hand, BNP allegedly offered to pay Tk. 50-60 crore, of which Tk. 2 crore was paid in advance, which had to be returned when the deal fell through (*Prothom Alo*, January 15, 2007). Interestingly, both Awami League and BNP were part of the 15-7-5 party alliance which brought down the Ershad regime in 1990, and the alliance members vowed never to embrace Ershad or his cohorts and bring them into their fold. This was yet another blatant example of our political parties not keeping their word.

Buying of votes is another important use of money in elections. Candidates often pay cash, and sometimes give items such as saris, lungis and other things for buying votes. Voters are almost always entertained with drinks and snacks, and sometimes more. Widespread poverty and lack of voter awareness makes such vote buying rampant. Sometimes middlemen are used for this purpose. Buying votes is an illegal act, and is considered to be a "corrupt practice" under The Representation of People Order, 1972 (the Order), and it is a punishable offence, the punishment being rigorous imprisonment of 2-7 years and also fines.

Yet another use of money in elections is the buying of official influence. Sometimes returning officers, polling officers, law enforcement personnel etc. Are bribed. In the same vein, the services of hooligans and musclemen are bought, and weapons are leased to influence election results.

Sometimes, the services of "dummy candidates" are bought with money. Setting up dummy candidates is a recent phenomenon in Bangladesh. In this arrangement, one or more spurious candidates run incognito in support of each major candidate, and the polling agents of such candidates support the major candidates' attempts to cast false votes. These agents also support their benefactors in cases of disputes in vote counting, declaration of results etc. At times, money is used to buy the polling agents of major opponents and cause other mischief. In a notoriously rigged by-election during the latter part of the last government, for example, major candidates allegedly gave huge amounts of money to a top political party leader to buy the party's influence for the day of the election.

Money in excess of the allowable limits is often used for campaign expenses, which is currently Taka 5 lakh. Money is also utilised for unallowable election expenses, such as wall writings, colour posters, use of vehicles for transporting voters, entertaining voters etc. Excessive election expenses are possible because of non-enforcement of electoral laws by the Election Commission (EC). For example, of the 1,939 candidates who contested the 8th parliamentary elections in 2001, only 1,473 submitted election expense reports. The remaining 466 candidates did not do so, thereby violating section 44C of the law, which is treated as an "illegal practice" under section 74 of the order and is punishable with a rigorous imprisonment of 2-7 years and also fines. However, nothing was done against the aspiring or actual lawmakers who were lawbreakers.

One Awami League candidate alone, for example, spent Tk. 16,700,000, and a lone BNP candidate spent Tk. 19,400,000

More importantly, all those who complied with the requirements of the law and submitted the required statements indicated that they did not exceed the expense limit of Tk. 500,000. However, it is common knowledge that in all recent elections all elected MPs exceeded the expense limit and, thus, they began their lawmaking career with false declarations. Also, even though the election expenses are, by tradition, counted from the date of declaration of the election schedule, many candidates spend huge sums of money prior to that date for staging meetings as well as printing posters and portraits etc.

How much money parliamentary candidates, especially rich candidates, spend in election campaigns can be ascertained from a study conducted by Transparency International-Bangladesh (TIB) during the three months prior to the elections that were to be held on January 22, 2007. TIB monitored the election expenses of 122 candidates in 40 constituencies and found that, as of January 3, 2007, the candidates had spent a total of Tk. 185,500,000, or an average of Tk. 1,520,000. However, the candidates of other than the two major political parties -- Awami League and BNP -- spent only minor amounts. One Awami League candidate alone, for example, spent Tk. 16,700,000, and a lone BNP candidate spent Tk. 19,400,000 during the study period. Much of these amounts was spent for holding rallies and public meetings, setting up election camps, paying campaign workers, and transportation costs, some of which are not allowable election expenses under the law.

It should be noted that the above figures are only for visible election expenses. There are also many types of invisible expenses, such as payments for buying nominations and other bribes. In addition, they which would have been substantial. Thus, TIB estimates give a rough indication, but not a complete picture, of election expenses of parliamentary candidates. It should be noted in this context that major