



Indigenous women queue up to vote at a polling centre in Dighinala upazila of Khagrachhari during the last round of upazila polls yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Malaysia keen to recruit 3 lakh Bangladeshis

UNB, Dhaka

Malaysia wants to recruit over 3 lakh workers from Bangladesh soon, visiting Malaysian Home Minister Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said yesterday.

He said this during a meeting with Planning Minister AHM Mostafa Kamal at the latter's office, according to a PID handout. Malaysian High Commissioner in Dhaka Norlin Othman was present.

The planning minister requested the Malaysian government to recruit Bangladeshi workers for Malaysia's agriculture sector.

Hamidi, who is leading a 12-member delegation, also held another meeting with Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain and discussed issues related to mutual interest.

Now on a two-day visit to Bangladesh, the Malaysian minister will leave Dhaka today.

Yemen's Hadi defends US drones

AP, Dubai

Yemen's president in an interview published yesterday defended the US use of drones against Al-Qaeda in his country, despite criticism from rights groups.

President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi also again accused Iran of supporting southern secessionists and northern rebels as Yemen undergoes a difficult political transition.

The United States has launched repeated drone strikes on Al-Qaeda targets in Yemen as part of its "war on terror" and in support of the army's campaign against the jihadists.

Dhaka's Crimea role upsets US

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"The resolution makes it clear that the international community doesn't accept the occupation...the annexation, I should say, by Russia of Crimea," he added.

Russian Ambassador in Dhaka Alexander A Nicholaev on Sunday expressed satisfaction over Bangladesh's abstention from the UNGA voting on the resolution.

Lauding Bangladesh's position, he said Russia has been giving special importance to its relations with Bangladesh since the Liberation War in 1971.

Speaking at a programme at the Bangladesh Institute of International

AL excels in unfair polls

FROM PAGE 1

AL rebels won three, BNP rebel one and an UPDF-backed candidate won one chairman post.

With the results of 455 upazila parishads in after five phases, the ruling AL-blessed chairman candidates won 225 posts while their challengers favoured by the BNP got 157.

Jamaat-e-Islami-backed candidates secured 35 chairman posts and Jatiya Party won three.

The results in three upazilas are withheld.

The AL favourites had been trailing the BNP-backed candidates in the first three phases of the polls held on February 19, 27, and March 15.

They had closed the gap in the third phase, which was marked by violence and election rigging.

In the fourth phase of polls on March 23, marred by widespread polls rigging, the AL-blessed secured 29 more chairman posts than their rivals favoured by the BNP, giving them a 27-post lead.

Yesterday, supporters of the AL-backed candidates intensified their unlawful activities, like capturing polling stations and stuffing ballot boxes, and made sure AL-favoured contenders got the victories.

The AL-blessed runners got a sweeping victory in all the 21 upazilas where BNP-backed contenders boycotted the polls in the early hours protesting election rigging by ruling party men.

In those upazilas, the AL-blessed candidates won by huge margins.

For example, in Chhagalnaiya upazila of Feni, the AL-favoured chair-

man candidate won by bagging 59,577 votes and his nearest rival, BNP blessed, got just 10,507, even though the upazila is considered BNP chief Khaleda Zia's backyard.

In Satkhira Sadar upazila, the AL-blessed candidate got 1,52,851 votes and his rival backed by Jamaat got 44,217 votes. In Debhata upazila of Satkhira, the AL contender secured 53,172 votes and his Jamaat-blessed challenger got only 7,750.

In Tala upazila of the same district, the AL-favourite won the chairman post getting 1,10,628 votes and the Jamaat-backed candidate received 37,946 votes.

In the three upazilas of Satkhira, the candidates blessed by the AL also won all the six vice-chairman posts, including those reserved for women.

Five years ago, the AL-backed candidates won 44 chairman posts in the polls to the same 73 upazila parishads. The elections were held within a month after the December 29, 2008, lauded parliamentary polls in which the AL had a landslide victory.

Both the AL and BNP had made efforts to pick a single candidate for each post of an upazila parishad by persuading their rebels to quit the race or back off. But rebels were still there in every phase of the polls chipping away at the party vote banks.

The upazila polls had become a prestige issue for both the AL and the BNP as the outcome of the elections would indicate gain or loss of their popularity. The parties had engaged in the elections so much that the non-partisan nature of the polls was lost.

Japan to give \$23m for airport safety

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Japan will provide Bangladesh a grant aid of \$ 23.5 million to help improve the country's airport safety and security system.

An Exchange of Note in this regard was signed by Japanese Ambassador Shiro Sadoshima and Secretary of

Economic Relations Division Mohammad Mejbahuddin in Dhaka yesterday.

With the grant money, the air navigation system in Dhaka, Chittagong, Jessore and Saidpur airports will be upgraded to enhance safety during take-offs and landings.

and Strategic Studies, he claimed that joining of Crimea with Russia was not an issue of "annexation", rather it was a "reunification".

