



(From right, anti-clockwise) A protester, wearing a police vest and holding a riot shield, celebrates the ouster of the Nepali government in Kathmandu; flames rise from the burning Singha Durbar office complex that houses the Nepali prime minister's office and other ministries; and a protester wields a firearm during protests in the Nepal capital.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Democrats share Trump's 'birthday note' to Epstein White House rejects it

REUTERS, Washington

Democrats in the US House of Representatives on Monday made public a birthday letter Donald Trump allegedly wrote to sex offender Jeffrey Epstein more than 20 years ago, though the White House quickly denied its authenticity.

The letter, the existence of which was reported by the Wall Street Journal in July, appears to have been signed by Trump, but he has denied doing so and has said it does not exist.

Democrats on the House Oversight Committee released the letter after Congress received the 2003 "birthday book" from Epstein's lawyers. The letter is dated three years before allegations of sex abuse by Epstein became public in 2006.

Later on Monday, Republicans who control the Oversight Committee released hundreds of pages of documents turned over by Epstein's lawyers, including the full "birthday book," Epstein's will and his 2007 non-prosecution agreement with prosecutors in Florida.

The birthday letter contains text of a purported dialogue between Trump and Epstein in which Trump calls him a "pal" and says, "May every day be another wonderful secret." The text sits within a crude sketch of the silhouette of a naked woman.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Taylor Budowich denounced the release, saying the signature on the letter was not Trump's and alluded to Trump's lawsuit against the Journal's parent company, News Corp.

Shibir leading in top two Ducsu posts

FROM PAGE 1

A tense situation prevailed on the campus with a large number of supporters of candidates from various panels gathering in and outside Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban from where the final results were set to be announced. The building's conference room was fully packed, with candidates and supporters chanting slogans.

Students and supporters of different candidates were also seen in front of all polling centres and major points, including TSC and Shahbagh. Many of them expressed frustration over the delay in announcing the result even 10 hours after the end of voting across eight centres. "We have been hearing that the results would be announced soon, but there is no such thing coming. How long does it take to announce the results?" said Akramul, a student of Amar Ekushey Hall.

Around 1:45am, authorities in charge of different centres started announcing results. DU officials said the final result will be declared after the centre authorities finish their result announcements.

Explaining the delay, Prof SM Shamim Reza, returning officer at the Udayan School centre, told reporters around 11:00pm last night that voting was completed at 4:00pm and all ballot boxes had to be brought to a central location afterwards, which took another hour.

"Then the ballots had to be processed, sorted, and extracted -- this sorting is taking considerable time because the ballots were marked in various ways," he said, adding that the ballots for the hall union elections were being scanned first, and one set of Ducsu had also been scanned.

"Based on what our technical team is saying, it could go past midnight."

Yesterday's voting was mostly peaceful, except scattered allegations of irregularities. The atmosphere remained electric as groups of students rallied behind their preferred candidates, engaged in debates, and made last-minute decisions before stepping into the polling booths from

early morning.

Ten correspondents and photographers of The Daily Star reported that students turned out in large numbers from 8:00am to 4:00pm across eight designated centres.

Alongside the central student union, votes were also cast for hall representatives. There were 471 candidates vying for 28 Ducsu posts and 1,035 for 234 posts in 18 hall unions.

Meanwhile, the DU administration last night announced that no classes or exams will be held today.

For 13 days, the campus buzzed with vibrant campaigning, colourful leaflets, and fiery debates as candidates vied for the Ducsu elections -- long seen as one of the country's most influential student bodies and a launchpad for national leadership.

However, supporters of various candidates were seen distributing campaign material at entry points, violating the electoral code, annoying many voters.

FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE

From early morning, the campus teemed with students lining up, energised by the sense of taking part in a historic exercise that shaped generations before them. The number of female voters was notably high.

Many students arrived in groups, taking photos and selfies as lines stretched outside centres. Around the Social Science buildings and Senate Bhaban, others sang and celebrated.

However, supporters of various candidates were seen distributing campaign material at entry points, violating the electoral code, annoying many voters.

