

ELECTION IN BARISAL DIVISION

Most voters unaware of 'No' vote

EMRAN HOSSAIN, From Barisal

Enchan, a resident of Diatoli in Palashkhali union, lives in a shanty made of jute sack and polythene in this chilling weather along with his family members, including two minor children.

Many a time, he tried during the previous BNP-led four-party alliance government to draw attention of the union parishad chairman and even the law-maker from his constituency, Barisal-6, to his poor condition and appealed for corrugated iron sheets in relief, but to no avail.

Then came the 1/11 and to his utter surprise, Enchan saw the joint forces arrested Abul Hossain Khan, former BNP lawmaker, on charges of misappropriating CI sheets meant for relief. This very man is again contesting today's parliamentary elections from the same area.

However, it is not true that Enchan, whose life is blighted by extreme poverty, has never received any relief. He received relief only one time so far -- 500gm of oil, 500gm of Suji and 500gm of pulse.

For Enchan, it is hard to believe that Abul Hossain has got the chance again to vie for a parliamentary seat even after the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) had submitted the final report in the CI sheet misappropriation case against him.

"I would rather not cast my vote in the

election, as whoever I would vote would not do anything for me," said a helpless Enchan, who even does not know about the newly introduced 'No' vote system in the ballot.

When this correspondent explained the system to Enchan, he said spontaneously: "Now, I feel more encouraged. I had been wondering who I would vote for if I dislike all candidates. I will cast 'No' vote."

During a visit to several constituencies in the Barisal division, this correspondent found that many voters are totally unaware of this system and many others do not understand its significance.

While the candidates in Barisal-6 think that a few 'No' votes might be cast, contenders in other constituencies see no possibility of anyone casting 'No' votes.

Most voters in towns and almost every villager either do not understand the significance of the 'No' vote or think it is useless. The supporters of the candidates also do not talk about the system during their campaign. Instead, they are trying to dissuade the people from casting 'No' votes.

"If the people had known about the significance of the system, there would have been a positive change in society and the people would no longer have welcomed the same old faces," said advocate Manabendra Batabyal, convener of

the Committee of Conscious Citizens in Barisal.

Some people said 'No' votes, however, might be cast in those constituencies where activists of both BNP and Awami League rejected party nominations.

Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami are directly campaigning against the 'No' vote system, saying that the option would rather help the bad people.

Denying the allegations of misappropriation of CI sheets, Abul Hossain said it is a conspiracy resulted from the intra-BNP conflict. "As the grand alliance is also suffering from intra-party conflict, many AL men will cast 'No' vote in my constituency," he added.

Grand alliance candidate ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader, who is contesting the election from the same area, said, "Some 'No' vote might be cast in my constituency as there is rift in the alliance."

Only some young and educated voters are aware of the option and a few of them said they will cast 'No' votes in the event that they do not have trust in the candidates.

Zahir, a voter in Jhalkathi-2 constituency, said, "Had there been a single candidate in the fray, I would have tried the option. There are more than one candidate in my area. Obviously, one of them is better than others. So, why should I waste my vote?"

Tight security in Ctg for elections

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Tight security measures have been beefed up by the law enforcement agencies in the port city to ensure today's general elections peacefully with deployment of over 30,000 security forces and law enforcers.

Some 15,000 law enforcers, including 3000 police and 7000 ansars, will maintain law and order situation in and around a total of 557 polling centres here, said the sources in City SB (Special Branch) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police.

In the metropolis, five armed police and fifteen ansars would be deployed in each of the "most important" 193 polling centres, while three armed police and twelve ansars would be on duty each of the rest 364 centres.

A total of 45 mobile teams of police, including four of the Detective Branch (DB) police, will patrol the city and another three mobile teams will patrol in the river under the city.

DC SB AKM Shahidur Rahman said a total of sixteen check posts would be set up at the entry points, important intersections and city points.

Apart from this, there would be three platoons of APBN (Arms Police Battalion), 21 platoons of BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) and members from both Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and army to perform as the striking forces in the city, sources added.

