



The man in T-shirt and lungi, *left photo*, was thrown out of the polling centre by the presiding officer as he tried several times to cast fake votes at Nabakishalay High School in Rupganj upazila of Narayanganj yesterday. The presiding officer then had another man, who was also trying to cast fake votes, escorted out of the polling station. It enraged the man in the T-shirt and other supporters of the ruling Awami League-backed chairman candidate and they manhandled the presiding officer. When this photojournalist tried to capture it on camera, they roughed him up as well.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Rigging without resistance

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engaged in violence and vote rigging in the following phases. Yet the BNP favourites led till the third phase.

In the fourth phase on March 23, ruling party men resorted to widespread violence and rigging that helped them take the lead.

The last round of polls will determine whether the AL or the BNP will prevail in the upazila elections held over a span of two months following the controversial January 5 national polls.

Yesterday, BNP-blessed candidates boycotted polls in 21 upazilas. Local units of the party called dawn-to-dusk hartals for today in at least eight upazilas, report our district correspondents.

The Election Commission postponed polls at 19 centres in five upazilas following violence and irregularities.

In Laxmipur Sadar upazila, Kabir Hossain, president of Dighali union Jubo League, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen.

Kabir came under attack around 3:30am while he along with others was

pasting posters of the AL-backed chairman candidate on walls, said Iqbal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station.

He died on the spot, said Iqbal. AL-blessed chairman candidate AKM Salahuddin Tipu alleged that BNP men had killed Kabir.

However, Harunur Rashid, organising secretary of Laxmipur district BNP, said Kabir was killed in an intra-party clash.

Laxmipur saw widespread vote rigging yesterday.

Activists of AL-backed candidate Salauddin Tipu, son of AL leader Abu Taher, captured polling stations in Sadar upazila, driving out the agents of Tipu's opponents.

At Laxmipur Government Girls High School centre, Tipu's followers were seen forcing voters to stamp his election symbol, as polling officials and law enforcers looked on.

In Moulvibazar, a voter died from wounds he suffered when BGB personnel swooped on unruly AL and Jamaat men near a polling centre in Rajnagar upazila.

Shamim Ahmed, 45, was injured in

the head and fell into a roadside pond while trying to escape the scene around 3:30pm, said Nazimuddin, officer-in-charge of Rajnagar Police Station.

The victim's brother Sharifuddin said Shamim was not involved in politics.

AL and Jamaat men were locked in a clash near Gobindabati Government Primary School polling centre over control of the station.

In another incident, 10 people were injured in a clash between Jamaat and BNP supporters at Sunadighi of the same upazila around 3:00pm.

Jamaat men led by party-backed chairman candidate MA Mannan attacked the supporters of BNP favourite Jamim Ahmed, as the latter tried to capture Sunadighi Government Primary School centre, said police.

In Tangail, AL-blessed candidates' men allegedly captured 37 polling centres and stamped ballot papers in Ghatil upazila before voting began.

Of the 13 candidates, nine, including those backed by the BNP, the Jamaat and the Jatiya Party, boycotted the election, raising allegations of capture of polling stations and stuffing



by AL men.

The candidates and their supporters laid siege to the assistant returning officer's office at 9:00am and blocked the busy Tangail-Mymensingh Road, demanding re-polling in the upazila.

Around 11:30am, police fired rubber bullets and teargas shells at them, leaving five people wounded.

In Munshiganj, 16 people suffered injuries in clashes in Tongibari and Sirajdikhan upazilas.

AL and BNP activists got into a scuffle at Balai Government Primary School in Tongibari around 11:00am, forcing the election officials to suspend voting for around one-and-a-half hours.

As voting resumed at 1:45pm, the two rival camps clashed over capturing the polling station, prompting police to fire rubber bullets.

The AL-backed candidate's followers beat up two local journalists outside the Panchgaon Government Primary School in the upazila. Police detained two of the attackers.

An AL leader and two Chhatra League leaders were injured in an attack allegedly by BNP men at

Abdullahpur Primary School centre.

In Chhagalnaiya upazila of Feni, supporters of AL-backed candidates occupied 30 of the 47 polling centres, and forced the agents of other aspirants to leave the stations between 8:00am and 9:00am.

A gang of armed youths exploded crude bombs and stamped 600 ballot papers around 3:30am at Pathannagar Government Primary School, said Ahmed Ulla, presiding officer at the station.

