

## Door-to-door campaign

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Amid widespread speculation about violence during the polls, the caretaker government, constitutionally mandated to hold a free and fair election, sat yesterday and analysed its latest preparation for the election.

Chief Advisor Latifur Rahman chaired the meeting at 5:00pm, which was attended by Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed, cabinet secretary, home secretary, EC secretary and other officials concerned, who discussed the further heightening of security across the country.

Syed met President Shahabuddin Ahmad yesterday evening and apprised the president of the latest preparation for the election.

The election will continue from 8:00am to 4:00pm straight.

The candidates were on a last-minute campaign to be people's representatives in the 300-strong parliament, while the voters are making their mind for whom to support.

However, the death of a candidate in Cox's Bazar-3 has dealt a blow to the electoral race in the constituency.

According to a fresh schedule, voting in this constituency will take place later.

Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia in their addresses, aired on the state-run Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar last night, called on countrymen to cast votes for respective candidates for welfare of the country. They also routed off their public meetings on Friday and yesterday.

Meanwhile, two of the advisors to the caretaker government, Barister Ishtiaque Ahmed and Mueyed Chowdhury visited the Election Commission yesterday. Both advisors saw the EC's preparation for announcement of the primary result of the election.

The CEC, informally talking to newsmen at the EC yesterday, hoped the election would be held in a peaceful manner. "We will go for repeated polling in case of violence and rigging at any polling station."

The CEC alleged the newspapers overplayed the speculation about violence during the polls. "In a country of 130 million people there may be some stray incidents, but it does not reflect the total situation."

This time, the EC set up 29,978 polling stations with 1,49,268 polling booths across the country to accommodate 7,50,00,656 voters, of which 3,86,84,971 male and 3,63,15,684 female ones.

According to the EC statistics, 1,933 candidates, (excluding the Cox's Bazar-3 constituency) of which 37 female candidates in 47 constituencies, are fighting the election. Fifty-two political parties have nominated 1,449 candidates while 484 independent candidates filed nominations.

Of 52 parties, only Awami League has fielded nominations in all the 300 constituencies. The BNP-led four party alliance has also fielded nominations in 300 seats. The BNP alone fielded candidatures in 248, while its allies Jamaat-e-Islami 31, Jatiya Party (Nazir) 11 and Islami Oikya Jote 1.

The Islami Jatiya Oikya Front led by Ershad's Jatiya Party has fielded

candidates in 281 seats. The faction of JP led by Anwar Hossain Monju has nominated 140, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) 76, Bangladesh Communist Party 64, Bangladesh Workers Party 32, and the remaining 152 candidates represent some other small parties in the October 1 general election.

A total of 4,77,842 polling personnel, of which 68 returning officers, 525 assistant returning officers, 29,978 presiding officers, 1,49,288 assistant presiding officers and 2,98,576 polling officers, will be engaged in completing the huge task.

In addition, nearly 1.1 lakh members of law-enforcement agencies, which also included the members of the armed forces, paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel, will be deployed throughout the country to ensure a peaceful atmosphere in pre-, running and post-election period.

The members of the armed forces will be stationed at Upazila headquarters in aid to the civil administration and will move, if required. This time, they are empowered to catch the election offenders on the day of election, and hand over them to the civil authorities.

A good number of foreign and local election observers will be deployed on the day. The EC has issued nearly 3.5 lakh accreditation cards to foreign and local election monitors. Dozens of foreign journalists from across the globe have also been accredited.

## People want a change

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coup and administrative coup. People felt the pinch in the last five years.

Khaleda said AL is again making false promises, telling lies and spreading canards against BNP and the alliance. "But I firmly believe that people will no more trust Awami League and make any mistake in the forthcoming polls," she added.

She devoted most of her 27-minute speech on alleged terrorism and corruption during AL rule and said if voted to power, her party's prime task will be to free the nation of the curse.

Referring to AL chief's claim that she would eliminate terrorism and corruption if voted to power, Khaleda said it is impossible by keeping "terrorist" like Dr Iqbal, Hajj Selim, Mokbul and Kamal Majumder beside her.

"You (Sheikh Hasina) have sided with godfathers of terrorists at Narayanganj and Feni and you are seeking vote for them... You should be ashamed because the entire nation knows them as godfathers. How can you beg vote for such godfathers and terrorists?"

Turning to corruption, she said Transparency International branded Bangladesh as the number one corrupt country in the world.

"People of the country are not corrupt... Bangladesh is not a corrupt country. Awami League earned this bad name for the country, which was considered an 'emerging tiger' during BNP rule".

She alleged that the AL chief

misappropriated Tk 400 crore from the purchase of MIG-29 aircraft and Tk 200 crore from Frigate purchase. She also made huge amounts of money through corrupt practices in many other major deals, Khaleda alleged.

She also described as "completely false" AL chief Hasina's claim that there were surplus of 10 lakh tonnes of food in fiscal 1999-2001 and 21 lakh tonnes in 2000-2001.

"If so, why the AL government imported food worth Tk 2000 crore in fiscal 1999-2000 and Tk 750 crore in the first six months of fiscal 2000-2001?"

The AL government failed to form a wage commission for workers and a pay scale for employees, the BNP chief said.

She said AL "used" government officials and employees in the last polls, but when they started movement for pay scale, it sacked and put many of them in jail.

The AL government also betrayed teachers of non-government schools and colleges, she said and promised that if her party is voted to power, 100 percent of their salary would be paid by the government.

Dwelling on the reason for increase in terrorism in the country, she said it is because AL has given the youths firearms in one hand and phensidyl and drugs in the other hand.

She said AL is campaigning that if BNP comes to power, garments factories will be closed because mulas will not allow women to come

out of houses and work.

She said it was during BNP's rule that the number of garment factories rose to 2,424 from 759 in 1990 and the workforce increased to 12.90 lakh from 3.40 lakh. Some 82,000 other industries were set up during BNP rule, she claimed.

She urged the people to show utmost tolerance in the face of any "provocation" by AL because they have resorted to violence and killings sensing their defeat in the election.

Turning to the "miserable condition" of Dhaka city, she said it will be turned into a "modern and model city with all civic amenities" if her party candidates are elected.

"Vote for us, we will present a beautiful and prosperous Bangladesh free of terrorism and corruption", she said.

Presided over by city BNP President and contender for Dhaka-7 seat Sadeque Hossain Khoka, the meeting was addressed by, among others, Islami Oikya Jote Chairman Azizul Haq, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, Jatiya party (N-F) Secretary General Kazi Firoz Rashid and BNP candidates in all the eight constituencies in the city.

After the meeting, the BNP chief wen round some areas of the city in a motorcade and sought vote from the city dwellers.

## Pre-election violence

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Protesting the killing, local Awami League brought out a procession in the town and damaged several vehicles. They also clashed with BNP activists, leaving many injured. Awami League at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday blamed the BNP men for the killing and demanded immediate arrest of the killers.

According to UNB, Army personnel surrounded the residence of AL district president Mohiuddin Ahmed while he was speaking at press conference protesting the killing of Jalaluddin. At one stage, they opened fire, leaving three workers of Awami League and Jubo League injured.

Deputy Commissioner of Munshiganj Mohammad Haider Ali said army opened fire in self-defence after shots were fired at them near the house of Awami League candidate in the town.

The DC claimed that a magistrate was present on the spot during the incident but could not give the name. He also refrained from disclosing how many shots were fired

by the army men.

Lieutenant Colonel Zahidul Islam Ukil visited the spot and assured of investigation into the incident.

Our Rajshahi correspondent reports: An Awami League activist was killed and 25 others were injured in an attack on a microbus allegedly by BNP workers at Jhalpara village in Baghmara upazila yesterday.

The dead was identified as Anisur Rahman, 30, of village Shaipara.

A case was filed against seven BNP men in this connection.

In Sylhet, one person was killed and eight others were seriously injured in a clash between the supporters of BNP and Jatiya Party (Ershad) at Boiragir Bazar in Bishanath thana on Friday night, according to BSS.

The dead was identified as Hurmuj Ali, 28, a BNP activist.

Bishanath thana police said an election procession of BNP candidate for Sylhet-2 constituency was attacked by a group of Jatiya Party activists with lethal weapons at about 9.30 pm leaving Hurmuj Ali injured. He died on way to hospital.

## Bagerhat AL leader

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Bagerhat-1 constituency came under an armed attack allegedly by AL activists, police and witnesses said.

Sheikh Helal is also contesting against his main rival Shaikh Mujibar Rahman of four-party alliance in Bagerhat-1.

Four of the bullet-injured were admitted to Bagerhat Sadar hospital. They are Manzurul Huq 30, Moni 25, Intaz Shaikh 50 and Ali Fakir 40.

In another incident at Beshargati village under Bagerhat Sadar thana in the evening, at least eleven people were injured when an alliance procession came under armed attack by AL supporters.

Police said a case was recorded with Kachua thana on Friday, in which 15 AL leaders and activists were accused of kidnapping three BNP activists from Kakarbil village at about midnight on Thursday.

The kidnapped BNP activists are Shahidul 22, Jahangir, 19, and Shujail, 23. They were physically tortured, police said. Police and some army personnel rescued the kidnapped BNP activists in the early morning of Friday.

The 15 accused include chairman of Rarhipara Union Parishad

Mahfuzur Rahman, who also heckled OC Abdul Alim of Kachua thana in presence of Sheikh Helal at Signboard Bazar on Friday in the morning. OC Abdul Alim was abused by Mahfuzur Rahman. OC admitted the incident and filed a general diary in this regard.

Meanwhile, a Jubo League armed cadre has given many important clues to the Mollahat bomb blast incident, said investigation officer (IO) of the case Khashrul Huq, ASP of CID. The IO is also searching for some armed cadres of Purbo Banglar Communist Party, suspecting their involvement in the blast.

The case may take a dramatic turn after arrest of some other persons, as per the confessional statement of Wahidur Rahman, one of the private security guards of Sheikh Helal, the IO said.

According to CID police, many armed cadres of Awami League and Jubo League in Mollahat are absconding after the arrest of Wahidur Rahman.

The situation in Bagerhat-1 and 2 constituencies is not congenial for a free and fair election, according to AHM Selim.

## Ctg blast

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Double-Mooring thana while they were allegedly making bombs at about 8:30pm, police said.

They alleged that Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal cadres were making the bombs when the explosion occurred.

Later police recovered huge quantity of explosives from the spot.

'Identity of the victim was not known immediately, as the body was taken away from the scene,' police said. Police were trying to recover the body till filing of this report at 10pm.

Two of the injured identified as JCD cadres Munir Ahmed Munna and Pichchi Alo were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital. Their condition was stated to be critical.

Police arrested four people in this connection.

At the same time, another bomb went off at a water tank of Anand Salt Factory in Bakulia thana on Abdul Latif Road that left one worker, Shah Alam, dead and 10 others injured.

Motives behind the bomb explosion that created panic among local people could not be ascertained immediately.

Soon after the explosion, locals laid a siege to the salt factory and confined a number of people, including the owner of the factory, for about 20 minutes.

Later police rushed to the scene and rescued them from the wrath of people after bringing the situation under control.

## Business bodies

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Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Benajir Ahmed, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and Kutubuddin Ahmed, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) signed the statement.

To ensure a peaceful environment during the election, the administrative and security measures that have been taken up are fairly exhaustive, they observed. "We trust that the government machinery and the law-enforcement agencies entrusted with the election process will discharge their sacred duties fairly and courageously."

What is important is the goodwill of the political parties and more particularly, their commitment to strengthening the democratisation process. The major political parties have already committed themselves to peaceful election and its

results, business leaders stated.

"On behalf of the business community, we sincerely hope that through graceful acceptance of election results, our political parties will show to the world that the national aspirations for democracy and economic stability are much above party interests," the statement added.

It is well known that the country's export earnings are under threat, particularly due to the recent turmoil in the international arena. The garment sector, which is more threatened than at any time before, has already reported loss of orders worth millions of US dollars, they mentioned.

It falls on all political parties to rise to the looming economic crisis by ensuring peaceful environment during the election and accepting the people's verdict, the business leaders said.

## Longest police drive

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But a top police official said they are "happy with the achievement" in the on-going drive. He however said they apprehend more incidents of violence during and after the election. "We are ready to face it," he said.

"This election will not be like the previous ones. There will be more incidents of violence", he said referring to reports from different areas. But he did not elaborate.

There was large scale transfer and reshuffle in the civil and police administrations after take over by the caretaker government to ensure a free, fair and peaceful election.

But the results achieved so far during the special police drive belied people's expectation as regards recovery of illegal arms and arrest of terrorists and criminals, sources said.

There were complaints from the police administration earlier that criminals could not be nabbed due to political interference during the

tenure of the previous political government.

Some police officials claimed that there would be little scope for use of the illegal arms yet to recovered as the huge number of law enforcers would remain on "high alert" during the post-election days.

During the previous month-long special drive that ended on June 28, police recovered 1152 firearms and arrested 236 'identified terrorist', 34,642 'wanted criminals' and 14,164 people accused in various cases.

Firearms recovered during the tenures of 1991 and 1996 caretaker governments totalled 693 and 862 respectively.

"Success of the current drive can not be judge by comparing the results with those during tenure of 1991 and 1996 caretaker governments because inflow of illegal arms has greatly increased now," a senior police official said seeking anonymity.

## 300 foreign observers

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Austria to Australia and Nepal to Nigeria are already in the country while others are arriving.

The largest contingent of foreign observers is from the 15-member European Union under the umbrella of EU Observer Mission in Bangladesh (EUOMB). With participation from most of the member countries, the EU has set up bases in different parts of the country with some 67 long and short term observers including a core group of six. All the team members are already in their designated locations.

Several European countries are also sending country-specific observers. They include a 12-member team from the UK, Lord Peter Shore, known as a great friend of Bangladesh for rallying support during its Liberation War, was scheduled to be in the British team but he died recently. The delegation will comprise eminent citizens of Britain.

The nine-member observer group from Norway represents different professions while Germany is having a five-member team and the Netherlands an eight-member delegation. Other European countries who are deploying observers are Sweden, Portugal, France, Austria, Spain, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Belgium and Finland.

Canada is sending a four-member team who will be joined by two from its mission in Dhaka.

Australia is expected to send a small team. Bruce Chamberlain, Speaker of the Legislative Council

of Victoria, is also due to come.

The US team will now comprise more than 30 of its embassy staff.

The Washington-based NDI, which had announced cancellation of Dhaka visit of its team following the September 11 incidents, later said that Peter Manikias, head of the organisation's Asia Division based in Indonesia, would come to Bangladesh to observe the polls. He will be joined by two foreign staff of the NDI already in Dhaka.

Former US President Jimmy Carter who came earlier was expected to lead the NDI team if its visit was not cancelled.

Foreign Ministry officials said Japan has sought accreditation for nine of its observers and Nepal for 10. The Japanese team will include Shin Sakura, a former vice foreign minister and Vice President of Japan-Bangladesh friendship society.

Besides Nepal, other SAARC countries sending observers are India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. India is sending two representatives from the civil society while Pakistan is sending two high officials of its election commission. Sri Lankan team comprises members of an experienced observer group.

Thailand is likely to send at least two observers, including a former foreign minister.

Nigeria, a D-8 member, is sending a six-member team from the country's electoral reform commission.

Besides, some observers are likely to come from the Philippines and Indonesia.

## Hasina: Restraint

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early, cast your vote and watch out against vote-rigging," she said, asking the AL polling agents not to leave the voting centres before the counting and compilation of votes ends.

Begging vote for boat, Hasina promised that her party, if returned to power, would act tougher against terrorism. "We'll free Bangladesh from poverty. Our politics aims to close the gap between the rich and poor," she said. "We're pledge-bound to build a prosperous Bangladesh imbued with the spirit of the liberation war."

Expressing her gratitude to the people for electing her party in 1996, Hasina said, "Let us serve you again."

Amid cheers and slogans, she told the rally that her government provided the country a solid economic footing in the past five years and would work on it, if re-elected, to prepare the nation to face the challenges of the new century.

Referring to a recent comment made by BNP chief Khaleda Zia, the AL leader urged her arch rival not to speak of sinking boat anymore for the sake of people of the riverine Bangladesh.

"It's unfortunate that the BNP leader had wanted to sink boat, the only means of river communication in rural Bangladesh. How would her voters reach the polling centres by

boat if it were sunk? How could she announce to sink boat during her journey by launch, which is a kind of boat?" Hasina said.

"Just think about your fate had the launch carrying you capsized," Hasina said, reminding her archival of the recent boat capsizing in Feni in which several pro-BNP people had died. She would have been wise had she not spoken of sinking boat after the Feni capsizing.

"Boat is people's saviour, with boat prophet Nuh (Al) saved the mankind from the devastating deluge and it is boat that earned people independence and food autonomy."

Seeking vote for Saber Choudhury, the AL chief said party candidate "is honest and polite". She said the four-party alliance candidate (Mirza Abbas of BNP) was chargesheeted in a case involving terrorism. "You have to decide who you should vote for an honest person or a terrorist!"

Hasina straight drove to Malibagh from BTV Bhaban in Rampura and attended the rally on the way back to her Dhanmondi residence. Earlier, she had her election address to the nation recorded at the BTV Bhaban.

As she entered the BTV Bhaban, thousands of people, chanting slogans, gathered outside to see her.

