

Sakku sinks

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polled 65,577 votes while his rival Afzal, joint convener of Comilla district AL, got 36,471.

It was the first time that electronic voting machines (EVM) were used at all polling centres in an election. Also for the first time was the application of webcam surveillance at all centres.

Save for a few untoward incidents, polling was peaceful throughout the city.

Of a total of 1,69,273 voters, 1,27,072 (75%) cast their ballots. Returning Officer Abdul Baten said as he announced the unofficial results at around 9:15pm, some five hours after voting closed.

As soon as the results were declared at the city's Town Hall auditorium, thousands of Sakku's supporters roared in joy and chanted slogans.

"Comilla city dwellers have witnessed a free, fair and peaceful election. The use of EVM has been successful," Abdul Baten told The Daily Star.

Afzal Khan has conceded defeat and congratulated Sakku on his victory. "I don't have any complaints about the polls," he told reporters.

Sakku, who was mayor of Comilla municipality before it was upgraded to a city corporation, said, "This is a victory of the people. I will work for the welfare of the people who have put so much trust in me."

He added, "I was in fear about the use of EVM. But people have elected me, brushing aside all my apprehensions."

Asked if he would rejoin the BNP, he said, "I was involved in BNP politics for over 30 years. I will meet my chairperson and explain the

reasons why I contested the polls."

The BNP did not openly back Sakku as it opted to boycott the polls, protesting the use of EVMs and non-deployment of the army. It had said free and fair polls were not possible with EVMs and without army deployment.

The opposition's fears, however, proved misplaced as voting in all 65 centres was peaceful and voters cast their ballots through the machines mostly with ease.

Voting began at 8:00am and ended at 4:00pm without any break.

A total of 1,69,273 people, including 86,074 females, were on the voter list to elect their first city mayor from among nine candidates and 36 ward councillors, including nine in reserved seats for women, from among 287 contestants.

Of the other mayoral candidates, Nur-ur Rahman Mahmud got 8,514 votes, Anisur Rahman 3,994, Jatiya Party-backed Air Ahmed Selim 7,961, Shirin Akhter 1,103, Salman Saeed 427 and Chanchal Kumar Ghosh 890.

Meanwhile, Afzal's brother Amanullah Khan, who ran for ward councillor, also lost. His daughter Anjum Sultana, however, came out victorious as a reserved seat councillor.

Political observers say though the BNP did not lend its formal backing to Sakku, the election results will boost the morale of its leaders and workers. The opposition may as well argue that the ruling party's popularity is on the wane.

The government, on the other side, may claim credit for allowing the election to be held in a free and fair manner.

The outcome of the Comilla polls, which coincide with the third anniversary of the AL-led government, is quite embarrassing for the ruling alliance.

It is the second defeat of a ruling party-backed candidate in a little over two months. In last year's October 30 Narayanganj City Corporation polls, AL-backed mayoral hopeful Shamim Osman suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Selina Hayat Ivy. Ivy, herself an AL leader, had fought her party's support in vain.

POLLS ATMOSPHERE
People came out in their droves to cast ballots, creating a festive mood throughout the city. The turnout of female voters, in particular, was remarkable.

Supporters of some candidates were seen helping voters by giving them their serial numbers on the voters' roll.

Tight security measures were in place at the poll centres and adjacent areas. All the leading mayoral aspirants expressed satisfaction over the environment.

A number of polling officials and agents of some candidates, however, said many illiterate voters, including elderly women, had difficulty casting votes through EVMs. They later cast ballots with the help of election officials.

Police said they had arrested three people, including an agent of a councillor candidate, for trying to cast fake votes and create problems at the centre.

Al Amin, one of the arrestees, was sentenced by a mobile court to six months in jail for trying to cast fake votes.

Visionary

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others in the years to come.

Samson, chairman of Square Group, died yesterday around 10:20am at Raffles Hospital in Singapore, from old-age complications. He was 86.

Samson saw the future and led the corporate world to it, in a legacy that spans five decades. He ranked among the greatest of the country's corporate leaders -- brave enough to take up challenges and talented enough to innovate to reach the goal.

His passing prompted President Zillur Rahman to describe him as a visionary entrepreneur and an industrialist.

In a separate message, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "Samson H Chowdhury has made immense contributions to the development of various industrial sectors in the country."

As the news of his death spread, condolences and memories of working with the corporate giant poured in also from his friends and colleagues in the sector.

"He [Samson] was a role model for young entrepreneurs who could see in him innovation, leadership and perseverance in creating a market and make a success of it," said Anis Ud Dowla, chairman of ACI Group.

"He was a rare example of honesty in business," recalled a depressed Anis, a long-time friend of the deceased.

Samson left behind wife Anita Chowdhury, three sons,

Samuel H Chowdhury, Tapan Chowdhury, a former caretaker government adviser, and Anjan Chowdhury, daughter Ratna Patra and a very large number of admirers to mourn his death.

Born on February 25, 1926 in Pabna, Samson H Chowdhury was the eldest child of EH Chowdhury and Latika Chowdhury. His siblings included five brothers and a sister.

Educated in Mymensingh and Kolkata, he also obtained a diploma in management from a Harvard University school.

Samson Chowdhury, son of a medical officer in an outdoor dispensary in Pabna, started a small pharmacy in the district's Ataikula village in 1952.

That move was followed by his venturing into a pharmaceutical company in partnership with three friends in 1958.

The company was named Square. He was to explain the genesis of the name of the firm thus, "It was started by four friends and also because it signifies accuracy and perfection, meaning quality."

Square Pharma became the market leader among all national and multinational companies in 1985.

Looking farther ahead, he made his entry into other industries -- from textiles to consumer goods, banking and insurance, agro vet products, information technology,

media and herbal medicine -- to help the country grow with

local products.

Square Group has presented an annual turnover of \$781 million (2009-10) or over Tk 6,000 crore, according to Dun and Bradstreet Rating Agency Bangladesh. The group employs over 33,000 people.

Samson is considered to have been different from other top businessmen in the country in his approach to business in that he always put people's welfare at the centre of entrepreneurship. Throughout his career, he remained above controversy of any kind.

He received awards from the revenue board for being one of the highest taxpayers.

While big family-owned companies are still shy about going to the stock market and sharing their hard-earned profits with others, he did the reverse in 1995. The public hold over 39 percent stakes in Square Pharmaceuticals. Square Textile, too, has been in the capital market as a listed company since 2002.

"He [Samson] is a legend and the most respected businessman in the country," said Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank. "Whatever he started he made it the best."

"Every bank felt honoured to give him loans. Banks no more have such transparent and committed customers in the country," said Iftekhar, citing his 26 years' experience in banking.

During the Liberation War, 1971, Samson sheltered free-

dom fighters and supported them with medicines. He did lot of philanthropic work, both in his ancestral home in Pabna and Dhaka. But he is someone who did all these outside the glare of the spotlight.

A former president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Samson served as the chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh in 2004-2007, besides holding a number of key positions in local and international organisations.

He was adjudged the Best Entrepreneur of the Country for the Year 2000-2001 by The Daily Star and DHL. The American Chamber in Bangladesh honoured him as Business Executive of the Year in 1998.

He was founder president of Bangladesh Association of Publicly Listed Companies and vice-president of International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh. He was also the chairman of Central Depository Bangladesh Ltd.

Samson served Bangladesh Aushad Shilpa Samity as adviser and president. He was the president of Bangladesh Herbal Products Manufacturing Association and chairman of Mutual Trust Bank.

In his passing, the country has lost a leading business figure; and 33,000 employees of Square Group have lost a caring father figure. He was a source of inspiration for all of

them.

"He [Samson] had the same lunch at the same venue with the employees. He never made any differentiation," said Fakhru Hasan, senior manager of Square Pharmaceuticals.

The group has decided to keep its factories shut tomorrow in honour of its chairman.

A prayer service will be held at Catholic Church in Kakrail today, according to Square Group.

Conflict

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influential AL leaders and Afzal Khan led to latter's defeat in the polls.

Three lawmakers - AKM Bahauddin Bahar, AHM Mostafa Kamal (Lotus Kamal) and whip Mujibur Haque all of whom hold influence in Comilla city politics had severe differences with Khan. Party men believe they did not come to Khan's rescue the way it could have made a difference.

Jahangir Alam, organising secretary of Sadar upazila Awami League, said, "Election results prove that the conflict remains as before."

Meanwhile, as was predicted by pundits, Sakku won most of the votes in City's South area. Around 47,000 voters of the area were considered as an important vote bank.

Jahangir Alam pointed out that former BNP lawmaker Monirul Haque Chowdhury held a massive influence over this area and Sakku also went out all the way while campaigning here.

Prof Amir Ali Chowdhury, former principal of Comilla Victoria College, thinks Sakku was able to touch the hearts of locals which resulted in this landslide victory.

"Though he was the Comilla municipality mayor for a short time, he proved his sincerity towards the city's development," Prof Amir said.

Many others think the ruling party's internal conflicts played a vital part in Afzal's defeat. Ali Akbar Masum, general secretary of Sujan (Comilla chapter) said, "The party ignored the opinion of other party leaders in extending support to Afzal."

