

Campaign goes

FROM PAGE 1
the work done early, so he would not have to scramble today, reported our Tangail correspondent.

Three campaigners for four-party and Jamaat nominee Moniruzzaman Montu in Nilphamari-2 were arrested by police on charges of trying to buy votes around 2:00am yesterday. The law enforcers confiscated Tk 6,700 and two unregistered motorbikes from their possession. But they were later released to the custody of Montu, as according to police, 'there was no specific allegation against them'. The three are Ismail Hossain, 28, and Nurul Huda, 28, of Bandarpara village in Kochukata union, and Azad Ali, 50, of Dundori village in the same union. There was another accomplice with them, but he managed to escape.

Around 8:30pm Jamaat activist Moshiur Rahman, 30, who described himself as a teacher of Boraibari Madrasa in Nilphamari district headquarters, was arrested by police from Jummamara of the town while he was distributing money to buy votes. Officer-in-charge of the local police station, Nurul Islam, said if any official charge is filed, they will take proper legal action against the arrestee, according to our local correspondent.

In Noakhali, police arrested two BNP leaders with Tk 70,000 in their possession from the main election camp of four-party alliance candidate Barkat Ullah Bulu at Choumuhoni Golabaria while they were distributing the money among party activists in the evening.

Protesting the arrests, BNP activists blocked a road in the evening, but were dispersed after police resorted to baton charges.

Bulu, who is running for the Noakhali-3 seat, alleged that the administration is

biased towards a 'particular' candidate. He also demanded release of the BNP leaders.

In Sathkira-3, two campaigners for four-party nominee AM Riasat Ali were arrested last night by police while they were trying to buy votes. The law enforcers confiscated Tk 54,500 from their possession. The arrestees are AKM Ehsanul Haque of Old Sathkira Town, and Wahidul Islam of Katia Sarkarpara of the same town, reported our Sathkira correspondent.

In Kurigram-2 police arrested Chowdhury Shafiqul Islam, brother of four-party nominee Tajul Islam Chowdhury, and his four accomplices while they were distributing money among voters to buy votes and were also distributing defamatory leaflets against rival AL-led grand alliance nominee also Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad. They were going around Balarhat Bazar area in Naudanga union of Phulbari upazila in a sport utility vehicle sporting a BNP flag. Police also confiscated the vehicle and some money from their possession, reported our Kurigram correspondent.

In Magura, police arrested three campaigners for BNP-led four-party alliance nominee Iqbal Aktar Khan, and confiscated Tk 1.96 lakh cash from them. The law enforcers also seized a car from the possession of the arrestees. Witnesses said they were distributing money to buy votes.

In Khulna, police arrested five supporters of a four-party candidate from Paikgachha and Koira areas and confiscated Tk 27,000 from the arrestees.

Sayani Union Parishad Chairman Jamal Uddin also a BNP leader of Noakhali was arrested in the afternoon in connection with violating the electoral code of conduct.

24 killed

FROM PAGE 16
succumbed to his injuries, raising the death toll to 24.

Thirteen of the injured were admitted to the hospital with 10 in critical condition.

Of the dead, 14 were identified so far. They are Afsar, 40, and his son Shajalal, 9, Romen, 35, Enamul, 25, Fatik, 30, Habibur, 35, Rafiqul, 25, and Lalon -- all from Sirajganj, Abdur Rahim, 35, of Bogra, Monir, 11, of Tangail, Akber, 30, of Rangpur, Akram from Natore, and one Hazrat Ali.

Identities of 10 dead could not be known immediately.

The day labourers, mostly brickfield workers, had boarded the truck for a fare of Tk 40 each from different places in Dhaka, and Mirzapur in Tangail, said one of the injured, Abdul Barek.

Following the accident, the deputy commissioner and superintendent of police of Tangail rushed to the spot and arranged rescue of the injured and their treatment.

Judicial

FROM PAGE 16
The EC on Saturday finally decided that the judicial magistrates would perform their jobs sitting in their offices, which was in complete contrast with their previous decision.

