innocents Alems," he tells the Star just a day before the election.

Badrul Alam, a tea vendor from Shib Bari, Gazipur says that Hefazat men came to him with a Quran and pleaded with him to make a vow to vote for Mannan, saying they were trying to establish the fact that the ballot is the best way to give a reply against the said genocide. Although Badrul was not convinced, they forced him to touch the holy book. He says, "I was completely surprised when they told me that they had brought some money folded inside the Quran and asked me to take it. And when I took the money they reminded me that I had vowed to vote for Mannan."

According to Bangladesh Islamic Foundation, in Gazipur City Corporation alone there are 200 madrasahs. So the Islamist group mainly made use of the madrassah students to persuade voters to vote for Mannan. The campaigners supporting Mannan had used mobile phone to show the May 5 rally and photos of police charging batons and throwing teargas shells on Hefazat-e-Islam supporters.

Two days before the poll, while addressing an election rally, Fazlur Rahman, general secretary of Gazipur district Hefazat-e Islam, tells The Daily Star that election result will reflect the government's unprecedented killing of Muslims who were sleeping and offering prayers at Shapla Chattar. "We were informing people about the government-sponsored killing in Dhaka. During the May 5 mayhem, government had killed five Alems of Gazipur, so if people make any wrong decision on the election day, they would betray the blood of the martyrs. I hope by now people have made up their mind. On the instructions of our Ameer Allama Shah Ahmad Shafi, we have to help MA Mannan to win the election and we will do it to take revenge for the blood of our martyred brothers."

As per the constitution of Bangladesh, during any election a particular group cannot use governmental institutions. But the AL-backed candidate overlooked the constitutional obligations. Allegations found that on May 4, Gazipur Islamic Foundation advised 200 Imams from Kaliganj, Kapasia, Kaliakoyr, Tangail, Mymensing and its nearby areas to attend a teachers' conference at Gazipur

Dr Nehal Karim, professor of sociology, at Dhaka University believes that both the parties used religion as an instrument to get votes but Mannan who has read people's pulse better has won the game.

The Gazipur city corporation election had a high turnout of women voters.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

