

## Campaign at high tide, response at low ebb

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The last minute campaigning was feverish but the voters were not enthusiastic.

Many of the 40 voters this correspondent talked to yesterday were found reluctant to cast their vote in the Dhaka City Corporation election.

The campaigning ended at midnight last night.

Most of them believe the election will not bring any improvement in the city life, particularly in law and order.

In the last 10 years, the mayor and most of the commissioners failed in their commitments and dishonoured people's mandate, they said.

They made a lot of promises but after the election, they used their position and power for personal gains, they said.

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Electioneering in earnest...city corporation elections candidates bring out colourful last-minute campaign processions in the city while the army troops patrol violence-prone zones.



PHOTO: STAR

## Commissioners for crime cartels!

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over the last eight years activities of most of the city's ward commissioners mainly revolved round various crimes including land grabbing, hooliganism, extortion and minting money by abusing office.

Many of the 120 ward commissioners in the city, in reality, did not know what they should do with the mandate. Neither the mayor nor the local government ministry ever took any initiative to train these public representatives and hand them a job description.

The moment election results were announced in 1994, most of the newly elected ward commis-

sioners knew that anyone in their wards would require their approval to secure government payment for local development works. They knew exactly how much to charge for giving the nod. The ward commissioners also learnt that they needed an office to run the day-to-day business in the ward. Many ward commissioners, aided by gangs of hoodlums, grabbed public land and launched construction of an office that would serve obvious purposes.

Over the years ward commissioners, particularly of the ruling party, enjoyed an unofficial immunity from rule of law. The local police invariably played into the hands of these commissioners who main-

tained their own army of hoodlums with the active support of law enforcers.

Many ward commissioners, who were responsible for social welfare and development activities, did nothing for their voters excepting for indulging in criminal activities. There have been widespread allegations that not a single criminal incident took place in the city without the knowledge of the ward commissioners.

In Sutrapur, Ward Commissioner Saidur Rahman Shahid became notorious as 'godfather' of criminals having access to wealth and power.

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## Campaign ends, polls tomorrow

NAZRUL ISLAM AND ABUL KALAM AZAD

Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi turned into cities of colourful processions yesterday, as mayoral and ward commissioner candidates were engaged in high-pitched last-minute election campaign.

Streets, lanes and by-lanes of the three metropolitan cities were crowded with colourful processions of varying sizes.

However, fears of violence caused by presence of some alleged criminals in the fray largely dampened the mood, associated with city corporation polls.

Electioneering frenzy, meanwhile, died down as the midnight cut-off approached.

Under the existing electoral laws, ban on campaign activities such as public meetings and processions

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## No decision on gas export yet: Khaleda

'Many press reports found exaggerated, false'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said her government has not yet taken any decision on gas export.

She also said use of the natural resource by its own people is top priority. "We still have no concrete assessment of our gas reserves. After assessment, we will first meet our domestic demand and then set up gas-based industries for our own development," she said.

Khaleda further said: "The question of gas export does not arise before the assessment is made and domestic demands met. We can think of export through value addition and we must discuss the issue with all, if it was necessary to export gas. The BNP will not take any decision on gas of its own."

During exchange of views with reporters at the International Conference

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Khaleda Zia

## Polls violence rising

ABUL KALAM AZAD

Violence in the city ahead of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) election has increased due to frequent threats, attacks on processions, and ransacking and vandalising of election offices by rival ward commissioner candidates or their men.

Sources said criminal activities have increased as none of the listed and identified criminals contesting the DCC election have been arrested despite the fact that many of them are campaigning for vote openly.

Two persons, including an independent commissioner candidate, have so far been killed, while three candidates and one ruling BNP leader were shot by miscreants. More than 40 persons sustained injuries when at least eight processions came under attack in different parts of the city.

Sources said despite enhanced

security measures independent candidates were attacked by the hoodlums of ruling four-party alliance nominees.

With only one day to go, the ruling BNP candidates are issuing threats to the independent candidates over telephone and also in person to oust them from the fray.

Many independent candidates alleged that the ruling party nominees were sending gangsters to their houses at night to pressure them into withdrawing from the race since the election schedules were announced last month. Even supporters and relatives of the independent candidates are not spared and they often find themselves facing the wrath of the goons.

On the night of April 21, miscreants fired gunshots and kicked at the gate of the entrance of Delwar Hossain Khan, independent ward

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## Hanif's shenanigans

STAR REPORT

When Mohammad Hanif's eight years of mayorship ends through the April 25 polls, he will go down the history of Dhaka in his litany of uncollected garbage, mindless construction of markets, encroachment on public spaces including parks, footpaths and what not.

Elected in 1994 for a period of five years, he and his ward commissioners however managed to stay in office for over eight years, thanks to a writ petition against the demarcation of city wards.

But the city corporation polls tomorrow will give the Dhaka dwellers a chance to drown their sorrows over the election of a new mayor. And whoever will be the new city father, it will be an easy sail for him with the Awami League keeping away from the election. Scaling the challenge will not be, though.

For this last eight years, Dhakaites would meet with newer city corporation shenanigans everyday. One day, they woke up to find the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) contractors digging busy city roads. Soon, they found out that the mayor has at long last thought about segregating rickshaws from fast-moving



Mohammad Hanif

vehicles, and therefore, took up a Tk 5 crore project to build rickshaw lanes along all major thoroughfares.

The scheme increasingly looked ridiculous as the dividers created more and more chaos on the roads. An apparently embarrassed mayor took up another project at an unspecified cost from the public coffer. This time, it was to remove the rickshaw lane slabs from the roads installed only a few months ago!

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## RPCL delights in PDB plight

SHARIER KHAN

The Rural Power Company Limited (RPCL), which sells highly 'over-priced' power to the Power Development Board (PDB) under a faulty agreement, is now planning to expand its power generation capacity, sources said.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is scheduled to inaugurate a 70MW expansion project of the RPCL plant, which already has a capacity of 140MW single-cycle power generation.

Sources said that the new project, now at a primary stage, aims at converting the plant into a combined

cycle system.

Owned 49 per cent by private owners and 51 per cent by the Rural Electrification Board (REB), the RPCL has been 'forcibly' selling power to the PDB from its 70MW first-phase Mymensingh plant from 1999. Its second-phase 70MW power plant has been in operation since 2000.

The RPCL's equity is designed to gradually go to the private owners, making it a full private scheme. In mid last year, the PDB was forced by the higher authorities to sign a power purchase agreement (PPA) with the RPCL at a very high price, sources said.

As a result, the financially crippled PDB has been buying power from RPC at Tk 2.15 per kilowatt-hour (or a unit) and sell the same to the REB, parent company of the RPCL, at Tk 1.84 per unit. The monthly billing comes at around Tk 20-25 crore. In contrast, the PDB pays the private AES 360MW Haripur Power Plant around Tk 22-23 crore per month.

In addition, using political influence the RPCL struck a costly operation and maintenance (O&M) deal

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RAW FOR ROUND

The Daily Star  
RANGS TOSHIBA  
WORLD CUP QUIZ 2002

keep your fingers crossed!  
Let our special guests pick your name on April 26  
Venue:  
Aswini Kumar Town Hall  
BARISAL  
Time: 4pm

Best wishes for you in Round 1. But, just in case you miss out, there's always Round 2 starting April 26