

## Bihari votes

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National Congress.

During the historic election of 1970, he was settled in Dhaka two years after his migration to the then East Pakistan. Like many who moved here from India since the partition, he backed Jamaat-e-Islami, the party that worked against the independence movement.

The Biharis were stripped of their right to vote after Bangladesh was liberated from Pakistani occupation in 1971. Since then, they had been stranded here as successive Pakistan governments showed little interest in taking them back.

Mohammad Parvez, a 28-year-old resident of Geneva Camp, said, "We are happy that we have a national identity and we can say we are the citizens of Bangladesh."

In Mohammadpur, Pallabi and Mirpur, many Biharis mingling with different party workers are busy canvassing. Interestingly, a group supporting Ilias Uddin Mollah, AL-led grand alliance candidate for Mirpur-Pallabi (Dhaka-16), has published leaflets in Urdu to seek attention of fellow Biharis.

Mohammad Abbas, 74, and Shahzada Selim, 43, were distributing the leaflets when this correspondent got to speak to them. They said they have published these on their own as many in their community can read only Urdu.

"We did this because we want them to rally behind our candidate of choice," added Shahzada.

Rafiqul Islam Mia, BNP-led four-party alliance candidate for Dhaka-16, yesterday told The Daily Star, "My supporters in Bihari community too have decided to publish leaflets for me."

Similarly, Biharis of Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur have published Urdu leaflets for Jahangir Kabir Nanak, grand alliance candidate for Dhaka-13.

Showing a leaflet to this correspondent, 53-year-old Mansur Alam said, "Who doesn't want to see his mother tongue in print?"

Sixty-year-old Sheikh Abdul Gafur finds it pretty amazing that both Nanak and four-party alliance candidate Moazzem Hossain Alal are canvassing vigorously for their support.

"This is the first time that politicians are coming to our doorsteps to vote. It feels like we have grown to be worthy citizens from being a bunch of losers. Till this month, there was none to look after us. Even if it's for the sake of vote, the political leaders are now asking how we do."

The candidates have made a lot of promises in the leaflets for the Biharis. The pledges range from improving the living standards to ensuring fundamental rights.

With pledges aplenty, the Biharis have resolved to vote for the candidate they think

## 3 Indian ships

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contacted the Indian warships and alerted them that they have entered Bangladesh's maritime economic zone.

The Indian ships then retreated five degrees westward, towards the Indian coast, but they are still within Bangladesh's zone.

Bangladesh is yet to finish marking its maritime boundary to avert disputes with its neighbours especially in dealing with deep-sea oil and gas exploration.

## Report on poll

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contesting candidates submit their election expenditure reports, it issued the circular asking the ROs to inform the contesting candidates and their agents about the legal provision for submission of election expenditure reports, said EC officials.

In previous elections, many candidates did not submit their expenditure reports and those who filed reports did not follow laws to do so, the officials said.

But the EC did not take any actions against the candidates for failure to submit their election expenditure reports and those who filed false reports, they said.

"You [ROs] will take legal action against a candidate if he/she does not submit the expenditure report," the circular asked the ROs.

The ROs can file criminal cases with competent courts against the candidates who fail to abide by the law. The ROs do not require taking prior permission from the EC to file the cases.

The EC officials said the political parties contesting the election must submit their poll expenditure report in next 90 days after the election. The commission may issue another circular in this regard.

would work sincerely for their rehabilitation and a better life.

Rafiqul Islam Mia said, "As a candidate, I naturally expect votes from the Bihari community. However, my expectation of them is a bit higher as I have fought for them in the cases regarding their citizenship."

"I think they know I can live up to the promises I'm making, and will vote for me."

Meanwhile, AL candidate Ilias Mollah said, "I hope they'll be on my side as our family has always stood by them."

As no official number of Bihari voters is available yet, the figures given by candidates and their campaign workers vary considerably.

While Mollah claims Bihari voters in his constituency would be 25-29 thousand, Mia says the number would range between 40 thousand and 45 thousand.

Ahmed Ilias, managing director of Al-Falah Bangladesh, an NGO working on social and economic rehabilitation of Biharis, told The Daily Star that his organisation conducted a survey for relief purposes on behalf of UNHCR in 2006.

"Though it wasn't a census of Urdu-speaking people in Bangladesh, we presume there would be around 160 thousand of them in 116 camps," he continued.

"If we consider 60 percent of them eligible to be voters, the number should be 95-96 thousand."

Ahmed thinks there would be some 12 thousand Bihari voters in six camps and other places in Mohammadpur.

## Shortage of men marks Christmas in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

The little Church of the Virgin Mary of the Holy Heart in the centre of Baghdad was packed for Christmas mass on Thursday but the shortage of men gave a clue to the harassment the community has faced.

As worshippers quietly listened to the sermon and received communion in a two-hour service, a quick count of the congregation of around 200 showed that about 75 percent of them were women.

The lopsided gender ratio is a grim reminder of the violence Iraq's beleaguered minority Christian community has endured since the 2003 US-led invasion sparked vicious sectarianism in this multi-faith nation.

"A lot of men were kidnapped, killed or have been unemployed since 2003, so (many) have left, especially Christians," said Sundus Butros, 38, who was directly affected by the violence when one of her brothers was kidnapped in 2006.

## Hasina

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constituency Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin at the rally, the AL president said Jalal is educated, honest and dedicated to the cause of people. But BNP candidate for the constituency Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu is involved in crimes and corruption, she alleged.

If voted to power, Hasina said, they will ensure adequate electricity and water supply in Lalbagh and Kotwali areas, and solve their residential problems.

Later, she addressed two rallies at Joypara Baramath in Dohar and Nawabganj Pilot High School ground, and sought vote for AL candidate for Dhaka-1 constituency Abdul Mannan Khan.

She assured locals that if voted to power, they would make Nawabganj a municipality, ensure gas supply and construct a bridge on the Buriganga river at Madhya Basila for easy communication with the capital.

Hasina also pledged that they will take steps to resolve problems of all sections of people including farmers, weavers, blacksmiths and potters.

The AL chief warned people about her party's political rivals saying, "They will try to buy your vote, but don't sell your iman."

At the rallies, the former premier reiterated her pledge to provide job for at least one male or female member of each family, give bank loan to unemployed youths without any collateral, bring down prices of essentials and make education up to degree level free, and set up community health clinic for every 6,000 people.

On her way back to the capital, Hasina addressed a street rally at Keraniganj for Dhaka-2 constituency candidate Kamrul Islam. Later, she conducted a few electoral campaigns through video conferencing from her residence Sudha Sadan at Dhanmoudi.

## Home rush

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day short of the polls. Election Day is a public holiday.

Nazmul Hasan, a teacher of St Joseph High School, is all set to leave Dhaka a day before the elections to cast his vote in his constituency. For sure, he will be with his loved ones in Chandpur.

"We are going to the polls after so long and I don't want to miss out on the chance to vote. And I'll have a chance to see my family. It's like an Eid reunion," he says.

But Nazmul does not want to stay apart from the post-polls excitement in Dhaka either.

"I'll be back in town late Monday. Keeping tabs on the election results is exciting, really," Nazmul told The Daily Star.

For the first-time voters, elections are far more exciting. Habibur Rahman Habib, a final-year honours student of political science at Habibullah Bahar College, will travel back to Narayanganj with his brother on Sunday. Both are first-time voters.

"Vote matters much to me."

With a pause, Habib says: "I'm proud of being part of the voting population."

As the election campaign is nearing its final lap, hundreds of thousands of people are now bound for their constituencies.

Ariful Islam Dalim, a medical promotion officer for Square Pharmaceuticals, is another person in a long line of voters who have made plans for home.

"But I have a hectic schedule." For him, travelling in and out of the city on the same day is far from easy.

## Khaleda

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and Netrakona and introduced the alliance candidates to the people.

She came down heavily on Awami League (AL) at yesterday's election rallies and urged people to vote for the four-party alliance to protect the country's independence and sovereignty.

Pointing finger at the AL, the BNP chief said, "They (AL) had repeatedly deceived people. Every time the party went to power, it did not fulfil its commitments to the people."

Earlier, the BNP chief on her way to Jamalpur made a stopover near a paddy field in Tangail to enquire the farmers about their problems.

Khaleda got down from her car at Ramkrishnapur of Dhanbari upazila and asked the farmers about the problems they face in producing rice.

The BNP chairperson, who began her campaign trip from her cantonment residence at about 11:35am, addressed rallies at Maona in Gazipur and Tongi before returning to the capital.

## Kibria killing

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Harunur Rashid, owner of Harun Traders, is elder brother of Mizan, they added.

On the statement of Mizan, police also recovered a motorcycle from a shop beside Poursava road in the town on Monday.

Police said two assailants fled the scene on the motorbike shortly after the grenade attack on the AL rally.

## Gas bidding

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invited the third-round international gas-block bidding in February this year with a plan to award the contract by September or October. The main thrust of the plan was to utilise this year's dry season for exploration work under the contracts.

After the bidding, only two international oil companies (IOCs)- US-based Conoco Philip and Irish company Tullow--were selected responsive bidders for the country's nine offshore blocks.

After completion of a two-month evaluation process by the state-owned Petrobangla, the energy ministry put forward the proposals of Conoco and Tullow to the Cabinet Purchase Committee.

Instead of taking any responsibility of considering such single bid in the hydrocarbon business, the purchase committee sent the things back to the energy ministry, saying that the line ministry should be the final authority to take the decision.

But the energy ministry did not dare to take the decision on its own on the matter of billion-dollar business in Bangladesh's potential natural gas.

## Woman aspirants

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thrown a challenge in Chandpur-3 to strong BNP candidate GM Fazlul Haque who won the last two parliamentary polls from here.

Former student leader Shirin Sultana is contesting as the BNP candidate in Dhaka-9 against influential AL leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury. Saber won the 1996 election in the constituency while Shirin is in an electoral race for the first time.

Also in her first time fight in parliamentary poll is legendary actress Sara Begum Kobori. She has already come into discussion by creating a good image in her constituency, Narayanganj-4, where BNP has nominated industrialist Shah Alam.

Rangamati voters will see a fight between well-educated Dr Alo Rani Aich of Bikalpadhara and Moitree Chakma of BNP.

Besides Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Joint Secretary General Selima Rahman, the BNP has nominated Sabina Yasmin in Natore-2, Rumana Mahmud in Sirajganj-2, Majeda Ahsan in Comilla-4, Hasina Ahmed in Cox's Bazar-1, Elen Bhutto in Jhalakathi-2, Shahida Akhter Rita in Jamalpur-1, Afroza Khan Rita in Manikganj-2, Shama Obayed Islam in Faridpur-2 and Helen Zerin Khan in Madaripur-2.

Sabina Yasmin, Rumana Mahmud, Majeda Ahsan and Hasina Ahmed got nomination after their husbands, who were BNP lawmakers from the seats, were convicted by the court and cannot qualify for the poll.

Elen Bhutto won the last parliamentary election while former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader Helen Zerin Khan

was defeated.

The AL has nominated Nilufar Zafarullah in Faridpur-4 as her husband AL Presidium member Mohammad Zafarullah cannot contest the polls because of conviction.

Apart from party President Sheikh Hasina, presidium members Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Matia Chowdhury and central leader Sahara Khatun, the party has nominated Zannat Ara Henri (Sirajganj-2), Sultana Tarun (Kustia-4), Habibunnahar (Bagerhat-3), Begum Monnujan Sufian (Khulna-3), Rebeka Momin (Netrakona-4), Sagufa Yasmin (Munshiganj-2), Sanjida Khanam (Dhaka-4), Meher Afroze Chumki (Gazipur-5) and Lutfunnahar Begum (Noakhali-3).

Sagufa Yasmin and Meher Afroze Chumki were elected members of parliament from reserve seats in 1996. Sagufa contested the last parliamentary polls but was defeated.

Sanjida Khanam came into limelight by playing a vital role as Hasina's lawyer after promulgation of the state of emergency.

A candidate Habibunnahar is the wife of Khulna Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque and Rebeka Momin is the wife of late AL leader Abdul Momin. Begum Monnujan Sufian is a veteran labour leader.

The AL also endorses independent candidate Ayesha Ferdous of Noakhali-6 as her husband Mohammad Ali was declared unfit by the returning officer.

JP leader Roushan Ershad is running in the election from Gaibandha-5 and Mymensingh-4 while Momotaj Iqbal from Sunamganj-4.

## 48 graft accused

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Besides, 14 candidates from Jatiya Party (JP), 12 from Jamaat-e-Islami, three from Islamic Andolon Bangladesh, five from Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and 22 independent candidates are also facing cases on different charges.

At least 139 candidates from BNP and 101 from AL, 22 from JP, 12 from Jamaat, eight from Islamic Andolon Bangladesh and 44 independent candidates had faced cases in the past.

According to the survey, of the 2,500 parliamentary aspirants, who submitted nomination papers, 865 had no Tax Identification Number (TIN) while 493 candidates have no TIN numbers.

Citing several reports published in newspapers, the survey said 21 war criminals are contesting the elections.

The survey also revealed that of the candidates, 130 have no educational qualification while 305 passed SSC or HSC, 555 completed graduation and 557 have post-graduation degree but 32 candidates did not mention their educational qualification.

Of the nominees, 214 from AL and 198 from BNP competed graduation or post-graduation while 46 AL and 45 BNP candidates passed SSC or HSC.

Ten Jatiya Party candidates and three Jamaat candidates passed SSC or HSC exams.

Of the candidates without

## Xmas prayers

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On the occasion, churches and adjoining grounds were decorated with lighting and illuminated Christmas trees. Men dressed as Santa Claus handed out Christmas presents to children.

Several sessions of special prayers were held in the churches including Tejoaon Church and St Mary's Cathedral in Kakrail on Christmas Eve and yesterday morning.

Alongside prayers seeking peace and prosperity for humankind, special prayers were also for honest candidates to win the upcoming election who would work for the welfare of the common people.

Christmas carols and hymns were sung before and after the prayer sessions at the churches.

The Christian community celebrated the day with feasts at homes with special dishes and shared the joy and happiness of the holy festival with relatives, friends and neighbours. Different events were also held at city hotels to mark the occasion. The day was a national holiday.

Pope Benedict XVI on Thursday, in his traditional Christmas Day greeted everyone on the occasion. In his speech, he expressed hope for peace in the Middle East and other conflict areas.

He also wished peace and prosperity for people all around the world.

To ensure peaceful celebration of Christmas, security in the capital city and different places around the country was beefed up with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police on alert at different strategic points.

President Iajuddin Ahmed hosted a reception at Bangabhaban for the members of the Christian community. He and his wife Prof Dr Anawara Begum welcomed the guests and exchanged greetings with them.

Religious Affairs Adviser AF Hasan Arif was present at the reception.

Archbishop Paulinus Costa, diplomats of different countries including the US Ambassador James F Moriarty and British High Commissioner Stephen Evans, distinguished persons of the Christian community and religious leaders and professionals joined the reception.

4 sacked

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cancelled according to the section 5(Ga) of the party constitution.

They were charged with violating the party discipline, involvement in anti-party activities and hindering the election campaign of the party nominated candidates.

They have also been stripped of all the posts of the party, the release said.



## Noor Ali sorry

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He claimed he did not file the case against Hasina and a highly-ambitious vested quarter lodged the case in his name aiming to make his relation with the AL chief sour.

He had filed the case accusing Hasina, her cousin Sheikh Helal and his wife Ruqa Chowdhury, of extorting the money in 1997 in exchange for contracts for installing three power plants.

On December 24, Westmont Power Company (Bangladesh) Ltd Chairman Tajul Islam Farook withdrew his case against Hasina filed with Tejoaon Police Station.

Farook, who had filed the Tk 3-crore extortion case on April 9 last year, during a press conference in his Baridhara office claimed, "I have withdrawn the case on my own will."

In the case, he had accused Hasina of forcing him to pay her the money when she was in power in 1998.

Earlier this month, Azam J Chowdhury during a press briefing at his Gulshan office, expressed his wish to discontinue the extortion case he filed against Hasina and her cousin Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim.

He had submitted an application to the home ministry seeking executive orders for withdrawal of the case through the court concerned.

## 5-tier security

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team led by a sub-inspector at each general centre. In addition, 12 ansar personnel will be deployed at each of the polling centres, he said.

Besides, 393 VDP (village defence party) members will be deployed at 393 polling centres in 16 unions under the DMP's jurisdiction.

The DMP chief said 2,500 of the policemen to be deployed were given special training on electoral affairs.

There will be a police patrol team for each 10 polling centres and reserve strike forces at each police station in 'all the eight crime zones', and DMP control room and three sub-control rooms created for polls duty.

To face any untoward situation, DMP has also formed women police teams, bomb disposal unit, and special weapon and tactics teams.

Naim said a medical team with an ambulance would be kept ready in each police station on the election day.

Relying to a question, he said police personnel are already keeping watch on all modes of transport at entry points in the city.

Crime prone areas in the capital, residential hotels and many houses also are under constant police vigil. And police are on alert to tackle any subversive activities, he added.

## Bomb found

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about the raid. Explosives experts made the bomb inactive at noon.

According to police, the AL leader is an armed cadre of Mohammad Hossain Mukta, KCC councillor elected from ward no 31.

Meanwhile, Rab and police have launched combing operations in the city in search of illegal firearms and arrested some hardened criminals.

## Group of former

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The Daily Star of receiving phone calls from former bureaucrats.

They said they have been offered promotion and better postings in exchange for favouring the BNP-led alliance's candidates in the December parliamentary elections.

