

Election fever grips Rajshahi

From Asiuzzaman

RAJSHAHI, Jan 13: An election fever gripped this northern city with the candidates putting their full force to draw the attention of the voters for the January 30 mayoral election.

The century-old city of a half million people is now replete with banners, posters and wall writings in favour of seven mayor candidates and 257 commissioner candidates for 30 wards.

Everyday, a series of processions parade the city's main thoroughfares as well as the suburban small lanes while high-volume loud speakers are blaring slogans or special announcements of a public meeting or so throughout the day.

Hardly any space is left for pasting a poster on the walls but the die-hard workers of respective candidates are still searching spaces for posterizing at dead of night.

Besides these activities, the candidates are wooing the voters at their doorsteps which they consider the only effective way of campaigning. The mayoral candidates are following a comprehensive itinerary to cover the 30 wards of 1.52 lakh voters.

A number of former and incumbent ministers and MPs joined the campaign for their respective party candidates.

State Minister for Land Kabir Hossain, State Minister for Establishment Aminul Huq, Azizur Rahman MP and other party leaders are participating in the campaigning for the ruling party candidate Mizanur Rahman Minu who has just resigned from the mayoralty ahead of the polls. He got the symbol 'Fish'. LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukder and Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda recently visited Rajshahi to inaugurate two separate development projects which local politicians termed as part of the election cam-

paign. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is likely to visit the city on January 23 and address a public meeting in support of Minu.

None of the prominent central leaders from the Awami League and the Jamaat-e-Islami so far visited the city in support of their candidates Abdul Matin Khan and Siddique Hussain respectively.

Matin of the Awami League won the symbol 'Wheel' while Hussain of the Jamaat-e-Islami got the symbol 'Watch'.

Former vice-president Moudud Ahmed and former minister Shah Moazzem Hossain last month visited Rajshahi to campaign for the Jatiya party candidate Durul Huda who got the symbol 'Umbrella'. A number of former ministers and state ministers are staying here for campaigning in favour of Huda. JP central leaders, including acting chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, will shortly come here to round off the campaign.

The JSD (Inu) and Workers Party-backed candidate Siddique Rahman (Bicycle), BNP dissident independent candidate Enamul Huq (Bullock Cart) and JP (Nationalist) candidate Selim Sarder (Lock) are also continuing their campaigns with the help of their local supporters.

The candidates are promising massive developments and increase of civic amenities if they are given the mandate in the election.

The promises include establishment of water treatment plants for the city dwellers, a full-fledged TV centre, auto-traffic signal system, children's park and tourist resorts on the bank of the river Padma and resuming publication of the Dainik Barta. Facilities for health and education and social services would also be increased, the candidates promise.

Both sides also agreed to strengthen relations at ground level on the two sides of the borders.

Refusing Opposition allegations that there had been no development under the present government, Begum Zia said more than 2000 miles and factories had been set up during the last three years.

"We have to give maximum stress on education," she said and listed a number of education development programmes taken up by the government.

Saying that the people were, and are, in favour of the 'sheaf of paddy', the BNP's election symbol, Begum Zia called upon all to strengthen her party for carrying forward the uplift programmes.

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