

## POLLS IRREGULARITIES

# Protest erupts at DU; strike today

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Protests erupted in Dhaka University yesterday immediately after most of the prominent panels boycotted the Ducsu election citing mass irregularities.

Agitating students staged a sit-in near the vice-chancellor's residence for around an hour and called a 24-hour strike on the campus today to press home their demand for re-election.

Voting began at 8:00am. Around 1:00pm, all major panels, except the ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League, announced their decision to boycott the election in two different press conferences.

At the press conference held at Madhur Canteen, panels of quota reformists' platform Bangladesh Sadhara Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, leftist Pragatishil Chhatra Oikya and Chhatra Federation, and two alliances of independent candidates Swadhikar Satantra Parishad and Santanra Jote announced their decision to boycott

the election.

Then they brought out procession on the campus, which was joined by over a hundred female students when it reached near Ruqayyah Hall.

At one stage of the demonstration, when the chief returning officer of the election Prof SM Mahfuzur Rahman came out of the hall, agitating students surrounded him.

Many of them chanted slogans against him and accused him for "ensuring all arrangements for vote rigging." They also chanted slogans against the VC demanding his resignation for "his failure to ensure a free and fair election."

When Prof Mahfuzur wanted to walk away without saying anything, several students lay down on the street. Several protesters then guarded him and helped him leave the area.

The agitating students then paraded around the campus again. At 2:00pm, they staged a sit-in in front of the VC's residence for around one hour.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 2



Pro-BNP Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leaders announce their decision to boycott the Ducsu polls at the Madhur Canteen in Dhaka University after 1:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## It's a drama BCL rejects allegation of ballot anomalies at Ruqayyah Hall

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of the ruling Awami League, alleged that "a drama was staged" at Dhaka University's Ruqayyah Hall to "bring controversy in the Ducsu election".

Leaders of BCL threatened to file a case against those involved with the "drama" at a press conference held at the Madhur Canteen of Dhaka University yesterday.

The press conference was organised after reports of mass irregularities surfaced from two girls' halls Ruqayyah Hall and Bangladesh Kuwait Maitree Hall -- where proofs of irregularity were found.

After three hours of protests after suspected discrepancy of ballot boxes, girls of Ruqayyah Hall found unmarked ballot papers in the hall, which were allegedly hidden from the election process.

A Ducsu VP candidate, Nurul Haq Nur, was allegedly assaulted at Ruqayyah Hall and "another attack was attempted" on another VP candidate Liton Nandi.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

# Quota leader shocks BCL

FROM PAGE 1

As soon as the VC announced the name of the VP-elect, the crowd present at the Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban started to shout "fake".

The VC remained silent for more than a minute. Amid the shouts of students, he struggled to announce the rest of the results.

The day began with high hopes for a fair Ducsu election pending for nearly three long decades.

Much before the voting started at 8:00am yesterday, Dhaka University students started lining up at their dormitories with enthusiasm.

However, much of the optimism that had gripped the country's top university was deflated soon.

Prolonging the wait of voters allegedly by Bangladesh Chhatra League and boycotts by all rival organisations and groups alleging "irregularities and vote rigging" marred the much-hyped polls.

Members of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, leftists, quota reformists and independent panels separately staged protests on the campus demanding re-

Nurul Haq Nur, Ducsu vice president candidate from quota reformists' panel, was allegedly assaulted by BCL men at Ruqayyah Hall.

And leftist panel's VP candidate Liton Nandi was chased away from Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall, witnesses say. Both went to the halls to see the election process.

Correspondents of this newspaper covering the election reported that in most cases, BCL men "maintained" the order of the queues at the polling centres.

On many occasions, BCL activists of respective halls stood in the lines even after casting their votes. They allegedly obstructed non-resident students from casting their votes by standing ahead of them in the queues.

BCL men were seen checking ID cards of students.

