



'Can't say we did very well but tried best'

CEC says 40pc votes cast

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Habibul Awal said yesterday that 40 percent of votes were cast in the 12th parliamentary election.

"However, the figure may change after the counting of votes end. The voting rate may or may not increase," CEC Habibul told journalists at the Election Commission (EC) building in Dhaka around 5:30pm.

Earlier, EC Secretary Jahangir Alam said the voter turnout stood at 26.37 percent till 3:00pm, adding that the figure might change as data from all constituencies wasn't available at the time.

Jahangir expressed satisfaction over the absence of significant violence during the election. "There was a fear of large-scale violence as a group boycotted the election and indirectly tried to resist the polls."



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Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, her daughter Saima Wazed, and sister Sheikh Rehana are all smiles as her nephew Radwan Mujib Siddiq takes a selfie at Dhaka City College where Hasina and Saima cast their votes.

PHOTO: BSS

BNP activists clash with cops, BGB in port city

Rab vehicle vandalised; driver injured; 48-hour hartal ends this morning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

Sporadic incidents of clashes took place between law enforcers and BNP men in the Chandgaon area of Chattogram city on election day yesterday, also the second day of the 48-hour nationwide hartal that BNP and its allies called to garner support for the non-cooperation movement and the boycott of the polls.

A Rab patrol vehicle was vandalised and its driver was injured in one of the incidents.

The first clash took place around 9:15am at the Sarafat Ullah Petrol Pump area in Chandgaon, when a group of BNP activists tried to block the Arakan Road.

"They [BNP men] tried to create a blockade on the road by setting tyres on fire. On duty police personnel came under attack when law enforcers tried to disperse the protesters and free the road. The police fired blank shotgun rounds to bring the situation under control. Chases and counter-chases continued for around half an hour in the area," said Pankaj Dutta, additional deputy commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

Around 11:00am, BNP activists launched another attack on police at the same spot when teams from the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) joined law enforcers to chase out the protesters, he added.

Another clash ensued around 12:30pm in the Moulavipukurpar area when BNP men pelted brickbats at

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FARIDPUR-3

AK Azad braves all odds, comes out victorious

ASIFUR RAHMAN and SUZIT KUMAR DAS, from Faridpur

AK Azad, an Awami League leader who ran as an independent, had to fight against all odds to win yesterday's parliamentary polls from Faridpur-3.

Supporters of his main rival Shamim Haque, the AL nominee, obstructed many voters from going to the polling centers. They also assaulted some voters at several places. A chase and counter chase between supporters of the two candidates also took place.

Since the beginning of the campaign, Shamim's supporters intimidated the supporters of Azad. Even a day before the voting, Azad's chief election agent Shamsul Haque was attacked.

Azad bagged 1,34,098 votes against Shamim's 75,089.

Azad yesterday said people voted for him to protest the use of muscle power.

Visiting 13 polling centres in Faridpur-3 yesterday, The Daily Star found polling agents of both the candidates were present in all the centres.

However, at the Gerda Government Primary School polling centre, Azad's polling agent Halima Begum said a group of 10-12 supporters of the AL nominee entered the polling station around 1:30pm and started stuffing ballots.

"After I started shouting, law enforcers came in and drove them out," she said.

Admitting the incident, Presiding

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Apathy runs deep among young voters

NAZIBA BASHER and NILIMA JAHAN

Sukanta Roy was 19 when he first got the chance to vote in 2014.

Excited, he woke up early to head to the polling centre in his constituency in Dhaka with his father and get that first blue line on his thumb.

"When we reached, the polling official told my father his name wasn't on the list. My father said it was impossible and insisted on helping the official find his name.

"He found it, but it showed a vote was already cast in his name. It completely deflated me. We just ended up going back home without having cast vote."

This ultimately left Sukanta, now 28, so demotivated that he didn't consider going back to a polling centre again - including this year.

Like him, many young voters have been showing apathy towards the polls, owing to bitter experiences of the past. They also believe the election lost its significance with the main opposition BNP and allies boycotting it once again.

Some spoke of frustrations for not ever being able to vote since becoming a voter post 2008.

The 2008 parliamentary election is considered the last free and fair polls.

Like the two previous polls, this year's too begged the question: "Do I even have a choice of who to vote for?"

