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Choose from  
Quran,  
Narayan

Campaigns Jamaat  
candidate in Khulna

PINAKI ROY and QUAZI  
AMANULLAH from Khulna

In gross violation of the electoral code of conduct, supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Miah Golam Parwar of Khulna-5 constituency have apparently set an option to choose between "Quran and Narayan" in their campaigns against Awami League candidate Narayan Chandra Chanda.

Jamaat and BNP activists are also asking the voters that they must choose between "Bismillah or Narayan", said locals from Dumuria and Fultola.

"I've heard it. Jamaat activists are campaigning for Golam Parwar using religion. This is nothing new. They did the same last time," said Gazi Abdul Hadi, AL acting general secretary of Khulna.

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ANSAR-VDP  
Govt rejects  
ansar-VDP's  
curious bid to  
watch polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government on Saturday rejected a proposal for independent deployment of the ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) on poll duties, as the idea contradicts the home ministry's circular on election security measures.

In the proposal submitted to the ministry on December 14, the ansar and VDP suggested that they should control five percent of the total poll centres, sources said.

But such deployment is unprecedented in the history of elections in the country as the two forces traditionally carry out election duties along with the police.

Home ministry sources said the two forces, which run under a unified command,

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RANGPUR  
Feud doesn't  
matter for  
JP aspirants

PORIMOL PALMA and  
RAFIQUE SARKER

Jatiya Party's (JP) alliance with Awami League (AL) is to give all JP candidates in greater Rangpur a considerable edge in today's polls despite intra-alliance feud of the two parties in several constituencies.

The BNP-Jamaat government's "lack of attention" towards the people of this region is also likely to help AL and JP candidates, local political analysts say.

JP candidates are contesting in 18 constituencies in greater Rangpur. Of them, five

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Cellphones  
to stay alive  
during polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mobile phone network will remain in operation during the polling hours across the country but it might be suspended in certain areas or even in the whole country instantly if any situation arises.

In a televised speech yesterday evening, Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda said the decision was taken considering public demand and for successful completion of election activities.

But except the presiding officer, nobody can enter the polling station with mobile phone.

RESTRICTION

Meanwhile, the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat has imposed a ban on certain vehicles from December 28 midnight to December 29 midnight.

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Over 300 migrants  
feared drowned  
near Andaman

Victims are mostly Bangladeshis,  
Indian coastguards say

INDEPENDENT TELEVISION NEWS ONLINE

Around 300 people are feared drowned after jumping from a boat and trying to swim ashore in the Bay of Bengal.

The Indian coast guard said 88 people, mostly Bangladeshi illegal migrants, had been rescued from a small boat near Little Andaman island which lies around 90km (55 miles) south of Port Blair - about 1,200km (750 miles) off India's east coast.

Another 11 men were found on nearby Sandy Point island.

S P Sharma, commander of the coast guard for the Andaman region, said: "Around 300 of them reportedly jumped into the sea hoping to swim across to the shore. While all of them are feared dead or missing, search operations are still ongoing."

A survivor told officials there had been there had been 412 men, aged between 18 and 60, on the boat, which had little food or water and only a plastic sheet for a sail.

Sharma said the man told police seven others had died at sea and their bodies were dumped overboard.

Preliminary investigations suggested the men had left Bangladesh bound for Malaysia in six motorised boats about 45 days ago. At some point on their journey, the men had changed vessels, a coast guard statement said.

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Campaign  
rings in a  
change

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

Although the intense desire of voters for honest and competent candidates remains largely unmet in this election, they are coming out of their homes to vote this morning at least with one positive impression about politics after witnessing over the last couple of weeks a welcome change in the country's culture of electioneering.

The campaigns, which started on December 12 with the lifting of emergency restrictions on processions and rallies, were very different in many aspects this year from traditional election campaigns the country is used to.

Due to the stringent new electoral code of conduct drawn by the Election Commission (EC), residents of cities, especially of the capital,

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700 foreign  
observers to  
watch polls

STAR REPORT

As many as 700 foreign observers from different countries and international organisations and 74 foreign journalists will monitor today's parliamentary polls across the country, according to the data of Election Commission (EC).

Foreign observer teams include Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), European Union (EU), International Republican Institute (IRI), ANFREL-BD, EOJ, National Democratic Institute (NDI), EU Election Observation Mission, Commonwealth, Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership, Asia Foundation (SAARC), British High Commission, US Embassy, Japan, Indian High Commission, Swedish Embassy, Nepal, German Embassy and the USAID.

EU Election Observation Mission has sent the largest team with 181 members

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Election process,  
not results

Deputy chief of EU observers  
tells The Daily Star  
about team's focus

ARUN DEVNATH



In election observation, it is the process that matters. The outcome in terms of who wins or loses the election seems immaterial to observers.

"We are not here to manage or supervise the process. We are here to observe it, note it and report on it," says Graham Elson, deputy chief of the European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission, now in Bangladesh.

The Daily Star caught up with Elson, a man with the experience of observing elections in around 20 countries worldwide, in an exclusive interview to understand what it means to be an election observer.

"As I often say, for us what matters is the process. The outcome to us, in terms of who wins or loses, in a sense is immaterial," he says.

Election observation is a long, thorough process guided by a

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PHOTO: STAR



Escorted by policemen, election officials take transparent ballot boxes and other materials to a polling centre in the city. The photo was taken on English Road in Old Dhaka.

24 killed in Tangail  
truck crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Twenty-four people including a father and his son were killed and 20 others injured in a truck accident on Jamuna Bridge approach road in Tangail Sadar upazila yesterday morning.

The truck loaded with iron rod and carrying the victims -- all day labourers -- skidded off the road in dense fog and fell into a ditch at Kandila around 9:00am.

Most of the 44 victims hail from Gaibandha, Sirajganj, Bogra, Rangpur and Tangail districts, and they were going back to their villages to cast vote in today's parliamentary election, sources and witnesses said.

Ashraf Hossain, officer-in-charge of Tangail Sadar Police Station, said the driver of the Bogra-bound truck from Chittagong lost control of the vehicle due to poor visibility as dense fog blanketed the area. The victims were sitting on the pile of iron rod in the truck.

Twenty-three of them died on the spot and one at hospital later, he told this correspondent.

Police, fire service men and local people rescued the injured and rushed them to Tangail General Hospital where one

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Judicial magistrates  
resent EC decision  
BNP wants them to be in field

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A delegation of the BNP-led four-party alliance yesterday requested the Election Commission (EC) to deploy judicial magistrates in the field level to effectively check violation of election code of conduct in today's parliamentary polls.

Meanwhile, a section of judicial magistrates commissioned to try electoral offences on the polling day yesterday expressed resentment over the EC's decision not to deploy them (magistrates) in the constituencies.

BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan who led the delegation told reporters that they met Election Commissioner M. Sakhat Hossain and made the plea to employ judicial magistrates in the field level as was the tradition in all past elections.

He said, as judicial magistrates, as per EC's decision, would discharge their duties from their offices at district level, they would only be able to punish anyone once any allegation regarding violation of the election code of conduct is lodged with them.

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The photo shows a few of the hermaphrodites in Malibagh in the capital who have become voters for the first time. However, they had to identify themselves as either male or female on papers as the state only recognises the two sexes.

PHOTO: STAR

'Hijras' still  
deprived of  
franchise

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Ignored in every step of life, the society is blind towards a third variety of the sexes, the 'Hijra Community' (hermaphrodite or eunuch), deprived of their right to vote because of their distinctiveness.

Hijras are left with no choice and are bound to identify themselves as either male or female, to cast their vote. Bangladeshi law and related election documents, only recognise the dominant two sexes. This is the first time they

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Southwest waits for  
polls minus outlaws

PINAKI ROY from Khulna

led alliance leaders during and after the 2001 national polls.

When contacted Deputy Police Commissioner of Khulna Metropolis Md Shahadat Hossain told The Daily Star that he did not hear anything about extremists' activities ahead of the election.

"We have not even heard about any incident of toll collection this time," he said.

Elections in at least three of the six constituencies in Khulna district were greatly influenced by these extremist groups in the past while 15 out of 36 Khulna division constituencies were directly or indirectly influenced by them.

Extremist groups like Purba Banglar Communist Party, Biplobi Communist Party, New Biplobi Communist Party and Purba Banglar Communist Party (Janajuddha) have been active in Khulna, Kushtia, Jhenidah, Jessor, Chuadanga and Meherpur districts and parts

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