Earlier the EC entrusted judicial magistrates with the task of punishing electoral offences on the very polling day. But this time around they are not going to move around the constituencies as per EC's decision. They will only take into cognisance electoral offences for trial.

MAGISTRATES UNHAPPY
Talking to The Daily Star a senior magistrate said the EC had no jurisdiction to handle the assignment of the judicial magistrates. "As per the law only the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate or the Chief Judicial Magistrate can assign magistrates to perform a certain duty," he added.

Seeking anonymity, another magistrate said now offenders and wrongdoers would have the upper hand in committing crimes and offences like casting false votes or getting away with ballot boxes or bringing out a procession without any major trouble as the executive magistrates will have no jurisdiction to punish any offender rather than slapping only a fine of a certain amount of money.

Another magistrate on the same grounds said the EC was biased by the administration and it would create controversies between the judicial and the executive magistrates.

During the meet Nazrul Islam also complained to the EC about the remarks made by AL's Election Conducting Committee co-Chairman HT Imam who alleged that a BNP leader along with some others in the BG Press had trained up around 100 BNP-Jamaat workers to print fake ballot papers.

UNBadds: A press briefing at BNP's Gulshan office Nazrul also alleged that AL activists and a few policemen and Rab and army personnel are involved in harassing leaders and workers of the BNP and its alliance in a bid to hold them back from working for their candidates.

He said they received reports of harassment from many constituencies across the country, including Magura-1, Magura-2, Sylhet-2, Jhenidha-4, Shariatpur-2, Chandpur-2, Gazipur-5 and Noakhali-3.

Terming such incidents "unfortunate", he demanded that the administration monitor the election properly.

Mahela

FROM PAGE 16
was caught behind by Mushfiqur Rahim but Shahadat Hossain had bowled a no ball. In his 219-ball knock of 129 runs, Jayawardene was particularly harsh on the erratic Shahadat, hitting him for seven boundaries but Mashrafe Bin Mortaza troubled him early on.

After Mahbubul Alam removed Malinda Warnapura for eight, Mashrafe took the wicket of Michael Vandort to reduce the visitors to 18 for two after Muttiah Muralidaran took the last Bangladesh wicket to finish with figures of six for 49 after the Tigers added just one run to their overnight total.

Kumar Sangakkara gave his captain good support in rebuilding the innings, adding 135 runs for the third wicket. The left-hander made a patient 67 off 134 balls with eight boundaries before being caught well down the leg-side by wicketkeeper Mushfiqur off left-arm spinner Mehrab Hossain when he tried to guide the ball down to fine-leg.

Arrival of first innings hero Thilan Samaraweera did not put much of a smile on the Tigers' face as the belligerent right-hander smacked eight boundaries in his 116-ball knock of 62. He and Jayawardene had an interesting battle with paceman Shahadat who repeatedly bounced the pair well into the teasection.

On a few occasions, the bowler was on top with top-edges streaking over the square-leg fielders but they survived to take the visitors' lead over the 400-run mark. Samaraweera was eventually cleaned up by an unrewarded Mashrafe and soon after, the two umpires offered the batsmen light.

JP aspirants

FROM PAGE 16
are in Rangpur, home district of JP Chairman HM Ershad, four in Gaibandha, four in Kurigram, three in Nilphamari and two in Lalmonirhat districts.

JP's alliance partner AL also nominated candidates in six constituencies-Rangpur-4, Rangpur-5, Kurigram-4, Gaibandha-4, Gaibandha-5 and Nilphamari-4.

Political analysts had earlier apprehended that the grand alliances would be in trouble in these six constituencies because voters of AL and JP would be divided paving the way for four-party alliance candidates to do some damage to the grand alliance's will-win-tally.

But latest developments suggest otherwise. They now say that there will be a three-horse-race only in Nilphamari-4, Kurigram-4 and Rangpur-4 as candidates of AL, JP and four-party alliance have equal hold on voters.

