

# CEC happy with polls

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) KM Nurul Huda has expressed satisfaction over yesterday's three city corporation elections, saying the polls were "considerably good". "Some irregularities took place in Barisal City Corporation polls but the rest of the elections were peaceful," he said at his office in the city. The BNP alleged that the government and the Election Commission jointly staged a farce in the name of elections.

The ruling Awami League said that the BNP was "following its strategy for polls boycott as it wants to create an issue ahead of the upcoming general elections".

Meanwhile, Left Democratic Alliance (LDA), a platform of eight left-leaning organisations, demanded re-elections to the three city corporations in Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet. It termed the polls "farce".

Communist party of Bangladesh (CPB) also demanded re-elections, saying the EC "failed to hold fair polls".

Talking to reporters at the Election Commission, the CEC claimed that peaceful voting was held at all the 138 polling centres in Rajshahi.

In Sylhet, elections at all the 134 centres, except for two, were fair, he said.

In Barisal, voting was postponed at one centre out of total 123 while the results from 15 more polling centres were withheld due to sporadic incidents, the CEC added.

At a press conference at the party headquarters at Naya Paltan, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said yesterday's polls were worse than that of Khulna and Gazipur.

"It's not voting, it's a farce in the three cities".

He alleged that AL men indulged in vote rigging after driving the polling agents of the BNP candidates out of most of the polling centres.

Rizvi also alleged that the ruling party men were aided by law enforcers.

At another press conference at the AL president's Dhanmondi office, party's General Secretary Obaidul Quader said the aim of the BNP was to "make the elections controversial".

Quader, also the road, transport and bridges minister, claimed that the government foiled the "evil attempt" of the BNP.

BNP did not want to win the elections and the party's mayoral runner for Rajshahi city "staged a drama by not casting his vote", he said.

"There were no causalities during SEE PAGE 10 COL 4



From left, Sadik Abdullah, Awami League mayoral candidate in Barisal City Corporation polls, comes out after visiting a polling centre at Kashipur Girls' High School and College in the city. From the corridor of the centre, a police official waves at the mayor aspirant. Sadik gives a thumbs up from the school premises to the AL men and police personnel inside the polling centre. The photos were taken around 9:30am yesterday. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# AL wins 2

FROM PAGE 1 The common picture of the three cities was the ruling party supporters or activists wearing badges of boat, the electoral symbol of AL, turned up in huge number and took control of the premises, entrances and even inside of the many polling stations in a gross violation of the electoral law.

The returning officers announced the results around midnight. The counts show that AL's AHM Khairuzzaman Liton secured 1,65,096 votes in Rajshahi, while Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul of BNP, the immediate-past mayor, bagged 77,700.

In Sylhet, the BNP retained its stronghold as party candidate Ariful Haque Chowdhury won by a small margin, securing 90,496 votes while Badruddin Ahmed Kamran of AL got 85,870.

Polling at the city's two centres, which have 4,787 voters listed, was suspended due to violence. Returning Officer Alimuzzaman referred the matter to the Election Commission headquarters in the capital.

The Barisal city dwellers will see a new face in the mayor office as Serniabat Sadik Abdullah, son of veteran AL leader Abul Hasnat Abdullah, got 1,07,353 votes and BNP's Mujibur Rahman Sarwar 13,135.

In the polls violence in Barisal and Sylhet, a magistrate and seven journalists, including a reporter of The Daily Star, were injured.

A mayoral candidate, Manisha Chakraborty of BSD, was assaulted as she protested snatching of ballot papers by AL supporters at a polling station in ward-17 in Barisal. She got 1,917 votes.

Twelve correspondents and three

photographers of The Daily Star visited 111 out of 395 polling centres in the three cities and saw how the AL activists and supporters exercised power to influence voting in many of the centres.

Our correspondents reported incidents of ballot stuffing, casting fake votes and driving out or barring rival polling agents.

As per electoral rules, no campaigns and show of strength like gatherings are allowed within 400 yards of the centres during the voting. Anyone violating this may face up to two years in prison.

But many AL men apart from polling agents stayed inside the polling booths and moved from one booth to another without any obstruction.

A huge number of law enforcers were deployed in the cities but they mostly played the role of silent spectators.