In Madarganj upazila of Jamalpur, AL men captured polling centres and drove out the agents of the BNP and Jamaat-backed candidates, and cast fake votes for AL-blessed chairman and vice chairman candidates between 8:30am and 11:00am.

The situation was different in Rangamati, where the ruling party men were at the receiving end.

Supporters of the BNP, the Jamaat and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti attacked the AL candidates' polling agents in different polling centres in Sadar upazila.

The local AL unit called a dawn-to-dusk hartal for today to protest the

attack but later called it off.

BNP men clashed with AL activists over allegations of vote rigging by ruling party men in Araihaaz upazila of Narayanganj. Five supporters of both the parties were injured in the clash.

There were incidents of violence and ballot stuffing in three upazilas in Satkhira, Amtoli upazila in Barguna, Kalapara in Patuakhali, Sandwip in Chittagong, Phulchhori in Gaibandha, Kasba in Brahmanbaria and in Narsingdi Sadar upazila.

The commission's failure to check violation of electoral code of conduct and rigging in upazila elections has drawn huge criticism.

Making matters worse, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad left the country for the US on March 3 after two phases of the polls, leaving the EC bereft of leadership.

Election Commissioner Abdul Mobarak, authorised by Rakibuddin to fill in for him, has been making controversial comments, adding to doubts about the EC's ability to conduct free and fair polls.

Tainted face of polls

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prevented from entering the centre.

A number of voters, preferring anonymity, said the ruling Awami League men were stamping ballots inside the booths.

Presiding Officer Abdullah Al-Mahmud said unidentified youths snatched 2,500 ballots from the centre.

"Some 2,736 votes have been cast so far [of which 2,500 ballots were snatched]," he said around 11:45am.

This means, 12 votes were cast there every minute.

The Majlishpur Government Primary School centre of the upazila witnessed similar incidents. In the first three hours of polling, 2,000 of the 2,400 votes were cast, which means 11 people voted every minute.

Presiding Officer Abdur Rauf Molla confirmed the casting of 2,000 votes between 8:00am and 11:00am. Asked how that was possible, he said, "People are coming and voting."

Supporters of the AL-backed aspirant forced out the polling agents of the BNP-sponsored candidate and stuffed ballot boxes at the centre.

While visiting the centre around 11:00am, The Daily Star correspondent found none other than the AL-backed candidate's supporters there.

At Al-Amin Model Academy centre in Rupganj upazila of Narayanganj, AL men offered money to The Daily Star

Polls in 458 upazilas
14 killed in violence
Clash, rigging at over 700 centres
Polls suspended at 134 centres
BNP's boycott in at least 67 upazilas

correspondent, requesting him not to report on their stuffing of ballot boxes.

"Please take the money and keep quiet," said Khalilur Rahman, a local Jubo League leader.

Asked about the rigging, Presiding Officer Abdul Mannan said, "I am helpless."

In Barguna's Amtoli upazila, ruling party men stormed different polling stations even before the voting began and started stuffing ballots.

The incidents forced Assistant Returning Officer Md Abdullah to suspend polling at 12 centres of the upazila.

"We had initially suspended voting at 12 polling stations following allegations of various irregularities. After examining those, we started voting at

four centres," he said.

Conditions in three other upazilas - Barguna Sadar, Bamna and Patharghata -- were no different.

At least 30 candidates for chairmen and vice-chairmen posts in the four upazilas, including AL rebels and BNP contenders, boycotted the elections over vote rigging by AL men.

At a joint press conference at the sitting chairman's house, they claimed that supporters of the AL-backed candidates had captured 32 of the 59 polling stations and stuffed ballot boxes with the help of some administration officials.

In some areas, unruly AL-men stopped stuffing ballot boxes and ran away when journalists entered the polling stations.

In Feni, for example, supporters of Mesbaul Haider, an AL-backed chairman candidate, were marking ballots randomly at Pathannagar Government Primary School centre in Chhagalnaiya around 8:30am.

But they fled when journalists entered the booth. As they ran away, they exploded cocktails to create panic.

At Ballabhpur High School centre in the same upazila, Mesbaul's supporters took away all the ballot papers, marked them in neighbouring houses and then put them in ballot boxes.

When the magistrate found all the



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKI

Ballot papers marked well before the start of voting at South Ballavpur High School and College polling centre in Chhagalnaiya of Feni yesterday.

ballot papers marked, he asked the presiding officer to take action. But he was seen leaving the centre after receiving a phone call.

Presiding Officer Abdul Jalil

Bhuiyan said he felt helpless.

At Gopal Government Primary School, a polling official was seen marking ballot papers and put them in the boxes around 12noon. He was silent

when asked why he had done so.

(The report was prepared based on the information sent by our district correspondents who visited all the polling centres mentioned in the story.)

2 BCL men held with firearm

RU CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch of Police yesterday arrested two members of Rajshahi University unit Chhatra League in connection with the attack on students demonstrating on campus on February 2.

The detainees are Sudipta Salam,



Asif

Sudipta

former joint general secretary of RU unit Chhatra League, and Akhterul Islam Asif, its organising secretary.

During the arrest, police recovered a pistol from Sudipta.

The duo was seen brandishing firearms at students who were protesting against fee hike and evening masters programme on February 2. That day, Chhatra League men backed by police swooped on students leaving

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JS panel for evening

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That's why the committee members have unanimously made the recommendation for introducing evening session in courts," Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the committee, told reporters at a briefing at the parliament's media centre yesterday.

Citing an example of the evening shift, Suranjit, also the ruling Awami League MP, said different countries, including India, have evening shift at courts.

He also said the parliamentary watchdog has also proposed enacting a law for recruiting retired judges in the higher courts to meet the additional requirement of judges for running the evening shift.

The committee chief said they have also recommended increasing by 50 percent the remuneration of higher

court judges.

Suranjit informed the reporters that the remuneration of the chief justice in India is Rs 1 lakh, in Pakistan Rs 1.99 lakh and in Sri Lanka Rs 70,000, whereas in Bangladesh the amount is only Tk 56,000.

"Remuneration and privileges of judges must increase for getting brilliant and quality people in the judiciary," he said.

The former minister also said, "It does not matter if the remuneration of the Supreme Court judges is higher than that of the country's president or prime minister."

He said remuneration and privileges of the chief justice in Sri Lanka, India and the USA are higher than what their president gets.

Suranjit also said judges cannot be

equated with other government service officials as they are under the judicial service pay commission.

Despite all courts, including the Supreme Court, disposing of over 11.19 lakh cases last year, more than 27.47 lakh cases were pending with them till December 31 that year.

A recent report of the SC shows that over 15.05 lakh cases were filed and revived at the courts across the country between January 1 and December 31 last year.

The Appellate Division of the SC resolved over 5,000 cases and its High Court Division more than 24,000 cases. The lower courts settled nearly 10.90 lakh cases during the time, it says.

The number of cases disposed of at both the Appellate and High Court Divisions was less last year than in

Kamal also touched upon the concept of public-private partnership championed by Muhith.

"He has come with this thing called public-private partnership. Every year he allocates Tk 2,000 crore to Tk 3,000 crore for it, but no-one knows what it is. Is it a cow or a goat?"

About the finance minister's intent

2012 due to political unrest. Additionally, there was an increase in the number of cases filed last year, says a Supreme Court high official.

On Sunday, Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star that his office had found the reasons behind the increase in the backlog of pending cases and had taken some steps to reduce the backlog.

The minister, however, declined to provide any details about the reasons and steps taken.

A law ministry high official, requesting anonymity, said the government had already amended the Civil Procedure Code to introduce alternative dispute regulation (ADR) for disposing of civil cases through a compromise between the parties in the cases in order to reduce the backlog.

to file a case against the World Bank, Kamal said: "He takes pension from the World Bank. Do you believe that he will take legal actions against them?"

When contacted, Muhith said: "It is rubbish. I have worked for many organisations in the world, but I have never taken any pension from them, except the Bangladesh government."

BRITISH JOURNALIST Tribunal sets Apr 17 for decision on contempt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday fixed April 17 for a decision on contempt proceedings against David Bergman, a Dhaka-based British journalist, for his write-ups that allegedly questioned the death figure of the Liberation War and demeaned the tribunals' dignity.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam set the date after hearing Bergman's replies.

In response to a contempt petition filed by a Supreme Court lawyer, the tribunal on February 20 asked Bergman to explain his write-ups posted on his personal blog that focused on the indictment order passed on Delawar Hossain Sayedee and the verdict in the case against Abul Kalam Azad.

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