Bangladesh's stance on the Crimea issue is being discussed widely within the diplomatic circle in Dhaka as many wanted to know whether it was a shift in Bangladesh's foreign policy.

However, Dhaka unequivocally said there has been no shift in its foreign policy. Rather, Bangladesh has always been avoiding any country-specific resolution at the UNGA.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a diplomat of an influential Asian state said, "It looks like they're sitting on the fence, given the recent trend of leaning

gradually towards Russia."

Another South Asian diplomat on condition of anonymity said Bangladesh's abstention from voting is a shift from its policy. He thanked Dhaka for not being influenced by anyone.

However, foreign ministry officials rejected the notion of a change in foreign policy. The abstention list is very rich as countries like India, China, South Africa and Sri Lanka have refrained from voting, they added.

"It cannot be seen as a policy shift because Bangladesh has always avoided country-specific resolutions, no matter whether those are right or wrong," a senior foreign ministry official told this correspondent.

SL through

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Herath, who was playing his first game of the tournament, stepped in in the fourth over and in a matter of half-an-hour changed the complexion of the game.

He first got Martin Guptill out with a smart piece of fielding to his own delivery. Brendon McCullum tried to take the attack to the bowler by coming down the track later that over, only for him to get stumped by a mile.

Ross Taylor came in with a mission to rebuild, but he proved to be as confused as the others and almost seemed to be teased by Herath's turners. He survived a close leg-before call in the fourth ball off the sixth over, but was trapped in the next.

Left-handed Jimmy Neesham was sent in with hopes of countering the left-arm spin but he was just bowled through his bat and pad. And after Luke Ronchi was trapped plumb in front in the eighth over, the celebrations had already begun. At 30 for five with three overs from Lasith Malinga left there was no way New Zealand were getting back from here.

Sachitra Senayanake got two more wickets in the flow after which Herath came back in the 15th over to finish things off with a five-for. His figures were the second best figures in T20 World Cups, and everyone was left asking where he was hiding all this while?

Earlier, after electing to bowl first, New Zealand bowlers bowled back of a length throughout the innings and caused trouble. Trent Boult got the dangerous Kusal Perera caught down the leg side in the second over.

Tillakaratne Dilshan followed next, while attempting a scoop while Sangakkara was held at mid off. At the end of the powerplay Sri Lanka struggled to 35 for three.

Mahela Jayawardene's 25 off 32 balls and Lahiru Thirimanne's 20 off 21 attempted a recovery midway through but they soon departed. A few lofty hits from Thisara Perera at the end helped them reach 119.

Case against

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AB Siddiqui, president of Bangladesh Jananetri Parishad, a pro-Awami League organisation, filed the case with the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

Khaleda made the claim on March 27 at a discussion at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh.

"With her statement, she belittled Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman before the international community," Siddiqui said in the case statement, appealing to the court to issue an arrest warrant for Khaleda after taking the charges into cognizance. He also sought the highest punishment to Khaleda as per the law.

Metropolitan Magistrate Shamsul Arefin dismissed the case, saying no element was there in the complaint.

However, the matter dominated yesterday's cabinet meeting at the Secretariat with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Before Khaleda, her elder son BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman made a similar claim at a programme in London.

The government should take the matter seriously since BNP leaders are questioning a proven fact, a minister was quoted as saying in the cabinet meeting.

"She [BNP chief] is trying to create a new controversy as part of her and her party's conspiracy against Awami League and Sheikh Hasina," a senior minister told the cabinet.

Referring to some sedition cases, he said the claim by Khaleda and as well as by her son was an act of sedition and so, sedition charges could be brought against them.

Another minister said the new generation, especially those born after the independence, might be misled by Khaleda's claim. He suggested a massive counter-campaign against the claim.

2 BCL men held

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around 100 students injured including 27 bullet-hit.

Saidur Rahman Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of the Detective Branch of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, said they had arrested Sudipta and Asif around 12:30pm at Tukitaki Chatter on the campus.

Meanwhile, in protest at the arrests, the RU unit Chhatra League, student wing of ruling Awami League, yesterday vandalised two buses and two offices of the university.

Witnesses said more than 50 Chhatra League activists led by its RU unit president Rashedul Islam Ranju and joint secretary Golam Kibria had vandalised the doors, window panes and furniture of the proctor's and public relations administrator's offices.

The activists later blocked the Dhaka-Rajshahi highway for an hour.

RU BCL unit general secretary SM Tawhid-Al-Hossain Tuhin condemned the arrests saying that police had arrested Chhatra League men leaving the Shibir cadres, who often severe tendons of BCL activists, untouched.

RU proctor Prof Tariquul Hasan told The Daily Star that police would take action against whoever tried to destabilise the campus.