The ruling AL brushed aside all the allegations and claimed that the voting underwent in a festive mood and that the BNP was out to make it controversial.

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda expressed satisfaction over the three city polls.

"We never want irregularities but there were some [during the voting]. Those who boycotted the election can say how they viewed the election. But I am satisfied with the three city polls."

BNP leaders had already been apprehensive about free and fair elections, saying the AL might resort to "vote rigging" in the elections like it did in the Khulna and Gazipur polls.

In the run-up to the elections, a number of BNP leaders and activists

were arrested and harassed, a feature that was seen ahead of the Khulna and Gazipur elections.

The polling agents of BNP candidates were allegedly driven out of all the polling stations during the two city elections, held on May 15 and June 26. Supporters of BNP candidates were hardly seen at the centres dominated by AL men.

A major feature of yesterday's polls was the boycott of election in Barisal -- mayoral contenders of BNP, Jatiya Party, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) and Bangladesh Islami Andolan announced it.

Voting was cancelled in one centre and suspended in 15 others following different irregularities there. There are 123 polling centres in Barisal.

At a press conference around noon, Mujibur Rahman Sarwar announced the polls boycott, alleging that the ballot papers in 70 to 80 centres were stamped in favour of AL's mayoral candidate even before the voting began.

Besides, the polling agents of BNP and other parties were not allowed in the polling centres, he said.

"I was elected MP four times and mayor once. But I never saw such an election during any government's tenure. This government could just announce and take it all without holding such a farcical election."

Sarwar said they were doubtful whether the election would be fair since the AL candidate is a relative of the prime minister. "We were assured by the prime minister and the Election Commission [of fair polls], but our apprehension came true."

However, AL's Sadik Abdullah, after casting vote at Barisal College Centre, told reporters that the elections were being held in a free and peaceful way. "I am hopeful about my victory."

In Rajshahi, BNP's Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul refrained from casting vote and staged a sit-in at Islamia College centre.

"I did not cast vote. I am concerned over democracy that is now in jeopardy," he said, adding that he visited 35 centres and found irregularities everywhere.

"That's why I am sitting here," he said. "Who would I fight? Law enforcement agencies, presiding officers, polling officers -- everyone is involved," he added.

AL candidate Liton, however, said he would clinch a landslide victory against his rivals.

"It was a free and festive election. After the independence, the countrymen did not see any election like what was held in Rajshahi city today [yesterday]," he told reporters after polling ended.

Earlier, after casting vote at Satellite Town High School, he said, "I am almost cent percent sure that I will win. I have seen enthusiasm among voters as they want a change."

Most of yesterday's incidents of violence were reported from Sylhet.

Executive Magistrate Motiur Rahman was hurt by brick chunks hurled during fights between followers of two councillor candidates in Kumarpara around 1:30pm while he was passing through the area in a car.

Proloy Kumar Saha, assistant returning officer, confirmed that Motiur was injured.

Voting was also suspended at

Khasdobir Government Primary School for half an hour after AL men allegedly snatched ballot papers in the presence of AL's mayor candidate Kamran.

Kamran entered a booth of the polling station while his supporters stormed two others, said witnesses.

The supporters allegedly drove all the agents of rival candidates, voters and presiding officers from the centre, alleged Rassel Miah, an agent of the BNP candidate.

Soon after the polling ended, BNP's mayoral candidate Arif at a press conference at his office in Kazi Tula area said he would reject the election result whatever that would be.

"It was not a theft of votes; it was a robbery in broad daylight in the presence of law enforcers," he said.

Later at night, after it was known that he was leading in polls, Arif told journalists, "This is the victory of the people."

Asked about his earlier statement that he wanted re-polling whatever the result would be, he said, "I had said if rigging continues, I will demand re-election."

In his reaction after casting vote, Kamran said, "The voting is going on in a fair manner and will end likewise."

In the 2013 polls in Barisal, Khulna, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Gazipur city corporations, BNP-backed candidates won all the five mayoral posts months before the 2014 national elections.

With the two AL candidates coming out victorious yesterday, the ruling party swept back to four city corporations months ahead of parliamentary election likely to be held in December.

