

High and mighty

FROM PAGE 1 image was further tainted when his son was jailed for 13 years for corruption. These two elements put his personal integrity to question.

Former law minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed suffered a colossal defeat at the hands of grand alliance's Obaidul Quader in Noakhali-5.

Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, the high-profile BNP leader from Rauzan, who has been controversial for his anti-Liberation War role, as well as remarks often verging on the edge of obscenity, and intimidation of the Hindu voters in order to gain electoral advantage, is running behind the grand alliance candidate Hasan Mahmud in Chittagong-6 by a wide margin. He however has won in Chittagong-2.

Lutfozzaman Babar, the infamous home minister of the four-party alliance rule, has been routed by the grand alliance candidate Rebeka Momin in Netrokona-4.

Babar has been widely criticised for his controversial role after the August 21 grenade attack aimed at wiping out the AL leadership including Sheikh Hasina.

Both the Jamaat leaders were against the birth of Bangladesh during the 1971 War of Independence and actively collaborated with the Pakistani occupation army to commit genocide. It seems that the recent campaign of the Liberation War sector commanders against the war criminals has made them pay through their noses.

BNP Secretary General Khandakar Delwar Hossain crumbled against grand alliance candidate ABM Anwarul Haque in Manikganj-1.

Although Delwar was the last person to take charge of the BNP when Khaleda was behind bars, his son Akhter Hamid Paban's criminal record put a big stain on his image.

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who was a key player in the BNP as its secretary general until he lost his nerve in the face of the anti-graft drive after emergency and turned into a so-called "reformist," found himself mauled by Zahurul Haq Mohan in Narsingdi-3.

Former president and Bikalpadhara Bangladesh chief AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury appears unable to escape his bad luck as he is trailing behind Mizanur Rahman Khan of grand alliance in Dhaka-6 and Sukumar Ranjan in Munshiganj-1.

Once a steadfast adherent of the BNP, he turned his face away from his former party after he was ousted. But his popular TV show and fame as a good physician could not find him in good health in yesterday's election.

Dr Khondokar Mosharrar Hossain, four-party's former health minister and standing committee member of BNP, lost

his ground to grand alliance's Subid Ali Bhuiyan in Comilla-1. The Pandora's box opened up for him when a number of corruption charges were brought against him after the 1/11 changeover.

Former home minister Air Vice-Marshal (ret) Altaf Hossain Chowdhury of the BNP found himself shot down by Advocate Shahjahan Mia of Grand Alliance in Patuakhali-1. He launched himself into notoriety when he made a statement "Allah Mal Alla niyese" (God has taken back His gift) commenting on the shooting death of a child by criminals.

He later became the commerce minister and miserably failed in maintaining commodity supplies. He was at the centre of a controversy when he built a bungalow with public funds on his home premises and it was used by his brother as his office.

His brothers earned him a bad name through their activities. Krishak Sramik Janata League's President Abdul Kader Siddiqui, bir utram, has long ruled his Tangail constituency with an iron fist.

But it loosened this time against Shawkat Momen Shahjahan in Tangail-8. Siddiqui recently gained notoriety for his role in the bridge project scam.

BNP stalwart Major (ret) Hafiz lost to a greenhorn of the grand alliance, Maj (ret) Jasimuddin in Bhola-3. He lost his party men's trust when he lost his nerve during the purge after 1/11 and took a makeover as a "reformist."

Lt Gen (ret) Mahbubur Rahman, member of the BNP's standing committee, lost to grand alliance's Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury in Dinajpur-2. He was a key person in trying to bring in "reforms" to the BNP.

Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, former disaster and relief minister, lost his luck when he did not get nomination from the BNP and contested as an independent candidate.

Sadeque Hossain Khoka, mayor of Dhaka and a BNP stalwart, lost to an unknown grand alliance candidate Mizanur Rahman Dipu in Dhaka-6. Known as Mr 2 percent, Khoka did little for the Dhaka city's development.

He was the first person after emergency to demand a cut in BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's power. But Khoka lost his charm as the city father, and also as a people's representative, as the capital remained in a sad state in respect to its amenities.

