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Voters behave, not the politicians

There have been apprehensions of widespread violence on the election day. But the voters in the Pabna-2 constituency decided not to shrink away from exercising their democratic rights. The 90-year-old man did not stay indoors, these women didn't either.

—Star photo by Amran Hossain

BNP rejects vote, demands repolling, calls hartal on Sunday

By Staff Correspondent

BNP has rejected the Pabna-2 by-election results, demanded re-polling and called a country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal on Sunday protesting the "farfai" polls.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, addressing a hurriedly called press conference at the party's central office in the city last night, also announced there would be country-wide demonstration today and torch processions on Saturday. The Seven-Party Alliance has taken up the three-day programme, he added.

"We will not accept the election and its results even if we win because it was completely a farfai one," Bhuiyan said as early results had showed BNP candidate was trailing.

The ruling Awami League has snatched BNP's victory through farfai polls and BNP cannot accept it.

"There was an unwritten curfew in the entire constituency and majority of the people did not cast their votes due to intimidation of terrorists of the ruling party," Bhuiyan alleged.

The BNP leader urged the Election Commission to immediately cancel the polls and arrange re-election in the constituency to make "elections credible" in the country.

"People will lose their confidence in the EC if it accepts this type of farfai election."

He called upon all "patriotic, democratic and progressive political parties" to unite and launch a vigorous street protest against the government for the cause of democracy and future elections.

Bhuiyan said this "farfai" election again proved that no election under the Awami League government can be free and fair. The government snatched BNP's victory in the past by-elections and did it again yesterday.

He said BNP central leaders, including Moudud Ahmed, M Shamsul Islam, Abdul Mannan and Hiris Chowdhury, who stayed at the EC office since early morning lodged a written complaint at 2:13 pm about 23 polling centres. But the EC did not take any effective measures, he alleged.

Bhuiyan said there was no voting at 11 centres out of the 23 in four unions under Sujannagar thana. "AL terrorists captured the centres and cast false votes."

The BNP secretary general alleged that the AL activists captured 13 polling centres

early in the morning and completed casting of 60 per cent votes by 10 am. Besides, results of a large number of centres clearly showed that BNP got 40 to 50 votes in a centre while AL bagged 1000-plus votes.

"BNP is a very popular party and has a mass support across the country. A party like BNP cannot get 40 or 50 votes in a centre," he asserted.

Moudud Ahmed, who led the BNP to EC, told the press conference that result of a centre which came at the EC first showed that BNP candidate got 41 votes while Awami League nominee bagged 1090 votes.

"This result clearly proved that voters could not cast their votes and Awami League cast false votes through capturing the centre."

MK Anwar said the government "nakedly used" officials, employees and the state machinery to influence the election.

Earlier, the BNP team met with the Chief Election Commissioner and demanded re-election in the constituency.

In Pabna, the BNP supporters brought out a procession chanting slogans in favour of the hartal call rejecting the polls.

The announcements came from BNP leader Fazlur Rahman Patal at a press briefing at the Pabna residence of BNP legislator Rafiqul Islam Bakul at 8:30 pm when results of the polls were being compiled at the returning officers' chamber.

"We reject today's by-elections and its results, as it was a great farce," said Fazlur Rahman Patal MP, who was the co-ordinator of the elections on behalf of BNP candidate Selim Reza Habib.

Echoing Patal, Selim Reza Habib said: "It was all farce. I reject the polls, its results and demand repolling in the entire constituency."

While briefing newsmen, the BNP leaders said that the supporters of the ruling party activists have obstructed the opposition voters to enter the polling stations.

Replying to a query, the BNP candidate said that none of his supporters was arrested during the election time.

When asked whether he would stick to the announcement of rejecting the polling results if it eventually go in his favour, Selim said: "The question of my winning does not arise in this farfai polls."

Ruling party retains Pabna-2

A K Khandaker 80,762; A K M Selim Reza 60,716

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League candidate former air vice marshal A K Khandaker has won the Pabna-2 seat of the Jatiya Sangsad.

Khandaker, who was the first air force chief of independent Bangladesh and second-in-command in the nation's Liberation War, emerged winner by a whopping margin of over 20,000 votes in the polling marked by a turnout of 75.30 per cent.