There are candidates of both AL and JP in Rangpur-5, Gaibandha-4 and Gaibandha-5 constituencies but the battle is likely to be between them only as four-party alliance candidates appear to be weak.

Hasan Ali of BNP in Gaibandha-5, Shah Mohammad Hafizur Rahman of Jamaat in Rangpur-5 and Abdur Rahim Sarkar of Jamaat in Gaibandha-4 are up against strong JP and AL candidates.

Prof Mazharul Mannan of Gaibandha said the three candidates in the constituencies are new and had trouble persuading undecided voters.

In the other 12 constituencies of the region, the grand alliance nominated JP candidates are likely to win since they are going to get votes of AL and JP supporters.

These constituencies

include Rangpur-1, Rangpur-2, Rangpur-3, Gaibandha-1, Gaibandha-3, Kurigram-1, Kurigram-2, Kurigram-3, Lalmonirhat-2, Lalmonirhat-3, Nilphamari-1, and Nilphamari-3.

JP Chairman HM Ershad himself is standing in Rangpur-3 and Kurigram-2 constituencies. His younger brother GM Quader is in Lalmonirhat-3.

JP traditionally has a strong voter base in greater Rangpur as Rangpur is the home of Ershad who played a major role in developing the region's infrastructure when he was the president in the 80's.

In the 1991 national polls, JP won 35 seats and Ershad alone had won five seats in Rangpur district despite being in jail. The JP strongholds, however, declined to 32 in the 1996 polls and to just 13 in the 2001 polls.

Analysts say that JP's alliance with AL has given JP the opportunity to win most of the constituencies in this region in today's polls.

AL and JP pledged that Rangpur will be made a division if the alliance was voted to power. "It is inspiring to the voters," Rangpur municipality mayor told The Daily Star yesterday.

President of Rangpur district BNP Rahim Uddin Bhoroisha, however, said the BNP-led alliance is likely to win at least 10 seats in greater Rangpur as the alliance tried to take advantage of the intra-alliance feud in grand alliance.

The chief election coordinator of AL for Rangpur-6 and AL central executive committee member KM Jahangir said even though there are candidates of both AL and JP in six constituencies in greater Rangpur, the BNP-led alliance candidates have no chance of winning those.

A relaxed day

FROM PAGE 1
Later, she had similar meetings with several delegations of international polls observer bodies including IRI and NDI ather Gulshan office.

Khaleda Zia also called on US Ambassador in Dhaka James F Moriarty and a three-member British delegation led by Baroness Paula Manjila Uddin at the same venue.

The former prime minister and top leader of the BNP-led four-party alliance will cast vote in today's parliamentary polls at Adamjee Cantonment School and College polling centre, party sources said.

She is also set to visit some other polling centres in the capital.

At the Jatiya Press Club, the BNP chief avoided polls-related questions from journalists. It is better not to reply to your queries today due to obligations of the electoral code of conduct, a smiling Khaleda said.

"Every time on the eve of the (national) election day, I used to visit the press club to exchange views with you. And I do so today also," she said.

"Besides, I want to take to express my gratitude to reporters who accompanied me during my countrywide polls campaign."

President of the Press Club Shaukat Mahmud and General Secretary Kamal Uddin Sabuj, among others, were present at the view exchange meeting.

Launching her electioneering from Sylhet on December 12, the BNP chief travelled around 7,000 km in about 45 districts until December 27, party sources said.

The BNP chief also visited the mazar of late president and party's founder Ziaur Rahman at about 11:30pm and offered munajat and fateha there.

Dhaka slums

FROM PAGE 1
Many of them said campaigners of some candidates distributed cash, and clothes among the voters in 2001 election.

"But this time we did not get anything," said Shamsunnahar of the slum.

Many others echoed her saying, candidates gave Tk 300-500 to each person besides distributing saree, lungi and T-shirts in the previous election.

