

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 Nirbachon 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

FROM PAGE 1
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 voter turnout to be low there.

Take Bogura College polling station for an example.

There, the total number of male voters was 3,559. Until 4:00pm, only 204 votes were cast, said Presiding Officer Md Fazle Rabbi.

At Naruli Uttarban Government primary school centre in Bogura sadar upazila, 140 out of 2,059 voters cast their ballots, said Presiding Officer Mahbub Alam Zilani.

The lowest turnout was reported at Maltnagar 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.

Besides, a woman in Bera upazila and a youth at Sujanagar upazila were jailed for five and seven days respectively for violating the electoral code of conduct and creating chaos at voting centres.

In Chattogram, the upazila nirbahi officer of Hathazari upazila detained a vice president candidate for ballot stuffing.

He was released later.

Besides, law enforcers caught a vice chairman contender while he was allegedly stamping ballots at Hathazari College polling centre at around 12:30pm. But he could not put those in the ballot box, said UNO Ruhul Amin.

He was released after he signed a bond that he would never do it again,

he said.

In Sylhet, a mobile court fined five people Tk 5,000 each for casting fake votes in Companiganj upazila. Besides, six men were detained at two polling centres over the same offence at Jaintiapur upazila.

Meanwhile, the BNP, which has boycotted the election, issued show cause notices upon eight leaders for working on behalf of a chairman candidate who had been expelled from the party for taking part in the polls.

Boycotts by the BNP and other political parties have dampened the spirit of the elections yesterday. Voter turnout was low.

In the first phase of the polls, AL men, without any surprise, bagged majority of chairman posts.

Terror attacks by non-Muslims get less media

FROM PAGE 1
than half the news coverage.

“We found clear evidence that terrorist attacks perpetrated by Muslims receive drastically more media coverage than attacks by non-Muslims,” the report said.

The study also said a Muslim perpetrator of such attacks increased the number of stories by 357 percent.

Professor Gitiara Nasreen, teacher of Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Dhaka University, said the whole Muslim community is blamed when a Muslim is involved in any terrorist attack, but in terms of non-Muslims the media is focused on the individual only.

“We always see that in terrorist attacks, if the attacker is Non Muslim, the media do not focus on religious identity [but] rather describe the attacker as mentally ill or insane,” she added.

Media analysts have previously noted that an attackers' identity can be ascertained from the words used by media when covering a violent extremism.

If dubbed a “terrorist act” at the very onset, then there is no doubt that the assailant is of Muslim origin.

But when reports express doubts about the nature of violence and are

reluctant to term it as an act of terrorism, chances are that the perpetrator is a non-Muslim Caucasian.

The recent Christchurch attack was an exception where the New Zealand government was quick to say that the massacre of nearly 50 Muslims in two mosques was an act of terror.

However, the assailant's face was blurred and the media has been cautious in releasing details of the attacker.

Such is seldom the case for brown terrorist who have some relation to Islam.

Generally, when a Muslim is the perpetrator of an attack, his race, origins, and religion make immediate headlines. In the New Zealand case, Brenton Tarrant has not been referred to as a “white terrorist” or a “Christian terrorist”, even though his detailed 74-page manifesto has clear racial and religious references.

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, a teacher of International Relations at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star that all the western media was owned by Non-Muslims, especially Jews.

“We know about the media racism and the terrorist attacks by Muslims and Non-Muslims are the good examples of media racism,” he said.

Extreme right-wing politics is asso-

ciated with ultra-nationalism, fascism and racism or race supremacy, which is often used as justification to oppress and repress others.

The most classic example of right-wing extremism is Nazism (oppressing Jews and others) and more recently, Zionism (oppressing Palestinian people) and the extreme right-wing politics used by President Donald Trump in many instances to stay in power.

While state sponsored terrorism is declining globally, white supremacist terrorism is on the rise.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of hate groups in the United States has grown from 784 in 2014 to 1,020 in 2018.

There has also been a jump in reported hate crimes with an increase of 30 percent between 2014 and 2017, the SPLC wrote

Experts believe the disproportionate coverage between Islamist and non-Islamist attacks have shaped public perception against Muslims.

In another study titled “Equal Treatment? Measuring the legal and media responses to ideologically motivated violence in the United States”, it was revealed that “suspected terrorists who were perceived as Muslim received twice as much media coverage as non-Muslim suspects.

In cases of unsuccessful attacks, suspects perceived as Muslim received nearly eight times the coverage of those perceived as non-Muslim.”

The study was carried out by Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, a Michigan-based research institute focused solely on the religious minority.

It also said that many journalists rely on the Department of Justice press releases to determine whether or not an act of violence qualifies as terrorism.

“The agency is six times more likely to issue a press release if the perpetrator is perceived as Muslim.”

Writer and anthropologist Rahnuma Ahmed said since 9/11, Islam has been equated with terror and terror attacks in the Western media.

“Since then, Western ruling elites have crafted and stoked Islamophobia in their own countries to manufacture domestic consent for their imperial wars of aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, which benefits the oil, and arms manufacturing industry.

“The longer term intent is to redraw the national boundaries of Middle Eastern countries, and install subservient rulers in the name of championing democracy,” she alleged.

Three killed in B'baria clash

Dead include pregnant woman; 25 injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Three people, including a pregnant woman, have been killed and 25 others injured in a clash at Mirpur village in Bijoynagar upazila.

The clash occurred at the village under Chandura union on Saturday morning and the three victims died while under treatment at hospitals between Saturday and Monday.

The deceased were identified as Kala Mia, 70, son of Ala Baksh, Mansur Miah, 22, son of Khusho Mia, and three months' pregnant Nasima Akhter, 30, wife of Al-Amin of Mirpur village.

Rezaul Kabir, additional superintendent of police of Sadar-Bijoynagar circle, confirmed the deaths followed by a clash. He told The Daily Star that a dispute between Saudi expatriate Sohel Miah and tractor trader Mishal Miah of Mirpur had been going on for the last few years.

A few days ago, Mishal along with his men broke an earth-furrowing machine at Abdullahpur village.

Following the incident, tension

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

Over five kg

FROM PAGE 16
said customs officials.

Members of Armed Police Battalion assisted in the drive. Two cases were filed against the duo with Airport Police Station under the Customs Act and Special Powers Act.

In another drive at the green channel, customs officials arrested Razia along with one kg of gold. She arrived at the airport in a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight from Malaysia around 4:00am, said Othello.

The value of the seized gold is around Tk 2.5 crore.

Though Razia denied carrying any gold during interrogation, officials found the gold after searching her body, he said.

Razia claimed that she did not own the gold, but carried it from Malaysia to hand it over to someone else in exchange for money.

Razia is a frequent traveller and has already visited abroad five times this year, said a customs official.

“She used to get Tk 50,000 apart from the travel cost for carrying every consignment,” said the official, preferring anonymity.

Contacted, an official at Premier Bank's Kalabagan branch confirmed that there is a deputy manager at the branch named Razia. But she is now on leave.

“You better communicate with the [bank] headquarters for comments,” said the female official, wishing not to be named.

Reazul Karim, managing director of the bank, said, “We will initially serve a show-cause notice on her and take proper actions after investigation.”

Situation gets

FROM PAGE 1
The non-cooperation movement was on its 18th day and most schools, institutions and private offices remained closed.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had begun talks with General Yahya Khan, but 90 minutes into the conversation, he heard about the military opening fire on civilians in Tongi and Joydebpur, among other areas.

Bangabandhu found no reason to continue the meeting with Yahya following that.

In Joydebpur, Pakistani army officials locked in clashes with people when Bangladeshes set up a barricade to prevent a military commander from going to Dhaka.

At least two civilians died and around 200 were injured including three army men, leading to a curfew imposed by the Pakistani authorities.

After the news of the clash spread across the country, spontaneous processions were immediately organised in Dhaka to oppose the military.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman swiftly responded to the army shootings, saying “if the junta thought it could suppress a popular movement by military action, they were living in a fool's paradise”.

He further said, “No sacrifice would be considered enough to emancipate the people of Bangladesh. Bangladesh cannot be suppressed by force. If necessary, we shall give the last drop of our blood to see that our posterity lived happily as free citizens in a free country.”

Bangabandhu's meeting with Yahya resumed after a break, but was apparently leading nowhere.

In his heart and soul, Bangabandhu knew very well that a war was knocking on the door.

He and his people were ready for it.

[Source: Liberation War Museum and The Daily Star archive]