Confirming the incident, Singra Police Station officer-in-charge Mohammad Abdun Nur said three people were injured, but no complaint had been filed with police yet.

[Our correspondents from Noakhali, Barishal and Pabna contributed to this report]

Persecutors

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He claimed that under BNP rule, people of all faiths lived in safety, adding that the party’s founder, the martyred President Ziaur Rahman, ensured religious freedom for all and recognised everyone living in Bangladesh as Bangladeshi, regardless of religion.

“We do not support ethnic, religious or racial divisions. We want everyone to live together as Bangladeshis,” he said.

The meeting was chaired by Chandamoy Biswas Tilok, former general secretary of the Pekua upazila Bishwas Para Puja Udjapon Parishad.

Democratic League leader Oli Ahad.

Samira Azim (Cumilla-9) entered politics after the death of her father, former MP Anwar-ul Azim.

Akhter Sultana (Mymensingh-6) is the wife of ex-BNP MP Shamsuddin Ahmed.

Hasina Khan Chowdhury (Mymensingh-9) is married to former BNP MP Khurram Khan Chowdhury.

Antara Selima Huda (Dhaka-1) is the daughter of former minister Nazmul Huda.

A LONG, UNEVEN HISTORY

According to EC records, no women were elected in the first two parliamentary polls in 1973 and 1979. Five were elected in 1986 and four in 1988.

In 1991, 40 women contested and four won. In June 1996, 30 women ran and five were elected. In 2001, 38 contested and six won. In 2008, 59 women ran and 19 were elected. In 2014, 29 contested and 18 won. In 2018, 69 women contested and 22 won. In 2024, 99 women ran and 20 were elected.

The 2014 and 2024 elections were widely criticised as one-sided, with most opposition parties boycotting the polls and allegations of dummy candidates. The 2018 election, though contested, was marred by claims of ballot stuffing, intimidation and institutional failure.

Across decades, the pattern remains unchanged: women enter politics, but rarely on their own terms – not as self-made actors, but as inheritors of political lineage, stepping into a system still guarded by men, where power is passed down like an heirloom rather than earned in the field.