

Anomaly in voter enrolment in districts

Ruling party men engaged, minority voters skipped, opposition leaders claim

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Gross anomaly in enrolment of voters has been reported from many urban and rural areas in different districts. The irregularities are taking place as the job is being done allegedly by ruling party men and supporters, recruited by local Election Commission offices.

Allegations have it that at places, supporters of opposition parties and minority community people were left out deliberately, according to reports by our correspondents.

Our Kushtia Correspondent reports: Sumon Sen Gupta of Courtpara area in Kushtia town said two enumerators -- Emdadul Haq and Shamsur Rahman -- went to his rented flat yesterday.

They enrolled names of Muslim voters residing in the building and ignored six eligible voters of his family even after his repeated request, Sumon alleged. Emdadul Haq and Shamsur Rahman, both teachers at Kushtia Muslim High School tried to leave the place hurriedly after enrolling the Muslim voters.

Sumon then informed some local journalists. When the journalists rushed there and asked the enumerators about the matter, they said it was a 'mistake' and then enrolled the six members of Sumon's family in the voter list.

Sources said both the enumerators belonged to ruling Jamaat-e-Islami.

Our Nilphamari Correspondent reports: Enrolment of voters continued in a haphazard manner in Nilphamari town yesterday as most of the eligible voters did not know that preparation of a fresh list began three days ago.

The authorities concerned claimed that 70 per cent work has been completed at field level though the enrolment process drew a lacklustre response from eligible voters due to lack of publicity and awareness.

Leaders of opposition political parties alleged that ruling party men have been appointment as supervisors and data collectors. BNP - Jamaat supporter and madrasa teachers were given preference in the recruitment, they alleged.

They also alleged that supporters of opposition parties and minority community people were being deliberately left out of lists.

It was gathered that Kamruzzaman, a Jamaat-e-Islami activist in Jaldhaka upazila, is preparing the voter list in Khatamara union in the upazila. He is a former president of Jaldhaka unit of Isami Chhatra Shibir.

On the other hand, the work is also being hampered due to short-

age of funds and inadequate logistics. It was gathered that the Election Commission (EC) has not yet allotted the required fund for the work in the district though it has directed the officials to complete the enrolment in time.

The EC has allotted only Tk eight lakh for buying needles, thread, papers and pens etc. The enrollment work is being hindered as stamp pads were not supplied for taking thumb impression of voters. Loose prescribed forms were supplied instead of books, a number of data collectors said. The loose forms might be missing, they said.

The District Election Office has supplied enrollment forms as per the lists prepared in 2000, on which there were 9,31,899 voters in the district. The number of voters now will be around 20 per cent more, sources said.

Day labourer Akhtarul Islam of Sindoi village in Sadar upazila and farmer Mansoor Ali of Master Para village under Kishoreganj upazila of the district told this correspondent yesterday that no data collector went to their homes to enrol them and his family members in the voter list.

Sources at the District Election Office said 74 assistant registration officers, 724 supervisors and 2677 data collectors were appointed in the district. But when contacted, the Upazila Election Office could

not show the list of appointed supervisors and data collectors for Nilphamari municipal area.

When contacted, Sadar Upazila Election Officer M Rahman refuted all the allegations and said, "Everything is being performed properly as per directive of the Election Commission".

Our Barisal Correspondent Reports: Leaders of opposition parties have raised objections to preparation of the new voters list, for two hours for irregularities in voter lists preparation in many areas of the city.

In ward no. 2 in Kawnia under Barisal City Corporation, local BNP president Anisur Rahman Hiru and vice-president Khairul Alam were engaged in the work, which was delayed for two days as they went to Kawnia on a New Year picnic, local people said.

When contacted, Barisal District Election Officer Majibur Rahman said that in other areas, Anisur Rahman Hiru and Khairul Alam were engaged in the work as they were teachers at local Kawnia Girls School and Manik Mia Schools. The EC office did not know that they were BNP leaders, he said.

Shahnaz claimed that she was an employee of a local NGO, VOSD. But its local manager Sajedur Rahman, when contacted, said they have female employee named Shahnaz.

Barisal district unit of FEMA, an election monitoring NGO, said their observers reported irregularities in voter enrollment in Charmonai union and Barisal Sadar upazila. Non-resident people and were included in the lists, its officials said.

The incident has created resentment among local people. Representations were submitted to the Deputy Commissioner and the Police Superintendent to take steps to protect the age old tree, but to no effect.

A magistrate was deployed at the spot to stave off any undesirable situation when woodcutters started axing the tree yesterday.

When asked, Khagrachhari Civil Surgeon Dr Abu Taher said he has nothing to do in this regard. The decision was taken by the former Civil Surgeon, he told newsmen.

Local officials rescued them and later resumed the work. Deputy Assistant Registration Officer Khan Shamsul Huq, Supervisor S M Arif, and Gournadi UNO Mahfuzul Huq admitted the incident and said Shahnaz was working in place of her brother Rafiqul Islam.

Shahnaz claimed that she was an employee of a local NGO, VOSD. But its local manager Sajedur Rahman, when contacted, said they have female employee named Shahnaz.

Jhalakathi judges' murder trial begins in Barisal STT

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Trial of Jhalakathi judges' murder case began at the Barisal Speedy Trial Tribunal (STT) yesterday.

JMB (Jamaatul Mujahideen, Bangladesh) suicide bomber Iftekhar Hasan Al Mamun alias Mamun Ali alias Shahab, principal accused in the case, was produced before the tribunal at noon amid tight security.

Mamun, whose right leg was amputated from knee due to injury in the bomb attack on the two judges, was clad in a bulletproof jacket and a helmet when he was taken to the court.

Senior Assistant Judges Jagannath Parey and Sohel Ahmed were killed in the suicide bomb attack on their microbus at Jhalakathi, made by Mamun on November 14 last year. The microbus blew up in the horrific blasts.

At the court yesterday, Special Public Prosecutor Majibar Rahman Noman prayed for producing all the accused persons before the court and framing charges against them.

Mamun was asked whether he would like to appoint a lawyer for him.

As he agreed, advocate Mokhlesur Rahman was appointed his attorney by the Legal Aid Committee while Advocate Samsuddin was appointed by the state to plead for the two absconded accused.

STT Judge M A Matin fixed January 8 for the next hearing and directed the authorities concerned to produce rest of the accused before the court and to frame charges against them.

40 hurt in two gangs' gunfight in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

At least 40 members of two gangs -- Lalchad Bahini and Panna Bahini -- were injured when they were locked in a gun battle at remote Habirchar village in Daulatpur upazila in the district in the early hours of yesterday.

According to police, the gun battle ensued when Lalchad Bahini men attacked Panna Bahini at about 2.30am to drive them away from Habirchar.

Panna Bahini men had taken shelter there earlier, police said. Of the injured, local people identified eight of the gang members. They are Ilu 35, Rashid 32, Naharul 30, Sawkat 30, Millat 30, Jamrul 36, Mannan 29 and Kamal, 35. Local people said the injured people are taking treatment at secret places to avoid arrest.

Sources said Lalchad allegedly belongs to a local ruling party lawmaker while Panna is sheltered by an Awami League leader. The two gangs have created a reign of terror in the upazila, they said.

Police and Rab raided hideouts of the gang leaders several times but could not arrest any of them as they enjoyed blessings from political leaders, the sources claimed.

At least 6 lakh people of the upazila are hostage to the gang, they claimed.



JCD holding a rally in Barisal city violating Section 144 (left) while police intercepting a BCL procession.

BCL rallies vandalised in 5 dists

At least 80 injured in attacks by JCD in Barisal, Bakerganj, Bhola, Natore and Netrakona

STAR NATIONAL DESK

At least 50 persons were injured as Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), students front of ruling BNP, vandalised rallies of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in Barisal, Bakerganj, Bhola and Natore, marking its 58th founding anniversary.

Our Barisal Correspondent reports: Activists of Chhatra League (BCL) and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) were locked in a series of clashes yesterday despite imposition of Section 144 in certain areas of Barisal city, leaving at least 12 BCL activists injured, some of them seriously.

BCL leaders and witnesses claimed that the clashes ensued when Judo Dal, student front of ruling BNP, swooped on their rallies, despite shifting of the venue thrice. The BCL programme, announced earlier, marked its 58th founding anniversary yesterday.

Barisal BCL leaders said, as part of their earlier announced programme, they organised a rally at Shoeb Chhattar in the city at 6 am.

They said the trouble began as JCD activists attacked their rally at Shoeb Chhattar when Barisal district Juba League convener Kazi Muniruddin Tarik was hoisting a party flag and the National Flag there. Tarik and five BCL activists were injured there, party claimed.

Protesting the attack, BCL tried to hold a rally in a Sadar Road area but police foiled the attempt, BCL leaders alleged.

JCD men also swooped on BCL and Juba League leaders and workers there in presence of police, they claimed.

Critically injured BCL and Juba

League activists Ziaur Rahman, Kabir Hossain, Shahin Ahmed, Majibur Rahman, Faisal and Tareque were admitted to Barisal Medical College Hospital (BMCH).

