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AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

The US superhero film opens to \$201.2m at foreign box office

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HAWKING ENDORSES LABOUR

The physicist thinks Miliband is the best person to be UK PM

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THE SAME OLD FACE-OFF

AL, BNP to dominate today's polls to 3 city corporations

IN NUMBERS: 3 CITY CORPORATIONS

POLLING HOURS 8:00AM TO 4:00PM	60,29,576 voters	884 councillor (general) candidates for	248 councillor (reserved) candidates for	78,730 law enforcers
	48 mayoral aspirants	134 wards	45 wards	3,813 observers



SHAKHAWAT LITON

Six million voters get to decide the outcome of a high-voltage battle of ballots between the ruling Awami League and its archrival BNP, as Dhaka and Chittagong city corporations go to polls today.

Along with the country's remaining 90 million voters, election observers and the international community will keep their eyes on the polls that are supposed to be non-partisan in nature.

Three mayors and 179 councillors will be elected through the polls, which are taking place amid fears of violence and intimidation despite tight security measures taken by the authorities for peaceful voting.

The elections will ensure that people have their representatives in the three local government bodies -- two city corporations in Dhaka and one in Chittagong.

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SMS TO KNOW YOUR POLLING CENTRE'S NAME -- PAGE 16



Polling agents assisted by law enforcers taking election materials to different polling stations from a temporary result announcement centre at the gymnasium of MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong city yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

No power, yet most sought-after EC pledges security amid complaints

679 vie for 93 ward councillor posts in Dhaka; hidden clout, benefit seen as reasons

RASHIDUL HASAN and PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

By the looks of it, city councillors' job is not that appealing. They have little power to exercise and all they get to do is sign some certificates and monitor civic services such as waste management and maintenance of street lights in their wards.

Yet, 679 candidates are at a rat race to win the 93 councillor posts in today's polls in the two Dhaka city corporations.

So what's the catch? The answer is simple: A councillor has many unoffi-

cial gains, including establishing supremacy in the area, controlling tenders of development projects and making a mint out of those.

And if he happens to be from the ruling party, he can use his political influence more than those from the opposition, said a number of former councillors and candidates running for the post.

Under the law, councillors are empowered to issue 17 types of certificates, including that for birth, death, citizenship and inheritance. They get a monthly pay of Tk 27,500 -- Tk 17,500 in honorarium, up to Tk 8,000 in office

rent and up to Tk 2,000 for hospitality and other purposes.

In addition, they attend the general meeting and standing committee meetings of city corporations and can formulate development plans for their wards and submit those for inclusion in development programmes.

"Ward councillors have neither any power in the city corporation nor do they get any significant amount of salary. The main reason behind contesting for the post is to establish authority in the area and secure illegal benefits using that power," Badiul

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

BNP candidates claim their campaigners facing arrest, threat, harassment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the BNP-backed candidates complaining of arrests and threats, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad yesterday said measures have been taken to ensure a peaceful environment for today's polls.

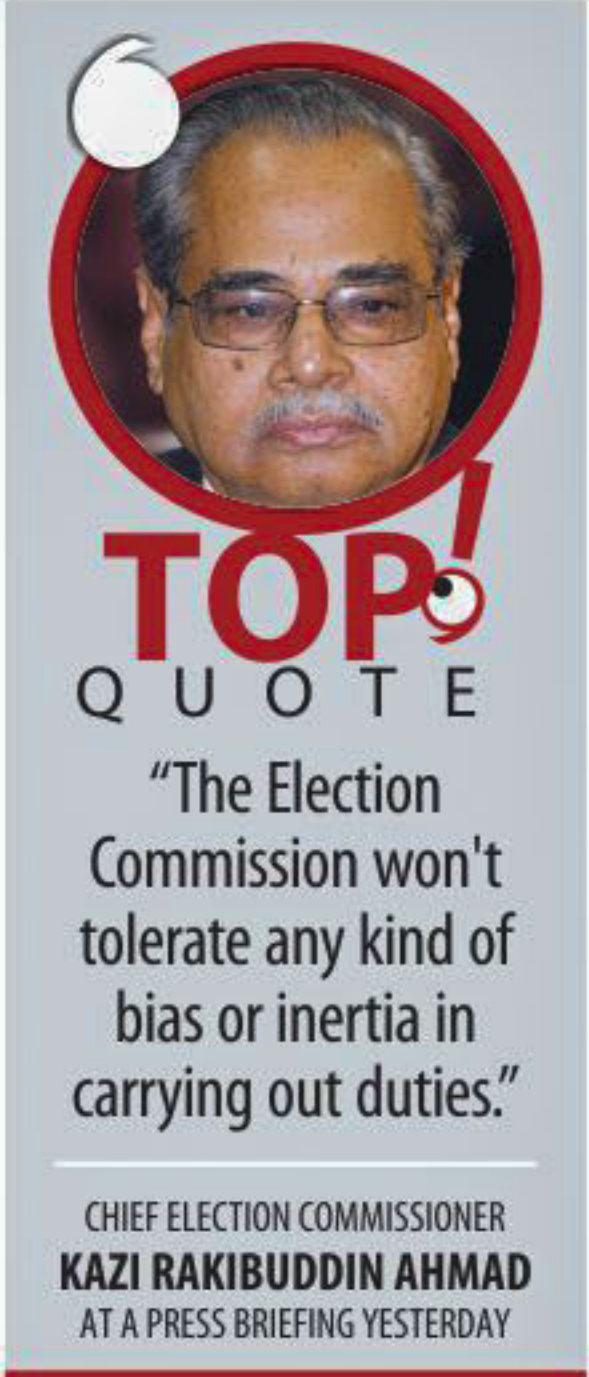
Foolproof security measures were taken and about 80,000 law enforcers have been deployed in three city corporations for today's polls, he said during a press briefing at the Election Commission's media centre.