The Election Commission has barred all candidates from distributing even T-shirts with their photographs, names and symbols. But this was a common practice earlier.

Buying votes in the slums is also an old practice in the country's election.

The law-enforcement agencies yesterday arrested some leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami in Nilphamari for distributing money among the slum dwellers.

Slum dwellers said usually the candidates start distributing money or clothing one or two days ahead of polls, especially at the night before polls. "That is why we would continue our vigilance in the slum all night long," said Jamal.

Slum dwellers on Karwan Bazar railway land said they have been registered as voters for the first time as national ID card is needed for a citizen.

"So the candidates in Dhaka-11 constituency visited our slum but none gave us anything," said a slum dweller. Most of the slum dwellers however said all they want is a sharp decrease in essentials' prices.

Distribution of money to buy vote was off the campaign so far, but slum dwellers had some other way to earn a little.

Many slum dwellers, including teenagers, earned some money by joining the election processions.

Masum, 17, who lives at Rayer Bazar Poolpar slum, said he took part in 10-12 processions for BNP and four to five for AL candidates.

"Sometimes I was paid Tk 50 for each procession and sometimes the amount was less. Organisers of the processions are known as our senior brothers at the slum. They gave us money for snacks and drinks," said Masum, a carpenter.

Another teenager Saddam Hossain said he took part in some processions for AL candidates and earned Tk 400.

The same scene was seen at Begunbari slum built on stilt in Tejgaon. Some people, especially the young, pocketed some money by attending election rallies.

Rahatan, who could not even tell her age [she looks like over 40], said, "We took part in a BNP procession yesterday [Saturday] and we walked a long way."

She added, "We went to collect money last night from the person who promised to pay us, but he said he did not get the money from his leaders yet."

Ansar-VDP

FROM PAGE 16
suggested in their independent force deployment and operational proposal that their security activities during the election should be led by the ansar-VDP director general (DG), and should be executed through their own chain of command.

The proposal instantly gave rise to questions about its motive.

Sources said both the home ministry and the Election Commission rejected the proposal outright.

A senior official of the EC said, "The proposal was rejected outright as there is no scope for experimenting with the security of the national parliament election."

The home ministry's decision was also prompted by Bangladesh Police's veto of the idea, the sources said.

Police sources said they vetoed the idea because such a move would jeopardise poll security planning and open up possibilities of security breaches.

The proposal signed by Forkan Uddin Ahamad, director of operations (current) of the Ansar, also suggested that the two auxiliary forces carry on independent patrols, and mob control and search operations where necessary.

But traditionally election security duties are carried out by all law enforcing agencies under the leadership of the police, which is coordinated by returning officers.

The home ministry circular directed all law enforcement agencies, including the ansar and VDP, to carry out their duties as associates of the police.

It also directed them to consult with superintendents of police at the district level and with police commissioners in metropolitan cities while maintaining law and order during the election period.

In contrast, the ansar-VDP proposal sought to place the Ansar DG out of the purview of the rule.

There are a total of 35,220 poll centres and the ansar and VDP proposed to deploy a total of 4,22,640 personnel.

Forkan told The Daily Star, "The home ministry did not agree with our proposal, so we will carry out our duties as usual."

"We are run by public money. That's why we proposed to control five percent of the total polling centres to help the government."

Former adviser to a caretaker government SM Shahjahan also a former

inspector general of police, however, told The Daily Star, "I don't know whether there is anything positive in the proposal. It is quite negative to make such an unprecedented proposal suddenly without consulting other agencies concerned."

"It's not possible to start a new system unless it's agreeable to others, because that could create anarchy", he said adding, "Exercise of power should not be the goal, rather the goal should be to carry out the duties responsibly."

The army's deployment on poll security duties this year however is a bit different than its deployment in earlier elections. The army included its street patrols last night, and will remain stand-by as a striking force at some nodal points today during the election to move into action if called in by returning officers.

In 2001 election, the army patrols were on before, during and after the election day.

