



After 56 years, women of South Rupsha vote

Chandpur union sees women voters for first time since 1969

STAR REPORT

For the first time in 56 years, women from Rupsha South union under Faridganj upazila of Chandpur exercised their franchise in the 13th national election and referendum held yesterday.

According to locals, in 1969, women were locally directed not to cast votes. Since then, women residents of the union have not participated in elections, despite repeated encouragement from the Election Commission and local authorities, reports Prothom Alo.

After voting began yesterday morning, women were seen thronging polling centres across the union in good numbers, casting their votes spontaneously and with enthusiasm.

"I am feeling very happy to have voted for the first time in my life today," said Ayesha Begum, 70, at the Gridhkalindiya High School polling centre.

Asked why she had never voted before, Ayesha said, "There was a restriction [on voting by women]. After locals convinced us, we came to vote."

Nurjahan Begum, another resident, said she has been living in the area for 45 years since her marriage and has never voted during this time.

Explaining why she came to vote this time, Nurjahan said, "Everyone told us that since women can have jobs, go to the market and do everything, why can't you vote? Voting isn't haram in Islam, so there is no problem with it. So we came to vote today. Not participating in previous elections had been a mistake."

KM Lokman Hakim, presiding officer at the Gridhkalindiya High School centre, said there were 3,603 voters at the centre, including 1,811 men and 1,792 women.

"Till 9:30am, a total of 401 voters had cast their franchise, including 159 women," he said.



A similar scene was witnessed at the Charmandari Shaheed Smrity Government Primary School centre. However, presiding officer Abdus Samad said that as women voters had never voted before, many were largely unaware of the voting process.

The union has a total of 21,695 voters, including 10,299 women.

Recently, the Chandpur district administration took initiatives to organise meetings to raise awareness among women in the union and encourage them to vote. Local leaders, amins, muezzins and common people participated in the meetings.

"Voting by women is not a crime according

to Islam. The then military administration's directive 56 years ago was misinterpreted locally, depriving women in this union of their voting rights all these years, which is unacceptable," said Nazmul Islam Sarkar, deputy commissioner and returning officer in Chandpur.

Visiting the Gridhkalindiya High School centre around 11:00am, Chandpur Superintendent of Police Rabiul Hasan said women in the union had been informed that there would be no problem if they came to vote.

"Realising that, women have come to vote. So far, there has been no untoward incident across the district," he added.

Voting held peacefully in three hill districts

STAR REPORT

Voting in the 13th national election was held in a peaceful and festive atmosphere yesterday across the three hill districts – Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari – with no major untoward incidents reported.

While voter turnout was comparatively low in Bandarban, long queues were seen at many polling centres in Rangamati and Khagrachhari.

In Bandarban, voter presence was relatively thin at most centres since voting began at 7:30am.

At the Government Girls' High School centre in Bandarban town, Presiding Officer Satyajit Majumdar said around 55 percent of the 3,784 registered voters cast their ballots by the time voting ended at 4:30pm.

A similar picture was seen at the Bus Station Government Primary School centre, where female voter turnout was comparatively higher. Presiding Officer Abu Hasan Md Nayeem said about 56 percent of the 3,311 registered voters exercised their franchise.

Election officials said turnout at remote centres ranged between 45 and 55 percent.

According to district administration sources, voting was held at 186 centres for a total of 3,15,422 registered voters in the district.

In Rangamati, long queues of voters were visible at different centres from the morning.

At the Shukrachhari Government Primary School centre, 31 percent of voters were cast by 12:00pm, while the figure stood at 42 percent at the Hajachhari centre at the same time.

At 6:00pm, the office of the district returning officer said a total of 54.07 percent votes were cast across the district's 10 upazilas, excluding postal ballots.

Rangamati Superintendent of Police Muhammad Abdur Rakib said voting ended peacefully across the district, except for a few isolated allegations of fake voting.

