

AL wins

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2008 parliamentary elections. Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda termed yesterday's vote "by and large free and fair".

While the EC declared the polls largely peaceful, it suspended voting at mid-afternoon in nine centres because of allegations that ballot boxes had been stuffed and other anomalies. All the suspended stations are in the Lalmohan upazila, hometown of both the AL and BNP candidates.

Re-polling at the suspended centres is not required as the margin of victory was greater than the 31,566 voters registered at those stations.

Polling was held in remaining 77 stations including those in the Tajumuddin upazila, another area in the constituency.

However, journalists covering the by-poll noted widespread reports that voters were intimidated and opposition polling agents were forced to remain out of the fray.

Voting started at 8:00am and remained peaceful in the morning, but by noon it turned out to be a "one-sided" show as BNP agents and supporters were driven out of the polling centres.

After voting started, activists and supporters of the ruling party candidate took position mainly in BNP-dominated areas and prevented voters from going to polling stations.

BNP supporters and voters were beaten up and attacked allegedly by AL men when they tried to reach polling centres at several places of Lalmohan and Tajumuddin upazilas.

"I could not cast my vote as Awami League men had threatened us last night [Friday] not to go to the poll centre," said Sirajul Islam of Kachukhali under Farashganj union of Lalmohan upazila.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain said the commission would open inquiry into the alleged irregularities and take stern actions against those responsible for it.

'One-sided' show

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free, fair and neutral one.

A large number of voters in the morning were seen at the polling centres, especially in the Awami League-dominated areas. But the turnout was low at those located in BNP-dominated areas.

During visits to a number of centres, the presence of voters was mostly found very slim after 12:00 noon excepting some major polling stations at Lalmohan and Tajumuddin sadar.

Awami League polling agents were found sealing ballot papers in front of polling officers in Hajiganj Govt Primary School centre under Charbhuta union and at Char Kachchapia centre under Badarpur union.

Soon after the voting began, Awami League men ousted BNP candidate's polling agents from Lalmohan Mohila College Centre, which is within 50 yards of Lalmohan Police Station.

Major Hafiz rushed there and took his agents back into the centre. But they were forced to leave the centre again as soon as Hafiz left the area.

Eight people were injured when Awami League men swooped on BNP voters with sharp weapons at Ashrafia Govt Primary School under Farashganj union at about 10:00am.

Abul Kashem, a BNP supporter, said miscreants stabbed him with machete as he was approaching the polling centre.

Also in Farashganj BNP agent Parveen Akther was assaulted allegedly by the ruling party supporters at Satani Govt Primary School. BNP agents were forced to leave both the centres.

In Madhiyaa Ashuli, Awami League men put up barricades in the morning so that BNP voters couldn't reach Kishoreganj Govt Primary School Centre. They allegedly launched attacks on voters with sharp weapons as some of them tried to get to the polling station.

Three injured people were seen being taken to hospital at about 9:30am. Injamamul Haq of the area said male voters didn't dare to go near the centre because of attacks and threats by the ruling party men.

During visits to eight centres under Badarpur union between 10am and 12 noon, not a single BNP agent was found in most of the centres. Presiding Officers in those centres claimed that BNP agents did not turn up.

However, Badarpur BNP alleged Awami League supporters did not allow BNP agents

In the December 29 parliamentary election, polling was not suspended at any of over 35,000 stations in 299 constituencies. Even during the incumbent government, the EC successfully held seven other by-elections without suspending voting at any centre.

The Bhola-3 by-poll drew huge attention and generated heat in the national politics, prompting the EC to take innovative measures to control irregularities. The measures included using "silent observers", video cameras, recruiting a number of election officers from outside the district, and deploying a huge security force.

The AL yesterday expressed satisfaction with the poll. But the BNP immediately rejected the result, demanding a fresh election and the resignation of incumbent EC members.

Top BNP leaders last night held a meeting with party chief Khaleda Zia to decide their strategy for waging an anti-government agitation.

"We do not have any other alternative but to take to the streets to protest holding of the farcical election," said Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, a member of BNP national standing committee.

The margin of votes between the AL and BNP candidates also widened this time comparing to the December 29 parliamentary election. In that poll, AL candidate Major (ret'd) Jasim Uddin defeated BNP candidate Major (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin, who won 96,034 votes. Hafiz received 83,123.