Khandaker polled 80,762 votes while his nearest rival BNP candidate A K M Selim Reza Habib received 60,716 votes, according to unofficial results from all 81 centres received from the Election Commission at 12.19 am.

The JP candidate, Sajjad Hussain Bachchu, received a measly 389 votes while Sadek Mohammad Krishak of Krishak-Sramik Mukti Andolon netted a mere 233 votes. Both lost their deposits.

EC officials said a total of 1,42,100 votes were cast out of a total enlisted 188,703 voters of whom 96,165 are male and 92,538 females.

The number of valid votes were 1,42,100 while the number of cancelled ballots was 1,334.

With the victory of Khandaker, the ruling Awami League retained the parliamentary seat which fell vacant after the

death of Ahmed Tafazzuddin on June 28 last.

The crucial parliamentary byelection to the Pabna-2 seat took place amid mounting tension and unprecedented security measures by the authorities.

In 1996 general elections, Khandaker, a minister under General Ershad, contested as a Awami League nominee for another Pabna seat but lost to the BNP candidate by a margin of 10,000 votes.

In 1996, BNP candidate Selim Reza was defeated by Tafazzuddin by some 1500 votes in Pabna-2.



Political parties failed to behave, says CEC but polling was by and large peaceful

By Staff Correspondent

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), Mohammad Abu Hena, has termed the Pabna-2 by-polls "by and large peaceful" but said he was not happy at the behaviour of the political parties.

"The polling centres remained absolutely peaceful, although there were some stray incidents outside the centres," the CEC told reporters on his return to the capital from the Pabna constituency.

"But I'm not happy. I could have been so had I found consistency in their (the contesting parties) words and deeds. I could have only been happy seeing them practising democracy sincerely," he said, adding the general fears of widespread violence was proven unfounded.

"The Election Commission (EC) took all possible steps to make the by-polls free, fair, peaceful and transparent. But unfortunately, our efforts did not gain momentum as much as it was supposed to due to lack of sincerity by all concerned," he said. "It could have happened with the practice of tolerance and restraint (by the politicians)."

However, the CEC did find some improvements in the behaviour of the political parties and said he was optimistic of more.

Narrating his experiences during the day-long visit to eight polling stations, Abu Hena told the newsmen at his EC office that he did not find any irregularities nor did he find any substance in the allegations of malpractice he received on the spot.

"The eight centres I visited were among the most vulnerable ones. During my visit, BNP leaders complained that their polling agents were not allowed to perform their duties and that the voters were obstructed at places. But they failed to substantiate their allegations," he noted.

Referring to his exchanges with the election officials, agents, observers, electoral inquiry committee members and journalists, the CEC said none reported any vote rigging.

He also informed of receiving a written complaint on irregularities at 11 polling centres just before he flew back to Dhaka. "This will be disposed of before the official result is announced," he said. The BNP candidate and other leaders of the party were with the CEC during his visit, he said adding he found only one leader of the ruling Awami League.

To another question, he said the EC would take action against the deputy commissioner of Pabna, who was earlier appointed returning officer, and some other officials involved in conducting the by-polls.

Stray incidents mark prestige polls

From Shehab Ahmed, Nurul Kabir and Ranesh Maitra

PABNA, Dec 10: The much trumpeted by-election for Pabna-2 seat of the Jatiya Sangsad which brought the otherwise sleepy thanas of Sujannagar and Bera into national limelight was held without major violence today, despite the clash of the titans of Bangladesh politics.

