

Irregularities wash out optimism

STAR REPORT

Hopes of a fair election in the country faded as irregularities -- ballot stuffing, casting of fake votes and driving out opposition polling agents -- began to surface.

Our correspondents in 25 districts visited around 350 polling stations, and found various types of irregularities.

Furthermore, out of those stations, BNP polling agents were seen in only 100 centres.

In Chattogram, our correspondents visited 57 centres of 16 constituencies and found BNP polling agents in only seven of them. Various kinds of anomalies like ballot stuffing, voter intimidation and casting of fake votes were also seen in some places.

In Tangail, our correspondent went to seven polling stations in Tangail-5. BNP polling agents were present in all polling stations, but were inactive.

Visiting Enayetpur Government Primary School, a women's polling centre under Tangail-5, around 11:15am, the collapsible gate and the room of presiding officer was found to be locked from inside. After an on-duty policeman was informed of the matter, Presiding Officer Md Sharifuzzaman opened the door.

Entering the centre, this correspondent saw a man wearing a "boat" badge sitting inside the room, and ballot papers were seen strewn on the ground. The presiding officer declined to comment on the matter.

In 11 polling stations of three constituencies, our Noakhali correspondent found no polling agents of BNP in any of them.

Mohammad Shahjahan, BNP candidate for Noakhali-4, at a press conference around 11:30am alleged that his 1,055 polling agents were forced out of 183 centres by 10:00am.

Some four to five girls were seen protesting in front of the Al-Faruk Academy centre in Noakhali town at noon. Asked, they alleged that their

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1



Voters surround an executive magistrate's vehicle near Algir Char Government Model Primary School polling centre in Keraniganj of Dhaka yesterday and demand he make sure they are allowed to vote. They eventually left failing to cast their votes.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

OIC satisfied with overall election atmosphere

UNB, Dhaka

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has expressed satisfaction with the overall atmosphere of yesterday's polls.

"We are very happy," said Hamid Opeloyeru, OIC assistant secretary general for economic affairs, while sharing their primary observation after monitoring the polls, reports UNB.

Talking to reporters at a city hotel, he said the polling agents of major political parties -- Awami League and BNP -- were seen and mentioned that their impression, in general, about the polls atmosphere was good.

Upon invitation by the Bangladesh Election Commission, OIC Secretary General Dr Yousef Al-Othaimen dispatched the high-level election observation team, led by Ambassador Opeloyeru, to observe the national parliamentary elections.

Fair election possible under partisan govt

Says HT Imam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

HT Imam, co-chairman of the Awami League polls steering committee, yesterday said this election has proved that a free, fair and neutral one is possible under a partisan government.

He made the comment at a press conference in the party's Bangabandhu avenue office after the end of the voting.

Pointing to polls results they had received from different sources, Imam said it could be said that the AL under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina would surely win in most of the constituencies.

Imam, also Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's political affairs adviser, said foreign observers from the OIC, Commonwealth and India termed the election fair and peaceful.

Speaking at another briefing in the party chief's Dhanmondi office in the day, AL Joint General Secretary Abdur Rahman claimed that incidents of violence in the election were significantly less compared to the previous ones. "This election was very participatory."

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



AL men rule Ctg centres

STAR REPORT, Ctg

Polling agents of BNP-led alliance candidates were barred from entering the voting centres and BNP supporters were driven out from the area in all 16 constituencies in Chattogram during yesterday's election.

At 9:30am, The Daily Star correspondent visited Zobaida Islamia Mahila Madrasa centre in Chattogram-4 (Sitakunda upazila), and found AL men only allowing their supporters in the centre, while no polling agents of BNP was spotted.

Md Nuruschhafa, presiding officer of the centre said that 400 votes out of a total 2,972 were cast in the first one and a half hours.

Several crude bombs were exploded in front of the centre around 10:00am, creating panic among voters of the area.

Our correspondent tried to enter the same polling centre again at 10:30am but was barred by police officials.

At 10:45am, while visiting Sitakunda Girls' High School polling centre, this correspondent found a ruling party polling agent with the top ballot paper of the book, marked with boat symbol.