Most of the first time voters shared the same vision about country's future leaders. Those from the educated middle class group sounded concerned about security, law and order, corruption, nepotism, education and employment issues. They believe the next elected government would work hard to address these issues.

On the other hand, those from the poor group were mostly concerned about the price hike of essentials. They said they were casting their votes with the hope that the new government would keep the prices within their reach.

Kabir Hossain, 22, of Rayer Bazar slum said he mainly voted for peace and affordable prices of everything.

Dolna and Itee of the same slum were about to start for the poll centre in the afternoon. They believe this election will ensure welfare of the poor. Both of them are uneducated but they would favour the more educated candidate of Dhaka-13 constituency, they said.

This time young and educated voters were aware about background of the candidates. Many of them said they got information about the aspirant parliamentarians through leaflets and discussions about polls.

Besides, the Election Commission also made it a provision to reveal personal information of the candidates in eight categories including education background, financial status and criminal records.

Rumana Islam of Rayer Bazar slum said, "I have voted on the basis of educational qualification and character of the candidates. I believe an educated enemy is better than an illiterate friend."

Anful Islam, a student of chartered accountancy, voted at Tejgaon College centre. He said, "I voted only for a change in the country."

"I want law and order to be maintained all times like the past two years so that criminals dare not commit any crime," he said.

Arif expects that the new government will judge everything on the basis of qualification, not on political affiliation.

Manira Khanam, a student of Bangladesh Medical College in Dhanmondi, said she hopes politicians have learned a lot from last two years and will run the country in a disciplined manner.

Dhaka University student Ashabul Yameen voted at Dhaka College centre. He expressed his satisfaction saying the country is going back to democracy after a long time.

Another first time voter Tinku Rani Devi said, "I hope we'll elect a good government which will work against corruption and all bad things."

Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1 winning only two seats out of 38 it contested for.

Jamaat's big shots including Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami, Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid and central leader Delwar Hossain Saydee -- lawmakers in the last parliament -- have been rejected by voters.

Nizami, who contested the elections from Pabna-1 constituency, lost to M Shamsul Haque Tuku, while Mojahid managed to grab third position in Faridpur-3.

Jamaat candidates Shamsul Islam won in Chittagong-14 and Hamidur Rahman Azad in Cox's Bazar-2.

Interestingly, Azad defeated not only the grand alliance candidate but also the four-party one as he was not the official ticket holder of the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance.

As a component of the previous BNP-led four-party alliance, Jamaat had 18 seats in the eighth parliament in 2001 thanks to BNP's vote banks.

But this time the party faces the people's wrath for the alliance's misdeeds during its five-year tenure in the government from 2001 to 2006 and mounting demands for the trial of their war crimes.

In 1971, Jamaat stood against people's aspiration for an independent Bangladesh and collaborated with the Pakistani forces to exterminate the freedom-loving Bangalees by killing three million people, including women and children.

However, nothing could stop the indomitable freedom fighters who defeated the stronger Pakistani forces to snatch independence on December 16, 1971.

Jamaat lost its political rights during the rule of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman but was rehabilitated politically by the military ruler late president Ziaur Rahman after 1975.

Jamaat had a strong political base across the country under another army ruler, HM Ershad, from 1982 to 1990. It emerged as a political factor in the fifth parliamentary elections in 1991, getting 18 seats.

But in the seventh parliamentary election in 1996, Jamaat got only three seats. After the 2001 elections, in which BNP got a landslide victory over Awami League, Nizami and Mojahid were made ministers and they roamed the country with the flag of Bangladesh, which they opposed in 1971.

Sector commanders FROM PAGE 1 all of Jamaat-e-Islami's top leaders who are accused of involvement in war crimes and of collaborating with occupying Pakistani forces in 1971.

Khandakar, deputy chief of 1971 Liberation Forces, won in Pabna-2 constituency defeating BNP's Selim Reza Habib by over 20,000 votes. Khandakar, the first chief of Bangladesh Air Force received 1,16,730 votes while his opponent received 95,000.

Bir Uttam Rafiqul Islam, the commander of Sector 1 during the War of Liberation, cliched victory from Chandpur-5 as an AL candidate.

