

No privacy

FROM PAGE 16
These correspondents, however, found her signature on the list of polling agents. At different polling centres, her signature also varied.

Ruling party men are using her signature on those lists and using their (AL) party men as BNP polling agents to confuse voters, she alleged.

Asked, assistant presiding officer of Bakshor Government Primary School polling centre, said he was helpless as the situation was beyond his control.

The polling agents using BNP's identity cards do not belong to the party, he told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity. "What can we do in this regard?"

Lutfar Rahman, the centre's presiding officer, said there should not be more than one agent from a candidate in each booth. However, if they find any anomaly they would take action.

When asked, Ariful Islam, who according to his identity card was a polling agent for the BNP candidate, told The Daily Star that he is a polling agent of Awami League. When the correspondents pointed out that his identity card said otherwise, he said, "Oh really! I forgot!"

Meanwhile, voters at Dighapatia PN High School polling centre were also found casting vote for "boat" openly in front of the polling officials and agents.

Shariful Islam, a polling agent of Jatiya Party candidate Mujibur Rahman Sentu in Natore-2 constituency, was seen "helping" voters vote for boat openly at the centre.

When asked, Shariful Islam said he is a polling agent of the Awami League candidate.

When pointed out that his ID card says he is an agent of Mujibur Rahman, he looked at the ID card and became surprised. "You're right! I'm a polling agent of langol (plough)," he said.

Contacted, Ripon Kumar Kundu, presiding officer of Dighapatia PN High School centre, said he did not see anyone casting vote openly. "I visited the polling booths three times since morning... No one has made any such objection yet," he told The Daily Star around 11:00am.

These correspondents also visited Dighapatia Government Primary School centre and saw similar scenarios of voters' casting vote openly and found proof of polling agents providing false identities.

BNP candidate Sabina Yasmin's signature was found on the list of her polling agents though her main agent Aminul's signature was supposed to be there.

No polling agent of BNP was seen at Natore Government Girls High School polling centre in Natore Sadar. Sabina alleged that Awami League activists did not allow her agents to enter the centre.

They attacked her around 8:45am when she was getting out of her home to vote at Natore Government Girls High School polling centre, a few yards off her residence, she alleged.

"Awami League men were throwing brickbats, targeting my residence. So, I could not go the polling centre to cast my vote," she said.

Ashrafuzzaman Munni, polling agent of Jatiya Party candidate Mujibur Rahman Sentu, complained that he was ousted from the polling booth around 8:15am.

Asked about the polling agents using fake identities and voters casting vote openly for boat, AL candidate Shafiqul Islam said his party has mobilised massive support. "Therefore, people are casting vote for the party publicly."

"BNP has taken a policy of falsehood to make the election debatable," he said.

Lunch break

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The Daily Star correspondent sneaked inside but was forced out by the police because of "lunch break".

When asked about it, a presiding officer said, "You have been misinformed. There is no lunch break."

"You've seen what's happening here; I do not want to talk about this," said another presiding officer.

This correspondent witnessed some women voters turn away without voting because the rooms were empty.

While visiting Future Gen International School polling centre at Moneswar Road, 25 women were seen standing in a queue.

One of them told this correspondent that she was waiting for nearly half an hour but couldn't cast her vote as voting remained suspended due to lunch break.

The presiding officer of the polling station admitted that voting was "paused" so that election officials could have lunch but did not give any reply when he was asked why this was being done flouting the rules.

A police official, standing next to the presiding officer, said voting was stopped only for five minutes.

18 dead, 200 hurt

FROM PAGE 1
An activist of the Liberal Democratic Party. He was killed after police opened fire following a clash between rival groups at Paschim Bellashor Govt Primary School centre in Chandina.

Abu Faisal Mia, officer-in-charge of Chandina Police Station, said police fired shots in self-defence as miscreants tried to attack the centre.

In Chattogram, Jatiya Party supporter Ahmed Kabir, 35, was shot dead during a triangular clash between police, local AL men and BNP-JP activists when ruling party supporters tried to capture Boraitoli Govt Primary School centre in the dead of the night, locals and police said.

Presiding Officer Mahmudul Hasan said they woke up around 1:30am hearing gunshots at the centre, and later called the police.

"We heard gunshots for five minutes. Three policemen were injured during the clash," said Mahmudul.

Another person died in a clash over "capturing" the Paschim Maliyara Govt Primary School centre in Patiya.

Victim Abu Sadek, 18, was a madrasa student.

Witnesses said the clash began when BNP men tried to resist a group of ruling party men trying to enter the polling station.

Presiding Officer Abdul Jalil said the attackers vandalised one ballot box and looted 300 ballots, forcing them to suspend voting from 10:30am to 2:00pm.

In Rajshahi, at least two people were killed and 22 others injured in election violence.

The victims -- Meraj Uddin, 22, of Mohonpur upazila and Md Modasser, 45, of Tanore upazila -- were Awami League activists.

They were beaten to death by BNP activists during a clash with AL men, said Abdur Razzak Khan, additional superintendent of Police of Rajshahi.

In Brahmanbaria, a mason was killed allegedly in police firing during a clash between AL and BNP supporters at Raighar Govt Primary School centre under Sadar upazila.

Witnesses said police used baton and later opened fire as supporters of AL and BNP clashed inside the centre around 11:00am.

Victim Israil Mia, 20, of Rajghar village in the upazila, died on the spot, they said.

Selim Uddin, officer-in-charge of Brahmanbaria Sadar Police Station, said miscreants attacked AL candidate RAM Ubaidul Muktadir Chowdhury of Brahmanbaria-3 with firearms and tried to capture the centre.

Law enforcers opened fire on instructions of the executive magistrate, he added.

Meanwhile, Chhatra League activists allegedly vandalised the house and set fire to two cars of Khaled Hossain Mahubub Shaymal, Oikyafront candidate for the same seat.

Shaymal alleged the BCL men hurled crude bombs to take control of a polling centre near his home.

Police said they had no clue about the attackers.

In Cox's Bazar, a Chhatra League activist died in a clash with BNP men at Rajakhali Matobbor Para Govt Primary School in Pekua upazila around noon.

The dead is Md Abdullah, 23.

He was attacked when he went to the centre to vote, said upazila Awami League General Secretary Abul Kashem.

In Rangamati, Jubo League Ghagra unit General Secretary Basir Uddin was killed in an attack by BNP activists at Rangeparo around 8:00am on his way to vote, locals said.

Musa Matobbor, general secretary of Rangamati AL, said BNP men killed Bashir and injured eight other party activists. Shah Alam, president of Rangamati BNP, denied the allegation.

In Bogura, Jubo League activist Azizul Haque died during a clash with BNP men in front of Bogail Govt Primary School around 11:30am.

Kahalu police OC Shawkat Kabir said the clash ensued as AL men obstructed a procession of BNP men near the centre. The BNP men hit Azizul on his head with a sharp weapon leaving him injured. The 28-year-old died of his injuries while being taken to hospital.

In Sylhet, a local Chhatra Dal leader died after being shot allegedly by police at Azizpur Govt Primary School centre in Balaganj upazila around 3:45pm.

Victim Sayem Ahmed Sohel, 24, was general secretary of upazila Chhatra Dal.

Mujibur Rahman, general secretary of BNP's Balaganj unit, said Sayem and his associates were standing outside the centre when police shot him.

Shamsul Islam Sardar, additional superintendent of Sylhet police, said

the JCD men, including Sayem, arrived there to capture the centre. A clash broke out as AL activists confronted them.

"At one stage, Sayem got shot and died," he said.

In Noakhali, an Ansar man was killed allegedly by BNP-Jamaat activists in Tulatuli Govt Primary School centre in Begumganj.

Ruhul Amin, Begumganj upazila nirbahi officer, said the clash broke out when AL men tried to prevent the BNP-Jamaat-Shibir men from capturing the centre.

Victim Nur Nabi got shot as they opened fire, the UNO said.

In Dinajpur, an elderly man suffered a cardiac arrest during a clash between AL and BNP supporters at Shohorgram Govt Primary School around noon, locals said.

Kina Mohammad, 65, of Uttar Laxmipur in Biral died on the spot, his son Azizur Rahman said.

In Lalmonirhat, a ward-level BNP leader of Kholaihat village died in a stampede as a chase and counter-chase between the supporters of AL and BNP took place in front of Paglahat Govt Primary School around 10:00am.

Tozammel Haque, 63, was declared dead at Rangpur Medical College Hospital, police said.

In Gazipur's Harinal, 44-year-old Liakat Hossain, former vice-president of Kazi Azimuddin College unit of Chhatra League, died while two others suffered injuries in poll violence.

City AL member Abdul Hadi Shamim said about 50 youths carrying sticks and sharp weapons attacked him when he was sitting outside Harinal High School around 1:30pm.

