

## A conducive atmosphere prevails in Ctg

ABDULLAH-AL MAHMUD, Chittagong

DISCIPLINED electioneering and voters' appreciable democratic outlook in electing their representatives in the parliament seem to have created an atmosphere congenial and conducive to holding free and fair polls in the port city.

To strengthen the hope of the candidates and voters strong security measures have also been taken to maintain the law and order during the polling here.

Clear battle lines are being drawn between the candidates of major two parties - Awami League and BNP - contesting in each of the three city seats (Ctg-8, 9 & 10) in Chittagong. The candidates have already started intensified electoral campaign. But unlike previous occasions, the electioneering this time has so far been kept mostly within the door-to-door campaigning what the general people also greatly appreciate.

Absence of frequent meetings, rallies or processions blocking the city streets is also a matter of relief to many. People wish, it were continued as it would discourage use of muscle power and flow of money as well hampering the real reflection of people's verdict in the polls.

For the present pleasant style of electioneering people in the port city thank the six candidates of major two parties of three city seats who all are regarded as 'gentleman candidates'.

Of these candidates, immediate past minister MA Mannan who is also the City AL president, Dr. Afsarul Amin and SM Abul Kalam are contesting with AL ticket from Ctg-9, 8 and 10 constituencies, respectively. Joint secretary general of BNP Abdulah Al Noman who is also a former minister, Vice-chairman of BNP M Morshed Khan and Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury of BNP are contesting with 4-party alliance ticket from Ctg-9, 10 and 8 constituencies, respectively.

Besides, it is also a common observation in the port city that the prevailing fair trend of electioneering would not have been possible if the listed and notorious terrorists had not been made inactive. People are also relieved to see no incident of pre-poll violence in the city

of over 12 lakh voters since the caretaker government took over.

Talking to different classes of people it was revealed that they hardly believe in 'bullying' or 'big talks' on the stage, rather expect the candidates to come to them to tell what commitments they have for the development of the locality and betterment of the local people.

"Such commitments in the door-to-door campaign would create a sense of accountability among them (candidates)," people say. "We have seen both the parties (Awami League and BNP) in power and their governance in the past ten years and let us elect our representatives in the parliament judging their commitments and sincerity for the locality and local people," they further added.

While talking to different types of voters it was further revealed that terrorism, toll extortion, land grabbing, acute water crisis and corruptions in the local administrations related with development of the city and providing the public amenities were considered to be the prime problems in the port city. People strongly expect specific commitments on addressing these problems from the candidates.

To ensure free and fair poll and maintain law and order the authorities concerned have made massive preparations. Of the 424 polling centres of the three seats in the city, 66 have been identified as 'most vulnerable', 348 as 'vulnerable' and the rest 10 as 'risky' ones.

Sources said, on the polling day 76 teams of uniformed and white-clothes police, 36 teams of army and eight teams of paramilitary BDR would be patrolling the city as reserve force. Twenty areas of the city have been identified as violence-prone to be taken extra care of with additional security measures.

Inside each polling centre security arrangements would be made with 21 to 25 personnel of police, BDR and Ansar. In each vulnerable centre armed security forces will remain alert taking position in bunkers while army would stay 400 yards off the polling centre to assist the police and BDR in maintaining law and order.



Army deployed in Narayanganj to help conduct free, fair polls.

## Khaleque maintains mum on 'politics of opportunism'

INTERVIEW BY MONJUR MAHMUD

**B** NP candidate from Dhaka-1 constituency S A Khaleque has said if elected, his first task would be to free Mirpur and Pallabi areas from the clutches of terrorists and extortionists.

"Different parts of Mirpur and Pallabi (which comprise his constituency) have been turned into haven for terrorists and extortionists over the past five years. Freeing the areas from their criminal activities tops my election pledges," Khaleque said while talking to The Daily Star at his residence at Kalyanpur recently.

He was elected to parliament from the same constituency in 1979 on BNP ticket, in 1986 and 1988 as Jatiya Party candidate and in the February 1996 election as BNP nominee.

Khaleque claimed that he had played the main role in developing today's 'modern' Mirpur which was a rural area earlier. "I had taken steps for supply of gas, electricity and water, setting up sewerage networks and construction of roads in underdeveloped Mirpur and Pallabi areas."

He said that he did not seek nomination from 'his party' this time. After conducting a survey, 'his party' has nominated him as its candidate. Besides, he agreed to be BNP candidate for the seat following pressure from the people of Mirpur.

"I believe that people of Mirpur like me. They elected me MP four times and I think this time also they would vote for me," he said. He hoped that he would win against his main opponent Kamal Ahmed Majumder of Awami League with a margin of around 50 thousand votes.

"Former prime minister Sheikh Hasina had asked me to join Awami League when she was in power and offered to make me a minister, but I did not agree," Khaleque claimed.

Asked whether he would support any move by his party to boycott parliament sessions in future if he is elected and his party is in the opposition, he said he would follow the decision of his party high command.

About his plan for the next five years, if elected, Khaleque said he does not want to make any commitment now because of the electoral code of conduct.

When asked if he believes in 'politics of opportunism' as he has changed his political identity several times, he evaded a direct reply and said that 'bad people' we're trying to tarnish his image.



S A Khaleque (left) on people-to-people contact in Mirpur.



Saber Hossain Chowdhury on people-to-people contact in Meradia.



