

Election was free and fair: EMWG

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Monitoring Working Group (EMWG) yesterday said the country's overall election was free and fair with the exception of some isolated incidents of violence and rigging.

The EMWG, an alliance of 29 organisations, revealed this observation at a post-polls press conference at a city hotel, which was organised to release the preliminary findings of its election monitoring.

The polls-monitoring outfit protested the AL's allegations of massive corruption and crude rigging in the election.

It also called upon the AL to refrain from agitation programmes, and also upon all political parties to show respect to the people's verdict.

The EMWG praised Hasina for her announcement of participating in the re-polling despite her rejection of election results.

The group revealed that the minority voters faced harassment in some areas. Tribal voters were barred from casting their votes at eight centres in Rangamati hill district.

It also observed that improvement in election administration and monitoring is a continuing process, and there are many lessons to be learned from the election 2001.

A written statement of the group said, "The enthusiastic participation of women voters was clearly evident across the country." The high turnout of women voters was attributed to their increased awareness about rights and responsibilities and to the strong commitment from the Election Commission (EC), election

Shazneen case

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1998 accusing Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, a domestic help at his residence.

All the accused Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shaniram, Minu and Parvin were produced before the court during the hearing.

The murder case, pending with the first additional metropolitan sessions judge's court, Dhaka was earlier stayed by an order of the Supreme Court. The order will remain valid till disposal of the rape case.

The trial of the rape case began at the special court on July 9 last

Taliban deploy troops

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Another report says, Afghanistan's opposition Northern Alliance said yesterday it had suspended helicopter flights to its Panjshir valley stronghold north of Kabul for at least two days.

It gave no reason for the suspension, but it marked the first time since the United States threatened to strike Afghanistan in its hunt for Laden that the alliance had cancelled flights without blaming the weather.

"There will be no flights to Panjshir today or tomorrow. Perhaps the next day (they will resume)," Dr Abdullah Abdullah, foreign minister in the Northern Alliance government, told Reuters by telephone.

On Saturday, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said plans were in place for a military strike against the Taliban, who are accused of harbouring Laden.

"Things are coming into place, although obviously the timing on any such action is a matter we must discuss with our close allies," Blair

BNP elements

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Toha Group, having close ties with Mirza Abbas, the BNP MP-elect who is widely known as a godfather. Demra police fear that the two gangs may engage in a bloody fight for control of the Syedabad terminal.

Meanwhile, at least three separate armed gangs, belonging to the Sramik Dal, the Jubo Dal and the local ward commissioner, Chowdhury Alam, tried to take control of the Fulbaria bus terminal on October 2. According to transport workers, the Jubo Dal gang led by one Ahmed and the Sramik Dal gang led by Belal ousted Chowdhury's men from the terminal.

Both Ahmed and Belal are now fighting to assert absolute control over the terminal. A fight might erupt any moment in the area, transport workers fear.

The day after the October 1 election, Nazimuddin, a notorious criminal, and his armed associates entered the Gabtoli inter-district bus terminal and ordered all others to vacate the area. Nazimuddin had met the BNP MP-elect of the Mirpur area earlier on the day. Sharif, Haktaka Rahim, Shawkat and about hundred others participated in the operation.

A policeman of the Mirpur station said that they could hardly anything to stop such take-overs.

A sub-inspector said that if the political leaders stopped encouraging these criminals, police would be forced to act against them. Some honest policemen tried to arrest some of these criminals but ended up being transferred to remote areas of the country. "To get transferred to a police station in Dhaka is very costly. Why should any police officer bother to upset the party in power and get transferred to a

observers and administrative and security personnel.

Strategic measures including restriction on vehicular movement and ban on cellular phones have greatly minimised the incidence of violence, the EMWG said in its report read out by its co-ordinator Mosharraf Hossain.

Yet, the election was affected by isolated incidents of violence and rigging, and consequently, polling at a few centres was suspended.

Rokshana Khandoker, Adilur Rahman, Fazal Kamal, Nazmul Ahasan Kolimullah, Kamrul Hassan Monju, Taleya Rehman and Sharmin Moshed, among others, attended the press conference.

The EMWG's complete report will be made available by the end of the current month, EMWG officials said.

BSS adds: Brottee, an organisation in the group, said Hindu voters in Barisal and Jhalakathi were threatened by the cadres of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami not to go to polling centres. Moreover, some members of the minority community were beaten up and forced to leave their homes.

Brottee said its observers received information about attacks on them and burning of their houses in different parts of Barisal and Patuakhali districts.

Sumon

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Several hundred agitated party workers, who were crowding outside the office as Hasina was delivering her speech inside, also raised their voice against Dhaka city AL General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya.

They demanded replacement of Maya who was also a state minister during AL rule. Maya's image was tarnished, mainly because of the bad name earned by his son Dipu Chowdhury.

Four days back, Maya faced another embarrassing situation while attending an extended meeting of the party's Central Working Committee at the Institute of Engineers in the city.

Over 100 agitating party workers had gheraoed his vehicle shouting 'catch him, catch him.' Some party leaders however managed his safe escape.

told reporters on return from a whirlwind tour of Russia, Pakistan and India.

The Taliban said yesterday a British reporter, Yvonne Ridley, 43, held for more than a week for entering the country illegally, had been freed.

"She has been released," Abdul Hannan Himat, head of the Taliban's Bakhtar News Agency, quoted Information Minister Qudratullah Jamal as saying. Details were not immediately available.

Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar issued an order for her release on Saturday.

US and British aircraft carriers, more than 300 warplanes, ships armed with cruise missiles and special forces troops have gathered within striking distance of Afghanistan. Some 30,000 troops have also been deployed.

On the economic front, the world's richest nations, meeting in Washington, said they would work together to jump-start global growth and choke off funds for groups that sponsor terrorism.

remote area of the country."

On Friday last, armed BNP hoodlums attacked the microbus and taxi stand at the Zia International Airport, one of the most lucrative areas in the city. Although Zia police denied the attack, they admitted that there were scuffles between two gangs.

Local people say that, due to its "strategic and financial" attractions, the BNP and the AL hoodlums have struck a deal to co-exist at the ZIA. The taxicab counters and links with various smuggling connections make the ZIA taxi stand a "very important area" for the city's underworld.

Similar "understanding" has been arrived at between the BNP and the AL hoodlums in Karwan Bazar area as well after a series of clashes that left several injured, one of them critically, in the last one week.

According to traders, at least two lakh taka is raised as toll in the area every day. Most illegal traders pay toll daily and genuine and permanent traders monthly to the two gangs operating in the area.

These politically blessed gangs have also demarcated their respective territories, as not hamper each other's work. However, the BNP gang is now demanding 'more areas' for, what they said, an "increased liability" now that the party has been elected.

Meanwhile, the notorious "Red Army" has deserted the Sadarghat launch terminal, where about a lakh people depart and arrive every day. Members of the red army used to systematically tax every merchandise being transported through the river port.

2 muggers held, beaten up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two muggers were caught and beaten by a mob as they tried to speed away in an auto-rickshaw, firing shots at police who challenged them near the Shapla Chatter in the city yesterday evening.

None of the policemen was injured.

Police recovered a foreign made revolver with two magazines and 31 bullets from their possession.

The muggers were identified as Saiful Islam Arif, 25, son of Liakot Ali and Mohammad Liton, 24, son of Deen Islam of Satish Sangkar Road in the city, according to police.

As the auto-rickshaw came near the Shapla Chhatar, police asked them to stop but they tried to speed away firing shots.

Police with the help of people nearby chased and caught them. The mob beat and injured them critically. They were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Carter

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"It now appears from all international and domestic observer reports that the elections were peaceful and that they were conducted in accordance with international standards," he said in the letter to CECMASyed.

Carter noted that the reports ran counter to public statements attributed to Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League of massive rigging, said an EC press release yesterday.

"Any complaints should follow normal legal channels of appeal rather than a complete refusal to recognise the election's legitimacy," said Carter, who had visited the country on a pre-election observation mission last August.

He said Hasina's recent vow to boycott parliament ran counter to her August pledge and has the potential not only to destabilise the new parliament but also to unravel the delicate fabric of the Bangladeshi democracy.

"It is imperative, however, that the Awami League accept the results of the election in order to strengthen Bangladesh's democratic institutions in the long term," he said.

He appreciated the party's important leadership role for democracy in Bangladesh, and said that the AL must continue to play that role while in opposition. "This is the essence of democracy."

PDB

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bers on those committees. Meanwhile, the contract remained suspended. As a result, Technopromexport refrained from giving any performance guarantee and the PDB refrained from giving any down payment.

However, while the investigation committee proceeded with its work at a snail's pace, suddenly Technopromexport, also known as TPE, on January 14 announced that a lot of equipment and materials would arrive at the Mongla Port and the PDB should immediately clear these from the customs.

