

Mahbub for reform of polls process

The election commissioner says one-sided polls erode voters' interest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar yesterday emphasised on reforming the current electoral process to make polls meaningful.

He also termed the prevailing election atmosphere an ominous sign for democracy as voters are showing less interest in going to polling centres.

"Voters are not interested in casting their ballots due to elections being one-sided. This disinterest can turn into an aversion to democracy, which is an ominous sign for democracy," Mahbub said while reading out a statement to journalists in his Nirbachan Bhaban office.

He called the ongoing upazila parishad election an exception as most of the political parties did not participate in it. "And for this reason, the upazila parishad election has lost its value."

The election commissioner said over 100 people had already been elected uncontested in the upazila polls, and there was a possibility of 50 more being elected the same way.

"The words -- elected unopposed -- is now being widely used. But I don't understand the meaning of these. In my opinion, election means picking one among more than one person. How can it be an election when there is no competition?" Mahbub said.

"In English, can we call them selected [who are elected unopposed]?"

"The trend of being elected as people's representatives unopposed is not good news for democracy."

"The reform of the electoral process is needed for holding a meaningful election and making democracy unhindered."

But it is not the Election Commission's task to reform the electoral process; rather it is a matter of political decision, Mahbub added.

He said currently, the government sets the local government election process.

If the EC is tasked with the work after the reformation of the electoral process, voters' presence at polling centres will increase, Mahbub added.

Hasina, Trudeau

FROM PAGE 1

New Zealand," PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told BSS.

During the nearly 20-minute conversation, Trudeau expressed concern over the safety of Bangladesh national cricket team that narrowly escaped the Friday's brutal attack.

He expressed relief that the cricketers were safe, the press secretary said.

The Canadian PM offered deep condolences over the loss of 50 lives, including those of five Bangladeshis, in the attack.

Hasina told Trudeau that there was a need for initiating a global movement against terrorism.

Supporting her view, the Canadian PM said the world community should act together to uproot terrorism.

Reiterating her government's "zero tolerance" policy against terrorism, Hasina said Bangladesh denounces terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

"Bangladesh is a land of peace and communal harmony. We've asked the law enforcement agencies to keep a strong vigil and protect all the places of worship, including mosques, temples, churches and pagodas," she said.

The PM said Islam does not allow terrorism in any forms and the terrorists have no religion.

She told Trudeau that the Bangladesh government took concerted efforts for ensuring people's safety and security and rooting out terrorism from the society.

Hasina renewed her call to extradite Bangabandhu's self-confessed killer Noor Chowdhury to Bangladesh.

"Noor Chowdhury is presently fleeing justice and now staying in Canada. It would be a great service to the rule of law if Canada hands over the killer to Bangladesh so he faces justice," she said.

The Canadian PM said it was a legal matter and they would look into it.

Hasina expressed firm optimism that Bangladesh and Canada would remain engaged in a mutually cooperative, supportive and respectful partnership in the journey towards further development and progress.

She invited Trudeau to visit Bangladesh and wished his success in the coming Canadian polls.

Trudeau greeted Hasina on her party's landslide victory in the December 30 general elections, said the PM's press secretary.



PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

A polling centre at Amritakunda Primary School in Pabna's Chatmohar upazila looks almost deserted around 3:00pm yesterday during the second phase of upazila polls. Polling officials at the centre claimed that 40 percent of the ballots had already been cast by that time.

7 shot dead in Rangamati

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The OC said seven of the injured, including presiding officer Abdul Hannan Arnab, were in critical condition.

Rangamati SP Alamgir Kabir said some injured were taken to the Combined Military Hospital in Chattogram by a helicopter as their condition deteriorated.

Meanwhile, members of the army remain deployed in the three hilly districts, including Rangamati, round the clock.

The deceased were identified as

polling officials Amir Ali, 37, and Abu Tyab, Ansar members Jahanara Begum, 40, Mihir Kanti Dutta, 40, Bilkis Akter, 50, and Alamin, 25, and helper of a jeep driver, Mintu Chakma,

said Upazila Nirbahi Officer Nadim Sarwar.

The Election Commission strongly condemned the attack yesterday.

It expressed deep sympathy to the families of victims, said SM Asaduzzaman, EC joint secretary director (public relations).

He said the commission also asked the authorities concerned to take steps

for ensuring treatment of the injured.

Eleven candidates in Rangamati boycotted the polls about an hour after the voting began around 8:00am, alleging irregularities and vote rigging.

They include Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samity-backed chairman candidate in Baghaichhari Bara Rishi Chakma and vice chairman

contender Samiron Chakma and female vice chairman candidate Sumita Chakma.

Naniarchar upazila independent chairman candidates Panchanon

Chakma, Jantina Chakma, Rupom Dewan and vice chairman candidates Rana Bikash Chakma and Sujit Talukder and female vice chairman

candidates Promika Chakma and Koality Chakma also boycotted the elections over the same allegations.

Arjun Moni Chakma, an independent contender in Kawkhali upazila, did the same.

Asked, Returning Officer SM Shafi Kamal said the situation was not such that a candidate would have to boycott an election. "It was held in a free, fair and peaceful manner," he said.

AL candidates, rebels fight in low turnout

FROM PAGE 1

in Rangamati, there was no major incident of violence elsewhere yesterday.

After the voting ended, Election Commission Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed claimed that the election was free, fair and peaceful.

The voter turnout would be higher than that of the first phase, he said at a post-polls press conference at the capital's Nirbachan Bhaban.

Voting was suspended at seven centres due to different anomalies, he said.

LOW TURNOUT

Yesterday, 12 correspondents of this newspaper visited at least 90 polling stations in 21 upazilas. They found the

lowest turnout was reported at Maltinagar High School centre in the same upazila. Of the 2,413 votes, only 24 votes were cast, said Zakir Hossain, sadar upazila election officer in the district.

In Pabna, at least two persons were injured as the supporters of the AL candidate and party rebel clashed in front of Savar Primary School Centre in Faridpur upazila.

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Maltinagar High School centre in the

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