

Cold wave continues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three passenger flights and one cargo freighter bound for Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka were diverted to different airports from 4:00am to 8:00am yesterday due to dense fog.

Group Captain Kamrul Islam, executive director of HSI, said the flights were diverted to Sylhet and Kolkata.

The diverted flights started returning to HSI from 9:00am, when visibility improved, he added.

According to the forecast of Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), a mild cold wave has been sweeping over the districts of Dinajpur, Panchagarh and Kurigram.

The lowest recorded temperature yesterday was 8.4 degrees Celsius in Tentulia. In Dhaka, lowest temperature was recorded at 14.2 degrees Celsius, which was 14.9 on Wednesday.

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Govt cannot force people to vote

Says Moyeen Khan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP standing committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan yesterday said the government can't force people to vote in the January 7 national polls since there are no laws in the country regarding this.

"The government says that asking people not to vote is unlawful, but this is a lie," said Moyeen at a press conference at his Gulshan residence.

"Being able to decide whether to vote or not is a fundamental right," he said.

"This one-sided seat-sharing election has been subjected to joke and criticism at home and abroad," he added.

"After producing dummy candidates and dummy parties, it has now turned its focus to forcibly creating dummy voters," he claimed.

BNP has boycotted the 12th parliamentary election after failing to realise their demand for the government to step down and the polls to be held under a non-party caretaker government.

In the lead-up to the polls, to garner support for their appeal to boycott the polls, the party has been conducting mass contact programmes.

Moyeen called upon "democratic people" not to be worried by

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Awami League will win Jan 7 polls

Says Obaidul Quader

STAR REPORT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the result of the January 7 national election will determine who the opposition in parliament will be.

During a press conference at AL's Dhaka district office in Dhanmondi, a reporter, mentioning that the ruling party was set to win a fourth straight term, asked Quader who he thought would be in the opposition.

"There is no need to say anything about it [opposition] now. We will win the election. I do not want to mention the margin of the victory," said Quader, also road transport and bridges minister.

"People are enthusiastic about the election. Hopefully, we will get a decent number of seats, but I don't want to say how many as I don't want to be an astrologer like [BNP Secretary General] Mirza Fakhrul," he added.

Asked whether the 12th parliamentary election would be acceptable to foreigners, Quader said, "Let the election take place. The foreigners will say whether it is acceptable."

Stating that the polls would have been more competitive if the BNP participated, Quader said, "All we are saying is that voters' participation will be satisfactory. The main opposition party is not here, we regret it. This is regrettable."



Security forces on high alert

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Security has been beefed up across the country ahead of the January 7 polls, as opposition parties, including BNP, have called for a 48-hour hartal boycotting the elections.

Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun yesterday said he believes citizens will participate in voting in groups and pro-hartal supporters won't be found anywhere on January 7.

"If anyone tries to commit sabotage centring the 12th parliamentary election, the consequences will be dire," warned the IGP while briefing the media about election security at Willes Little Flower School and College premises in Kakrail.

BNP and like-minded parties called for a 48-hour nationwide hartal starting today at 6:00am, which includes the voting day.

Asked whether people would stay away from voting out of fear of the hartal, the IGP said, "We want to assure the countrymen that they [those enforcing hartal] will not get any chance."

"We have details of their [pro-hartal parties] plans," he said, adding that police are working to counter social media rumours too.

He said following the arrest of a Chhatra Dal leader in Magura, they got information about plans to commit violence and sabotage during the polls.

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Police personnel	42,025
BGB members	1.89 lakh
Ansar, VDP	34,530
	5.17 lakh

3 CONSTITUENCIES

Intra-party rivalry, violence a concern for Rajshahi voters

ANWAR ALI

In Rajshahi, Awami League candidates face tough battles with independents in five out of six constituencies, with the focal point being Rajshahi-2 (city) and Rajshahi-6 (Charghat-Bagha) and Rajshahi-4 (Bagmara) due to intra-party rivalry and pre-polls violence.

The AL independents at the constituencies expressed their concerns that the AL candidates "may influence election results by rigging and other unfair means".

They alleged that AL candidates began distributing money for votes after the campaign ended.

In Rajshahi-2, Workers' Party's Fazle Hossain Badsha got the "boat" symbol but faced resistance from the local 14-party alliance. The city AL, led by Mohammad Ali Kamal, supported independent Shafiqur Rahman Badsha, endorsing the "scissor" symbol instead of boat, causing Fazle to seek support from a faction led by city AL's general secretary Dablu Sarker.

Shafiqur Rahman Badsha in a press conference on Thursday night said he noticed "a partial behaviour of local administration during the election campaign".

"The authorities ignored all five complaints against my opponent, while I have to seek apology for one complaint against me," he said.

In Rajshahi-6, AL's Mohammad Shahriar Alam faces a tough fight against independent candidate Md Rahenul Haque, who has backing from local leaders like Bagha UP Chairman Layeb Uddin Lavlu and Bagha Municipality Mayor Akkas Ali.

Shariar is the state minister for foreign affairs.

Concluding his campaign, Rahenul told reporters he fears poll rigging by the AL candidate. He also submitted complaints of buying votes.

In Rajshahi-4 constituency, the battle will be between AL candidate Abul Kalam Azad and independent candidate Enamul Haque.

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10 inmates out of 47,000 voted thru postal ballots

Finds Star after speaking to 34 jail authorities

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

With the country going to polls tomorrow, at least 86,000 inmates in 68 jails across the country also got a chance to exercise their franchise through postal ballots this time.

However, when The Daily Star communicated with officials of 34 jails across the country, it found out only 10 inmates out of over 47,000 in those jails voted.

Out of the 10 inmates, seven are from Narayanganj jail, two from Mymensingh, and one from Moulvibazar.

Mokammel Hossain, jail superintendent of Narayanganj, said there are around 1,670 inmates in the jail. "We informed the inmates through loudspeakers last month that votes can be given through postal ballots. At first, around 50 inmates expressed a desire to cast votes. But many of them later failed to meet the requirement," he said.

Mokammel said an inmate has to submit his NID number, voter number, and polling centre details to cast postal votes. Once this information is submitted, the jail authority sends an application to the returning officer concerned.

Once all these processes are completed, the postal ballots are sent to jail. The inmate then gives the vote secretly and the ballot is again sent back to the returning officer through the postal service, he said.

In Mymensingh Central Jail, there are around 1,800 inmates and only two of them submitted the

The inmates did not show any interest in casting votes through postal ballot as the process is troublesome.

SUVASH KUMAR GHOSH
Senior superintendent Dhaka Central Jail



necessary documents, said Jahanra Begum, senior jail superintendent. There are around 5,200 inmates in the five jails of Mymensingh division.

In Sylhet, out of the four district jails -- Sylhet, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, and Sunamganj -- among 677 inmates, only one from Moulvibazar showed interest, said Md Sagir Mia, deputy inspector general of prisons of Sylhet Range.

"We went through the process for the first time this year. For this, it got a bit complicated for us," he said.

In Dhaka Central Jail, there are around 10,000 inmates, but none of them applied for votes.

"The inmates did not show any interest in casting votes through postal ballot as the process is troublesome," said Suvash Kumar Ghosh, senior jail superintendent.

Even none of the around 10,000 inmates in the five jails in Gazipur expressed their desire to cast votes, according to officials.

A similar scenario was found in Chattogram and Barishal divisions.

Altab Hossain, DIG prisons for Chattogram Range, said, "Around

16,000 prisoners and inmates are now behind bars at three hill tracts, Cox's Bazar, Feni, Cumilla, and Noakhali jails. But none wanted to cast a postal vote."

In the six jails of Barishal division, there are over 2,600 inmates and none of them showed interest.

Col Sheikh Sujaur Rahman, additional inspector general of the directorate of prisons, said, "We circulated the information to all 68 jails across the country in November last year regarding the postal ballots, and district jail authorities have taken steps on it."

According to sources, a person wishing to vote by postal ballot has to apply to the returning officer concerned within 15 days from the date of announcement of the polls schedule. The application shall mention the voter's name, address, and serial number.

After applying, the returning officer will mail the postal ballot paper and an envelope to the voter. Then the voter will send the envelope back after casting their vote as soon as possible.

Tough battle awaits AL in 8 Ctg seats

SIFAYET ULLAH

Awami League candidates in eight constituencies of Chattogram are facing tough competition as the ruling party's men are also contesting as independent candidates in these seats.

The seats are Chattogram-1 (Mirsarai), Chattogram-2 (Fatikchhari), Chattogram-3 (Sandwip), Chattogram-10 (Halishahar-Doublemooring), Chattogram-11 (Bandar-Patenga), Chattogram-12 (Patiya), Chattogram-15 (Satkania-Lohagara) and Chattogram-16 (Banskhali).

In Chattogram-11, AL candidate and three-time MP MA Latif is contesting. But he is facing challenges as Ziaul Hoque Sumon, a councillor of Chattogram City Corporation and ward AL secretary, is running against him.

"Locals don't like the Awami League candidate as he didn't visit them. I am getting responses from voters and they said they are ready to vote for me," said Sumon.

Chattogram AL General Secretary AJM Nasir Uddin is supporting Sumon and has campaigned for him in different areas.

"We are supporting independent candidates as local leaders and activists have expressed their grievances over MA Latif's activities," said Khorshed Alam Sujon, vice president of city unit AL.

Latif, however, said he is getting support

from local AL leaders.

AL candidate Mahbubur Rahman is contesting from Chattogram-1 against six contenders. Former upazila chairman Gias Uddin is running from this seat as an independent candidate.

"Strong political background is an advantage for Gias Uddin," said Sohiful Islam, a voter of Nizampur.

Gias, who is contesting with the "eagle" symbol, said voters want a change.

Abdul Motaleb, former upazila chairman of Satkania and president of upazila AL unit, is contesting independently from Chattogram-15 (Satkania-Lohagara) against incumbent MP and AL candidate Abu Reza Muhammad Nezamuddin Nadwi.

Both candidates have already made headlines as supporters of these candidates have clashed at least 10 times.

"Most of the ruling party leaders and local UP chairmen are with me. I also have the people's support," Motaleb claimed.

Nadwi claimed people will vote for him as he has initiated many development activities.

Besides, AL candidate of Fatikchhari constituency Khadijatul Anwar Sony, Mahfuzur Rahman of Sandwip, Mohiuddin Bachchu of Chattogram-10, Motaherul Islam of Patiya, and Mostafizur Rahman of Banskhali are also in for tough competition as strong AL independent candidates are running against them.



When this photojournalist spotted a man on a ladder with posters in his hand yesterday afternoon, at first he thought the man was removing those as the electioneering ended around 8:00am. Instead, he was putting up posters of a candidate even five hours after the deadline. The photo was taken on Saat Masjid Road.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON