

Water returns to Choichari village

ANVIL CHAKMA with ANDREW EAGLE

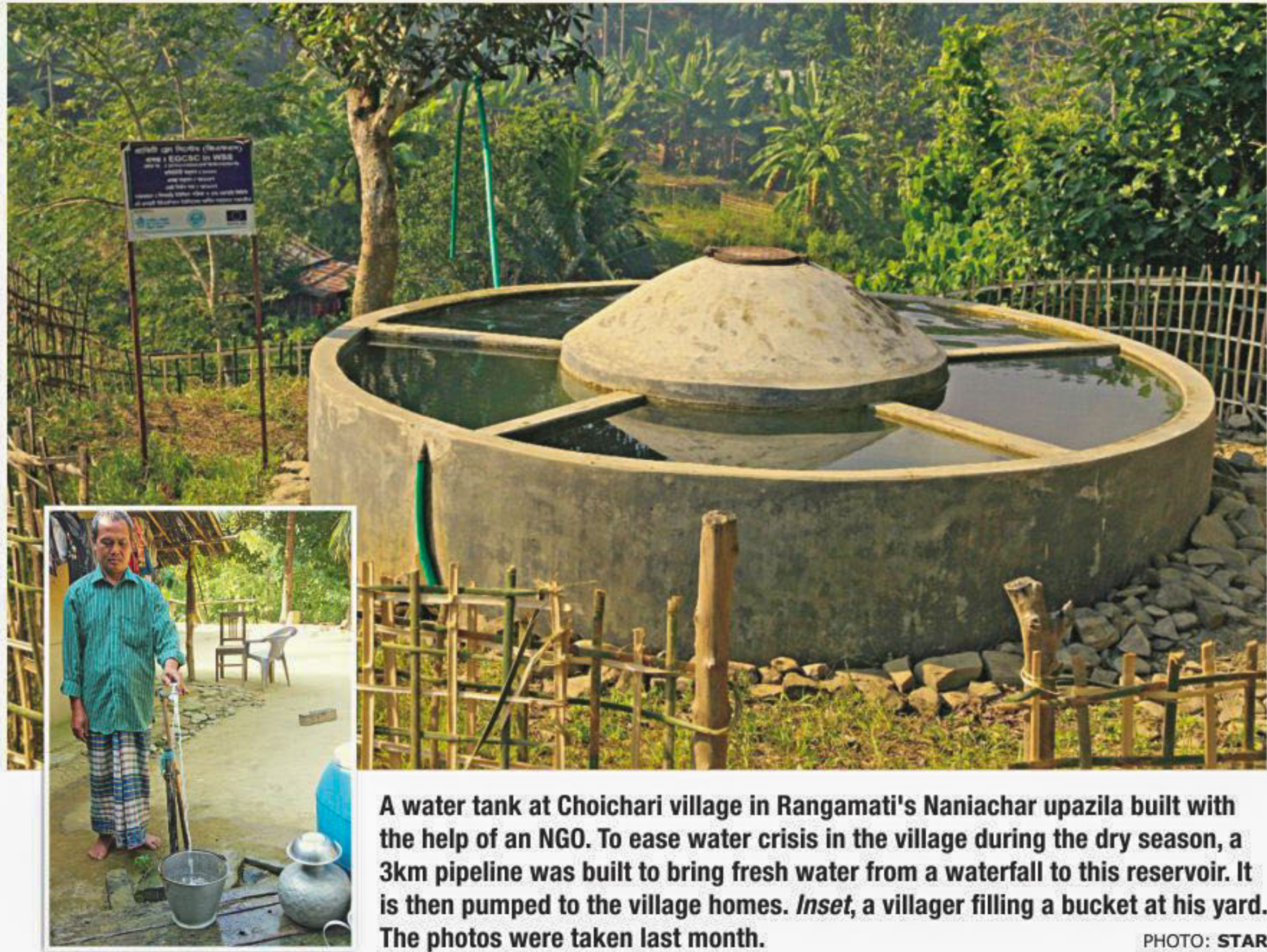
Science says that water flows in circles: we know that evaporation from river and sea returns water vapour to the sky, to condense and fall once more as precipitation. In hilltop Choichari village in Ghilachari union of Rangamati's Naniachar upazila, water also has a circular history, though of a different sort. The once pristine village was blessed by a runnel of fresh water running through its midst; but due to environmental degradation caused by logging, some years ago the runnel ran dry. But now, thanks to the efforts of villagers and the NGO 'Progressive', fresh water has returned.

"I don't have any trouble to get water now," says Sumati Chakma, 32, from Choichari. "We can simply sit at home and have drinking water. Many neighbouring housewives are also enjoying the improved situation. Not so long ago there was a water crisis.

Older villagers recall that once, thanks to nature, there was a lot of water. The village is built on both sides of the runnel upon which they relied. But day by day, due to logging the runnel ran dry; yet there was water during the rainy season, but in the dry months when there was water it was dirty, and at other times the village was water deprived. It wasn't only drinking water that was lacking; basic sanitation also became a luxury. As a result, many people died of diarrhoea. All 45 families who relied on the runnel-water suffered.

Then in 2008 the Village Development Committee, a village-based organisation, took up the challenge of ensuring a safe water supply. They called all the villagers to a meeting to discuss the issue and agreed to forest conservation initiatives, such as to preserve the forest for five kilometres around the village.

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A water tank at Choichari village in Rangamati's Naniachar upazila built with the help of an NGO. To ease water crisis in the village during the dry season, a 3km pipeline was built to bring fresh water from a waterfall to this reservoir. It is then pumped to the village homes. Inset, a villager filling a bucket at his yard. The photos were taken last month.

PHOTO: STAR

Process for a law underway

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for selecting the persons for appointment as judges to the HC.

The bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Krishna Debnath concluded hearing on the petition in September and kept the petition for giving its judgement any day.

Deputy Attorney General Motaher Hossain Sazu and petitioner's counsel Barrister Hassan MS Azim told this correspondent that the HC bench might give its verdict in January, as this court would go for annual vacation on December 16 and would reopen on January 2.

Barrister Azim said the HC had heard experts' opinions from four amice curiae (friends of the court) -- Dr

Kamal Hossain, Barrister Shafique Ahmed, Advocate AF Hasan Ariff and Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud -- on the petition.

During hearing on the petition, Dr Kamal Hossain, Barrister Shafique Ahmed, Advocate AF Hasan Ariff opined that the HC could frame guidelines for appointing its judges until a specific law was formulated, he said. Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud told the HC that parliament was the authority to pass a bill for formulating a law for recruitment of its judges, he added.

Following the writ petition, the HC on June 6, 2010 asked the government to explain why a specific guideline to appoint its judges should not be framed to bring transparency and

competitiveness in the process.

The government has not replied to the HC rule, Barrister Azim said.

The HC judges are now being appointed as per article 95(2) of the Constitution.

The article says the candidate must be a citizen of Bangladesh and have the experience of practising as a Supreme Court advocate for at least 10 years; or have held judicial office in Bangladesh for at least 10 years; or have such qualifications as may be prescribed by law for appointment as a judge of the High Court.

Different quarters have long been demanding a guideline to bring transparency and competitiveness in the recruitment process.

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha on December 7 at a programme in Dhaka said he too was in favour of a law for appointing HC judges.

The Supreme Court Bar Association has been demanding a guideline for several years and alleging that incompetent people were being appointed as judges on political consideration.

In November 2012, the law ministry prepared a draft guideline in consultation with the chief justice, specifying the academic qualifications and experience of a candidate.

The ministry sent the draft to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) the same month to forward it to the president for his approval.

However, the PMO sent the draft

back to the ministry in the face of opposition from some "influential" lawyers and judicial officials, a law ministry official told this correspondent.

Earlier on March 2, 2009, the Appellate Division in a judgement in a case (Idrisur Rahman vs Bangladesh case) said, "In the matter of selection of judges, the opinion of the chief justice should be dominant in the area of legal acumen and suitability for the appointment, and in the area of antecedents the opinion of the executive should be dominant."

"Together, the two should function to find out the most suitable candidates available for appointment through a transparent process of consultation."

Little success in nutrition

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"Early marriages, underweight babies -- this is a 'cycle of undernutrition.' The Strategic Review gives us insight; hope, it'll trigger wider discussion," WFP Chief of Staff James Harvey told The Daily Star.

For the past decade, the Strategic Review notes, prevalence of low birthweight in Bangladesh has hovered around 36-37 percent, which is high by international standards. Low birthweight babies tend to be more susceptible to stunting in later life.

More than one-third (36 percent) of under-five children in Bangladesh suffer from stunting, which means some 5.5 million children are suffering from chronic undernutrition. Furthermore, prevalence of acute malnutrition, as reflected in wasting, remains alarmingly stubborn, afflicting more than 2 million children.

Undernutrition includes being underweight for one's age, too short for one's age (stunted), too thin for one's height (wasted), and deficient in vitamins and minerals.

Development economist Prof SR Osmani, who led a six-member team in the 10-month exercise of Strategic Review, told The Daily Star that a massive campaign to the magnitudes of Bangladesh's previous successful ones -- population control, immunisation, sanitation -- is a must to break free the

'cycle of undernutrition.'

Often the teenaged mothers, he noted, are themselves malnourished and as a result many of them give births to babies with low birthweight.

According to the Strategic Review, "The problem of low birthweight is aggravated by a lack of access to diets of adequate nutritional quantity and quality. More than half the adolescent girls and women of reproductive age eat diets that are inadequate in both macro- and micronutrients."

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, who was present at the Strategic Review launch ceremony and was particularly perturbed by the sheer high number of child marriages, said: "This is causing us pains and the burden of which has to be borne by the future generations. We have to do something about it."

The minister said he would make budgetary allocation in the next fiscal year so that society and village-based movement could be launched against child marriage.

Defying the women and right bodies' outcry, government placed a bill - Child Marriage Restraint Act-2016 - in the parliament on Thursday (December 8) incorporating provision that allows girls under 18 to get married if the marriage was held in her best interest with prior permission of a court, which would consider the special circumstances,

and the consent of the parents. Critics fear misuse of this provision if the bill is passed as a law in its current form.

Christa Räder, country director of WFP Bangladesh, told The Daily Star that for the sake of reaping full benefits of the country's growth and prosperity, nutrition challenges have to be taken care of. She put emphasis on mother and childcare.

"The entire biological history of the mother matters, starting from her own birthweight at the beginning of her life, how she was fed and taken care of as a child, her physical stature as an adult, at what stage in life she started childbearing, and the quality of antenatal care and nutrition she received during pregnancy," observes the Strategic Review.

"Undernutrition already costs Bangladesh more than \$1 billion in lost productivity every year and even more in health costs," said Prof SR Osmani, who teaches at the UK's University of Ulster. "No country can expect to build a thriving economy on the backs of hungry and undernourished people."

All the experts strongly advocated for a social campaign with sole objective to increase the age of marriage as well as to postpone pregnancy of those girls who get married early, and said family planning support should be provided to them to achieve the latter (postponing pregnancy).

Pull migrants out of misery

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The theme of this year's summit is "Migration that Works for Sustainable Development for All: Towards a Transformative Migration Agenda".

Hasina called for securing a predictable and responsible international response to migrants and refugees to realise the pledges of "transformation" of the Agenda 2030.

"We've to ensure that their [migrants] rights are protected -- in all situations, regardless of their status as we all agreed in New York in September," she added.

Recognising migration's role in connecting communities, economies and societies, the PM said in a diverse and connected world, peace, stability and growth is equally essential. "Societies need to understand the benefits of diversity, for harmony among all people including the migrants."

A migrant is not just a labour, but he has a unique story to tell. He makes a great sacrifice as he leaves his family and country, said the premier.

"Migrants contribute their ideas, labour and resources to the development of the host societies. They also spend their best part of life for others. Often we ignore their human stories, their inalienable rights as human beings," Hasina told her audience.

About the global development vision, popularly known as Agenda 2030, she

said all need to identify convergence of interests, balance needs, aspirations, security concerns and opportunities to realise the goals.

She hoped that the GMFD will focus on some of the challenging issues like migrants in situations of crisis and conflicts, migration governance, diversity and harmony.

She mentioned Bangladesh's proposal on the comprehensive Global Compact for Migration Governance at the UN Summit on Migrants and Refugees which the world accepted in September.

The PM urged the participants to be ambitious, pragmatic and balanced in designing a new compact.

Hasina also said the international community was working with states and civil society to push for a comprehensive Global Compact of Migrants and Refugees by 2018.

LGRD Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Nurul Islam, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, Under Secretary General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs representing the UN Secretary General Wu Hongbo, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Director General Guy Ryder, International Organisation for Migration DG William Lacy Swing and ILO DG Lakshmi Puri also spoke at the

Driverless

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for Roborace -- a proposed race series where driverless cars will compete on temporary city circuits.

"It's the first time we've run the Devbot in driverless mode on a Formula E track in the middle of a city street," Roborace's Justin Cooke told CNN.

"It's so exciting for the team who put hours and hours of work in. These guys were up to 1-2 a.m. in the morning developing a technology that no one else in the world is able to do at this speed and in these complicated environments."

Using a variety of sensors -- including GPS, radar and ultrasonics -- allied to sophisticated computer programmes, the car learns how to navigate a track at speed avoiding all obstacles.

"What we are doing is at the forefront of technology right now," says Cooke, who is also CMO of Kinetik -- an investment company founded by Russian businessman Denis Sverdlov which is providing financial backing for the project.

"There are two or three kinds of space races, if you will -- some people are going to Mars, we're developing robotic cars and I think it's probably one of the most, if not the most exciting space in the world right now."