The presiding officer of the centre, Saurav Pal Mithun, claimed 700 votes out of a total 3,614 were cast till 11:00am. However, after collecting information from each booth, this correspondent found 367 were cast.

Meanwhile, groups of youth, equipped with sticks were seen at this centre and also at Sitakunda Datta Para Government

Primary School centre.

In another incident, Ishaque Quader Chowdhury, brother of BNP candidate Aslam Chowdhury, sustained injuries in a crude bomb blast in Faujdarhat Station Road area at 9:00am yesterday.

Shilbrata Barua, assistant sub-inspector of Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) Police Outpost, said Ishaque received treatment at the hospital after injuries in one of his legs.



Meanwhile, a man identified as Ahmed Kabir, was shot dead in front of Boroitola Government Primary School centre in Chattogram-16 (Banskhali upazila) early yesterday.

Mahmudul Hasan Chowdhury, a Jatiya Party candidate, claimed Kabir was his supporter and said he [Kabir] resisted some police officials, who were stuffing ballots at the centre the night before the polls.

Meanwhile, OC Kamal Hossain of

Banskhali Police Station claimed Kabir was killed in a clash with police while trying to take over the polling station the night before. Five others were also injured in the incident, the OC claimed.

After visiting 10 polling centers in the constituency, The Daily Star found polling agents of BNP and Jatiya Party in only two centres: Ahmadi Dalampir Senior Madrasa and Purba Boilgaon Government Primary School in Chattogram 16.

Around 11:00am, local ruling party men drove out all BNP polling agents from the Chandpur Government Primary School polling centre, Saidur Rahman, an eyewitness claimed.

Tushar Kanti Bharati, the presiding officer of the centre, said he did not know about the incident. Asked about voter turnout, he said 700 ballots out of total 3,202 were cast till 9:30am.

In another incident, madrasa student Md Abu Sadek, 18, was killed in a clash between BNP and AL men over taking control of Pachim Maliyara Govt Primary School polling centre at Chattogram-12 (Patiya upazila).

The presiding officer Abdul Jalil said attackers vandalised a ballot box and looted 300 ballots, while voting remained suspended for three and half hours from 10:30am.

Our correspondent visited South Pahartali Government Primary School, Fatehabad City Corporation Degree College, Fatehabad City Corporation

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

National polls draw global attention

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

International media widely covered yesterday's national election that saw deadly clashes and accusations of vote rigging.

In a news report, the Associated Press said it received more than 50 calls from people across Bangladesh, who identified themselves as opposition supporters.

They complained of intimidation and threats, and being forced to vote in front of ruling party men inside polling booths, it mentioned.

"Hasina's use of the state machinery to subjugate the opposition virtually ensures her electoral victory," Sasha Riser-Kositsky, a South Asia analyst for the New York-based Eurasia Group, told AP.

Minutes before the polls opened, a BBC correspondent saw filled ballot boxes at a polling centre in Chittagong city. The presiding officer declined to comment.

Only the ruling party's polling agents were present there and several other polling centres in the port city.

BBC's South Asia Regional Editor Anbarasan Ethirajan said if the opposition's claims of widespread

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5



Two activists escape with ballots and a ballot box after their accomplices occupied Sohagpur Govt Primary School polling centre at Ashuganj under Brahmanbaria-2 constituency yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'AL men' beat up Hero Alam

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Ashraf Hossen Alam (Hero Alam), who contested yesterday as an independent candidate from Bogura-4 (Kahalu and Nandigram upazilas), was beaten allegedly by AL men while he was visiting a polling center in Chakolma Govt Primary School in Nandigram upazila.

A video clip of the incident went viral on online platforms yesterday evening.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Hero said that after he heard that AL men were "stuffing ballots" at the centre, he went there. "At least 15 AL men, including Nandigram upazila's Krishak League president, attacked and beat me badly," he said.

The attackers allegedly asked why he was creating violence while they were voting peacefully. Hero claimed that he was earlier attacked at the Bagdara polling centre.

"Wherever I visited, AL men threaten me, rushed behind me. Therefore, I announced that I will boycott the polls around 2:00pm yesterday at a press conference," he said.

Hero alleged that opposition candidates also threatened his agents, beat them, and kicked them out from the polling centers after which

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4