

Fear factor behind low turnout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political interference and fear of clashes between candidates' followers were among the main reasons behind low turnout in yesterday's Upazila Parishad polls.

Besides, participation of controversial candidates in

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AL men win in most upazilas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pro-Awami League (AL) candidates won the chairmanship of most of the upazilas, according to unofficially results of yesterday's upazila parishad elections received early today.

The unofficial results of 59

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Upazila polls influenced

EC slams ruling party for misusing offices, controlling administration; tells of violence, ballot-stuffing, seizing polling stations by AL men; decides to probe low turnout reason

SHAKHAWAT LITON and SHARIFUL ISLAM

Low turnout, ministers and ruling party lawmakers meddling in balloting, and irregularities in places marked the long-awaited upazila elections yesterday, meaning a letdown for the Election Commission (EC).

Despite a relatively peaceful atmosphere, people did not come out in droves to vote like they did in the recently held national election.

Concerned, the EC has decided to open an enquiry to find out the reasons.

Referring to poor turnout, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said, "It will leave harmful



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Police arrested this assistant presiding officer for casting fake votes at Maruadi Govt Primary School centre in Araihaaz upazila of Narayanganj. Inset, ballots with fake votes.

effects on the efforts to ensure free and fair elections in the country."

He was talking to reporters at his office yesterday after-

noon. Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain sounded quite riled up.

He said violence, seizure of polling stations and ballot-stuffing were done by Awami League men.

Sakhawat, who had earlier

visited some polling centres, observed that lawmakers interfered to secure win for their favoured candidates as they want to keep upazila parishads under their sway.

The EC has suspended elections in five upazilas and over 50 polling stations in response to violence and ruling party MPs exerting influence on the election process.

It also ordered that legal actions be taken against at least a minister and a lawmaker for interference in the polls.

The polls chief however appeared undaunted by the setback.

Referring to electoral

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Minister, AL MP may face jail term

EC initiates legal action for influencing polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) has initiated steps to take legal actions against a cabinet minister and a ruling party lawmaker for allegedly influencing yesterday's upazila parishad election.

Ignoring the electoral rules, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdul Latif Biswas and Awami League lawmaker Abdur Rahman Bodi interfered in the polls in Belkuchi upazila of Sirajganj and Teknaf of Cox's Bazar.

As per the electoral rules, they may be imprisoned for a term of two to seven years and fined if they are found guilty of the offences, which are considered criminal offences.

In the run-up to the upazila parishad elections, the EC had written to the Cabinet Division requesting all ministers, state ministers, deputy ministers and persons enjoying similar status

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Abdul Latif Biswas A Rahman Bodi

Ghosts of past return

Ruling party interference, clash, voter intimidation, ballot box hijack mar upazila polls

STAR REPORT

More than 100 people including policemen were injured across the country during clashes among supporters of rival candidates of upazila polls yesterday.

Clashes, ruling party activists influencing polling, snatching of ballot boxes and ballot papers, preventing voters from going to the polling centres, forcing voters

to vote openly and a low turnout scarred the long awaited upazila parishad election day, according to our correspondents.

Executive judicial magistrates across the country in instant judgments sentenced at least nine people to different terms of imprisonment for violating electoral and other laws. More than 30 people were arrested for their involve-

ment in criminal activities related to the election.

Elections to five upazilas parishads were postponed following allegations of intimidation, deterioration of law and order situation, irregularities and preventing people to cast their votes.

Following allegations of vote rigging, locals torched ballot boxes and sacks full

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Vote almost peaceful

Claims home briefing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry yesterday observed that upazila parishad elections were held peacefully across the country yesterday without major violent incidents.

"The polls were held in a peaceful environment in 99 percent centres across the country according to the reports we have received,"

said State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sobel

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Polls suspended in 5 upazilas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Polls were suspended in five upazilas and at over 50 polling centres of other upazilas due to deterioration of law and order, intimidation of voters and irregularities in the yesterday's upazila polls held across the country.

