

JP retains Kurigram-3

STAR REPORT

Jatiya Party (JP) candidate Akkas Ali Sarker won the by-polls to Kurigram-3 by 2,703 votes.

Akkas, whose electoral symbol is a plough, led the race with 82,598 votes, with Awami League candidate MA Matin and his boat symbol close behind with 79,895 votes.

A total of 1,64,346 out of 3,63,075 voters exercised their franchise in the by-polls, which resulted in a 45.27 per cent voter turnout.

Of the votes cast, 1,853 were declared to be spoiled.

The parliamentary seat fell vacant after the death Jatiya Party MP AKM Maidul Islam on May 11.

The JP, now the main opposition, has 40 seats in parliament -- 35 general seats and five seats reserved for women.

We made history

FROM PAGE 1

According to BBC Urdu, women turnout was high at Lower Dir's Government Higher Secondary School Rabaat.

Meanwhile, Express Tribune's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bureau Chief Iftikhar Firdous tweeted a photo of women in Mohmand tribal district's Bayzai sub-division, some 5 kilometres from the Afghan border, going to vote for the first time.

North Waziristan Government Administrator Mohammad Ayaz Khan told AP that women had voted in the tribal region for the first time. "We made history today. It is the first time that women have come out of their homes to cast their vote," he said.

Local administration in South Waziristan also confirmed that female voter turnout is "extremely healthy", and that no complaints had been received from anywhere.

Other areas that saw an unprecedented turnout of women voters included Badin, Mithi and Kohistan where a large number of women voters were spotted casting their votes.

However, Dawn NewsTV reported that women's turnout in Upper and Lower Dir, Bajaur, Khyber Division, Shangla, Mohmand, Charsadda and Peshawar's suburban areas is nearly non-existent.

Although political parties, particularly religious parties, had said during their election campaigns that women should be allowed to vote, women in some parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been forbidden to vote by local jirgas, and at certain polling stations in various constituencies.

WOMEN STOPPED FROM VOTING

In Peshawar, despite a fair turnout of female voters reported, low turnout of women was apparent in the Haji Banda, Acheni Bala and Hajiabad areas.

Men also entered a women's polling station in Peshawar and attempted to shut it down, Dawn NewsTV reported.

Bars on women voters were reported in Swabi district's Adina area, Buner's Gulbandi, Balo Khan, Narbatol and Dokada areas.

The ECP asked mosques in Buner to announce on their loudspeakers that women should go cast their votes.

Extensive reports were received about women being prevented from voting in various areas of KP and Punjab.

In Shangla, women were not permitted to vote at polling stations where men were also voting. In Swabi, although a jirga placed a ban on women voting, police and army officials insisted on women voting and ensured they were brought out of their homes to vote.

In Puniab, women were prevented from voting in Kot Momin, Mandi Bahauddin, Chiniot and Chakwal.

In Chakwal's Dharnal area, women voters were sent back home, with men at polling stations claiming it is un-Islamic for women to cast votes, BBC Urdu reported.

The ECP, meanwhile, took notice of reports that women were prevented from voting in Swabi and Malakand. The ECP Monitoring Cell contacted the Gender Desk's deputy commissioner in Swabi in this regard.

The ECP secretary also confirmed that complaints had been received regarding restrictions on women voters in Nowshera's PK-65 area.

The ECP had earlier said that turnout of less than 10 percent of women voters at any polling station across the country would lead to the results from those polling stations being considered null and void.

Voting is segregated throughout the country with even single polling stations divided between men and women, including separate election officials.

One of the reasons behind this is to encourage more women to come out and vote, particularly in more conservative parts of the country.



AL mayor candidate for Rajshahi City Corporation AHM Khairuzzaman Liton greets a rickshaw puller and asks for a vote in Mohishbatan of Rajpara in the city yesterday while his rival BNP's Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul, right, campaigns in ward-20 of the city.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

BNP worried about its polling agents

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said, "We are worried that the law enforcement agencies would harass our agents."

The BNP has enough activists to make polling agents, he added.

Each mayoral candidate would have to place 926 polling agents inside as many booths at 134 polling centres.

In Rajshahi, the BNP has already trained more than twice the required number of polling agents amid fears of police harassment.

Despite this, the party has refused the Election Commission's request for a list of polling agents of all mayoral candidates so that the Commission could provide them security.

During his recent visit to Rajshahi, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) Shahadat Hossain urged candidates to submit a list of their polling agents to the EC. He promised to provide the agents with security, given there are no criminal charges against them.

BNP leader Tofazzal Hossain Topu said his party would not provide the EC with such a list fearing that the police would then know who to harass before the election.

"The police are already arresting our men every night," he told The Daily Star.

"The Election Commissioner's statement has political purposes. If the commission was really sincere about

its intention to provide security, they would have issued an official circular about it."

Rajshahi city BNP office secretary Nazmul Haque said, "In some polling centres, where the BNP has fewer supporters than Awami League, we did not find polling agents at first. But we finally managed to train dedicated individuals."

Awami League leaders said they have trained some 2,400 polling agents.

Mayoral nominees are expected to deploy at least one polling agent at each of the 1,026 booths in 138 polling centres in 30 wards of Rajshahi City Corporation on the election day.

In Barisal, BNP insiders said they

selected more than one polling agent for each booth.

Top leaders advised polling agents to stay out of home at night, they said.

"Our main opponent is the administration, not the Awami League. If the Awami League does something we can at least face it politically," said Ebaydul Haque Chan, member secretary of BNP campaign committee.

BNP mayoral nominee Mujibur Rahaman Sarwar said, "We will stay at the polling centres till results are declared. We instructed our agents to stay at the centres no matter what."

The party is now examining whether its polling agents are facing any criminal charges.

CEC WRITES TO SPEAKER

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda sent a letter to Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury yesterday requesting her not to allow any lawmaker to participate in the city election campaigns.

The move comes amid reports of lawmakers participating in the campaigns violating the EC's code of conduct, EC Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed told The Daily Star.

Incidents of AL lawmakers seeking votes for their party's mayoral nominees have been reported in the media for the last few days.

Asked about the arrests of BNP leaders and activists, Helal said police arrested them over specific allegations.

'Blatant rigging', blast mar Pakistan polls

FROM PAGE 1

Hours after voting came to an end at 6:00pm, PTI supporters across the country started early celebrations in anticipation of their party's victory.

According to Dawn, PTI is ahead with 109 constituencies, PML-N is trailing behind with 67 while PPP is at third spot with 38 seats.

Sharif's brother Shehbaz, who now leads the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), rejected the count after complaints soldiers stationed in polling stations had thrown out political parties' monitors during the tabulations.

"It is a sheer rigging. The way the people's mandate has blatantly been insulted, it is intolerable," Shehbaz told a news conference as the counting continued.

"We totally reject this result," he said. "It is a big shock to Pakistan's democratic process."

Yesterday's election will be only the second civilian transfer of power in Pakistan's 71-year history.

But campaigning has been plagued for months by allegations the powerful armed forces have been trying to tilt the race in Khan's favour after falling out with the outgoing ruling party of Sharif, who was jailed on corruption charges this month.

About 371,000 soldiers have been stationed at polling stations across the country, nearly five times the number deployed at the last election in 2013.

The voting was marred by a suicide bombing that killed 31 people near a polling station in Quetta, capital of the southwestern province of Baluchistan. Islamic State claimed responsibility.

During the count, outgoing PML-N Defence Minister Khurram Dastgir-Khan tweeted that official result forms were not given at hundreds of polling stations, decrying what he called "blatant, callous, shameless rigging".

The third major party, the Pakistan Peoples Party, also complained that its polling agents were asked to leave during the vote count in a number of voting centres.

"This is the warning bell of a serious threat," said PPP senator Sherry Rehman. "This whole election could be null and void, and we don't want this."

Several smaller parties made similar complaints in public statements.

Whichever party wins, it will face a mounting and urgent in-tray, from a brewing economic crisis to worsening relations with on-off ally the United States to deepening cross-country water shortages.

An anti-corruption crusader, Khan

has promised an "Islamic welfare state" and cast his populist campaign as a battle to topple a predatory political elite hindering development in the impoverished mostly-Muslim nation of 208 million people, where the illiteracy rate hovers above 40 percent.

"This is the most important election in Pakistan's history," Khan, 65, said after casting his vote in the capital, Islamabad.

"I ask everyone today - be a citizen, cherish this country, worry about this country, use your vote."

PROSPECT OF WEEKS OF HAGGLING

Khan has staunchly denied allegations by PML-N that he is getting help from the military, which has ruled Pakistan for about half of its history and still sets key security and foreign policy in the nuclear-armed nation. The army has also dismissed allegations of meddling in the election.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has inched ahead of PML-N in recent national polls, but even if it gets the most votes, it will likely struggle to win a majority, raising the prospect of weeks of haggling to form a messy coalition government.

Such a delay could further imperil Pakistan's economy, with a looming

currency crisis expected to force the new government to turn to the IMF for Pakistan's second bailout since 2013. PTI has not ruled out seeking succour from China, Islamabad's closest ally.

The PML-N has sought to turn the vote into a referendum on democracy, and has said it was campaigning to protect the "sanctity of the vote", a reference to a history of political interference by the military.

The PPP, which has been overtaken by Khan's PTI as the main challenger to PML-N, has also alleged intimidation by spy agencies.

PML-N spokeswoman Maryam Aurangzeb also said there had been complaints about the vote counting.

"We have serious reservations. Our political agents have been pushed out and results are being withheld," she told a press conference.

PML-N's campaign had been reinvigorated by the return to Pakistan of Nawaz Sharif, 68, who was earlier this month convicted and sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison over the purchase of upscale London apartments using offshore companies in the mid-1990s.

Sharif has denied any wrongdoing and accused elements of the judiciary and military of conspiring to bring down his government.

4 killed

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in the district.

In Khulna, the "drug peddler" killed was identified as Imran alias Rocky.

Hasan Emon Al Razib, commanding officer of Khulna's Rab-6, told The Daily Star that Rocky was killed in a "shootout" that took place at around 1:25am in Daulatpur area, when a Rab team signaled a moving motorcycle to stop. The men on the motorcycle attempted to flee and when Rab officials began chasing them, they opened fire which forced the law enforcers to retaliate.

Rocky was left injured while the others managed to flee. He was sent to Khulna Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, he said.

Rab claimed it recovered a revolver, three bullets and 308 yaba pills from the spot.

Rocky's family, however, claimed that he was picked up by Rab more than two weeks ago, a claim that Rab denied.

Mizanur Rahman, Rocky's father, yesterday told our Khulna correspondent that Rab had detained his son on July 7 from Rampal Power Plant area where he worked and many workers had even witnessed it.

Rocky's mother, Nasrin Begum, had lodged a general diary at Rampal Thana on Sunday in this regard.

"We had been searching for my son since then. I went to over 15 police stations to look for him. Today we came to know that he was killed," Mizanur said.

Mostaq Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Daulatpur Police Station, said Rocky was accused in seven cases, including two for drug peddling.

The other alleged drug peddler, Sazzad Ali, was killed in a "gunfight" with Rab at Paba upazila in Rajshahi.

Maj Ashraful Islam of Rab-5 in Rajshahi alleged that the gunfight began when a Rab team ordered a group of suspected drugs peddlers to surrender in Kosba area at around 1:00am. The criminals opened fire on the Rab officials who retaliated. Ali was left injured as the others managed to flee.

He was declared dead after he was taken to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Rab claimed that 50 bottles of phensedyl, a pistol and a bullet were recovered from the spot.

Ali had at least seven cases for drug peddling filed against him, Maj Ashraful said.

With the two, the number of drug peddlers killed since the anti-narcotics drive began on May 4 rises to 199. Most of them were killed in incidents of "shootouts" with police or Rab.

In Jessore, police recovered the bullet-hit bodies of two "robbers" from Jessore-Manirampur road in Sadar upazila at around 2:55am.

The identities of the dead could not yet be known, reports our Benapole correspondent.

Find out the coal culprits

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Meanwhile, the coalmine's Manager (administration) Anisur Rahman filed a case with Parbatipur Model Police Station against 19 officials on Tuesday night.

According to the case statement, a small volume of coal was explored from the mine during the roadway development of the coalmine before 2005. Some of it was sold, while the rest was stockpiled.

Since September 10, 2005, the Barapukuria Coal Mine Company began commercial exploration and maintained the stock record by adding the previous stock with the freshly extracted coal.

The development of the mine began in 2001. Between 2001 and July 19 this year, some 1,01,66,042.33 tonnes were explored. Of that, about 66,87,029 tonnes were supplied to the power plant while 33,19,280.37 tonnes were sold to various private companies. Another 12,088.27 tonnes were used at the mine's boiler (for internal use

such as for air conditioners, heating system etc).

On July 19 this year, there should have been a stock of 1,47,644 tonnes, but there were only 3,000 tonnes, said the case statement.

This means, there was a deficit of 1,44,644 tonnes worth about Tk 230 crore, it added.

It appears that some of the accused in the case may have long been involved in the theft of the coal in connivance with the previous managements, the case statement reads.

A copy of the case was sent to the Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday.

The ACC has already opened a separate inquiry. A three-member ACC team visited the mine on Monday.

The 19 accused are: Abu Taher Md Nuruzzaman Chowdhury, general manager (suspended), Khaledul Islam, deputy general manager (suspended), Habib Uddin Ahmed, former managing director, (withdrawn and now made OSD) Abul Kashem

Prodhania, former general manager (administration) and company's secretary (stand released), Mosharaf Hossain, former general manager (exploration), Masudur Rahman Hawladar, manager (general services), Ashok Kumar Haldar, manager (production management), Arifur Rahman manager (maintenance and operation), Zahidul Islam, manager (design, construction and maintenance), Ekramul Haque, deputy manager (safety management), Muhammad Khalilur Rahman, deputy manager (coal handling and management), Morsheduzzaman, deputy manager (maintenance and operation), Habibur Rahman, deputy manager (production management), Zahidur Rahman, deputy manager (mine development), Sattayendra Nath Barman, assistant manager (ventilation management), Syed Imam Hasan, manager (security), Jobaer Ali, deputy general manager (mine planning operation), Abdul Mannan Patwari, former general manager (finance) and

Gopal Chandra Saha, acting general manager (finance).

NEUTRAL PROBE DEMANDED

The Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) demanded formation of a neutral and acceptable committee to investigate the "scam" and called for punishment of the culprits.

They also called on the government to publish the total amount of the coal extracted, its distribution and total price.

The Petrobangla, the mine authorities and the power and energy ministry cannot avoid their responsibility for the coal going missing, said the statement, signed by Syeda Rizwana Hasan on behalf of both the TIB and the BELA.

The TIB and the BELA also urged the ACC to show highest professionalism and carry out the investigation objectively and without giving in to any pressure in the national interest.

[Our Dinajpur correspondent contributed to this report].

Liquid water lake revealed on Mars

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Scientists are eager to find signs of contemporary water, because such discoveries are key to unlocking the mystery of whether life ever formed on Mars in its ancient past, or if it might persist today.

"This is a stunning result that suggests water on Mars is not a temporary trickle like previous discoveries but a persistent body of water that provides the conditions for life for extended periods of time," said Alan Duffy, an

associate professor at Swinburne University in Australia, who was not involved in the study.

Being able to access water sources could also help humans survive on a future crewed mission to Earth's neighbouring planet.

This particular lake, however, would be neither swimmable nor drinkable, and lies almost a mile deep (1.5 kilometers) beneath the icy surface in a harsh and frigid environment.

Whether microbial forms of life

could lie within is a matter of debate.

Some experts are skeptical of the possibility since the lake is so cold and briny, and mixed with a heavy dose of dissolved Martian salts and minerals.

The temperature is likely below the freezing point of pure water, but can remain liquid due to the presence of magnesium, calcium, and sodium.

"This is a discovery of extraordinary significance, and is bound to heighten speculation about the presence of

living organisms on the Red Planet," said Fred Watson of the Australian Astronomical Observatory.

"Caution needs to be exercised, however, as the concentration of salts needed to keep the water liquid could be fatal for any microbial life similar to Earth's," added Watson, who was not involved in the research.

The discovery was made using a radar instrument on board the European Space Agency's Mars Express orbiter, which launched in 2003.