



Chief Advisor Latifur Rahman talks to polling officials at the Adamjee Cantonment College centre during an inspection (right); Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed (centre) casts his vote at the Gulshan-2 Model School and College; and counting goes on in full swing at the Segunbagicha School (left).

Voting suspended at four centres High turnout in Feni

MORSHED ALI KHAN & NURUL KARIM MOZUMDER, From Feni

An overwhelming majority of Feni's 6.86 lakh voters exercised their right to franchise yesterday.

With the polling centres having opened at 8:00am sharp, men and women poured in and formed long queues defying the blazing sun.

These correspondents visited 16 polling centres in the district and saw an exceptionally high turnout of female voters.

At the end of the day, however, sporadic violence forced the election officials to suspend voting at four centres at least.

In one such incident witnessed by our correspondents at Bhuiyarth Reazuddin Primary school centre, under Feni-3, at least ten gunmen stormed into the centre at 12:50pm. The gunmen, allegedly belonging to the Awami League, started shooting indiscriminately, forcing men and women in queues to run for cover.

The terrorists snatched a ballot box from a room. One of three armed policemen deployed there, Serajul Haque, repulsed the attack by firing two shots before his 303 rifle went out of order.

The terrorists then unleashed a

reign of terror by beating up Serajul Haque and all polling officials, including Presiding Officer Mostafa Kamal.

The hoodlums ran away into the nearby village along with the ballot box and the magazine of Haque's rifle. At 11:00am, he had informed the mobile army team of a possible terrorist attack, said the presiding officer. But a jeep-load of army

Polls held amid tension in Munshiganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Back From Munshiganj

Voting in Munshiganj-4 constituency comprising Munshiganj Sadar and Gazaria upazilas took place amid tension and panic among the people.

Three ballot boxes were snatched from one polling centre and voting at three centres in the town was suspended following violence.

Supporters of BNP and Awami League exchanged fire, exploded bombs and crackers and chased

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personnel arrived there half an hour after the incident.

Local administrative officials said the polling at Bottolbazar and Charlala under Feni-3, and at Birinchi under Feni-2 was suspended following reports of violence. There are 273 polling centres in three constituencies of Feni.

Officials said "several arrests" were made, but failed to confirm the number.

At most polling centres, women waited longer in the queues than men. Rokeya Begum, a mother of two, of Laxmipur under Feni-2, said she had waited for four hours before casting her vote.

At the Lashkorhal Primary School centre, Presiding Officer Mozibur Rahman said many rural women took longer time to cast their votes, which caused the delay. To make things worse, the number of female booths was few, compared to male ones, although female voters equalled male ones in numbers, he said.

Army, BDR and police conducted intensive patrolling in the constituencies. In remote villages, army vehicles were stationed at a safe

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'BNP rigged votes, forced out polling agents'

AL alleges massive irregularities

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Awami League yesterday alleged massive irregularities during elections.

Briefing newsmen at its election committee office, AL Election Committee Member-Secretary Mozaffar Hossain Paltu said according to reports received by them till 8 pm from across the country the BNP-Jamaat led terrorists occupied at least 110 centres of 70 constituencies and stamped the ballot papers in favour of their party candidates.

He also alleged that the BNP-led terrorists killed 3 AL activists at Gourmadi, Agarihaia and Sariatpur. In these centres, they forced out AL polling agents and heavily rigged the votes in favour of their alliance.

According to the statistics of the rigged centres, Paltu mentioned, 3 were in Dhaka-3, 2 in Rangpur-6, 4 in Thakurgaon-7, 1 in Chandpur (Kachua), 1 in Nilphamari-2, 2 in Gourmadi of Barisal, 25 in Shariatpur-1, 7 in Shariatpur-2, 12 in Muktagaacha, 7 in Jamalpur-2, 11 in Jamalpur 4, 3 in Pubna 1, 9 in Sylhet-1, 5 in Noakhali 1 and 16 in Comilla-6.

Besides, Paltu said the BNP-Jamaat activists forced out AL polling agents from many centres in Bhola, Narayanganj, Mehandiganj and Noakhali (Senbug) and stamped ballot papers in favour of their party nominees.

Paltu alleged that in most of these centres, the presiding officers and other members of the administration worked in favour of the alliance candidates.

He said although it apparently seemed from outside that polling was held in a free and fair manner, in reality the polls were heavily rigged from inside the centres.

He alleged that despite frantic efforts, Joint Secretary of the EC Katibur Rahman, who was coordinating the law and order, did not respond to receive their allegations.

Election Committee members Advocate Syed Ahmed Aatur Rahman Khan Kaiser, Abul Hossain Chowdhury and Monayem Sarker were present during the briefing.

Saifur leading against Muhit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

BNP nominee M Saifur Rahman was leading with a margin of 35,000 votes against Awami League's AMA Muhit in Sylhet-1 constituency.

Till 10 last night, Saifur got 86,180 votes and Muhit 51,418 in 83 centres out of the 159 in the constituency.

Four-party alliance candidates were also leading in two other constituencies in the district while AL candidate was leading in one constituency.

In Sylhet-5, alliance nominee Moulana Farid Uddin Chowdhury of Jamaat-e-Islami got 44,000 votes against 21,000 of Awami League's Hafiz Ahmed Majumder in 47 centres out of 106.

In Sylhet 4, BNP's Dilder Hossain Selim got 20,334 votes against 14,488 of Awami League's Imran Ahmed in 24 centres out of 75.

In Moulvibazar-1, BNP's Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury was leading with 500 votes against Awami League's Shahabuddin in 57 centres out of 60. Election in one centre was suspended in the constituency.