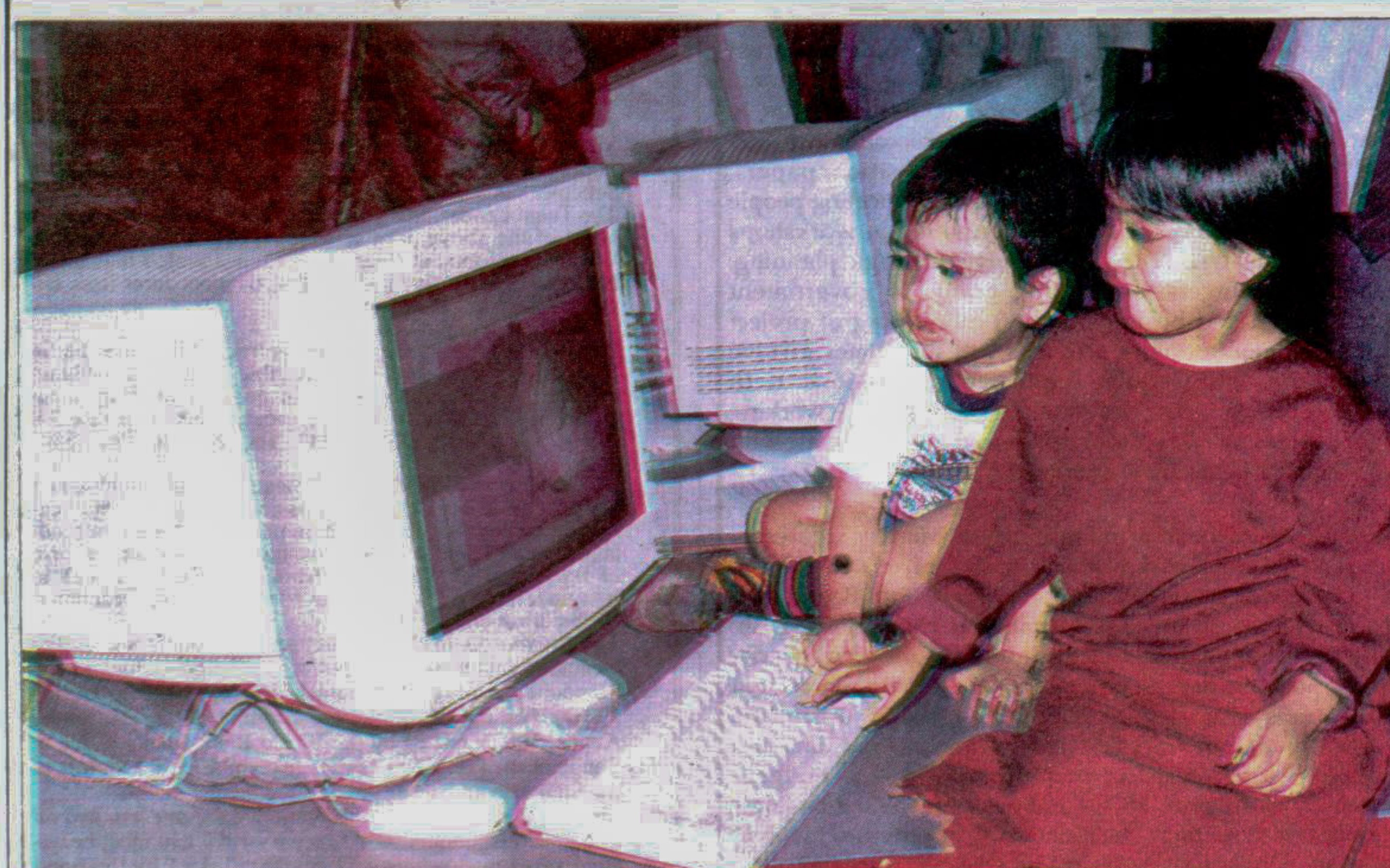
Despite the tension generated from the boisterous electioneering of the past weeks where the governing Awami League and main opposition Bangladesh Nationalists Party stalwarts campaigned for their candidates the voting was generally peaceful. Sporadic incidents left at least a dozen people

injured when rivals chased each other to keep voters away from polling centres in at least half a dozen centres, but the law keepers who threw a massive security blanket came under accusation from the main opposition of not intervening, a charge denied by the administration.

At Ahmedpur centre, a finance ministry official and a major from the Army were accused by BNP of working for the ruling party. The official was blamed for inciting AL supporters to chase the opponents away.

Even a polling agent, Abdur

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Future Fantastic

With awe written all over their faces, a little boy and a girl have their eyes glued to the monitor of a computer on the inaugural day of the five-day BCS trade show at the IDB Bhaban in the capital's Agargaon yesterday. The graphics on the screen beckons them to the realm of a fantastic future. On the first day of the show, young children along with their parents came to the show to see for themselves what the next century has on offer for them.

—Star Photo by Sheikh Enamul Huq.

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