"Chhatra League members obstructed non-resident students and discouraged them to vote," said a statement of eight teachers who voluntarily observed the election.

"We are ashamed of the irregularities that took place during the elec-

Voting was withheld for an hour from 10:00am at female dormitory Kabi Sufia Kamal Hall as its students wanted to see empty ballot boxes.

Independent VP candidate for the hall union, Mehnaj Akter, said the authorities did not show them all the five empty ballot boxes before start of voting. As the vote started with two ballot boxes, students demanded to see the other three.

"As the students brought out a procession, they showed us the rest two boxes," she said. "We are not sure what happened in the meantime."

### BOYCOTTS

"We are rejecting the Ducsu election with disgust. This is a farce and a forged election," Pragatishil Chhatra Oikya candidate Liton Nandi said at a press conference at Madhur Canteen around 1:00pm, one hour before voting ended.

Representatives of quota reformists' platform Bangladesh Sadhara Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, left organisation Chhatra Federation, independent candidates' alliances Swadhikar Swatantra Parishad and Swatanra Jote were also present at the press conference.

"We want a re-election after cancellation of this election," Liton said, adding that they would go for class and exam boycotts today if the authorities do not cancel the polls.

About 10 minutes later, JCD's VP candidate Mostafizur Rahman announced that they are also boycotting the election.

"This is a staged election. It is vote looting and in fact the election took place on the night before the voting day," he said. He also wanted a re-election under the teachers who are not biased to any party.

DU Vice Chancellor Md Akhteruzzaman, however, said the environment of the elections were normal except for a few isolated incidents.

"The students have shown a stance for democracy and mentality of co-existence, which is commendable and praiseworthy," Akhteruzzaman told The Daily Star.

Those who boycotted the election submitted a written complaint to the chief returning officer bringing allegations of obstructing non-resident students, attacking candidates, playing hide and seek over the ballot boxes and creating artificial voting lines to linger the voting process.

tion," the teachers said and demanded a re-election.

A resident student of Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall alleged that Chhatra League men forced them to wear badges of the organisation-backed panel.

"Chhatra league men were standing in the line even after casting their votes," said another student of the same hall. "They were standing in front of non-resident students to delay their voting."

Similar situation was found at almost all male dormitories.

Our reporters present at Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall and other dormitories heard BCL men asking their followers to take 10, 15 or 20 minutes to cast vote.



Nur

Rabbani

Saddam

elections.

Students of Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall recovered a stash of ballots, marked in favour of BCL panel for hall union polls, from beside a reading room of the dormitory.

Students of another female dormitory, Ruqayyah Hall, recovered unmarked ballot papers for Ducsu and hall union polls in two trunks from hall union room.

Both the incidents led to suspension of voting for about three hours at the halls as students protested "marking ballot papers at Maitree Hall before the polling began and an attempted electoral fraud at Ruqayyah Hall".

The university authorities removed the provost of Maitree hall and appointed a new provost after the incident.

## As we saw

FROM PAGE 1

on the voting field. During the national election on December 30, finding trace of members from the opposition was a real challenge, as if they were swept away by some miracle force.

Yesterday, voters stood in long queues with BCL men at the front at nearly all 18 hall centres across the campus. And like the national election, the column of voters remained almost static for reasons unexplained to those standing at the back for hours.

But the voting progressed anyway. And, groups of voters were seen coming out of polling booths to stand in the lines again with their mates at the front.

There was another basic difference between the Ducsu polls and the parliamentary election.

During the December 30 polls, many voters alleged that as they entered the polling booths, they found their votes had already been cast. But yesterday, most of the voters could exercise their franchise if they managed to go in.

Interestingly, only resident students of male's halls somehow found their way at the start of every voter line. Non-resident students, on the other hand, faced all the troubles in moving up the seemingly immobile queues. Some in the queues pointed out that only the students loyal to the BCL got seats in the dormitories.

