

Number of local election observers drops

Experts point at less inclusive polls, lack of foreign funding

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Election Commission has approved 20,773 local observers from 84 organisations to monitor the January 7 national elections.

Of them, 517 local observers took approval centrally and 20,256 from the returning officers, said Shariful Alam, director (public relations) of the EC, yesterday.

This time, the number of local observers is significantly less compared to the 2018, 2008 and 2001 national polls, although the number of voters and polling stations in the upcoming polls will be higher.

Around 11.97 crore eligible voters are expected to cast votes at around 42,500 polling centres this time.

In 2018, the commission approved 25,920 local observers from 81 organisations to monitor the elections. There were about 10.38 crore voters and 40,199 polling centres in the 2018 polls.

Around 1.6 lakh local observers monitored the 2008 polls, and there were 35,263 polling centres for 8.1 crore voters.



Table with 2 columns: YEAR, NUMBER OF LOCAL OBSERVERS. Rows: 2023 (20,773), 2018 (25,920), 2014 (8,900), 2008 (1.6 lakh), 2001 (2.18)

In 2001 polls, the number of local observers was about 2.18 lakh and there were 29,978 polling centres for 7.50 crore voters.

The 2014 national election was held in 147 seats with only 12 parties contesting amid a boycott by BNP and many other opposition parties. About 8,900 local observers monitored the polls. There were 18,200 polling centres for 4.39 crore voters.

Elections experts pointed out two reasons for the drop in number of local observers this time.

Many did not feel interested in monitoring the polls as it is "less competitive and not inclusive", while there is a lack of foreign funds, they said.

Brig Gen (ret'd) Sakhawat Hussain, former election commissioner, said genuine and professional observers lost interest in monitoring a "less competitive election".

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Saifullar Sardar sits next to Sutarkhali river and repairs his fishnets. With these, he catches fish in the canals of the Sundarbans from dawn till dusk, selling his bounty to the local market for Tk 700-800 per day. The photo was taken near the Sadar Bari intersection in Dakope upazila of Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Pre-polls violence escalates in the south

1 killed, over 50 injured so far

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

With just over a week left before the January 7 national elections, incidents of violence are on the rise in the southern districts under Barishal division.

Of the 21 constituencies in the division, incidents of violence and violation of polls conduct were reported in at least seven, including Pirojpur-1 and 2, Barishal-4, 5 and 6, Barguna-1 and Patuakhali-4.

Sporadic clashes between supporters of Awami League and independent candidates in the region have left at least one person dead and more than 50 others injured so far.

Most incidents of pre-polls violence were reported in Pirojpur-1 (Nazirpur, Pirojpur Sadar and Indurkani), where the supporters of AL candidate SM Rezaul Karim and independent candidate AKMA Awal engaged in several clashes,

leaving one dead and around 25-30 others injured.

The deceased was identified as Mohammad Lalon Fakir, 32, who was working for AKMA Awal's polls campaign.

He was injured in a clash during vandalism of an election office in Pirojpur-1, and later died at a hospital in Dhaka on December 12.

A number of attacks and counter attacks followed in the later days in the constituency.

Contacted, Md Shariful Islam, superintendent of police in Pirojpur, said, "No party will be allowed to deteriorate the law and order situation."

Meanwhile, Barishal-4 is the most conflict-prone constituency at the moment within the district.

Pankaj Nath, an independent candidate, complained that AL leader Shammi Ahmed's

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THAKURGAON-1 Tahmina can contest polls: SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday restored the candidacy of independent candidate Tahmina Akter Mollah to contest the January 7 election from the Thakurgaon-1 constituency.

Chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC Justice M Enayetur Rahim directed the Election Commission to allow Tahmina to contest the election and allocate her an electoral symbol.

The judge passed the order following a petition filed by Tahmina challenging a High Court order that on December 26 upheld the EC's decision for cancelling her nomination papers.

Tahmina's lawyer Mansur Habib told The Daily Star that the EC had rejected the nomination papers of his client on the ground of anomalies in the list of signatures of her one percent voters, which she submitted to the EC along with the affidavit.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission has filed a petition with the Supreme Court challenging its chamber judge's order that allowed independent candidate Md Salahuddin to contest the January 7 polls for Chattogram-4 constituency.

The EC submitted the petition through its lawyer Khan Mohammad Shameem Aziz on December 27, saying that though Md Salahuddin does a government job (health assistant at Sitakunda Health Complex), he hid his official identity, and therefore, cannot contest the election.

The SC will pass an order on Sunday.

BCL men beat up 2 'BNP activists'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chhatra League activists allegedly beat up two "BNP men" while the latter were distributing anti-election leaflets among people in Chattogram city's Kazir Dewri yesterday.

The BCL men later handed over Monirul Islam, 30, and Bijoy Chowdhury, 20, to police.

The incident took place at Apollo Shopping Complex around 4:00pm, said the law enforcers.

The BCL men also recovered a copy of the leaflet from them, said Anwar Hossen, who introduced himself as the joint convener of Hazi Mohammad Mohsin Government College unit of BCL.

Sub-inspector Borhan Uddin, in charge of CRB Police Outpost, said, "They are verifying the identity of the detainees."

Advertisement for 'Genuine and professional observers lost interest in monitoring a "less competitive" polls.' by Brig Gen (Ret'd) Sakhawat Hussain and Badiul Alam Majumdar.

LALMONIRHAT-2 AL candidate show-caused for polls code violation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

The Election Inquiry Committee has issued a show-cause notice to Awami League candidate Nuruzzaman Ahmed of Lalmonirhat-2 constituency on the charge of violating the electoral code of conduct.

The action came following a written complaint filed by Golam Martuza Hanif, a supporter of an independent candidate, to the District Returning Officer and Deputy Commissioner.

Nuruzzaman Ahmed, the incumbent lawmaker and also the social welfare minister, will have to show reasons by 11:00am on December 31, according to the show-cause notice, signed by the committee Chairman and Senior Assistant Judge Tahmidur Rahman on Tuesday.

The complainant - Golam Martuza Hanif, a former chairman of Bhotmari Union Parishad and former vice president of Kaliganj upazila AL - is working for independent candidate Sirajul Haque, the district AL senior vice president.

In the complaint, he alleged that Nuruzzaman held an electoral meeting at Chamtahat in Kaliganj on December 22, where he threatened to kill him.

"I feel unsafe following the threatening speech of the social welfare minister," Golam Martuza Hanif, a freedom fighter, told The Daily Star.

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