According to them, a former cabinet secretary, a former establishment secretary and two former inspectors general of police have been making phone calls to the field level officials from a particular office Dhaka.

After the 2001 election, many deputy commissioners who worked as returning officers were soon promoted to higher posts. The then government even ignored rules to promote a few joint secretaries and additional secretaries to secretary.

One bureaucrat, who is now working for the BNP was deputy commissioner at the time of the 2001 election. He was made the secretary to a vital ministry. He retired from service during the current caretaker government's rule.

## 8 JMB men

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ammunition proves their preparation to commit a serious crime."

Of the JMB operatives, Rejaul Karim Reji alias Hasan alias Shihab, 25, Manjurul Islam Manju, 20, and Al Amin, 27, were arrested in Gobindaganj upazila during the drive that continued till early hours yesterday.

Following their statements, police arrested Mostafizur Rahman, 32, and Nannu Miah, 32, in Gobindaganj and Rowshan Ali, 30, Amzad, 35, and Mohammad Obaidur Rahman of Pashchim Komarnoi village in Sadar upazila.

SM Moniruzzaman, superintendent of Gaibandha police, said among the eight JMB men, Obaidur is a teacher of Chapadaha Dimukhi Dakhil Madrasa and Amzad Hossain of Afroza Khanam Dakhil Madrasa. Besides, Amzad is also the imam of Argishapur Jam-e-Mosque, he said.

Rejaul Karim Reji is the JMB's regional commander. He is a student of Gobindaganj Shamim and Shakil Technical College and also the member of JMB's policymaking body Ehsar.

"All the eight militants are senior JMB leaders," the Gaibandha SP said. "Following their confessions, we believe there are many JMB men active in the country."

He said all the JMB men were arrested in their own houses and the explosives were seized from Manju Al Amin.

Gaibandha police chief SM Moniruzzaman said the explosives might have been collected for any big attack ahead of the national election.

Lt Col Ahsan, commander of Gaibandha army camp, and Rab-5 Commander Major Shah Ali said the arrestees have given important information.

## Business of Babar

FROM PAGE 1  
business and how much money he earns from it. He however gave a list of his investments and showed Tk 21.17 lakh as his business capital, the statement says.

Analysis of his wealth statement shows Babar and his wife are equally wealthy as both have shares, savings certificates, bonds and fixed deposit receipts (FDR) worth crores of taka.

He has given Tk 32.79 lakh in advance to buy an apartment and a plot, while his wife owns a house and an apartment worth Tk 1.4 crore. His other assets include a Lexus car worth Tk 46.74 lakh, 40 tola of gold and three fire-arms worth Tk 1.12 lakh.

Babar has only Tk 4.85 lakh in cash but his total wealth amounts to Tk 2.14 crore with Tk 68.74 lakh deposited in different banks and financial institutions. The value of his shares and companies amounts to Tk 25.14 lakh, while postal and various savings certificates amount to Tk 9.7 lakh.

His wife has nearly Tk 1 crore deposited in banks and financial institutions besides shares and listed and unlisted companies worth 1.27 crore, adds the statement.

Babar says he owes nearly Tk 22 lakh to the City Bank and Prime Bank and has Tk 65.25 lakh loan without security deposit.

Being off-track of his family tradition, Babar studied up to Class X but succeeded in money-making allegedly through illicit means and established himself as a politician.

One of the youngest members in the cabinet of BNP-Jamaat government, Babar with his own style of spike-cut hair and a decent smile enjoyed blessings of Tarique Rahman and his Hawa Bhaban, which was considered as the alternative power house during BNP rule.

## Tamil Tigers

FROM PAGE 16  
recovered five LITE bodies."

The pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website said there was heavy fighting in the area, but give no further details.

The Tigers on Monday said that they killed more than 100 soldiers and had taken back territory lost to advancing government forces.

Both sides are known to make exaggerated claims about casualties they have inflicted on each other, and independent verification is virtually impossible as journalists and aid workers are barred from the conflict area.

In January the Sri Lankan government pulled out of a 2002 Norwegian-brokered truce with the rebels, who have been fighting since 1972 for a state for ethnic minority Tamils separate from the majority Sinhalese community.

They said they are continuing their operations in line with the information extracted from the arrestees.

Meanwhile, Lt Col M Sazzad Hossain said JMB men Masud and Noyeem, who were arrested in Comilla on Tuesday, were taken on eight-day remand.

Rab Additional DG Col Gulzar said, "The two