



PHOTO: STAR

FROM LEFT: Female voters wait in a queue at Khandar Primary School centre in Bogra town to exercise their right to choose representatives, an elderly man is being carried to Kurigram Alia Kamil Madrasa centre to cast his vote, police go into action to foil unruly activists' attempt to occupy Rikabi Bazar No 1 Government Primary School centre in Munshiganj district, and a group chases their opponents near Charkumira Government Primary School in Faridganj upazila under Chandpur district during yesterday's municipality polls across the country.

# Clashes, irregularities mark partisan municipal polls

One killed, over 100 injured across country, voting suspended at 38 centres

STAR COUNTRY DESK

The country's first ever partisan municipality polls ended amid reports of violence, irregularities, suspension of voting at 38 centres of 18 municipalities and boycott of at least 19 candidates.

One person was killed and at least 108 people were injured in clashes at 16 polling centres in 16 municipalities across the country since the beginning of the polls at 8:00am yesterday.

The Election Commission suspended five police officers for negligence in duty.

However, ruling Awami League claimed that apart from "few irregularities", the voting was free and fair by large.

On the other hand, BNP claimed of widespread rigging by the ruling party men.

Meanwhile, reports of violence came from Tangail, Noakhali, Chandpur, Pirojpur, Patuakhali, Narayanganj, Jamalpur, Pabna, Natore, Chittagong, Feni, Moulvibazar, Narsingdi, Rajshahi, Mymensingh and Jhalakathi districts.

In Chittagong's Satkania municipality, one Nurul Islam, 48, was killed, being bullet-hit during a clash between the supporters rival councillor candidates, one nominated by Awami League, and the other 'rebel' candidate from the party, near Satkania Government College polling centre. Nurul Islam was on his way to the centre for casting his vote, said family sources.

In Shitakunda municipality under the same district, BNP mayor candidate Abul Mansur was reportedly injured after allegedly attacked by ruling party men while he was on his way to Pontijila High School polling centre in Sitakunda area of the district.

In Noakhali, voting at 10 of the

20 polling centres in Choumuhani municipality in Begunjanj upazila were suspended due to snatching of ballot papers, vote rigging and clashes among the supporters of councillor candidates, said District Election Officer Md Monir Hossain, also returning officer of Choumuhani municipality.

Election related clashes left 13 people including three policemen injured in Hatiya and Basurhat municipalities, said police.

In Barguna municipality, 11 people including Awami League candidate Kamrul Ahsan Maharaj were injured as police fired bullets during a clash between the supporters of Kamrul and the party's 'rebel' candidate Md Shahadat Hossain, also the incumbent mayor, at Barguna Government College centre.

Kamul, joint general secretary of Barguna district Awami League, and general secretary of district bar association, had earlier withdrawn his candidature protesting biased role of the local administration.

In Narayanganj's Sonargaon municipality, at least 10 people were injured at GRU Institute in a clash between the Awami League nominated mayoral candidate and the 'rebel' candidate from the party.

Some crude bombs were blasted during the clash around 3:30am, said Sonargaon Police Station Officer-in-Charge Manzur Quader, who was also injured in the clash.

In Tangail, the supporters of Awami League's mayoral candidate and the party's 'rebel' contestant locked in a clash at Ghatandi polling centre around 9:30am, our local correspondent reported from the spot.

Rebel candidate Tarikul Islam Chanchal and his polling agent Aminul Islam Babu were injured. They were taken to Tangail Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Ten others, including Bhuapur upazila parishad Vice Chairman Shahinul Islam, was injured in clashes between two groups of ruling party supporters and later with BNP men at Bhuapur Model School polling centre.

In Chandpur's Matlab municipality, at least seven people were injured in separate clashes between ruling party and BNP activists, our correspondent reports, quoting Returning Officer Farhana Islam.

Police fired 15 blank shots to bring the situation under control at Dakkhin Baishpur Government Primary School polling centre around 9:30am, injuring five.

In Pirojpur's Swarupkathi municipality, three BNP agents were beaten up by ruling Awami League activists early today, our local correspondent reports.

BNP candidate Shafiqul Islam Farid told reporters he does not want to contest the polls anymore considering the present situation, our correspondent reported.

In Patuakhali's Kuakata municipality, at least seven were injured in a clash between supporters of local Awami League and BNP at Panjpara polling centre, our local correspondent reports.

The clash broke out when local AL activists were staffing ballots soon after the voting started, reports our Patuakhali correspondent. Following the clash, voters fled from the polling centre.

Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kalapara Police Station, confirmed our correspondent about the clash. Returning Officer Nazmul Kabir had assured that the situation was under control.

In Pabna's Sujapur municipality, five people were injured in separate clashes between supporters of ruling party's nominated mayor candidate and its rebel candidate at Sujapur, Bhanipur and Char

Bhanipur polling centres, reports our local correspondent.

In Natore's Gurudaspur municipality, at least seven BNP supporters were injured after they were beaten allegedly by ruling Awami League supporters at three polling centres in Natore.

The incidents took place at Ghaisapara, Tebaria and Phulbagan polling centres, our Natore correspondent reports.

In Feni's Dagonbhuiyan municipality, BNP's mayor candidate Kazi Saifur Rahman was assaulted allegedly by ruling party activists around 9:00am. Returning Officer Farida Khanom said she heard about the incident, reports our local correspondent.

Later, Saifur withdrew down from the election contest around 1:30pm.

In Moulvibazar Sadar municipality, at least 15 people including policemen were injured in clash between supporters of ruling Awami League and BNP, confirmed Abdul Salek, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station.

In Mymensingh's Phulbaria municipality, at least five people were injured in chase and counter chase between supporters of BNP and ruling Awami League, reports our local correspondent.

In Rajshahi's Taherpur municipality, the mayoral candidate nominated by BNP suffered injuries on the head after alleged Jubo League activists attacked him around 1:00pm, reports our staff correspondent from Rajshahi.

Besides, six others were also injured during the incident.

In Jhalakathi's Nalcity municipality, six people including AL's 'rebel' candidate Abu Sayeed Mostafa Kamal, and Md Selim, a local Jubo League leader, were injured in polls related violence yesterday.

# Radiotherapy machine at MMCH lies inoperative for four months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The lone radiotherapy machine for treating cancer patients at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) has been out of order for four months, much to the suffering of the patients.

Dr Md Aminul Islam, a cancer specialist and associate professor of Oncology Department of MMCH, said Tk 30 lakh is needed for servicing the radiotherapy machine, which was procured in 1996.

The money was allocated by the government in the current and previous fiscal years, but the MMCH authorities allegedly did not take initiatives for servicing the machine and the allocation was returned, Dr Aminul Islam added.

We wrote to the hospital director several times in the last couple of years, but to no effect, the doctor further said.

There are two cancer wards at the department with 13-bed facilities, including eight for males, but there is no patient admitted now as the radiotherapy can't be done, sources said.

All patients are referred to Dhaka for radiotherapy, but many could not get appointment in time at government hospitals in Dhaka, said Dr Aminul Islam.

Only chemotherapy is done at the department but many patients are forced by some employees to go to private clinics, it was also alleged.

Once the machine was used from morning till evening to handle hundreds of patients but now the number of patients has sharply decreased as we cannot render due services to them, sources said.

Earlier, at least 60 patients visited the department everyday but now it

has reduced sharply. Only 1058 patients visited the department this year till December 11, they said.

The department has outdoor facilities but there is no medical officer and resident surgeon posted at the department.

A cancer patient needs Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000 to undergo a month-long radiotherapy at a government hospital while private hospitals charge around Tk 1 lakh, which is beyond the reach of poor patients, said Dr Islam.

For chemotherapy, the patients have to pay only Tk 600 per dose in the hospital, while private clinics take Tk 20,000 to Tk 30,000, sources said.

Businessman Md Saiful Islam, a cancer patient from

Montola in Mymensingh Sadar upazila, said "I have been referred to Dhaka for radio therapy after completing the chemotherapy, but I don't know how to manage the huge amount of money."

Mahfuza Akhtar, 36, a cancer patient from Trishal, said it is a burden for her to bear the cost in Mymensingh and if she is referred to Dhaka for radiotherapy, it would be out of her capacity.

Prof Dr Safiul Alam, head of Radiology Department, said the process to repair the machine is on.

Contacted, MMCH Director Brig Gen Nasir Uddin Ahamed said steps have been taken to make the machine functional by January next year.



PHOTO: STAR

The lone radiology machine at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital has been lying inoperative for the last four months.

# Huge date expired worm killers stocked in community clinics

Those were supplied only 15-20 days before expiry

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Huge quantities of expired worm killer Albendazole tablets are stored in different community clinics (CC) of Sadar upazila under the district as those were supplied there hurriedly from the reserve store of district civil surgeon's (CS) office only 15-20 days before expiry on November 30.

The expired medicines, if distributed to the people, put the consumers under serious health risk.

The district's reserve store in the third week of November provided Albendazole tablets via the upazila store for supplying 4000 to 5000 pieces to each CC in Sadar upazila, sources said.

The tables are produced by Bogra-based drug company 'Essential Drugs Company Ltd' and the label of each container with 500 tablets shows the manufacturing and expiry periods as December 2012 and November 2015, they said.

health care providers (CHCP) of the CCs put objections but the authority concerned compelled them to receive those worm killer tablets and directed distributing them among patients very quickly, said the stakeholders.

"When they brought 5,000 Albendazole tablets for my clinic on November 16, I received it unwillingly as there was only two weeks validity. I could distribute only 400-500 tablets to patients till November 30 and the remaining tablets are in the stock," Tanjila Aktar, CHCP of Gobbar Danga CC, told this correspondent.

"Now I am confused about what to do with the tablets as the department concerned is yet to give any directive or guideline in this regard," she added.

Sultana Aktar, CHCP of Kisamat Dogachhi CC in Tupamari union, said the community groups and local managing bodies concerned will sit in a meeting soon regarding the date expired medicines and then contact

with the higher authorities.

Zila Parishad administrator Momtazul Islam, also district unit secretary of Awami League, said he will raise the matter in the next district coordination committee meeting as it concerns public health.

Mosharaf Hossain, district unit president of Durnity Protirodh Committee, said departmental procedure should be initiated to find out whose negligence led to the situation.

"A single date expired tablet should not be given to patients in any case. I'll talk to the civil surgeon so that he immediately withdraws the tablets and takes measure as per rule," said Zakir Hossain, deputy commissioner of Nilphamari.

Contacted, Nilphamari CS Dr Abdur Rashid said, "It is our policy to distribute Albendazole tablets to as many people as possible before expiry of date. We will soon ask the CHCPs to return it as we have prior directive not to distribute any date expired medicine."



PHOTO: STAR

A pot containing expired worm killer Albendazole tablets that see stocking in huge quantities at different community clinics in Nilphamari Sadar upazila as those were supplied only 15 to 20 days before the expiry period.

# Heavy defeat

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ensure victory of his brother-in-law "at any cost".

While visiting some voting centres in the municipality yesterday, The Daily Star correspondent found only Rabbi's men around the polling stations.

At the Sahapur Talimul Quran Madrasa and the Bhattapur Model Govt Primary School centres, they were seen stamping on Rabbi's 'boat' symbol and stuffing the ballots in the boxes between 1:30pm and 4:00pm.

Rabbi himself was seen coordinating this at the school around 2:00pm.

There was more. Around 200 men snatched away ballot papers at the GR Institute centre, stamped ballots in favour of Rabbi and blasted firecrackers to create panic and keep voters away.

Similar irregularities were found in some other polling stations as well. Babu himself was coordinating everything from his home in Araihasar, one of his close associates, who had come to the Madrasa centre during the voting, told The Daily Star.

Interestingly, Rabbi's men barely faced any resis-

tance from the law enforcers present at the voting centres, which frustrated Sadequr even more.

Speaking to journalists at the madrasa, the AL dissident said the administration was also acting biased.

"Many of my agents were driven out of the polling centres right in front of the eyes of the administration people."

On Shamim Osman's support for him, he said the lawmaker helped him during the election campaigns but "none came from outside [the municipality] to help me win".

Rabbi, however, denied the allegations and said a vested quarter was spreading propaganda against him.

Local leaders of the ruling party think wrong choice of the mayor candidate was the main reason behind the crushing defeat of the Awami League there.

Meanwhile, BNP favourite Mosharaf Hossain, who got 2,788 votes to stand third out of four mayor candidates, alleged that Sadequr too had resorted to ballot-stuffing in at least four polling stations.

The victor denied the allegation.

# Ghost voting

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Manirul Islam, presiding officer of Natun Kuri Bidiyaniketan polling centre, said no polling agent of BNP candidate Badiuzzaman contacted him.

Out of 2,654 voters under the centre, only some 500 exercised their franchise in six booths until 2:30pm, he added.

Meanwhile, independent mayor candidate Salauddin Khan alleged that several hundred garment workers were brought to polling centres from different factories to cast fake votes. He, however, didn't say who brought them.

Interestingly, the number of the polling agents of AL mayor aspirant and councillor candidates surpassed the number of voters at several polling centres around noon. Presiding and polling officers, polling agents and law enforcers were found sitting idly and gossiping at some centres around 1:00pm as there were no voters.

"Voting is almost over here. We are waiting as about an hour is left before the polls close," Shajedul Islam, a polling agent of AL mayor hopeful Abdul Gani, told this correspondent around 3:00pm.