

Violence in some constituencies: FEMA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), a local polls observing group, in a report last night said that the poll was marred by violence and intimidation in some constituencies.

The FEMA cited some examples of violence that had taken place in different districts, resulting in suspension of polling in some centres. It deployed over 60,000 volunteers to observe the voting across the country.

It, however, stated that in most of the polling stations the FEMA observers visited voter turnout was found high. There was also visibly a high number of women voters. Rain disrupted polling intermittently, it noted, adding that security arrangements were generally satisfactory and people queued up in significant numbers to vote in Dhaka.

The FEMA also noted that at some polling stations election officials did not appear to have been trained and did not display efficiency in performing their duties. "Our reports suggest that even though many polling stations opened on time and election officials had all the material available, there have been serious electoral irregularities at some of the polling

stations observed."

According to the FEMA report, one AL supporter was killed in a clash between the AL and BNP activists in Shariatpur-1 seat at around noon and BNP had reportedly taken over four polling stations.

Moreover, due to violent incidents, various polling stations were closed down in different constituencies including Comilla-8, 9 and 11, Madaripur-1.

It said, on the night proceeding the polling day, a group of activists went to a village in Manikganj and warned the people that they should vote for the AL. They attacked women of the village with sharp weapons. The women eventually caught them, but later the local UP chairman helped them escape before law-enforcement agencies could arrest them, it added.

In addition, intimidation of voters was also reported from several places in Chittagong including Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachhari. Reports of widespread impersonation have also come from many constituencies, the FEMA said.

It alleged that some of its observers faced obstacles at places and officials on polling duties took away their identity cards at some places.

AL unleashed

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Shibchat under Madaripur, Nilphaman sadar and Kazipur under Sirajganj.

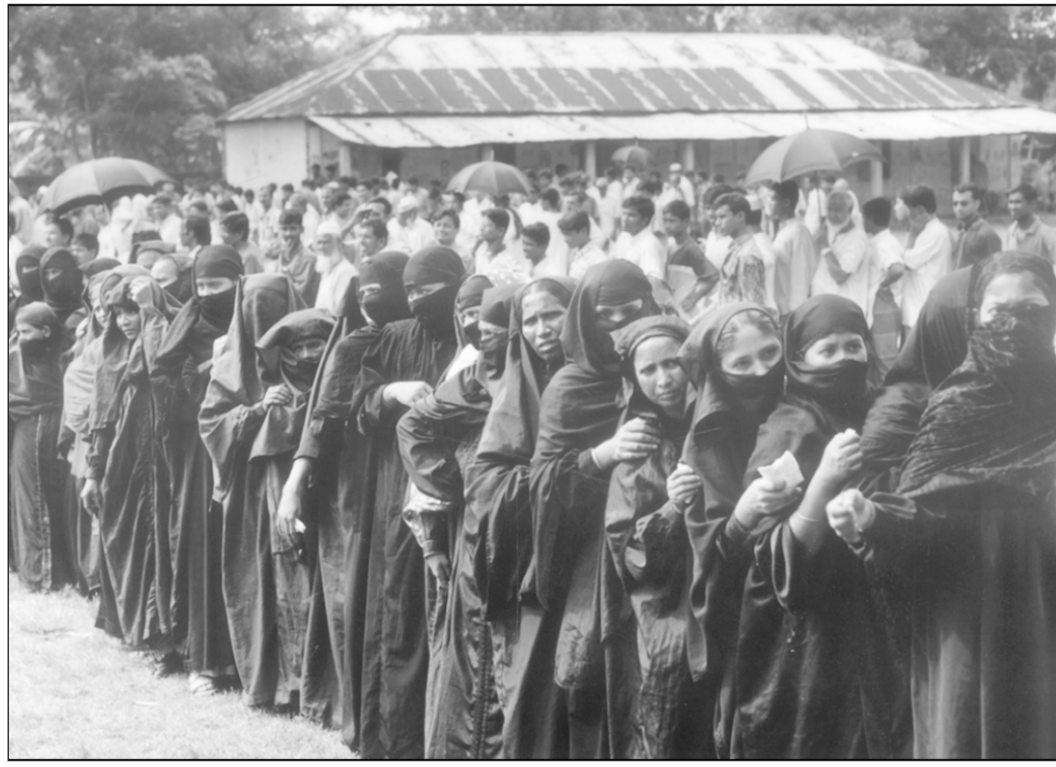
The spokesman said BNP's candidate at Narayanganj-4 constituency lodged complaints with the EC about forcible occupation of 27 polling centres by his rival candidate and AL leader Shamim Osman.

He said terrorists led by AL leader Tofail Ahmed forcibly occupied polling centres and resorted to massive vote-rigging through casting fake votes and manipulating results in other ways in three constituencies in Bhola from where the AL leader is contesting, and fired shots indiscriminately from sawn-off rifles.

Referring to Dhaka's situation, he said AL activists inside different polling centres created jam in polling booths by deliberately delaying the process of voting as each took 10 to 15 minutes to vote.

He said voters were forced to stand in very long queues outside many polling centres as voting could not even begin for at least an hour due to such willful obstructions by AL activists and many frustrated voters returned home without casting their vote.

The BNP spokesman said that the government had failed to ensure a free, fair and peaceful election.



Women voters queuing up at Rampur High School polling centre in Feni yesterday to cast their votes.

PHOTO: STAR

Peaceful polls

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thousand military, paramilitary and law enforcement personnel have been deployed to help peaceful polling.

The number of contestants in these elections is 1,933, with 1,449 running on the tickets of 52 political parties.

Both Hasina and Khaleda have, meanwhile, expressed hopes that their parties would secure enough seats to form the government on their own.

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 the all the 299 seats at stake. It has retained its traditional election symbol, boat.

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-Islami, pro-Naziur Rahman Manzur Jatiya Party faction and the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ).

In the June 12, 1996 elections, the AL won 146 seats while the BNP won 116 while the then unified JP 32 and the Jamaat 3. 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 144 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.

Clinton barred from practicing law in SC

REUTERS, Washington

Former President Bill Clinton was suspended yesterday from the practice of law before the US Supreme Court and he must show why he should not be disbarred, the nation's highest court said.

In a one-sentence order entitled "In the matter of discipline of Bill Clinton," the justices said the former president would have 40 days to show why he should not be disbarred from practicing law before the high court.

On January 19, right before he left office, Clinton admitted giving false, evasive statements about his relationship with former White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. As part of the deal with the independent counsel, Clinton accepted a five-year suspension of his license to practice law in Arkansas and paid a \$25,000 fine.

"Whenever a member of the bar of this court has been disbarred or suspended from practice in any court of record or has engaged in conduct unbecoming a member of the bar of this court," the Supreme Court's rules require it to suspend the lawyer and give the lawyer 40 days to respond to possible disbarment.

Women of Surat union cast votes for the first time in 50 years

UNB, Jhenedidah

For the first time in nearly 50 years, female voters of 12 villages at Surat union in Sadar upazila cast their votes yesterday.

The turnout of female voters in the district, which has got 3,737 women voters, was 80 per cent, said an official.

According to various NGOs, a devastating cyclone had lashed the area some 50 years ago on a polling day killing a good number of women and a child, and it prompted the locals to believe that the calamity befell on them due to casting of votes by women.

Since then, the female voters were discouraged to go to polling centres.

But this time the women of the 12 villages broke the age-old superstition and joined the election thanks to local leaders, NGO workers and the administration for their campaign to that end.



Relatives escort 90 year old Latifunnessa who came to cast her vote at Adamjee College polling centre. Incidentally it was the International Day for the Elderly yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Festive mood in city

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The Shamsul Haq High School centre in Demra under the Dhaka-4 constituency, several hundred people had already queued up when the clock struck eight. They did not mind the long wait, the voters said.

Away at the Suritola School centre under the Dhaka-7 constituency, several hundred female voters anxiously awaited their turn at 4:00 pm, scheduled end of the voting hours. Officials in charge of the centre, however, told The Daily Star that they would allow voting to continue until the queue was cleared, no matter how many more hours it needed.

Our correspondents visited over 15 polling centres under different city constituencies and talked to polling agents of rival candidates. Except at a few centres, they expressed satisfaction with the voting progressed throughout the day.

At the Suritola School centre, some agents of the four-party alliance candidates complained of hastened process of voting that had given them no chance to examine the authenticity of voters. Officials, however, denied the charge but acknowledged that due to too few booths available for women in that centre, they had to hurry a bit so that female voters did not remain in queues for long hours.

