



Turnout 38.4% in Tungipara

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

Tungipara, the ancestral home and former electoral stronghold of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, had been expected to record one of the lowest turnouts in the election. Instead, the constituency delivered a surprise, with a higher-than-anticipated number of voters casting their ballots.

Despite the Awami League being barred from the polls, after the voting ended at 4:30pm yesterday, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Zahurul Alam said voter turnout in Tungipara stood at 38.40 percent.

Voter presence was thin at polling centres in the Gopalganj-3 (Tungipara-Kotalipara) constituency in the morning after voting began at 7:30am, but steadily increased as the day wore on.

Of the 93,903 registered voters in Tungipara upazila, 36,061 exercised their franchise.

Visits to several polling centres found no long queues at most locations, except at Tungipara Government College centre, where nearly 20 percent of votes had been cast by 12:00pm.

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BNP reclaims Obaidul Quader's Noakhali-5 Jamaat was also in close contest

ANWARUL HAIDER, Noakhali

Noakhali 5, seen as Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader's "impenetrable fortress" for a decade and a half, transformed into a fiercely contested battleground for the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami after the 2024 uprising.

Mohammad Fakhru Islam, a Dhaka-based businessman, finally reclaimed the seat for the BNP in the 13th parliamentary polls yesterday by bagging 1,47,808 votes.

His nearest rival, Jamaat's Maulana Belayet Hossain, secured 1,20,453, according to unofficial results published at around 2:00am today.

With Quader absent and the Awami League organisationally weakened, both Fakhru and Belayet campaigned door-to-door, expressing strong optimism about victory from the seat.

Historically, the main contest in this seat, comprising Companiganj, Kabirhat and a portion of Sadar upazila, was between Quader and the late senior BNP leader Barrister Moudud Ahmed.

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Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin casting his ballots in the 13th parliamentary polls and referendum at Eskaton Garden High School centre in the capital's Ramna yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Queues, selfies and festivities define polls day in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was as if Eid came a month early. Families thronged the streets, voters reconvened with friends in voting centres, snacked on street-side delicacies from the few hawkers who opened shop, proudly shot selfies with their inked thumbs, and most importantly – for a full day became masters of the state.

The Daily Star's correspondents visited 286 centres across Dhaka city, and the two most repeated words in their descriptions were "peaceful" and "joyful", with a sparse smattering of allegations of irregularities.

After the official voting hours ended, different groups of people brought out processions in the surrounding areas, adding to the day's political atmosphere. Rabiul Islam Roni, 29, an electrical mechanic, was the last voter to cast his ballot at the Bottomley Home Girls High School polling centre in Dhaka-12 yesterday. Roni, who earns his living through daily mechanical work, was unable to visit the polling centre earlier for his morning shift. He finished his duty and rushed to the centre, arriving just three minutes before voting officially ended. His last-minute arrival marked a determined effort to take part in the democratic process.

"I am very happy today. I became a voter

11 years ago, but this is the first time I was able to cast my ballot."

Afsara Rahman was a first-time voter from Dhaka-17. After casting her ballot at Banani Bidiyaniketan School, she said, "It feels like if I did not come here, it would be an injustice to the country... I feel that my vote matters in the formation of the government."

BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman, a candidate in the constituency, cast his vote at Gulshan Model School and College, accompanied by members of his family.

Some voters turned the day into an educational experience.

In Dhaka-9, Tasnova, a private sector employee who cast her vote at a centre in Basabo, brought her children to the centre specifically to show them that voting does not always mean "chaos, threats and trouble".

"I came out to show the children what a voting day looks like. They have grown up thinking voting means chaos, threats and trouble. But this time the environment felt different after I cast my vote, so I brought them along."

Her daughter Manaka, an intermediate second-year student, said, "It feels festive. This time, there is a choice. Earlier, we heard there wasn't really an option. We hope such an environment continues so

that we can also vote in the future."

The atmosphere outside the centres in the constituency was vibrant.

BNP supporters were observed distributing biryani in large quantities to their backers. Additionally, rickshaws were reportedly dedicated to transporting BNP voters to and from the polling stations.

However, independent candidate in Dhaka-9, Tasnim Jara, while visiting Khilgaon Model College yesterday, alleged that her polling agents faced obstruction at several centres, with many denied entry or expelled on what she described as "baseless and fabricated" grounds.

"My polling agents are being prevented from entering centres or are being forced out using various made-up excuses. Some are being told, 'You are not a voter here,' even though there is no rule requiring a polling agent to be a voter of that particular constituency."

She further alleged that female polling agents were being barred from male polling centres under non-existent regulations. "They are also repeatedly being told that phones cannot be brought inside, whereas the rule is that phones may be carried but cannot be used. Under these excuses, our agents are being pushed out even as voting continues inside."

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Ballots before lunch, then crowds thinned Star observed in 2 constituencies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most voters in Dhaka hurried to polling centres and cast their ballots before lunchtime yesterday amid tight security, with no major incidents reported. That, at least, was the common picture in two constituencies.

The Daily Star correspondents stayed at polling centres at Government Science College in Dhaka-12 and Motijheel Ideal School and College in Dhaka-8 constituencies from 7:00am to 5:00pm, tracking the rhythm of the vote from opening hour to close.

Supporters and polling agents of different candidates were found setting up tables about 400 metres from the centres to help voters find their serial numbers. Police and army personnel, however, did not allow anyone, including voters, to hang around anywhere close to the premises.

At Government Science College in Farmgate area under the Dhaka-12 constituency, queues thinned sharply after 1:00pm, leaving the centre almost deserted.

After lunch, voters arrived only sporadically, usually no more than two every ten minutes. No one turned up after 3:30pm, an hour before voting ended at 4:30pm.

At the college, there were two centres. Official counts put turnout at Centre 1 at 31.88 percent. Centre 2 fared slightly better, with turnout reaching 39.88 percent.

At Motijheel Ideal School and College, under the Dhaka-8 constituency, the voting pattern was almost the same – a moderate rush in the morning, a brief lull around lunchtime, and a thin queue thereafter.

At 4:20pm, police used loudspeakers to urge people to come and cast their votes quickly, reminding them that polling would end at 4:30pm. However, only six voters entered the centre in the final ten minutes.

A 'LOST' AGENT

At the Motijheel Ideal School and College centre, one Hosne Ara Begum identified herself as representing the "Shapla Koli" candidate Nasiruddin Patwari.

Confusion followed when another person at the same booth also claimed to be an agent of Patwari, as rules allow only one agent per booth.

Patwari is the chief coordinator of the National Citizen Party (NCP) and contested the election as the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance candidate for Dhaka-8.

In the afternoon, the matter was resolved only after Hosne Ara produced her identity card, which showed she was in fact an agent of independent candidate Md Golam Sarwar, who contested with the Pen symbol.

With permission from the presiding officer, The Daily Star correspondent spoke to polling agents at several booths. During these conversations, Hosne Ara appeared unaware until the afternoon which candidate she was representing.

Later in the day, Patwari, who contested against BNP Standing Committee Member Mirza Abbas, alleged that "dummy agents" from different candidates "were working in favour of Abbas."

Faizur Rahman Dipu and Saidur Rahman Zihan, polling agents for BNP and Jatiya Party respectively, rejected the allegation.

AKM Anwarul Kabir, in charge of the centre on behalf of BNP candidate Mirza Abbas, also denied the claim.

At the centre, Kabir was seen offering breakfast and later lunch to polling agents from BNP, Jatiya Party, NCP and independent candidates. "From a good political gesture, Mirza Abbas has sent food for all," he said.

Nurul Islam, the presiding officer of the centre, said voting was held peacefully.

BNP heads for big win

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elected from both Dhaka-17 and Bogura-6, according to unofficial results from the EC and party sources.

Among BNP parliamentary committee members, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain won Cumilla-1; Mirza Abbas secured Dhaka-8; and Abdul Moyeen Khan won Narsingdi-2. Amir Khoshru Mahmud Chowdhury was elected from Chattogram-11, and Salahuddin Ahmed from Cox's Bazar-1.

On the other hand, Jamaat Nayebe-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammed Taher was leading the race in Cumilla-12, while Nayebe-Ameer ATM Azharul Islam from Rangpur-2, and Barrister Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem Arman from Dhaka-14 were ahead of their competitors in their respective constituencies.

NCP Convener Nahid Islam was leading the race in Dhaka-11, while Member Secretary Akhter Hossen from Rangpur-4, Chief Organiser (Southern Region) Hasnat Abdullah from Cumilla-4, and Joint Convener Atik Mujahid from Kurigram-2 were ahead of their rivals, according to unofficial results.

The candidates entered the fray after 20 days of high-octane campaigning that swept across every corner of the country. This election saw a unique blend of seasoned political veterans and a new generation of vibrant leaders born out of the student-led uprising.

Yesterday, thousands of men and women – some on crutches or in wheelchairs – queued patiently for hours at polling centres across the country. They stood without fear, reclaiming the opportunity to choose representatives for 299 of the 300 parliamentary seats.

The presence of women voters was overwhelming, with many arriving in groups, reflecting broad participation that cut across age and gender.

Alongside electing a new parliament widely seen as critical to the country's democratic transition after years of political turmoil,

voters took part in a referendum on constitutional reforms – two votes were held simultaneously for the first time in the nation's history.

As of the last count, "Yes" got 215,579 votes while "No" received 80,203 votes.

The parliamentary election, held 18 months after an unprecedented student-led uprising toppled the Awami League government, reflected the interim government's commitment to delivering a free, fair and transparent election.

The voter turnout was 47.91 percent till 2:00pm, according to the EC data from 36,031 out of 42,651 polling centres across the country.

The AL has been barred from contesting the election for its role in the brutal crackdown that claimed at least 1,400 lives.

Unlike the previous polls marred by deadly clashes, arson attacks and sweeping allegations of irregularities, yesterday's vote saw only sporadic and low-intensity incidents. Reports of violence were few and far between, and allegations of fake voting appeared minimal compared to past experiences.

Meanwhile, at least eight people, including a presiding officer and a polling officer, died after falling ill inside or near polling stations during voting hours in seven districts.

The country was draped in a security blanket, with members of the armed forces, police and other law enforcement agencies guarding and patrolling polling stations to prevent any untoward incidents.

Inside the centres, the EC kept the management orderly and efficient, ensuring a steady and calm flow of voters throughout the day. Outside, colourful election bunting strung across roads and walkways fluttered in the breeze, adding a festive touch that matched the spirit of the occasion.

The scenes remained largely consistent throughout the day – from the start of the polling at 7:30am to

the end at 4:30pm. While turnout was low in the early hours, it gradually picked up, with long queues forming at some centres by midday.

The distinctly calm, festive mood of the election remained intact despite instances of mismanagement reported in some polling centres in the capital and elsewhere. A few voters were left disheartened when they discovered their ballots had already been cast in their names.

Young voters, making up 43.56 percent of the 12.10 crore electorate, showed up in droves, their eyes bright with excitement as they searched for their serial numbers, eager to cast their ballots.

The first-time voters were especially enthusiastic, holding up ink-marked thumbs as badges of honour to show they had taken part in shaping the nation's future.

Many of them, having seen their rights curtailed in previous elections, cheered with relief and pride after finally exercising their franchise.

"It feels great to vote for the first time. I am happy to cast my vote peacefully," said Nusrat Ahmed Sneha, a first-time voter from Dhaka-6.

"We want a government that prioritises young people and works for the welfare of the country," she said.

After casting ballots at Kalyanpur Girls' School and College, Rafiqul Islam, a 26-year-old voter, said, "This is the first vote I've been able to cast. Over the past decade, I didn't feel the situation was right. I want a leader who represents the country with dignity. We are tired of conflict – we want stability and progress. Whoever forms the government should strengthen our country's global standing," he said.