The day did not progress like the national Election Day, although the university's vice-chancellor echoed the chief election commissioner's remark about the polls being fair.

DU students, on the other hand, stood up firmly for their rights to vote, which was not the case for the parliamentary polls. Residents of different dormitories staged protests alleging vote rigging by the BCL.

The Daily Star correspondents had this experience visiting all the 18 polling centres at the halls.

### SHAHIDULLAH HALL

Around 8:30am, students wearing badges of the BCL panel were seen disciplining the voters' line inside Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall. Almost all at the front was either wear-

ing the same badge or T-shirts with photograph of the BCL-sponsored vice president candidate.

For the next 30 minutes, one of the correspondents observed the queue, which advanced in an unusual slow manner. Several BCL men were heard asking to ensure that no outsiders could stand there.

Talking to reporters around 9:30am, a voter from the chemistry department said, "I have been standing here since 7:00am. But after all these hours could move only a few steps ahead."

A student was supposed to get maximum four minutes to cast a vote.

Several residents of the dormitory alleged that BCL activists created an "artificial long queue" to delay the voting process.

"It seems the voting process has intentionally been slowed down to discourage voters, especially those who don't stay here. Chhatra League thinks the students will leave without casting their votes if they have to stand [in the line] for long," said one of the

## RESULT OF HALL UNIONS

HALL	VICE PRESIDENT	GENERAL SECRETARY
Jagannath Hall	Utpal Biswas (BCL)	Kajal Das (BCL)
Salimullah Muslim Hall	Mozahid Kamal Uddin (BCL)	Zulias Cizar (BCL)
Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall	Hossain Ahmed Shohan (BCL)	Irfanul Hye Sourav (BCL)
Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall	Mahmudul Hasan Tomal (Independent)	Mahfuzur Rahman (BCL)
Zahurul Haq Hall	Shaifullah Abbasi Ananto (BCL)	Toufiqul Islam (Independent)
Surja Sen Hall	Mariam Zaman Khan (BCL)	Siam Rahman (BCL)
Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall	Shahidul Haq Shishir (BCL)	Mehedi Hasan Mizan (BCL)
Kabi Jasimuddin Hall	Farhad Ali (BCL)	Imam Hasan (BCL)
AF Rahman Hall	Abdul Alim Khan (BCL)	Abdur Rahim (BCL)
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall	Akmol Hossain (BCL)	Mehedi Hasan Shanto (BCL)
Muktijoddha Ziaur Rahman Hall	Shariful Islam Shakil (BCL)	Hasibul Hossain Shanto (BCL)
Amar Ekushey Hall	Mehedi Hasan Sumon (Independent)	Ahsan Habib (BCL)
Bijoy Ekattar Hall	Mehajib Ur Rahman (BCL)	Nazmul Hasan Nishan (BCL)
Ruqayyah Hall	Israt Jahan Tonni (BCL)	Sayma Akhter Prami (BCL)
Shamsunnahar Hall	Sheikh Tasnim Afrose Emi (Independent)	Afsana Chhopa (Independent)
Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall	Susmita Dey (Independent)	Shagufta Bushra Mishma (Independent)
Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall	Rickey Haider Asha (Independent)	Sarah Binte Kamal (BCL)
Kabi Sufia Kamal Hall	Tanjila Akhter Shoma (Independent)	Monira Sharmin (Independent)

Chief Returning Officer SM Mahfuzur Rahman expressed regret for some untoward incidents during yesterday's election and said the complaint will be forwarded to election steering committee.

Since the announcement of the election schedule, there were apprehensions over the fairness of the polls.

BCL's Ducsu general secretary candidate Golam Rabbani denied the allegations of being indulging in intimidation and creating obstacles to any voters.

"You have to say specifically where someone faced obstacles," he said from a post-poll press conference at Madhur's Canteen.

"We wanted 100 percent vote casting so we are cordial with voters. Whenever we heard there is some problem, we rushed to solve it."

Except for BCL, all the student organisations and independent candidates demanded that the polling centres be set up at the academic buildings of the university, instead of the dormitories.

They pointed out that since BCL has the supreme dominance in the halls, fair election is not possible if voting takes place there. However, the university authorities did not accept it.

They also raised concern about the non-transparent ballot boxes and

sending those to the halls day before the polls.

It was alleged that as the provosts and house tutors are either supporters or leaders of the pro Awami League teachers' panel, there is a chance of vote rigging. Many candidates were sceptical about returning officers' role in the election.

### RESULTS

During the vote count by teachers in halls, candidates or their representatives were allowed to stay but no journalists had the access, DU sources say.

No representatives from the panels that boycotted the polls were seen there, they added.

BCL bagged both vice-president and general secretary posts in 10 out of the 18 halls in the hall union elections, according to the respective returning officers.

BCL candidates won the VP post in Zahurul Haq Hall and GS posts in Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall and Amar Ekushey Hall.

The 10 halls where they took both the posts are: Jagannath Hall, Salimullah Muslim Hall, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall, Surja Sen Hall, Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall, Kabi Jasimuddin Hall, AF Rahman Hall, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall, Muktijoddha Ziaur Rahman Hall and Bijoy Ekattor

Hall.

Meanwhile, independent candidates bagged VP posts at Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall and Amar Ekushey Hall and GS position in Zahurul Haq Hall.

In the female hall elections, independent candidates won both VP and GS positions in Shamsunnahar Hall, Kabi Sufia Kamal Hall and Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall.

An independent candidate also won VP position in Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall, where a Chhatra League candidate was elected to the GS post.

Chhatra league bagged both the VP and GS positions at Ruqayyah Hall.

BCL panel for Ducsu consists of Rezwanaul Haque Chowdhury Shovon for vice president, Golam Rabbani for GS and Saddam Hossain for AGS.

JCD panel comprises Mostafizur Rahman for VP, Anisur Rahman Khondoker Anik for GS and Khorshed Alam Sohel for AGS.

Candidates of quota reformists' platform Bangladesh Sadhara Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad include Nurul Haque Nur for VP, Rashed Khan for GS and Faruk Hasan for AGS.

Leftist Pragatishil Chhatra Oikya includes Liton Nandi for VP, Faisal Mahmud for GS and Sadikul Islam Sadik for AGS.

alleged that BCL men were barring non-resident students from casting their votes.

Voting advanced slowly at that dormitory as well.

Mominur Rahman, a returning officer for the polling centre at the hall, said he asked the teachers working as polling officials to look into why the voting was taking time.

### SURJASEN HALL

Around 7:30am, some 150 students were in a voters' queue at the Surja Sen Hall. Some other students were seen distributing leaflets and instructing the students to vote for the BCL panel.

"Remember what you were told last night?" one asked, according to a video footage obtained by this newspaper.

### BANGABANDHU HALL

From a little distance, the situation at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall seemed better. But a closer look revealed that the voters' line there was actually staged.

Hall sources said having cast their votes, BCL men created a "fake"

queue, which was moving slowly around 12:15pm.

Because of that queue, the other voters from the dormitory were stuck nearly 60 yards off from the polling centre.

"I stood in the queue for three hours and it advanced only a few yards. I asked for help from one of my friends who is a BCL activist. I only got a smile in return," said one of the voters.

Talking to The Daily Star, at least 20 BCL activists said they had drawn up a "strategy" a week before.

"Newcomers at the hall were instructed to stand in the queue and spend as much as time possible so that the non-resident students leave without casting votes," one of the leaders said.

At Safia Kamal Hall, the voters' queue stretched to the nearby Shikha Bhaban and did not progressed an inch for one hour since 10:00am.

The picture was similar at Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall, Muktijoddha Ziaur Rahman Hall and Zahurul Haq Hall.