The forum, a platform of the liberation war sector commanders and freedom fighters, published a list of war criminals to raise awareness largely among new voters to vote against war criminals, who turned out in droves to vote out Jamaat.

Nizami's ex-PS FROM PAGE 1 In Thakurgaon, locals held two more Jamaat workers--Haider Ali and Elazuddin--on the same charge and handed them over to Bangladesh Rifles with Tk 1,540.

In Nilphamari, police arrested six BNP men for distributing money among voters violating the electoral code of conduct. Six Jatia Party men were also rounded up in the district on the same charge.

Meanwhile, in the capital locals caught BNP supporter Mostafa red-handed distributing money among voters at Sabujbagh Wahab Colony. They handed him over to Sabujbagh police.

Police said police recovered Tk 72,000 from a biker in Tangail and arrested him along with three other bikers.

You shall reap

FROM PAGE 1 lowed since 1991, it can be considered somewhat natural that Awami League should get a turn to run the country in 2008, after BNP did so in 2001.

What however is not explainable by the anti-incumbency factor nor simply by people's desire for a change is the massiveness of the rejection of the BNP. The near rout of this once mighty party, who just the last time got two-third's majority, is the clearest sign that people are sending the strongest possible message of their disgust for what happened from 2001 to 2006 and are punishing BNP and its allies for the way they run the country.

Yesterday votes was a total, complete and comprehensive rejection of the BNP and its allies for corruption, political violence, nepotism, Hawa Bhaban, the role of Tarique, Arafat, Falu, Harris, Babar, etc. for obliterating the distinction between the State, government and the party, politicising every branch of administration, for instituting a culture of impunity where party henchmen considered themselves above the law. Finally for turning a blind eye as terrorism and fundamentalism spread its ugly tentacles throughout the country.

While it is true that Bangladesh headed the list of the most corrupt country in the world in the last year of AL rule, however it continued to be judged as such for the next four continuous years while BNP ruled the country.

Instead of attempting to curb corruption people close to the Prime Minister became involved with it and a criminal nexus seemed to envelope the party hierarchy.

First, the assassination of Ahsanullah Master, then the mass murder of 22 people while attempting to kill the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina and then the killing of S.A.M.S Kibria shocked the nation to the very core. What however made them disgusted is the BNP government's refusal to go after the real culprit.

This, in our view, totally destroyed the party's claim to stand for rule of law and respect for human rights.

The setting up of Hawa Bhavan and it's becoming an alternative centre of power with its attending corruption involving Prime Minister's elder son not only greatly damaged the reputation of BNP as a clean party, but also greatly damaged the image of Khaleda Zia as the prime minister. The reputation of people extremely close to the PM like Harris Chowdhury and Musadeq Ali Falu and Prime Minister's younger son Arafat Rahman Coko further sunk the reputation of BNP.

A man hitherto respected for his integrity, veteran finance minister Saifur Rahman, destroyed his reputation by allowing his sons into illegal business and permitting them to exert undue influence on NBR and related institutions. The final blow to reputation came when he, being the

finance minister, 'whitened' his own undeclared money.

While politicisation of the administration was a known phenomenon, however it reached its zenith under the BNP. Almost all branches of government came under direct and indirect influence of the party with the health ministry experiencing its most blatant abuse.

The point we are making today is that it is the BNP and its leaders, especially Khaleda Zia, her two sons, some senior ministers and PM's personal staff brought this defeat on themselves. Any serious introspection will lead to an objective observer to conclude that BNP and its allies are paying the price of mis-governance, arrogance, nepotism and disregard for the rule of law.

All cries of foul play must be compared with the record of its performance and judged as such.

People of Bangladesh have spoken, loudly, clearly and decisively. And it is not the first time that they have done so. For those who are stunned by the extent of the defeat of the 4-party alliance please remember the election of 2001. The then ruling party, the Awami League, was reduced to 62 seats. If that can be the verdict of the people at the present, then why can't the present results be considered the same?

