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## Vote on Jan 7 to prove democracy exists in country

### PM tells Narayanganj rally

BSS, Fatullah

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has asked the countrymen to cast their votes in the January 7 parliamentary election to prove that democracy has been prevailing in the country.



"Voting is your democratic and constitutional right. Go to the polling centres to cast your votes and thus prove that democracy is prevailing in the country," she said.

Hasina, also Awami League president, said this while addressing the last public rally of the election campaign for the 12th parliamentary polls slated for January 7, at Fatullah in Narayanganj.

The AL president asked all to maintain peace across Bangladesh ahead of the national election.

Describing the "boat" as the symbol of development, she said, "Boat is our electoral symbol. If you vote us to assume power again, we will build a developed, prosperous and smart Bangladesh."

The AL president also pledged to build three metro rail lines - 1, 2 and 4 - which will cross Narayanganj district.

She said conspiracies are being hatched till the date to foil the election. Hasina urged all to remain alert to this end.

# Polls code takes a back seat in Dhaka

MASHFIQ MIZAN and NAIMUR RAHMAN

From the untimely blare of loudspeakers to election camps mushrooming everywhere and the cityscape being marred by posters on every available surface, needless to say, electioneering is going on in full swing in the capital.

At the same time, electoral code violations are also rampant.

These correspondents visited at least 10 Dhaka constituencies in the past few days, spanning from Rampura to Old Dhaka, covering all areas in between.

At Trimohoni Bridge, a large bamboo gate with a replica of a boat placed on top of it has been set up by supporters of Saber Hossain Chowdhury, the Awami League candidate for Dhaka-9.

The entrance of the "Deb Mandir" temple at Basabo has also been turned into a similar kind of gate.

As per Section 10(a) of the electoral code of conduct, setting up such gates is not permitted.

Such gates are present in several other places, including one of Md Solaimon Selim, AL candidate for Dhaka 7, in Lalbagh area.

Two cars of posters plastered all over them - one of Wakil Uddin at the entrance of Hatirjheel near Rampura, the other of Hasibur Rahman Manik at Old Dhaka - were also observed.

Hasibur is an independent candidate, while Wakil an AL contender in Dhaka-11.

According to 7.1(c) of the electoral code, posters cannot be plastered on cars, trucks, steamers, trains, water vessels, or rickshaws.

Meanwhile, it seems like the Election Commission forgot to tell the candidates of Dhaka that posters can only be hung,

and electric poles, road dividers, road lamps, and similar structures are off limits, as candidates from all parties, including smaller ones, continue to display their posters on these surfaces.

In Paltan and Gulistan, several banners of Bahauddin Nasim, AL candidate for Dhaka-8, were visible on electric poles, road lamps, and similar structures. Md Rasel Kabir, candidate of MuktiJote, MA Yusuf of Trinamool BNP, and other small players did the same.

Near Dhaka University's Jagannath Hall, two election camps belonging to Nasim

and electric poles, road dividers, road lamps, and similar structures are off limits, as candidates from all parties, including smaller ones, continue to display their posters on these surfaces.

Meanwhile, in Old Dhaka, it became abundantly clear that polls code had taken a vacation, with everyone, especially the supporters of AL duo Md Sayeed Khokon of Dhaka-6 and Solaiman Selim of Dhaka-7, flouting the rules as if they were mere suggestions.

In the narrow alleys of Old Dhaka, it appeared that every conceivable surface - walls, homes, market entrances - had volunteered to display posters of the candidates.

Even heritage sites like Lalbagh Fort,

constituencies, plastic coated posters of the respective ruling party nominees for those constituencies, Sayeed Khokon, Mohammad Solaiman Salim, and actor Ferdous Ahmed, were also seen in abundance.

The same was the case for Dhaka 8 and 9. Other political party candidates, like SM Sarwar of Bangladesh Islami Front, a candidate from Dhaka-8, were also seen using laminated posters.

Besides, supporters were seen campaigning with loudspeakers in Solaiman's constituency, and near Bijoy Sarani signal at a camp of Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan after 8:00pm, which is a violation as per Section 13 of the relevant law.

Until Wednesday evening, the electoral enquiry committees, formed by the EC to probe polls irregularities, issued show-cause notices to 589 candidates and their supporters over allegations of breaching the code of conduct.

The number was 256 from November 23 to December 26.

Several EC officials said about 40 percent of violators are either AL candidates or their supporters.

They said the highest 131 violations were reported in Dhaka region.

In the report, EC Anisur Rahman said, "Several incidents of violations [of the code of conduct] have been reported this time, but the number is less than those of the previous polls."

The EC may fine the person or the registered political party concerned Tk 20,000 to Tk 1 lakh and also cancel the candidature of an aspirant.

The campaign for the January 7 polls, which began on December 18, ends at 8:00am today.



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were established on footpaths. One of these camps entirely obstructed the movement of pedestrians, leaving no space for walking.

Setting up camps that hinder people's movement or occupy commonly used areas is prohibited under Section 10(d) of the electoral code.

Besides, there should not be more than one such camp per union or city corporation ward, as per the same section.

If pandals are built, they cannot be bigger than 400 square feet. Such camps are not allowed to serve soft drinks or

food or give out any type of gift to voters. Also, Sayeed and Solaiman featured their fathers' images in the posters, a move that defies the guidelines set by sections 7(3) and 7(4), which permit visuals of only the candidate, their symbols, and the image of their party chief.

In many Dhaka areas, supporters hung posters asking for votes for their preferred candidates, which is a violation of the same sections.

While visiting Dhaka 6, 7, and 10



## Dengue claims another life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One dengue patient died while 75 others were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till yesterday.

The total number of deaths this year rose to three while that of cases is 290, according to Directorate General of Health Services.

Meanwhile, 483 dengue patients, including 244 in Dhaka, are still under treatment at different hospitals across the country and 532 patients have already been released.

Last year, the country witnessed 1,705 dengue-related deaths while 321,179 cases were reported.

Experts identified changing patterns of the dengue virus, false results in testing kits, and the presence of serotypes DEN-2 and DEN-3 among other reasons for the staggering number of deaths last year.

## Protect religious minorities from polls violence

### Urges Oikya Parishad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of religious minority communities yesterday demanded effective security measures for minorities, as, according to their claim, many of them are passing days amid insecurity surrounding the national election.

"While electioneering, some candidates make explosive statements and use derogatory language, primarily targeting the minority communities. In some areas, religious minorities, particularly the Hindu community, are threatened to visit polling stations and cast votes for a particular symbol or face repercussions," said Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad in a statement.

"The community feared that if the Election Commission and the security forces do not take immediate strong measures, the level of oppression, especially against the Hindu community, may escalate on the voting day and following the announcement of election results," he added.

Rana Dasgupta also presented some examples of repression in some constituencies based on information gathered from its central monitoring cell.

An Awami League candidate threatened and tortured Hindu community members out of concern that they might vote for the independent candidates, while in another constituency, Hindu community members were threatened by the AL candidate to vote for the boat, said the statement.



It has been more than two months since the BNP central office in the capital's Nayapaltan area remains padlocked. Though the party is continuing its countrywide non-cooperation movement to boycott the January 7 polls, most of its leaders are either imprisoned or on the run.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN