



Bikalpa Dhara activists, left, set up a bamboo-made scale, tilted heavily to one side, to symbolise a more weighty government than the High Court. Party Lawmaker Mahi B Chowdhury, in the middle of first row, along with party activists lies down at the main entrance to the High Court building to protest against vote rigging by the ruling alliance in Dhaka-10 by-polls.



Hired voters being herded on to a bus in front of Bishal Centre in Moghbazar on an impersonation mission.

The ACEC's first-hand knowledge about the by-poll, however, was unmistakably sour. While visiting the BG Press Government Primary School polling centre Safiur found around 50 percent votes had been already cast, though he could not find a single voter in the booth.

The ACEC, however, has refused to cancel the results of the by-poll. We do not have any evidence of polling centre captures or stuffing of ballot boxes, he said. Election cannot be annulled on the ground of the absence of army alone, he continued. Safiur, however, said, "I hope legal action will be taken against individuals responsible for the violation of electoral laws. The High Court will take legal action if the matter is brought to its cognisance." The EC has not done that yet.

ALL is well in the BNP camp though. While independent observers have denounced the result by terming it "a farce", Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, the BNP general secretary has described the election as "free, fair and peaceful". Bikalpa Dhara contested the election not to win it; they just participated in the polls only to bring allegations against the BNP as a strategy for its publicity, the BNP secretary general claims.

Sharmeen Murshid, chairperson of Brotee, an independent election monitoring organisation, has a different story to narrate. "We, citizens and voters, note with concern, shame and anger the degradation of the election commission from an independent constitutional body to a mere expansion of the government and a tool in the hands of subsequent governments to manipulate elections," she said while presenting Brotee's report on Dhaka-10 by-poll.

Muhammad Abdul Matin, secretary general of Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), agrees. Matin describes the election as "an unusual event in the history of the country", and a "one sided show". Sacks of ballot papers in the possession of the assistant presiding officers of most of the polling stations were found to have been stamped in advance with official seal of the EC to provide ample scope for stuffing, a FEMA report says. The participation of voters, according to Brotee's report, was very low too. Though the total presence of voters is recorded as 73 percent, the average vote cast was a mere 38 percent; 35 percent of the genuine voters left the booths without casting their ballots, the report alleges. "Of the 38 percent votes cast, 55 percent were false, and the rest 45 percent were genuine," Brotee, which has used "vote matrix" to monitor the by-poll, says.

The BDM, meanwhile, staged demonstrations at the entrance to the High Court on July 8. The BDM workers carried a coffin and a scale to protest what they said "the death of democracy and massive rigging in the by-poll". "These are all about Dhaka-10 by-poll. The coffin is the symbol of the corpse of democracy," Mahi B Chowdhury said.