

No room for boarders

Boarding houses ask occupants to vacate; DMP denies giving any such instruction

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

A six-storey building in East Rajabazar has been evacuated recently. Almost all the rooms rented out to 140 boarders are locked from outside, with lights switched off.

In the capital, it is a rare sight – darkness engulfing an entire building after sunset.

During a visit yesterday, this correspondent found not only this building but almost all boarding houses in the area vacant.

A local vendor who was upset with the sudden decline in sales said boarders started to leave on Monday. Before that he saw police looking for boarding houses in the area.

He spoke to a few boarders when they left, and learnt that the managements of the boarding houses had issued notice asking them to vacate their rooms by December 25.

The notices also said boarders should not return before December 31, said the vendor who didn't want to be named, fearing police harassment.

When approached, a man who runs a nearby boarding house admitted that no one was living there since Tuesday but said he didn't know why the boarders had suddenly left.

A nearby women's boarding house, however, had residents still living there.

"Some of them had gone to their village homes to vote. But almost half of the residents are still here," said the owner of the five-storey female hostel.

The Daily Star obtained a notice that a boarding house in Panthapath had put up, asking its boarders to leave by yesterday and return after December 31.

Meanwhile, two other female hostels in Lalmatia had been vacated after the owner told the boarders that they should leave by December 25, said a resident who is now living with her local guardians in Shanir Akhra.

Like the hostels mentioned above, other boarding houses in Indira Road, East Rajabazar, Pathapath, Mirpur, Farmgate and East Tejguriabazar were found vacated.

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LAST DAY OF ELECTIONEERING AL continues to dominate streets of Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Last-moment campaign for the December 30 polls was in full-swing in Dhaka city yesterday, with complete dominance of the ruling camp, as there was little sign of opposition parties.

Streets were decorated with posters with "boat" symbol, while publicity through megaphones and playing promotional songs in loudspeakers were a common sight across the capital.

Besides, ruling party men brought out large processions on many major streets of Dhaka, resulting in traffic tailbacks that caused sufferings for commuters.

Electoral campaigning for the 11th parliamentary polls are scheduled to end at 8am this morning.

In Dhaka-9, campaign for AL heavy-weight Saber Hossain Chowdhury reached its peak, while there was no visible campaigning of BNP candidate Afroza Abbas.

Several thousand leaders and activists of AL and its alliance members brought out a procession around 3pm from Malibagh Community Centre.

They chanted slogans and sought vote for "boat". The area is flooded with Saber's posters while Afroza's posters could hardly be seen.

Similar picture was seen in Dhaka-13 where AL candidate Sadek Khan is contesting BNP nominee Abdus Salam.

Sadek's posters, banners, leaflets and promotional songs could be seen and heard everywhere. Campaign for Salam was virtually invisible.

Supporters of AL nominee for Dhaka-7 Haji Mohammad Selim last evening brought out a large procession that marched Chawkbazar, Lalbagh, Kotwali, and Bangshal areas.

On the other hand, some 200 supporters of Jatiya Oikyafront nominee Mostafa Mohsin

Montu who is running with BNP's electoral symbol "sheaf of paddy" brought out a procession on Nazimuddin Road in Bangshal.

Local trader Jalal said Selim is more popular than Montu. However, the contest could have been intense if candidacy of Nasima Akhtar Kalpana, wife of BNP leader Nasir Uddin Pintu, was not cancelled by the Election Commission.

Nabiullah Nabi, BNP candidate for Dhaka-5, campaigned with party activists and supporters at South Jatrabari, Shahid Faruk Road, West Jatrabari, Wapda Colony and



Graveyard roads for about two and half hours.

Nabiullah alleged that police obstructed his campaign at some places and arrested 250 of his activists. Police was creating more problems than the opposition men, he said.

"Police did not allow me to campaign with more than 25 people. On the other hand, the AL candidate campaigned with huge number of supporters," he added.

Contacted, Kazi Wazed Ali, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station, denied the

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Awami League leaders, activists and supporters bring out a street procession on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue at Farmgate yesterday, the last day of campaign. A huge number of women, inset, also took part in it.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Hundreds of people leaving Dhaka ahead of the national election. Kamalapur railway station, where the photo was taken yesterday, only sees this kind of crowd during the two Eid festivals.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Festive atmosphere indeed! Sceptical, yet leaving Dhaka in droves to vote

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and WASIM BIN HABIB

It seems like days leading up to Eid – people leaving Dhaka in large numbers. But this time, the journey home is for a different purpose. They all are keen to exercise their right to vote in the upcoming national polls.

Today being Friday and election day (December 30) being public holiday, it's an extended weekend for the nation – setting off a vacation mood.

The election atmosphere is, however, tinged with scepticism regarding casting valuable votes, thanks to the ongoing spate of violence and reported intimidation of the opposition candidates.

Yet, they are going home in hundreds. Bus and launch terminals are witnessing sizeable crowds of home-goers and so is the railway station.

"I want to cast my vote; I'm going home but I'm not sure whether I'll be able to do that," M Hasan, a private service holder from Bogura, told this newspaper at Mohakhali inter-district bus terminal.

Visiting the terminal around 2pm yester-

day, several hundred people were seen waiting to catch their buses.

Sadequul Islam was going to his home district Gaibandha. "I have a three-day holiday, so I'll go home. Casting vote is my main purpose."

Around 100 people were seen in queue at a counter of Ena Paribahan – operating buses from Dhaka to Mymensingh.

"I couldn't cast my vote in the last national election as the lawmaker was elected uncontested. This year I want to cast my vote," said a madrasa teacher, wishing not to be named, on his way to Iswarganj Upazila of Mymensingh.

Situation was similar in Gabtoli, Sayedabad, and Mohakhali bus terminals, bus operators said.

Mosharref Hossain, general manager of Hanif Paribahan, said people started leaving Dhaka from the first week of December.

"Rush of home-goers gained momentum in the last three-four days, reaching its peak yesterday," he told The Daily Star.

"It's an Eid-like situation," he added.

A staffer of Shimula-Kathalbari ferry

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Noted citizens concerned about Dr Kamal's security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern over Jatiya Oikyafront leader Dr Kamal Hossain's security, 42 eminent citizens yesterday called upon police to take legal action against the persons posing threats to him.

"We have learned from media reports that being concerned about his security, the police have recently met with Dr Kamal Hossain, one of the founders of the Constitution of Bangladesh," reads a joint statement.

"We believe that there is no reason to treat this statement lightly. We believe that the police would not give such information to a nationally and internationally renowned person... without any cause," it says. It is therefore the responsibility of police to identify those who are threats to his security. "We also call upon the police to perform its duty properly to ensure the security of all candidates and voters."

The signatories include political scientist Prof Rounaq Jahan, former caretaker government advisers M Hafizuddin Khan, Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman and Rasheda K Choudhury, former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hussain, economists Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya and Prof Anu Muhammad, women's rights leader Shireen Huq, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman, local government expert Dr Tofayel Ahmed, environment activist Syeda Rizwana Hasan, rights activists Sultana Kamal and Khushi Kabir, lawyer Shahdeen Malik and DU professor CR Abrar.

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Fair polls under AL not possible Says Mirza Fakhrul

UNB, Thakurgaon

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said holding a fair election under the Awami League government is not possible.

"The election process has turned into a farce, and no election atmosphere is prevailing in the country as all the attacks are made on BNP activists. It's unfortunate and unimaginable that these attacks are being sponsored by the state," said Fakhrul while talking to journalists in front of his Thakurgaon residence.

He also alleged that goons equipped with sticks, machetes and firearms are not only roaming the area openly but also threatening people.

"It's most unfortunate that a rumour

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Hope to win two-thirds majority: Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday hoped that his party will win the 11th parliamentary polls by getting a two-thirds majority.

"I hope that Awami League will get two-third seats in the upcoming parliamentary polls," he said while addressing an election rally at Bashur Hat (market) Govt High School at Companyganj upazila in Noakhali.