None was arrested from the spots during the clashes.

BCL leaders also alleged that police foiled their programme while ruling party men held gatherings violating Section 144 in front of police and a Magistrate.

The administration said Section 144 was imposed in and around Bibirpukur area covering the city Awami League office as BCL and its rival JCD announced programmes at the same venue at the same time.

Reports received from Bakerganj upazila town said at least 20 opposition activists were injured in attacks by ruling party men who also damaged the pandal and a microbus on Bakerganj Circuit House premises at about 1.00 pm yesterday.

BNP men drove away opposition activists including former Awami League lawmaker Masud Reza from there and confined them inside Bakerganj Government College for some hours.

Iman Sikdar, Bakerganj Sadar upazila BCL leader and Masud Reza alleged that the attack was made after local BNP lawmaker Abul Hossain Khan addressed a party gathering in front of the BNP office near Bakerganj bus stand.

Eight of the injured were taken to the local hospital, BCL and AL sources there said.

They said police were preparing to file a case against some opposition activists for 'holding unauthorised gathering' on Circuit House premises and damaging public property.

Our Netrakona Correspondent reported that 30 BCL activists were injured in attack by JCD and police action.

UNB adds: At least 17 BCL activists were injured in attacks by JCD men who also foiled BCL's founding anniversary programme in Natore and Bhola yesterday.

In Natore, at least 10 BCL workers were injured in an attack by JCD.

100 year-old bayan tree being axed

A CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

A 100 year-old banyan tree is being felled on the Khagrachhari Adhunik Sadar Hospital compound in the name of development projects despite protests by environmentalists, local NGOs, journalists and the elite of the hill town.

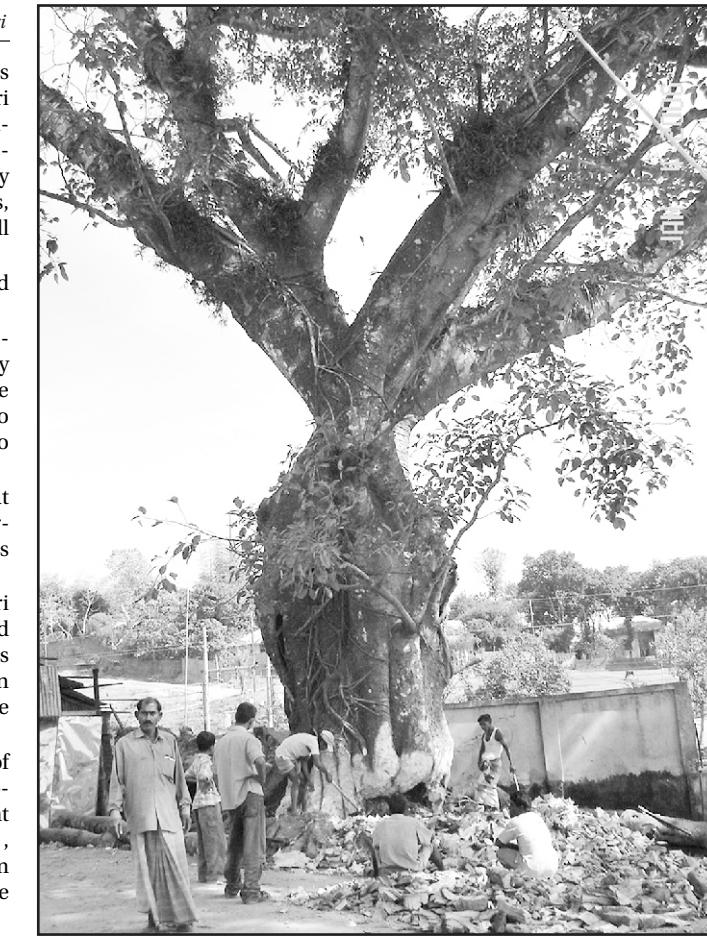
The incident has created resentment among local people.

Representations were submitted to the Deputy Commissioner and the Police Superintendent to take steps to protect the age old tree, but to no effect.

A magistrate was deployed at the spot to stave off any undesirable situation when woodcutters started axing the tree yesterday.

When asked, Khagrachhari Civil Surgeon Dr Abu Taher said he has nothing to do in this regard. The decision was taken by the former Civil Surgeon, he told newsmen.

Local officials rescued them and later resumed the work. Deputy Assistant Registration Officer Khan Shamsul Huq, Supervisor S M Arif, and Gournadi UNO Mahfuzul Huq admitted the incident and said Shahnaz was working in place of her brother Rafiqul Islam.



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