

SAIDPUR MUNICIPALITY

Urdu speaking voters likely to play decisive role

TEAM ASADUZZAMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

A crowded railway town by tradition, Saidpur has long been home to a significant Urdu-speaking community. The forefathers of many arrived in the British period from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other parts of India to pursue careers in the railway workshops. Still others fled communal violence to arrive after Partition. In the upcoming municipal elections, the support of Saidpur's Urdu speakers will likely be decisive. "The votes of the Urdu-speaking community always play a crucial role," says Abdul Hafiz, the principal of Saidpur College and a well-known local historian. While Urdu-speakers

account for 25 of the 74 candidates who will contest the 15 councillor seats, there is no Urdu-speaking candidate running for the post of mayor.

Nonetheless, for a minority community anywhere in the country it is rare to wield such electoral clout, and for Urdu speakers in Bangladesh, Saidpur is undoubtedly unique.

According to the upazila election office, of the 81,500 registered voters in the first class municipality, 60% speak Urdu as a first language.

In light of such statistics, mayoral and councillor candidates of all persuasions have been making efforts to appeal to Urdu speakers in preparation for

the upcoming polls.

A rare sound in Bangladesh, loudspeaker campaign announcements in Urdu are likely to surprise any visitor. But in Saidpur, any serious election campaign must be conducted bilingually.

Although the community lost some of its dominance after the Liberation War, during which many Urdu-speakers supported Pakistan and subsequently migrated there, Urdu-speakers remain influential in the area's cultural, political and economic life.

Yet which way they will vote is becoming harder to predict. Traditionally it has been assumed that Urdu speakers favour BNP-backed mayoral candidates, with a

succession of them having been elected. But in more recent times circumstances have changed.

"The issue of the war criminal trials may have given Urdu speakers reason to reconsider their vote," says railway workers' leader Aminur Rahman, "It could be reflected in the upcoming poll."

President of the Urdu Welfare Society, Ashraf Islam Babu, has also observed a break with the past. "We made an historical mistake in 1971," he says, "Many supported the Pakistani Army due to political ignorance. Nowadays we want to intermingle with all people in this country and take pragmatic decisions when casting votes."

Baby stolen from Pabna hospital still traceless

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The newborn baby, stolen from Pabna Medical College Hospital on Tuesday, still remains traceless.

The hospital authorities formed a three-member inquiry committee headed by senior gynaecologist Dr Hasnat Jahan yesterday. The committee will submit its report within seven days, said Md Ruhul, an official of the hospital.

"Although this is a government hospital, there is not enough security here, which is why the culprit could easily manage to take away the newborn baby from the hospital ward," Md Abdul Halim, maternal grandfather of the baby, told this correspondent.

A middle-aged woman in the guise of a patient took away a three-day-old girl from a ward in the hospital on Tuesday evening.

Hospital sources said Shelley Khatun, 25, wife of Ukil Uddin of Khoyersuti village in Pabna Sadar upazila gave birth to a girl on Sunday night.

"As the baby's condition was delicate she was referred to the pediatrics ward for better treatment," says Halima Khatun, the child's grandmother. "When I was carrying the baby to the ward at about 7:00pm, a middle-aged woman in the guise of a patient took the baby in her lap, saying she would stop the baby crying."

Within a few minutes, the woman left the ward with the baby, Halima added.

"Law enforcing agencies have made several drives in the district headquarters, but there is no trace of the victim," Abdullah Al Hasan, officer-in-charge of Pabna Sadar Police Station, said, adding that the grandmother of the missing baby filed a case with the police station on Wednesday night.



Locals form a human chain beside Sylhet-Tamabil highway in Jaintapur upazila of Sylhet yesterday, demanding capital punishment to the killers of SSC candidate Pulok. The decomposed body of Pulok was found on December 18, eight days into his missing.

MURDER OF SSC CANDIDATE PULOK Locals demand capital punishment of killers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Local people held a rally and formed a human chain beside Sylhet-Tamabil highway on Wednesday, demanding capital punishment to the killers of SSC examinee pulok in Jaintapur upazila of Sylhet district.

They also brought out a procession in bus stand area of the upazila town to press the demand.

People from all walks of life, including teacher and students of different educational institutions, politicians and traders took part in the programmes.

Police recovered the decomposed body of Pulok, 15, son of Panna Lal of Baurbhag Dakkhin village in Jaintapur upazila, on December 18, eight days after he went missing.

On December 10, Pulok

went missing, Shafiq Kabir, officer-in-charge of Jaintapur Police Station, said, adding that on the day, the victim's father filed a general diary with the PS in this connection.

The law enforcers later arrested Pulok's classmate Abdul Kuddus, 16, son of Shafiq Ahmed of the same village, and his stepbrother Sehab Uddin Sabu, 15, for their alleged involvement in the killing.



Four aspirants of Thakurgaon municipality pledge to fight corruption, if elected, at a programme organised by Sushasoner Jonno Nagarik (Sujan) on the Judge's Court premises yesterday.

4 Thakurgaon mayor aspirants vow to fight corruption

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Four candidates for the post of mayor of Thakurgaon Municipality have vowed to root out corruption and put an end to criminal activities in the municipality, if elected.

They made their electoral pledges and responded to voters' queries in a face-to-face with people

programme organised by Sushasoner Jonno Nagarik (Sujan) on Judge's Court premises.

The candidates who attended the programme are Tahmina Akhter Mollah of Awami League (AL), Mirza Foizan Amin of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Soleman Ali Sarkar rebel AL candidate, and Mahfuzul

Islam (independent).

The four aspirants promised to fulfill their election pledges, if voted to power, and work together for development of the municipality. They also promised to accept the people's verdict in the election.

The mayoral candidates vowed to eradicate social menaces like drug peddling,

early marriage and stalking.

They promised to ensure citizens' rights, including smooth supply of safe drinking water, cleanliness and communal harmony in the municipality.

Professor Monotos Kumar Dey, president of Panchagarh district unit of Sujan, presided over the programme while Rajesh Dey, regional coordinator of Sujan, conducted the programme.

A good number of townspeople attended the programme. On Monday, three candidates for the post of mayor of Panchagarh Municipality vowed to root out corruption and put an end to criminal activities, if elected.

They made their electoral pledges and responded to voters' queries in a face-to-face with people programme organised by Sushasoner Jonno Nagarik (Sujan) at Sher-e-Bangla Park in the town yesterday.

JCD leader held on subversion charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole, Jessore

Police arrested a local leader of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) from Health Complex area in Bagharpara upazila of Jessore district on Wednesday.

The arrestee is Nazmul Al Mamun, 27, president of Bagharpara upazila unit of JCD, and son of Abul Hossain of the area.

He was arrested in a case for carrying out subversive activities, said Sayaruddin Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Bagharpara Police Station.

Robbers abduct 3 fishermen, take away trawler

30 others drift in Bay as the gang loots another boat's engine

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Robbers yesterday abducted three fishermen and took away a fishing trawler from Jahajmara area on the Bay, about 80-km south-west of Kuakata sea beach. They also looted the engine from another boat, leaving 30 fishermen drifting in an engineless trawler.

Md Golam Mostafa Chowdhury, president of Barguna Fishing Trawler Owners' Association, confirmed the matter.

The abducted fishermen are

Kalam Majhee, 40, Masum Majhee, 35, and Zakir Hossain, 36, of trawler FB Maamoni, and residents of different areas under Patharghata upazila of Barguna district, Golam Mostafasaid.

The pirates attacked FB Maamoni at about 2:00am, and abducted three out of 19 fishermen.

Later on, the gang attacked another trawler named FB Kishoyan, looted its engine and then headed towards the Sundarbans. Since then, FB Kishoyan has been floating on the Bay

with 30 fishermen as it has no engine, sources said.

The fishermen of FB Kishoyan are Jahirul, 32, Nanna Mia, 36, Shahid Mia, 38, Kabir Hossain, 40, Jamal, 35, Mamun, 28, Moti Mia, 42, Mohiuddin, 32, Jubayer, 23, Monir Hossain, 25, Khokon Mia, 26, Abul Kalam, 28, Badsha Mia, 25, Abdur Rahman, 24, Dulal, 22, Abu Kalam, 30 and Abul Hossain, 25. Golam Mostafa said quoting Nanna Mia fisherman of the trawler. Names of the rest of the fishermen could not be known.

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Sk. Golam Mohammad
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