The nine centres where voting was suspended are Lalmohan Public Library and its adjacent Mohila College, Doctor Azhar Uddin Registered Primary School, Veduria Shirajia Senior Madrasa, Satani Government Primary and Secondary School, Kishoreganj Government Primary School, Maheshkhali Ashrafia Government Primary School, Lord Harding Fazil Madrasa, Uttara Annoda Prasad Government Primary School, and Syedabad Forkania Madrasa.

into the polling centres.

About 150 miscreants ransacked six shops and set fire to a trowler in Kachukhali Bazar Friday midnight. They also attacked the house of local BNP leader Nanu Chairman.

"The attackers brandishing sharp weapons and firearms warned us not to go for voting today. They threatened to cut our hands if we voted for BNP candidate," 60-year old Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star at a local bazaar at about 10:00am.

In Aralia centre under Tajumuddin, Amanullah Aman, the chief election coordinator of BNP candidate, was confined allegedly by Jubo League activists for about half an hour when he was visiting different centres. Later police rescued him.

Major Hafiz took a group of women voters to Bangla Bazar centre under Charbhuta union as they were prevented from entering the centre at about 11:00am.

BNP voters were chased out of the Uttara Annoda Prasad Primary School Centre under Lord Harding union at about 11:30am. Agents of BNP candidate were also driven out of the centre, where EC cancelled the voting later.

BNP activists were also beaten up outside the Raichand Govt Primary School.

Janipop Chairman Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah termed the election "so far so good" at about 2:00pm after visiting different centres. He, however, feared that a post-poll violence might erupt in the area.

With darkness approaching police and Rapid Action Battalion members in Lalmohan asked people to return to their houses through loudspeakers. The streets were a deserted look. An uneasy calm was prevailing in the area.

Polls, free fair

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undesirable deeds sensing his certain defeat.

He also said the BNP wanted to create an issue for movement centring the polls but the AL would face them politically.

Meanwhile, at a press briefing at the Lalmohan residence of AL candidate Nurunnabi Chowdhury Shawon yesterday afternoon, AL advisory council member Tofail Ahmed criticised the Election Commission's decision to suspend voting at nine polling centres, saying there was no reason behind the suspension.

Tofail refuted the BNP's claim of vote rigging.

Thai protesters pull out of talks with government

AP, Bangkok

Hopes for a swift, peaceful resolution to Thailand's political crisis were dashed yesterday when the prime minister rejected a compromise proposal for dissolving parliament and protesters hit back by withdrawing from negotiations.

The breakdown of talks heightened fears of a new confrontation between security forces and the red-shirted protesters who have virtually shut down central Bangkok.

The protesters, who claim the government took power illegitimately, had previously demanded Parliament be dissolved immediately, while the government said it would disband parliament in six months.

The Red Shirts softened their stance Friday, offering the government 30 days to disband the legislature in a move they said was aimed at preventing further bloodshed in a standoff that has resulted in 26 deaths and wounded nearly 1,000 others.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva rejected that proposal on Saturday.

"If you're going to hand us an ultimatum -- 30 days or nothing -- this is not negotiating," he told reporters, adding that he feared the opposition demands would only grow if the government capitulated.

"The thing is that 'dissolving parliament' might not be the last words we hear, it might not be the last thing they demand," he said.

BCL versus BCL

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BCL city unit president MR Azim said they are totally against the on-going strike.

"We also protest the killing of three CU students in the last two months while the VC is trying to establish academic environment in the university," Azim said.

The demand for resignation of the VC is illogical, he added.

Parishad coordinator and Chhatra Moitry central vice-president Kaiser Alam said the city mayor in a meeting with the Parishad leaders in his residence on April 21 directed to resist the group who are trying to create unrest on the campus using the name of BCL.

However, BCL general secretary of CU unit Ershad Hossain said there is nothing to discuss about the demand for the VC's resignation.

Meanwhile, with poor presence of students and teachers, the deadline on the CU campus continued for the fourth consecutive day yesterday since the CU reopened on April 20 after three-day class suspension following the murder of Asaduzzaman, a student of CU, on April 16.

Authorities of Bangladesh Railway (east zone) kept movement of all shuttle trains between the city and the CU suspended since Thursday due to insecurity felt by loco masters after BCL CU unit activists threatened them.

CU VC Professor Abu Yusuf said, "We requested the railway authorities to run the trains but no trains went to the campus today (Saturday)."