This question rang louder for those whose first polls experiences were in 2014 and 2018 - both of which were marred by walkovers, boycotts and rigging.

According to the Election Commission data, there were around 10 million young voters, who had voted in earlier polls, and around 15 million first-time voters, registered to vote this election.

Saira Rahman, a young entrepreneur living in the capital's Uttara, when asked why she preferred not to vote, said, "What's the point in going to a polling centre early in the morning in this cold? I'm sure like the last time, my vote was given on my behalf."

After two back-to-back disappointing elections - one in which she could not enter the polling centre and another in

about my vote; they'll triumph anyway." Shuva Dasgupta, a voter in Chattogram-9, shared similar sentiments.

In his first election in 2014, he refrained from voting due to apathy towards the whole electoral affair. "But in 2018, I went to cast my vote. As soon as I entered the polling booth, I was told my vote had already been cast!"

WHY HE DIDN'T VOTE:
"I wasn't allowed inside the polling centre in the 2018 polls. I opted not to vote in the 2014 election as it was dominated by a single party, and I didn't vote this year for the same reason... Those who conducted the election don't care about my vote; they'll triumph anyway."

HABIBUR RAHMAN, a voter in Gazipur in his early thirties.

WHY SHE VOTED:
"When I was in school, a teacher of mine told me about how many women fought for the right to vote. After they sacrificed so much so that I have this right as a woman, why shouldn't I exercise it?"

NAZIA HOQUE, 32, a Dhaka voter since 2014 polls, in which she had her vote stolen.



which she was a victim of vote fraud - she didn't feel like trying to vote this year.

Like her, Habibur Rahman, who works at a financial organisation in Gazipur and is in his early thirties, did not vote.

"I wasn't allowed inside the polling centre in the 2018 polls. I opted not to vote in the 2014 election as it was dominated by a single party, and I didn't vote this year for the same reason... Those who conducted the election don't care

Noorjahan Kabir, 32, an entrepreneur in Dhaka, believes the spirit of voting is gone due to the lack participation in the polls. "It's crucial for the two major parties to engage in dialogue and contribute to the establishment of a truly democratic nation."

A voter since 2016, she was not allowed to enter the polling centre by ruling party men in 2018. As her fear of violence and

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WORLD MEDIA REACTION

'Predictable' polls 'guarantee' AL victory

STAR REPORT

The election "without opposition" in Bangladesh has seen a low voter turnout but guarantees a fifth term for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, reported several international media today.

Covering the 12th parliamentary election in Bangladesh - the first in South Asia this year - several prominent news outlets and agencies said Hasina, the longest-serving prime minister of the country, also the longest-serving female head of government in the world, is set to win her fourth consecutive term in office.

AFP in an article titled "Bangladesh votes in election without opposition" said the polls boycotted led by BNP - which Hasina branded a 'terrorist organisation' - and some other opposition parties guaranteed a victory for the ruling Awami League.

According to the article, Hasina has presided over breakneck economic growth in a country once beset by grinding poverty, but her government has been accused of rampant human rights abuses and a ruthless opposition crackdown.

Reuters on the other hand, in a jibe at the voter turnout, in an article said Bangladeshis largely stayed away from the

polls. The election is "set to give Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a fourth straight term, after a vote boycotted by the main opposition party and marred by violence," reads the article.

The Guardian reported that Hasina's party faces almost no effective rivals in the seats it is contesting but has avoided fielding candidates in a few seats, in an apparent effort to avoid the legislature being labelled a one-party institution.

CNN, echoing other media, wrote that the election is all but certain to bring Hasina back to power again.

The news network based in the US said overseas watchdogs have expressed concerns the country was heading towards a one-party system.

"Bangladesh begins elections with predictable outcome," Deutsche Welle, based in Germany, titled their report on today's polls.

"Elections are underway, and many Bangladeshis already know what the result will be. The ruling Awami League faces almost no effective rivals in most seats," Beenish Javed wrote in the DW article.

Indian media outlet the Hindustan Times ran a story titled "Bangladesh

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BNP activists throwing pieces of bricks at law enforcers in Chattogram city's Chandgaon area yesterday afternoon. Clashes between police, Rab and opposition activists took place multiple times throughout the day.

PHOTO: COLLECTED