

One-third polling centres in North marked as risky

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

The police administration identified 3,061 high-risk polling centres out of a total 8,105 in 72 constituencies of 16 northern districts.

The information was revealed at a divisional police conference held in Bogra Police Line Conference Room on December 17, which was presided over by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police Khan Sayed Hasan.

The conference also revealed that 2,055 polling centres were identified as partially risky while 2,989 were identified as risk free. Superintendents of police (SP) of the 16 districts were present in the conference.

The conference also informed the participants that a shortage of police personnel may jeopardise sufficient security measures at several polling centres in the constituencies of Rajshahi division. To ensure security at all the

polling centres at least 13,221 police personnel are needed while the existing strength is 7,584.

Although during the last general election the present strength of the divisional police force successfully provided security for conducting the polls, the present situation is being considered as a 'difficult one' to maintain law and order, according to some SPs who took part in the conference.

They said the present strength of the divisional police force is not sufficient for maintaining law and order at all the polling centres in the division during the upcoming general election.

They advised the authorities to deploy 5,000 more personnel of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Armed Police Battalion (APBn). DIG Khan Syed Hassan told journalist that the findings will be communicated to the authorities soon.

Hasina on polls

FROM PAGE 1 Zaker Party, a faction of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), Islami Oikya Front Bangladesh, and Tarikat Federation -- three days ahead of the deadline for filing nominations for the upcoming election.

Top leaders of the allies of 14-party coalition -- JP Chairman HM Ershad and LDP President Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury -- also addressed the rally and announced that they will also boycott and resist any election under the current schedule.

"We have formed the grand alliance to establish the people's right to universal franchise and to safeguard the democratic process as well," Hasina said urging her alliance's leaders and activists to join the ongoing movement for ensuring a free and fair election through realising their electoral demands set as preconditions for their participation in the election.

The AL chief categorically said, "Our stance is very clear --- the voter list must be updated and it will have to be displayed across the country allowing people to examine his or her name on the list before printing it. After completing the task, a new election schedule will have to be announced."

Hasina asked her alliance activists to sue election officials in their respective constituencies if the voter list is not shown on demand.

About recasting the EC, the AL chief said the EC must be reconstituted in line with the package proposal of the council of advisers. "Controversial men in the Election Commission including SM Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury must go, 345 upazila election officers recruited by the BNP-Jammated government have to be withdrawn from election duties, and the civil and police administration must be depoliticised," she demanded. "The present Election Commission made all arrangements for rigging the next election through appointing 345 partisan election officers and by creating a flawed voter list," she alleged.

Accusing President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed of designing an election in line with a blue print provided by BNP-Jamaat-led alliance, Hasina said Iajuddin assumed the office of chief adviser violating the constitution and now he is using the constitutional provision of holding an election within 90 days of dissolution of the last parliament as an excuse for rigging the polls.

"Which is more important? The people's constitutional right or a 90-day constitutional obligation?" she questioned before coming up with a reply herself, "Of course the constitutional right of the people is more important, as the people are the sovereign!"

Hasina also demanded introduction of transparent ballot boxes and voter ID cards. Referring to the statement and remarks made by the UN, European Union and donor agencies, who urged the caretaker government to create a level playing field for the election, Hasina said, "Iajuddin

failed to perform neutrally and his failure has been acknowledged universally. Iajuddin desecrated the constitution and he must go making way for a neutral person to assume the office of chief adviser." Hasina categorically demanded implementation of the package proposal finalised by the council of advisers for ending the political impasse.

She also blasted Iajuddin for sudden deployment of the armed forces. "The armed forces are the asset of our country. Their responsibilities are to protect the country's independence and sovereignty. Now the president is saying that they will take rest," Hasina said asking, "Was the situation so grave that the armed forces needed to be deployed?" "It is not their task to safe guard the thieves and corruptionists of the immediate past government," Hasina quipped.

The AL chief demanded arrests of those 'corruptionists and thieves', terming them 'enemy of the people'.

She also urged the officials of the civil administration and members of the law enforcement agencies not to assist in any move designed to hold a rigged election.