In the verbal reports to the Election Commission (EC), the returning officers (ROs) showed the reasons and sought EC's directives to suspend the voting in those upazilas and centres, sources at the EC Secretariat said.

They informed the EC that it was not possible to continue the polling under the prevailing circumstances.

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BNP alleges massive irregularities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Accusing ruling Awami League (AL) of massive irregularities in the upazila polls yesterday, BNP said AL proved it wanted to annihilate the opposition, which is nothing but a traditional characteristic of AL politics.

The main opposition party alleged that the ruling party took control of polling centres,

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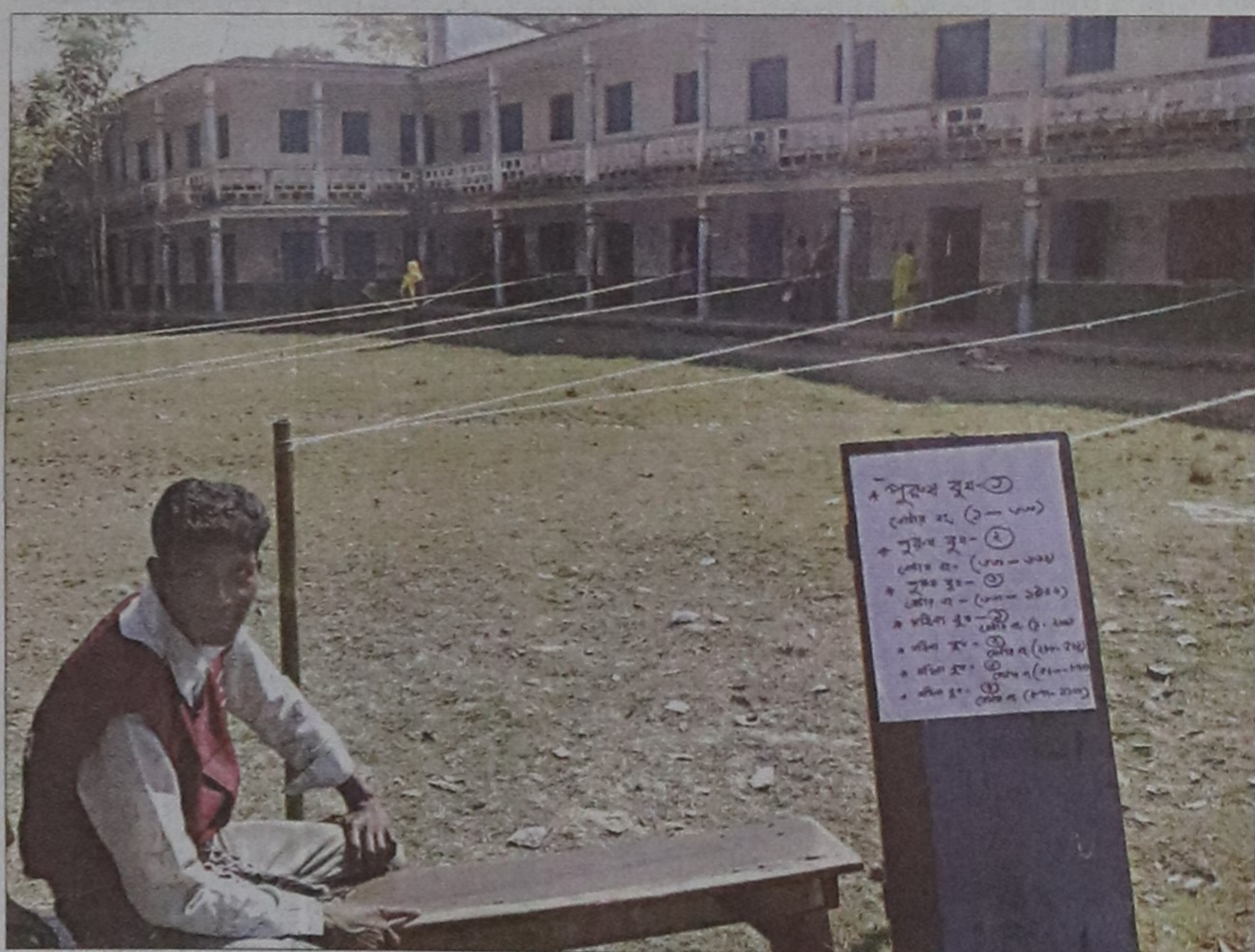


PHOTO: STAR

Dohazari Jamhuri Ahmadur High School polling centre in Chandanaish upazila in Chittagong is almost empty during peak polling hours yesterday. The picture was taken around 11:30 in the morning.

