



Clusters of posters crowd the divider on the Dhaka Zoo Road in Mirpur. Even the tress, planted to enhance the median's beauty, were not spared. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Special focus on final hours of voting

Police preparations underway to prevent violence

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Law enforcers are now setting their focus completely on January 7, the election day. They are particularly preparing contingency plans for the final hours of voting, as violence often erupts between supporters of rival candidates during this time.

In constituencies where a neck-to-neck battle is anticipated between Awami League candidates and independents from within AL, police are concerned that supporters of candidates fearing defeat might resort to attacking polling stations, aiming to invalidate votes from those booths.

According to sources, police have taken a security plan focusing on the polling day in over 100 seats, where AL independents might pose tough challenges for "boat" candidates.

Keeping infighting within AL in mind, the superintendents of police in those areas have already been instructed to take special measures and deploy additional forces.

Besides, the police will remain vigilant on the day after the voting to prevent any attacks on defeated candidates and their

supporters.

Police have also taken all-out measures to stop election-related violence, as the government thinks it might reduce voter turnout.

Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun is visiting the divisional headquarters of the police and holding meetings with local police high-ups.

He has already visited Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Khulna divisions and will visit Mymensingh, Chattogram, and Barishal within a day or two.

Following a meeting with local police in Jessore, the police chief affirmed that law enforcement will be on standby to maintain a conducive atmosphere for smooth voting and is ready to handle any situation for fair and festive elections.

During the electoral campaign from December 18 to December 30, a total of 213 cases related to pre-polls violence were filed, leading to the arrest of 235 individuals across the country, as per PHQ statistics.

According to law enforcers, at least 100 pre-polls violence incidents have taken place in the last 13 days, resulting in over 300 injuries and three deaths.

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ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL



Hattrick for Nixon in Faridpur-4?

Zafarullah faces uphill battle as campaign lacks momentum, youth support

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU, back from Faridpur

After suffering defeats in the last two national elections to independent candidate Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury, alias Nixon Chowdhury, Kazi Zafarullah is in a "tight spot" this time as well in Faridpur-4 constituency.

His campaign seems lacklustre compared to that of Nixon. Most of the public representatives at the local level are loyal to Nixon.

Of the total 24 union parishads -- Bhanga, Sadarpur, Charbhadrasan -- that falls in the constituency, 20 chairmen, who contested the last UP election as independents against AL picks, are followers of Nixon.

While visiting different areas of the constituency, posters, banners and election camps of Nixon were seen in larger numbers than that of Zafarullah.

As per locals, Nixon's main strength is the youth and floating voters while the relatively older ones are rallying behind Zafarullah.

They said Nixon always remained connected with the youth and had carried out developments in the constituency which made him "popular".

Talking to The Daily Star, Mostafizur, a tea stall vendor in Sadarpur area, said, "The elderly are working in favour of the Awami League candidate, they are dedicated to the party irrespective of whoever it picks."

Also, many of the voters in Faridpur-4 constituency said the voting of 22

centres adjacent to Shibchar upazila of Madaripur will be a big factor in the election.

In the last two elections, Nixon got majority of votes in these 22 centres located in Shibchar, the ancestral home of Nixon.

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AL DIVIDED

Zafar is the presidium member of the AL while Nixon holds the post of presidium member in AL's youth wing Jubo League.

Though there has been no major incident of violence in this constituency since the election campaign started, the atmosphere occasionally heats up due to the ongoing war of words between Nixon and Zafarullah, where they exchange verbal attacks and make various allegations against each other.

Zafarullah accused Nixon of occupying khas land, extortion, and illegal sand extraction, as well as providing false

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Swing voters hold the key

Mymensingh-4 to see tough battle between AL's Shanto and independent Shamim

MD ABBAS, back from Mymensingh

The fate of Mymensingh-4 constituency hinges on the votes of 11 unions, including five in char areas (shallow lands that rise from a river when water level decreases).

There are 339,529 voters in the 33

The voters in the 11 unions, being swing voters, do not exhibit loyalty to any particular party but rather base their votes on individual candidates.

city corporation wards and an additional 310,755 voters in the 11 unions under Mymensingh-4 constituency.

