

Focus on election- '91

Sylhet voters determined to see fair elections

By A Special Correspondent

SYLHET, Feb 23: The mood of peaceful co-existence among the supporters and voters of various political parties and a strong determination to see a free and fair elections held are clearly visible in Sylhet.

The mood this correspondent found on entering Sylhet was such that any candidate who may be responsible for disrupting this atmosphere would certainly lose all support. Such a positive attitude is indeed unprecedented in the history of elections in this country.

The tea garden labourers who make up the main workforce of the several tea gardens in Sylhet traditionally vote in masse for 'Nawka' no matter who the candidate may be and in this election too the trend is being followed.

A candidate who is well known in these decided to contest the election with the symbol of another party is very naively asked why had he not opted for the Nawka symbol.

Turnout of tea garden labourers on voting day is known to be very high and this factor will definitely play a decisive role in determining the results in these constituencies.

There was a strong feeling among us that voting would be much higher in 'actual' terms in this election than in previous ones.

The trend showed that the voters will go out to elect local nominated leaders rather than the 'absentee candidates' who only occasionally visit the constituencies, then too, when the elections are over.

Despite the governments strict directive to the contrary, the upazila, union parishad and parashava chairmen are playing a significantly critical role in the run up to the ensuing elections.

Many of the Chairman, Jatiya Party stalwarts, still hold key positions in the rural administrative machinery and have greatly improved the position of 'langal' (the Jatiya Party elections symbol) in the past few weeks.

It also seems that the strong anti-Jatiya Party feeling of the predominantly urban-based pro-democracy movement is absent in the Sylhet countryside.

The Jatiya Party is also trying to capitalise on the development activities it had undertaken during its eight-years rule.

The position of BNP in the constituency comprising Sylhet town seemed to be good. The candidate Khondoker



SYLHET: Election campaigning at a constituency in the district.

Photo: Farhad Mahmood

Malek is a renowned and popular personality in the area and was successful in most of the previous elections in which he contested. He was the Vice-President of the then Pakistan Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industries and is still a respected personality among the Chamber members in Bangladesh. It is expected that he may pass this election with a large majority.

The Islami Oikya Jote appears to be playing an important role in the greater Sylhet area. The Islamic religious currents have taken an unusual turn here. The followers of Jamiat, Ulema Islami Party which forms a part of Islamic Oikya Jote are comprised primarily of the devotees of Moulana Hussain Ahmed Madani of the Deoband School of believers who incidentally had a large following in the Sylhet area.

The constituencies in certain areas like Jaintia, in spite of having a conservative Muslim dominated electorate, may not elect candidates from Jamaat-e-Islami. The recent political alignments have brought them closer in alliance with the block comprising Awami League, BNP traditionally Muslim conservative areas like Jaintia. The position of Jamaat-e-Islami is also relatively poor in those areas.

The BNP candidate in the Jaintia area is Nazim Kamran Chowdhury who was the General Secretary of DUCSU in

1969 and who, along with To-fac Ahmed, had led the movement spearheaded by the Chhatra Shangram Parishad against the then Ayub government.

Kamran Chowdhury is now facing tough competition from another young and dynamic candidate from Awami League, Imran Ahmed, who is the owner of Sripur Tea Estate. His father Captain Rashid was killed during the liberation movement.

Imran is drawing large crowds in his meetings and is very fast gaining supporters as a candidate opposed to Kamran Chowdhury who is known to be based in Dhaka. Kamran Chowdhury passed the last election with a large margin.

Another candidate who has amassed substantial popular backing in that area is the JSD (Rab) nominee, Moniruddin Master. The Awami League workers seemed to particularly support of the fast gaining support of this candidate whose biggest advantage is being a well known local politician.

Our journey next took us to the Sunamganj District. We visited two constituencies there in both of which the Awami League candidates appeared to be leading in popularity. The first was Sunamganj-2 where veteran 8-party politician, Suranjit Sen Gupta was facing tough contest with a relatively unknown candidate under Jatiya Party banner, Dabirul Islam. In trying to regain his traditional popular support

from this area, Sen Gupta was handicapped to an extent by the fact that there was long hill in his visits to his constituency while he was exhaustively involved with parliamentary politics in Dhaka. During this period Dabirul Islam's involvement in the development activities in that area had been rather intense.

