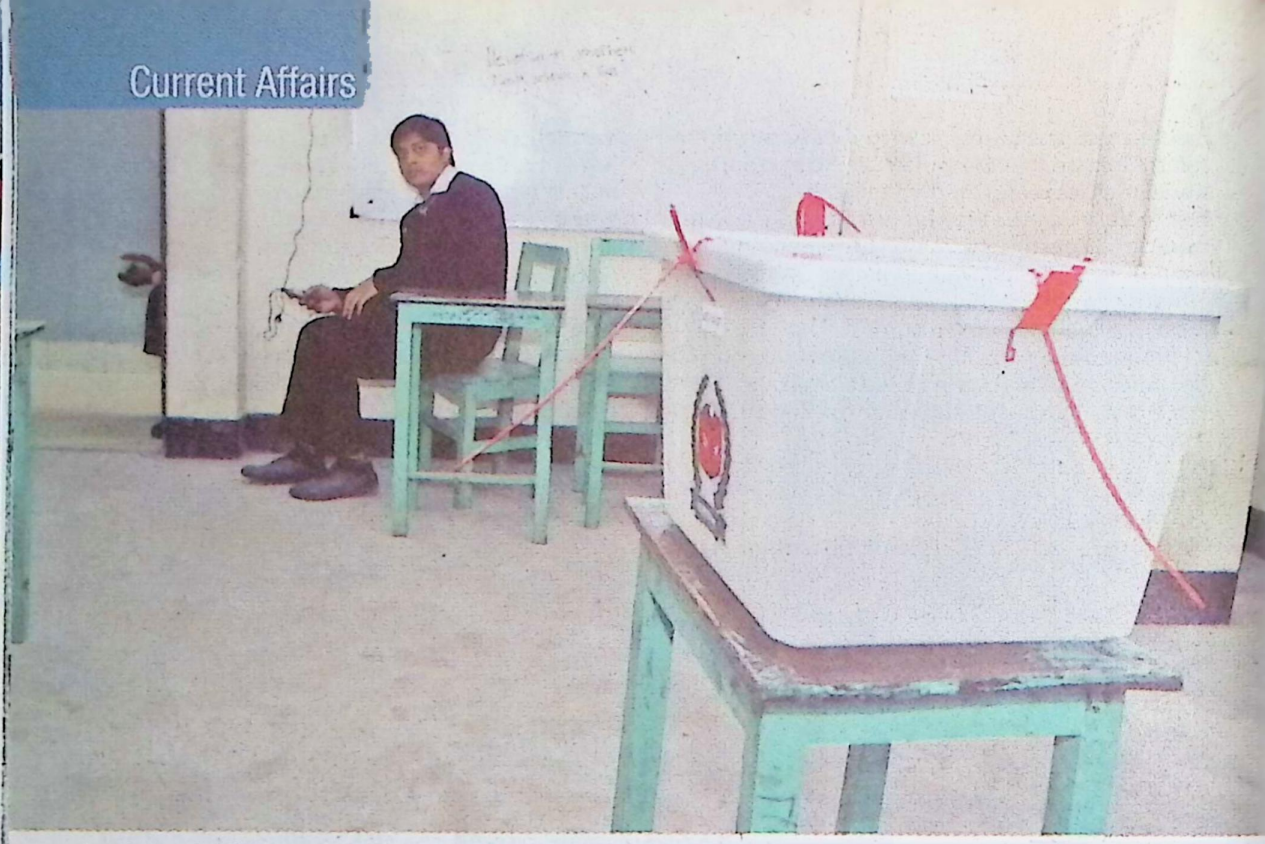


A polling station in Dhaka: even though the EC has officially put the total number of votes cast at around 40 percent, newspapers are littered with photos of empty voting centres.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

One-Sided and Abnormal

SHAKHAWAT LITON

After holding a farcical election on February, 15 in 1996, then Chief Election Commissioner Justice Sadeque had expressed his happiness for holding the polls regardless of the people's participation in it. Lowest turnout of voters (only 26.5 percent), widespread violence and rigging in many constituencies destroyed the credibility of the election held amid a boycott by the Awami League, Jatiya Party and other political parties. Justice Sadeque however did not bother much about the facts. He told newsmen: "It is not important to consider how many voters have cast votes. Election was held and this is important."

Around 18 years after that, Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad has blamed the opposition's boycott and foggy weather for the low turnout in the January 5 election. He might take some credit for a better turnover than the February 15 polls. The turnout of January 5 polling is around 40 percent. Under his leadership, the Election Commission had also posted the new record of people getting elected without any election. In the February election, 49 candidates were elected uncontested. But this time the number rose to 153. This is unprecedented, which is a world record.

Justice Aziz is an unfortunate man. He could not put his name in the record of holding a farcical election. Under his leadership, the EC was desperately moving towards holding a one-sided election scheduled for January 22, 2007 to install BNP-led alliance in power. But his venture could not succeed. At that time an intervention of the armed forces' foiled his bid though they helped the then BNP regime in 1996 to hold a farcical election by maintaining law and order. BNP chief Khaleda Zia and her party colleagues had expected the same cooperation in 2007. But in the changed situation, they did not get it. So, they were unhappy with the changeover in January 2007.

This time around, the armed forces did not play the same role as it did in 2007, which benefited Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her ruling AL to hold a one-sided election, ending all uncertainties over it. It has certainly made Hasina happy. In the post-poll press conference on January 6, she said she was happy to hold the election. She has termed