

SIX CONSTITUENCIES IN RAJSHAHI, RANGPUR

Ethnic voters to be a factor

KONGKON KARMAKER, *Dinajpur*

Voters belonging to ethnic minority community can influence results at six constituencies of Rangpur and Rajshahi regions in the 11th Parliamentary Election today.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the population of indigenous community people in 16 districts in Rajshahi and Rangpur regions is around 21 lakh, of whom more than 14 lakh are voters.

Total number of voters in Rajshahi and Rangpur regions is 2.405 crore in 72 constituencies.

Six constituencies are highly populated by indigenous people.

They are Dinajpur-1 (Birganj and Kaharol) and Dinajpur-6 (Birampur, Hakimpur, Nawabganj and Ghoraghat) in Rangpur region and Rajshahi-1 (Godagari and Tanor), Naogaon-1 (Niamatpur, Sapahar and Porsha), Naogaon-2 (Patnitol and Dhamoirhat) and Naogaon-3 (Mohadevpur-Badalgachhi) in Rajshahi region.

Besides, there are members of the ethnic community in other districts, including Rangpur, Thakurgaon and Gaibandha in Rangpur region and Chapainabganj in Rajshahi region.

In Dinajpur, the population of ethnic people is around 1.1 lakh, of whom 28 percent voters are

in Dinajpur-1 (Birganj and Kaharol) constituency while 35 percent voters are in Dinajpur-6 (Birampur, Hakimpur, Nawabganj and Ghoraghat) constituency.

Indigenous people can be a factor here, said Shital Mardi, a leader of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad in Dinajpur. The number of ethnic voters in Rajshahi-1 is around 43,000.

Total number of voters in Naogaon-1 is 4.2 lakh, of whom 39 percent are of ethnic minority community. Besides, there are around 40,000 voters from ethnic minority community in Naogaon-2 and Naogaon-3 constituencies.

Philimon Baske a leader of the ethnic community in Gobindaganj upazila of Gaibandha, said people of this ethnic minority are mostly backward, oppressed and neglected.

Aspirant candidates visited them to seek votes during the campaign and pledged to take steps for development of the people of the neglected community, he said.

"We are not so satisfied with the pledges given by the candidates, we want to see visible development for us," Philimon added.

He urged the voters of his community to elect the right candidate who would be more caring about them.

Rabindranath Soren, president of Jatiya Adivasi

Parishad, said people of their community were very active in casting their ballots during previous elections. "It's a vote bank for candidates," he said.

He also urged the voters of his community to cast their votes in favour of those candidates who would give high priority to their demands.

This correspondent also talked with two incumbent lawmakers and AL nominated contenders of Dinajpur-1 and Dinajpur-6 constituencies to know their views and electoral pledges for the ethnic people in their respective areas.

Shibli Sadiq, incumbent lawmaker and AL contender for Dinajpur-6 constituency, said lifestyle of indigenous people has improved a lot in the last 10 years due to various initiatives taken by the government.

More steps will be taken if AL is voted to power again, he added.

Monaranjan Shill Gopal, incumbent lawmaker and AL contender for Dinajpur-1 constituency, said the backward community advanced much in various fields in the last 10 years. Besides, their access to healthcare, education and social security was also ensured.

"Power connection to every house of the community was also ensured", he said.

They were more oppressed, neglected and backward during the BNP-led governments, he

Newborn saved from being stolen at Jashore Hospital

Alleged culprit caught red-handed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Benapole*

A woman was caught red-handed while stealing a newborn baby from the gynaecology ward of Jashore General Hospital on Friday.

The alleged criminal is Shiprani Ghosh, 40, hailing from Bou Bazar area in Sonadanga upazila of Khulna.

Taslima Begum, grandmother of the newborn baby, said Shiprani had been moving beside the bed of the newborn and its mother for the last three days. Taslima, leaving her daughter and the latter's newborn, went to the nearby ward in the afternoon.

While Taslima was absent and the mother of the baby was asleep, Shiprani stole a mobile phone and Tk 1,500 in cash from the mother's vanity bag and tried to take away the newborn before

Taslima returned.

After returning from the nearby ward, Taslima saw Shiprani going out of the ward with the baby in her arms.

She shouted out and relatives of the patients in the ward held the woman and rescued the baby.

On information, police detained Shiprani.

Reshma Khatun, a nurse of the female surgery ward, said Shiprani had been roaming in the hospital for the last three days.

People at the hospital held the woman when she was going out of the hospital after stealing a newborn baby from the gynaecology ward, said Apurba Hasan, officer-in-charge Jashore Kotwali Police Station.

Police took her to the police station and a case has been filed in this regard.

5.8 kg gunpowder seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Chapainawabganj*

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in a drive seized 5.8 kg of gunpowder from Shyamapara area in Shibganj upazila under the district yesterday.

Following a secret information, a team of the border guards from Wahedpur border observation post went to Shyamapara field around 2:00pm and seized a bag containing gunpowder from the area, said Lt Col Sajjad Sarwar, commanding officer of BGB 53 Battalion.

However, none was arrested in this connection as the culprits managed to flee the area, sensing the presence of law enforcers, said the BGB official.

HIVES AT JAMALPUR POLLING CENTRE

Voters scared as wild bees return, more aggressive

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Jamalpur*

As many as 4,600 voters of a polling centre in Jamalpur-2 constituency (Islampur upazila) are worried about whether they will be able to cast their votes, fearing possible wild bee attacks during the polls today.

