

# 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 think 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 Abdullah Al Noman who is also a former minister, Vice-chairman of BNP M Morshed Khan and Amir Khasru Mahmood 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.



PHOTO: STAR

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

## Violence grips Chandpur

RAZIUR RAHMAN, back from Kachua, Chandpur

INCIDENTS of violence have greatly affected election atmosphere in Chandpur-1 constituency (Kachua upazila). Local people said the constituency did not experience such pre-poll violence in the past.

Though five candidates are contesting in the October 1 general election, the main competition is likely to be confined between former lawmaker A N M Ehsanul Haq Milon of BNP and former state minister for planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir of Awami League (AL).

While visiting different areas of Kachua, this correspondent saw people expressing fear that violence may increase in degree till the election, affecting turnout of voters at the polling centres. However, they expect a tough competition between the candidates of AL and BNP.

Supporters of the BNP candidate and those of the AL nominee blamed each other for incidents of violence. BNP activists said there was no such violence or use of

firearms in the area before the 1996 election. It started when Dr Alamgir began his election campaign this time. On the other hand, AL supporters said the BNP candidate is responsible for the present situation. They alleged that BNP activists fired shots on the vehicle of Dr Alamgir on Friday night.

According to local police, attacks on BNP processions going to join the election rally of party chief Khaleda Zia on Friday, allegedly by AL activists, has resulted in the present situation. At least two BNP activists were injured when AL activists fired on their rivals in Akania area at about 7:30 pm on the day.

Local AL enforced a hartal in the area on Saturday following attack on the vehicle of Alamgir amid stray clashes between supporters of the rival candidates at different places in the constituency. Police said they have been investigating the incidents.

Rezaul Karim, an ASP at Kachua thana, while talking with this correspondent, denied presence of armed men in Kachua. He, however, said, "We have got such complaints on a few occasions, but our investigation could not find

anything in support of the complaint."

In the 1996 election, Milon won getting 34,240 votes. His nearest rival Mesbahuddin Khan, elder brother of Alamgir, got 31,214 votes and the Jamaat candidate about 9,000 votes.

There were allegations that BNP supporters were harassing minority community voters, who number nearly 20,000 in the constituency. On the other hand, BNP activists alleged that they could not conduct election campaign in Gulbahar area (Alamgir hails from the area) and adjoining areas due to violent resistance from supporters of the AL candidate.

While visiting those areas, this correspondent saw no poster of the BNP candidate. A large number of posters of the AL candidate and a small number of posters of JP (E) nominee Shafiullah Shafi were seen.

The constituency comprising 12 unions and 243 villages with more than two lakh voters is going to have 71 polling centres in the coming election. Local administration has so far identified 30 of the proposed centres as vulnerable.



PHOTO: STAR

BNP campaign in Kachua, Chandpur.

## Twenty-six vie for four seats in Kushtia

M A 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).

# Khaleque maintains mum on 'politics of opportunism'

INTERVIEW BY MONJUR MAHMUD

BNP 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 believe 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.



PHOTO: STAR

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



PHOTO: STAR

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

## Int'l tension dampens domestic tempo

ZAGLUL A CHOWDHURY, BSS

THE 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 physical 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 major 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.