Southwest

FROM PAGE 16
of Pabna, Sirajganj and Magura for decades.

Their activities increased significantly during the rule of the last BNP-Jamaat-led government. Different political and vested interest groups used to hire them to kill journalists and political leaders from progressive forces.

Islamist extremists also allegedly started working under the shadow of the left-leaning extremists. Extremists killed journalist Harun or Rashid in 2002, Manik Saha on January 15, 2004, and Humayun Kabir Balu on June 24 the same year, and popular Awami League leader Manzurul Imam on August 25, 2003.

"This is well known that anybody could hire the extremists to work for them. But this time we have noticed nothing," said a resident of Khulna, requesting anonymity.

Mofakkar Hossain Chowdhury and Abdur Rashid of Purbanga Communist Party and Abdur Rashid Malitha Tapan of Janajuddha were recently killed in cross fire while New Biplobi Communist Party chief Minhal Das and his second-in-command Shah Alam were killed in India in 2004.

Locals believe that it will take some time for these extremists to organise again.

Israel warns

FROM PAGE 16
Ehud Olmert said at the start of the weekly cabinet meeting.

Israel is "aiming to change the situation on the ground whereby in the future there will be a tranquil border between Israel and Gaza," Isaac Herzog, the welfare minister, told reporters before the meeting.

Hamas, the Islamist Palestinian movement branded a terror group by Israel and the West, remains defiant.

Its exiled leader Khaled Meshal called in Damascus for a new Palestinian intifada, or uprising, against Israel and promised more suicide attacks. Hamas last carried out a suicide bombing against Israel in January 2005.

The Israeli onslaught -- one of the bloodiest single days in the 60-year Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- has sparked massive international concern.

In New York, the UN Security Council called for an "immediate halt to all violence" and on the parties "to stop immediately all military activities," without mentioning Israel or Hamas by name.

The Israeli campaign has been slammed by many Arab nations and on Sunday, 30 Jordanian lawmakers demanded the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador.

Israel's main ally the United States has blamed Hamas "thugs" for provoking the campaign by firing rockets into the Jewish state from Gaza, and urged Israel to avoid causing civilian casualties in its bombing raids.

"If Hamas stops firing rockets into Israel, then Israel would not have a need for strikes in Gaza," White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe said.

Amid the bombing, Barak also authorised the passage of an aid convoy into Gaza on Sunday, his spokeswoman said. Israel has kept Gaza largely sealed off since Hamas violently seized power there in June 2007, overrunning forces loyal to secular president Mahmud Abbas.

Egypt, which had slammed Israel for the bombing campaign, on Sunday blamed Hamas for not allowing hundreds of wounded to pass through the Rafah border

crossing -- the only one that bypasses Israel -- to receive treatment.

"The wounded are barred from crossing" into Egypt, Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit said in Cairo, blaming "those who control Gaza. We are waiting for the wounded to cross."

Israel unleashed "Operation Cast Lead" against Hamas targets mid-morning on Saturday, with some 60 warplanes hitting more than 50 targets in just a few minutes, and Barak vowing it would continue for "as long as necessary."

Hamas has responded by firing more than 90 rockets and mortar rounds into Israel, killing one man and wounding a handful of others.

The Israeli bombing came after days of spiralling violence that followed the expiry of a six-month Egyptian-mediated truce between Israel and Hamas.

It also comes less than two months ahead of Israeli snap elections called for February 10.

Cellphones

FROM PAGE 16
However, emergency vehicles will remain out of the purview of the restriction, said a circular.

It said Hajj returnees could use a banner inscribing 'Hajj returnee' in front of their cars. Besides, there is no restriction on outgoing and incoming passengers in the country if they show their flight tickets or passports.

EC PREPARATION TO DISSEMINATE UNOFFICIAL POLLS RESULTS
The EC Secretariat has taken all-out measures for smooth dissemination of unofficial results of the ninth parliamentary elections.

Apart from making sufficient booths for electronic and print media on the EC premises, the commission was also preparing to set up a big electronic board outside the EC secretariat so that people can watch the polls results from outside.

Updated election results will be displayed on the board. EC Secretariat sources said they have assigned 16 teams who will collect results from the returning officers through fax or over phone. Later, the results will be shown on the board for newsmen.

Religious rituals

FROM PAGE 1
contesting in today's general elections and gave them directives on things they should do today.

After offering Fazr prayers and reciting from the Holy Quran, Hasina met the election observing delegation of International Republican Institute around 7:30am at her Sudha Sadan home in Dhanmondi. She also met the delegations of British parliament members, European parliament members and National Democratic Institute (NDI) later in the day.

At the meetings, each lasting more than an hour, Hasina said she expects that the people would give the AL-led grand alliance the mandate for change in today's national elections.

Around 6:40 in the evening, Hasina and her younger sister went to Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhanmondi Road-32. The building was once her home. She recited from the Holy Quran for several hours and offered Esha and especial prayers for the salvation of her departed family members who were killed on August 15, 1975.

AL, after the meeting with NDI, hoped that it would secure two-third majority in the next parliament.

"Insha'Allah we will get absolute majority. We will be victorious with about 200 seats," co-chairman of the AL's election-conducting committee HT Imam told reporters at Sudha Sadan.

Today's national elections, post-polls environment, election observing, threat to minorities and the use of black money came up for discussion during the meeting between NDI and AL.

"We just had a very good talk with Sheikh Hasina," head of the six-member NDI delegation Howard B Schafer told journalists after the meeting.

"We mostly want a free, fair and transparent election to be followed by the organisation of a good stable generous government in which the opposition can play a role, a traditional role, which has not always been the case in Bangladesh," he said.

Howard, who was the US ambassador to Bangladesh 20 years ago, said, "I wish the country all the best...the best way is to hold a good election tomorrow and we are here to help you to do that."

AL's advisory council member HT Imam claimed that the minority communi-

ties have been threatened in different parts of the country and a huge amount of money has been distributed among voters to buy votes for the BNP-Jamaat coalition.

"We in the meeting also pointed out the issues of minorities and the use of religion in the elections," he said.

Former ambassadors Ziauddin and Muhammad Zamir, Sheikh Rahana's son Redowan Mujib Siddique Boby, daughter Rezwana Mujib Siddique Tulip and Boby's wife Peppi-T-Kiviniemi were present at the meeting.

Quran, Narayan

FROM PAGE 16
In 2001 election, Golam Parwar defeated Narayan Chandra by 4,578 votes by running a similar campaign based on religion.

The campaigners have added new colours to their strategies this time. They are trying to woo the voters by saying "if they vote for the Hindus, they won't be allowed in heavens." Besides, the Muslims won't be allowed to grow beard if the AL or grand alliance forms government, the campaigners warned.

In addition to exploiting religion, the Jamaat candidates are also distributing money among the voters.

In Khulna-6 (Koira-Paikgachha) constituency, the supporters and activists of Jamaat candidate and alleged war criminal Shah Mohammed Ruhul Kuddus are reportedly distributing money to buy voters.

Kuddus, who is fighting against freedom fighter Sohrab Ali Sana of AL, was on the list of 600 war criminals announced recently by Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad.

Local voters said Kuddus has become desperate as he is gradually losing his ground in the constituency. Three Jamaat activists -- Sheikh Masum, Sheikh Jahangir and Enamul Islam -- were caught red-handed in the act of distributing money in Melek Kuraiakathi village in Paikgachha Saturday night. The villagers turned them in to the police.

Abdur Razzak Malongi, chairman of Goidapur Union Parishad, confirmed the incident. But Officer-in-Charge of Paikgachha Police Station Sheikh Abul Hashem told journalists the villagers only suspected that they were distributing money.

Of the six constituencies in Khulna Jamaat has candidates in two where the party won in last national election.