Despite suggestions from the PDB not to import any of these equipment as the contract was not yet effective, TPE brought in the machinery on February 13. The equipment, later discovered to be old and refurbished, are lying with Mongla customs till date.

Fresh voting in 83 centres today

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Brahmanbaria-3 and 6, Comilla-8 and 9, Chandpur-2, Munshiganj-4 and Laxmipur-4 constituencies.

A total of 298,919 voters of the 90 centres are expected to exercise their franchise in today's re-election. They will cast their ballots at 601 booths amid additional security arrangement. However, officials at the EC Secretariat said the deployment of armed forces will be like that of the October 1 election.

Constituency-wise polling centres, where re-polling is taking place, are nine in Barisal-6, eight each in Mymensingh-5 and Chandpur-2, five in Mymensingh-6, one each in Kishoreganj-1 and 2, Moulvibazar-1 and Laxmipur-4; seven in Brahmanbaria-6; 12 each in Shariatpur-1 and Comilla-8, three in Moulvibazar-2, 10 in Brahmanbaria-3 and four in Comilla-9 constituencies.

The BNP-led alliance has fetched 203 seats, the Awami League 61, Jatiya Party (Ershad) 14, Jatiya Party (Manju) and Krishak Sramik Janata League one each and independent candidates three of the 283 seats, gazetted results of which have been published.

According to UNB, following are the standings in 15 seats set for repolling:

In Bagerhat-4, Maulana Abdus Sattar of Jamaat-e-Islami is leading the race polling 82,710 votes. His nearest rival Dr Mozammel Hossain of AL got 81,869.

Sattar is 841 votes ahead of Mozammel while the number of voters in the lone centre set for re-

Attacks on AL activists

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with offenders or remaining inactive.

The politics of grabbing is widespread - from the capital out to the remote areas - and the Hindu-dominated areas are reported to have been the worst hit.

Barisal, Bhola, Pirojpur, Satkhira, Jessore, Khulna, Kushtia, Jhenidah, Bagerhat, Feni, Tangail, Noakhala, Natore, Bogra, Sirajganj, Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Brahmanbaria, Gazipur and Chittagong are among the districts where the post-election violence is taking its toll.

Following are some of the horrific stories of torture on the AL workers and religious minorities as reported in the leading dailies.

On Thursday, an intern doctor of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital Dr. Bijoy Dutta was picked up from the hospital and severely injured allegedly by an armed group of pro-BNP men. Armed people also attacked nine other doctors belonging to the Hindu community at the DMCH and the Mitford Hospital.

At Panchaboti in Narayanganj, some pro-BNP terrorists attacked the house of schoolteacher Dilip Mondol on the same day. They assaulted Mondol's ailing father and

then took on two young sisters of the teacher as they tried to protect their 60-year-old father.

The terrorists tried to unclothe the two sisters and their mother, and threw away Mondol's four-month-old daughter.

On Friday, BNP supporters dragged a local AL leader, Fatema Begum (50), onto the street from her house at Mirpara under Munshiganj Sadar Upazila. They severely beat her up and shaved her head near the Mirapara mosque in presence of many.

Yesterday, a group of armed miscreants attacked Hindu-concentrated areas at Deobhogg and Golachipa in the Narayanganj town. They fired shots driving the minorities away from these areas.

UNB quoted Rajendra Prasad Jha, priest of Laxminarayan Akhra at Deobhogg, as saying that the attackers from Nandipara kidnapped the firing of the temple and left the place rigid gunshots.

Pro-BNP students also took over Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College, Salimullah Medical College, Jagannath Government College, BUET, Dhaka College and other leading educational institu-

tions in the capital. The terrorists have not spared the shopping centres surrounding these campuses either.

Besides, students loyal to the BNP and Jamaat have also taken control of Jahangirnagar University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University and other leading educational institutions across the country.

Control of the bus terminals at Syedabad, Mahakkhali, Gabtoli and Fulbaria, and some markets in the city has also changed hands, from the AL elements to their BNP counterparts. At least two city MPs elected on the BNP ticket are learnt to have masterminded such practices. The truck stands in the city were not also spared.

The hoodlums of the winning party have also taken control of the Sadarghat launch terminal, Badamtoli, Wizehgate and Sowaighat jetties and the taxi stand of the Zia International Airport.

Interestingly, there are people who had changed their political colour overnight and joined the all-grabbing goons.