The AL chief, also a former prime minister, assured the ralliers that the wealth and money 'looted by the immediate past government's goons' will be returned to the people if her alliance is voted to power.

Senior leaders of AL, 14-party coalition, JP, IOJ, and other allied parties also spoke.

Fatwa victim

FROM PAGE 16 Mahmuda, 17, of Manirgati village in Chhatak, Sunamganj was supposed to be caned in a public after madrasa teacher Mufti Abdus Sobhan handed down the fatwa to beat her up until she bled.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Samajik Protirodh Committee, and Prothom Alo Bandhu Shava with assistance from law enforcers managed to save the girl after learning about the fatwa in newspapers.

Law enforcers arrested four people at the village in connection with provoking the fatwa. The arrestees are Manik Miah, Firoz Miah, Meraj Uddin and Shalik Miah.

Prior to the fatwa, Mahmuda's father Fabar Ullah, 80, a freedom fighter, was forced to walk around the village mosque wearing a garland of shoes. Mahmuda and Fabar filed two cases in this connection against Mufti Abdus Sobhan, Lala Miah, 35, his three associates and eight others. Lala Miah and Mufti Abdus Sobhan are absconding.

Fabar has been supporting his family by begging. His younger daughter Mahmuda had a love affair with their neighbour Lala, which led to pregnancy. Lala had pledged to marry her but he refused later on.

Following the birth of her child, which died in its infancy, the village people held a "Panchayat" (a local assembly) where Mufti Abdus Sobhan had handed down the fatwa.

Expressing their concerns, the Mahila Parishad yesterday demanded legal steps against the "fatwabaz" and his cohorts.

In a statement, signed by its President Hena Das and General Secretary Ayesha Khanam, the organisation also demanded immediate arrest of those involved with the fatwa and to ensure security of the victim's family.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Raiqul Alam, however, said the situation is under their control and they would provide the victim's family with security.

B Chy

FROM PAGE 1 correcting the voter roll and depoliticising the administration first.

"A free and fair election is not possible with biased election officials and fake names in the voter list....President Iajuddin, Khaleda and Nizami are in collusion with each other to hold an election of vote rigging, but people will never allow it," he said addressing the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine's grand rally at Paltan yesterday.

Criticising the president, also the chief adviser, for 'not creating' an atmosphere congenial for election, the former president pointed out that the government has not taken any steps to arrest the corrupt people or recover illegal firearms.

The chief adviser has failed to create any example showing his neutrality so far, Badruddoza said adding that people of the country has rejected holding of the polls under the existing system and preparations.

He also slammed the lawmakers and ministers of the immediate past four-party coalition government who, according to him, had plundered crores of taka in public wealth.

A founding member of BNP, Badruddoza left the party accusing its leadership of corruption and floated a new party, styled Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, which later merged with the LDP.

Govt borrowing

FROM PAGE 1 political instability.

A finance ministry high official, preferring anonymity, said the government will review the ADP projects and will only approve their funds if the projects are deemed important.

The finance ministry last month instructed all ministries to send all projects approved by Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) after July 1, 2006, to the planning ministry and Finance Division for review. The ministries were also asked to include all ADP projects yet to spend 10 per cent of their designated budgets.

National Board of Revenue (NBR) sources said the government borrowing has increased in the first half of this fiscal year because the government failed to increase revenue income by the targeted 21 per cent in the first four months, managing to earn only 8 per cent. In the corresponding period last year, revenue income increased by 15 per cent.

The government's borrowing troubles have been compounded by net foreign aid dropping by a staggering 81 per cent in the first three months of this fiscal year, with only \$35.19 million coming in, compared to \$179.64 million in the last fiscal year.

Planning ministry sources say the immediate past government marginalised the donor-funded projects because they were busy implementing the government funded projects due to greater opportunities for 'corruption' and to boost popularity before the upcoming elections.

Meanwhile, an increase in government spending also forced a rise in government borrowing. It was learnt, the government spent nearly 13 per cent of its annual ADP budget, mostly with local funds, within the first three months of the current fiscal.

In the same period last year, only 6 per cent of the ADP budget was spent.

4-party

FROM PAGE 1 said the alliance would try to outnumber the attendance of the rally staged by the 14-party alliance.

BNP would attempt to split the Ershad-led Jatiya Party as Rawshan Ershad was not happy with her husband's decision to join the 14-party-led platform, added the sources.

"BNP leaders are trying to convince HM Ershad's wife Rawshan Ershad to join the rally along with Jatiya Party leaders loyal to her," said a four-party leader.

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said the 14-party's demand of deferring the election date beyond 90 days as stipulated by the constitution is nothing but a plot to create a crisis in the country.

Addressing a preparatory meeting of the Dhaka City four-party alliance in Shahjahanpur area ahead of today's Paltan rally, the BNP leader said, "There is no scope to hold the election beyond the 90 days timeframe stipulated by the constitution. ...Otherwise the constitution will be violated."

He asked the 14-party alliance to test its popularity by participating in the scheduled election.

Mannan Bhuiyan also proposed a dialogue with the 14-party alliance for discussing possible amendments of the election code of conduct for ensuring a free and fair election.

The BNP Secretary General urged leaders and workers of the four-party alliance to make today's rally a success.

Dhaka city BNP president and Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka presided over the meeting while Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan M Mujahid also spoke.

Field visits end

FROM PAGE 16 enrolled in 2000, have been left out from the present list.

Ruhi Chandra Das, 28, said he and four other family members -- his mother Austra Dashi, 50, brother Dayal Chandra Das, 45, wife Shilpi, 25, and sister-in-law Parul, 38, -- were on the list of 2000, but this time their names have been deleted.

"The Election Commission staff concerned told me that we are not voter as we have no holding number. But the fact is we are residing at Rajarbagh since my birth," Ruhi said.

Ratan Peter Gomes, assistant headmaster of Avoyn Binodini High School in Rajarbagh, said names of nearly three-fourth voters in the minority-dominated area have been crossed in red ink. "Three of my colleagues working as EC staff in the area found the list in this form. So they had nothing to do," he said.

"A single page of voter list contains details of 24 voters. But except five to six names, the others are crossed in red ink," Gomes said.

He also said that locals on Sunday submitted to the assistant returning officer a list of 2,500 people who have either been dropped from the list made in 2000 or not been enrolled during the correction drive although they are now 18 or above.

Many locals at Nikunja in the capital alleged that no EC staff visited their addresses during the 12 days of voter list correction task. The Daily Star visited five houses on different lanes in the residential area and talked to the residents all of who said that no EC staff turned up at their addresses.

"As I asked an Election Commission staff why they did not visit my house, he replied that they have only visited the houses directed by local BNP leader Dollar," Mushfiqur Rahman, a resident of the area, said.

Several thousand eligible people at Nobodoy Housing Project area and Gabtoli Beribandh City Colony in the capital were also not enrolled as voters, locals told The Daily Star

over phone yesterday. Residents of Gabtoli colony where mainly class four employees of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) reside alleged that out of about 1,800 eligible people, only around 300 were included in the updated list.

The situation is even more frustrating at Nobodoy Housing Project in Adabor where, according to locals, around 4,000 eligible people were not registered as voter.

Mostafizur Raman, a resident of Rajapur in Mangalkandi under Shonagazi upazila in Feni yesterday told The Daily Star over telephone that the enumerators showed much negligence in performing their duty to go door to door for correcting the voter list in the area.

Shafiqul

FROM PAGE 16 Bangers was going on at the Babgabhaban with President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed in the chair till filing this report at 9:00pm last night.

During the briefing, Choudhury disagreed with the US Ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia A Butemis's remarks that the caretaker government has failed to act impartially sometime.

He said the matter would be discussed at the council of advisers' meeting to determine whether her comments violated the diplomatic norms.

When asked if any fresh initiative for talks with the political alliances would be taken, Choudhury said it was unnecessary since the president and chief adviser pledged to implement the remaining proposals of the package to end the crisis.

Meanwhile, commenting on the US ambassador's evaluation about the caretaker government's performance, housing and public works Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath said the interim government might be criticized for some of its activities, but not for all. He further added that it is difficult to for anyone to be cent per cent neutral.

Political crisis

FROM PAGE 1 commissioners and police superintendents were present at the poll-preparatory meeting at the chief adviser's office

The president said the political problems have been solved to a great extent and thanked his advisers for their efforts in this regard. He also welcomed the political parties for their farsightedness and wisdom.

"I believe the political parties will demonstrate more restraint, mutual respect, tolerance and compassion," the chief adviser said, expecting that it will contribute to establishing peace, discipline and stability needed for creating a pro-election environment.

He sought all-out cooperation of the political parties in ensuring free, fair, peaceful and neutral elections. At the same time, he asked the law enforcement agencies to ensure security of public life to create a peaceful election atmosphere.

"If necessary, armed forces will be deployed in aid of civil administration for the sake of fair, neutral and peaceful elections," he said.

He reminded the officials concerned that the Election

Commission would not hesitate to take stern legal actions under the Election Officials (Special Provision) Act 1991 for negligence of duty, partiality, intentional wrongdoing and failure on their part.

He urged the officials and employees of the republic to discharge their duties with maximum neutrality and objectivity rising above all fears, pressures, greed and influence.

The president hoped that the confusion over the electoral roll would be removed soon to a great extent immediately after publication of the updated list.

"I firmly hope that we'll be completely successful in handing over power to the elected government through an acceptable, free, fair and neutral election within the stipulated timeframe," he told his audience from the administration.

The president sought cooperation from all citizens, political parties and leaders, workers and supporters of the political parties in greater interest of the country.

Ershad says

FROM PAGE 1 "I am getting threats that I would be sent to jail and come out as a mere corpse," the former dictator told the grand rally of the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine at Paltan Maidan.

"But I am a soldier, I am not scared of death," said Ershad who for the first time joined a public programme of the AL-led combine.

"I've thrown off the shackles to express solidarity with the Awami League led grand alliance. I'm here today free as a bird," he said in an emphatic voice.

He said he had to get over several hurdles to get to the rally 'at this crucial juncture'.

He claimed that the JP leaders and activists have been the target of persecution since he decided to join the AL-led alliance.

Referring to the High Court's (HC) recent verdict sentencing him to two years' imprisonment, the former military ruler alleged the court has passed the order against him, giving him no chance to defend and without any hearing.

"This all was to make sure that I cannot participate in the election," he added.

He noted that his 'fault' is that he has joined the ranks of common people at this critical point and raised his voice against torture and injustice.

"Whenever I tried to speak out against unbridled corruption and price hike during four-party alliance rule, they would bring pressure, threats, and torture to bear on me," he observed.

He declared that from now on the JP will side with the AL-led combine in its movement.

He added: "A new horizon has

Mirza Khokon

FROM PAGE 16 Mirza Abbas and his family, who live in the same house, however, did not disclose the matter to police and denied the incident before the press as well as the detectives from several intelligence agencies, giving rise to mysteries as the locals have confirmed a shooting in the house.

When reporters rushed to the spot following a rumour that Khokon's wife Maksuda was shot due to a family feud at her house, Mirza Abbas assured them there that nothing of the sort has taken place adding that some one might have spread the rumour to make political gains out of it.

Meanwhile, Mirza Khokon could not be traced after the incident. He could not be reached at his house, office or over his cellphone. Family sources refused to give his whereabouts.

It has been learnt that Maksuda was admitted to Apollo Hospital in the capital as Masuda Akram, wife of Akramul Hasan, from House No 1/A, Road No 79, Gulshan-2.

However, when the reporters went to the address registered with the hospital, a guard of the house identifying himself as Delwar, informed them that no Akram lives there nor has anyone gotten injured in any shooting there. He also confirmed that no patient was taken out of the house.

