

## AL candidates

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In Khulna City Corporation, AL backed Talukder Abdul Khalique was leading with 1,18,829 votes in a close fight against BNP supported candidate Moniruzzaman Moni, who managed to get 99,556 votes in 182 centres out of a total of 239.

ALM Khamruzzaman Liton, who is backed by AL in Rajshahi City Corporation, was leading with 85,930 votes against his nearest rival BNP Jemaat supported Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul who got 67,010 votes in 117 centres out of a total of 129.

The newly elected municipal mayors are Golam Kibria in Fulbaria of Mymensingh, Anisur Rahman in Sreepur of Gazipur, Reazul Islam Joarder in Chuadanga of Chuadanga district, Nayek Shahid Alam Shafi in Sitakunda of Chittagong, Zakaria Ahmed Pablu in Golapganj of Sylhet, Abdur Rab Munshi in Sharatpur of Sharatpur district, Ramzan Ali in Manikganj of Manikganj district, and Abdur Gafur in Naohata of Rajshahi. All of them were ALI-backed candidates.

Only Jahangir Alam backed by BNP won in Dhupchachia municipality of Bogra.

Voting in four city corporations and nine municipalities however ended peacefully with satisfactory turnout of voters yesterday, although widespread confusion over voters' identification numbers had caused a messy start in the morning slowing down the balloting.

A considerable number of voters also had to return home after spending hours in queues without having the chance to exercise their right to franchise because of polling officials' failure to determine many voters' identities despite having voter lists with photographs in their hands.

Although voters in great numbers lined up at all polling stations before voting started, their enthusiasm soon started to sap due to the voter identification chaos, which delayed the whole process of voting that finally dragged on in many places even after the deadline of 4:00pm.

Queues were seen in front of some polling stations in the city corporations of Rajshahi, Barisal, Sylhet and Khulna where voters were still casting their votes more than an hour into the deadline, reported our staff correspondents.

No major incident of violence was however reported, and the contestants, especially the mayoral aspirants, expressed their satisfaction regarding the overall voting atmosphere saying the polls were 'more or less' free and fair, except the lone incident in Barisal.

Law enforcers however arrested some people on charges of violating electoral rules by doling out money among voters.

The first elections under the military backed caretaker administration started at 8:00am amid heavy security with the Emergency Power Rules fully restored.

Some 1,600 contestants were in the ballot race seeking votes from a total of 13,660 lakhs.

In the city corporations 46 were voting for four mayoral posts, 752 were contesting for 118 councilorships, and 194 were seeking votes for 39 reserved councilors' seats for women.

Fifty nine were competing for mayoral posts, 429 for 81 councilorships, and 120 for 27 reserved seats for women in Naohata, Duppachia, Chuadanga, Sreepur, Manikganj, Fulbaria, Sharatpur, Golapganj) and Sitakunda municipalities.

Chaos reigned at every polling station immediately after voting started because of the confusion over voter registration numbers and national identity card numbers.

Voters who carried with them their national ID cards for voting and the ones who did not carry any card or number with them, both groups faced unexpected hassles in casting their votes, many of whom finally gave up and returned home disgruntled without casting their votes.

Those who brought the national ID cards, their numbers did not match the voters' numbers on the list in the hands of the polling officials, and they were barred from entering the polling booths until they were able to produce voter registration numbers which matched the numbers on the list.

Some of them actually traveled back home and returned with their voter registration numbers and finally cast their votes, while some

## 136 killed

FROM PAGE 16 confirmed that fighters with his group had carried out the attack but claimed they had not suffered casualties.

The US military announced meanwhile it had killed "several" militants elsewhere in Ghazni, a once quiet province that has seen a steep rise in Taliban activity in the past.

In Paktika province, which adjoins Ghazni, two men were killed when a waistcoat they were packing with bombs for use in a suicide attack exploded, the government said.

Two mullahs (prayer leaders) were killed when a suicide vest they were building went off prematurely, the interior ministry's Zemara Bashary said.

Morshed Khan

FROM PAGE 1 The commission served notice on the former minister on June 20 last year asking him to submit wealth statement, and he did so on July 10 through his representatives.

Mir Ahmed Ali Salam was the prosecution counsel in the case.

## Observers give

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society organisations in its 'quick impression' survey said the voting process was peaceful with some irregularities.

Many of the election observers were denied access to observe the ballot counting process, it said.

"Only about 4.3 percent of 116 polling centres experienced any problem related to security forces on Election Day. Observers in three-city corporation reported no security concerns. However, in Sylhet, in 14.8 percent of polling centre observers reported that security officials were not performing their duties in a neutral way," an EWG statement said.

"Observers were prevented from entering 17.5 percent of polling centres in three city corporations," it added.

"We are facing problems in identifying voters as most of them don't know their registration numbers," said Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, presiding officer (PO) of a polling centre in Barisal, adding that the problem was slowing down the voting process.

Voters said there should have been sufficient campaign by the authorities on the voting system prior to the polls for preventing such confusions.

"I didn't vote and am returning home after not being able to find my voter registration number," said Yusuf Ali, a voter at Government Pilot Boys High School in Sylhet. The PO of the centre said providing voters with their registration numbers is not their duty.

Over 5,500 local and international observers monitored yesterday's polls, which is widely considered as a litmus test of the Election Commission's (EC) preparations for the all-important parliamentary election planned for the third week of December. Many observers termed yesterday's polling as free, fair and credible.

The strict electoral rules bar any rally or procession till August 7, meaning the winners will not be able to do much in victory celebrations.

The EC and some advisers to the caretaker administration expressed their satisfaction over the elections to the local governments and the voter turnout, terming those free, fair and neutral.

For the first time in the country's election history, a large projection screen was set up in front of the Khulna office of the Election Commission to provide live update of the poll counts to the public, causing enthusiastic local people to crowd there.

Police and Rapid Action Battalion personnel brutally beat up agitating voters at Ward 6 during the Barisal City Corporation polls, injuring women and elderly, said a Brotee statement.

"On an average, 60 percent vote had been cast at the centres until 2:15pm... it is projected that it would reach 80% in the end."

## ACC chief

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From there the applications will be sent for verification to the law cell in the building called Uttarayan.

If the corrupt suspect is found eligible to get mercy in the verification, Tac will provide him/her with a form to be filled up with necessary information regarding their graft.

Finally the applications would be forwarded for consideration of the commission to the office in the building called Tanmoy, officials say.

The commission has not yet finalised the form, sources say. Tac officials, however, said the form is almost completed and will be finalised anytime.

## Kuwait to pay

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release of the external publicity wing of the foreign ministry.

The ministry requested the deported workers to submit photo-copies of their passports and civil identity cards they used in Kuwait, and other documents mentioning their names, workplace in Kuwait, date of joining work and deportation, and the amount of outstanding salaries to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) at Karkh in the capital.

BMET will prepare a list of deported workers and send it to the Kuwaiti authorities, which will realise the arrears from the companies concerned, said acting Foreign Secretary MAMMudh.

Meanwhile, labour rights and citizens' organisations continued condemning the deportation of Bangladeshi workers from Kuwait.

The Nargorik Sanghati and Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity said as per the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention, a country can take legal actions against workers if they cause deterioration in law and order but it cannot resort to torture.

In a written statement, Nargorik Sanghati President Dr ASM Atiqur Rahman said Bangladeshi workers are being repressed in the Middle East.

Columunist Syed Abul Maksud said the demonstrations by the Bangladeshi workers in Kuwait were just and if they did anything wrong it could be settled in court.

Dhaka University Prof Rubayet Ferdous said it is important to find out what role the Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait played in protecting the rights of Bangladeshi workers.

Prof Hafizur Rahman Curzon said Bangladesh should take measures to make sure that its workers in the Middle East can enjoy rights as per the UN convention.

The speakers also demanded that the government hold talks with the Middle East countries to solve the problems of Bangladeshi workers, and punish the corrupt recruitment agents and officials.

Nargorik Sanghati General Secretary Sharifuzzaman Sharif, trade union leader Dr Wazedul Islam Khan, OSHE Executive Director Ripon Chowdhury, AR Aman of ActionAid and deported worker Didar Hossain Majumder also spoke.

Hiron, who was cruising towards a victory, rejected an early unofficial count after his lead suddenly started to erode in many centres.

As the chance of Hiron emerging victorious appeared to have slimmed considerably in the quick turn of events, he quipped, "My victory is being hijacked."

## Code of conduct

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front of the Abu Hanif Keratul Nurani Madrasa polling centre trying to influence voters by distributing money.

Police arrested five people for violating the electoral code of conduct and three others for distributing money in the early hours yesterday.

Fake votes were also cast at a few polling centres although in a very small number.

Coming to the polling centres, Tanzila Sultan Mitu and Nazma Begum of ward-19 and Mohammad Zainal Abedin of ward-21 found that their votes had already been cast. "It was the first vote in my life but I could not cast it, a frustrated Mitu told The Daily Star.