JMB finds

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Some recently held JMB operatives revealed these to the crime busting force during interrogation, Rab officials say.

Lt Col Ziaul Ahsan said, "Some arrested JMB operatives admitted that their operatives hiding in district towns as rickshaw-pullers or hotel boys continue 'dawat' activities in mosques in limited scale posing as Tabligh Jamaat men."

He added JMB members first target simpleton students from madrasas, schools and colleges in guise of Tabligh men. When they think their targets have become infatuated with Islam, the militants invite them to join JMB.

He however said JMB is running this activity very secretly and in a very limited scale as the outfit is under constant surveillance of Rab.

The elite force, however, could not give the exact number of active JMB leaders and operatives.

Former military wing commander of JMB "Boma" Mizan during interrogation said the outfit has around 100 Eshar (in-charge of a certain area) members, 500 Gayeri Eshar (active members) and around 1,000 general members and 2,000 supporters across the country.

Mizan was arrested on May 14 last year.

The Rab has so far arrested 558 JMB members. Of them, 13 are Majlisih-e-Shura members, 112 Eshar members and the rest are Gayeri Eshar or general members or supporters.

JS body chief's

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Supreme Judicial Council and other bodies are there for this purpose.

Former CJ Mahmudul Amin also came down on the law minister for saying at a function that it was unjust to the two judges when the notification of their appointment is still valid.

He also referred to a minister's threat to go to the Supreme Judicial Council for the comments of an HC judge in December, court boycott by all HC and Supreme Court judges in 2006 and putting people on remand on pressure.

"The judiciary is now like a glasshouse that can collapse any moment," he said.

"It is not a positive sign. So, steps need to be taken immediately. Now it seems that the judiciary needs to be accountable to a separate body," he added, suggesting formation of judicial ombudsman for looking into court activities.

Justice Mahmudul was speaking at the inaugural session of a seminar styled "Accountability in parliamentary democracy: A Bangladesh perspective". Chief Justice Mohammed Fazlul Karim addressed the programme as the chief guest at CIRDP auditorium in the city.

Monthly Legal Aid organised the seminar.

Justice Mahmudul criticised lawmakers for wasting time discussing worthless issues in parliament and hurling abusive language at opponents.

He said lawmakers should discuss the arrests and harassment of businessmen and students during the caretaker government in parliament.

He also criticised the attitude of the state counsels, saying they think everything will happen as per their expectations.

Voting farce

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Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed at the party's central office in Naya Paltan.

The party brought out a procession from its central office, protesting the "one sided poll" and marched to the Jatiya Press Club. The demonstrators burnt an effigy of the CEC.

BNP candidate Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed alleged that ruling party activists took control of all the polling centres during voting and attacked about 400 of his followers.

He was speaking at a press briefing at around 1:00pm at his residence in Lalmohan.

In the morning, a BNP delegation led by MK Anwar, member of national standing committee, met the CEC and two other election commissioners. The BNP leaders alleged that AL men drove out their candidate's polling agents from 30 stations.

MK Anwar said they wanted to stay on the EC Secretariat premises to keep the commission informed

Untreated waste

FROM PAGE 16
capacity, said Mujibur.

Residential areas including Uttara, Baridhara, Badda, part of Mirpur and Mohammadpur, Dhonia, Shyamoli, Kalyanpur, Banani, part of Gulshan and Jatrabari and a large area of the city's northern part remain out of WASA sewerage network, said a WASA official.

The sewerage network in the city covers up to 890 km and 60,277 houses have sewerage connections said the official.

Mujibur said WASA failed to bring all areas in the city under sewerage network.

Many house owners link sewage discharge connection directly to storm water drainage line instead of sewerage network to evade service charge or due to unavailability of WASA sewerage connection, said WASA officials.

There will be a disaster in near future if measures are not taken to improve the city's sewerage management system, said Naser.

WASA has initiated installation of a sewerage treatment plant at Daserkandi but the Development Project Proposal of the plant has been lying with the planning commission for the last one and a half years, sources said.

Installation of the waste treatment plant is a major component of the Hatirjheel project scheduled to begin in July 2008, said Mujibur.

At least four more treatment plants need to be set up to bring the whole city under the sewerage network, said WASA Deputy Managing Director (Research, Planning and Development) Liaquat Ali.