Two young ladies, Sharmin and

Mariam, were among over a hundred women who got held up for over two hours in long queue. "You see, there are six booths for male voters here. And there was only one for us. A little while ago the authorities here opened another booth to ease the pressure," Sharmin said angrily as Mariam nodded her head in agreement.

Some AL workers raised a hue and cry over the BNP candidate's long stay at a centre under the Dhaka-10 constituency. Tension prevailed over the issue for some time at the Ispahani Girls High School centre. When a Daily Star correspondent visited the centre at 12:50pm, Major (Retd.) Abdul Mannan said he had rushed there upon getting allegation of obstructions in the works of his polling agents.

Presiding Officer Solaiman Ali, however, said that some tension was generated centring some rumours but there was not a single genuine complaint lodged till that time.

As the scenario suggested, it appeared that people mostly tried to cast their votes in the first half of the day. In most centres some 50 to 60 per cent votes were cast by 12 noon.

At the Moghbazar Shanoori School centre, Presiding Officer Naresh Chandra told The Daily Star at 12 noon that over 800 votes out of total 1600 were cast.

Northern Alliance

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paigned to control militancy. Shamkhani also acknowledged for the first time that Iran has been supplying the Afghan opposition Northern Alliance with weapons and said Iran would continue to do so.

Pakistan's president said yesterday believed the United States will launch a military strike against Afghanistan, after the Taliban's supreme leader told the Afghan people that "Americans don't have the courage to come here."

The Pakistani president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, told the British Broadcasting Corp. that "It appears that the United States will take action in Afghanistan." Asked in the Taliban's days were numbered, he replied: "It appears so."

"It appears that the United States will take action in Afghanistan and we have conveyed this to the Taliban," Musharraf said, adding that Pakistan had tried its best to head off a confrontation over Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect in the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the United States.

In Afghanistan's beleaguered capital, Kabul, the first World Food Programme convoy since the start of the crisis arrived yesterday. Eight trucks carrying 218 tons of wheat made it through to the city after a

bone-jarring journey over rutted roads, said WFP spokesman Khalid Mansour said in neighboring Pakistan.

Fighting continued in the north of Afghanistan, with one district whose capture the opposition alliance had reported on Sunday apparently changing hands again. Taliban officials quoted by the private Afghan Islamic Press, a private news agency close to the Taliban, said their fighters had retaken the district of Qadis in northeastern Bagdis province.

Young voters

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defaulting and terrorist-harboring candidates."

She said it is better to boycott polls than elect a corrupt representative. More voters should boycott election to make political leaders understand that people do not like the present political culture, she said.

Shunil Chandra Babu, a barber in Mirpur area, said, "I voted for the person of my choice without any fear."

Abdus Sattar, a rickshawpuller in Mohammadpur area, said, "Fearing rigging, I cast my vote in the early hours of voting."

Hasina Akhtar, a fifth year student of Sir Salimullah Medical College, expressed her optimism that with three consecutive credible elections in the country, democracy will be consolidated. She hoped that the party losing the election will also accept the people's verdict.

Mozammel Hossain Bokul, a student of Dhaka University said, "It is difficult to choose a candidate because all of them are controversial and of dubious character. I have to choose the better between the two evils."

He was doubtful whether the party which would be in the opposition would attend the Jatiya Sangsad sessions.

Former president of S Vietnam Van Thieu dead

AP, Boston

Former South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, who led his nation in the war that tore apart Vietnam and bitterly divided the United States, then was forced to step down as North Vietnamese troops closed in, has died. He was 78.

Thieu collapsed Thursday at his home in suburban Foxboro on Thursday and died late Saturday at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, hospital spokesman Jerry Berger and cousin Hoang Duc Nha said Sunday.

Polls violence kills 5

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said that violence erupted after two of his supporters were wounded in firing by the BNP terrorists. He alleged that BNP men occupied eight polling centres and cast false votes.

BNP candidate Mosharraf Hossain Shajahan made similar allegations against AL. He claimed that AL men occupied ten polling centres and cast false votes. He also claimed that many of his activists were beaten up by AL activists.

Our Staff Correspondent from Barisal reports: Two persons were killed and 40 others injured in clashes between the activists of two rival parties at two centres one in Barisal-4 constituency and the other at a centre in Barisal-6 constituency during yesterday's voting.