In Khagrachhari, voting was held peacefully at 203 centres, with visibly high voter turnout at polling centres across Khagrachhari Sadar, Panchhari, Dighinala, Mahalchhari, Lakshmichhari, Matiranga, Manikchhari and Guimara upazilas. Participation of female voters



was also significant.

District Election Officer Md SM Shahadat Hossain said nearly 60 percent of the district's 5,54,414 registered voters cast their ballots.

To ensure security, members of the BGB, police, Rab, Ansar and VDP were deployed across all three districts, with additional measures taken at vulnerable centres. The administration said necessary materials and officials were present at all centres on time.

[Our Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari correspondents contributed to this report.]

Will accept results even if others don't

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the polls, the ameer said initial results from across the country started coming in.

"We believe the results may begin to take shape by around 11:00pm. It would not be appropriate for us to make any comment at this moment."

However, referring to the possibility of being ahead, he added, "The initial results that have started coming in indicate such a possibility. But it cannot be guaranteed. We need to wait patiently for some more time."

Speaking at another press briefing, he described Jamaat as "a party with a painful history. Since its inception, the party has been banned repeatedly, yet it has never stopped its activities."

Shafiqur also expressed hope that if Jamaat gets the opportunity to form the government, it would want all parties to stand by it as partners.

"There was a lot of fear, panic, and propaganda that the election would not take place and that

no one would be able to participate. Ultimately, the Election Commission and the people together ensured a good election.

"The credit does not belong as much to political parties as it does to those involved in election management and those who worked as guiding forces to make this election meaningful from different aspects."

Thanking voters for their participation, Shafiqur said, "There had been widespread panic surrounding the election. But despite everything, the election has been held and there has been no major casualty."

Regarding the possibility of victory or defeat in his own constituency, he said, "In society, mistakes can happen when people move together. The person who contested against me in this seat is also my colleague and associate. We met twice today [Thursday] as well. When we engage in such a contest, only one will win

and the other will accept it. That is normal." Earlier, at a press conference around 2:00pm, the Jamaat ameer alleged that scattered incidents of violence and irregularities after voting began in the 13th parliamentary election but expressed hope for a "good election" by the end of the day.

Shafiqur cast his vote in the morning at Monipur High School Boys' Branch polling centre in the Mirpur's 60 Feet area. Describing his experience, he said, "I saw a normal situation there and voter turnout was noticeable. Afterwards, I tried to visit several centres. Except for one or two centres, the turnout in the rest was very satisfactory."

He also alleged that a rival candidate forcibly entered the Monipur High School Girls' Branch polling station. "That centre has the highest number of voters in this constituency -- 26,000 voters. Suddenly,

some people from the rival party entered the centre recklessly. They harassed our voters and supporters."

He said he visited the centre after getting the information. "We saw that an army officer was handling the situation very responsibly. He assured us that the situation was under control."

Throughout the day, he also shared his statements through multiple posts on his verified Facebook page. In a post at 3:50pm, he alleged attempts to cast fake votes and capture polling centres in different parts of the country.

"You have defeated all rumours since yesterday [Wednesday] and resisted attempts and conspiracies to capture polling centres. Since morning, you have cast your votes in a festive mood, driven by the dream of establishing justice," the post said.

"But we are concerned to observe attempts to cast fake votes in different places. Polling agents are being attacked and injured in various places. Women

are being harassed. Attempts are also being made to capture polling centres in several places."

He urged voters to protect their votes until the announcement of results.

"We request the people to continue resisting vote rigging and attempts to capture centres the way you have done so far. Guard your polling centres and cooperate with law enforcement agencies so that no one can snatch away your valuable votes," he said.

In another post around 5:00pm, Shafiqur wrote, "If the Almighty grants victory to the oppressed out of the mercy, there will be no rallies, slogans, or celebrations."

"We will thank Almighty Allah wholeheartedly and seek the help to serve the nation."

In another post 45 minutes later, he wrote, "No one should leave the polling centres until the final results are announced."

Queues, selfies and festivities

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Because most centres lacked elevators, elderly voters and women faced difficulties. Ansar members were seen assisting them, and one pregnant woman was observed climbing to the third floor, having to pause at each level to rest.

Abul Kashem, a voter at Jatrabari Ideal School and College in Dhaka-5, said he cast his vote after many years, hoping for a big change in the election. "Earlier, other people cast our votes on our behalf. This time, I cast my own vote."

A female voter of Dhaka-5 rushed to the polling centre at Rose Garden High School in Dhalpur but could not enter because the voting time was over.

Speaking to The Daily Star without mentioning her name, she said she had gone to different polling centres to find her name on the voter list. "When I finally found my name and rushed to the correct polling centre, I discovered that the time was already up."

Expressing frustration that she missed entering the centre by only three minutes, she added, "It was my fault. I should have left home earlier to cast my vote."

Meanwhile, a relaxed atmosphere was observed at a roadside tea stall in Pallabi's C Block in Dhaka-16. Voters were seen chatting over tea, relieved that there was "no fighting or shoving".

Right next to the stall, fresh jilapis were being fried in a single pan and selling out instantly, with many voters returning home carrying bags of the sweets after casting their ballots.

In Dhaka-6, 90-year-old Monowara Begum arrived early with her daughter, stating she "could not sleep at night" out of excitement. The Laxmibazar resident cast her vote at St Gregory's High School and College.

Another Laxmibazar resident, Laila Akter Lipi, came to cast her vote despite battling a brain tumour for a long time. She said she last voted in 2008 and had been waiting for the opportunity to exercise her right again. "I feel very good to have gotten the chance after so many years. Please pray for me."

In Dhaka-15, a long queue of voters was seen at Shewrapara's Monipur School and College around 6:15am -- even before polling activities gained full momentum.

According to several locals present at the scene,

many of those standing in line identified themselves as supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami. Witnesses said they had gathered shortly after the Fajr prayer, demonstrating early enthusiasm to cast their votes.

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, a candidate from this seat, cast his vote at the Manipur High School and College centre (Boys' Branch) at 8:30am.

Young voters were seen taking selfies and group photos in the centres after voting, prompting the Army and BGB to use megaphones to request people to return home and reduce congestion.

Throughout the day, a notable number of female police officers were deployed, playing an active role in managing the crowd and maintaining order. Their efforts were observed to be effective in keeping the voting process smooth and disciplined.

The overall environment reflected strong voter participation and heightened security arrangements.

While generally peaceful, a tense scene unfolded at Mirza Abbas Mohila College in Shahjahanpur. National

Citizen Party candidate Nasiruddin Patwary and BNP candidate Mirza Abbas held separate press briefings where they traded barbs.

The duo's verbal tug-of-war and prickly relationship during the campaign season have left voters both troubled and entertained over the past month.

Patwary, chief coordinator of the NCP, claimed that voters were being intimidated by Abbas's men due to the party's rising popularity, alleging that BNP activists barred his polling agents from entering several centres.

He also alleged that the Awami League was backing the BNP, and "India was backing the Awami League", and therefore, the Awami League, India and BNP were collectively contesting the election against the Jamaat-led II-party alliance.

As he left the Mirza Abbas Mohila College centre, a group, mostly BNP supporters, chanted "Bhua bhua [fake]" aimed at him.

Later, at a separate press briefing in the same place, Abbas said the NCP candidate had failed to deploy agents in many centres as he had no supporters.

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Polls catch the eyes of global

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Furthermore, the new leadership will be tasked with implementing the state and social reforms that the people have repeatedly demanded, BBC reports.

News agency AP reported that the election could redefine the nation's future.

"Many voters hope the return to elections will restore law and order, protect civil liberties and bring accountable leadership. But there is also unease. Some fear political instability, the

marginalisation of women and minorities, and the rise of Islamists in a secular country."

There is a broader consensus that Yunus' interim government steadied an economy that had been in free fall, but many say it failed to restore security and protect human rights, and neglected the safety of religious minorities.

For years, Bangladesh stood out globally for being governed by female prime ministers -- Khaleda Zia for two full terms and Hasina for four. It gave

LONDON SCHOOL STABBINGS Boy, 13, charged with attempted murder

AFP, London

Police in London yesterday said they had charged a 13-year-old boy with two counts of attempted murder after pupils were stabbed at a school in the capital.

The boy, who cannot be identified due to his age, also faces charges of possessing a knife on school premises and spraying insect spray in the face of a third victim.

The stabbing victims, two boys aged 12 and 13, remained in hospital, London's Metropolitan Police said in a statement.

Both were described as being in a "stable" condition following the attack at Kingsbury High School in northwest London at lunchtime on Tuesday.

Due to circumstances surrounding the incident, the investigation was passed to counter terrorism officers "although at this time, it has not been declared as a terrorist incident", said senior police officer Helen Flanagan of Counter Terrorism Policing London.

"These are extremely serious charges against a young boy, and we continue to support the victims and their families, as well as the wider school community following this shocking incident," she said.

The UK, and London in particular, has long grappled with teenage violence and the use of knives, while violence within schools has been growing nationwide, according to unions representing teachers.

An investigation involving counter terrorism officers alongside Met detectives was "ongoing", Flanagan added.

China calls Taiwan's leader a 'war instigator'

AFP, Beijing

China called Taiwan's leader Lai Ching-te a "war instigator" yesterday after he warned in an AFP interview that Beijing would target countries in the region should it seize control of the self-ruled island.

Lai told AFP in his first interview with a global news agency since taking office in May 2024 that if China were to take Taiwan, Beijing would become "more aggressive" and would next turn its expansionist ambitions to Japan, the Philippines and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Beijing's foreign ministry yesterday accused Lai of provoking aggression, calling him a "war instigator".

"Lai Ching-te's remarks once again exposed his stubborn pro-independence nature, fully proving that he is a peace disruptor, crisis creator, and war instigator," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a regular news conference.

"No matter what Lai Ching-te says or does, it cannot change the historical and legal fact that Taiwan is part of China's territory," he said.

China claims Taiwan is part of its territory and has threatened to use force to bring the self-governed island under its control.

Taiwan has stepped up efforts to strengthen security and economic ties with Europe, its third-largest export market, at a time when questions have been raised over US willingness to defend the island against a Chinese attack.

In his interview with AFP, Lai called for greater defence and artificial intelligence cooperation between Taiwan and Europe.

Taipei, which makes nearly all of the world's most advanced semiconductors, would also support its chip companies investing overseas, including in Europe, he said.

The concentration of chip production in Taiwan has long been seen as a protection against an attack by China and an incentive for the United States to defend it.

In response, Beijing's foreign ministry insisted efforts to boost cooperation between Taiwan and Europe would be futile as a means of defending the island.

EU, C'wealth pleased with turnout

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In a statement, the Commonwealth said that by mid-morning, the early quiet anticipation had given way to a steady flow of civic participation as voters streamed in to cast their ballots, marking an important moment in the nation's democratic journey.

Nana Akufo-Addo, chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group, said his team was monitoring the entire process, from the opening

of polling stations to the management of results.

For the first time, diaspora voters participated in the election from 122 countries.

"The inclusion of diaspora voters on this scale, alongside the simultaneous referendum on the constitutional reforms, is noteworthy and reflects a commitment to enhancing democratic processes," said Akufo-Addo who was present when polls opened at Viqarunnisa Noon School

and College under Dhaka-8 constituency.

The Commonwealth deployed observers to eight divisions two days before the vote to assess preparations and meet with local stakeholders. They will issue a preliminary report tomorrow.

According to the Chief Adviser's Office, at least 394 international observers and 197 foreign journalists were on the ground to monitor and cover the election and referendum.