WASA has a plan to install four more plants in north and south Dhaka, Gabtoli and Uttara, he said.

in his speech, Chief Justice Fazlul Karim said, "Now democracy has emerged as a popular system worldwide, but it stumbles again and again in our country and where democracy is under question, its accountability is a far cry."

He said in the guise of democracy, sometimes one-party rule, sometimes military rule and sometimes caretaker government system have been in place. In fact, the modern accountable system or democratic system is moving ahead slowly, he added.

The chief justice, however, observed, "Our democratic government is always trying to give the democratic system an institutional shape."

"Although we talk about democracy, we do not adopt its ideology and hesitate to shoulder minimum responsibility in an accountable way. Though we get our salary from people's taxes, we work as the employees of the government or a party, not as workers for the people," he said.

He stressed the need for changing the attitude and serving people.

The chief justice said it is not the time for blame game. He asked all to work jointly to make parliamentary democracy sustainable and suggested resolving all problems through discussion.

He also said to gain people's confidence judges have to be honest and must have courage in performing judicial function and demonstrate firm character.

Former caretaker government adviser AF Hassan Ariff also addressed the function, which was followed by a working session in which Justice Md Joynul Abedin presented a keynote paper.

Armenians mourn victims of mass killings

AP, Armenia

Hundreds of thousands of Armenians laid flowers yesterday at a monument to the victims of mass killings by Ottoman Turks, marking the 95th anniversary of the start of the slaughter. US President Obama called it "one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century."

Historians estimate that up to 1.5 million Armenians were killed by Ottoman Turks around the time of World War I. Turkey denies that the deaths constituted genocide, saying the toll has been inflated and those killed were victims of civil war and unrest.

Residents of Yerevan and other regions and representatives of the Armenian diaspora marched to a monument on a hill overlooking the capital. Some carried placards such as "Nobody and nothing will be forgotten!" and "Genocide never gets old!"

Armenian President Serge Sarkisian described the slaughter as "unprecedented in its scope, monstrosity and gravity of its consequences" in an address to the nation.

In Asheville, North Carolina, where Obama was spending the weekend, he marked Armenian Remembrance Day by issuing a statement saying, "The indomitable spirit of the Armenian people is a lasting triumph over those who set out to destroy them."

540 stalled

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Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Sajeda Chowdhury, Abul Hasnat Abdullah, Abdul Jalil, Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Obaidul Quader, businessman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, Giasuddin Al Mamun, Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Shahjahan Chowdhury, Matiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and bureaucrat Taufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury.

SC verdict and how the cases were stalled

The SC on April 4 in its ruling upheld the HC verdict that declared legal the way ACC filed a case against AL lawmaker Habibur Rahman Mollah.

In 2008, Mollah filed a petition challenging the commission's permission to its officials to file the case against him. In his petition, he said the anti-graft watchdog did not follow the timeframe prescribed by its law for investigation before filing the case.

On November 20, 2008, the HC ruled that the ACC's receiving investigation report from its officials and approving charge sheet in the case were done with lawful authority.

As Mollah moved to SC, the apex court granted him a leave petition only on ground that offences taking place before formulation of the ACC Act, 2004 cannot be tried under it. The SC also stayed HC judgement until hearing on Mollah's petition is held.

About 580 petitions based on the same ground got stuck showing that a same petition is pending with the apex court. All cases were stayed until the apex court settles the issue through a hearing.

The SC took over one year and four months to hear the petition against the HC verdict, leading to an impasse in the anti-corruption measures.

The SC in its judgement said offences committed prior to formulation of the ACC Act can be tried under it.

CEC happy

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incidents. The election was fair, by and large," he said.

The country's political culture needs to change. No specific issue came in the poll except allegations and counter-allegations, he said.

He said people in Bhola are facing problems like poverty and river erosion.

"But I don't know whether those were discussed. The election should be based on those issues," the CEC said.

On BNP's demand for his resignation, Shamsul Huda said, "I hear this thing so many times. I don't have any statement on it."

"Why we can't accept people's verdict. Why do we demand anyone's resignation without accepting the verdict," asked the CEC.

He said such attitude is the main barrier to sustainable democracy.

Such comment will not be helpful for strengthening the commission, which did a lot to ensure a free and fair election, he said.

The CEC said they suspended voting in nine centres after thoroughly investigating the allegations brought by BNP. Of the 86 polling centres, BNP brought allegations of anomalies in 30 centres.