"The voters in the 11 unions, being swing voters, do not exhibit loyalty to any particular party but rather base their votes on individual candidates. As half of the voters are from these unions, they will be a decisive factor," said a top leader of the Mymensingh district Awami League.

Meanwhile, city corporation areas have been known as the stronghold of AL for years, he said.

AL nominee Muhit Ur Rahman Shanto and his "independent" counterpart Md Aminul Haque Shamim, both from the

Mymensingh city unit AL, are actively seeking support from the swing voters.

Voters said Shanto holds a strategic advantage with the legacy of his late father, Principal Motiur Rahman, a popular figure in the constituency and former state minister for religious affairs.

The influence of Shanto's late father is expected to sway voters in his favour, they said.

On the other hand, Shamim, president of Mymensingh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and former president of Mymensingh District Transport Owners Association, has a strong base among transport owners, workers, and the business community.

Besides, Shamim's younger brother Ekramul Haque Titu, mayor of Mymensingh City Corporation, and also the president of Mymensingh City unit AL, also has a strong base among the voters that would go in favour of Shamim.

Additionally, AL district unit president Ehteshamul Alam and its general secretary advocate Maozzem Hossain Babul along with several other leaders have been actively backing Shamim.

Preferring anonymity, an AL leader while talking with The Daily Star justified their support for the independent candidate.

"People of this constituency did not see expected development in the last 15 years. We are working to bring a change. As the independent candidate also belongs to Awami League, it would not

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DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

'464 politicians, 442 journos sued in last five years'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The rights of people have been curtailed significantly in the country, said speakers at a webinar yesterday.

"In the past five years, it has been observed that the Digital Security Act was utilised to suppress dissidents and there is no confusion or doubt about it," said Ali Riaz, a political scientist and distinguished professor at Illinois State University.

"It is evident that the rights of the people have been significantly curtailed in the country by using the DSA, which has now been converted into the Cyber Security Act. The law was enacted to suppress freedom of speech, particularly to protect those in power," he added.

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ALI RIAZ
Political scientist

He made these remarks while addressing a webinar titled "The Perpetual Misery: The Plight of the Accused under the Digital Security Act 2018 in Bangladesh," organised by the Centre for Governance Studies.

He presented a study report during the webinar regarding the plight of those accused under the DSA.

According to the study, 464 politicians, 442 journalists, 135 students, and 59 teachers were accused in DSA cases from October 2018 to October 2023.

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YUNUS VERDICT

'It was a result of political vendetta' Speakers tell Ganatantra Mancha rally

UNB, Dhaka

Ganatantra Mancha, a platform of some opposition organisations, yesterday alleged that the Labour Court's verdict against Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus is an outcome of the Awami League government's political vengeance.

Speaking at a rally in the capital's Kakrail intersection, the platform's leaders warned that people will come up with a fitting reply if the lopsided national election is not stopped.

"While the opposition parties have been on a street movement, they [govt] have used the judiciary to jail the ordinary leaders and activists of BNP with dictated verdicts. They didn't stop there as Professor Yunus was also sentenced to six months' imprisonment by the Labour Court," said Saiful Haque, general secretary of Bangladesh-er Biplobi Workers Party.

This verdict also exposed how the government has been using the judiciary to implement its agenda, he added.

"The long-standing political vendetta

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Is he above law, did govt punish him, asks Quader

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said Prof Muhammad Yunus was sentenced to six months' imprisonment by the court, and the Awami League government had nothing to do with the verdict.

"Noble Laureate economist Dr Muhammad Yunus is not above the law and that's why social status of a particular person won't be considered in the eye of law," he said, reports BSS.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court on Monday sentenced Yunus and three other top officials of Grameen Telecom to six months in jail in a case filed by the government over labour law violations.

"The court has sentenced Dr Muhammad Yunus, not the Awami League government. Why will the Awami League face criticism?" the AL general secretary asked.

Quader was briefing the media at the party president's Dhanmondi office.

In another programme in Chattogram, AL joint general secretary Hasan Mahmud said some people are trying to spread confusion over Dr Yunus' issue and trying to make the role of the

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People gather around a TCB truck parked near Karwan Bazar rail tracks yesterday afternoon to buy essentials in a subsidised rate. With prices of commodities spiraling, such scenes have become common.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN