

## Who casts vote where

FROM PAGE 1

Most of the candidates of Awami League and the BNP-led 4-party alliance in the city said they will cast their votes by 9 am.

AL candidate Sabir Hossain Choudhury contesting for Dhaka-6 seat said he will cast his vote at Khilgaon Government High School polling centre. He said he will go to the centre by 8 am.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, he said, "In 1996, people of the area elected me by giving their verdict against terrorism. The same thing happened in 1994 mayoral election. This time I expect the same thing will happen. People will vote in favour of peace and development."

Saber also alleged that his main opponent was charged under the Public Safety Act for terrorist acts.

Saber's main rival BNP candidate Mirza Abbas said he will cast his vote at Shajapur Mirza Abbas Women's College centre in the early hours of voting.

"If the election is free and fair, I expect to be elected with a margin of at least 20,000 votes," he told The Daily Star.

AL candidate Haji Mohammad Selim contesting from Dhaka-8 will cast his vote at Islamic High School polling centre near Boro Katra at 8 am.

His rival Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu of BNP will cast his vote at the Jatiya Tarun Sangha polling centre in Lalbagh.

"I apprehend rigging by Haji Selim's men in Ward No. 66. So I will first go to the centre there to observe the situation. I will cast my vote in the afternoon," said Nasiruddin.

He said he hopes to win with a margin of at least 30,000 votes.

AL candidate A K M Rahmatullah contesting from Dhaka-5 said he will cast his vote at Gulshan Model High School polling centre at about 8 am.

Rahmatullah's main rival, Maj (Retd) Kamrul Islam of BNP will cast his vote at Kala Chandpur Primary

School polling centre in Baridhara by 8:30 am.

"I apprehend violence at Berait, Dumni and Pajira polling centres as Rahmatullah's men may try to rig votes," Islam said. Islam also hopes to will the election with a big margin.

Mayor's son M Sayeed Khokan of AL who is contesting from Dhaka-7 will cast his vote at Nazirabar Islamia Primary School centre in the early hours of voting. "I am confident of winning the election," he said.

His rival Sadek Hossain Khoka of BNP will cast his vote at the Brothers Club polling centre in Gopi Bangh. He said he will cast his vote by noon, after visiting some polling centres.

AL candidate Alhaj Mokbul Hossain contesting from Dhaka-9 will cast his vote at Kishalay Girls High School and College centre in Mohammadpur. "I will visit all the centres after casting my vote," Hossain said.

His main rival Khandaker Mahbubuddin of BNP could not be contacted over telephone.

AL candidate Kamal Ahmed Majumder contesting from Dhaka-11 will cast his vote at Mirpur Bangla School Centre.

His main rival S A Khaleq of BNP will cast his vote at Dar-us-Salam Primary School in Kalyanpur. "I expect to win with a margin of at least 50,000 votes," said Khaleq.

BNP candidate Salauddin Ahmed contesting from Dhaka-4 will cast his vote at DIT Primary School polling centre in Shyampur Kadamtoli. "I expect to be the first voter to cast vote in the centre. I apprehend trouble in some of the centres in my constituency. I came to know that some people are engaged in making seals to cast false votes. I am going to file a complaint regarding this."

His main rival Habibur Rahman Molla of AL could not be contacted over telephone.

## Hasina unhappy

FROM PAGE 12

Hasina alerted. Alleging that police and district administrations in Feni were acting like BNP activists, Hasina said, "It seems as if they would capture Feni-1, 2 and 3 seats through media coup."

The AL chief called on over 75 million voters in the country to exercise their franchise without fear.

Hasina reminded the first-time voters that voting is a sacred constitutional responsibility. She also hoped the new-generation voters would vote for the Awami League.

"If AL men want to register a case, the police show reluctance, but they take prompt action in case of complaints by BNP men," Hasina alleged raising question about the neutrality of both civil and police administrations.

Hasina mentioned an army officer, Lt. Col. Toufiquddin, saying he was acting in favour of a BNP candidate, and also an independent candidate in Shariatpur-1 constituency. "Auranga, the independent candidate, has established a reign of terror in villages of Shariatpur by hiring armed goons from Dhaka."

The AL president brought allegation against another army officer, a major, whose name she did not mention, saying, "Although this officer has been given the charge of Dhunat (Bogra) area, he was illegally operating at Sariakandi and once tied an elected chairman with a tree there."

Hasina gave a long list of constituencies where, she alleged, violence was perpetrated against her party men, the minorities and female voters. These constituencies include Chuadanga-2, Faridpur-4, Shaohai-4, Feni-1, 2 and 3, Chittagong-4 and 8, and also the districts of Khagrachari, Kushtia, and Netrokona.

Besides, Hasina mentioned some areas in Dhaka where the AL has a large support base, and said

fear was created among the voters of the areas.

The briefing was interrupted for 15 minutes halfway through because she received a phone call from former US president Jimmy Carter.

The telephonic conversation over, Hasina told newsmen that Carter wanted to know about the latest pre-polls scenario in Bangladesh. "I told him about the incidents of intimidating the minority voters. He felt sorry that he could not come to observe the polls this time due to September 11 terrorist blitz in the US."

International Affairs Secretary of the AL Abul Hasan Chowdhury and Hasina's Press Secretary Jawadul Karim were also present.

Earlier in the afternoon, AL Election Conducting Committee held its daily briefing to the press at the AL polls office in the city.

AL leaders Mozaffar Hossain Paltu and Abdul Mannan Khan informed the journalists of the violent incidents that targeted AL leaders and workers and also the minorities across the country.

## M Muhaddes appointed press minister

UNB, Dhaka

Deputy Director General (Programmes) of Bangladesh Betar, M Muhaddes, has been appointed Minister (Press) of the Press Wing of Bangladesh Mission in New York.

Muhaddes, who also entrusted with additional responsibility of Chief Advisor's Press Secretary, will be posted in New York till December 31, 2002, said a handout.

## Nation goes to polls today

FROM PAGE 1

could win a number of seats and emerge as a key factor in formation of the next government should any of the two major parties fails to secure single majority. The alliance called the Islamic Oikya Front has fielded 281 candidates.

Both Hasina and Khaleda have, meanwhile, expressed hopes that their parties would secure enough seats to form the government on their own. Ershad, who was convicted in corruption cases and served prison terms, stands disqualified from running for the Jatiya Sangsad.

The 50-year-old AL, which led the country's liberation war and won the last parliamentary polls to get back to power after a 21-year hiatus, has named candidates for all the 299 seats at stake. It has retained its traditional election symbol, boat.

Its president Hasina, the immediate-past prime minister and daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of the country's independence, will vie for five seats from the Rangpur-6, Narail-1, Narail-2, Barguna-3 and Gopalganj-3 constituencies.

The 21-year-old BNP, founded by late Ziaur Rahman, a key figure in the country's war of liberation who was later propelled to power as a soldier in 1976, has cobbled an electoral alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami, pro-Nazir Rahman Manzur Jatiya Party faction and the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ).

The BNP, which formed the first government under a parliamentary system of government after winning

the 1991 polls, has doled out 49 seats to its partners in the alliance. It has fielded candidates for 250 constituencies, the Jamaat for 31, the JP (Nazir) for 11 and the IOJ for seven.

Like Hasina, the alliance leader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda is also running from five constituencies - Bogra-6, Bogra-7, Khulna-2, Feni-1 and Laxmipur-2.

While the JP (Nazir) and the IOJ candidates will share with the BNP the latter's traditional symbol, sheaf of paddy, the Jamaat contestants will run with the party's own symbol, balance.

While the Jamaat opposed the nation's struggle for independence in 1971, the IOJ is viewed as a right-wing party with strong religious undertone.

In the June 12, 1996 elections, the AL won 146 seats and the BNP 116. The JP - unified then - got 32 and the Jamaat three. The AL dislodged the BNP in forming the government with support from the JP and managed to complete a five-year tenure.

In the previous elections held in February 1991, the BNP secured 140 seats, the AL 88, the JP 35 and Jamaat 18. The BNP succeeded in forming the government with the support of the Jamaat.

According to the Election Commission sources, the AL secured 37.44 per cent of the popular votes and the BNP 33.6 per cent. In 1991, the AL had 33.67 per cent of the popular votes and the BNP 30.81 per cent.

Nearly 150 people have died in

widespread political violence across the country in the run-up to the eighth Jatiya Sangsad elections.

An extensive arms recovery drive was launched, which, however, yielded modest result. Only around 5,000 illegal weapons could be confiscated while only 6,200 licensed arms were deposited as a pre-election safety measure. According to estimates there are nearly 250,000 illegal weapons in the country.

The EC instituted a large number of electoral law reform measures. These include raising electoral expenses from Tk 300,000 to Tk 500,000. It also brought poll observers under legal coverage and tried to exclude bank loan defaulters although most of the defaulters were reported to have been able to remain in the race through some legal loopholes.

A code of conduct for electioneering, further reinforced later on, has been flouted in most cases.

The EC came under severe criticism when it had to re-promulgate an ordinance related to electoral reforms, probably the first ever in the country's history.

The election is marked by presence of the largest number of domestic observers and also nearly 300 foreign observers.

Nearly 350,000 domestic observers have been permitted to oversee elections, which will mean presence of more than nine observers in every centre and several hundred through rotation - a measure which, many feel, could bring undue strain on the conduct of the

polling process.

The EC has come under serious criticism for involving local observers without maintaining any stringent rules.

The caretaker government led by Justice Latifur Rahman took several drastic measures, some of which generated criticism. However, it succeeded in creating a climate of confidence in the general population through taking some very effective steps to create a level-playing field.

The presence of foreign observers in large numbers and also the express interest of democratic and donor countries in a violence-free and peaceful polls have brought the elections under the glare of international attention.

For the people of Bangladesh, these elections, unlike any other before, have generated immense enthusiasm. However, although parties and candidates have literally lavished the electorate with great attention and bombarded them with lofty pledges the silent majority who are the deciding factor are keeping everyone guessing as to whom they will cast their vote for.

The ordinary voter is the real king or queen of the day.

Observers feel that the important thing after the vote is accepting the verdict of the people. Both the losers and the winners must accept the results in a tribute to the people's wishes and to strengthen democracy in Bangladesh.

## Go to polling centres without fear: CA

FROM PAGE 1

Latif observed that all elected members would have to play an important role for national development; constructive roles of the members of the treasury bench and the opposition will help strengthen the democratic system and accelerate national development.

In a democratic polity, election is that medium through which opinion of the majority prevails, he said.

In today's election, a total of 1933 candidates are competing for 299 seats. "Among them, one will be winner in a seat on the basis of majority votes and others will be defeated," he said urging all candidates of all parties to gracefully accept the verdict of the people.

The head of the caretaker government, who claimed that overall law and order had improved a lot in last two and a half months after he took office for holding the polls, said there were however some incidents of deaths across the country in clashes between the activists of rival political parties.

"Such sad incidents shock us during the democratic march of the country. These unfortunate incidents took place as the roots of terrorism, black money and muscle power are set deep into the fabric of the society," observed the immediate-past chief justice.

The CA sounded a stern warning that any attempt to disrupt voting would be put down in order to uphold the propriety of people's franchise.

"I unequivocally say that immediate and stern action will be taken against those who will try to disrupt the peaceful polling environment resorting to terrorism, casting false votes and capturing booths during the voting," he cautioned.

He said the caretaker government had clearly directed the members of the law-enforcing agencies to be on high alert to thwart any such attempts.

He also urged the people in general and the electorates in particular to remain alert so that a

handful of terrorists cannot subvert the efforts of all.

"You should remember that the terrorists, however much powerful they might be in the strength of arms, money and muscle power, are morally weak."

They are bound to retreat in the face of united resistance of the people, he noted, urging the people to build up united resistance with assurance that they will get total support from the members of the law-enforcing agencies in combating the terrorists.

In his observations on political parties, the chief advisor said those who are in politics, regardless of their party affiliation, have taken up the political with a commitment for people's welfare, service and national development.

"So, despite differences of opinion and ways between the major political parties, they should take each other in cognisance and confidence for people's welfare and national development."

He hoped collective realisation on the part of political parties, their spirit of public welfare and responsible role would help the nation reach its cherished goal through the forward march of democracy and development.

He assured that the nonparty caretaker government had taken all possible steps for holding a free, fair and impartial election.

The chief advisor expressed his deep conviction about holding election in a festive and peaceful manner due to initiatives taken by his administration.

Greeting the new voters enrolled for the first time, Latif suggested to them to go to the polling centres taking with them their parents and other members of the family. "Success of democracy in Bangladesh and future development of the nation largely depend on your good choice."

Addressing the womenfolk and minority voters he said, "Go to the polling centres without fear and cast your vote for the candidate of your

choice. If anyone obstructs you on the way to the polling centres or from casting votes, inform the police, army or BDR personnel immediately."

The CA said he had already given candid directive to the law-enforcing agencies to arrest and take tough action against the 'terrorists-evil forces' if they try to obstruct voting adding that the law enforcers were always on the red alert.

Latif asked the election officials and law enforcers to ensure congenial and peaceful environment at the polling booths at any cost. He also asked them to perform their duties with utmost neutrality to ensure fair voting by the people and complete all other activities, including vote count and preparing results.

Reiterating his direction to the returning officers, assistant returning officers, presiding officers, assistant presiding officers and polling officers to play their role without any fear, the chief advisor said, "Arrest those who come to cast false vote and take action according to rule, immediately."

He issued a strict order asking election officials to stop the voting at any centre if any incidents of terrorism, false voting and capture of booth take place.

"We will not accept any election that is not transparent. If necessary, for ensuring free, transparent and neutral polling, repeated voting will be held in the centres where voting may be stopped for any trouble."

On the eve of the crucial polls, he asked the law-enforcing agencies and district and upazila administrations to be on the highest alert so that none can create a law-and-order situation anywhere in the country before or after the polls.

## Rain unlikely

FROM PAGE 1

places. Temperature may change a little and it is likely to be hot in those areas where there will be no rain.

The officials further said that the low which had developed in the Bay 'moved towards land and weakened' after yesterday's rains. The low had developed in the west-middle sea and its adjacent Tamil Nadu State of India and crossed it yesterday morning.

The maximum temperature in Dhaka yesterday was 29.9 degree Celsius and the minimum was 24.7 degree. The maximum temperature in the country on the day was 34.4 degree in Dinajpur and the minimum was 23 degree in Sylhet.

## Laden's assets

FROM PAGE 1

the Bangladesh Bank for necessary action.

According to sources, the central bank will send circulars to all banks after the parliament election to identify any bank account that might belong to Laden or his groups. If found, the accounts will be frozen.

The US government has also reminded Bangladesh that according to a UN resolution, all countries are supposed to suspend business transactions of Laden.

## 6 killed

FROM PAGE 1

The dead was identified as Suraj Ali, 50, of Singua village in Ghaghotia union. He was reportedly a BNP activist.

Ten shops were ransacked during the clash.

Our Correspondent from Mymensingh says: A female supporter of BNP was killed and 10 people were injured in an attack at village Bhorpur in Gafargaon upazila yesterday afternoon.

A group of miscreants attacked the houses of Rafiqul and Shafiq, police said. Panna, 30, wife of Rafiqul died on the spot following the attack with sharp weapons. The miscreants also ransacked the houses and set fire to those.

Rafiqul and Shafiq were admitted at Gafargaon Health Complex. BNP claimed the victim as its supporter and blamed AL for the killing. Army personnel visited the spot.

Our Kushtia correspondent adds: At least 21 people were injured, six of them bullet-hit, during a gunfight between activists of AL and BNP at Mahiskundi Bazar under Daulatpur upazila in Kushtia yesterday.

The clash ensued at 12 pm when BNP activists allegedly attacked and ransacked an Awami League election camp.

Police arrested BNP cadre Tazu with arms.

A tense situation was prevailing in the area.

## Mobile phones

FROM PAGE 1

cases failed due to leakage of information through mobile phones, intelligence sources said.

The decision to shut down mobile networks on the election day was taken early last month but it was kept a secret apprehending widespread protest and possible court injunction, some sources said.

The step would seriously affect work of journalists, election observers and others needing quick transmission of polls reports.

Landline telephones provided by Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) would be in normal operation, officials pointed out.

There are some 4.5 lakh landline phones provided by the BTB.

During the 1996 general election, there was a small number of mobile phones in the country, provided by only one company. But now there are about six lakh mobile phones.

Sources in the four private companies which provide mobile phone service claim that they incur a revenue loss of over 125,000 dollars a day if their networks are kept closed.

## Leaders promised us

FROM PAGE 1

this time around we would have a "No boycott, No Hartal" pledge.

Was it too much to ask? Look at the irony of the situation. For the last several weeks candidates of both parties were going from door to door, literally begging us for our votes. Yet they were not willing to promise to us that they will carry out their obligation as our representative in the parliament. Both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia were touring the country and addressing hundreds of meetings so that we elect their party candidates. But when asked "will you desist from boycotting the parliament if we elect you or pledge to us that you will not call hartals when in opposition?" the answer was always full of "ifs" and "buts" - if the Speaker behaves neutrally, if we are allowed to speak, if we are not insulted... if, if and if. There was never any categorical affirmation that "If you vote for us we pledge to fight for and represent you REGARDLESS of how the Treasury bench or the Speaker behaves".

Take the case of hartals. Is there any doubt in anybody's mind that it is the most destructive thing for us? Having been the head of the government, haven't Khaleda and Hasina seen it from inside how crippling hartals have been for the economy? Why then is there this refusal to give us a "No hartal" pledge. Sheikh Hasina in one of her earlier meetings with editors as the PM said that she and her party would never call hartal again even if she goes into the opposition. This pledge did not find any place in the AL party manifesto or in Sheikh Hasina's last address. Further the hartal calls at the district and lower levels by her party and by front organisations significantly diluted the credibility of her pledge.

On hartal the BNP and its chief's position was "we don't want to call it but are forced to". They never went anywhere near a "No hartal" pledge.

So here we are about to elect our eighth parliament not knowing whether the representatives we elect today will discharge their responsibility inside the Jatiya Sangsad or leave us in the lurch on one pretext or another.

For the sake of democracy and for our future we urge upon our two leading political parties to change the way they have been doing politics. It has done nobody, including themselves, any good. Hartals and boycott did not lodge either

the two governments it only hurt the people and damaged the economy. Therefore, we suggest the following for the future:

As a mark of respect for the "Will of the People" the loser must accept the election results. If there are faults then use the legal mechanism to correct it.

The ruling party must be gracious in its victory. It must make the first move for changing the existing destructive political culture.

The ruling party should make the first move by declaring that it will nominate highly respected, credible and widely acceptable candidates for the Speaker and Deputy Speaker (the latter from the opposition), after consultation with all concerned and will permit them both to resign (or de-link) from their respective parties. This will ensure their neutral role. This process is followed both in the UK and in Australia.

Instead of trying to form a "Government of Consensus" which essentially deprives the parliament of an effective opposition, try to form national policies on the basis of "consensus". So the approach should be consensus on policies and not on forming the government.

Nominate Chair for Standing Committees from the Opposition, especially for some key Oversight Committees.

Elevate the status of the Leader of the Opposition to the rank of Deputy Prime Minister or a senior minister higher than that of normal cabinet ministers.

Allocate 75 per cent of the time of the Prime Minister's question hour only for the opposition.

These are some of the initial ideas to make the parliament effective, avoid boycott and make it the centre of all politics as it was meant to be. There could be many other suggestions. The main thing is sincerity of purpose and genuine wish to solve the problems that have bedevilled our democracy so far. But to get the whole process started we must have enough foresight, enough sagacity and sufficient respect for the voters to accept, graciously, the verdict that is pronounced in this election. Without it there is no beginning of the healing process that we need so very badly. After long five years we have a chance to make a new beginning. We will not get another for the next five. Let us not miss it.

## Diplomats happy

FROM PAGE 12

aspects. The development partners will watch very carefully how the next government fights poverty and corruption and ensure observance of human rights and strengthening of democratic institutions and process.

They also said that the level of development partnership would depend critically on these factors.

The envoys also thanked the Chief Advisor for the excellent support and security made available to foreign observers by local administration.

In a separate meeting, the Ambassador of Germany expressed "the fullest support" to the work of the caretaker government and underlined that the election results should be accepted by

all the parties.

Stressing the importance of holding election in peaceful atmosphere the German Ambassador said, political parties also have their own responsibilities in this regard.

The Head of Election Monitoring Team of Japan and former Japanese Cabinet Minister Shin Sakurai also called on the Chief Adviser along with the Japanese Ambassador.

Lauding the strenuous efforts of the Caretaker government, he said the measures taken by Chief Adviser and his government would ensure successful election.

Terming Bangladesh as one of the most important partners of Japan in South Asia, Shin Sakurai said Japan would like to see peace, stability and prosperity in Bangladesh in the coming days.

## US rejects

FROM PAGE 12

and four Germans who were arrested in August and charged with proselytising, a serious offense under the Taliban regime's strict version of Islam.

Meanwhile, AFP from London adds: The United States and Britain plan to attack bases controlled by Laden within 48 hours, newspapers reported here yesterday.

The Observer, quoting unidentified US and British sources, said the attack was designed to kill bin Laden and would be carried out alongside strikes against air and ground forces of Afghanistan's Taliban regime.

According to the weekly, sources said that air and missile strikes could begin as early as Sunday and that US and British Special Forces would offer support in the attack.

The Mail on Sunday tabloid meanwhile quoted the military

leader of Afghanistan's opposition Northern Alliance as saying that his men would launch a new offensive against the Taliban within two days and with the support of the US.

"We hope and believe our offensive, in a number of places throughout the country, will be backed by America attacking from the air," Soleh Muhammad Registani was quoted as saying.

The Observer also said that it had obtained crucial evidence linking bin Laden to the September 11 strikes on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

It said it had seen a secret intelligence dossier compiled by an Arab state with a long-standing interest in bin Laden, which revealed that at least one of the 19 hijackers involved in the terrorist attacks was trained by the Saudi-born militant's network, al-Qaeda.

## Hasina, Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

to be Nour Mohammad Mandol of Jatiya Party (Ershad) in Rangpur-6 constituency where her husband Dr. MA Wajed Mia hails from.