In Moulvibazar-2, independent candidate MM Shahin got 47,262 votes against 35,274 of Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed of AL in 56 centres out of 99. Polling was suspended in one centre.

Awami League's Nurul Islam Nahid was leading with 6,000 votes in 25 centres out of 138 in Sylhet-6.

Awami League unleashed a reign of terror

BNP alleges at press briefing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP has accused the Awami League of unleashing a reign of terror in different parts of the country during polling hours yesterday.

A BNP spokesman at a formal briefing at Sheraton Hotel in the evening alleged that AL "terrorists" attacked BNP candidates and supporters, snatched ballot papers and boxes, stopped voters from casting votes through obstruction and intimidation, and rigged votes in a good number of constituencies.

He said the nation was disheartened to see the hope of a free, fair and peaceful election fade away due to AL's vandalism, adding that even many noted personalities in the city including businessman Mehruz Ispahani, and journalists Nirmal Sen and Shafiqul Aziz could not cast their votes. Of them, Ispahani's vote had already been cast by a different person.

In Dhaka, the spokesman said, activists and terrorists of "a certain political party" cast fake votes in two centres - Curzon Hall and Science Annex Building - at the Dhaka University. The presiding officer at Curzon Hall punched and injured the polling officer when he protested

the widespread rigging including casting of fake votes in those centres, he said.

Besides, AL activists ousted BNP's polling agents in different polling centres at Moghbazar, Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur and Lalbagh in the city, he said, adding that the party was still receiving reports of attacks, vote-rigging and terrorist activities by the AL from different parts of the country.

He said AL "terrorists" attacked BNP candidate Zainal Abedin Faruq at Parikat polling centre at Senbag in Noakhali.

Quoting preliminary reports, the BNP spokesman said that violence, snatching of ballot papers and boxes, and casting of fake votes by the AL took place at Brahmanbaria - 3, Khulna - 4, Narayanganj - 2 and 4, Dhaka - 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11, Jessore - 3, Tangail - 1, Jhalakathi - 2, Rajshahi - 4, Bhola - 1, 2 and 3, Barisal - 3 and 5, Chittagong - 8, 9, 10 and 14, Madaripur - 1, Sylhet - 3, Noakhali - 1, Narsingdi - 1, 3 and 4, Laxmipur - 3, Pabna - 2, Chandpur - 5, Rangpur - 3, and Comilla - 8 and 9 constituencies.

Besides, there were similar reports from Netrokona sadar,

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Northern Alliance, Zahir Shah reach accord to oust Taliban

Iran to use force if US uses its airspace

AP, Rome

The ex-king of Afghanistan has reached an agreement with the opposition Northern Alliance aimed at ousting the Taliban rulers in Kabul, the two sides said yesterday.

Under the terms of the accord, the anti-Taliban coalition called for the convening of a traditional grand council of Afghan leaders.

This council would then convene a so-called Loya Jirga, made up of representatives of all of Afghanistan's ethnic and tribal groupings. It was not immediately clear when or where the Loya Jirga would take place or whether it was dependent on the Taliban being ousted from power.

The parties said in a statement that the Loya Jirga would elect a head of state and transitional gov-

ernment.

Western diplomats say that ex-king Mohammad Zahir Shah, who has lived in Italy in exile since 1973, is the only figure with the authority to assemble a broad anti-Taliban front. The Northern Alliance is the main force still fighting the Kabul regime and controls under 10 per cent of Afghan territory.

AP from Tehran says: Iran's Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani warned the United States yesterday that Tehran would use force if the US used Iranian airspace for its expected attacks on neighboring Afghanistan.

"A mistake cannot be repeated. We will strongly defend our airspace and will confront (US) planes if they use our airspace," Shamkhani said at a press conference.

The comments appeared aimed

more at underlining Iran's opposition to US plans for a war on terrorism than declaring a policy that could realistically limit US action.

The US could launch attacks from Pakistan, which also neighbours Afghanistan, or from warships in the Arabian Sea without violating Iranian airspace.

Osama Bin Laden, the Islamic extremist who is Washington's No. 1 suspect in the Sept. 11 terror attacks on the United States, is in Afghanistan.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said last week that Iran does not consider the United States "competent and sincere (enough) to lead any global campaign against terrorism."

But Iranian officials have left open the possibility of joining a UN-led cam

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News Analysis

Scindia's death deals a body blow to Cong

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Death of senior Congress leader Madhavrao Scindia in a plane crash Monday has come as a major blow to India's main opposition party at a time when it is trying hard to revive itself after suffering the worst electoral defeat in the 1999 general elections.

Scindia, 56, had been one of the leading lights of the century-old party's young generation of leadership and clearly stood out from others in the group by his suave and articulate manner of speaking in and outside parliament.

It was just over a year ago that the Congress suffered another setback when another of its young leader Rajesh Pilot died in a car accident.

The Congress had counted heavily on Scindia, who hails from Madhya Pradesh and Pilot from neighbouring Rajasthan to steer it through the most difficult phase the party faces.

The main opposition planned to rely on the two for reviving its fortunes in the crucial assembly elections due in India's most populous state in a matter of months.

Importance of the coming state polls could be gauged by the fact that

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee himself recently admitted that its outcome would have a bearing on the future of his government at the centre.

While Pilot was the party's presentable face among the sizeable Jat community voters in western Uttar Pradesh, Scindia was being seen as a real crowd-puller among Muslim voters, a deciding factor in at least 100 of the 300-odd assembly constituencies in the state.

Congress President Sonia Gandhi had no doubt been looking up to Scindia as her party's answer

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