AL campaign in old Dhaka.

## Party candidates to face formidable rebels in Rajshahi

ABDUL WADOOD, Rajshahi

**T**HOUGH Chapainawabganj district is a stronghold of the four-party alliance (FPA), the results of elections in the three seats of the district have become 'uncertain' for the rebel candidates of BNP and Jamaat, observers say.

In Chapainawabganj-2 constituency, Syed Monzoor Hossain of BNP has got the FPA nomination. Khurshid Alam Bachchu of BNP has also become a candidate having support from a portion of BNP. Rebel Jamaat candidate withdrew from the race at the directives of the party.

BNP candidate Monzoor won in this seat in 1991 with 51,272 votes against the nearest contestant of AL who got 39,033 votes. Jamaat candidate got 37,967 votes. In 1996, Hossain of BNP again won the seat and got 77,673 votes. His nearest contestant Abdul Khaleque Biswas of AL got 57,358 votes and Mia Obaidullah of Jamaat got 33,356 votes.

Hossain has built up a good relation with Jamaat here through united movement of FPA against AL during the last five years. He is reportedly backing Jamaat rebel candidate in the others two seats to ensure Jamaat's support in his favour.

There is no rebel candidate of BNP in Chapainawabganj-1 but a faction of BNP has extended its support to Prof. Nazrul Islam, the rebel candidate of Jamaat, sources said.

Shahjahan Mia of BNP won in this seat in 1991 with 65,560 votes against his nearest contestant Prof. Nazrul Islam of Jamaat who got 62,945 votes. AL candidate received 16,930 votes. Mia again captured the seat in 1996 and got 93,119 votes. Jamaat candidate Islam was again the nearest contestant with 74,144 votes. AL candidate got 29,568 votes.

Prof. Islam has become a candidate and local Jamaat has stood firmly in his favour ignoring the directives of the party high command. A smaller faction of BNP is also supporting him, sources said.

In the elections of 1991 and 1996, BNP got 44,380 and 77,929 votes, Jamaat received 54,304 and 47,048



BNP campaign in Kachua, Chandpur.

## Twenty-six vie for four seats in Kushtia

MA AREFIN, KUSHTIA

**A** total of 26 candidates are set to contest in the October 1 general elections in the district in four constituencies. According to sources, a total of 38 candidates who submitted nomination papers on party tickets or as independent candidates have withdrawn their candidature, leaving 26 contenders for the four parliamentary seats. Earlier, Returning Officer of Kushtia district allocated election symbols to the

finally selected candidates for parliamentary polls, formally kicking off a three week electioneering.

According to sources, the symbols were given after the returning officer prepared the final list of candidates in four seats. A total of 26 candidates remained in the race after 12 withdrawals. In the case of independent candidates, when there was more than one claimant for one symbol, the returning officer as per Election Commission directive, first tried to solve the matter through discussion,

or failing that, he resorted to lottery. The returning officer of Kushtia allocated "Boat" for Awami League, "Sheaf of Paddy" for BNP and "Scales" for Jamaat-e-Islami. Other parties and their symbols include CPB (Sickle), JSD (Torch), Workers' Party (Hammer), Gano Forum (Rising Sun), Jatiya Party (E) (Plough), Jatiya Party (M) (Bicycle), BSD Mahbub (Rickshaw), Ganotantri Party (Pigeon) and Jaker Party (Rose).

## Int'l tension dampens domestic tempo

ZAGLUL A CHOWDHURY, BSS

**T**HE sudden eruption of an international crisis centring the massive terrorism in the United States and subsequent shift of the tension at Bangladesh's neighbourhood have to some extent dampened the usual enthusiasm for the run-up to October 1 general elections.

As the electioneering and people's interest in the forthcoming polls were reaching the crescendo less than two weeks ahead of the balloting, the flare-up of a developing conflict in not for a neighbourhood stemming from terrorist attacks on the landmark sites in the United States has changed the scenario to an extent.

The cataclysmic proportion of devastation sent shock waves across the world and drew widespread condemnation but growing tension as a corollary to the occurrence leading the world towards an alarming situation is hogging headlines of the newspapers in this country, as elsewhere.

However, this situation notwithstanding, there is no dearth of electioneering as political parties and those contesting the polls have great stakes in the voting. As the polls are drawing nearer, major players of the political spectrum are acquiring more punches in their wordy duels against the rivals while political clashes and killings are also happening.

Two main political leaders are sparing no efforts to drum up support for their respective parties or alliances while the activists have fanned out in the far-flung areas. The two leaders, both of whom are former prime ministers, are demonstrating remarkable stamina as they are addressing scores of public meetings and rallies every day, at times even at midnight or small hours of the day. Leaders of the relatively smaller parties, too, are not lagging behind in the campaign. Their withdrawal of candidature and efforts to quell the rebellion of the recalcitrant are now matter of the past. The country both urban and rural areas is bristling with poll-activities.

Still, one cannot lose sight of the fact that there has been marked qualitative change in the interest of the general people about the elections ever since the crisis broke out in the US and Washington's desire to respond to the terrorism is growing stronger. Not surprisingly, people of Bangladesh have turned their eyes on the global scene and in the process domestic affairs have become a matter of a bit lesser interest. "This was unexpected for our country which is gripped with an election fever, but I cannot turn a Nelson's eye to international developments of colossal magnitude," said a conscious citizen.