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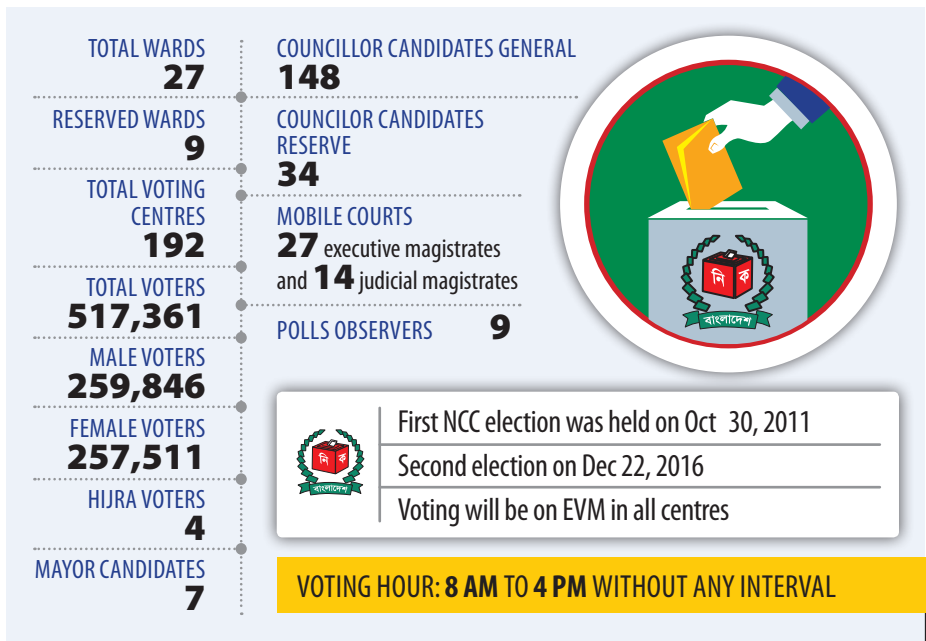
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16 PAGES : Tk 12.00



Ivy's hattrick or Taimur's first?

Narayanganj picks mayor, councillors today



MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA AND SANAD SAHA

Narayanganj goes to polls today to pick its mayor and 36 councillors, in an election that can be expected to be a departure from the recent violence-ridden voting for Union Parishad seats.

Outgoing mayor Selina Hayat Ivy is locking horns with Taimur Alam Khandakar, an independent candidate, to run the Narayanganj City Corporation (NCC), the seventh-largest city corporation in Bangladesh.

BNP has boycotted the polls citing that a free and fair election is not possible under the current Election Commission (EC) and the government.

A win for Ivy, who is contesting with the ruling party ticket as in the previous polls, means she remains the only mayor of NCC, which was formed in 2011.

For the veteran politician Taimur, the post of mayor is a long coveted wish: he pulled out of the race in the maiden election and did not participate in the 2016 polls.

Like in previous elections, the Osman family remains at the centre of discussion due to Shamim Osman's longstanding rivalry with Ivy.

In 2011, Ivy had clinched the post of the mayor by beating the then ruling Awami League-backed candidate Shamim by a margin of more than one lakh votes. A total of 276,329 votes were cast in the maiden NCC polls.

While Shamim has gone on record to extend his support to Ivy, speculations are rife that he and his men might try to influence the polls today.

Tight security measures were put in place by the EC, whose tenure expires

on February 16, to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for the polls, being held on partisan lines.

"The election atmosphere is very good," said Mahfuza Akter, the returning officer of the NCC polls, while urging the voters to come to the polling centres following all health guidelines and to cast their votes without fear.

Voting will start at 8 am and will continue until 4 pm without any break.

Ivy's clean image, popularity and the development activities she had carried out during her first term might benefit her in the polls today, said residents of Narayanganj, which houses more than five lakh voters.

Over the past decade, a period that coincided with Ivy's reign as the mayor, the road network in Narayanganj, Bangladesh's industrial hub, has improved noticeably.