Meanwhile, the Apollo Hospital's media manager Giasuddin told the press that some people admitted one Masuda there with the given address yesterday morning with bullet wounds. "She has been undergoing treatment at the surgical intensive care unit in the second floor." He, however, could not confirm if she was Mirza Khokon's wife.

Physician of the patient Omprokash Rohidia said two bullets, from a pistol, pierced the body through the abdomen leaving the patient's liver damaged. A five-member medical board has been treating her, he added.

An attendant of a patient in the hospital, meanwhile, told the reporters that he saw Mirza Abbas along with several others on the hospital premises. "He was visiting a female patient," he added.

When Abbas was asked if he had visited Apollo Hospital, he replied that he went there to visit one of his relatives, but did not give any details.

Contacted over cellphone, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Motijheel Police Station M Ainul Haq told The Daily Star in the afternoon that he has no knowledge of the matter. As this correspondent inquired as to how he can remain ignorant of such a sensational incident, a feeling of exasperation was evident in his voice. "I am busy at the rally in Paltan," he said before disconnecting abruptly.

A police source, however, said that they have been ordered "not to get involved in the matter."

7 killed

FROM PAGE 16 driver tried to give way to another vehicle.

The victims were merchants riding with the onions on the back of the truck. Five of them were killed on the spot and two more died on way to hospital.

The dead are Riaz Uddun, 35, Entaz Ali, 40, Shantu, 38, Abdul Hamid, 55, Lala Mian, 35, Rafikul Islam Rafik, 28, and Afsar Ali, 50. All were from Gasirdia village under Daulatpur upazila in Kushtia.

Kamarkhandha police rushed to the spot, recovered the bodies and sent those to Sirajganj General Hospital for autopsies.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 16 nomination seekers started on December 5.

A total of 179 nomination seekers from seven districts of Dhaka Division yesterday appeared before the parliamentary board.

Madaripur-1 constituency has been kept reserved for Ali Ahsan Mohammed Mujahid, secretary general of Jamaat, one of the components of the four-party alliance.

"If the election is not deferred, the names of the nominated candidates will be declared on Tuesday night," Nazrul Islam told newsmen.

Guantanamo

FROM PAGE 16 learn his 'true' objective for going to Pakistan, if he was a member of any banned organisation in the country and if he had any criminal records, said Sub-Inspector Masud of Airport police in the remand prayer.

Police also revealed that Mobarak went to Kabul in Afghanistan to visit his friend Rafiq, whom he met while teaching at a Karachi madrasa.

Then he went to Jalalabad in Afghanistan from where Pakistan intelligence arrested him and kept detained for 32 weeks.

The Pakistan authorities later handed him over to the US authorities, who interrogated him at different camps in Pakistan and lastly sent to the Guantanamo Bay prison, Masud said in the police report placed before the court.

Mobarak's father Abul Hashem reiterated his claim that his son is innocent. "If they [US authorities] had found the slightest clue about his militancy link, they would not have released him," he told The Daily Star.

Lack of voter list

FROM PAGE 1 Swarawsati Puja.

The DCs expressed their grievance at the daylight meeting organised by the Election Training Institute to brief and train high officials responsible for administering the election process across the country.

The officials present at the meeting noted the next election is a challenge for the civil servants because of so many problems from the start of the election process, and a greater threat to security.

The DCs said they cannot accept nominations of the candidates for not having the updated voter list as it is required to check the names of the proposer and supporter of a candidate on the list.

"We need EC directives in this regard," said Habibul Kabir Chowdhury, DC of Noakhali.

Some of the DCs also complained they have not received enough copies of the voter list of 2000.

Acting Chief Election Commissioner justice Mahfuzur Rahman said, "It is not possible to hold acceptable elections with the efforts of the EC alone, everyone's participation is needed."

He assured that a correct voter list is being prepared for holding a free and fair election.

Abdur Rashid Sarkar, EC secretary, said they have resolved all the problems they faced and are now

ready to hold free and fair polls. Inspector General of Police Khoda Baksh Chowdhury said, "The threat to security is much higher in the elections this time than in the previous ones."

"The insecurity has to be lessened by sharing more information with the media to make the public aware of the risks."