He, however, pointed out the fact remains that Sakku was comparatively better among all mayoral candidates, and that is why people voted for him.

Singer Asif Akbar, who campaigned for the winner, thinks Sakku won the public over with his outstanding work as municipality mayor.

"He developed an excellent drainage system which helped resolve the continuous water logging in many areas," Asif pointed out.

Wish list

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- Form an acceptable Election Commission
- Make the parliament functional
- Stop confrontational politics
- Make local government bodies effective
- Make the Anti-Corruption Commission stronger
- Ensure full independence of the judiciary
- Make the Human Rights Commission effective
- Make the Information Commission effective
- Punish manipulators to restore public confidence in share market
- Prioritise projects to ease traffic congestion in the capital
- Ensure road safety by impartial law enforcement
- Curb unruly activities of ruling party operatives
- Ensure end of river pollution and punish grabbers
- Address secret killings and disappearances
- Tightly manage market price to control unbridled price hikes
- Fast implementation of large scale road infrastructure projects
- Ensure corruption free project implementation
- Improve ties with middle-eastern countries to expand manpower export market

EVM gets big boost

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pressed buttons... It's really interesting," said Noorchan Begum, an elderly woman who cast her vote at Shongrisha Saleha Girls' High School centre at ward no 16 in Comilla.

The Daily Star talked to some 250 voters at 30 centres when the elections were on. Almost all of them said that voting through EVM was a lot easier and quicker than what it was previously.

A few, however, complained that they had been completely unaware of how to use the machines before the election day though the Election Commission claims they conducted massive campaigns to educate people about EVM.

Hafiza Begum, who claimed to be 110 years old, said, "This, perhaps, is the last time I am voting in my life and I am happy to cast my vote through the machine as it is very easy." Her grandson brought her to Newran MI High School

centre.

Abdul Karim, 85, said, "It has taken only five seconds to cast my vote. Never did I take such a short time for voting before."

Nurul Islam, an engineer, said, "I am very happy to have such a new technology. Now, the security must be ensured."

Sudhir Chandra Sheel, who came to Reazuddin Govt School to vote, said, "Earlier, I thought that the operation of the voting machine will be complex. I found it rather easy."

Saleha Begum at Comilla Modern School said, "I knew nothing about the machine. I just pressed buttons as per instructions of the polling officer. This method is very easy and quick."

Besides voters, polling officers also felt it easy to work with EVM.

Manobendra Roy, presiding officer at Islamia Adarsha High School centre, said, "EVM has made our work easy. But we have to remain very alert" as a vote could go to a candi-

date that was not meant for if anyone did a mistake.

Talking to The Daily Star, Returning Officer Abdul Baten said, "People have taken the new system spontaneously."

Before the election, massive programmes were taken to inform people of the new voting system, he said.

This is the first time in the country that voters at all the polling centres in an election used EVM.

Technical experts were there in the centres to address any technical problem during the polls. They were mainly recruited by Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and Comilla Polytechnic Institute.

The Election Commission used 421 EVMs in 65 polling centres.

The main opposition BNP decided not to back any candidate in the Comilla City Corporation polls as the EC had turned down its demand for army deployment and not using EVM.

that Sheikh Hasina's popularity as the prime minister has declined in the last one year quite significantly. Last year, 53 percent said they were happy with her performance. This year 39.4 percent said so.

But Khaleda Zia's popularity as the leader of the opposition has remained static at 30 percent.

People's perception about how the country is being governed has also gone through a dramatic change over the past year.

More people now think that the country is heading in the wrong direction.

The survey showed that people are not happy with the way the economy and price inflation are being handled. They are also worried about the law and order situation.

But the respondents were happy with the government's initiatives to improve power supply.

People's perception about corruption has also worsened as 44 percent now think that corruption has increased compared to 31 percent last year.

(For details of the survey, read today's special supplement)

BCL dissolves

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student body also urged police to take stern action against the duo -- president Sheikh Jewel Hasan and general secretary Nazmul Haque.

A day after the incident, police last night arrested Nazmul Haque from Sakhira town. Law enforcers are trying to arrest the other accused.

"Police should not hesitate to take action against the culprits as they have destroyed the image of our organisation," HM Badiuzzaman Sohag, president of Chhatra League's central unit, told The Daily Star last night.

They would not find shelter in the party, he added.

The 19-year-old victim, a college student in Khulna, filed a case with Sakhira Sadar Police Station yesterday morning under Women and Children Repression Preventive Act against four people -- Jewel, Nazmul, Sumon and another unidentified youth.

Locals said Sakhira unit BCL leaders hired the girl, a dance artiste, to perform at a cultural function organised by them on the occasion of the 64th founding anniversary of the student body on Wednesday evening.

The victim, who resides in Khulna, came to Sakhira with her husband to attend the function.

But, soon after the couple started for Khulna at the end of the function around 8:30pm, the accused snatched the victim from her husband on the way, took her to a house in Katia of the town and violated her, the victim said in the case.

They threatened to kill her husband when he tried to save her, she added.

The husband then informed police who rescued the girl from the house around 12 midnight.

Officer-in-Charge of Sadar Police Station Aslam Khan confirmed the incident.

District AL General Secretary Nazrul Islam urged local administration to take strict measures against the culprits as they tarnished the party's image.

Local AL leaders and activists have expressed their frustration with the BCL men for their involvement in various criminal and anti-social activities in the district.

Meanwhile, condemning the incident a section of the BCL brought out a procession in the evening. They demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the culprits, who are known as extortionists in the area.

But we have to judge the

School children

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from Shewrapara to Mirpur-10 intersection.

The act of the member of parliament created huge panic among students and guardians.

On Monday, Kamal Ahmed assaulted a female journalist and a videographer of private television channel Rtv when they went to Monipur school in Mirpur to enquire about an allegation that the institution was charging much higher fees for admission than that the government had fixed.

Such behaviour of a people's representative drew huge flak from different sections of society, especially the media.

Following news reports on the incident, Kamal Ahmed, also president of Monipur High School and College management committee, instructed the authorities of different schools in Shewrapara area to form the human chain protesting a "conspiracy" against him and Monipur school.

Meanwhile, around 2:00pm yesterday, many worried guardians were seen rushing to the demonstration spot to pick up their children hearing about the news of the human chain.

Some severely annoyed mothers were found storming out of the school with their children disapproving of the decision of making their children stand along the road under the sun.

According to students of Monipur school, they were first lined up inside the school

compound.

"But as the entrance was opened to have the children taken to the demonstration, some guardians rushed into the school and took their children home," said a student who managed to avoid the programme.

Some teachers and the lawmaker's supporters were seen dragging children out of school vans. The Daily Star witnessed several men of lawmaker Kamal Ahmed exchanging heated words with van drivers over pulling out children from the vans and taking them to the human chain.

The Daily Star spoke to at least 50 students at the human chain and not one of them could tell why they were kept standing there for an hour.

Around 3:00pm, father of a class-III student told The Daily Star, "About an hour ago the driver of the school van informed me over the telephone that he could not bring my child home as the school authorities prevented him from doing so. So I rushed to Shewrapara from my office and found my son standing along the road pale and starving."

"I found many other parents doing the same," he added.

Father of a class-IV student said his child does not know the way home from Shewrapara; so he had to go and pick up his child.

"I don't think the teachers of these schools care much about their students. Who would have taken the respon-

PM's speech

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Immediately after the prime minister's address to the nation, The Daily Star talked to a number of political party leaders and members of the civil society for their views.

BNP Standing Committee member MK Anwar sees no success of the government, except for power generation mainly through quick rental power plants.

"Most of the achievements the prime minister mentioned are not true," he said.

On Hasina's remark on BNP not joining parliament, he said the ruling party lawmakers have turned parliament into a "fish market".

"The prime minister called us thieves and robbers. How can we join parliament when she speaks like that," he said.

Human rights activist Sultana Kamal said information and statistics do not always reflect the real picture. The prime minister always delivers her speech from her own perspective; according to the initiatives she has taken and the information given to her, Sultana Kamal said.

success of the government not by the statistics but by how many people were benefited from those initiatives. We have to see how much of those initiatives reached the people and how much of it did not," she said.

Jatiya Party Presidium member Anisul Islam Mahmud said the achievements that the prime minister mentioned in her address were real. The government should look into the issue of law and order vigorously, especially the incidents of disappearances, he said.

Power generation has fairly been a success but now the challenge is implementing the big power plants, he said.

The government could not start the Padma Bridge yet, Mahmud said.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Manzurul Ahsan Khan termed prime minister's speech conventional. He said it seemed from her speech that the country is not facing any problems.

Certainly the government did many good deeds but she

did not utter anything about the people's problems like price hike of daily commodities, rising house rent, crisis of gas, electricity and water, secret killings, muggings, extortion, share market collapse, liquidity crisis and devaluation of money, he said.

"You [prime minister] have to accept the problems and then speak about solutions," he said.

The CPB president warmly welcomed Hasina's call to the opposition to work together with the government and said the opposition would have to be given the space.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Huq Inu said the prime minister's speech is basically a picture of development activities of the government in the last three years.

The prime minister took many bold steps that resulted in significant progress and success in many sectors but there are also some miserable administrative failures which blur many of the successes, he said.