But her campaign promise of building a bridge to connect Bandar, which lies on the other side of the Shitalakshya river, with the town centre remains unfulfilled.

On the other hand, Taimur's political career, which spans more than 50 years, and his connection with the city's working-class people might give him an edge along with the anti-government sentiment.

Both the candidates have wrapped up their campaigning on Friday.

Following the electoral code of conduct, Ivy declined to make any comment to the media yesterday.

If free and fair polls are held, Ivy will win the polls by a margin of one lakh votes, said Adinath Basu, her chief election agent.

Taimur, however, spoke with the media on the eve of the polls.

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Secured boxes containing Electronic Voting Machines kept at the Morgan Girls' High School in Narayanganj, moments before they were dispatched to polling centres across the city yesterday for the city corporation election being held today.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Leahy law poses new challenge to Dhaka

ZYMA ISLAM

For a second time in a month, Dhaka has sought more time to notify the US whether it would consent to the Leahy law, which was invoked at the beginning of the new year.

The Leahy amendment is a law that restricts assistance to entities accused of committing human rights violations. This clause specifically governs assistance from the State Department and the Department of Defense to other countries.

The US State Department website lists torture, extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance and rape as acts of "gross human rights violations".

In December, the US sent a letter to Bangladesh saying that the Leahy law will be activated beginning January 1, 2022, and asking if Bangladesh consents to being subject to it.

Originally, Dhaka was asked to respond by December 31. But it requested two extensions so far – first on December 15, 2021, and second on January 1, 2022.

Asked when Dhaka will respond, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Thursday said

the law ministry was looking into the law and its impacts, and that the government would respond after the scrutiny.

Experts say the law puts Bangladesh in a fix – consent and submit to scrutiny regarding how it spends assistance, or decline and risk having aid dry up.

According to the State Department's website, this will affect training, equipment and other support.

"The USA will scrutinise every single penny, which forces the assistance is being spent on and to what end," said Ali Riaz, political scientist and distinguished professor at US's Illinois State University.

Just Security, a platform that analyses security and foreign policy, based at New York University School of Law, published an article analysing the Leahy law, and said that the challenge lies in deciding if one unit is blacklisted, would another that works in collaboration be affected too?

"Should the violations attributable to members from 'joint' units affect their unit of origin, or just the composite unit to which

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COVID PATIENTS Hospitals in 3 divisions see a spike

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Hospitals in three divisions have seen a rise in the number of patients being admitted with the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, according to the health directorate.

The divisions are Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi.

Dhaka division had the highest 14 percent bed occupancy rate in Covid-19 hospitals yesterday. It was 13 percent in Chattogram and 10 percent in Rajshahi divisions.

According to experts, the number of Covid-19 patients would continue to increase in the coming days due to the spread of the new coronavirus variant.

Dr Abu Jamil Faisal, member of Public Health Advisory Committee of the DGHS, said, "Omicron will continue to infect more people in the coming days. The rush of patients to the hospitals will also rise."

According to the Covid-19 dynamic dashboard data, the bed occupancy

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Inam, aged around five, holds a picture of his father Ismail Hossain, who went missing on June 16, 2019.

PHOTO: STAR

DISAPPEARANCES

Allow a UN panel probe

Victim families urge the govt; DMP denies coercion allegations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances should be allowed to visit Bangladesh to conduct an impartial investigation into the state of enforced disappearances, said victims' families.

Alroza Islam Akhi, who runs Mayer Daak, a platform of families of the victims of enforced disappearance, made this appeal to the government at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

According to its annual report of 2021, the Working Group has made several requests to the government since 2013 to invite it to visit the country for an impartial investigation, but it is yet to get the green signal.

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Inauguration of Relocated Gulshan Corporate Branch
of Trust Bank Limited

Gulshan Corporate Branch
Khandker Tower (1st Floor)
94 Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan
Dhaka-1212
Contact +880 1715 942 630

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