Presiding Officer Kazi Jahangir Hossain blamed the casting of fake votes on polling agents' failure to recognise the voters. Candidates should nominate agents who know everyone, he said.

Many voters could not cast their votes because of mismatching national ID numbers and numbers on the voter lists although vote taking was peaceful, free and fair with satisfactory voter turnout.

"The candidate who could possibly win might lose because of this," said Jabbbar.

Nikhil Chandra Halder, presiding officer of a polling centre in ward-21, told The Daily Star that a number of voters returned after failing to find their names on the voter lists at their polling centres but returned home disheartened.

"The government spent a lot of public money on the NID, but now it is useless for voting purposes," said a disgruntled Amjad.

Several other voters complained about their votes having been cast by others at different polling centres in the city including the centres at Institute of Health Technology (IHT) and Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industries (RCCI).

A number of other voters left the polling centres without casting their votes as they failed to provide their voter registration numbers to be verified with voter rolls kept at the polling centres.

Sayed Muhammad Musa, the regional deputy election commissioner of Rajshahi and also the returning officer for Rajshahi City Corporation polls, told The Daily Star that the voter registration number on the voter roll is required for casting a vote, not the NID number.

Meanwhile, at the Priojon Community Centre a number of presiding officers were seen in front of the Bilash Community Centre at 6:00am. The picture was the same at Priojon Community Centre.

Voting continued till filing this report at 6:00pm as voting was slow. MA Haque, told The Daily Star, "It is not our duty to provide the serial numbers."

Three voters at the Khashabdar Government Boys School polling

## Confusion

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bubble burst. He was told by the polling officer that the voter registration number, not the NID number, is required to cast vote.

It took an hour and a half for this elderly person to go home and get back to the polling centre with the voter registration number. He had to spend the next half hour in the queue again.

After all this, who would have thought that more shocking discoveries awaited the 52-year-old?

After Amjad's voter registration number was verified, he found it hard to believe that someone else had already cast his vote.

"How could the polling officer allow someone else to cast my vote when there's my photograph printed on the new voter roll?" he said while lodging a complaint with Rajshahi regional Election Commission at around 2:00pm.

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## Voters defy rain

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Although there were no reports of vote rigging, there were scattered reports of names missing on the voter list and fake votes being cast despite heavy presence of police, anasr and the Rapid Action Battalion personnel.

Belal of Gowaripara, voter ID number of 91962051447131, said he found somebody had already cast his vote at 2:00pm. Jahangir, voter ID number 9196205144588, and Mosammam Rahima Khaton, voter ID number 9196205145799, also faced similar problems.

Meanwhile, several presiding officers cited difficulty adapting to the new voter identification system, voter lists with photographs and ID cards for the delays.

A number of presiding officers also feared that they might not be able to accommodate all the voters who had queued up because the voting was slow.

The delays also caused a number of voters to leave without casting their ballots; many of them were women.

Major candidate, BNP-backed

MA Haque, told The Daily Star "Voters suffered because of mismanagement and slow vote-casting but the voter turnout was good."

Meanwhile, councillor candidate Selim Ahmed Roni was picked up and arrested by police after he had a heated argument with a presiding officer.

About 250 people were seen in queue in front of the Bilash Community Centre at 6:00am. The picture was the same at Priojon Community Centre.

Voting continued till filing this report at 6:00pm as voting was slow. Priojon Community Centre and Bilash Community Centre at Chowdighi, Kazi Jalal Uddin Government Primary School at Kazitola, Ambarkhana Government Primary School at Ambarkhana, Jalal Government Primary School at Dargah Mohalla and Shahi Eidgah are the polling centres where voting could go on till 7:00pm, sources said.

## CEC sees JS polls

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yesterday said it is no more an issue now.

"I know of no obstacles to polling today [yesterday]. We won't have any difficulty conducting the general election under the state of emergency if the government can ensure an atmosphere like today's," he told reporters after the end of polling.

Earlier in the day, he visited Manikganj municipality to observe the election situation there.

Meanwhile, Home Affairs Adviser Major General (retd) MA Matin and Communications Adviser Major General (retd) Ghulam Quader said they are satisfied with the way the polls were held.

Speaking to reporters at the Secretariat, Matin termed the elections a test case and said, "It has been pretty successful."

Still, he noted, the government will decide later whether to withdraw the emergency reins for the parliamentary polls.

Another adviser Ghulam Quader said yesterday's polls have proved that a free, fair and peaceful election is quite possible under the state of emergency.

The polls chief on several occasions last year said holding elections with the emergency power rules (EPR) is not a practicable idea.