BNP's devastating defeat is AL's most severest warning. The later must not forget for a moment how our people punish, and most severely so, when ruling parties fail to keep their promise to the people and live up to the latter's expectation of them. Two third's majority has always been a curse to those who got them. That is truer still if the victory is even bigger. The victors of yesterday's election must bear that in mind every moment of their coming five year tenure. More on that later. Today, we only celebrate people's victory over the corrupt.

Work together FROM PAGE 1 the losers would work together for taking the country forward.

"The country should not be divided unnecessarily and without any reason," he told reporters after casting his vote at Adamjee Cantonment College polling centre.

Replying to a question, General Moeen said, "This is not only the victory of Bangladesh but also the victory of the whole world."

The United Nations and all other peace centres of the present-day world have extended support to the caretaker government for Bangladesh's democratic transition from the state of emergency through necessary reforms to put behind past crises.

The chief of army staff said, "We all want democracy. Democracy is coming back after two years."

Hasina calls for calm

FROM PAGE 1 reporters at the party's media centre on Dhanmondi Road-3 at around 10:45pm.

Shortly after being sure about the victory from television news in the early hours, Hasina offered special prayers at her Sudha Sadan residence in Dhanmondi.

She also called her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy and his wife Christine in the US and other relatives and party colleagues to exchange greetings.

Speaking to AL leaders over phone, she directed them to make sure the party rank and file does not get involved in any violence in reprisals, one of her close aides told The Daily Star at around 3:00am.

He also quoted her as saying, "We want to put an end to the politics of vengeance."

The former prime minister cast her vote at Dhaka City College centre at 8:30am. There, she told reporters that she was quite optimistic about her alliance-winning mandate.

She called on all to accept the election outcomes whatever they may be.

Meanwhile, as the grand alliance was heading for a landslide victory in unofficial counts, AL expressed its gratitude to the people, especially the first-time and young voters, for voting overwhelmingly in its favour.

AL's Information and Research Secretary Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin conveyed the message at a press conference at around 12:45am.

He said his party president will come up with a formal reaction this morning.

AL believes Sheikh Hasina's call for a change has resonated with people from across the spectrum, and brought the

grand combine on the threshold of a momentous victory.

"People wanted a change; they wanted an end to misuse, corruption, and price hike of essentials. And so they have given their verdict for the 'charter for change'."

Lenin said the AL president remains unwavering in her commitment to materialising the vision for a prosperous Bangladesh by 2021, the golden jubilee of independence.

Earlier in the day, Hasina visited different polling centres across the city constituencies. After that, she went to Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhanmondi Road-3. There, she said her Ar prayers, recited from holy Quran and offered prayers for the family members she lost in the August 15 bloodbath in 1975.

Talking to reporters, the AL chief referred to press reports on BNP-led four-party alliances' "attempts to buy votes" in different constituencies, and said rigging was taking place in some places including her constituency in Rangpur.

"If this continues, how can I believe that the election will be free and fair," she said. The Election Commission and the government must explain what they have done in this regard.

"We want people to cast their votes fearlessly, and the election to be free and fair."

Hasina noted that there might be some flaws in the conduct of polls and those should be ironed out in future.

The 13 polling centres that the AL chief visited in the city were in Hazaribagh, Rayerbazar, Mirpur, Kaflur, Uttara, Badda, Rampura, Malibagh, Magbazar, Shyampur and Lalbagh areas.

Uganda rebels accused of massacre at church

AP, Kampala

Attackers wielding machetes hacked to death dozens of people at a church in remote eastern Congo, witnesses said Monday, and the Ugandan army accused the Lord's Resistance Army rebels of the massacre.

A European aid worker said more than 100 people are reported to have been killed in the attack the day after Christmas and that the Congolese military put the number dead at 120 to 150.

The accused Ugandan rebel group, which has waged one of Africa's longest and most brutal wars, denied responsibility. Spokesman David Matsanga said the Lord's Resistance Army had no fighters in the area and he accused Uganda's army of the killings.

But witness Abel Longi said he recognized the rebels by their dreadlocked hair, their Acholi language and the number of young boys among them.

"I hid in bush near the church and heard people wailing as they were being cut with machetes," Longi told The Associated Press in a telephone call from the village of Doruma, site of the church, where he owns a shop.