Meanwhile, district police also took necessary measures for holding the polls smoothly in 1257 polling centres, including 667 "most important" ones under the 14 upazilas, in the district.

District Special Branch (DSB) of police said some 30,000 forces, including police, ansar and village defence party (VDF) would be deployed in and around the polling centres in the district where members of APBN and RRF (Range Reserve Police) will perform as the striking forces.

NAT'L ELECTIONS
PID sets up media centre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Press Information Department (PID) has set up a media centre at Hotel Sonargaon in the capital to assist local and foreign journalists in collecting the results of the ninth parliamentary elections and other information.

The media centre was inaugurated yesterday and it will remain open today and tomorrow around the clock, said a press release.

The telephone numbers of the media centre are 8140230, 8140231, 8140232, 8140234 and 8140228 and the fax numbers are 8140227 and 8140229.

The centre has computers with Internet connection and telephones with ISD connections. A hotline service was also set up with the Election Commission (EC), the press release added.

Information Secretary Jamil Osman visited the centre yesterday afternoon. Principal Information Officer Iftekhar Hossain and other high officials were present during his visit.



International election observer team of International Republican Institute (IRI) led by Dr Sukehiro Hasegawa pays a courtesy call on Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed at Army Headquarters at Dhaka Cantonment in the city yesterday.

Ctg voters look for change

MD HASAN AND DWAIPAYAN BARUA

The port city remained silent just day before the much-awaited general elections as curtain fell on the last-minute polls campaign on Saturday night.

Curious voters gathered together at different parts of the city's tea stalls, calculating last-time maths to whom they would vote for. Taking into account the last seven years' tenure, they are thinking that they need a change.

Local voters said last two year's anti-corruption rules by the caretaker government and delimitation of constituencies in the city will affect the 9th parliamentary elections.

The four-party alliance succeeded to bag 13 seats in the port city in 2001 elections,

whether Awami League (AL) won the remaining two constituencies out of 15 ones. However, this year one more seat has been included in the total constituencies here.

"I will cast my vote for an honest candidate," said Mahub Alam, a resident of Dhaniapara slum, just after his last sip of the tea.

Talking to The Daily Star, Rezaul Alam at Chawkbazar intersection said this year election calculation might be changed and even something new might happen in the poll results.

He would consider price hike of essentials, corruption by the political leaders and competent leadership in casting his vote.

Along with the young voters in the city, there are 25 percent minority votes who

will contribute a lot to this year's elections.

"New voters will play a significant role in the port city as they are more conscious of corruption," said Mushtari Shafi, TIB convener in Chittagong.

She said campaign against war criminals and for honest and competent leaders by different organisations can change the vote tallies in the city.

However, some voters in the port city noticed purchasing votes using black money, especially in the remote areas.

"Tonight would be very sensitive for the voters," said Sadek, a businessman in the city, adding that as maximum candidates are involved in businesses here, it would not be surprising if someone purchases votes.

Jamaat affinity leaves Minu in dire straits

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Apart from his rift with party leaders and corruption charges, BNP candidate Mizanur Rahman Minu at Rajshahi-2 constituency is facing criticisms from his own party-men as well as his opponents for his affinity to alliance partner Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.

To cover his Jamaat loyalty, Minu's followers circulated leaflets identifying his rival grand alliance's Fazle Hossain Badsha as the godfather of underground operatives.

"For his pro-Jamaat attitude, he (Minu) lost trust of maximum party leaders a long ago. Now, he has no way but the support of Jamaat," said a BNP leader seeking anonymity.

His electoral rival grand alliance candidate Fazle Hossain Badsha has talked about Minu's pro-Jamaat attitude and his role behind militancy quite louder than corruption charges during electoral campaigns.

Ignoring those campaign-ing, Minu said it would not

hurt his popularity. "People are aware that it was during our (BNP-Jamaat) rule when militants were arrested and tried".

National hero AHM Kamruzzaman won this seat for the last time from Awami League in 1973. In later elections, BNP has won the seat. The constituency is considered to be important for politics in entire North Bengal.