Quader in his speech said, "Uplift in favour of Awami League has been created ahead of the parliamentary polls... We are seeing signs of victory as people of the country are giving positive feedback in favour of Awami League."

"Awami League believes people are the source of power... We always respect the hopes and aspiration of the people. Awami League must come to power through winning people's mandate," the AL general secretary said.

The people of Bangladesh are now leading a happy life and the country is marching forward as a result of far-sighted and dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, he said, adding, "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has achieved global recognition because of her hardworking and humanitarian qualities."

President of Companyganj unit of AL Kijir Hayat, Upazila Parishad Chairman Mizanur Rahman, leaders and activists of the party, among others, were present at the rally.

Discharge duties sincerely

PM tells PMO officials, employees on her last working day

BSS, Dhaka

Yesterday was the last working day of the current tenure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. On the occasion, the premier addressed officials and employees of the Prime Minister's Office at the PMO in the afternoon.

"I feel proud to be the daughter of the Father of the Nation... I don't think about how much I will enjoy the post [of prime minister], but rather... how I can engage myself in people's welfare," she said.

Hasina termed the PMO an important place and reminded the public servants about their responsibilities.

"Whether I stay [in power] or not, you will discharge your duties with utmost sincerity as you're public servants," she said. "Your salary and allowances come from the taxes paid by people. It's your responsibility to serve them..."

In an emotion-choked voice, she said, "I don't consider myself the premier... I perform my responsibilities as my father's daughter. I got the responsibility of premiership and through it, I got the scope to work for the country's welfare... it's very important to me."

"We've completed many development works as we stayed in power for 10 years at a stretch. Many are still pending... if people vote for us, we will be able to return to power and complete the work."

Mentioning the country's socioeconomic development including increasing salary of government employees, she said, "We worked with you over the last 10 years. We are temporary [in office]. But you are permanent. We are elected to power for five years."

"I'm fortunate that we came to power for the second time. Our development projects are visible now."

Journos can use motorbikes on election day: EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday okayed plying of motorbikes by journalists on the election day (December 30), provided that they display the approval sticker of the commission.

Asadul Haq, EC deputy director (public relations), told The Daily Star that the previous ban is not valid for motorbikes with stickers provided by the EC. The vehicles used for transporting newspapers will be allowed to ply the roads without any sticker, he said.

The move comes a day after the Editors' Council wrote to the commission to

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University teachers, journos seek vote for 'boat'

DU CORRESPONDENT

Presidents and general secretaries of 33 public university teachers' associations yesterday sought vote for "boat", the electoral symbol of Awami League, to "continue the process of peace and development".

The teachers issued a statement in this regard, which was written on the official notepad of the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association, signed by Dhaka University Teachers' Association General Secretary Prof Shibli Rubayat Ul Islam.

In the last 10 years, development took place in various sectors including education and those were highly appreciated at home and abroad, read the statement.

"For the sake of its continuation, we are urging people to support the candidates nominated by Sheikh Hasina, to take the country forward under her leadership," it added.

Meanwhile, under the banner of "Joy

Bangla Sangbadik Mancha", a group of journalist leaders yesterday urged people to vote for "boat" in the December 30 election.

Addressing the rally in front of Jatiya Press Club, Prime Minister's Media Adviser Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury said, "To continue the democratic process and build 'Sonar Bangla' as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it is necessary to re-elect Sheikh Hasina as prime minister."

"We are urging everyone including journalists to vote for boat," he added.

Among others, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists Secretary General Shaban Mahmud, Senior Vice President of Jatiya Press Club Omar Faruque, Dhaka Union of Journalists General Secretary Sohel Haider Chowdhury and former general secretary of Dhaka Reporters' Unity Syed Shukur Ali Shuvo were also present at the programme.



Muktijuddher Chetona Sangbadik Forum and Joy Bangla Sangbadik Mancha form a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club yesterday, seeking votes for Awami League.

PHOTO: COLLECTIVE