Eyes of Sarbahara leader gouged out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Both the eyes of a so-called Sarbahara party leader of Kamrul group were gouged out by the armed activists of rival Gia group at Islampur village of Agarpur union under Babuganj thana of the district on Saturday.

According to police and witnesses, Shahid Akon, 40, was attacked by the party-men of his rival group at Islampur in the afternoon.

They beat him up mercilessly and at one stage gouged out his both eyes with sharp lethal weapons. Later they left the place leaving the victim on the road.

Local people took Shahid to the Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) in a critical condition and got him admitted there.

Shahid, an accused in several cases, was in hiding since long, police said.

Law & order situation reviewed

UNB, Dhaka

The Advisory Committee on Law and Order at a meeting yesterday reviewed the country's overall law and order situation.

Members of the Council of Advisors and senior officials concerned attended the meeting at the Chief Advisor's office.

Khaleda for dialogue

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equal rights. Today, I am giving people the assurance that people of all religions and communities will enjoy full freedom. From now no one will be repressed and none would be allowed to repress anyone. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists are equal in our eyes."

The BNP chairperson reiterated that her party would implement the pledges it had made to people before the election. The commitments detailed in the manifesto would be realised in the next five years, she added.

Khaleda sought full co-operation from all officials and employees of the republic and assured that the new government would not harass anyone. Nor would it use the administration to meet partisan end, she said.

"There would be no politicisation of the administration. We will not do what the past government did to the officials and employees of the republic. Posting and promotion would be decided on the basis of merit and competence."

The October 1 general election, she said, was a great challenge for

the BNP and the alliance. "We have successfully tackled the challenge and hope that we would successfully handle the challenge of running the country."

In this regard, she warned, no one would be allowed to get away with any wrongdoing.

"Don't think that you would do whatever you wish just because you are an MP. No member of the parliament belonging to the four-party will be forgiven for committing any injustice. Tougher legal action will be taken if any MP commits any crime."

Khaleda advised the lawmakers to discharge the responsibilities entrusted upon them by the Constitution with sincerity and dedication. "We sincerely want to make the parliament effective and lively. All members should concentrate on parliamentary affairs and duties of the MPs would be to ensure peace, discipline and security in their respective constituencies."

The BNP chairperson instructed the MPs to be in Dhaka only when the session was on and go back to

their respective constituencies when the session was over. "You will listen to the problems of people and then inform us. We will try our best to solve all problems of the people."

Khaleda said there was an acute financial crisis in the country now and urged all to work hard to improve the economic situation. "We revived the economy and achieved tremendous development in between 1991-96 through hard work. Similarly, we have to work hard again to improve the economy."

She accused the AL of continuing terrorism to discredit the BNP and the alliance, alleging that it was stoking the communal issue and trying to create an anarchic situation.

BNP leaders Professor AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and Abdol Mannan Bhuiyan, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Matiuur Rahman Nizami, Jatiya Party (N-F) Chairman Nazirul Rahman Manzur and Islami Oikya Jote Chairman Azizul Haq addressed the function among others.

12 AL, BCL men killed

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thana accusing 25 JCD activists.

At Chhagalnaiya, unidentified gunmen abducted BCL activist Hasnat Mahmud from Samity Bazar at noon on Saturday. They took him to an unknown place and beat him mercilessly. The abductors later sent Masud to Mastannagar Health Complex where he succumbed to his injuries in the evening.

AL activist Abu Sayed Bahar, who was abducted and beaten up by rival party activists at Dharmapur in Dagonbhuiyan thana in the early hours of Thursday, died at Maidde Health Complex at 1:00 pm yesterday.

Our Staff Correspondent from Khulna writes: Two leaders of Awami League were killed in Rampal and Swarankhola upazillas of Bagerhat district on Saturday.

Shibir cadre Sajjad on fresh remand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Sajjad, a cadre of Islami Chhatra Shibir and the prime chargesheeted accused in the sensational eight murder case, and his accomplice Delwar were placed on another five day's remand here yesterday.

Sources said they were remanded again for interrogation in the case regarding murder of Chhatra League leaders Abul Quasem and Abu Taher in the city last month. Sajjad and Delwar were allegedly involved in the murder.

Earlier, Sajjad and Delwar were placed on four days' remand for interrogation in the eight murder case and the case regarding murder of Ward Commissioner Liakot Ali.

Police said, during interrogation, Sajjad divulged some important information about his terrorist gang and its leader Habib Khan.

AL leaders from Gazipur

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ducted as per a blue print. The post-election terrorism is also part of that blueprint done by BNP and its anti-liberation allies."

AL leader Akhteruzzaman who contested in Gazipur-3 demanded re-polling at Ajmatpur Centre No. 71 and re-counting of votes in the remaining 73 centres in the constituency.

He said, "Polling Officer Atiqur Rahman Molla was caught red handed during rigging and casting false votes. Following a complaint, the Presiding Officer filed a case -- No 1 (10) 2001 -- with Kaliganj thana against the polling officer", he said.

Polling at Ajmatpur centre was continued despite my demand for postponement, he claimed.

He also claimed that at Mafbaria centre 100 more votes in favour of 'boat' were found after recounting locally and at Dhanbari centre 28 ballot papers were not used.

He alleged that BNP workers are demanding toll from local businessmen and two cement factories have already been closed for this.

Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj, elected from Gazipur-4, alleged that the

AL non-cooperation

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day after if the demand is not met. At yesterday's meeting the AL chief, however, did not relax the already-announced October 10 road barricade programme. Nor did she give any hint of softening the party stance on non-joining the eighth parliament.

Hasina reiterated her allegation of 'crude rigging' in the polls and called party rank and file to hold protest rallies across the country today and tomorrow and make the October 10 road barricade a success.

"We could go for violent reaction to ventile our wrath against the poll rigging, but we didn't do so. We're a democratic organisation and we believe that they (those who rigged the polls) will have to pay the price one day," said Hasina in a tone of restraint.

She, however, hastened to add that her party workers should not hesitate to retaliate any attacks on them.

"They (BNP-led alliance) have not formed government as yet, but they already started grabbing bus terminals, students' residential halls, footpaths and MP hostels. Is it their style of building a terrorism and corruption-free society?" Hasina wondered.

AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman and presidium members Sajeda Chowdhury and Abdur Razzak also spoke briefly at the meeting chaired by the party's city unit President Mohammad Hanif. AL presidium members Abdus Samad Azad and Amir Hossain Amu were also present.

Members of the AL Dhaka city unit, presidents and secretaries of its front organisations, party candidates from different city constituencies in the just-held election and Dhaka City Corporation's ward commissioners belonging to the AL attended the joint meeting that lasted for 75 minutes.

Hasina alleged that extra ballot

Police said Mohammad Mallik, 40, president of Gourambha union unit of Awami League in Rampal upazilla, was chopped to death at 7 am yesterday.

Mallik came under attack by a group of BNP activists while he was returning home at Borna village from Gourambha bazar.

Bagerhat AL leaders blamed BNP armed cadres for the murder.

In another incident, Shamsu, 32, a leader of Dhanshagar union unit of Awami League of Swarankhola upazilla, was beaten to death early yesterday morning.

Awami League has blamed Jamaat activists for the killing. Jamaat denied the charge.

None has so far been arrested in connection with the two murders.

AL activist Enayet Shikder of Kumarkhali union of Morrelganj upazilla of Bagerhat, succumbed to his fatal injuries in Khulna Medical College Hospital early yesterday morning.

He was severely injured in post-poll violence on October 3 in Morrelganj upazilla.

His body was lying in the morgue of Khulna Sadar hospital till filing of this report at 6 pm yesterday.

Hanif's directive File cases against illegal occupants

UNB, Dhaka

Dhaka City Mayor Mohammad Hanif has directed the officials concerned to file cases against those who illegally occupied markets, bus terminals, public toilets and other assets of the city corporation.

In a statement yesterday, he also urged the caretaker government to take appropriate legal actions against the illegal occupants, terrorists and extortionists.

TNO and the OC of Kapasia thana did not co-operate with AL leaders and favoured BNP candidate Brig (Retd) Hannan Shah. AL polling agents were forced out of some centres, he alleged.

He expressed grave concern over "terrorist activities" by BNP workers in his constituency, specially in areas of minority community people. "They have already demolished a Mandir (temple) at Durgapur village."

In Kapasia town, BNP "terrorists" made announcements over mike, threatening to attack AL leaders, Taj alleged.

M Ahsanullah Master said, "Chief Advisor of the caretaker government Justice Latifur Rahman and CEC Abu Syed are laughing in such a situation. This is like the torture done by Tikka Khan in 1971."

He also expressed concern at the "silent role" of police in the "deteriorating law and order situation in the district".