2 teenage girls raped in Jessore

3 arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Two teenage labourers of Akij Jute Mill were raped early yesterday in Monirampur of Jessore after they were abducted on their way home from the factory.

Monirampur police arrested three people in connection with the incident. The arrestees were identified as Hafijur, son of Yunus Dafadar; Jahangir, son of Aziz Morol, and Ripon, son of Ershad Gazi of Bijoyranpur village under Monirampur upazila.

Some seven to eight miscreants obstructed a factory bus at Mandartola around midnight when it was going to Monirampur with some female and child labourers, said the bus driver, Kamrul Islam. They abducted two girls aged 13 or 14.

Later, he with the help of villagers rescued the girls from a nearby banana orchard and found out that the two had been raped around 2:00am.

Informed by the bus driver, a police patrol team arrested two rapists and one of their accomplices from a nearby

house, said Sub-inspector Habib, second officer of Monirampur Police Station.

Mother of a victim filed a case. Medical examination of the girls was supposed to take place in the evening, the SI said.

The rapists are involved in local Awami League politics and are followers of an upazila-level leader, villagers said.

Mother of a rape victim said influential quarters were pressuring the victims' families to bury the matter saying the girls would be harassed if villagers learnt that they had been raped.

Asfaq Hossain, admin officer of Akij Jute Mill in Noapara of Abhaynagar upazila, said that if a case was filed, the authority would give legal assistance to the victims.

There are no additional safety measures for women and children when they go home by factory buses after night shifts, he said.

Three days after the 10th parliamentary election on December 5, two teenage housewives were raped in Monirampur upazila for casting votes.

AL claims fair polls

FROM PAGE 1

Nanak came up with the party's reaction at the party president's Dhanmondi office while BNP Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed gave the opposition's reaction at the party's Naya Palatan central office in the capital.

The Election Commission successfully conducted the polls and the government cooperated with it, Nanak said.

There is no scope for raising question about the EC's role as all elections held under the incumbent commission were free, fair and neutral, he added.

The former state minister also said BNP should return to the path of democracy shunning conflicts for the sake of the country's development and stability.

At the BNP's press conference, Rizvi said the party would announce a fresh anti-government programme in protest at vote rigging in the upazila elections.

"In many upazilas, Awami League supporters took over polling centres, stuffed ballots since the morning. The local administration and security forces helped ruling party men rig polls," he added.

Mobarak sees

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also saw violence that claimed two lives, vote rigging and stuffing of ballots by ruling Awami League men.

"Many suggested that violence could have been averted if the upazila elections were held in a day instead of in phases. From our previous experience, I think violence could not be averted totally even if we had done so," mentioned Mobarak, who is temporarily discharging duties as the chief election commissioner.

He added: "Political parties are meddling in the upazila polls though it is a non-party election. If they [politicians] want to continue this, they can change the law accordingly."

Voting in 19 polling centres in five upazilas has been suspended due to violence, he told newsmen.

About the BNP's remark that the commissioner should apologise to the

nation for its comment on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Mobarak said, "It is very natural that if you throw a brick chip at someone, you get stones in return.... Both we and they [BNP] are citizens of this country. They have no right to scold us all the year round."

Until yesterday, elections have been held in 459 upazilas out of 487.

Asked about the tentative date for elections to rest of the upazilas, he said the tenure of the remaining upazilas will end in July and August. As per law, elections must be held in those upazilas 180 days before the expiry of the tenure.

The EC, he said, will decide about holding elections to rest of the upazilas after the return of the chief election commissioner from abroad.

Mobarak on Sunday said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has rubbed her nose in the dirt by participating in the upazila polls.

Tribunal sets Apr 17

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Bergman on March 18 submitted his replies through his lawyers.

The petitioner alleged that Bergman, in an article "Sayeede indictment-1971 deaths" on November 11, 2011 had "made relentless efforts to justify that the tribunal was absolutely wrong in mentioning three million deaths and the number of 200,000 women raped in 1971 with reference to various unsupported, inconsistent and contradictory sources".

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 on October 3, 2011 mentioned the figures in its indictment order in the case against Sayeede.

During yesterday's hearing, Bergman's lawyer Mustafizur Rahman Khan said one of the articles written by his client was posted around two and a half years ago, but no one, including the prosecutors and investigators, batted an eyelid before the filing of the petition.

Besides, the petitioner did not specifically mention which part of the article was contemptuous, said Mustafiz, adding that his client had written the article for 'fair criticism' and it was not tantamount to "contempt".

The intention of Bergman's writings was to assist the court, he claimed.

Sara Hossain, another counsel of Bergman, said her client had made a documentary in the 1990s on three war crimes suspects living in the UK, which had been used as evidence in a war crimes case.

Bergman had come to Bangladesh and made the documentary, at risk to his life, thus demonstrating his respect for the martyrs of the Liberation War, she added.

But Justice Hassan said: "Why have you [Bergman] asked a question about the historically established fact [the number of martyrs]? Didn't you have any books other than the ones you have used for references?"

Justice Shahinur Islam said: "It's apparently understood that you wrote [the article] to create a controversy."

As Bergman had carried out "many researches" on the Liberation War as mentioned by his defence, why didn't he take up the issue earlier, he asked.

"Why did he select this time [November 2011] when several cases were

pending with the tribunals?" he questioned.

Mustafiz argued that his client did not say the three million deaths were false but said the tribunal did not cite sources in mentioning the figures. Bergman mentioned several references, which contradicted those figures, Mustafiz added.

Justice Mozibur Rahman said the subsequent judgment of the tribunals mentioned sources about the three million deaths. "Why didn't you then withdraw the article from your blog?" he questioned.

"Do all the books that contradict the three million figures have to be withdrawn?" asked Mustafiz.

Justice Hassan said there might be a debate over the death figures, but "how are you [Bergman] assisting the court by creating a debate over a settled issue?"

As the court mentioned a part of the article, Mustafiz said his client had withdrawn it from his article after getting the notice.

The lawyer further said that raising questions over the death figure might have hurt the emotions of the people, including the petitioner, and "I respect that emotion".

"But the question is whether it was contemptuous or not. We think it was not contemptuous," he added.

When the court asked Mustafiz if his client was respectful to emotions as he was, Mustafiz replied: "Obviously."

Mizan Syeed, lawyer for petitioner Abul Kalam Azad, said the tribunal had the right to take any historical matter into judicial notice and it had taken the death figure in judicial notice while passing the order.

Raising a question over the death figure "couldn't be fair criticism" but it had "demeaned" the dignity of the tribunal and "it was contemptuous," he said.

Mizan added Bergman had termed the tribunal a rubber stamp and also said the tribunal had delivered "pre-determined judgement". "Isn't it contemptuous?" asked Mizan.

M Anamul Kabir Emon assisted Mizan.

They blush

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However, they came back shortly afterwards and went on with the rigging.

As The Daily Star lens man took photos of them stamping on the ballot papers, some AL men drove him out of the centre.

In most cases, polling officers and law enforcers of the two upazilas helped AL men cast illegal votes for their party-backed candidates.

The BNP-backed candidates and its rebels in the upazilas boycotted the polls after 11:00am alleging vote rigging.

The Daily Star visited 20 centres of the upazilas and witnessed illegal stamping on ballots in favour of the ruling party-blessed chairman, vice-chairman and woman vice chairman candidates in more than half the centres.

There were hardly any agents of the BNP-backed candidates in the upazilas. Not only the AL men barred the polling agents of the opposition camp, but also acted as pro-BNP polling agent to give the impression to journalists and magistrates that the polls were being held in a free and fair manner.

The picture was no different in polling centres at Govt Safar Ali

College, and No-49 Dakkhinpara Govt Primary School in Arahazar; and at Nabokishalay High School, Al-Amin Model Academy, Jonokolyan School, Al Arafah Islamia Dakhil Madrasa, Paschimgaon Govt Primary School and Hazi Mohammad Ekhlal Uddin Bhuiyan Kindergarten in Rupganj.

At Nabokishalay school centre in Chandrapara, Rupganj, AL men assaulted the presiding officer as he tried to stop them from illegally stamping on ballots. They also assaulted The Daily Star photo journalist when he took photos of the AL men in the act.

The presiding officer of the upazila Nabokishalay centre told The Daily Star that when he had stopped 50 men entering into the centre altogether, the AL men physically assaulted him and took over the control of the centre.

Another presiding officer of the centre, Monir Hossain, said although he had informed the authorities of the matter, no support was received.

Meanwhile, around 10:50am, Additional Police Superintendent of Narayanganj Mohammad Zakaria had visited the Nabokishalay school centre.

He asked the two presiding officers to remain alert as people of the area might have had hired killers with only Tk 20,000 to get their party-backed candidates come out as winners.

BRIBE OFFERED

At the Al-Amin Model Academy centre in Rupganj, local Jubo League president Khalilur Rahman offered The Daily Star correspondent money to keep him from writing about the vote rigging.

"Please take the money and keep silent," he said.

Presiding Officer of the centre Abdul Mannan said, "I am helpless here."

In Sonargaon upazila, supporters of AL rebel candidate Mahfuzur Rahman Kalam, who became a candidate with blessings from controversial AL leader and lawmaker Shamim Osman, tried to take control over several centres to stamp on ballots in his favour.

The law enforcers, however, foiled the effort which resulted in chase and counter chase in a few centres.

The returning officer of the upazila suspended polls at five centres sensing further violence by the supporters of AL rebels.