Senior BNP leader Kabir Hossain won this seat in 1991 and 1996. Minu locked horns with Kabir when Minu got BNP nomination in 2001 forcing Kabir to contest from another constituency of Rajshahi-5. Minu with Jamaat support won the seat.

The anti-Jamaat sentiment of Kabir, also the central BNP's liberation war affairs secretary, has been another reason of Kabir-Minu rivalry since 2001.

Kabir-Minu cold war is back again this year, when Kabir chooses Rajshahi-3 and Rajshahi Jamaat Ataur Rahman, also close to Minu, submitted his nomination from the same seat. Kabir

followers said, none but 'Minu in league with his Jamaat masters' planned fielding Ataur against Kabir.

Minu too did a lot for Jamaat during the BNP-Jamaat rule, said BNP insiders. He helped Jamaat build a stronghold on Rajshahi University campus and for establishing an economic support in the city, they added.

In addition to allegations of helping militancy and sharp infighting, Minu is passing hard times witnessing BNP in disarray for sky rocketing high prices of essentials, power and water crises.

Minu certified the militant kingpin Asadullah Al Galib in 2004 stating that he was not involved in militancy, but his government detained Galib for the charge.

Minu is also facing rivalry with a BNP faction that was led by former BNP lawmaker Nadim Mustafa who is now absconding abroad.

Despite the groupings, many Minu followers said, "Rajshahi BNP has no worth without Minu."



City streets look deserted yesterday as most of the residents went to their village homes for casting their votes in today's elections.

Ashura on January 8

UNB, Dhaka

The Holy Ashura will be observed on January 8 as the moon of the month of Muharram was not sighted anywhere in the country yesterday.

As the moon was not sighted yesterday, so the month of Muharram or the new year of Hijri 1430 begins on Tuesday, according to a decision taken at a meeting of the National Moon Sighting Committee held in the evening at the Islamic Foundation.

Acting secretary of the religious affairs ministry and assistant secretary of the committee, Mamunur Rashid Chowdhury presided over the meeting.

Indian ships go back

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Navy ships continuing their patrol in the deep sea early yesterday as two survey ships from India sailed back to Indian waters beyond the sight of Naval patrol.

An ISPR press release yesterday, however, said the Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) and ships of Indian Coast Guards continued to come and go in the same area.

Earlier on December 25, Bangladesh Navy ships identified the two ships of Australian company, SANTOS, engaged by Indian government, conducting surveys after intruding into Bangladesh's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) adjacent to Gas Block DS-14.

Later, Bangladesh Navy ship 'Khalid Bin Walid' requested the Indian ships to leave Bangladesh maritime boundary as it spotted the ships in Bangladesh waters.

In reply, the ships of Indian Coastguard and MPA reached the zone and insisted Bangladesh Navy ships to leave the Indian territorial water, the ISPR said, adding the captain of Indian survey ship, CGG Symphony, meanwhile expressed dissatisfaction over conducting surveys in the disputed sea area.

On Saturday morning (December 27), the Indian ships that intruded into Bangladesh water territory moved slightly westwards and were carrying out their survey work, the ISPR release said.

Early yesterday, the Indian survey ships went out of the sight of Bangladesh Navy ships and took position into Indian water territory.

Hasina concerned over Israeli air strikes in Gaza

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed deep concern over the Israeli air strikes in Gaza that killed 280 Palestinians on Saturday.

Expressing deep shock at the loss of lives, she said, "We believe that it is possible to peacefully resolve Middle East crisis through negotiations."

In a statement, Hasina urged all to refrain from violence and to work towards establishing human rights and peace.

Meanwhile, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) strongly condemned the Israeli air strikes in Gaza.

In a statement, CPB President Manzurul Ahsan Khan and General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim termed the attack a crime against humanity and a threat to world peace.

Bid to remove NHRC office from PWD building

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Public Works Department (PWD) yesterday removed computers and furniture of the newly formed National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) from its office without any prior notice.

NHRC Secretary Aftab Uddin Talukdar filed a theft case with Ramna Police Station alleging that the equipment of the office, including computers and furniture, were stolen.

NHRC Chairman Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "I came at office at 9:00am yesterday and found the equipment and furniture missing and many of the furniture damaged."

He said, "It is a criminal offence to remove a government office and its documents and equipment and, therefore, the criminal case has been filed."

When contacted, the PWD official, who is looking after the NHRC office, told reporters that he opened the door of the office following the directive of a higher official.

The two-storey NHRC building at Hare Road in the Ramna area is owned by the

Public Works Department (PWD).

The NHRC was formed through an ordinance in December last year and started its activities in October this year.

Besides, the government appointed a chairman and two members on December 1. They started work from the day of their appointments in the office. NHRC opened its office in the building with the permission of housing and public works ministry in November.

Sources said, the computers and other equipment were stored in a room on the ground floor.

PWD Chief Engineer Abdul Hakim said they are renovating the building following the directive of the Ministry of Housing and Public Works to accommodate the ministers of the coming government.

Rashedul Hai, secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, said the NHRC was supposed to leave the building by November and so they are asked to evict the office.

"The building is allotted for the ministers, so we are bound to vacate the building for them", the secretary said.

Justice Amirul Kabir

Chowdhury said he is not aware of the deadline to vacate the office as he has been appointed on December 1.

Besides, he said they were not informed of any renovation work or given any prior notice to leave the office.

NHRC chairman said, "We would continue our office in the building and some of the materials have been reinstalled in the afternoon after interference by the law ministry."

Mahmudur files defamation case against HT Imam

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Former energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman yesterday filed a defamation case against HT Imam, co-chairman of Awami League Election Steering Committee, for making defamatory statements against him.

Mahmudur, also chairman of Amar Desh Publications Ltd, filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka seeking arrest warrant against the accused.

After hearing the case, Metropolitan Magistrate Dr Abdul Mazid recorded the statements of the complainant but did not pass any order.

In his complaint, Mahmudur Rahman said that HT Imam at a press conference on December 27 made defamatory statements against him.

Mahmudur also said the statements, which are baseless, were made with the intention to undermine his image.

At the press conference, HT Imam said, "We have come to know that Mahmudur Rahman and a deputy secretary of Bangladesh Government (BG) Press who also acted as the personal secretary to Jamaat secretary Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojahid and two former IGPs have trained up some 100 workers of BNP-Jamaat on making fake ballot papers and techniques of vote rigging."

BDRCS AGM stayed until January 4

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday stayed until January 4 the process for holding annual general meeting (AGM) of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).

The AGM was earlier scheduled to be held on December 31.

Following a writ petition filed by a delegate of the society, an HC vacation bench of Justice Moeenul Islam Chowdhury passed the interim order and fixed January 4 for further hearing of the petition.

Emran Chowdhury, a delegate of BDRCS for Sylhet, yesterday filed a writ petition with the HC challenging the legality of the action of BDRCS authorities deleting his name from the list of delegation of the society.

In the petition, he prayed to the HC to issue a stay order on holding the AGM of BDRCS.

Advocate Khurshid Alam Khan appeared for the petitioner.

Minor boy injured in bomb blast

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A minor boy sustained severe injuries in a home-made bomb blast in the city's Kadamtoli area yesterday.

The injured was identified as Md Hasan, 8, a student of class one at Jurain Brac School, at Jurain under Kadamtoli Police Station.

The right eye of Hasan got damaged and he received burn injury on the right portion of his body in the incident.

The on-duty doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital feared that the victim might lose his eye.

Hasan told The Daily Star that when he was playing with his friend Uzzol in front of their house, suddenly a thing fell on

him that left him seriously injured.

Officer-in-Charge Md Nur Hossain of Kadamtoli Police Station said while Hasan was unwrapping the bomb collected from the nearby dustbin, it blew up leaving him injured.

Muyeed new Biman chairman

METRO DESK

Abdul Muyeed Chowdhury has been elected chairman of the board of directors of Biman Bangladesh Airlines at a meeting of the board at Balaka Bhaban in the city on Saturday, says a press release.