After the successful 30-minute test in Marrakech -- this year's host city for the United Nations climate change conference (COP22) -- Cooke say the company will next try racing two cars together on track with the eventual aim of having up to 10 cars competing at every Formula E ePrix weekend.

"To be here at COP22 when we are celebrating an electric future, a driverless future -- it's the perfect time for Roborace," Cooke enthuses.

"More than anything we want people to be excited about the technology because it's going to change our lives, it's going to transform our cities."

52 children still at Indian safe home

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According to Child in Need Institute (CINI), a voluntary organisation in India, 203 Bangladeshi children are trapped in different shelter homes in West Bengal.

The Deputy High Commission of Bangladesh in Kolkata confirmed the figure.

Children at Shuvayan Home wrote to PM Hasina with the help of the voluntary organisation on August 1 this year.

Suroj Das, a local caretaker of Child Line, yesterday said the remaining 33 children of those who wrote the letter from the shelter home were spending days in inhuman conditions.

Recently the West Bengal government issued a letter to the CINI asking for assistance in sending Bangladeshi children back.

The Deputy High Commission also sent a list of 203 Bangladeshi children to the CINI and requested it to help get them back, said Subir Roy, senior programme manager of the CINI.

The voluntary organisation was involved in the process as per an initiative taken by the Department of Women and Children of the West Bengal government.

Subir expressed the hope that the organisation would be able to send the children to Bangladesh soon.

Consular (Political) BM Jamal Hossain of Bangladesh Deputy High



Eight Bangladeshi teenagers, who had been trafficked to India, return home yesterday. The photo was taken as they were walking towards the Hili Land Port immigration post in Hakimpur upazila of Dinajpur.

PHOTO: STAR

Commission said whenever the mission received information about trapped Bangladeshi citizens they took prompt actions.

The boys repatriated yesterday were identified as Sohel Rana, Amit Chandra Roy, Azizul Islam, Mizanur Rahman, Goutam Roy and Sujana Ali of Kaharol upazila of Dinajpur, Ariful

Islam of Pirganj upazila of Thakurgaon and Jonayed Ahmed of Keraniganj upazila of Dhaka.

Nazir Hossain, in-charge of Indian Hili Immigration, handed over the boys to his Bangladeshi counterpart Md Rafiquzzaman.

Rafiquzzaman said he handed over the boys to their parents after completing formalities.

These boys -- aged between 13 and 15 -- had been trafficked to India through different borders. Later, Indian police and Border Security Force rescued them from traffickers and sent them to the shelter home.

[Our Dinajpur correspondent contributed to this report]

No troops for N'ganj polls

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polling stations and check other electoral irregularities.

The directives came at a meeting among the EC, senior officials of intelligence and law enforcement agencies and the administration at the National Economic Council (NEC) auditorium in the capital yesterday.

The NCC elections will be held on December 22. Seven mayoral candidates, 156 councillor aspirants for general wards and 38 for reserved (women) wards are contesting the polls.

The CEC asked law enforcers to beef up patrolling and make it visible to voters, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

Such an environment must be ensured that no voter could say 'I could not cast my vote,' the sources quoting the CEC said.

Expressing dissatisfaction over law enforcers' role in some previous polls to local government bodies, the CEC said he could not understand how polling stations were occupied in presence of law enforcers.

He added a few untoward incidents occurred in some past elections that caused the EC to face criticism, said the sources.

At the meeting, officials of intelligence agencies said currently there was no threat of any untoward incident ahead of the election, although they kept vigil to foil any such attempts.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) AKM Shahidul Hoque and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Director General Benazir Ahmed said pre-election atmosphere is peaceful.

After the meeting, the CEC at a formal press briefing told reporters, "Law and order in Narayanganj is normal. The situation will improve further. No such situation has been created that requires army deployment."

Police, Rab, and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) would be on duty during the elections as usual, he said.

IVY'S CLAIM

Ruling Awami League's mayoral candidate Selina Hayat Ivy yesterday said she did not oppose deployment of army and it was the decision of the EC, reports a correspondent from Narayanganj.

"I want a free and fair election. I do not want any extra favour from the EC," she told reporters while conducting a campaign in the city's Chashara area.

She also claimed that all candidates including the BNP's mayor aspirant were conducting electoral campaign freely.

FAKHRUL'S CAMPAIGN

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the future of the country and next parliamentary election would depend on the results of the NCC polls.

"People are deprived of their voting rights. We believe our candidate will win as people have taken a position in favour of the BNP-nominated mayoral candidate," he said while talking to reporters during electioneering in favour of Shakhawat Hossain.

Led by Fakhrul, a team of BNP-led 20-party alliance carried out the campaign in different areas including Kalibazar, Galachipa and Chashara.