

AL-blessed aspirants

FROM PAGE 1
AL managed to win seven mayoral posts while BNP's rebels got three, and independent candidates got four.

With yesterday's poll results, AL-backed candidates and its rebels so far won 87 out of 183 mayoral posts while BNP's favourites and its rebels grabbed 76.

The toe to toe fight makes today's polls in 58 municipalities of Chittagong and Sylhet divisions very crucial, as those will decide the ultimate outcome of the polls.

Yesterday's results show that rebel candidates caused defeat to a good number of party-backed candidates.

The number of AL-backed candidates who suffered defeats to party affiliated rebels is higher than the number of similar BNP-backed losers (see our separate stories).

The second phase of the battle of ballots yesterday pushed the two archrival camps into a cliffhanger that developed through the polls in four divisions in northern and southern belts last week.

BNP-backed candidates dominated the maiden day of votes in northern divisions of Rajshahi and Rangpur, but AL's favourites took the lead in southern divisions of Khulna and Barisal.

The two major political parties hit a tie over 121 may-

oral posts in the four divisions with AL-backed candidates and its rebels winning 53, and pro-BNP candidates and its rebels winning an equal number as well.

Today the AL-backed candidates will step into the last day's battle after their grassroots' better performance in Dhaka division.

But the opposition's grassroots might perform better in the 42 municipalities in Chittagong division, as BNP has a stronghold in the region.

In contrast, AL-supported mayoral aspirants might perform better in the 16 municipalities of Sylhet division.

Grassroots level leaders now believe results of the Chittagong division might conclusively determine the countrywide winner in the vote battle between the two major parties.

Yesterday, voters turned up at polling centres with enthusiasm ignoring the winter chill just like the last week's polls. Female voters again outnumbered males in the first half of the day.

Meanwhile, a few stray incidents of breaching the electoral code of conduct also happened in some districts including Jamalpur, Narayanganj, and Sherpur. Law enforcers picked up at least 10 people, including a

councillor candidate, for creating disturbance.

Judicial magistrates and mobile courts punished a number of people too.

Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussein said yesterday's polls were held in a peaceful manner. Asked about the incident in Kaliakoir municipality, he said the Election Commission will investigate the matter.

BNP said the election was relatively fair in many places. The party, however, alleged that incidents of gross irregularities were more yesterday compared to the recent polls in Rajshahi, Rangpur, Barisal and Khulna divisions.

Briefing the press, BNP Standing Committee Member Nazrul Islam Khan alleged that the administration worked to influence the results in favour of AL-supported candidates at different places in Dhaka division, and expressed fear that it is going to do the same in Chittagong and Sylhet divisions.

He said their leaders and workers are alert to prevent any kind of manipulation of poll results.

Besides, BNP demanded re-election to Shibchar municipality in Madaripur.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, AL Presidium Member Obaidul Quader refuted the allegations, and said the EC is conducting the polls in a free and fair manner, and without any interference from the administration.

TODAY'S POLLS
Polls to 42 municipalities under 10 districts in Chittagong division will be held today amid tight security. Over 11.5 lakh voters are entitled to cast their votes to elect 42 mayors from 212 aspirants. A total of 2,179 aspirants are contesting for the posts of councillors.

Seventy-four candidates are contesting for 16 mayoral posts in 16 municipalities in four districts of Sylhet division. Over 2.96 lakh voters are entitled to exercise their franchise to elect their representatives there.

AL suffer

FROM PAGE 1
candidates contributing to easy victory of opposition BNP-backed candidates.

In the wake of poor result in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions, AL high command held the party rebels responsible and made hectic efforts to convince the rebels of the remaining three divisions quit the polls. But many stayed in the race despite the warning of expulsion from the party.

For instance, BNP rebel Mohammad Shaheen won in Bhairab municipality of Kishoreganj securing 12,259 votes while the nearest candidate AL rebel Fakhru Alam got 11,776 votes with AL-backed Saidullah Mia obtaining 10,500 votes. BNP-backed candidate Rafiqul Islam got 4,216 votes.

A single AL candidate could have swept the polls in Bhairab, which is the constituency of party lawmaker Nazmul Hasan, son of President Zillur Rahman. The total votes cast for AL camp is much higher than that of BNP.

BNP also had to lose municipalities due to popularity flowing to the rebel camps.

BNP could have won in Kishoreganj municipality, the constituency of AL General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam, if the opposition party could avoid the rebel candidate there.

AL-backed Qaiyum Khokon lost in Hossainpur municipality, which is also under AL lawmaker Ashraf's constituency, due to sharing votes with his party rebel.

In Faridpur municipality, under the constituency of AL leader and Labour and Employment Minister Khondokar Mosharraf Hossain, independent candidate Mahtab Ali Mithu swept the poll beating four rebel candidates of AL and a BNP-backed candidate who secured the second position.

BNP-supported candidate Mokhesur Rahman won the poll in Nakla municipality, an area under AL presidium member and Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury's constituency, due to an AL rebel taking the lion's share of AL votes.

In Tarabo municipality of Narayanganj, BNP-backed candidate Shafiqul Islam Chowdhury swept the poll defeating four rebel candidates of the ruling AL.

Free world

FROM PAGE 1
gas (GHG) emissions at a minimum level and reach the status of carbon-free nation in the near future.

The summit began with the objective to find out future energy solutions.

Some 25,000 participants from around the world are expected to attend the WFES over the four days.

The summit is the world's largest conference and exhibition on renewable and future energy solutions, innovations, investments, policy and vision.

This year's theme is: Enabling Future Energy Solutions.

The premier said Bangladesh's contribution of green house gas emissions is negligible. "Yet we are its worst victim. Erratic weather and frequent natural disasters are having its toll on human lives and development activities."

She said that a metre rise in sea level due to global warming would submerge a fifth of Bangladesh, displacing some 30 million people and causing a catastrophe.

"Such concern led us all to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, which was followed by Kyoto, Bali, Copenhagen and Cancun conferences on climate."

Hasina said, "But sadly the progress in reaching a legally binding comprehensive agreement still eludes us."

In this connection, the prime minister mentioned that Abu Dhabi is a leading reservoir of fossil fuel. She said its commitment to clean and renewable energy is extraordinary.

Hasina said Bangladesh too is adopting clean energy and already four million homes have been installed with solar power system. "We are, however, realistic regarding the sources of energy needed for development."

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon was the special speaker at the inaugural session while CEO of Masdar United Arab Emirates Dr Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber gave the welcome address.

Iceland President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister of Portugal Jose Socrates Carvalho Pinto de Sousa, Prime Minister of Georgia Nikoloz Gilauri, Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria and Crown Prince of Luxembourg Guillaume also spoke at the opening session of the summit.

MEETING WITH ZARDARI
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari held talks at the Hotel Emirates Palace, on the sidelines of the World Future Energy Summit that began yesterday.

After the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told reporters that Zardari praised Sheikh Hasina for her leadership in restoring democracy in Bangladesh.

Zardari also lauded the bold and pragmatic role of Sheikh Hasina in raising the issues of climate change in different international forums.

Talking about global terrorism during the meeting, Hasina said there is no room for terrorism and militancy in Islam, as it is the religion of peace.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, State Minister for Forest and Environment Dr Hassan Mahmud, Ambassador-at-Large M Ziauddin, Principal Secretary to the PM M A Karim and Bangladesh Ambassador to the UAE Md Nazmul Qaunine were present.

No meter

FROM PAGE 20
in the capital, and most of those have the new-rate meters installed.

BRTA officials held a meeting with owners, drivers and police yesterday to ensure that the new rates of fare are properly enforced.

The tales, however, were different on yesterday's streets of the capital.

The defiance continued frustrating the passengers, and in many cases angering them.

However, in some places police were seen checking auto-rickshaws to see if those were using meters.

The measures were having little impact on the drivers.

CNG run auto-rickshaw driver, Hanif, carried a passenger from Laxmibazar to Bashundhara residential area on a contract fare. The driver said he did not know about the new system.

In another place this correspondent found a passenger who opted for a contract fare than going on the meter.

When asked, the passenger, Sumon, said he would rather go by contract, as fare on the meter would be higher due to traffic jams.

Some drivers complained that owners are charging them high rents violating their agreement with the government.

Dulal Hawlader, at Shahjahanpur, said some owners are charging drivers Tk 700 for rent even though the agreement set the amount at Tk 600.

"They take 700 taka, but give us vouchers for 600 taka," said Hawlader.

If any driver protests, the owners do not rent the auto to him, he said.

Desperate bid

FROM PAGE 20
He also installed his large portraits within 400-yard of several polling stations. Any sort of campaign within the distance from a centre is prohibited in election rules.

Mujibur, also the president of Sonargaon Jubo League, yesterday frequently entered centres with his fellows and exchanged greetings with voters.

Contacted, Returning Officer Nursia Kamol of Sonargaon said, "He [Mujibur] has not violated electoral code of conduct by displaying the large portraits as those were mentioned in his affidavit."

"But he cannot campaign close to polling centres with his fellows," she said, adding "Executive magistrates stepped in whenever such a situation was reported."

Mujibur said he had taken permission from Election Commission to make three-metre-long portraits.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of his affidavit that avoids mentioning even a single portrait. It also states the approximate number of posters to be 4,000 only.

Another mayor candidate, Sadekur Rahman, alleged "A number of outsiders, mostly Awami League men favouring Mujibur, are flexing their muscles in the area."

Sadekur was contesting the polls with support from the main opposition BNP and Nagorik Committee, a platform of members of some other political parties.

However, the election day at the municipality ended peacefully. After the count ended at night, Sadekur emerged victorious.

Polling in Tarabo municipality also ended without any report of unrest. Visiting seven centres in the two municipalities, this correspondent found the turnout modest as of afternoon.

"I know all the candidates and will vote for the best," said eighty-year-old Abidun Begum at Kendriya Gano Vidyalaya of Sonargaon.

Rahima Begum, another voter at Borpa Government Primary School centre of Tarabo, said polling gives her a sense of dignity. "That's why I am waiting in the line for four hours to cast my vote," said a proud Rahima.

Govt told

FROM PAGE 1
all sites of the projects.

It ordered the authorities to put up visible and legible notices on project sites stating clearly the prohibition on earth-filling.

Earlier on July 27, the HC also directed the government to take proper action to stop advertisement and earth-filling of any unapproved and unauthorised housing projects in and around Dhaka.

The HC bench of Justice Wahab Miah and Justice Kazi Rezaul Hoque issued a rule with the directives following a writ filed by five environmental and urban planner groups.

The petitioners included Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, Ain O Salish Kendra, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan, Institute of Architects Bangladesh and Paribesh Bachao Andolan.

The petitioners listed 56 unauthorised projects and 418 mouzas at that time where earth filling has to be stopped.

Despite legal prohibition, private housing companies are regularly putting up advertisement in various media to lure people into buying their plots.

The Bela again filed a writ petition as publishing advertisements and earth filling are going on continuously.

Anwarul Islam Sikdar, member (planning) of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha, said they are taking action against illegal housing projects.

He said after getting the HC directives of July 27 they published advertisements warning the people.

"We've also made enquiry into some housing projects following complaints and cancelled registration of some of them," he added.

Responding to a question he said they did not file any case against the housing projects on the issue.

Rajuk does not have any data about the number of total housing projects under its jurisdiction. However, around 77 housing projects have so far been registered with Rajuk, said another Rajuk official.

Advocate Iqbal Kabir Lytton moved for Bela yesterday.

HC stays polls in B'baria

BNP puts off hartal hrs after calling

STAR REPORT

The High Court yesterday postponed today's polls at Brahmanbaria municipality for three weeks upon a writ petition.

To protest the stay order, BNP called for a half-day hartal in Brahmanbaria town, which it later called off as per instruction of the party central leaders.

Haroon Al Rashid, district BNP president and vice chairman of central BNP, has informed that the central body suggested that the hartal would be going against the HC order and hence they withdrew it.

Meanwhile, rebel mayoral candidates of Awami League also held separate press conferences denouncing the stay order at Brahmanbaria Press Club yesterday.

An HC bench of Justice A H M Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain stayed the polls at Brahmanbaria municipality for three weeks following a writ petition by Brahmanbaria district unit AL agriculture secretary Zahurul Islam Bhuiyan.

The petitioner sought the stay on the plea that since the parliamentary by-election to Brahmanbaria constituency-3 would be held on January 27, there is a possibility of violence over campaign activities if the election to the municipality is held on January 18 (today).

After the petition hearing, the bench issued a rule upon the Election Commission to explain within two weeks why it should not be directed to postpone the municipal election for later on.

Hearing the news of the stay, BNP adherents and supporters of BNP-supported candidate and incumbent mayor of Brahmanbaria municipality Hafizur Rahman Molla Kochi took to the streets with brooms and shoes in the district headquarters.

Kochi and two other AL rebel mayoral candidates Nair Kabir and Mahmudul Haq held separate press briefings denouncing the last moment stay on the polls.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court yesterday cleared the way for holding election to Sandwip municipality in Chittagong on schedule today.

Justice SK Sinha, chamber judge of the Appellate Division of SC, yesterday stayed for six weeks a High Court order that had earlier stayed the process for holding election to this municipality.

The judge passed the order following a petition filed by the election commission seeking stay on the HC order.

In response to a writ petition filed by M Atiqullah, a voter of Sandwip municipality, the HC on January 10 stayed its election process for three months.

Swindlers thrive

FROM PAGE 20
Both concepts charge Tk 1,000 to Tk 10,000 for membership.

There are many more companies spreading out countrywide and running business without a trade licence.

Around 50 lakh people are involved in the business, says AL-Mahmud, managing director of Mway International Limited, an MLM company. And the money involved will be several thousand crore taka, he adds.

Market players, however, blame each other.

"We are creating jobs for thousands of unemployed youths. MLM exists in many countries including in developed ones," said Gazi Md Zakir Hossen, chief executive officer of Uptrend Distribution (BD) Ltd known as uptrend2u.

But a section of unscrupulous gang is cheating people by offering big returns, Hossen claimed.

He points fingers at unipay2u, TVI Express, Visa Ray, Speak Asia, Legend Venture, Unigateway, Goldtrend, Neway and Destiny-2000 Ltd.

Many companies have already folded up, he said.

Meanwhile, a section of MLM companies at a press briefing yesterday requested the government to take action against those involved in illegal banking in the name of MLM.

This group claims multi-level marketing doesn't allow banking, and it must be product-based. This means profit will come from selling products.

Whatever the concept is, these companies are managing funds of people, mostly uneducated, in an unregulated way. They manipulate people by winning their trust.

And if a company can bring a minister, a senior politician or a lawmaker in any of its programme, it not only adds beauty to the occasion but also helps the company expand.

Ifty Islam, an investment analyst, says MLM companies in Bangladesh are "self-styled investment advisers" and "fund managers," who are out of any regulations.

"They must be regulated because only regulations can protect individual's investment," Ifty noted.

The government, however, has moved on the issue after receiving complaints against some companies. It is now working to formulate a guideline to regulate such business.

"An investigation is underway against the companies that cheated people," a senior commerce ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday.

On Sunday, Bangladesh Bank cautioned those investing in multilevel marketing companies that offer abnormal profits.

The central bank said investors can be deceived by the MLM companies that offer 10 percent or more profits a month upon investments in gold markets abroad or foreign exchanges.

The Anti-Money Laundering Act 2009 deems such investments to be offences, the statement added.

pany expand.

Ifty Islam, an investment analyst, says MLM companies in Bangladesh are "self-styled investment advisers" and "fund managers," who are out of any regulations.

"They must be regulated because only regulations can protect individual's investment," Ifty noted.

The government, however, has moved on the issue after receiving complaints against some companies. It is now working to formulate a guideline to regulate such business.

"An investigation is underway against the companies that cheated people," a senior commerce ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday.

On Sunday, Bangladesh Bank cautioned those investing in multilevel marketing companies that offer abnormal profits.

The central bank said investors can be deceived by the MLM companies that offer 10 percent or more profits a month upon investments in gold markets abroad or foreign exchanges.

The Anti-Money Laundering Act 2009 deems such investments to be offences, the statement added.

Procurement

FROM PAGE 20
Development Board.

The Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the government is implementing the project in coordination with the four agencies.

The World Bank has granted \$24 million interest free credit for the scheme.

A WB team recently met the government and reviewed the need for more effort and better pace in strengthening CPTU staffing and procurement monitoring of the four agencies.

The press release said an online procurement monitoring system in these agencies is expected to start by the same time.

It said to introduce the electronic bidding, the WB trained about 1,200 staff under Public Procurement Reform Project II.

The project has also initiated a public-private stakeholders committee to carry forward the discussion on the issue. A nationwide campaign on procurement reforms also has been launched.

Ali Arshad

FROM PAGE 20
illness. He was 74.

He left behind his wife, three daughters and a host of relatives and friends to mourn his death.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held at Gulshan Azad Mosque after Zohr prayers on Wednesday and qulkhara will be hosted on Friday after Asr prayers at his residence.

Family members of the deceased requested all his relatives and well-wishers to attend the occasion.