

CITY CORPORATION  
ELECTION 2018 SERIES



# THE POWER PLAY

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DOCUMENTING BARISAL CITY ELECTION 2018

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# THE POWER PLAY

## DOCUMENTING BARISAL CITY ELECTION 2018

A detailed report by  
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City Corporation Election 2018 Series

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## CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

### AN ELECTION OF MANY HOPE

The schedule of Barisal City Corporation election was announced with the election date on July 30 2018.

Barisal city corporation area falls under Barisal-5 constituency where Bangladesh Nationalist Party-BNP never lost an election since its founding and is known as one of the bastions of BNP. Moreover, the incumbent mayor of the city was a BNP leader who won a landslide victory in 2013 by defeating Awami League (AL) backed candidate.

Apparently, the election became a litmus test for the Awami League government for two reasons. Losing the election will reflect that the party is as unpopular as it was in 2013, and on the other hand, winning the election by rigging will essentially prove that no credible election can be held under the government. The only way out for the party was to win it in a fair poll, something that did not happen.

Moreover, the election became a personal issue for Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister by force of Bangladesh, as the mayoral candidate was her nephew, and a defeat would prove that she has become unpopular as a person as well as her party.

The government rigged the poll in favour of them by intimidating the voters, pressurizing opposition men to leave the field by raiding their house and arresting them if needed, expelling the polling agents of other parties from the centres, snatch ballots from the voters and force them to vote for AL's candidate, and therefore obstructing journalists from covering the incidents.

In the entire process of rigging the vote, AL got the administration including police, poll officials and local government officials as their ally. This was made easy by appointing loyal officials and transferring neutral officials right before the poll.

This paper can prove the abovementioned allegations by providing necessary proof.

## CHAPTER II

# NO FAIR-PLAY

Collection of events before the election

The election campaign in Barisal, similar to other cities, was marked by police raiding and arresting BNP men, obstructing campaign, flouting of rules by Awami League backed candidate and so on. A brief of the irregularities before the election have been mentioned in this paper. Readers can find them in this chapter.

### **Govt. official foil BNP's campaign<sup>1</sup>**

The election campaign of BNP mayoral candidate for Barisal City Corporation (BCC) election, Mujibar Rahman Sarwar, was foiled by the team of an executive magistrate of police on July 28.

Some 70-80 district and metropolitan leaders and activists led by Sarwar got out from its district party office in the evening to distribute leaflets and hold meetings when Executive Magistrate Zakir Hossain interrupted them along with some plainclothes policemen.

The magistrate then told the BNP leaders that they could only campaign with teams of eight members each.

Soon after the incident, the BNP leaders protested the instruction from the magistrate.

Angrily, they cancelled the leaflet distribution program and street meeting but staged a demonstration in front of their party office.

At the demonstration, BNP candidate Sarwar said: "The Awami League candidate has held a massive gathering today.

The code of conduct of the election has been violated there, but the legitimate campaign of the BNP candidate has been interrupted by an executive magistrate here."

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<sup>1</sup> BNP candidate's campaign foiled by police magistrate in Barisal,  
<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/07/29/bnp-candidate-s-campaign-foiled-by-police-magistrate-in-barisal>

## **Govt. official violates the electoral code<sup>2</sup>**

Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Principal Bhaskar Saha breached the election code of conduct in Barisal City Corporation polls by campaigning as a government official.

The election commission sources said on Jul 18 Awami League candidate Serniabat Sadique Abdullah arranged a view-exchange programme with the college officials and employees where Bhaskar and hospital Director Bakir Hossain were present.

Assistant Returning Officer of Barisal City Corporation election Helal Uddin said, we received a formal complaint from BNP accusing that the government officials violating election conduct are taking part in Awami League polls campaign.

## **Minister father abuse power for son<sup>3</sup>**

BNP mayoral candidate Mojibor Rahman Sarwar and Jatiya Party candidate Iqbal Hossain Tapos complained about electoral code violations by AL candidate Serniabat Sadik Abdullah on July 11.

Both candidates alleged that local police was being influenced by AL candidate's father Abul Hasanat Abdullah, who holds minister status, obstructed their programmes for coordinating the electioneering.

## **Outsiders flout rules<sup>4</sup>**

In Barisal, Sadar Upazila Chairman Saidur Rahman Rintu campaigned for Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah.

Gournadi Mayor Haris Chowdhury and Upazila chairmen Khalid Hossain Swapan of Babuganj and Shamsul Alam Chunnu of Bakerganj did not leave the city amid a ban of election commission on their stay in the city corporation areas before the poll.

Meanwhile, AL brought out a procession with the band and musical instruments from different city wards.

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<sup>2</sup> **Govt official violates election conduct in Barishal**, [en.banglatribune.com/country/news/8069/Govt-official-violates-election-conduct-in](http://en.banglatribune.com/country/news/8069/Govt-official-violates-election-conduct-in)

<sup>3</sup> **AL candidates face allegations of poll code violations**, [www.newagebd.net/article/45803/al-candidates-face-allegations-of-poll-code-violations-](http://www.newagebd.net/article/45803/al-candidates-face-allegations-of-poll-code-violations-)

<sup>4</sup> **Last Day's Campaign: Outsiders flout rules in 3 cities**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/last-days-campaign-outsiders-flout-rules-3-cities-1612738>

## **Police officials transferred right before the poll<sup>5</sup>**

Deputy Police Commissioner (South), Golam Rouf Khan and Uttam Kumar Paul (Traffic) of Barisal Metropolitan Police (BMP) were transferred to Industrial Police as Superintendent.

This transfer came only five days before Barisal City Corporation elections scheduled to be held July 30.

Dhananjay Kumar Das, Deputy Secretary of Home Ministry, signed a letter on July 23, and two police officials were already released from BMP on July 24, confirmed Acting Police Commissioner of BMP Md Mahafuzur Rahaman.

Not only that, Officer in Charge of Kotwali Model Police Station Awlad Hossain was transferred two days before.

Different sources including BNP expressed concern over the transfer and replacement of police officials.

The transferred officials were replaced by loyal Awami League supporter cops to ensure the smooth rigging. This paper will prove it in the next chapters.

## **AL mayoral candidate's desperate campaign flouting deadline<sup>6</sup>**

Islami Andolan Bangladesh candidate Obaidur Rahman Mahabub submitted a written complaint to the returning officer, claiming that the Awami League candidate held a 'large rally' under the name of an 'uthan boithok'.

The Election Commission subsequently sent just a notice to Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah, the Awami League mayoral candidate for the Barisal City Corporation polls, ordering him to answer allegations of violating the code of conduct.

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<sup>5</sup> **Two top Barisal cops transferred ahead of BCC election**, [observerbd.com/details.php?id=150041](http://observerbd.com/details.php?id=150041)

<sup>6</sup> **Barishal election: EC serves notice on Awami League's Abdullah for campaigning past deadline**, <https://bdnews24.com/politics/2018/07/29/barishal-election-ec-serves-notice-on-awami-leagues-abdullah-for-campaigning-past-deadline>

## **Pressured to withdraw candidacy<sup>7</sup>**

A number of BNP-supported councillor candidates were forced to withdraw from the Barisal City Corporation polls.

Five BNP-backed councillor candidates confirmed to media that they were pressurised continuously to withdraw themselves from the race.

They alleged that their activists and supports are also being threatened and barred from the election campaign.

Zakir Hossain, a councillor of Barisal City Corporation's ward no. 15, secured victory in the three consecutive elections.

This year, he had to withdraw his candidature. An AL-backed councillor candidate Liakat Hossain, who is AL president of the ward won uncontested in the ward.

AL-backed Mosharraf Ali Khan and Gazi Naimul Hossain won uncontested in ward no. 16 and ward no. 19 respectively as BNP-backed Quamrul Hassan and Sumon Haldar withdrawn their candidature.

Asked about the matter, Quamrul Hassan, who is general secretary of the BNP's ward no. 16 unit, said, "There was a pressure. A family problem was there as well. Finally, I've withdrawn my candidature."

Jamaat candidates are contesting in 4 wards in the civic polls. However, two of their councillor aspirants came up with the same allegations.

Jamaat's councillor candidate at ward no. 14 Md Salauddin said, "We can't go for canvassing due to various pressure on us. Party leaders and activists are threatened. Two days ago, several leaders and activists of the party were beaten up."

The voters at several wards also think the BNP and Jamaat candidates are facing pressures as the polling date is nearing.

None of the voters, with whom the reporters talked to, wanted to mention their names.

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<sup>7</sup> **BNP Barishal candidates pressured to pull out**, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/180399/BNP-Barishal-candidates-pressured-to-pull-out>



## Police raids house of 300 BNP men<sup>8</sup>

Policemen raided around 300 residences of BNP leaders and activists in Barisal before the election and arrested many of them while campaigning, from home and elsewhere.

Moreover, on July 17, Barisal city Jamaat Secretary General Jahir Uddin Md Babor was arrested when he was campaigning for BNP mayor nominee Mujibur Rahman Sarwar in the city's Battala area.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party submitted a list of its arrested activists ahead of the mayoral polls of Barisal on July 20.

A BNP delegation, led by its standing committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan, submitted the list and placed demand to stop arbitrary arrest of its activists to the EC during a two-hour meeting with the chief election commissioner KM Nurul Huda and other commissioners at the Nirbachon Bhavan in Dhaka.<sup>9</sup>

This paper has managed to collect a few prominent names from media reports as most of the arrests remained unreported.

Victim	Designation	Date of arrest
Zulhas Uddin Masud	BNP Leader	26 <sup>th</sup> July, 2018
Abdul Mannan	Shramik Dal leader	26 <sup>th</sup> July, 2018
Nasir Ahmed	President, 30 no. ward Jubo Dal	26 <sup>th</sup> July, 2018
Nuru Mia	President, 30 no. ward Chhatra Dal	26 <sup>th</sup> July, 2018
Zahiruddin Md. Babur	General Secretary, Barisal Mahanagar Jamaat-e-Islami,	17 <sup>th</sup> July, 2018
Shahid	Vice President, Barisal Mahanagar Jubo Dal	27 <sup>th</sup> July, 2018

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<sup>8</sup> Barisal city polls: BNP candidate vows stay in race at any cost, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/07/29/barisal-city-polls-bnp-candidate-vows-stay-in-race-at-any-cost>

<sup>9</sup> BNP submits list of arrested activists to EC, [www.newagebd.net/article/46755/bnp-submits-list-of-arrested-activists-to-ec](http://www.newagebd.net/article/46755/bnp-submits-list-of-arrested-activists-to-ec)

## CHAPTER III

# A DISTURBING DAY

Collection of events during the election

The election day of July 30 was full of irregularities and boycott of all the candidates except the ruling Awami League backed one. The irregularities were so wide open that the election commission who is known for being loyal to Awami League even accepted that the highest irregularities were recorded in Barisal.



In Barisal, a voter is seen during a heated exchange of words with an election official, after waiting in line for hours and then finding ballots already stamped on the “boat” symbol.

### **Voters forced to vote for AL<sup>10</sup>**

*Kaladema Government Primary School Centre*

Since the voting started at 8 am, seven to eight ruling party men wearing tags of the “boat” symbol occupied each of the five polling booths for men at Kaladema Government Primary School in Barisal city.

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<sup>10</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>

Within the next half an hour, 198 votes were cast and all the voters were forced to vote for Awami League's mayor candidate. Two correspondents of The Daily Star present at the centre for half an hour since the voting started witnessed the incident.

Asked about the irregularities, presiding officer of the centre Md Ibrahim denied any such incident. He rather asked the correspondents to leave the polling centre after taking photos.

Al Amin, a voter of the centre, said he saw AL men obstructing voters, who were known as supporters of other parties, on their way to the centre.



Vote rigging at Soioda Mozidunnesa High School centre in Barisal City Corporation election, where the votes were already cast in the ballot papers on July 30, 2018

## **Ballots snatched, stuffed<sup>11</sup>**

### *Kashipur Government Primary School Centre*

Visiting four booths of Kashipur Government Primary School centre at 9:15 am, the correspondents of The Daily Star found that AL men, wearing the same “boat” symbol tags, snatched away ballots from voters, stamped and dropped those in the ballot box.

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<sup>11</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>

During half an hour visit at the centre, the correspondents found that at least 10 voters were forced to give away their ballot papers to the AL men.

### **Voters forced to vote for boat<sup>12</sup>**

*Kashipur High School and College Centre*

At Kashipur High School and College centre, journalists saw at least 10 voters being forced to hand over the ballot papers of mayoral candidates, which the AL men later stamped.

Shahjahan Mridha, a voter of the centre, said AL men forced him to vote for the ruling party mayoral candidate. Another voter at the centre, Nanna, said there was no point in going to the polling centre as there was no scope for choosing a candidate.



In Barisal, a cameraman of a private TV channel is carried away to the hospital after he was hit by brickbats thrown at a procession he was filming

The correspondents noticed a large number of ruling party supporters around the polling centres who barred known BNP supporters from entering the centres. AL

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<sup>12</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>



activists also asked the journalists not to take photographs, both inside and outside the polling centres.

### **AL men turn voting vigilantes<sup>13</sup>**

*Imam Gazzali Academy Dakhil Madrasa*

Around 8:40 am at Imam Gazzali Academy Dakhil Madrasa under ward 30, at least two women alleged that AL men accompanied them up to the booth for casting votes and forced them to stamp on the boat symbol.

Ruling party men were seen entering the centre before the very eyes of law enforcers without any obstacle. They also asked journalists to leave the centre.

Mostafizur Rahman, the presiding officer of the polling centre, denied any irregularities.

### **Under-aged queued to vote for AL<sup>14</sup>**

*Government Barisal College centre*

At Government Barisal College centre under ward 19, a large number of under-aged boys were found standing in queues to cast votes at 8:05 am. As several dozen journalists visited the centre, they left the spot.

AL candidate Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah cast his vote at the centre. Within half an hour, 116 votes were cast at the centre.

Vote taking at Barisal City College centre under ward 17 later remained suspended for half an hour from 12:30 pm as ruling party men snatched ballot papers from one of the booths. Monirul Islam, the presiding officer of the centre, confirmed the matter.

### **Ballots stuffed in front of journalists<sup>15</sup>**

*Sahara Institute of Technology centre*

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<sup>13</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>

<sup>14</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>

<sup>15</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>

At Sahara Institute of Technology under ward 26, AL men stuffed ballot boxes in front of journalists and the presiding officer around 11 am. Till 11 am, 630 votes out of 1,715 were cast there.

But presiding officer Manjur Sohel denied any such irregularities.

### **Voting suspended for hours<sup>16</sup>**

*Syada Majidunnesa High School centre*

The presiding officer of Syada Majidunnesa High School centre suspended voting as ruling party men from outside occupied the centre and stuffed ballot boxes.

Witnesses said soon after BNP's candidate left the centre, a number of people wearing badges of the Awami League's boat symbol entered the centre, went into the polling booths and started stamping ballot papers.



Ballot papers confiscated by BSD men with seals on Boat

### **Female mayor candidate attacked by AL-men<sup>17</sup>**

*Sadar Girls' School centre*

Socialist Party of Bangladesh's Manisha Chakrabarty said that on arriving at Sadar Girls' School centre, they found Awami League activists engaged in ballot-box stuffing.

'When we took the stamped ballots to the presiding officer, two people wearing Awami League badges pushed me and hit me from the back. They also tore up the ballot papers taking away from me,' said Manisha.

### **Vote vigilantes threaten voters<sup>18</sup>**

*Jagua High School and College centre*

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<sup>16</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>

<sup>17</sup> **AL takes lead in 'rigged' polls**, [www.newagebd.net/article/47289/al-takes-lead-in-rigged-polls](http://www.newagebd.net/article/47289/al-takes-lead-in-rigged-polls)

<sup>18</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>

Mahbubur Rahman, a voter from Jagua High School and College centre, said he returned home without casting his vote as some youths asked him to vote for “boat”.

A voter from Rupatali area complained that there had been no scope for voting in the Rupatali Jagua High School centre as Awami League agents allegedly took over the centre in the morning.

“They hijacked our right to vote,” he said.

Seeking anonymity, a female voter from the same area told the Dhaka Tribune: “I could not cast my vote as they said they had run out of ballot papers in the morning.”



Manisha Chakraborty, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal's mayoral candidate of Barisal City Corporation, and her supporters claimed that some people “wearing badges of boat” snatched ballot papers from a polling centre

### **‘People wearing badges of boat snatch ballot papers’<sup>19</sup>**

*Government Girls High School polling centre*

The people of AL candidate, who were wearing badges of boat, snatched the ballot papers at Government Girls High School polling centre of ward No 17 around 9:45 am,

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<sup>19</sup> **People wearing badges of boat snatch ballot papers: Manisha**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/manisha-chakraborty-alleged-people-wearing-badges-boat-s snatch-ballot-papers-1613329>

Imran Habib Ruman, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal's convenor of the Barisal unit, told The Daily Star.

## **Voters unhappy<sup>20</sup>**

*Rupatoli Govt Primary School centre*

Visiting several polling centres, journalists found some voters unhappy. They alleged that their votes had been cast long before they made it to the polling booths.

## **Rigging with EVM<sup>21</sup>**

*Govt BM College centre*

Councillor contenders at two centres of ward 20 have been claiming that there were widespread irregularities at two polling stations.

The presiding officer at number 78 polling station under ward 20 handed over the memory chip of the Electronic Voting Machine to the investigation committee on August 30, a month after the election, raising further questions.

Awami League leader SM Zakir Hossain, who vied for the councillor's seat from the ward, complained of vote rigging using EVM at number 77 and 78 polling stations.

In a written complaint to the committee, he said the voting centre was changed to give an advantage to his rival Awami League candidate. He claimed a man, identifying himself as a judicial magistrate, had entered the number 77 polling station and helped rig the vote in favour of the ruling party aspirant.

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<sup>20</sup> Barisal city polls marred by irregularities,

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/07/31/barisal-city-polls-marred-by-irregularities>

<sup>21</sup> EC investigating 'EVM vote rigging' in Barisal, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2018/09/01/ec-investigating-evm-vote-rigging-in-barisal>



## CHAPTER IV

# BOYCOTT & RESPONSE

Collection of events after the election

According to the media reports, the highest number of irregularities has been reported from Barisal city. This led to a series of boycotts from all the participating parties and drew flak from all quarters.

### 4.1 Boycott spree

In Barisal city election, five of the six mayoral candidates, including BNP's Mujibur Rahman Sarwar, boycotted the polls halfway through the elections; about four hours after the voting began, protesting at widespread stuffing and manipulation.

#### A) Mujibur Rahman Sarwar

BNP's Mayoral candidate for Barisal City Corporation Mujibur Rahman Sarwar boycotted the city elections with complaints of widespread vote rigging and manipulation.<sup>22</sup>

Sarwar announced the decision from a press conference at Barisal Press Club around noon, four hours after the voting began. Mujibur Rahman Sarwar alleged that his polling agents were ousted from at least 50 polling stations.



Bangladesh Nationalist Party's mayoral candidate for Barisal City Corporation, Mojibar Rahman Sarwar announces boycotting the elections at a news conference.

<sup>22</sup> **BNP, CPB, IAB boycott Barisal city polls**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/50-agents-kicked-out-polling-centres-alleged-bnp-candidate-mujibur-rahman-sarwar-1613308>

## **B) Obaidur Rahman Mahbub**

Islami Andolan Bangladesh's candidate for Barisal City Corporation, Obaidur Rahman, has boycotted the city elections with complaints of widespread vote rigging and manipulation by the ruling party.<sup>23</sup>

Obaidur announced the decision from a press conference at Barisal Press Club around 11:25 am, more than three hours after the voting began.

## **C) Manisha Chakraborty**

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal candidate Manisha Chakraborty urged the returning officer to suspend the polls bringing vote-rigging allegations.

Claiming that her polling agents were driven out of polling centres and illegal ballot stuffing in different centres occurred, Manisha submitted a written application to the returning officer urging suspension of polls in Barisal around 12:30 pm.

Also, Manisha Chakraborty was allegedly assaulted when she went to cast her vote at Barisal BM College centre.

## **D) M Iqbal Hossain Tapos**

Jaitya Party's M Iqbal Hossain Tapos and Communist Party of Bangladesh's Abul Kalam Azad also boycotted the election demanding the Election Commission to postpone the polls due to vote rigging by Awami League.<sup>24</sup>

At a press conference at Nirbachon Bhaban in Dhaka, chief election commissioner KM Nurul Huda expressed his satisfaction over the polls, saying that the polls were held peacefully except some isolated incidents of irregularities.

## **E) Abul Kalam Azad**

Communist Party of Bangladesh's mayoral candidate Abul Kalam Azad also boycotted the election later in the day around 1:00 pm, alleging vote manipulation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> **Islami Andolan boycotts Barisal city polls**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/islami-andolan-boycotts-barisal-city-polls-1613347>

<sup>24</sup> **Barisal city polls marred by irregularities**, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/07/31/barisal-city-polls-marred-by-irregularities>

<sup>25</sup> **Barisal city polls marred by irregularities**, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/07/31/barisal-city-polls-marred-by-irregularities>

## 4.2 Response

The widespread irregularities in the campaign and election of Barisal escalated a public outcry across the country. Starting from election observers to the prominent journalists, everyone accepted it as a fact that the election was no way a fair and credible one.

Besides, it was made clear by this poll that a credible and fair poll will remain a far-cry under this government and their subservient election commission.

The response and reaction from different quarters of society have been compiled to give a brief view of the election in Barisal on July 30, 2018.

*“The silent rigging model of Khulna has been nakedly executed in Barisal.”<sup>26</sup>*

Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar

Secretary, Shushaner Jonne Nagorik (Shujan)

*“What happened in Barisal is disappointing. The assault on Manisha is unacceptable.”<sup>27</sup>*

Dr. Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah

Chairman, Jatiya Nirbachon Parjobekkhon Parishad

*“Some irregularities took place in Barisal City Corporation polls but the rest of the elections were peaceful.”<sup>28</sup>*

KM Nurul Huda

Chief Election Commissioner

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<sup>26</sup> **City polls: Awami League wins Rajshahi, Barishal, results postponed in Sylhet,** <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/07/31/city-polls-awami-league-candidates-win-in-rajshahi-barisal>

<sup>27</sup> **City polls: Awami League wins Rajshahi, Barishal, results postponed in Sylhet,** <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/07/31/city-polls-awami-league-candidates-win-in-rajshahi-barisal>

<sup>28</sup> **CEC happy with polls,** <https://www.thedailystar.net/3-city-polls/cec-expresses-satisfaction-3-city-rajshahi-sylhet-barisal-election-2018-1613506>

*“Not just on the election day, the EC turned a blind eye to numerous election rule violations—mainly by the ruling party and the police—in the run-up to the polls.”<sup>29</sup>*

Mahfuz Anam

Editor, The Daily Star

*“I was elected mayor once and member of parliament for four times. But, I've never experienced such an unprecedented election like this.”<sup>30</sup>*

Mujibur Rahman Sarwar

Mayoral candidate, Bangladesh Nationalist Party-BNP

*“The stamping on ballot papers for boat [AL's polls symbol] was done before the polling officer and some ballot books were stamped earlier.”<sup>31</sup>*

Manisha Chakraborty

Mayoral aspirant, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal

*“The most recent elections were not free. If the elections are held in the same manner, fair election cannot be possible under a party government.”*

Dr Kamal Hossain

President, Gono Forum

Besides, Left Democratic Alliance (LDA), a platform of eight left-leaning organisations, demanded re-elections to the three city corporations in Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet. It termed the polls “farce”.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) also demanded re-elections, saying the EC “failed to hold fair polls”.

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<sup>29</sup> **Three city polls replicate the previous two**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/editorial/three-city-polls-replicate-the-previous-two-1613977>

<sup>30</sup> **BNP, BSD, Islami Andolan quit Barishal polls**, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/180698/BNP-BSD-Islami-Andolan-quit-Barishal-polls>

<sup>31</sup> **Barisal Election: Manisha vows to fight for re-polling**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/barisal-election-manisha-vows-fight-re-polling-1614289>

## CHAPTER V

# THUMBS UP!

The unholy nexus between the administration and AL



As per electoral rules, no campaigns and show of strength like gatherings are allowed within 400 yards of the centres during the voting. Anyone violating this may face up to two years in prison.

But many AL men apart from polling agents stayed inside the polling booths and moved from one booth to another without any obstruction.

A huge number of law enforcers were deployed in the cities but they mostly played the role of silent spectators.

This was a result of the understanding between Awami League and administration including police and election officials that got exposed wide open on the election day.