In Natore, Awami League supporter Hussain Ali, 48, was allegedly stabbed by his nephew Ratan Fakir following an altercation over voting at Horidakhulshi village in Noldanga.

Ali slapped Ratan for voting the BNP candidate. Ratan retaliated by stabbing him with a knife, said locals and AL candidate Shafiqul Islam Shimul for Natore-2.

In Narsingdi, Milon Miah, 35, a polling agent of the Awami League, was allegedly hacked by supporters of an independent candidate for Narsingdi-3.

In Jashore, a BNP polling agent died hours after he was beaten allegedly by AL activists at Pathalia Primary School in Abhaynagar upazila around 8:30am.

Shamsur Rahman Mollah, 63, was a resident of Barni village in the upazila.

In Jashore-3, BNP candidate Aninda Islam Amit was assaulted and his car vandalised by "boat supporters" in the district town, the candidate alleged.

In Dhaka, BNP candidate for Dhaka-4 Salahuddin Ahmed came under attack when he went to visit a centre at Shyampur Model School and College around 9:15am, according to witnesses and police.

Clashes were also reported from Sherpur, Satkhira, Faridpur, Chandpur, Mymensingh, Feni, Laxmipur and Habiganj.

First 3 hours

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12:30pm while some 300-400 AL men clamoured inside the school.

A judicial magistrate arrived half an hour later and coaxed him out. A visibly shaken Rakibuzzaman informed that the voting boxes, stamps and ballot papers had been taken away by the AL men. The judicial magistrate then left.

"Voting has been suspended in consultation with the UNO (upazila nirbahi officer) as the situation here was tense," Rakibuzzaman replied on request for a comment.

On what happened to the voting materials, he abruptly turned around and again locked himself inside the classroom.

By 1:00pm the scenario had turned grim in most of the upazila's 89 polling centres: either voting was suspended or they were occupied by the AL men.

A correspondent of The Daily Star witnessed a local AL leader, Sumon Khan, and his men take over the Khochabari Primary School centre around 11:00am. They forced all others out within half an hour.

Villagers of Kulaghat came rushing to the correspondent during a visit to inform that AL men wielding sticks had chased them away from a voting centre in the local high school. They said normally returned when the army arrived.

Villagers of Shakoia staged agitations on a road after police created panic by chasing away voters, some even to their doorsteps, from the Shakoia Taj Mahmud High School centre.

BNP's Rajpur union publication secretary, Tojammel Haque, 62, died in Rangpur Medical College Hospital around 2:00pm on suffering injuries during a clash between AL and BNP men at Paglarhat Government Primary School in the initial hours.

Voting at the centre was suspended for some time.

3 journalists

FROM PAGE 16
15 miscreants while trying to enter Bepza High School polling centre in the port city around 10:30am, reports our Chattogram correspondent.

The attackers, who were near the polling centre during voting hours, swooped on him after knowing his professional identity, he further alleged.

He was rescued by some locals, and later took treatment at a local clinic.

Contacted, Officer-in-Charge Mir Nurul Huda of EPZ Police Station said he was unaware about the incident.

Police would take action if a complaint is filed, he added.

Kafi Kamal said he, along with his wife, was returning from Eskaton Garden School on a CNG-run auto-rickshaw around 9am.

Seeing some people beating up a few youths in front of Moghbazar BTCL School centre, he came down from the auto-rickshaw and tried to take photos and videos of the incident from a safe distance, Kafi said.

Suddenly, some youths wearing badges of "boat" symbol surrounded him, snatched away his cell phone and started kicking and punching him.

Kafi said he was rescued by two other journalists passing by, and received treatment at a nearby hospital. He had to get four stitches above his left eye.

STAR JOURNOS OBSTRUCTED
Besides, a number of journalists of this paper, who were carrying identity cards issued by the Election Commission, were also obstructed in different ways, including denial of entry to polling centres, by on-duty law enforcement agency members and alleged ruling party men across Dhaka city.

As per EC guideline, journalists carrying EC-issued identity cards were allowed to enter polling centres without any obstruction.

AKM Zamir Uddin was not allowed to enter AKM Rahmatullah Degree College in Uttar Badda area around 9am. Upon learning that he is a journalist, a man wearing badge of "boat" symbol told him not to enter the polling centre, and "offered a cup of tea".

Rafiqul Islam was repeatedly obstructed by on-duty police and Ansar men from entering nine out of the 10 polling centres under Dhaka-4 constituency, keeping him waiting outside the main gate in most cases while the law enforcers got "permission" from inside the centres.

In Shyampur under Dhaka-4, a senior reporter of this paper who wished not to be named, was kept waiting for over half an hour by police personnel, for "taking permission from authorities" to let him in at Faridabad High School polling centre.

Sohel Parvez was denied entry at four centres in Dhaka-6 constituency. He was pushed and shoved at Dhaka Central Girl's High School centre by some men wearing badges of Jatiya Party electoral symbol "plough", and was forced to leave the place.

Reporter Muhammad Zahidul Islam and photojournalist Amran Hossain were stopped at the gate of the Shaheed Zia Basabo High School under Dhaka-9 by law enforcers, saying photojournalists were not allowed inside. Later, they went in after the presiding officer came to the gate.

Zahidul Islam was also prevented by activists wearing badges of "boat" from entering a polling centre in Modhubagh, under Dhaka-12 constituency.

Photojournalist Palash Khan was prevented by activists of Awami League from entering Manipur High School polling centre in Mirpur under Dhaka-15.

Our reporters at Kalachandpur Government High School and College in the capital, as well as at polling centres in Bandarban and Barisal, also faced obstructions in covering the election.

'AL men' beat

FROM PAGE 3
they began stuffing ballots the night before the polls. "I went to the presiding officers and the administration but got no response," he said.

"Therefore, I gave a written complaint to the Returning Officer with my allegations yesterday afternoon," he added.

Officer-In-Charge of Nandigram Police Station Nasir Uddin said they heard of the incident but Hero did not go to them with a complaint.

"We will investigate the matter and action will be taken accordingly," he said.

The RO of Bogura said he had received Hero's written complaint around 3:40pm yesterday.

When asked what action would be taken in this regard, RO Foyez Ahmed said, "There is nothing to take action for. He made allegations, we heard them."

However, when he was reminded that the allegation was made by a candidate accusing AL men of assault, he said, "Let's see, action will be taken later."

Hat-trick for Hasina

FROM PAGE 1
Polling agents and party men in their hundreds roamed the alleys and sub-alleys. Party men with ID cards dangling from their neck sat lazily and gossiped by the voting centres. Security forces patrolled, but that was not necessary as peace prevailed.

Everything was fine except that it was a one-sided story all over. The festoons were of the ruling AL. The hundreds of polling agents and party men who thronged the voting centres all belonged to the AL or components of the alliance it leads.

Polling agents of neither the BNP nor its allies were seen in 196 polling centres visited by our correspondents in Dhaka city and 250 centres in 25 districts.

In an election, polling agents play a vital role in checking fake voting and fraud in ballot counting.

Later in the evening, the Oikyafront, an alliance of the BNP and several other opposition parties, demanded that the Election Commission immediately scrap yesterday's "farical polls" and hold a fresh election under a non-partisan interim government.

"We reject the so-called results. At the same time, we demand fresh polls under a non-partisan government," Jatiya Oikyafront Convener Dr Kamal Hossain said at a press conference at his house.

The Left Democratic Alliance (LDA), comprising eight left-leaning political parties, also rejected the election results and demanded fresh polls.

However, EC Secretary Helaluddin Ahmed seemed buoyant at the end of the polling hours and claimed that the election was peaceful and hugely participatory.

The AL also expressed similar views, and said the polls proved that a "free and fair" election was possible under a partisan government.

But BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told The Daily Star, "Our polling agents were deployed in almost all polling centres but they were driven out by ruling party men and law enforcers."

"Many were arrested while many others were attacked. Our candidates repeatedly informed the election officials and law enforcement agencies about it but they did not take any action," he alleged.

Yesterday, there was festivity also, but it was a one-sided overwhelming show of strength that had caused an enforced absence of the opposition. It seemed no party other than the ruling AL was contesting the polls. A contest with itself, probably.

The scene though was not surprising altogether.

After the fashion in which the opposition men were harassed and harried by law enforcers in the days and weeks running up to the election, it was too

Fair election

FROM PAGE 3
He said holding a peaceful election was a challenge. "It became possible with the people's support under an independent Election Commission."

The AL leader alleged that the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami had failed to execute their "mega" plan to thwart the election.

About the polls results, he requested the Jatiya Oikyafront to accept the people's verdict.

"The election was free, fair and neutral," Rahman said, adding that there were some stray incidents.

"Awami League leaders and activists were the victims of the attacks," he said, alleging that some 13 party leaders and activists were killed in 12 districts in attacks by BNP-Jamaat men.

He also alleged that BNP-Jamaat men had also killed two Ansar members.

Rahman praised Hasina for "setting an example by holding a free and fair election".

FLOODED INDIAN MINE Divers hunt for 15 trapped men

AFP, New Delhi
Indian navy divers yesterday launched an operation to find 15 men trapped for more than two weeks in a flooded "rat-hole" coal mine in remote north-east India, police said.

The workers have been cut off since December 13 when water from a nearby river poured into the 106-metre (348 feet) deep illegal mine in Meghalaya state.

There has been no sign of life, with the delayed rescue effort drawing public outrage, but the men's families are clinging to hopes that they may have found an air pocket.

"Fourteen navy divers arrived yesterday (Saturday) and surveyed the mine. They are trying to go inside now," police superintendent Sylvester Nongnteng told AFP.

"Rat hole" mining involves digging into the side of hills and then burrowing tunnels up to five feet (1.5 metres) high to reach a coal seam.

much to expect for any opposition men to approach the voting centres yesterday. No one wanted to be polling agents for the opposition amid the spectre of arrests.

Other strange symptoms were visible too.

The voters were greeted by smiling AL men at the centres and escorted inside where voters waited in long queues that moved at a snail's pace. But inside the polling rooms, there was hardly anything to justify the slow process of voting.

Around 9:30am at Anandamoyi Girls High School centre in Dhaka-7, voter was talking to one of our correspondents about the absence of the BNP candidate's polling agents.

Within moments, a group of AL men stormed the centre, and dragged the voter away by the collar.

The presiding officer concerned was present at the spot and watched it happen. He asked our correspondent to leave.

At Satarkul Government Primary School centre in Dhaka-11, AL supporters were found compelling voters to cast ballots for "boat" in front of them around 10:30am.

Asked why no step was taken to stop it, Presiding Officer AKM Humayun Kabir said he would take immediate action.

At some centres where electronic voting was introduced for the first time, ruling party men, in many instances, stood in front of the voters, overseeing who they voted for.

Dhaka may have passed a peaceful day. But in pockets outside Dhaka, violence flared where the opposition wanted to put up resistance, leaving at least 18 people, mostly AL men, dead.

Incidents of ballot stuffing and intimidation of voters and the opposition men by ruling party supporters were reported from many districts as detailed in our other reports.

As the day wore on, more than 50 opposition candidates gave up and withdrew from the race by noon, making it all the more a one-party affair.

The Oikyafront, however, kept its promise as it did not quit the race.

In the 2014 election, the BNP-led alliance boycotted the race, saying a free and fair election was not possible under a party government.

Tearful Salma

FROM PAGE 16
at a press conference at their Nawabganj home around noon and demanded reelection in the constituency.

"We are boycotting the election considering the safety of our polling agents, people and voters," said Babul, who was Salma's chief election coordinator.

It became known by late last night that Salma had been unofficially elected.

Contacted, Ali Ahsan Khokon, general secretary of Dohar AL, refuted the allegations and said people had cast their votes for the AL candidate.

AL candidate Salman F Rahman owns the Independent TV and the daily Independent.

A good number of journalists from both sides were deployed to cover the election in Dhaka-1 (Dohar and Nawabganj upazilas).

Two days before the polls, the BNP extended its support to Salma after the High Court cancelled the candidacy of its nominee Abu Ashfaq for his "inappropriate resignation" from the post of upazila chairman.

Addressing yesterday's press conference, Babul said Salma could not appoint agents for 150 of the 178 polling centres because the potential agents received death threats from ruling party leaders and activists.

Police had been raiding their homes and arresting them without any specific allegations, Babul alleged.

"After 11:00am, there was not a single polling agent working for her. All of them had been driven away."

Visiting at least 10 polling centers in the area, this correspondent found only two agents of Salma at two centres around 9:30am.

AL activists did not allow journalists from Jamuna TV and Jugantor to enter many of the polling centres, reporters alleged.

When this correspondent attempted to enter a centre in the morning, a man asked, "Are you from Jamuna or Jugantor?"

On the other hand, reporters from the Independent TV and The Independent went in and out of polling centres without any question, witnesses said.

On December 25, an attack by masked men left at least 10 journalists of the Jamuna TV and Jugantor injured at a guest house. Over 35 vehicles of the group were damaged.

Since Saturday night, the Jamuna TV could not be viewed in Dhaka and some other districts.

Its Chief News Editor Fahim Ahmed told The Daily Star on Saturday night that several cable operators had been contacted by his office, but they did not say anything about the issue.

Cable operators wishing anonymity said Salman F Rahman enjoys clout in the associations of cable operators.