

'EVM not voter-friendly'

Fakhrul urges EC to use ballot papers instead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP yesterday urged the Election Commission to drop the decision of using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in the upcoming elections to Dhaka north and south city corporations.

"We think the decision to use EVMs in the elections is part of the conspiracy to permanently snatch people's voting rights," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

Fakhrul was addressing a press conference at party Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office in Dhaka.

"From a sense of responsibility... we condemn the decision of using EVMs in the election and urge the constitutional body to cancel its decision immediately, paving the way to ensure people's voting rights through ballot papers," he said.

Fakhrul claimed that people prefer to cast vote in ballot papers rather than the EVM.

"Our voters are not used to EVM and did not get training on how to use the machine," Fakhrul said.

"EVM is not a voter-friendly system," he claimed.

The BNP leader alleged that as there is no audit trail system in the EVM, voters cannot understand whether they cast vote for preferred candidates or not.

The elections to Dhaka South City Corporation and Dhaka North City Corporation will be held on January 30.

The last date for submitting nomination papers was December 31.

The EC scrutinised the nomination papers on January 2.

The last date for withdrawal of candidacy is January 9.

Candidates breaching polls code to be show-caused

Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam warns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam yesterday said they have asked returning officers to serve show-cause notices to those candidates breaching electoral code of conduct.

He also urged law enforcers and administration not to harass anyone during the election.

Rafiqul made the comments as many Election Commission officials raised eyebrows after Awami League DNCC mayoral candidate Atiqul Islam opened an election office, which was inaugurated by lawmaker Sahara Khatun.

They said according to the code of conduct, none will be allowed to carry out formal campaigning before allotment of election symbols.

Moreover, no lawmaker can take part in campaigning.

On Saturday, BNP DSCC mayoral candidate filed a written complaint with the returning officer alleging that BNP-supported candidates were being intimidated.

The same day, BNP DNCC candidate Tabitha Awal also lodged a written complaint alleging that Atiqul Islam breached electoral code of conduct.

He alleged that Atiqul took part in election campaign in Gulshan-1 using loudspeakers and setting up a stage.

"I have asked the returning officer to issue show-cause notices to aspirants who are breaching the code of conduct," Rafiqul Islam said when his attention was drawn to the issue.

He said an aspirant becomes a candidate only after allotment of a symbol.

"If anyone brings out a procession and starts campaigning, we will ask returning officers to take action as per law," he said.

When mentioned about the inauguration of an election office of Atiqul by a lawmaker, he said the EC will ask the aspirant to refrain from carrying out such activities.

Locals alleged that Atiqul opened an election office in Uttara and many AL activists joined the programme and brought out a motorcycle rally.

"We just opened an election office but we did not seek votes from there. All we did was to hold a prayer session. There is no breaching of electoral code of conduct," Atiqul said.

Asked, DNCC Returning Officer Abul Kashem said Atiqul has just opened an election camp and did not start campaigning yet.

"We will talk to you [journalists] after discussing the matter with the executive magistrate and an assistant returning officer of the city," Abul Kashem added.

"If anyone is found at fault, the Election Commission will take action as per rules," he further said.

Meanwhile, DSCC Returning Officer Abdul Baten yesterday urged candidates to remain cautious about over use of loudspeakers during electioneering as SSC exams will start from February 2.

He said examinees will be taking their last minute preparations during the time.

The returning officer also warned candidates not to begin campaigning before allotment of symbols (January 10).

43 APPEALS

Forty-three aspirants including Jatiya Party's [mayoral aspirant] GM Quamrul Islam lodged appeals with the appellate authorities against the returning officers' decision to reject their candidacy during scrutiny.

Dhaka Division Commissioner Selim Reza, who will dispose of the appeals, said they will hold the hearing on Monday and Tuesday.

On January 2, returning officers of DNCC and DSCC -- during the scrutiny -- cancelled candidacy of 45 ward councillor aspirants and GM Quamrul Islam.



NEW YEAR, SAME TRAFFIC... The first week of the new year opens with another spell of heavy traffic jam. The photo was taken from Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover in Tejgaon yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



Several cars being repaired occupying this footpath beside Shaheed Captain Mansur Ali Sarani. As a result, pedestrians are forced to walk on the road. The motor workshop has been using the footpath with no action from the authorities.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

CITY POLLS

EC okays nominations of sacked councillor, wife

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Farhana Ahmed Boishakhi is vying against her husband, sacked councillor AKM Mominul Haq Shaeed, for ward-9 councillor post in the upcoming Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) polls.

After scrutinising, Election Commission found both the candidates' nomination papers okay.

In 2015, Shaeed -- currently on the run after the drive against illegal casino business -- became councillor of the ward with Awami League's support.

But this year, president of ward-9 unit of Awami League, Mozammel Haque, received party support instead of him.

Shaeed's wife Boishakhi has also secured nomination for the councillor post, EC sources confirmed.

Boishakhi, vice president of Mahila Awami League of ward-9, submitted her nomination paper on December 31, 2019. However, this correspondent could not confirm when Shaeed had submitted his nomination and whether the controversial councillor submitted the documents in person.

If the couple do not withdraw their nomination papers by January 9, both will remain valid candidates for the election -- scheduled to be held on January 30.

On social media, followers and associates of the couple -- on their behalf -- were found seeking support from locals.

On October 17, 2019, the Local Government Division removed Shaeed from councillor post for being "absent in meetings and staying abroad without permission". After his removal, DSCC gave Sultan Miah, councillor of ward-8, the additional responsibility of Shaeed's ward.

The move came weeks after reports surfaced that Shaeed was involved in illegal casino business in the capital.

He reportedly fled the country in September after Rab launched a crackdown on illegal gambling, extortion and tender manipulation.

On November 20, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed a case against Shaeed, also proprietor of "Baishakhi Enterprise", for amassing wealth of Tk 4.5 crore beyond known source of income.

ACC officials are now probing the case.

Contacted, Mozammel said the couple could cause "inconveniences" for him in the race. "Some votes may go in their favour," said Mozammel, adding that he is hopeful of winning.

The Daily Star tried to reach the couple for comments but their phones were found switched off.



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SEXUAL HARASSMENT

HC asks foreign ministry to submit probe report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday sought a probe report from the sexual harassment prevention committee formed by the foreign ministry over the alleged sexual and mental harassment of a ministry official.

The director general of foreign ministry's research wing, who is also the head of sexual harassment prevention committee, has been asked to submit the report to the HC within 30 days.

The court also issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain why their inaction against three foreign ministry officials for mentally and sexually harassing a female official at home and abroad should not be declared illegal.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman came up with the order and rule following a writ petition filed by the female official, who worked at the ministry's research wing.

Petitioner's lawyer Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua told The Daily Star that three foreign ministry

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