

Asia Foundation

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single meeting till yesterday while law and order deteriorated in the last couple of days.

Asked why the EC could meet on three consecutive days since the decision was taken, EC spokesman Kairuzzaman Chowdhury refused to say anything.

"I will not take any question from newsmen," said Chowdhury who is Additional Secretary of the EC Secretariat. Briefing newsmen he said, "I was authorised to speak only what I have said."

The Asia Foundation will distribute the accreditation cards as it decides, some EC official noted. In such a situation, they feared, those might not be distributed among the right people. According to the EC guidelines, Returning Officers (ROs) are to distribute the cards among eligible observers who are not politically biased.

The Asia Foundation has formed an election monitoring observers' group comprising 29 NGOs, to whom it channelled over Tk 50 crore to observe the election. These NGOs are Association for Community Development (Rajshahi), Alo (Kustia), Association for Social Welfare Media and Activities (Dhaka), Action on Disability and Development (Dhaka), Baste Shekha (Jessore), Bangladesh Human Right's Commission (Dhaka), Bangladesh Labour Research Foundation (Dhaka), Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (Dhaka), Bangladesh Nari Progati Shanga, Brotee, Bangladesh Manabaddhikar Samanaya a Parishad, Coast Trust, Democracy Watch, Khan Foundation, Liberty Movement, Mass Line Media Centre, National Election Observation Council, Naripokkha, Odhikar, Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service, RUDISOF, Rupantar

(Khulna), Service Civil International Bangladesh, Shariatpur Development Society, Social Network, Society for Asian Democracy, Society for Environment and Human Development, Society for Health and Care and the Wave.

Despite allegations of political affiliation of some observer groups, the EC permitted 15 NGOs on request from Canadian High Commissioner in Dhaka David Preston. Of the 15 NGOs, 10 are going for polls monitoring for the first time this time.

In a letter, Preston requested Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed to allow the observer groups. EC's newly appointed Public Relations Officer Mahbubul Alam, in reply to the letter, confirmed that his (Preston's) request was accepted.

"It has been decided to allow all the organisations mentioned in the attachment of your letter to observe the coming parliamentary election. Of the 15 organisations in your list, eleven do not seem to have contacted us before. Names of the rest five FEMA, Democracy Watch, Khan Foundation, Mass Line Media Center and the Odhikar-- are already included in the list of organisations who observed '91 and '96 elections. DCs/ROs have already been advised to give priority to them. Now the names of the newcomers have also been forwarded to the DCs/ROs for issuance of accreditation cards to the prospective observers," the reply reads.

Besides, some election observer groups have collected accreditation cards from the EC Secretariat, instead of taking those from the ROs concerned. FEMA has collected some 12,000 cards, some EC sources said.



Jatiya Party chairman HM Ershad addressing an election rally in Kishoreganj yesterday.

40 candidates

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(Jamalpur-4), Mahbubul Alam Hanif (Kushthia-2), M Hanif Ali (Natore-2), Shamsul Haq (Mymensingh-2), Noor Ali (Dhaka-2), Kalparanjan Chakma (Khagrachari), Dipankar Talukdar (Rangamati), Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury (Faridpur-2), Shamsul Haq (Nawabganj-3), Azizur Rahman (Moulivibazar-3), Kazi Sirajul Haq (Faridpur-1) and Matia Chowdhury (Sherpur-2).

JP (Ershad) and Islami Front: Majibar Rahman Sento (Natore-2), Rawshan Ershad (Gaibandha-5), Mymensingh-4) and Abul Kalam Azad (Joypurhat-1).

Independent: AKM Bahauddin Bahar (Comilla-8), Alhaj Majibar Rahman (Moulivibazar-4) and Kazi Shahed Ahmed (Jessore-3).

Women voters

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vote. We believe that if a congenial atmosphere is created and the barriers are broken, a lot of women who have not cast vote in the past will come out of their houses and cast vote this time."

The special programme involves local elite and especially imams of mosques to motivate women to cast vote and husbands to encourage their wives to do so.

The EC have identified five areas of the country where women could not vote. These are Badarkhalia and Rajkhali in Chakoria thana of Cox's Bazar district. Jamat-e-Islami's Chakoria unit reportedly put restrictions on women's voting 15 years ago.

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morning.

The BNP chairperson, who left for Bholia from Sadarghat terminal at 2am yesterday on board a launch, started holding riverside meetings from 9am. Khaleda and members of her entourage on board three big launches travelled the greater Barisal.

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US plane

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obtained permission from the government in advance informing about its cargo manifest to the foreign ministry as per rules.

The official said the aircraft carried diplomatic pouches, food and beverages for diplomatic personnel of the local US embassy.

Senior airforce officials, when contacted, said they were not aware of any foreign aircraft making any unauthorised landing.

A source close to the US embassy said late last night that it was a "routine, pre-scheduled flight" to support embassy operations and said these flights were commonly done for US embassies around the world.

The source also brushed aside reports in a section of the press that the US was sending advance military teams.

"There is nothing in those (reports)," the source close to the US embassy said.

Women in Surat village in Jhenidah Sadar upazila did not cast vote in the last 44 years due to superstitions. Women in Choto Bighai and Pangasai villages in Patuakhali district never voted. Local religious leaders asked them not to vote.

Women in Magar village in Nalchiti of Jhalokati district did not vote due to superstitions and restrictions from religious leaders.

In Raikot union in Langalkot upazila of Comilla district, women could not cast vote in the last 20 years due to prohibition from local ulama parishad backed by religious leaders.

The women and children's affairs ministry has asked its field level officials in their respective districts to visit the areas concerned and motivate women to cast vote this time.

High officials of the ministry were also present at the press conference.

Sissoo trees

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The disease spreads faster during dry season. The Conservator said that the Department of Forest in his region stopped selling sissoo saplings from their designated nurseries. The department is also advising villagers not to plant sissoo saplings any more.

Dr Wahed Baksha, a scientist and Divisional Officer of the BFRI in Chittagong, said they are still doing research to find cause of the disease. He said they have already isolated a fungus known as fufurium solani.

"But this fungus, as it is known, is too weak to attack a grown up tree. It is a complex situation and we are exploring various scientific aspects to pinpoint the cause," Baksha said.

Baksha said there could be various causes of the disease, which is reportedly rampant also in Nepal and India. The BFRI is planning to launch a campaign in Kushtia, Jessore and other areas where such attack has been reported.

"This tree originated from Nepal. It is in existence in our country for more than half a century without any problem. We are trying to find out why it is happening now and why the infestation is restricted to one particular region," Baksha said.

In her campaign at the tea garden areas in the greater Sylhet, the AL leader promised permanent residence for the workers who, she recalled, got Bangladesh's citizenship during the Bangabandhu regime. She also talked to a group of tea workers.

Speaking at those rallies, Hasina reiterated her allegation that the BNP was conspiring to rig the October 1 polls through terrorism and media coup. She also repeated her call to the authorities for effective measures to ensure a free and fair election. "The Awami League will not accept any attempt to influence the election."

The Sorail rally over, Hasina travelled to Sylhet touching Chunaughat, Bahubal, Madhavpur, Telipara and Shabzpur in Habiganj, Srimongal and Kusumdhara in Moulvibazar and Bishwanath, Companiganj and Court point in Sylhet.

People in their thousands gathered at the election meetings in all those areas. They chanted slogans, and brandished replicas of boat, banners and festoons, and danced with beat of drums.

Frequent slogans for boat filled the air and a cheerful Hasina joined the slogan chanting masses. The Bahubal rally was smaller compared to the others she addressed yesterday.

The AL chief quoted a local leader of her party who said that she might be late for the meetings.

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late as the BNP chief was. She joined a rally at the same spot 12 hours later than scheduled the other day. This is the difference between the Awami League and the BNP. We mean what we say. Besides we do our best not to cause suffering to the people while the BNP does not keep its words."

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Hasina once again alerted the voters who were trying to buy their votes. "The migratory birds will approach you with bundles of money but they will forget you soon after the election. You have to decide who you will vote the one-day guests or the Awami League men who are always with you."

She cited her government's development projects for mosques, madrassahs and other religious institutions for Muslims in her 40-minute speech at Sylhet.

In a bid to win the hearts of voters in Brahmanbaria, supposedly a strong base for fundamentalist Muslims, Hasina related how she strictly followed the edicts of Islam.

Describing her government's steps for the promotion of Islam, Hasina asked how a leader like Amin, accused of killing police constable Badsha Misra inside a mosque in the capital, could be a Muslim. "Islam preaches peace and tolerance and there is no place of killing and confrontation in Islam."

In a scathing attack on her opponents, who had so long propagated that the AL would damage Islam, Hasina said people had seen in the past five years of her party's rule how much it served Islam.

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