In the Sunamganj-3 constituency the election campaign of the other veteran Awami Leagueer Abdus Samad Azad, appeared to be progressing well. His main contenders in this constituency are Anisul Bari Chowdhury of BNP, Shamsul Islam of Jamiat Ulema Party and Faruk Rashid Chowdhury of Jatiya Party all of whom seemed to be putting up a tough fight for Abdus Samad Azad.

In the Moulvi Bazar-2 Constituency we visited the village Baramchal where candidates from two different parties, N. M. Younus of Muslim League and Sultan Mohammed Monsur of Awami League were addressing a gathering beside the local mosque after the Jumma prayer. It was an informal gathering and there was no arrangements for separate dais. It was truly impressive to see two politicians with different ideologies and parties address the people from the same platform. When the local Chairman spoke to the people he spoke for many of us. 'We are gathered to see from two leaders two different paths to reach the same goal.'

'Existing ties with India not satisfactory'

Acting Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh Abbas Ali Khan said in Dhaka on Saturday that the parties that had been in power in the past had no principle and ideology, reports BSS.

He said, those parties, rather, initiated a typical family-oriented and individualistic politics which made the people's life miserable.

He was addressing a party election meeting at Mirpur Gochhattar projecting the Jamaat nominee from Mirpur constituency, Abdul Gaffar.

Khan said if voted to power Jamaat would establish a social system based on universal Islamic ideology instead of any individualist and family politics.

The Jamaat leader said that the existing relationship between Bangladesh and India was not satisfactory. 'If voted to power Jamaat will build up better good neighbourly relationship with India on the basis of mutual respect.'

Khan said those who killed democracy and enunciated black laws denying the fundamental rights of the people in the past, were now shedding crocodile tears to present democracy to the nation. He called upon the people to remain alert against those identified quarters.

Presided over by the local Jamaat leader Abdul Latif, the meeting was also addressed, among others, by Jamaat nominee Abdul Gaffar and Mohanagar General Secretary ATS Azharul Islam.

The Midnight File

Israel tightens West Bank curfew

TEL AVIV, Feb 23: The Israeli army tightened the curfew imposed on January 17 on the Occupied Territories today as the deadline neared for Iraq to quit Kuwait. Soldiers shot dead fifteen-year-old Palestinian Ezzat Bader Lehrsah during clashes in Yatta village on the West Bank on Friday. Palestinian sources said today, reports AFP.

Iraq mentions Kuwait thrice

NICOSIA, Feb 23: An Iraqi government statement on Friday mentioned Kuwait at least three times, an unusual occurrence for what Baghdad has called its "19th province." Use of the country's name could signal that the Iraqis are resigned to giving up the Gulf emirate one way or another. The statement by the Revolutionary Command Council, headed by Saddam Hussein, was in response to President George Bush's ultimatum to start withdrawing troops from Kuwait by 8 p.m. Baghdad time (1700 GMT) on Saturday, reports AP.

Living in Iraqi death troops

KARACHI, Feb 23: More than 100 Pakistani workmen returned from Iraq on Friday after living through a month of allied bombing which one said turned daily life into a death trap. Mohammed Hanif, a manager at a tyre project in the holy city Majaf, told reporters Iraq faced critical food shortages but he did not know if anyone had died of starvation. He described life in Iraq as 'living in death traps', reports Reuter.

11 killed in Leningrad hotel fire

MOSCOW, Feb 23: A fire swept through a tourist hotel in Leningrad on Saturday killing at least 11 people, including three foreigners and three firefighters. Soviet television showed dramatic footage of flames shooting from the top-floor windows of the nine-story Leningrad Hotel and the body of a woman who jumped to her death in an attempt to escape the flames, reports AP.

Coffin coverage barred

WASHINGTON, Feb 23: A major US civil rights organisation sued the Defence Department on Friday for barring the press and public from Dover Air Force Base, where coffins containing US military casualties from the Gulf war will be brought. The lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union claimed that closing the base to the news media and the public, announced by the Pentagon the day after the war erupted on January 17, violates the US Constitution's free speech guarantees, reports Reuter.

Iraq yields to US terms

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latest military communique made no mention of US President George Bush's ultimatum. The radio instead appealed to Iraq's front-line to 'strike where it hurts' and send Allied forces tumbling into a crater of death.

'Strike and the whole of Iraq and the Muslim faithful will be on your side,' it said. 'Your families are waiting for you to return victorious... you are defending your families and homeland.'

As the hours to the deadline ticked away, US military sources said Saddam's troops sat tight in desert bunkers and trenches.

Baghdad radio broadcast two hours before the expiry of a US ultimatum to start withdrawing Iraqi troops from Kuwait that President Saddam Hussein had chaired a meeting of the Iraqi leadership.

It said the meeting of the ruling Baath Party and Revolutionary Command Council considered the political situation and current developments in the region.

Earlier, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev warned Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz today that the Gulf war was entering its final phase and Baghdad should weigh the consequences.

'He had last words of advice to weigh everything and to consider what this last phase of war could bring', chief Presidential spokesman Vitaly Ignatenko told a news-briefing.

He said the advice was delivered by Gorbachev just before Aziz left Moscow for Baghdad today.

However, the Soviet Union appealed Saturday to leaders of the Allied forces arrayed

against Iraq for a last-minute solution to avoid a tragic ground war.

The White House earlier dismissed as meaningless Iraq's acceptance of a revised Soviet plan aimed at averting a Gulf ground war.

In a three-paragraph statement, the White House said Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz's acceptance of the latest Soviet peace plan was, without effect.

White House officials said concern that Iraq might salvage much of its one-million strong army was one reason for dismissing the Soviet plan.

'It would please us to see that army get up and go now... leaving its weapons in the desert,' a Pentagon official said.

Bush was also anxious to prevent Saddam portraying himself as a moral victor against the 28-nation Allied war machine. 'If his army... the vaunted Republican Guard and everybody else... is streaming north, for example, without their equipment it's pretty hard to look like a winner,' a senior administration official said.

The US Defence Department reported no sign of movement on the ground.

Preparation

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ballot papers and other stationery to returning officers and assistant returning officers.

The commission has also distributed copies of a manual of election laws and rules, and the code of conduct to returning officers, assistant returning officers and officials of law enforcing agencies to help them take speedy action against violators.

The Home Ministry in a circular issued recently has instructed district administrations to take into custody suspected trouble mongers well in time. By the same circular the ministry also outlined its plan for the use of force to maintain law and order.

About 30 thousand army-men, 8 thousand Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel and armed police will be posted in upazilas to work as mobile striking force to assist the regular forces to maintain peace and discipline. In five off-shore upazilas of Manpara, Sandwip, Kutubdia, Moheshkhali and Hatiya navy personnel will be deployed to work as striking force.

Each police station will have an armed police platoon commander, one assistant platoon commander (Ansar) and 10 members of Ansar.

The Home Ministry is expected to start the operation of an election monitoring cell from tomorrow (Monday) to receive information about election related violent incidents from all over the country.

An Election Commission source said, the stationery sent to returning officers and assistant returning officers include: About one lakh cubic centimeters (CC) of nonerasable ink at the rate of one cc per polling booth and an extra cc per polling station), 72,600 official seals (at the rate of one per booth), 96,800 voters' seals, 72 thousand stamp pads and about one lakh ball-point pens for presiding and polling officers.

He assured that the government would do its best to ascertain the facts and seek all ways to help the members of the bereaved families.

'From the very beginning of the crisis, Bangladesh was deeply concerned for the well-being of our nationals in Kuwait and Iraq and under took sustained efforts in protecting their interests through repatriation and recall', he added.

Govt to publish Wage Board decision soon

Leaders of the BPUJ, DUJ, newspapers press workers federation, and newspapers employees federation Saturday met the Information Secretary and held discussion on matters relating to Wage Board Award, a PID handout said, reports BSS.

It was informed that Government had decided to publish the decisions of the Wage Board soon, it added.

Plea to remain alert against conspiracy

By Staff Correspondent

Liberty Forum urged the people to remain alert against conspiracy by the autocratic quarters and their supporters to foil election.

In a press release, the forum urged the interim government to remain firm for the last moment to hold a free and fair election.

It asked the political parties to maintain code of conduct and called upon the voters to reach timely at the polling booth to cast their vote for nationalist forces.

The 23 signatories to the press release include Justice Abdur Rahman Chowdhury, Dr Innas Ali, Dr M A Naser, Dr M Ershadul Bari, Dr Hamiduddin Khan, M Haider Chowdhury, Gias Kamal Chowdhury, Reazuddin Ahmed, Amanullah Kabir, Mozammel Huq and Sayed Zafar.

Two withdraw candidature

Amjad Hussain of Muslim League and Saiful Islam Mantu of Bangladesh Janata Dal have withdrawn their candidature from Dhaka-5 Gulshan-Cantonment constituency in the Jatiya Sangsad elections on February 27 in favour of BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia, a BNP press release said in Dhaka on Saturday night, reports BSS.

US conditions

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3. Within the first 48 hours of withdrawal, Iraq must remove all its forces from Kuwait City and allow for the prompt return of the legitimate government of Kuwait.

4. Iraq must withdraw from all prepared defences along the Saudi-Kuwaiti and Saudi-Iraq borders, from Bubiyan and Warbah islands, and from Kuwait's Rumaila oil field.

5. Within the one week specified, Iraq must return all its forces to their positions of August 1 in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 660.

6. In cooperation with the International Red Cross, Iraq must release all prisoners of war and 'third-country civilians' and return the remains of dead servicemen. This action must begin immediately with the start of the withdrawal and be completed in 48 hours.

7. Iraq must remove all explosives or booby traps, including those on Kuwaiti oil installations, and designate Iraqi military liaison officers to work with Kuwaiti and other coalition forces on the withdrawal's operational details.

8. Iraq must cease combat air force, aircraft flights over Iraq and Kuwait, except for transport aircraft carrying troops out of Kuwait, and allow coalition aircraft exclusive control over and use of all Kuwaiti air space.

9. Iraq must cease all destructive actions against Kuwait citizens and property, and release all Kuwaiti detainees.

10. The United States and its coalition partners will not attack retreating Iraqi forces, and will exercise restraint so long as withdrawal proceeds in accordance with the above guidelines and there are not attacks on other countries.

11. Any breach of these terms will bring an 'instant and sharp response' from coalition forces.

New Soviet plan

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3)The troop withdrawal will be completed within 21 days including a pull out from Kuwait City within the first four days.

4) Once the withdrawal has been completed, all UN Security Council resolutions will no longer be valid because the reasons for them will have been removed.

5) All prisoners of war will be freed and repatriated within three days after a ceasefire and the end of military operations; and 6) Control and monitoring of the ceasefire and withdrawal of troops will be carried out by observers or peace-keeping forces as determined by the Security Council.

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Khaleda

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had killed democracy by banning all political parties and took away Press freedom.

She said it was for BNP government that Awami League could participate in the elections as Shaheed President Zia-ur Rahman allowed the party to do politics.

Amik cheers Begum Zia declared Chittagong as her own city. She said if elected to power her party would make Chittagong the commercial capital.

Presided over by BNP City President Abdullah Al-Noman the meeting was addressed, by Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed, Begum Jahanara, Zahuruddin Khan, Advocate Mir Nasiruddin, Amir Khasru Mahmud and Begum Rosy Kabir.

UNB adds, on her way from Feni, the BNP Chairperson also addressed a series of public meetings and wayside gatherings at Muhurigonj, Mitreshari and Sitakundu.

Hasina

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the Constitution since these were brought in to legalise the illegal grabbing of power.

Sheikh Hasina refuted the charges that the country's sovereignty and independence would be at stake if Awami League was voted to power and said "those who brought the long-cherished independence at the cost of huge bloods can never sell it at any cost."

She alleged that some persons who had collaborated with the Pakistani forces during the Liberation War were very active and contesting the elections. She called upon the people to keep vigilance against them and reject them through ballots.

True democracy near at hand

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President of an insurance company said he is very optimistic about the election results.

He said he had toured many districts during the last two days. He found the people very alert and they are not expected to vote for a wrong person.

Begum Hosneara Begum, a senior teacher of Anwara Begum Muslim High School and College expressed identical views.

She says that the elections must be fair as the people now feel free to choose judiciously the candidates of their choice.

She says that if security is enforced at the polling booths chances of disturbance would decrease.

No party is going to gain absolute majority in the parliament and the forming of a government may be difficult, she said.

Monzur Morshed, and industrialist, says chances for fair elections are 80 per cent. He said level of education is very low in our country and the people face difficulty in choosing the right persons.

Morshed says no party will gain absolute majority and a coalition government may take over. He however expressed his anxiety that there will be widespread violence and in order to prevent these incidents, government should take appropriate measures well in advance, he added.

Asaduzzaman, a banker told The Star there is a danger of manipulation of the election results when a particular party sees it is losing the election battle. The people and the parties must show maximum restraint and shun violence with a view to ensuring fair elections. This is a rare occasion for the whole nation to choose the competent persons to the parliament.

Nurul Karim Nasim, Executive Officer of the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh, is quite hopeful of a free and fair elections. He said hopes and aspirations of the common

people must be fulfilled by the elected government.

The voters should be politically conscious and the candidates must be well educated and socially groomed to be the voters. He, however, said 60 per cent of the votes cast will be fair but he did not rule out the possibility of rigging. He said law enforcing agencies must be deployed at the polling stations.

H. R. Reza Kamal, a freedom fighter and an employee of a government organisation said the elections will hopefully be free and fair. The government is neutral and is expected to protect sanctity of the polling booths. He said the country's economy is in a mess and there is little chance to salvage it. Whichever party comes to power, will find it difficult to sustain the financial disasters which are confronting the nation. And if the elected government fails, things will be as bad as ever again, he opined.

Abdul Mazid, a rickshaw-puller told The Daily Star the election issue is less important to him as he is busy day and night earning his bread. But this year's election is something special and will encourage him to go to vote for his candidate. He said his fate may not change after the new Government is elected but he nourishes a dream that good days are ahead and that he will face no problem in leading a better life.

Sharif Azaal Hossain, senior Vice-President of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, an industrialist said government steps for a free and fair election appears to be sound. But motivation of the major political parties about a uniform system of transition to democracy is still questionable. He said fair democratic norms must be given a due role to play. Political parties should unite to uphold the commitments they made earlier during their struggle for a democratic government, he added.

Coup in Thailand

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Law imposed and the 1978 Constitution abolished.

It said they had taken over because of corruption by the government, its attempt "to destroy" the military as an institution, and an alleged attempt to "distort" a recently opened investigation into attempts to assassinate a previous Prime Minister and army chief in 1982.

"We, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the police, have taken over power in the country since 11:30 a.m (0430 GMT) today and we are in control of everything," Sunthorn, 59, said over the seized television stations. He was shown sitting at a table with several other military men in uniform.

In Bangkok, armoured personnel carriers and other military vehicles carrying about 20 soldiers arrived at the government-run Channel 9 television station at 12:40 p.m.

(0540 GMT), and soldiers ordered broadcasts stopped, witnesses said.

The soldiers, armed with machine guns and M-16 rifles, wore blue scarves to identify themselves as a group, the witnesses said.

Other troops appeared in front of the government's Radio Thailand building, which also houses the official Public Relations Department. Reporters at the department said they saw three military trucks and armed troops stationed outside.

The scheduled 12:30 p.m (0530 GMT) news broadcast on Radio Thailand was replaced by music without explanation.

Most of the city appeared normal Saturday, when many government offices are closed but most people work. Streets were jammed with traffic and shoppers crowded downtown shopping districts as usual.