Obama shuts down Guantanamo

CIA prisons also to be closed; use of torture banned

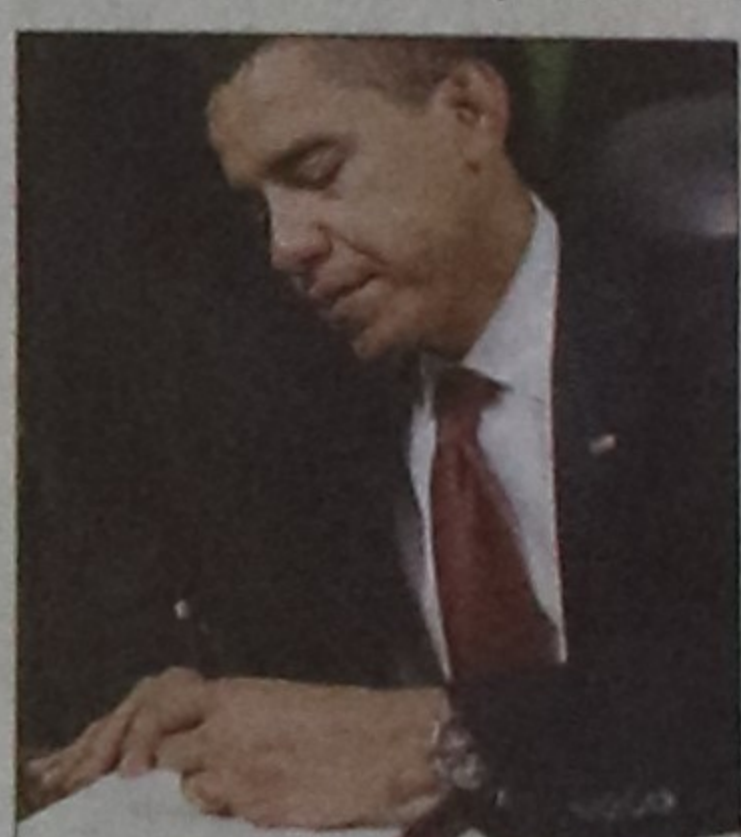
AFF, Washington

President Barack Obama yesterday signed three landmark executive orders mandating the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison, shutting down all CIA prisons and banning the use of torture.

The orders signaled a sharp reversal of the controversial Bush administration "war on terror" policies launched in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Signing the Guantanamo order which also halted any further military hearings of the inmates, Obama said he was setting in place a process by which the camp "will be closed no later than one year from now."

But many of the prisoners could find themselves released a lot sooner, as the order estab-



lishes a process to review their cases "with the goal of disposing of the detainees before closing the facility."

"The order sets up an immediate review to determine whether it is possible to transfer detainees to third countries, consistent with national security," a White House summary said.

"If transfer is not approved, a second review will determine whether prosecution is possible and in what forum."

If any of the remaining inmates, about 245 according to the Pentagon, cannot be transferred or prosecuted, then the review coordinated by the attorney general and the defense secretary will look at lawful ways of dealing with them.

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Clashes spoil JS polls success

Say observers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several election monitoring organisations yesterday in preliminary findings said voters' turnout in upazila parishad polls was low and incidence of violence in polling centers overshadowed the bright achievements of the recently held national polls.

The Election Working Group, a non-partisan network of civil society organisation, in a press release said that in some upazila campaigns rules were violated by candidates and their supporters and incidence of violence inside and outside of polling centers led them to close early.

It, however, said in most polling centres officials provided a high sense of security

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