



(Left) BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia exchanges views with the journalists at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. (Right) A delegation of British parliament members calls on Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at Sudha Sadan.

Election process, not results

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code of conduct. "We have a code of conduct, which is internationally recognised as a good code of conduct."

About 150 observers are working under the EU team on Election Day across the country, helped by Bangladeshi interpreters. The EU budget for the 2008 election observation in Bangladesh is 3.2 million euros.

Elson explains how the mission operates in different layers. At the heart of the operation is the core team of ten, usually deployed between six and eight weeks before Election Day. The core team consists of political or country, legal and media experts.

A week or ten days after the core team was deployed, the mission put in place 44 long-term observers, who work in teams of two, guided by the briefings from the core team.

"Their role is to observe five and six weeks of election preparations outside the capital," Elson says.

About six or seven days before Election Day, another group, called short-term observers, joined in to observe the final preparations for the elections. They fanned out across the country to observe polling centres on Election Day.

Two days after the elections, the mission will release preliminary findings and conclusions.

The chief and the deputy chief of the EU election observation will come back to Bangladesh -- two months after the elections -- to release their final report in Dhaka. The final report also goes online on the mission's website.

The final report has an important section called "recommendations" which will break down into "essential" and "desirable" recommendations.

"The purpose of the recommendations ... is putting forward proposals that we believe, if implemented, would help further improve and strengthen the political and democratic process in Bangladesh," Elson says.

"Whether or not the recommendations will be adopted is entirely dependent on the political will."

"Our report ... is an assessment or a record of an election that has taken place. This is for others to decide how to use the assessment."

The assessment of the elections is based on seven key criteria that have been adopted by the European Union in assessing the quality of elections. Two criteria stand out: The degree of impartiality shown by the election administration and the degree of freedom of political parties and candidates to assemble and express their views.

The polls observers followed the preparatory work of the Election Commission toward today's election.

"We obviously followed in detail and with great interest the party candidate registration and nomination processes."

The polls observers also followed, quite closely, all of the campaign activity that went on -- to assess whether or not all candidates and parties are free to campaign without intimidation or fear or hindrance.

The media are also under the scanner.

"We've obviously been analysing coverage of the election by the media here in Bangladesh. We look at not just the nature of coverage in terms and time or space devoted to the election. We also look at whether the media are covering the elections in a fair and balanced way," Elson says.

"We also look at the tone of the coverage. Is it positive or negative? Is it positive for some, but negative for others?"

Elson declines to make any "judgemental comment" on the media before the elections, but says: "Bangladesh has a very lively media environment."

"If we make any sort of judgemental comment before Election Day, some people might accuse us of interfering in the process. That's the last

thing we wish to do. We are exactly what we are. We are not here to interfere in the process."

Elson flashes back to the stormy days in 2007, when the EU observers had suspended its mission amid incidents of violence and intimidation.

"This mission is in effect the return of the suspended mission," Elson says.

"For me, personally, I've been heartened by the fact that there have been only very few isolated incidents of violence and intimidation so far (this time)."

Asked to comment on bias in observing the polls, Elson asserts: "We operate in a way that seeks to ensure our integrity and impartiality."

"At the end of the day, we can never prevent people who -- for whatever reasons -- might want to imply in some way that we are partial one way or the other. All we can do is demonstrate how we go about our business. But in fact we are impartial," Elson says.

"It's worth stressing that the European Union election observation missions are totally independent of the European Commission."

Elson says the observers are appointed and funded by the European Commission in Brussels, but not directed by it.

"We are not in any way instructed or directed by the commission in Brussels as to how we should write our reports and what we should or should not assess," he says.

"We are independent of the European Union member states governments and we are independent of European Union member states' diplomatic missions in Bangladesh."

Elson entered politics at local government level in the UK when he was elected to his local council in 1976, and eventually became an elected Leader of an English County Council. In 1989, he was appointed general secretary of the UK Liberal Democrat party. Elson left UK politics to pursue a career in election observation and democratisation.

2 Allahar Dal cadres held in Kurigram

A CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Kurigram district naye and acting naye of the banned militant group 'Allahar Dal' in Kurigram on Friday night.

The arrestees are Naye Rostam Ali, 22, son of Babar Ali of Nilkantha village under Kurigram Sadar upazila and acting naye Akhtaruzzaman Swit, 27, son of late Shahajada Asaduzzaman of Jamuna village under Ulupur upazila.

Police said Rab-5 under Rangpur raided the Rostam's house at 10:00 pm on Friday and arrested him. Later, he was handed over to Kurigram police. He was sent to jail next day.

Rab-5 arrested Akhtaruzzaman Swit from his sister's house at Adarsha Para in town yesterday and handed over him to Kurigram police.

Police arrested Allahar Dal chief Matin Mehedi and his four associates in Kurigram town on April 18 last year.

Police arrested 45 cadres of Allahar Dal, including Rostam and Swit, so far.

Zakir Siddiqui, captain of Rab-5, said operation will continue to arrest other militants.

Polls to witness

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vigilant in the coastal zones.

Election Commission and home ministry sources said the army personnel will be ready as strike force while the members of Rab and police will remain vigilant as both strike and mobile force.

Sources said special security measures have already been taken in the hilly and Haor areas with deployment of additional security personnel.

Home Secretary Maj Gen (ret'd) Abdul Matin yesterday said highest security measures have been taken across the country for holding the ninth parliamentary election peacefully.

Rab Additional Director General Gulzar Uddin Ahmed told The Daily Star that Rab members would remain vigilant in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

Deployment of law enforcers at the polling centres began at 6:00am yesterday. Election materials were taken to the remote polling stations under protection of security personnel.

Officials of the home ministry and the EC said police, Rab, armed police battalion and Ansar personnel had already been deployed across the country.

In the Dhaka city alone 38, 928 members of police and Ansar have been deployed, they said.

Besides, the army personnel will be ready as strike force in the district and upazila headquarters to deal with any situation.

The EC and the home ministry have divided the polling centres across the country into two categories -- normal and important. Of the 35,315 centres, 20,865 have been marked important and 14,350 normal.

Of the polling centres, 33,185 are located in plain lands and 2,130 in the special zone.

Wahid takes over as LGED chief engineer

METRO DESK

Md Wahidur Rahman, additional chief engineer, assumed the charge of chief engineer of the LGED yesterday, says a press release.

He took the charge as Md Nurul Islam, chief engineer of LGED, will go on LPR from today.

Wahidur Rahman received ADB's Performance Recognition Award as a project director in 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Looking back at events

FROM PAGE 1

a plot to set up a partisan caretaker government.

Because of the bill former chief justice KM Hasan was supposed to be the chief adviser to the caretaker government but the Awami League (AL) alleged that Justice Hasan had been the internal affairs secretary of BNP during Ziaur Rahman's regime. The party also announced that they would not take part in the election under Hasan's caretaker government.

Later, appointment of Justice Abdul Aziz as the chief election commissioner and Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria as election commissioners deepened the crisis. Preparation of a voter list with at least 1.24 crore fake voters by the Election Commission (EC) also added to the crisis.

The then BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and AL general secretary Abdul Jalil sat in dialogues but failed to bring any positive result.

Towards the end of the BNP-led government's tenure, Justice Hasan declined to take charge as the chief adviser.

As both the major parties failed to choose a neutral person for the post, President Iajuddin Ahmed, who was chosen as the president by the BNP-led four-party alliance, assumed the office of the chief adviser on October 29, 2006.

However, Iajuddin failed to perform neutrally and his dubious role in running the administration prompted four advisers of his cabinet to step down in December that year.

Iajuddin appointed four new advisers but failed to create an atmosphere for holding the ninth parliamentary polls.

The AL-led grand alliance boycotted the election and announced to resist it. But the BNP-Jamaat-led electoral alliance desperately put pres-

sure on the caretaker government and the EC to hold the election on January 22, 2007.

Finally, Iajuddin stepped down as chief adviser along with his ten advisers and declared the state of emergency on January 11. The next day he appointed Fakhruddin Ahmed the chief adviser and, on Fakhruddin's advice, ten other advisers to the new caretaker government.

A few weeks later, the caretaker government launched an all-out drive against corruption and arrested many corruption suspects including political leaders which received huge public support. The special court has convicted many corrupt persons.

Meanwhile, a group of leaders of both the AL and BNP took initiatives to implement reforms within the parties but they did not get support from the grassroots level leaders.

Besides these, law enforcers arrested the two top leaders -- AL President Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia. Even there was an initiative to exclude the two from politics which ultimately failed. Hasina was even barred to return to the country from the UK. The government, however, later removed the restriction.

Khaleda expelled party secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan just before her arrest on the morning of September 3, 2007.

Against this backdrop, the chief adviser reshuffled his cabinet on January 9 this year as new advisers took oath after the resignation of five advisers.

The government then decided to open dialogues with the political parties to minimise the gap with them.

Khaleda's eldest son Tarique Rahman left the country for London a day after her release on September 11. Tarique had also been arrested

on corruption charges and then released on bail. Before leaving the country in a statement he said he resigned from the party post and will not stay in politics.

Earlier, his brother Koko was also released on parole and left for Singapore for treatment.

On June 11, AL chief Sheikh Hasina was released following an executive order for treatment abroad.

After the release of both Hasina and Khaleda four advisers met them. The chief adviser also talked to them over phone.

Elections to four city corporations and nine municipalities were held on August 4 with a record voter turnout.

The EC negotiated with all parties and rescheduled the ninth parliamentary polls in December as per its electoral roadmap announced July 2007.

The commission primarily announced December 18 as the poll date but later, discussing with political parties a demand of the BNP-led alliance, shifted it to December 29.

The caretaker government withdrew the state of emergency on December 17 to ensure congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election.

Obituary

BSS, Dhaka

Dr Hasmat Ara Begum, wife of Alhaj Siraj Uddin Dowla, founding chairman of Mohammadi Group of Companies Limited, and director of the group of companies, passed away at a city hospital yesterday at the age of 64.

She left behind three sons, two daughters, granddaughters and grandsons and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn her death.

She was buried at her family graveyard in Bagerhat.

Past elections at a glance

FROM PAGE 1

candidates representing 29 parties and alliances as well as independents.

The third parliamentary elections were held on May 7, 1986 where a total of 1,980 candidates representing 28 parties and including 453 independents contested 300 seats.

Jatiya Party, led by military dictator HM Ershad, bagged highest 153 seats while Awami League won 73 seats in the 1986 elections. Nearly 66.31 percent of the 47,876,979 registered voters exercised their franchise.

The fourth parliamentary elections were held on March 3, 1988. As many as 1,192 candidates, representing eight parties and including 214 independents, took part in the elections.

The fifth general elections were held on February 27, 1991 with 2,787 candidates, representing 75 parties and

including 424 independents, contested the 300 seats.

The highest 169 seats were bagged by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which formed the government with Khaleda Zia as prime minister. Awami League secured 92 seats while Jatiya Party of HM Ershad won 35 seats.

Voters' turnout was approximately 52 percent of the registered voters totalling 62,289,556.

The sixth parliamentary elections were held on February 15, 1996. All the major political parties except BNP boycotted the controversial election. Only 26.54 percent voters exercised their franchise in the elections contested by 993 candidates with party affiliation and another 457 independents.

In the seventh general elections held on June 12 in 1996 under the caretaker government, a total of 2,574 candidates took part. The

candidates represented 81 parties and also included 284 independents. Bangladesh Awami League formed the government securing 146 seats in the election while BNP got 116.

The election to the eighth parliament was held on October 1, 2001. A total of 1,935 candidates representing 54 parties and including 484 independents contested the polls.

BNP won 193 seats while its key political rival Awami League got only 62 seats. Total turnout of voters was nearly 74.9 percent.

The ninth parliamentary elections, scheduled for January 22, 2007, was cancelled after declaration of the state of emergency on January 11, 2007 amid political turmoil.

The nation finally goes to the ninth Jatiya Sangsad election today.

30,000 voters may not be able to vote in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

At least 30,000 security personnel, who became voters in Khagrachhari, may not be able to cast their votes due to their transfer or engagement in maintaining law and order on the election day.

District Election Office sources said they had enlisted at least 30,000 security personnel including army, BDR, police, ansar and VDP members as voters but due to their transfer or duty they would not be able to cast their votes.

Admitting the fact, District Election Officer Nurul Hasan Bhuiyan said, "Due to time constraints we are not getting ballot papers on time, otherwise, they could cast their votes through postal ballots."

However, those who will be deployed near their polling centres may get a chance to cast their votes, if time and environment allow, he added.

Khagrachhari hill seat comprises eight upazilas including Khagrachhari sadar, Panchhari, Dighinala, Mohalchhari, Manikchhari, Matiranga, Laxmichhari and Ramghor.

According to Election Office sources, the total number of registered voters in the constituency is 3,38,425.

Death anniversary

METRO DESK

The sixth death anniversary of Principal Humayun Khalid, a freedom fighter, lawmaker and educationist, will be observed today, says a press release.

He was also a member of the constitution committee of the newborn country and founder principal of Nagarpur Degree College in Tangail.

To mark the occasion, a special prayer will be held on the college premises for the salvation of the departed soul.

Moazzem Hossain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 10th death anniversary of Moazzem Hossain, founding general secretary of Bangladesh Photojournalist Association, and a senior photojournalist of Bangladesh Observer, says a press release.

On this occasion, Quarkhoni will be held at his Shantinagar residence in the city. Food will also be distributed among the destitutes.

2001 still haunts Hindus in Barisal

FROM PAGE 1

Most of those musclemen prevail. And some of those whisper to the ears of the helpless Hindus that it's not certain who would come to power and the army won't save them throughout the year.

"We will know who of you have voted for Boat and who for Sheaf of Paddy," said a whisper in the ears of the Hindu community.

When approached, none of the Hindus, however, dared to talk about the issue yesterday evening despite repeated attempts.

Finally, a BNP activist, who is also a victim of Shahjahan Omar's gang, after seeing the ID card helped this correspondent win the trust of a Hindu family.

"We cannot say whether we can vote as everything changes at the night before polls," said a middle-aged member of the family.

"We can say it for sure after the night tomorrow and once we safely reach the polling centre," added the mid-aged farmer. He stressed the necessity of special security on their way to and from the polling booths.

Requesting not to publish his name he continued, "If my name is mentioned, that might cost either my life or my honour or both."

The atmosphere is different this year and the Hindus were hoping for a change. But a comment of local UP Chairman Abul Kalam Azad has buried all their hopes again.

"Those who support Boat won't be allowed a piece of earth in my union," the farmer quoted Azad as threatening them at a recent public meeting.

Azad became chairman in a "selection" process as he did not let anyone stand against him during the BNP-led alliance rule.

A report came in the evening that Azad's supporters, known as cadres of Soh-

Nayan Bahini backed by Shahjahan, were entering the area with lethal weapons as well as money.

Rumours were rife that the musclemen would use money to woo the Hindu voters but keep the weapons for an alternative if the first approach fails.

The rumours added another shade of fear in the Hindus, who might not vote today.

Suktagar is not the only place in the region where the Hindus are suppressed ahead of or during the elections. The people of minority community in Barisal are usually not allowed to cast their votes for long as they are considered the vote bank of Awami League.

There is no official estimate how many Hindu voters are in the district. But candidate sources say 45 percent of the

voters in Barisal-1, 30 percent in Barisal-2, and about 5 percent each in Barisal 3, 4, and 6 constituencies are Hindus. Another count says there are around 30,000 Hindu voters in Barisal-5.

The number of voters in these constituencies is about 1.98 lakh, 2.26 lakh, 1.83 lakh, 2.36 lakh, 2.94 lakh and 1.83 lakh respectively.

The voters of the metropolis under Barisal-5 don't face much trouble, but the problem is severe in some other places.

Around 20,000 Hindu voters in Uzirpur and Banaripara under Barisal-2 are reportedly under risk as they were repressed in 2001.

Hindu voters in Gouranadi and Agailjhara under Barisal-1 and Bakerganj under Barisal-6 fell victim to attacks in 2001 and mostly failed to cast their votes.



Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Moderate to thick fog may occur over the river basins and light to moderate fog elsewhere over the country.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 26.5 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 11.0 degrees Celsius at Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:21pm today and rises at 6:40am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	24.0	15.2	91	75
Chittagong	24.5	15.0	84	71
Rajshahi	25.2	13.4	96	78
Khulna	24.8	13.5	87	80
Barisal	24.0	12.5	89	90
Sylhet	26.0	14.1	78	67
Cox's Bazar	26.4	14.0	79	67