For many, especially first-time voters, the day was more than just about casting a vote -- it was a rite of passage into civic participation.

"I was too excited to sleep last night. This is my first time voting in a democratic environment," said Imdadul Haque, a Muktioddha Ziaur Rahman Hall student, at the Udayan School centre.

A second-year student from Ruqayyah Hall said, "We want winners who'll stand up for the rights of general students and uphold academic interests, not pursue political agendas."

As the day progressed, voter numbers rose. Some braved the heat, waiting in line for nearly an hour.

VOTER TURNOUT

According to returning offices, the highest turnout was recorded at Surya Sen Hall, with 88 percent, followed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall at 87 percent and Kabi Jasimuddin Hall at 86 percent.

Bangladesh Kuwait Maitree Hall witnessed 68.39 percent turnout and Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall saw 67.08 percent turnout, the lowest rate.

DU authorities could not immediately provide the voter turnout of the previous elections since independence, but former Ducsu candidates and student politics historians said turnout in yesterday's polls was significantly higher.

Mahmudur Rahman Manna, twice-elected VP in 1979 and 1980, said turnout in his time was about 60 percent. Professor MM Akash, a 1982 GS candidate, recalled participation above 50 percent.

Public health expert Mohammad Mushtuq Husain, elected GS in 1989, said turnout hovered around 60 percent in both 1989 and 1990.

The last Ducsu polls in March 2019, held after 28 years, saw 59.5 percent turnout.

Historian Mohammed Hannan described yesterday's turnout as highly encouraging, reflective of students' strong preference for democracy.

He noted the election timing -- a year after the student-led July uprising -- inspired many, especially women, to vote. He recalled turnout was also high in the first Ducsu election in 1972 after Liberation.

The Ducsu was formed in 1922, a year after the university was founded. Its mission was to promote cultural activities and foster cooperation among students across dormitories.

Over time, it became one of the most powerful and historically influential student bodies in the country, often termed as a launching pad for future national leaders.

Women's unpaid labour worth Tk 570,000cr

FROM PAGE 1

The HPSA highlighted the economic importance of unpaid domestic and care work, including cooking, cleaning, laundry, household management and caregiving for children, older persons, persons with disabilities and those with health conditions.

Despite being essential to the functioning of families and the economy, this work has long remained invisible in national accounts.

Women spend 7.3 times more time than men on unpaid and care work, according to the BBS Time Use Survey 2021.

The HPSA report also provided a breakdown of the top unpaid activities by gender.

For women, these are food and meal management and preparation (Tk 240,000 crore), children and instruction (Tk 220,000 crore), and cleaning and maintaining their own dwelling and surroundings (Tk 47,000 crore).

For men, the top activities are: shopping for their household and family members (Tk 15,200 crore), children and education (Tk 34,300 crore), and travelling, moving and transporting (Tk 12,600 crore).

Nubayra Jehen, programme analyst at UN Women Bangladesh, set the context for the report using

a care calculator, a tool that allows individuals to measure the time they spend on unpaid household and care tasks and their economic value, both daily and annually.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said the HPSA marks a milestone for women's dignity and empowerment.

"For years, we have stressed that women support society in countless ways, yet their efforts often went unnoticed and unmeasured. That recognition has finally come now."

"Through our advocacy, and with my personal engagement with the finance adviser, a commitment was made that was even highlighted in his budget speech. I believe it will not only transform women's position within the family but also strengthen their dignity in society," she added.

The report underscored the urgent need to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. It called for the establishment of an inter-ministerial mechanism to integrate unpaid work into laws and policies, prioritising care in national budgets and development strategies, and engaging the private sector to promote decent care jobs and family-friendly workplace policies.

It also emphasised the importance of sustained financing and regular data collection on unpaid work,

and challenging social norms by encouraging men and boys to share care responsibilities.

Women and Children's Affairs Adviser Sharmeen S Murshid said this research will inform gender-responsive policymaking, planning and budgeting going forward.

"The care economy demands a different value system. Evidence and data are critical tools for shifting mindsets, and this takes time."

To ensure recognition of women's unpaid work, an inter-ministerial coordination framework needs to be established at the national level, she added.

UN Women Representative Gitanjali Singh said the persistent undervaluation of care work reflects deep-rooted gender inequalities and entrenched social norms, leaving women's contributions largely uncounted in traditional economic measures.

"Care is not a cost -- it's an investment. As we mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and uphold the spirit of CEDAW and the SDGs, we must reaffirm our commitment to a future where women's work -- paid or unpaid -- is fully recognised, valued and supported for a more just, equitable and prosperous Bangladesh," she said.

Some allegations in otherwise smooth voting

FROM PAGE 1

union ballots, though many took longer, leading to long queues by midday.

Delays were particularly notable at booths designated for Jasimuddin Hall, prompting Returning Officer and House Tutor Mohammad Rashed Alam Bhuiyan to urge voters to complete voting within the usual time. One student was caught filling a ballot outside the secret booth and was warned. By 2:45pm, 4,900 votes, 79.4 percent of the registered voters, had been cast, rising to at least 84 percent by day's end.

Breaches in conduct were noted around noon, including candidates distributing leaflets or holding voters' belongings while they cast their votes.

The VP candidate nominated by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), along with VP and GS candidates from the Islami Chhatra Shibir-backed panel, voted at this centre.

At Curzon Hall, three polling rooms were designated for 5,055 students from Amar Ekushey, Fazlul Haq, and Shahidullah halls. While students waited patiently in long queues, campaigners lined the entrance, forcing voters to walk through them, causing congestion and delays. Many campaigners shouted at voters to support their candidates, violating the election code of conduct.

Fazlul Haq Hall Returning Officer Al Amin said, "We've been trying to bar the campaigners from obstructing the voters. But they aren't listening."

He lamented a lack of plan in controlling the crowd of campaigners. Authorities later roped off areas in Shahidullah Hall to reduce congestion, yet campaign materials and ballot numbers were found scattered across all rooms.

VP candidate Umama Fatema posted a photo on social media showing a list of candidates, which she said was being distributed outside the polling centre designated for Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall. "On one side is the list of candidates of the Oikyabaddho Shikharthi Jote supported by Chhatra Shibir, and on the other side is the list of candidates contesting the hall union election, identifying themselves as independents. Rumour is that this list was scattered under the desk of the polling booth," she wrote.

Abdul Qader, VP candidate from the "Boishommo Birodhi Shikharthi

Sangsad" panel, alleged a lack of discipline, claiming that ballots had been pre-filled. A similar incident occurred at Amar Ekushey Hall, leading to the removal of a polling officer.

Shibir-backed VP and GS candidates Shadik Kayem and SM Farhad alleged that the JCD panel and polling officers stuffed ballots. Farhad said, "We saw that the JCD and the polling officers were stuffing papers pre-filled with votes for all of their candidates. When we alerted the administration, they took action."

The returning officer described the incident as an "unintentional mistake". He explained that one voter was mistakenly given six sets of ballot papers instead of five and filled them all. "When the next voter arrived, the polling officer mistakenly gave them the previously filled-out ballot paper. That's where the misunderstanding began," he said. The officer involved was later removed from duty.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan said, "A minor incident occurred at Curzon Hall due to an error. We took immediate action. Nevertheless, we will investigate and take measures if anyone is found responsible. We hope both winners and the defeated will accept the results and acknowledge the transparency."

Speaking to reporters, independent candidate Rupaiya Shrestha Tanchangya claimed one voter from Ruqayyah Hall told her that she received a pre-filled paper at table number one.

Polling officer Rumana Parvin also acknowledged the case. "After coming out, a female student complained that her paper already had votes cast in favour of two candidates. She was then given a new ballot paper," she said.

The Physical Education Centre, hosting voters from Salimullah Muslim Hall, Jagannath Hall, and Zahurul Haq Hall, recorded turnouts between 82.44 percent and 84.56 percent.