## Hasina promises

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opment, human rights and economic freedom.

She said, "We have embarked upon a journey towards the enlightened path, there is no way to go back."

During her little over one-hour televised address, the former prime minister touched upon the success of her five-year rule, frankly admitted lapses, pointed out hostile political atmosphere and non-cooperation from the opposition in resolving some burning issues, like uprooting terrorism.

She also projected the salient features of her 21-point election manifesto to decentralise the administration and ensure development from the grassroots level upward.

"For having been kept aloof from state power under a planned conspiracy for 21 years, we might have made some mistakes in running the state affairs," she said, urging the people to forget those flaws considering the huge successes.

The former PM said her government was the first to complete the five-year term with cooperation from the people and handed over power peacefully without making any effort to hang on like previous regimes.

She said her efficient rule proved false all evil propaganda propagated by her opponents that people would go hungry and territory up to Feni would be part of India.

"All falsehood proved wrong at the end of the day as truth cannot be suppressed for long."

Hasina said the country attained self-sufficiency in food for the first time in the country's history meeting a 40-lakh-ton deficit left by the BNP

regime and kept food surplus of 26 lakh metric tons.

Urging people not to be misled by "motivated propaganda", the AL chief said she had requested her opponents to spell out their respective party manifestos and allow the people to decide whom they would give their verdict.

Referring to a spate of terrorism, she frankly admitted that despite honest efforts, her government could not fully eliminate this vice because of non-cooperation from the opposition.

"Terrorism and corruption engulfed the fabrics of society following autocracy that sponsored terrorism and corruption over the years for their heinous political gains," she told the countrymen.

Terrorists escaped through loopholes, she said, adding that if she had got help from all, it could be tackled. However, Hasina claimed that drastic steps of her government could restore peace in southwestern region.

"If we are reelected, we can assure you that we will be able to stamp out terrorism and corruption."

The AL leader said, "We no longer want to see bloodshed, no longer want to see any empty lap of a mother losing her son, sister her brother and wife her husband."

She also said if her party got people's mandate, the court's verdict against the killers of Bangabandhu would be executed ensuring the rule of law in the country.

## Accept with grace

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Group, said, "We call on the political parties to do their part by putting aside narrow interest, by insisting that their followers do not engage in violent activities and by accepting both victory and defeat."

The press conference was held at the American Centre at Banani.

The envoys present were ambassadors Mary Ann Peters of the US, Sief J Zermans of the Netherlands, Gerd Wahlstrom of Norway, Jiro Kobayashi of Japan, Niels Severin Munk of Denmark, Mario Filippo Pini of Italy, Dietrich Andreas of Germany, Michel Lummaux of France, high commissioners Dr David Carter of UK, Robert Flynn of Australia, David Preston of Canada, Chief of the EU mission Antonio de Souza Menezes and Charge d'affaires of Switzerland Giambattista Mondada.

Besides, Counsellor Anders Granlund of Swedish embassy and Minister Counsellor Ove Fritz Larsen of Danish embassy were present.

Coordinated by head of the Tuesday group David Preston, the envoys responding to various questions said, "We are here to support the democratic process. We are here to support the Bangladesh population as they go to polling."

Asked if they felt that fair polls would be held, they replied, "We are hopeful that there will be free and fair elections. We hope that winners and losers will accept the verdict with grace."

The envoys said there would be a large number of foreign observers from many of their countries, while some are being represented through the EU observer team, the largest group.

The envoys said, "In a democracy, the government represents all the people, not just the people who voted to it power."

"Similarly, the Opposition represents all the people. Its role is to ensure that government decisions are carefully thought through and that the government is accountable to the people."

Their joint statement

emphasised, "Everyone must be able to vote. No one has the right to deny others the right to vote, while taking advantage of that right themselves."

It pointed out, "There is no place for violence in a democracy. To influence by force the right to choose your parliamentarians is a violation of the rights of all citizens."

The envoys said, "We call on all Bangladeshis, particularly the leadership of the political parties, not to allow lethal weapons to undermine the democracy that Bangladeshis overwhelmingly support."

They hoped that whoever wins the polls will make the parliament effective and whoever loses will also participate in parliament sessions. They hoped that the leaders and parties, whether winners or losers, will assume and discharge their responsibilities in a judicious manner.

Asked if they have received any commitment from major political parties to play their due role in parliament whether they are in power or in opposition, to give up hartsals and to further empower women,