2 contradicting

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major untoward incident happened in the polling centres that witnessed steady voter turnout. Voters of minority communities cast their ballot without fear.

Democracy watch in a primary report said around 55 percent voters exercised their franchise. Voter turnout in some voting centres was thin.

The organisation monitored voting in 30 of 86 polling centres with three mobile teams comprised of eight trained observers.

It mentioned inefficient management in almost all the centres they monitored. In some voting centres the polling agents of the BNP candidate were not found.

It however said law and order in those centres was satisfactory.

Brotee said about 70 percent voters cast ballot in the poll.

Ali Hossain, coordinator of election observation control room of Brotee, said they pre-

pared their report on the information from their 30 observers.

Brotee also said although both the parties deviated in some instances from the election commission's instructions before the poll, they seemed to have complied with the regulations during the poll.

It also said the law enforcement agencies were found to have played a neutral role.

Jatiya Nirbachan Parjibekkhon Parishad said there were reports of clashes between the supporters of the two candidates in different places in the electoral area.

In a report, it said the polling agents of the opposition candidate were present at the voting centres when polling began, but they were not seen after 11:00am in some centres.

The supporters of ruling party were found upset at the postponement of polling in nine centres.

The report said voters in large number turned up in the polling centres to cast ballot.

Cop Gautam murder

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Police said according to the arrestee, the suspects are local muggers of Old Dhaka. However, police have not yet found any link of absconding Dakat Shahid with the killing.

During a press conference at Dhaka Metropolitan Police headquarters yesterday Haider said, "Zakir and Manik picked me up on my way home around 2:20am saying they had something to talk about. When we reached Lalmohan Saha Lane, we saw a policeman with two others was coming towards us. They intercepted us and asked what we were doing at such late hours of the night."

Zakir fired several shots when SI Gautam was frisking Manik after checking Haider, he said.

"Zakir then ran towards Narinda while Manik and I took another direction," said Haider, adding that he still does not know why Zakir took

him with them.

IO Jalal Uddin said both Zakir and Manik were carrying arms.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Abul Kashem said apparently the criminals gunned down SI Gautam out of panic as he opted for drawing his service arms while frisking the suspects.

He said the motive of the killing could be ascertained after apprehending Zakir and Manik.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Taufiq Mahmud Elahi of DMP Wari zone said Zakir had been sentenced to six years' imprisonment in an arms case in 2002. Now free, he got involved in snatching.

Zakir and Manik are accused in several cases including arms and snatching but police instantly found no cases lodged against Haider, the DC added.

Oath crisis

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Zahir when contacted.

But another expert, Rokon Uddin Mahmud, said the government and the chief justice have to solve the problem jointly.

"Either the chief justice has to administer oath to them or the government has to cancel their appointment. Otherwise, a question of violation of the constitution will remain until their appointments are cancelled," he said.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said the chief justice can swear in Ruhul Quddus and Khasruzzaman at any time.

"There is no specific time limit for the chief justice to administer oath to any judge appointed by the president. So, the time for swearing in of the two judges has not expired," he said.

President Zillur Rahman appointed 17 additional judges to the HC for two years.

Chief Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim administered oath to 15 of them on April 18, leaving out Ruhul Quddus and Khasruzzaman. Earlier, he had approved the list of all 17.

Thai govt rejects

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after two bouts of street violence this month left 26 dead and hundreds injured.

"The 30-day concession is just aimed at getting the attention of foreign media. I don't think it is the answer to the problems," Abhisit said.

"Tomorrow everything will become more clear when I and the army chief will jointly appear on my weekly television address."

The Reds, mostly rural poor and urban working class, condemn Abhisit's government as illegitimate because it came to power in a 2008 parliamentary vote after a court ruling ousted allies of ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

Fears of a crackdown escalated earlier this week amid warnings from the military that protesters would face live weapons fire in any clashes.

Army chief General Anupong Paojinda toned down the rhetoric Friday, saying that the use of force was no solution to the crisis, which has damaged Thailand's economy and its reputation as the "Land of Smiles".

"The best thing is to create understanding among the people. The army's job now is to take care of the people, and not allow Thais to attack each other," he said.

Despite Anupong's dovish stance, army spokesman Colonel Sunsern Kaewkumnerd kept up the pressure Saturday, saying an offensive could still be launched to target Reds hardliners who he referred to as "terrorists".