Another voter, Asha Akter, expressed satisfaction with the orderly environment inside the polling centre.

"Earlier, there used to be irregularities in voting, but this time

I did not see that. I hope whichever party comes to power will be women friendly," she said.

Sammii Akter Nitol, a resident of Dhaka's Gandaria area, said she felt relieved to be able to vote after a long gap.

"Over the past 17 years, we were deprived of our voting rights. It feels very good to vote today. I want a government that is free from corruption and extortion," she said.

Social media was flooded with posts of people of different ages, especially the young, proudly displaying their ink-marked thumbs, sharing selfies and short videos with captions about their first vote.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus described the election and referendum as a moment of national joy and renewal.

"This is a day of great joy. Today is the birthday of a new Bangladesh. We will celebrate this birthday throughout the day," he told reporters after casting his vote at 10:26am at Gulshan Model High School and College.

Later, he extended his heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to the entire nation.

"The spontaneous participation of voters, the responsible conduct of political parties, the restraint shown by candidates, and the professionalism of all institutions involved in the electoral process collectively demonstrated that our commitment to democracy remains unwavering," he said in a statement issued by his press wing after voting concluded at 4:30pm.

After casting his vote at Adamjee Cantonment College polling centre, Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman said he had been waiting for this day for the past one and a half years, hoping for a fair election.

Calling upon voters to cast their ballots without fear, he said, "Today is a very important day for us."

The army chief also praised the role of media personnel, noting that

they play a vital role in informing the public about the situation.

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman appeared confident of victory after casting his vote at Gulshan Model High School and College in Gulshan-2.

"If we form the government, we will prioritise improving law and order in the country so that people feel secure.

"I have exercised my constitutional right to vote. For more than a decade, the people of Bangladesh have been waiting for this day," he said.

Later, Tarique briefed reporters at the party chairman's office in Gulshan, and said, "If the election is free and fair without any controversy, then why would we not accept it? Of course, we will accept it. All parties will accept it. But there is one condition here. The election must be neutral and peaceful."

At a press conference, the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance described the voting process as "excellent," expressing hope of securing a "landslide victory" and the "highest number" of seats. It, however, raised allegations of some isolated incidents of violence and irregularities.

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman was optimistic that his party would form the government through the voters' mandate.

"If the voting is held in a free and fair manner, we will accept the results. Others should also accept the verdict of the people," he told reporters after casting his ballot around 8:30am at the Monipur High School and College polling centre.

"Through this vote, we hope to see the formation of a government that does not belong to any individual, family, or party, but to the 18 crore people of this country," he said.

However, in a post on his verified Facebook page at 3:50pm, Shafiqur alleged that candidates were being made to cast fake votes in different parts of the country.

Principal dies after Thailand school shooting

AFP, Bangkok

A teenage shooter accused of killing the principal of a school in Thailand using a police officer's weapon was in custody yesterday, authorities said, after an attack that also injured two students.

Police shot and arrested the 18-year-old on Wednesday after he stormed into the Phatong Prathan Khirawat School in southern Songkhla province with a gun, police and other authorities said, adding that several shots were fired.

School director Sasiphat Sinsamosorn died in hospital early yesterday after being admitted with gunshot wounds and undergoing surgery, the Songkhla public relations department said in a statement.

She was shot before police intervened and apprehended the teenager, Songkhla police chief Teerasak Chaiyotha told AFP.

The 18-year-old suspect was being treated in hospital after being grazed by a bullet and had not been charged pending an investigation, Teerasak said.

Police had responded to a report of a teenager "acting erratically," he said. Teerasak told reporters on Wednesday that the suspect was hospitalised for psychiatric treatment in December and had been discharged.

He said the teen stabbed a police officer with a knife and stole his weapon – a 9mm pistol – just before the incident at the school, which he then used to carry out the attack.

Sasiphat was shot in the chest and died in hospital from blood loss, the Songkhla department said, calling her a "brave teacher".

The school shared its "deepest condolences" in a Facebook post.

"Although we have lost her, the memories and kindness she left behind will forever remain in our hearts," the post said.