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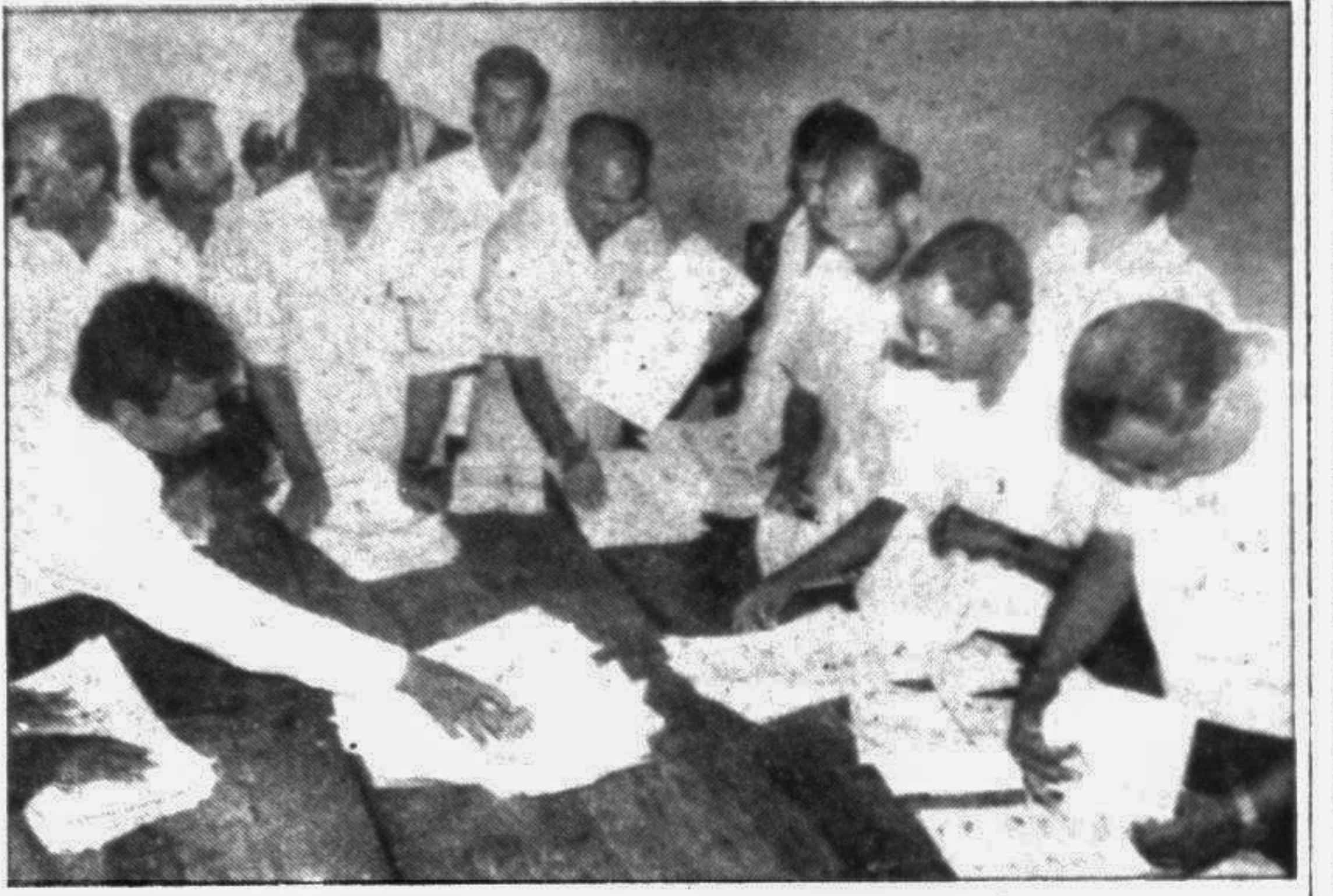
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The World On Time



Counting of votes at Segunbagicha School polling centre in the city yesterday

— Star photo

I never saw such polls

From page 1

The three-member team from The Daily Star while visiting a number of polling centres in Gazipur and Narasingdi districts, found that polling was progressing in a completely free and fair manner and the turnout of voters was quite high.

Women voters of various age groups were also seen waiting in long queues at the polling centres.

Shefali Akhter Shibli, a housewife in her twenties, talking to these correspondents while waiting in a queue, said, "No matter how long it takes, I will cast my vote."

Shibli, who hails from Dakkhin Shalma, Gazipur, further said all four female members of her joint family were casting their votes this time.

Out of 1590 votes at Rajbari High School polling centre in Gazipur, 1050 were cast by 12 noon, said Md Zahurul Islam, Presiding Officer of the centre.

At Phoolkali Kinder Garten centre near Joypur intersection, Shahnai Begum, Assistant Presiding Officer, said she was impressed at the way voters were exercising their franchise peacefully with great enthusiasm.

A poll's observer group of The Population Council was also visiting the centre at the same time. Ms Nancy of the group told The Daily Star, "Very orderly the polling is advancing."

Md Kawser, a representative of Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) said, "Everybody is satisfied at the way things are moving."

The Presiding Officer (PO) of Chandanbari Pilot Girls' High School centre at Monohordi in Narisingdi said that for all this enthusiasm and festivity, the Election Commission, the media and the parties in the electoral race deserved thanks.

Enthusiasm among the voters was so much that at many centres they started forming queues even an hour before casting of votes began at eight in the morning.

These correspondents reached Kauriapa Government

Khaleda

From page 1

The Election Commission to open more polling centres and booths, but the EC did not do it causing suffering to women voters.

Begum Zia alleged that many female voters returned home without casting their votes due to inadequate number of polling booths for women in every centre. The women voters are the worst sufferers of the inadequate arrangements.

Talking to newsmen, the former Prime Minister expressed her confidence that the people would vote her party to power again. "People must elect my party ... We'll win and must win if the election is free and fair."

After casting her ballot at 11:50 am, the BNP chairperson visited 10 polling centres in the city to see the voting.

The centres she visited are Mirpur Bangla School, Dharmundi Government Boys' High School, Surjitala Primary School in Surjitala, Silverleaf Preparatory School in Wari, Shaheed Zia Girls' School and College in Demra, Khilgaon Model College, Bangladesh Institute of Glass Ceramic in Tejgaon, Tejgaon Community Centre High School, Staff Welfare High School and Government Model High School.

EC officials in a jeep followed Khaleda Zia to every centre.

A group of Awami League activists staged demonstration chanting slogans against the BNP leader when she visited the Staff Welfare High School centre in Tejgaon. They also protested the entry of her car into the polling centre.

Great enthusiasm in city

From Page 1

Although polling was by and large peaceful, at least 10 people were injured when some unidentified people hurled bombs near a polling centre at Islambagh in the old part of the city. Another person was manhandled allegedly for false voting.

At least 17 people were picked up from different areas of the city for their alleged involvement in false voting, police said.

Some unidentified people hurled home-made bombs from the roof of a house at the vehicle of Haji Selim, Awami League candidate from Dhaka-8 constituency. Haji Selim was, however, not in the vehicle, witnesses said.

The explosion left at least 10 people injured. Of the injured, mostly activists of the AL and its student front Chhatra League, six were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), hospital sources said.

Polling was held at 907 centres in the eight constituencies in the city.

During the day-long visit to polling centres in different constituencies of the city, voters were seen patiently waiting in long queues to cast their votes. Some female voters at the Udayan School centre on

the Dhaka University campus complained at 10 am that they were in the queue for about two hours.

Turnout of women voters also seemed quite high this time.

Polling officials, personnel of the law enforcing and voters in general at a number of polling stations in various city constituencies expressed their satisfaction at the arrangements for the elections.

Sheikh Hasina started for the polling centre from her Dharmundi residence together with her daughter Saima Wazed at 10:35 am and left the centre at around 11:30 am.

While replying to various queries of newsmen Sheikh Hasina expressed her optimism over the outcome of the polls results. "I depend on almighty Allah for the outcome," she said. She also expressed her anxiety and concern saying that the President is a BNP man while his son is also contesting the polls on BNP ticket. Conspiracy is going on to manipulate and rig the poll, she added.

Sheikh Hasina said that complaints had already come from various areas of the city including Kotwali, Sutrapur and Sabujbagh that the minority voters were being threatened not to go to the polling centres and in other ways obstacles were being created. Besides information was received from different areas including Mirpur that ballot papers were taken away.

Meanwhile, central leaders of different political parties, candidates and local and foreign poll observers were seen visiting various polling centres during the day. Mobile courts were also seen in different constituencies.

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From the DAILYSTAR

AL wins 87 seats

From page 1

Primary School centre at Narisingdi Sadar at 4 pm. At 4:10 pm, ballot boxes were opened and counting began in the room of the Presiding Officer (PO) in presence of polling agents of all the contesting candidates.

When approached, all the polling agents said that none of them had any complaint and the voting was held in a very peaceful manner. The PO said 2,671 were cast.

Khaleda

From page 1

The Daily Star correspondents from across the country reported that there were long queues of enthusiastic voters in front of the polling centres even before polling began at 8 am. The turnout of female voters was also quite high and almost comparable to the male voters' turnout. Although EC figures were not available, initial estimates showed that the turnout is likely to have crossed 55 per cent as was recorded in the 1991 elections.

An initial report from the EC showed that the highest turnout recorded was 90 per cent and the lowest was 62.88 per cent at the polling centres this time.

The results of not even a single polling centre in at least 23 constituencies were announced while that of only one each in 49 constituencies were announced till 4:15 am today.

Asked about the matter, an official of the EC said that they would announce these results after compilation. He, however, declined to give the reason behind this.

A total of 5 crore 67 lakh 16 thousand and 935 voters were registered for exercising their franchise in yesterday's polls. This figure is about 55 lakh less than that of the 1991 elections.

A total of 2,574 candidates including nominees of 81 political parties and 281 independent candidates participated in the elections.

The major parties in the fray with candidates in all the 300 seats are the BNP led by former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, the Awami League and the BNP.

Besides, Kibria said in Manikdi Senior Alia Madrasah, the principal of the madrasah took away the ballot boxes at his own residence. Polls rigging was also reported from Banani Biddya Niketon, Motijheel Government High School, Sonali Bank Staff College centre and other parts of the city. Kibria claimed.

After casting her ballot at 11:50 am, the BNP chairperson visited 10 polling centres in the city to see the voting.

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A group of Awami League activists staged demonstration chanting slogans against the BNP leader when she visited the Staff Welfare High School centre in Tejgaon. They also protested the entry of her car into the polling centre.

Hasina

From page 1

voters and waited till her turn came.

When newsmen asked why she had taken the trouble of standing in the long queue despite having special arrangement for her as VVIP voter, Sheikh Hasina said, "I am always with the people — all voters are alike and have equal rights and privileges. Why should I avail myself of the special treatment."

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Meanwhile, central leaders of different political parties, candidates and local and foreign poll observers were seen visiting various polling centres during the day. Mobile courts were also seen in different constituencies.

When asked about her feeling immediately after coming out from the polling booth, Sheikh Hasina said, "I am very much happy to have the opportunity to hold such an election after the farcical polls of February 15.

Voters want new ties

From Page 1
we would like to pose at this early stage of the new parliament is, will these two leaders co-operate with one another and give the country a chance to solve its huge economic and social problems?

The lesson of the Fifth parliament was that no one party, with however large a majority it forms, the government, can run the affairs of the country all by itself. There will have to be co-operation between the government and the opposition, both inside and outside the parliament. The lack of such a co-operation cost us enormously during the last five years.

The time to give the nation a new start is now, at the beginning of our new democratic journey. We would like to suggest that the first act of the majority seat winner in this election should be to extend a hand of cooperation to the winners of second and third highest number of seats. Even at the risk of being personally snubbed, the winner should personally establish direct contact with the runner up, so to speak, and extend an open invitation for co-operation. There should not be any feeling that one has won, and the other has lost. The only losers are those who did not think that we could hold free and peaceful elections. The way we should think, and that is the only way to think in democracy, is that one party got more seats in the parliament than the other, and that the party which got more seats

needs the co-operation of those which got less seats.

At the risk of sounding naive we insist that Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina must seriously re-think about relations between their two parties and between themselves. We have paid too big a price for personalising a relationship which should be fundamentally political, as it normally is between heads of giant political parties.

If the electorate gives the highest number of seats to these two parties it only means that people want these two parties to co-operate and not be at each other's throat. Our voters want both these parties to be running the affairs of the State within some sort of broad understanding. Since the idea of a coalition between these two leading parties is perhaps too much even to broach, (but we do so nevertheless) the possibility of their working together within some sort of broad consensus on economic and social programmes should not be impossible to conceive.

The bottom line is that neither BNP nor AL singularly or in coalition with a third party will be able to give us a stable government and peaceful political climate. It is only collaboration between AL and BNP which can give us the sustained stability and peace which we need for economic development and to attract investment, both domestic and foreign. This is the message of our voters to Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. We hope that they do not allow the walls of their ego and the negative feelings of a bitter campaign to prevent this message from entering their hearts.

AL briefing

From page 1
headquarters Leaders of the two major parties — the Awami League and the BNP — within two and four hours respectively of the closing of polls, alleged rigging blaming each other.

The Daily Star correspondents from across the country reported that there were long queues of enthusiastic voters in front of the polling centres even before polling began at 8 am. The turnout of female voters was also quite high and almost comparable to the male voters' turnout. Although EC figures were not available, initial estimates showed that the turnout is likely to have crossed 55 per cent as was recorded in the 1991 elections.

CEC satisfied

From page 1
votes. If the people can be inspired, nothing is impossible."

A large number of female voters turned up this year which is very significant, he mentioned. Turn out of female voters was more because their security was ensured. Abu Hena said adding, "I did not see any violence or show of muscle power anywhere."

This correspondent, while accompanying the CEC during his visit to some polling centres in the city also saw enthusiasm among the people in casting votes.

Abu Hena was asked about the allegation by BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia that ballot papers in some centres in Mirpur area in the city did not contain symbol of her party.

The CEC said, "I was told by the EC Secretary that she had made a telephone call and alleged that ballot papers in some centres in Mirpur did not contain any symbol of her party.

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