Ugandan military spokesman Capt. Chris Magezi said survivors and witnesses described a massacre at the church near Congo's border with Sudan, where the three nations' armies this month began an offensive to root out the Ugandan rebels, who have been fighting for about 20 years. Aid and rights groups have accused the rebels of cutting off the lips of civilians and forcing thousands of children to serve as soldiers or sex slaves.

Israel's Gaza 'aggression' has halted peace talks

Says Syria

AFP, Damascus

Indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria have been halted due to the Jewish state's "aggression" in Gaza, a senior Syrian official said on Sunday.

"It's the Israeli aggression in Gaza which has closed the door on all activity in the political process" between Syria and Israel, the official told AFP speaking on condition of anonymity.

In May, Syria and Israel -- technically still at war since the first Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948 -- began Turkish-mediated indirect talks after direct negotiations halted eight years ago over the thorny Golan Heights issue.

Israeli tanks were massed at the Gaza border on Sunday as warplanes again pounded Hamas targets in the densely populated enclave.

Since early Saturday, at least 287 people have been killed and more than 600 wounded, medics said.

The peace talks had in any case been on hold since Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert first announced in July he would step down over corruption allegations.

In exchange for peace Syria is demanding the return of the entire Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed in 1981 in a move never recognised by the international community.

But Israel has balked at this, since it would mean returning land right down to the shores of the Sea of Galilee -- its main source of fresh water.

Israel for its part is calling on Damascus to sever its ties with the current regime in Iran and stop its support for militants, namely the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas movements.

Earlier this month, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said that his country would eventually embark on direct peace talks with Israel, but they must be based on UN Security Council resolutions.

"Peace cannot be achieved through indirect negotiations alone. But if indirect talks succeed then direct negotiations will also, and peace will come naturally," Assad told reporters on December 22.

Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 call on Israel to withdraw from Arab territory it captured in the 1967 war.

Irregularities

FROM PAGE 1 According to the BNP office secretary, other poll irregularities include taking over polling stations, fake voting, obstructing voting, favouritism by polling officials and attacks on the leaders and activists of the BNP and its allies.

Earlier in the afternoon, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia expressed optimism about a landslide victory of her alliance in the ninth parliamentary polls provided it is held in a free and fair atmosphere.

The former premier also expressed her readiness to accept the results of the crucial election if it is fair.

"No matter whatever the outcome of the result is, the question is if it is held in a free and fair manner," the chief of the four-party alliance said.

Clad in a pink saree and her usual outfits, Khaleda along with her two relatives and colleague Sarwar Rahman turned up at the Adamjee Cantonment School and College polling centre to cast her vote around noon.

"We do not have any objection to the formation of the next government by those who win people's mandate," Khaleda told reporters at an instant press briefing after casting her vote.

She expressed satisfaction over the election environment across the country and hoped for a free and fair election to be held.

Khaleda said she had seen

for herself the huge surge of people in favour of the four-party alliance across the country.

Later at another press briefing at the city's Ideal School and College, Khaleda alleged that there had been mismanagement in the process of casting votes and that casting of vote in the city's vote centres was going at a slow pace.

She alleged that BNP workers and supporters were being harassed in different parts of the country and that some were even arrested on charge of attempting to buy votes.

CEC FROM PAGE 1 both for the Election Commission and the caretaker government, he said the election campaign, by and large, was peaceful.

Many city residents left for their hometowns and villages to cast vote spending extra money, clearly indicating that a festive election atmosphere prevails in the country.

Replying to a question, the CEC said, "As a voter, I could choose a competent candidate, a pretty good one."

CA delighted FROM PAGE 1 He said good arrangements have been made so that the voters can cast their votes in a peaceful atmosphere.

Gaza-blitz on

FROM PAGE 1 Palestinian enclave, the army declared the area a closed military zone -- a move that in the past has often been followed by ground operations.

Israel's air force obliterated symbols of Hamas power on the third day of its overwhelming assault on Gaza yesterday, striking a house next to the Hamas premier's home, devastating a security compound and flattening a five-story building at a university closely linked to the Islamic group.