Replying to a question, the CEC claimed every candidate had been able to carry out campaign fairly. "It would not be possible if there had not been a 'level-playing field'."

Despite such assurances, the candidates alleged that police had arrested and harassed their campaigners and raided the residences and campaign offices of many BNP-supported councillor aspirants, threatening their relatives not to employ polling agents during voting today.

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SEE ONLINE FOR LIST OF POLLING CENTRES



TOP QUOTE

"The Election Commission won't tolerate any kind of bias or inertia in carrying out duties."

CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER KAZI RAKIBUDDIN AHMAD AT A PRESS BRIEFING YESTERDAY



Even president spends entire night in tent

NDTV ONLINE

Nepal President Ram Baran Yadav spent Saturday night inside a tent after the powerful earthquake caused several cracks in his office-cum-residence.

A senior presidential official told IANS that Yadav and his security guards spent the entire night inside the tent fearing that further aftershocks may damage the entire century-old building.

The President's Office was built some 150 years

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Aftershocks continue

Another quake hits India's Siliguri

STAR REPORT

Three days in a row Bangladesh experienced aftershocks of Saturday's devastating earthquake in Nepal.

There were rumours of cracks developing in buildings and actual cracks in buildings that led to evacuations.

There was panic too. SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



A temporary shelter for earthquake-affected people set up in open areas of an Army ground in Kathmandu.

PHOTO: AFP

Nepalis spend third night in open

Fears of food, water shortage rising; families flee quake-hit capital

AFP, Kathmandu

Hundreds of thousands of Nepalis spent another night in the open yesterday after a massive quake which killed more than 4,000, as officials warned the final toll could rise sharply once rescuers reach cut-off areas.

With fears rising of food and water shortages, Nepalis were rushing to stores and petrol stations to stock up on essential supplies in the capital Kathmandu, left devastated by Saturday's 7.8-magnitude quake.

Officials say more than 4,100 people are now known to have died, including 4,010 in

Nepal -- making it the quake-prone Himalayan nation's deadliest disaster in more than 80 years.

More than 90 people have been killed in neighbouring India and China while a further 7,500 people were injured in Nepal.

But senior disaster management official Rameshwar Dangal said the toll in Nepal could jump once rescuers discovered the full extent of devastation in villages.

"Rescue operations are underway, and in many places where buildings have collapsed there might be people trapped," Dangal, the home ministry's national disaster management

chief, told AFP.

"We are also in the process of getting information from villages, and these will add to the death toll."

Families who work in Kathmandu were packing onto buses, some even sitting on the roofs, leaving the city, many for their home villages to determine the damage there.

Mothers clutching children and men hauling bags were seen bargaining with drivers of the many buses clogging the roads out of the capital.

The exodus came as international rescue SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

DEATH TOLL 4,000

Voters 'offered money' at the last moment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was in Mirpur's Bhasantek slum around 10:00pm yesterday. A huge hue and cry was heard from a tent set up for coordinating the electioneering of AL-backed councillor candidate Haji Azmat Dewan.

"How come you pay them more than us?" someone was heard saying. A reporter of this newspaper was standing outside the tent during a visit to the slum area on the eve of city corporation election.

"You pay voters Tk 1,000 to 2,000 each but we got only Tk 500 working all daylong."

The correspondent also met a group of youths who were challenging any stranger seen in the area.

"We are here to see that nobody gets the chance to pay voters more than us," said one youth, who stopped the reporter moments ago.

Contacted, Azmat Dewan said, "It was my rival candidate Salek Mollah who is buying votes to win the polls."

On the other hand, Salek Mollah claimed that Ajmat "had been visiting the slum with sacks full of money for the last three days."

In Chittagong's Tulatoli slum during a visit around 7:00pm, our reporter overheard a conversation in a crowd of 10 to 12.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

76 observers from foreign missions to monitor polls

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A total of 76 foreign observers from 16 diplomatic missions, the UN, electoral and rights organisations based in Dhaka will monitor today's city corporation polls in Dhaka and Chittagong.

According to Election Commission sources, the foreign observers and their 73 local interpreters have received observer cards from the EC.

Diplomatic and EC sources said this time around a large number of foreign polls observers are covering the local SEE PAGE 2 COL 5