# Woman, 2 daughters found dead at home

UNB, Sylhet

A woman and her two daughters were found dead in their home in Sylhet city's Dakkhin Surma area yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Jony Begum Sheuli, 32, wife of Hasan Munshi of Kamalapur in Maksudpur upazila of Gopalganj district, and their daughters -- Mim, 15, and Sima, 12.

Smelling bad odour coming from the house at Mostafa Miah Colony in Jhalopara, neighbours called police, said Officer-in-Charge Khairul Fazal of Dakkhin Surma Police Station.

Later, police broke open the door to find the trio lying dead, he said.

They could not trace Hasan Munshi, the OC said.

# Alleged drug

FROM PAGE 16 anti-narcotics drive began on May 4. Most of them were killed in so-called shootouts involving police and Rab.

The Rab official said yesterday's "shootout" happened around 1:15am when a Rab team raided Basila in Mohammadpur on information that some "drug peddlers" were dividing a consignment of drugs among themselves. The drugs were brought there on boats from Amin Bazar area, he said.

Sensing presence of the law enforcers, the "criminals" opened fire. The Rab men retaliated, triggering the "gunfight". Rajon was hit by bullets, the others fled, the Rab official added.

Rajon was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead. Rab claimed to have recovered a pistol, two bullets and 10kg of cannabis from the spot.

# 40 lakh left off Assam citizen list

FROM PAGE 1 to identify and isolate people who do not vote for the BJP. "Are Bangalees being forced out of Assam?" West Bengal's Anandabazar Patrika quoted her yesterday.

"As many as four million Bangalees have been declared non-Indians. Bengal and Assam share borders. Other states would not be as adversely affected as Bengal. Bengal and Bangladesh will be the most affected by this decision," the Hindustan Times quoted her.

"They are turning Indian people into refugees in their own country," she said at a press meet, adding that she would try to meet Home Minister Rajnath Singh. "I am sending a team of party MPs to Assam and if necessary, I will go there too."

Mamata said many people have been identified as foreigners and they are to be sent back.

"There are many children and women among them ... So many Bengalis, Biharis, Hindus, Muslims ... they are very much Indians," she said, terming the move a game plan to evict human beings forcibly and an attempt

to isolate them in order to get votes, NDTV reports.

Amid an uproar in Lok Sabha, Home Minister Rajnath Singh asked the opposition not to politicise the "sensitive" issue.

In the face of criticism by Trinamool, Congress, CPI (M) and Samawadi Party that the draft puts "human rights and democratic rights" of people at stake, he said the NRC was being done as per a Supreme Court order.

Unsatisfied with his answers, the opposition walked out of the House.

Registrar General of India Sailesh, while releasing the NRC draft, said no one would be deported or arrested. He said those left out could appeal and the process would begin on August 30 and continue until September 28.

Assam Chief Minister Sabananda Sonowal also said no one would be sent to any detention camp.

But West Bengal's Anandabazar Patrika yesterday reported that the authorities started putting people in temporary detention camps. It said 900 people, including some women and children, were put in six detention

## ASSAM'S LIST OF CITIZENS

- ▶ 3.29cr applied, 2.89cr got listed
- ▶ Those who are left out can file objections
- ▶ Final list will be published in December
- ▶ Suspects are being taken to temporary detention camps

camps in Assam.

On Sunday, 52 people who went to Assam between 2012 and 2017, as claimed by the authorities, were sent back to Bangladesh, reported India's Bangla newspaper Dainik Jugasankha.

The NRC is an exercise first carried out in 1951 to enumerate the citizens, their houses and holdings. The list was updated to weed out illegal immigrants as per a provision of the Assam Accord. It was decided that anyone residing illegally in Assam from March 25, 1971 (as per the accord) would be kept out of the list, reported Hindustan

Times.

The first draft was published on December 31, 2017, and the names of 1.9 crore of the 3.29 crore applicants were incorporated.

BANGLADESH MUM Bangladesh has been silent about the developments in Assam but a foreign affairs expert in Dhaka warned that the issue could have "dangerous" implications, like that of the Rohingya crisis.

Former ambassador Humayun Kabir said Bangladesh should not be silent and it should take steps while there was still time.

"As of now, this is an internal matter of India, but Bangladesh government should officially seek information on the situation in Assam," he told The Daily Star.

He said Bangladesh had taken a similar stance when the crisis in Rakhine State was brewing and it had said it was an "internal matter" of Myanmar; but ultimately the burden of over 1.1 million Rohingyas fell on its shoulder.

He believes the government should immediately ask New Delhi to inform Dhaka about developments, India's

plans, and how they intend to accommodate the 40 lakh people excluded in the NRC.

International affairs expert Prof Imtiaz Ahmed of Dhaka University, however, said Bangladesh should convey the message to India that the problem in Assam was its own and India itself must resolve it.

He endorsed the stance of the foreign ministry that Bangladesh should not react or take up the issue with India.

A government high official said the issue has not been raised at any official level by India at any stage, so "why would Bangladesh raise it in advance?"

Asked about the latest development, a senior foreign ministry official referred to the July 24 comment of Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi Syed Muazzem Ali. He told reporters in Kolkata that the publication of the draft NRC in Assam was an "internal matter" of India and Bangladesh would not interfere.

The official said the issue could become "bilateral" only after India took it up with Bangladesh.

# PPP, PML-N join hands

FROM PAGE 16 "It was a very good meeting and you can call it a meeting of the minds," the PML-N leader said, adding that there was complete unanimity of views between the two parties that the "July 25 elections have been stolen".

He said both sides were of the view that they should "completely reject" the election results and should adopt "a coordinated joint opposition strategy" to give a tough time to the Imran Khan-led PTI government while staying inside parliament.

He said the two parties would meet again as the PML-N had told the PPP representatives that it would inform them about its decision on a proposal of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) to boycott parliament. He said the PPP delegation had informed the PML-N that they were not in favour of boycotting parliament.

The PPP delegation comprised

Yousuf Raza Gilani, Sherry Rehman, Qamar Zaman Kaira and Farhatullah Babar while the PML-N side was represented by Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Ayaz Sadiq, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Sardar Mahtab Ahmed Khan.

Later, the PPP delegation also held talks with Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman and tried to persuade him to reverse his decision of boycotting parliament.

Talking to Dawn, Sherry Rehman said they had urged the Maulana not to boycott parliament because by "vacating the space we will be providing a walkover" to the PTI.

She said the parties had had a bad experience of boycotting the elections or parliament in the past, adding that the PPP had even questioned the credibility of the 2013 elections and the party leadership had dubbed them "RO elections", yet they had partici-

pated fully in the parliamentary proceedings to strengthen democracy.

"We are very clear that democratic forces while condemning the polls have all the rights to sit on the seats for which they had fought very hard," she said.

In reply to a question, Rehman said consultations among the parties would continue and they were expected to have more sessions.

Both the PPP and PML-N leaders said that so far they had not discussed any strategy for the upcoming elections for key parliamentary offices of the speaker and deputy speaker, adding that such minute modalities would be discussed at a later stage.

Although the PTI has emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly after the polls, the final results issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), however, shows that the party is still short of numbers to form its government

independently. According to the results, the PTI has bagged 115 general seats -- 22 short of simple majority -- whereas the PML-N and PPP have won 64 and 43 seats, respectively.

Sources in the PPP and PML-N told Dawn that Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who also heads the MMA, had shown flexibility and might reverse the decision taken at a multi-party conference to boycott the oath-taking session of parliament. They said the Maulana had suggested that they should jointly field candidates for the parliamentary offices and make every effort to prevent the PTI from forming its government at the Centre.

Since the MMA has 12 seats, the combined seats of the PPP, PML-N and MMA become 117 -- two more than the PTI's number of seats.

The sources said that a joint meeting of the leaders of the three parties was also expected to be held yesterday. Last time it was after the 2002 elec-

tions when the PPP and PML-N had forged an anti-government alliance -- Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD) -- under Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan. The MMA was another opposition alliance in parliament at that time.

The members of the ARD and MMA had given a tough time to the military government of Gen Pervez Musharraf who had picked Zafarullah Jamali as the prime minister. Over 100 members of the two alliances kept parliament non-functional for a record almost one year through noisy protest against the Legal Framework Order of the military regime, forcing the government to hold talks with the opposition.

Political analysts and experts believe that the new parliament will be a reflection of the 2002 assembly when the government had to face a tough opposition in the form of the ARD and MMA.