The dead were identified as Subhas Chandra Das, 20 and Jamal Uddin, 25.

Subhash was killed at Boalia A S High School centre in Barisal-4 Constituency when a group of armed men opened fire at the centre at about 12.30pm.

The armed gang also ransacked the polling centre and exploded crackers. Polling at the centre has been postponed.

Jamal Uddin, an agent of an independent candidate, was shot dead at Darirchar Khajuria Madrassah centre in Mehendiganj upazila under Barisal-6 Constituency in the morning.

Polling in 19 centres of the two constituencies have been postponed.

In Shariatpur, one person was shot dead and many injured in clashes between the supporters of two candidates in Jazira area during election yesterday, according to UNB.

The dead was identified as Habibur Rahman, 25.

Three of the injured, who received bullet wounds in a gun-fight, were sent to Dhaka. They are Nuru Fakir, 27, Kalam Hawladar, 28, and Selim, 27.

Police and witnesses said the

supporters of AL candidate for Shariatpur-1 constituency Mobarak Ali Sikdar and AL rebel Hemaayat Ullah Awaranga clashed in BK Nagar Union of Jazira Upazila at about 2pm.

Polling was postponed in 11 centres in the three constituencies of the district, including 9 centres in Shariatpur-1, and one each in rest of the two constituencies.

US terror attacks condemn 10 million to poverty: World Bank

AFP, Washington

The September 11 terrorist assaults will plunge another 10 million people into poverty next year as developing nations take a battering, the World Bank said in a report yesterday.

"We have seen the human toll the recent attacks wrought in the US, with citizens from some 80 nations perishing in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania," said World Bank president James Wolfensohn.

"But there is another human toll that is largely unseen and one that will be felt in all parts of the developing world, especially Africa," he said in a statement.

"We estimate that tens of thousands more children will die worldwide and some 10 million more people are likely to be living below the poverty line of one dollar a day because of the terrorist attacks."

The World Bank's preliminary economic assessment was based only on expected loss of income, he said.

"Many, many more people will be thrown into poverty if development strategies are disrupted," Wolfensohn said.

Munshiganj polls

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each other at a number of polling centres.

District administration sources said that despite heavy deployment of army and law enforcing agency personnel, trouble broke out at some places in the constituency. However, the situation in other areas of the district was normal.

District officials said violence erupted and voting was disrupted in all the 13 polling centres in the town. None was however injured.

Polling at three of the centres was suspended -- at Dewbhog-2 Primary School and Makahati centres in the morning and at Bangla Bazar centre in the afternoon. It was disrupted in other centres for some time.

Activists of rival candidates also forced out polling agents of the other side from several centres.

Awami League candidate Mohammad Mohiuddin complained to the Returning Officer (RO) of rigging at 13 polling centres while Abdul Hai of four-party alliance complained of rigging at seven centres.

Both alleged that supporters of the rival side drove away their polling agents from those centres and demanded suspension of voting at the centres.

While visiting some polling centres in the town, this correspondent found that polling agents of either BNP or AL were absent from those and false votes were being cast.

An armed gang snatched three ballot boxes from Dewbhog-2 Primary School centre shortly after 9am.

Witnesses said the gang first

tried to stop voting at the centre by firing shots and exploding bombs and crackers.

Later, they snatched ballot boxes and threw those in a pond nearby. Officials suspended voting at the centre at around 10 am.

When this correspondent visited the spot at noon, one ballot box was still floating in the pond.

None was available at the centre and shops in the area were found closed. Local people were so panicked that they refused to talk to newsmen.

Meanwhile, some sources said one person Nasir-- who was bullet injured near Makhati polling centre on Sunday night died yesterday on way to hospital.

Army personnel arrested four persons with firearms from Sardar Para in the morning as they opened fire in front of Ziaatala Primary School centre.

Another gang put a revolver on the head of Presiding Officer Habibur Rahman at Idrakpur-1 Primary School centre and tried to snatch the ballot boxes, district administration sources said.

As the presiding officer raised an alarm, the elements fled. Army personnel turned up immediately and restored normalcy.

Activists of AL and BNP exchanged fire, exploded a number of bombs and chased each other in front of Munshiganj High School centre in the afternoon. The centre is near the office of the deputy commissioner.

Army personnel rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.