

ELECTION 2001

The Daily Star

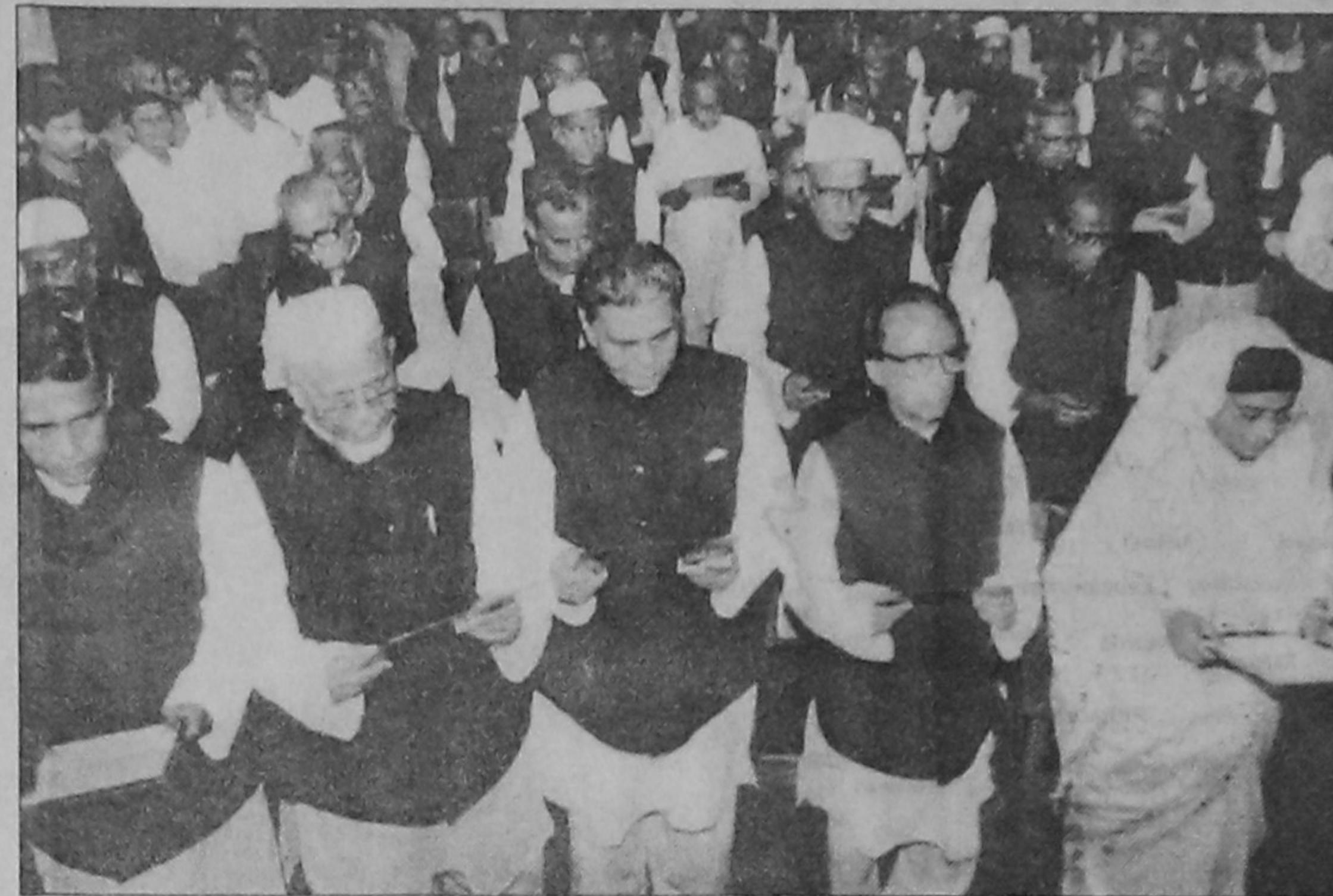
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2001

March of democracy

1991



MPs of BNP taking oath in March 1991



Awami League MPs taking oath in June 1996



Awami League MPs taking oath in March 1991



MPs of BNP taking oath in June 1996

1996 Fact Sheet

2001

No. of constituencies	:	300
No. of voters	:	75000656
Male:	38684972	
Female:	36315684	
68	:	
No. of Returning Officers	:	
No. of Assistant Returning Officers	:	525
No. of Presiding Officers	:	29978
No. of Assistant Presiding Officers	:	149288
No. of Polling Officers	:	298576
Total No. of Polling Personnel	:	477842
No. of Polling Centres	:	29978
No. of Polling Booths	:	149288
No. of Contesting Political Parties	:	52
No. of contesting candidates	:	1935
No. of Candidates contesting in more than one constituency	:	32 (in 84 constituencies)
No. of Female Candidates	:	37 (in 47 constituencies)
No. of candidates nominated by political parties	:	1451

Name of Political Party	Symbol	Contesting Candidates
Bangladesh Awami League	Boat	300
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Sheaf of Paddy	269
(including Jatiya Party (Naziur) and Islami Oikya Jote candidates)		
Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh	Scales	31
Islami Jatiya Oikya Front (Combination of JP (Ershad), ISA, JGP, ML, PNP)	Plough	281
Jatiya Party (Manju)	Bicycle	140
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)	Mashal	76
Bangladesh Communist Party	Sickle	64
Krishak Sramik Janata League	Gamchha	39
Bangladesh Workers Party	Hammer	32
Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD-Khalekuzaman)	Lock	37
Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon	Banyan Tree	30
Other Parties		152
Independent Candidates		484

Source: Bangladeshi Election Commission

Election 2001 in the eyes of journalists

MEDIA ALLIANCE FOR ELECTION MONITORING IN BANGLADESH (MAEM)

THE law and order situation continued to deteriorate in the country raising fear about violence on the October 1 election day and during post-election period. Large numbers of voting centres in most of the constituencies have been categorised by the administration as vulnerable to violence. The candidates have also identified certain voting centres as vulnerable for being the stronghold of their rival candidates and seeking increased security measures to ensure fair elections. Against the backdrop of run up for the coming general elections in Bangladesh scheduled for 1 October 2001, an uncertainty looms large on the issue of exercising voting rights by a section of the women and minority voters. Minority community in some constituencies is facing uncertainties in exercising their voting rights. The constituencies are: Barisal 1, Bhol 1 & 2, Pirozpur 1, Chittagong 6&7, Comilla 12, Jhalakati 1, Dhaka 3, Dhaka 11, Dhaka 12, Dhaka 7, Bagerhat 3, Dinajpur 2, Lalmonirhat 3, Netrakona 1, Kishoreganj 2, Madaripur 2, Barguna 2, Jhinaidah 3 & 4 and Rajbari 2. This has been revealed in the three weekly reports on the election prepared by journalists working for Media Alliance for Election Monitoring in Bangladesh (MAEM). The components of MAEM are Bangladesh Centre for Development, Journalism and Communication (BCDJC), Bangladesh Manabdhik Forum (BMSF), a forum of journalists committed to protection of human rights. The report covers the period from 1 through 21 September 2001. A total of 141 journalists are working across the country to prepare the weekly report for domestic and overseas consumption.

Incidents of obstructing rival candidates from carrying out campaigns were rampant in

many places in the country during the week in review. Posters with indecent comments against top leaders of the two major political parties -- Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) -- were also seen displayed in many places despite clear directives by the Election Commission against such practices.

Besides, uncertainty has been rated high in the Hill Districts of Chittagong where Parbatya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity, (PCJS) once popularly known as Shantibahini, has vowed to resist elections at any cost. PCJS has asked for a revision of the voter list in the context of Peace Agreement signed in December 1997. Proshit Bikash Khisha, chief of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), which opposes the Peace Agreement, is running for election from one of the three constituencies in the area.

There are allegations that candidates in different constituencies are violating the different prohibitions of the Code of Conduct, set by the Election Commission for holding elections in a free and fair way. The incidents of violations include use of microphones beyond predetermined hours, writing graffiti on walls, distribution of coloured leaflets, doling out cash in the form of subscription or donation and use of state or governmental facilities. The Electoral Inquiry Committees, set up in different districts to adjudicate complaints on violations of Code of Conduct, are not active enough. The Committees, so far, have issued a few show-cause notices on the vio-

lators of electoral rules. There are reports that candidates were offering gift items like cell phone, motorcycle and cassette recorders to win the hearts of the voters. In some areas, candidates have even distributed veil to the women voters.

Also, there are apprehensions that huge amount of unaccounted money would be spent during the election campaign, which would cross any past record. Candidates of the two major political parties -- Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) -- are reportedly leading the money game. The money game has been creating apprehension among the voters about the possibility of confrontation in the coming days.

In many places candidates are taking advantage of the cable network as part of the campaign strategies. Candidates are also giving importance to door-to-door campaign. Many candidates are also using the folk media, such as palagan and jatra, as media for campaign.

Candidates in different constituencies are reportedly trying to use the armed members of the outlawed Sarbhabara Party to win the elections. In Patuakhali 3 constituency, Galachipa and Dashmina thanas were once the strongholds of Sarbhabara Party. Police arrested two Sarbhabara men from the area on September 10 although they had hardly any activities during the past five years. Police also arrested two other youths the same day on suspicion that they could harm the holding of elections in the area. The Sirajganj 3 constitu-

ency is also a safe haven for terrorists. These constituencies are very sensitive and could experience serious violence unless steps are taken to improve the law and order situation there. Information collated show that the use of money would exceed all previous limits. In Rangpur 4 constituency, AL's Tipu Munshi, BNP's Rahimuddin Bharasha and Jatiya Party's Karimuddin have been spending huge amount of money in entertainment as well as donation for clubs and social institutions. In Netrokona 3 and 4 constituencies, BNP candidates spent Tk 1.5 lac in organising campaign processions. Similar allegations were made

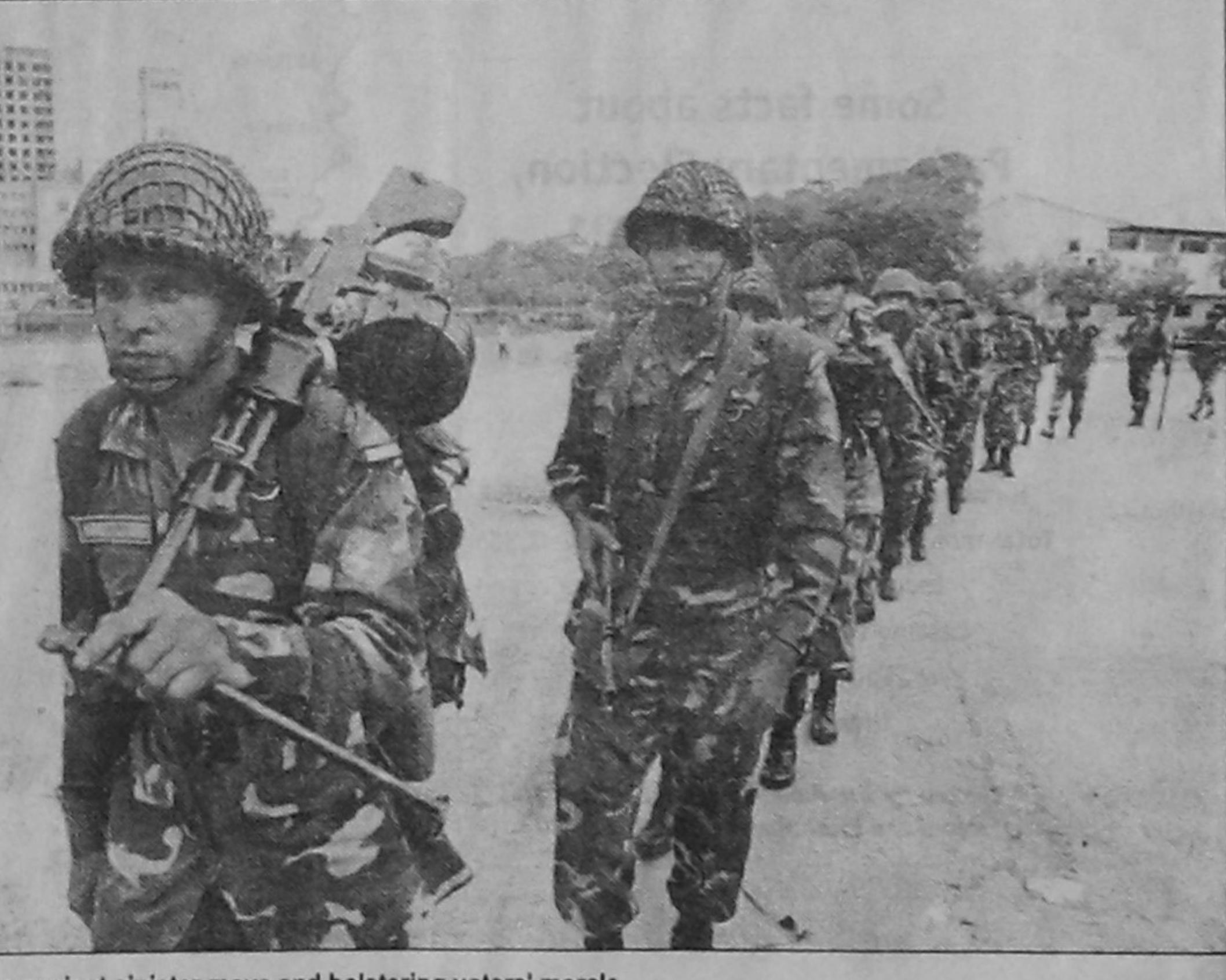
against some of the AL candidates. Some of the candidates who were refused nominations by the party are contesting as independent candidates with support from one or two top leaders of the party concerned. In many cases, they are also receiving support from the leaders and activists of other political parties. Many candidates are also using mosques, especially on Friday, to arouse the passion of the people. In some places, candidates are provoking communalism for tactical reasons. Women are also being used in the campaign to reach the female members of the voter families. In Dhaka 1 and 6 constituencies, AL candidates Salman F. Rahman and Saber Hossain Chowdhury have given campaign an institutional shape through recruiting paid campaigners for the purpose. Former AL Minister Syed Abul Hossain has hired artists from Dhaka to campaign for him at his Madaripur-3 constituency. He is also using three speed-boats, as he has to reach voters in many places across rivers. In many places, candidates have distributed cassettes and displayed indecent posters in a bid to vilify opponents. Such trend has led to confrontations in many places. Cross border smuggling is reportedly playing a role in the frontier constituencies, such as Jessor-1.



Securing ballot papers and boxes for a fair election.



Motivating community leaders for fair election at thana level.



Guarding against sinister move and bolstering voters' morale.



BNP intellectuals and professionals rallying for support.



Motivating community leaders for fair election at thana level.



Demonstration for not supporting anti-liberation forces in the polls.