Teachers and officials ensured order by intervening promptly when disputes arose. Some candidates were campaigning near the gates, and shortly after 2:00pm, a Jagannath Hall candidate accused a rival of campaigning inside a booth, but these incidents did not escalate.

Three observer teams monitored the centre. One of the observers, Prof Asif Shahan told The Daily Star, "The voting environment was acceptable and peaceful, with no major

irregularities."

Prof Samina Luthfa, present throughout the day, said around 2:30pm, "Voting is going smoothly."

JCD-backed VP candidate Abidul Islam said his panel submitted 12 formal complaints to the university authorities.

At booths for Ruqayyah Hall, he alleged, there were pre-marked ballots for Shibir-backed candidates. "A female student coming out of the polling centre alleged that the ballot they were given already had cross marks beside the names of Shadik Kayem and SM Farhad. The same thing also happened at booths for Amar Ekushey Hall," he said, adding, "Probably many other ballots had been marked in advance."

After voting ended, JCD President Rakibul Islam submitted complaints to the VC, claiming Jamaat Shibir members were gathering to "carry out criminal activities". In a heated exchange, he warned, "If any incident occurs, Jamaat and the VC will be responsible."

VC Prof Niaz said he was not aware of any such gatherings and refuted claims of inaction.

Shibir-backed and independent candidates alleged they were barred from entering polling centres, while Abidul had unbarred access. Farhad said, "When we raised the issue with the Chief Returning Officer, he told us at 1:30pm that we too would be allowed access."

A Daily Star correspondent saw Abidul enter the Physical Education Centre. Though the returning officer initially said this violated the code, he later retracted his statement.

The University Teachers' Network described the election as participatory. Prof Gitiara Nasreen said, "Apart from minor irregularities, we did not feel the election was unacceptable."

Prof Samina Luthfa noted gaps in transparency. "Mismanagement remained... Passes for polling agents did not reach all parties on time. Slowdowns occurred at Jagannath Hall and TSC. Cross-marked ballots were found at two centres. The process of appointing polling officers was opaque."

Despite these issues, voting proceeded largely smoothly, with teachers, officials, and observers ensuring order. Students participated enthusiastically, marking the Ducsu polls as one of the most participatory in recent memory.

A new breed of politics may take shape

FROM PAGE 1

Pointing to the large turnout and the presence of independent candidates, he expressed hope for the future of student politics: "If elections like this are held regularly at Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Chittagong University, and others, then student politics will gain momentum. Political parties can enrich themselves if they correctly interpret the mindset of the students," he told The Daily Star last night.

The similarity between the Ducsu election during his time and this year's one, he said, is how participatory and competitive it was. "The difference is that in our time, we held the election amid a mass movement against military rule. But this time, it was held in a post-uprising phase."

He added that during their time the established student organisations dominated the entire election process, including setting the agendas, but this time, a large

number of new, independent, and recently formed student groups have entered the scene. "Some of them have already turned into political parties. This is something new and outside the traditional political trend."

"Another difference is the huge participation of female students. Compared to the past, it was significantly higher this time. Though female students are still not proportionately represented, their participation this time was much better than before."

In the aftermath of the July uprising, he said, students are no longer invested in conventional political activities. They want to create a new political space as existing parties -- especially those that have ruled the country for long periods -- are failing to deliver. "Progressive parties still exist, but their organisational base has shrunk, so students don't fully trust them either. If they cannot organise effectively, others will attract support."

Mushtuq also said, "In Sri Lanka, the progressive forces made mistakes, but the younger generation's aspirations were captured successfully by new actors through democratic processes. In Nepal too, youth movements against the monarchy brought major change."

"In Bangladesh, the same is possible. If political forces keep their eyes and ears open, without clinging to rigid ideologies, and if regular student elections are ensured, then politics will be shaped by fresh student voices. Otherwise, if elections are manipulated or results are rejected, students' distrust in mainstream parties will only grow. That's why the existing student organisations and their parent political parties must handle the election results responsibly."

He warned, "If they fail to act responsibly, the same weaknesses exposed during the 2024 uprising will surface again."