

'It's outrageous'

PM slams foreign missions for 'including local staff as foreign observers'

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday sharply criticised some foreign missions in Dhaka for picking Bangladeshi nationals as "foreign election observers".

She also blasted the Election Commission for accepting those locals as foreign election observers.

"They didn't do the right thing. There are many Bangladeshi nationals who work at foreign missions here. They are Bangladeshi citizens... they are doing jobs there...they [foreign missions] have appointed them as foreign election observers...what they have done is outrageous," the PM said.

She was talking to reporters after casting her vote at Dhaka City College polling centre in the capital's Dhamondi at 8:00am.

Hasina, also the Awami League chief, questioned how a Bangladeshi national could become a "foreigner" and a "foreign election observer" as the person only worked for a foreign mission in Bangladesh.

The PM said the foreign missions in Bangladesh could express their concern as the country's past history was not good.

She said after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975, everyone witnessed how a game was played by snatching the people's voting rights. "But we have gradually overcome that situation and there is nothing to be worried about it."

She also mentioned that those who have expressed concerns over the polls know about the examples of the elections in their own countries. "We know about some instances of the elections in their countries."

Hasina said some people among those picked as foreign election observers have a hostile attitude

towards Bangladesh. "I know some of their fathers were involved in the August 15 massacre or were anti-liberation people."

She questioned the EC's judgment as they accepted local Bangladeshi people as foreign election observers. "I don't know how they accepted the country's nationals as foreign election observers. They didn't do the right thing by accepting that."

The PM also said Bangladeshi nationals doing jobs in foreign missions could visit polling centres as voters, but not as election observers.

She hoped the AL candidates would win the mayoral polls to two Dhaka city corporations.

Talking about the Electronic Voting Machine, Hasina briefly described the process of casting votes with it. She said she cast her vote with an EVM very quickly and easily.

"I think the Election Commission will be able to introduce this EVM gradually in the entire country so that people's voting rights are ensured, and nobody can snatch other's voting rights and capture polling centres," she said.

Responding to a question about the BNP's allegations that Awami League was trying to capture polling centres, the PM said a party tries to take other paths after it loses confidence in the people.

"This is the character of the BNP. They had started vote rigging; they cannot keep their confidence in the people, and they cannot trust the digital system."

She said the BNP must try to gain people's trust. Trust and confidence are the main sources of power and the AL has been in power for three consecutive terms with those, she added.

The AL chief also said the people were witnessing the remarkable progress of the country.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's fingerprint is being authenticated by an EVM at a polling booth in Dhaka City College.

PHOTO: PID

AL says 'better than ever'; BNP rejects 'farcical' polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League yesterday claimed that elections to the two Dhaka city corporations were held much more peacefully and better than ever in the past, while BNP said that elections were nothing but a farce.

Briefing at midway of voting hours at Awami League president's Dhanmondi office, party joint general secretary and information minister Hasan Mahmud said, "A festive environment is prevailing, and voters are exercising their franchise freely. Polls environment is much better than ever in the past."

He also criticised BNP for "trying to make the election questionable."

Responding to a query about thin

presence of voters, Hasan blamed winter and holiday for the low turnout.

At another briefing after the end of voting hours, the party's other joint general secretary Mahbulul Alam Hanif said yesterday's election through EVM has been "more free, fair and peaceful than any election held in the last 100 years."

At the press conference, AL presidium member Jahangir Kabir Nanak said there is no need for polling agents during an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)-only election.

"EVM is a scientific voting system where there is no need for polling agents of any party, as the machine itself works as the guard. If the fingerprint doesn't match, you can't

vote," he said replying to a query on BNP's allegations of driving out their agents from polling centres.

"The EVM is such a sturdy system that it works as polling agents of all parties," he added.

NO REFLECTION OF PEOPLE'S OPINION: FAKHRUL

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir at a briefing after polling hours at the party's Nayapaltn said "a farce was staged" in the name of elections to two Dhaka city corporations.

"What was held in the name of elections to Dhaka south and north city corporations was nothing but a farce. There was no scope for reflection of the people's opinion in the election

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Diplomats observe polls but without local staff

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign diplomats visited different polling centres during yesterday's Dhaka city polls without their local staffers, following a government directive not to include Bangladeshi employees of their missions in election observer teams.

The Daily Star could confirm that envoys of the US, the UK, the European Union, Canada, and Japan went to polling centres in various parts of the city.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R Miller visited Rampura Ekramunnesa High School, Shaheed Monu Miah Government High School in Tejgaon, and Banani Bidyaniketan School and College centres.

He spent around 15 minutes at Rampura Ekramunnesa High School and observed the voting process. The envoy then went to Shaheed Monu Miah Government High School and stood on the school playground for a while.

"This is a beautiful day," the ambassador said, looking around and up in the sky, reports UNB.

He also inquired about the school and when it was established. When he saw 72-year-old Mohammed Shahjalal was proceeding towards the polling centre with the support of his relatives, the diplomat suggested a television journalist that the moment be captured.

"The ambassador did not talk to any media as per the Election Commission's regulations," said a diplomatic source.

British High Commissioner Robert Chatterton Dickson visited several polling centres, including Banani Bidyaniketan School and College and Azimpur Girls School and College. He also refrained from talking to any media.

Besides the US and the UK diplomats, those from the foreign missions of Canada, Japan, and the European Union visited various stations.

An official of an embassy in SEE PAGE 10 COL 2



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OF QUEUES AND CHAOS

1. Police drive out hooligans from a polling centre in Habibul Model School and College in Uttara. 2. The polling centre proper wears a deserted look, owing to low voter turnout yesterday. 3. This long line of voters is actually full of those who are there only to make up the numbers and not actually vote. Whenever they see journalists, they make sure the line looks bigger. 4. A scuffle breaks out among supporters of two mayoral candidates at a polling centre of Ward-30. 5. A policeman, who was allegedly voting for others, being taken inside the centre for Ward 29 to be questioned. 6. A motorised rickshaw-van used to bring voters to a polling centre in Ashkona. 7. An elderly man all smiles after successfully voting. 8. Happy polls day participants decked out in the national colours.

PHOTO: STAR



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