Khoda Baksh informed the meeting there will be a three-layer security support for each polling station, involving the police, Bangladesh Rifles and the army.

Information Secretary Kamaluddin Ahmed said the coming election is very important because of 'special reasons'.

Additional Establishment Secretary Abdus Sabur said, "This election has become a challenge for us. We have to face this challenge with astuteness and honesty."

He stressed sincere cooperation between the DCs and superintendents of police (SPs), and upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) and officers-in-charge (OC) of police stations for an acceptable election.

The meeting chaired by the acting CEC was also addressed by two election commissioners, cabinet secretary and home secretary, and attended by divisional commissioners, metropolitan police commissioners, deputy inspectors general of police and SPs.

14-party, allies

FROM PAGE 1 and AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury-

Zaker Party Chairman Pirjada Amir Faisal, and leaders of Tarikat Federation, an Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) faction and Islamic Front Bangladesh yesterday formally joined forces with the Sheikh Hasina-led combine at a grand rally at the city's historic Paltan Maidan.

They announced that they will work in union both for the elections as well as the movement for level playing field.

Addressing the grand rally, the AL chief said all the political parties except the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami are now united under a common platform.

Earlier in the morning, senior leaders of the AL and its allies met Hasina to endorse getting Ershad, B Chowdhury and other Islamic leaders into the fold and forge a grand electoral alliance. However, earlier on Sunday night, some of the AL allies opposed the move to have Ershad and B Chowdhury aboard a common platform.

The idea of forming a greater alliance came to the fore with the other political parties excepting the four-party alliance joined in the 14-party clamouring for Iajuddin to step down as the chief adviser. The urge for a grand alliance grew in intensity as they increasingly felt that a free and credible election is not possible with Iajuddin at the helm.

Hundreds of thousands of leaders, workers, supporters and common people thronged the Paltan Maidan. They were carrying banners, festoons, and placards, and chanting slogans against Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed. They spread over a huge area surrounding the venue.

As AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil announced that the JP Chairman Ershad was going to address the rally soon, the entire audience sprang to life.

Ershad got up to the podium at 3:34pm, apparently marking the end of dramas centring whether he would join the AL-led combine or four-party alliance.

The leader of the second largest opposition in the last parliament came to the Paltan rally after keeping himself out of sight for the last two days.

As he reached the venue, tens of thousands of workers and supporters of the AL and allies welcomed the former president with thunderous applause.

Political observers believe that the High Court verdict sentencing him to two years in jail came to resist him from joining the AL-led alliance. Immediately after the HC order, the BNP high command had initiated yet another move to bring the former dictator into their alliance but to no avail.

As a top army official Ershad made a coup in 1982 after the death of former president Ziaur Rahman and ruled the country since 1990. He was forced to resign in the face of mass upsurge in 1990 to put up and end to 15 years of autocratic rule in the country from 1975.

On release from the jail in 1997, the JP chairman had extended informal support to the then AL government. He shifted his support to the BNP in 1999 by forming the four-party coalition. But immediately before the 2001 election, he quit the alliance and bagged 14 seats in 8th the parliament.

For the last several months, he had come up with varying announcements over allying with others to contest the 2007 elections. Sometimes he would say he was going to take part in the polls on his own while sometimes he would announce that he was going to join hands with the four-party.

LDP President Badruddoza Chowdhury, another former president and the founder secretary general of the BNP, was also forced to resign as the president in the face of an 'intra-party coup' on January 2002.

He floated a political party styled Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh in May 2004.

Then out of frustration and resentment at what they said was unabated corruption by the top brass of the then ruling BNP, a number of BNP ministers and lawmakers led by Colonel (retired) Oli Ahmed joined up with B Chowdhury and formed the LDP.

N Korea spells out

FROM PAGE 16 United Nations financial sanctions on it were lifted, the source said.

Washington imposed its financial curbs more than a year ago after determining that Pyongyang was engaged in money-laundering and counterfeiting American currency. The UN levelled sanctions in October after condemning the North's nuclear test.