Earlier, a total of 24 beehives were spotted at Sajalerchar Government Primary School polling centre at Chinarchar village in Islampur Upazila.

After The Daily Star online published a report titled '24 beehives found at polling centre in Jamalpur, voters fear possible attack' on Thursday, Islampur upazila administration removed the beehives from the school building after a three-hour-long frantic efforts from 10:00am to 1:00pm on Friday.

But within an hour of removing the beehives, the wild bees started returning to the two-storey schoolhouse and its adjoining areas and built 12 fresh beehives at different spots of the building and two large trees on the school compound, former UP member Javed Ali said.

The bees were driven away by pouring kerosene on each of the beehives first and then setting those on fire, local resident Mukhlesur Rahman said, adding that hours later those who survived returned to the location and built several beehives there again.

Seeing the deaths of their fellows the bees became violent and are now buzzing around the polling centre in attacking mode, he added.

"If any one hurls any object or brick chips on the beehives, they may become more troublesome and start hurting people waiting in queue for casting votes," Vice-Chairman of Islampur Upazila Parishad Sufia Begum said.

If anything like that happens, the voters will face hurdles to cast their votes, she said, adding that the authority concerned should take necessary measures to avoid any untoward incident by the wild bees.

Islampur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mizanur Rahman said local administration will deploy a vigilance team to guard the polling centre.



Hours after being driven away by the local administration, wild bees built several fresh hives at Sajalerchar Government Primary School polling centre in Jamalpur's Islampur upazila on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR



People cross with difficulty a dilapidated bridge at Charipara in Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali.

PHOTO: STAR

15 makeshift bridges on two km road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

Awful condition of the two-kilometre-long road, connecting Charipara village and Kalapara upazila headquarters, along Ramnabad river has been causing suffering to the villagers for the last two years.

Several thousand people of Charipara village, including school and college goers, are compelled to use the brick-built road every day, as it is the only way of communication to the upazila headquarters, villagers said.

Moreover, in an attempt to ease their communication trouble, villagers built at least 15 makeshift wooden or bamboo bridges to cross the road.

Local people have been using the road since Water Development Board (WDB) built the embankment on the bank of Ramnabad river in the 1980s.

Many villages said the brick-built road was very much usable once, but its condition started getting worse after nearly half of the road was washed away due to erosion by the Ramnabad river about two years back.

Villagers later erected at least 15 makeshift bridges at different parts of the damaged road to resume communication, Abul Hossain of the village said, adding that it takes nearly an hour to cross the road now, whereas, earlier it took only 10 minutes.

"Our school going children suffer the most," local resident Abdul Mannan Gazi said, adding that the trouble increases more during the rainy season when tidal surge enters the village through the damaged portion of the dyke.

Lalua Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Shawkat Hossain said he raised the issue at the upazila parishad coordination meeting on several occasions, but to no effect.

Moreover, the upazila parishad asked me to repair the damaged road from the UP fund, the UP chairman added.

WDB (Kalapara Circle) Executive Engineer Mohammad Shahjahan Siraj said they cannot take any step to repair the embankment at present as the area is under process of acquisition for Payra Sea Port.

Brick kilns destroy forest, croplands in Ghatail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Tangail*

A large number of brick-kilns have been set up illegally at Ghatail upazila, destroying the local environment and damaging rural roads.

Black smoke released by the kilns is hazardous for human health and also damages crops and fruits and rampant movement of earth and brick carrying trucks of the kilns is damaging rural roads.

Although no brick-kiln can be constructed near a forest, on croplands or residential areas as per laws, the authorities concerned have not taken any steps against the violation said Nazrul Islam, a green and rights activist in Ghatail.

Over 50 percent of the brick-kilns in the upazila have been run-

ning without licenses, he said.

Eight brick-kilns were set up at Chantara village under Jamuria union, covering a large part of the agricultural lands of the village, Nazrul said, adding that the top soil in many areas in the village was also being used for producing bricks, thereby damaging the fertility of the lands.

Ghatail Upazila Agriculture Officer Abdul Matin Biswas said they have not given permission to anyone to build brick-kiln on croplands.

Many kilns near Dhalapara, Pecharata and Sorabari areas are using timber instead of coal for burning bricks, reducing the forest land, locals alleged.

Dhalapara Forest Range Officer

Rezaul Karim said action will be taken against the kiln owners who are burning bricks with timber.

Ghatail Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Dilruba Ahmed said there are 62 brick-kilns in the upazila.

Ten kilns were set up at different villages in Dhalapara union, eleven in Rasulpur, ten in Deolabari, two in Ghatail Sadar and sixteen in Jamuria unions. The other kilns were set up at Lokerpara, Anehola, Digor, Deopara and Digholkani unions.

Many of the kilns do not have licenses and the owners have been running them after filing writ petitions with the court, she said.

"We have already stopped construction work of two new brick-kilns as they did not have

necessary permission and documents," the UNO said.

"After investigation, legal steps will be taken against the kilns set up illegally in the upazila as soon as possible," she added.

However, Faruk Hossain Dhala, secretary of the Brick-kiln Owners Association in Ghatail, said the kilns that do not have licenses are running after taking order from the higher courts.

Muzahidul Islam, deputy director of the Directorate of Environment (DoE) in Tangail, said they had taken action against 13 illegal kilns in the area last year.

"However, we could not take action against many others due to the court order in their favour," he added.



A brick kiln made in the middle of a cropland at Digholkandi in Ghatail upazila of Tangail. Inset, a huge quantity of firewood is kept for use at a brick kiln at Deolabari in the same upazila.

PHOTO: STAR