The strikes appear to have gravely damaged Hamas' ability to launch rockets but a medium-range rocket fired at the Israeli city of Ashkelon killed a man there Monday and wounded several others. It was the second fatality in Israel since the beginning of the offensive and the first person ever to be killed by a rocket in Ashkelon, a city of 120,000.

Defence Minister Ehud Barak, who has warned of a possible ground offensive, declared that the Jewish state was in "an all-out war with Hamas and its proxies."

"We will avoid as much as possible hitting civilians while the people of Hamas and other terrorists deliberately hide and operate within the civilian population," he told a parliamentary session.

"We have nothing against Gaza residents, but we are engaged in an all-out war against Hamas and its proxies," he said.

"This operation will expand and deepen as much as needed," he said. "We went to war to deal a heavy blow to Hamas, to change the situation in the south."

"We will avoid as much as possible hitting civilians while the people of Hamas and other terrorists deliberately hide and operate within the civilian population."

"We do not want to hit children and women and we will not prevent humanitarian aid" from reaching the besieged enclave, he said.

Barak said that Israel's massive operation was in self-defence to ongoing rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, which has been under Hamas rule since the Islamist movement violently assumed power there in June 2007.

At least 51 civilians, including children, have died as a result of the Israeli bombardment, a spokesman for the UN Palestinian refugee agency said.

Among the latest deaths were five girls from the same family, aged from four to 17 years old, killed in an air raid that targeted a mosque near their home in Jabalya, medics said.

In all, the Israeli blitz, unleashed on Saturday in retaliation for ongoing rocket and mortar fire from Gaza, has killed at least 318 Palestinians and wounded more than 1,400 others, according to Gaza medics.

Hamas militants remained defiant on Monday, firing nearly 40 rockets into Israel.

One of the projectiles slammed into a construction site in the southern city of Ashkelon some 13 kilometres (eight miles) north of the Gaza border, killing an Israeli Arab and wounding eight more people.

Western-backed Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas,

whose forces were routed from Gaza when Hamas seized the territory in June 2007, implored the international community to help end the violence.

"We call on the entire world to work to put an immediate stop to this aggression," he said.

Amid mounting international concern over the humanitarian situation in the aid-dependent territory of 1.5 million that Israel allowed the delivery of 80 truckloads of food and medicine in the territory it has kept virtually sealed since the Hamas takeover.

In another development, Turkey, one of Israel's leading allies in the Muslim world, announced that it was ending efforts to organise peace talks between Israel and Syria.

"The continuation of the talks under these conditions is naturally impossible," Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan told reporters after discussions with Egyptian counterpart Ahmed Abu Gheit.

"To make war on the Israeli-Palestinian track and at the same time make peace on the Israeli-Syrian track -- these two cannot go together," he said.

Parliament in Jordan -- one of two Arab countries to have signed a peace treaty with Israel -- demanded that the government "reconsider" relations with the Jewish state.

Hamas, which is branded a terror group by Israel and the West, has lashed out at the world for not doing enough to end the blitz.

Israel is "committing a holocaust as the whole world watches and doesn't lift a finger to stop it," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum told reporters.

The Islamists have warned they could resume suicide attacks against Israel for the first time since January 2005 to retaliate for the blitz.

Since the start of the Israeli onslaught on Saturday, Gaza militants have fired more than 250 rockets and mortars into the Jewish state, killing two people and wounding nearly two dozen more.

The Israeli offensive has sparked protests across the world, with demonstrations held in European capitals, Turkey, Egypt and Syria.

At a rally in Tehran on Monday, thousands shouted "Down with Israel" and "Down with the USA" as they carried banners reading "We should all rise and destroy Israel."

Israel unleashed "Operation Cast Lead" against Hamas in the middle of Saturday morning, with some 60 warplanes bombing more than 50 targets in just a few minutes.

The Israeli blitz came after days of spiralling violence since the expiry of the Gaza truce. It comes less than two months before snap parliamentary elections in Israel called for February 10.

Death denies

FROM PAGE 16 today," said Saurid Rahman Suman, grandson of Jalal Talukder.

Suman and other family members of deceased Jalal were waiting outside the poll center with the coffin of Jalal.