### 5.1 All the Serniabat's men

Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah is the son of Abul Hasnat Abdullah and the grand-son of Abdur Rab Serniabat. The water resource minister of the cabinet of 1973, Abdur Rab Serniabat was also the brother-in-law of Awami League's supreme leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and therefore, AL's mayor aspirant for Barisal, Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah is the nephew of Sheikh Hasina, Sheikh Mujib's daughter and the prime minister by force of Bangladesh.

The family connection is an integral part of Awami League's politics where relatives of Sheikh Family enjoy the boundless power and are commonly known as immune to all sort of criminal charges, therefore "the people who are beyond the law of the land".

Sadiq Abdullah's nomination from AL as the mayor candidate for the election gave him the power to rig the vote in his own style.

Moreover, Sheikh Hasina has already appointed his father with a special ministerial status that allows him with significant influence over the local administration.

As a result, the local administration and Awami League activists teamed up before the election to clinch the victory for Sadiq, and a reflection of that was seen on July 11 when police started intervening into BNP's campaign and raiding the houses of BNP men.



Sadiq Abdullah, Awami League mayoral candidate in Barisal City Corporation polls, comes out after visiting a polling centre at Kashipur Girls' High School and College in the city accompanied by the police officer assigned to oversee the centre on election day

More to add, government officials started campaigning for Sadiq Abdullah and compelling their subordinates to vote for Boat, Sadiq's symbol. The election commission verified at least one such incident where the chief of an educational



institution which is also used as a polling centre for election, organised a discussion in favour of Sadiq Abdullah inside the campus.<sup>32</sup>

While on the other hand, Sadiq's father influenced the transfer of a number of police officers right before the election in two phases on July 21 and July 23.

- Officer in Charge of Kotwali Model Police Station Awlad Hossain was transferred on July 21.
- Deputy Police Commissioner (South), Golam Rouf Khan and Uttam Kumar Paul (Traffic) of Barisal Metropolitan Police (BMP) were transferred to Industrial Police as Superintendent on July 23.<sup>33</sup>

The officials were replaced by loyal Awami League supporter policemen who raided 300 houses of 300 BNP men in next five days and arrested many polling agents of BNP right before the election. Most of the arrests were made between July 25 and July 27.

This further proves the understanding between police and AL mayoral candidate which was reflected on the election day, the most.



Sadiq gives a thumbs up from the Kashipur Girls' High School and College premises to the police personnel inside the polling centre

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<sup>32</sup> **Govt official violates election conduct in Barishal**, [en.banglatribune.com/country/news/8069/Govt-official-violates-election-conduct-in](http://en.banglatribune.com/country/news/8069/Govt-official-violates-election-conduct-in)

<sup>33</sup> **Two top Barisal cops transferred ahead of BCC election**, [observerbd.com/details.php?id=150041](http://observerbd.com/details.php?id=150041)

On election day, a rare moment was witnessed by the voters and was captured by the journalists when Sadiq Abdullah went to visit Kashipur Girls' High School and College centre, a centre known for extreme rigging.

At 9.30 am, when Sadiq was coming out, he was seen being escorted by the police official assigned to oversee the centre. Both were having a friendly chat and smiling, consulting.

Within a few seconds, when Sadiq reached the field in front of the centre, he waved his hand and gave a thumbs up to the police personnel inside the polling centre.



From the corridor of the centre, a police official waves at the mayor aspirant

He was further greeted by the police officials inside the centre who waved back smiling, showing their support to him, a gross violation of electoral conduct for a government official.

What happened in the centre after that is predictable.

The incidents inside the centre were detailed by a The Daily Star journalist which was published on July 31 edition.

*“At Kashipur High School and College centre, journalists saw at least 10 voters being forced to hand over the ballot papers of mayoral candidates, which the AL men later stamped.*



*Shahjahan Mridha, a voter of the centre, said AL men forced him to vote for the ruling party mayoral candidate. Another voter at the centre, Nanna, said there was no point of going to the polling centre as there was no scope for choosing a candidate.*

*The correspondents noticed a large number of ruling party supporters around the polling centres who barred known BNP supporters from entering the centres. AL activists also asked the journalists not to take photographs, both inside and outside the polling centres.”<sup>34</sup>*

This example is enough to reach a conclusion on how the election was held in Barisal on July 30.

## **5.2 Patterns of forgery**

The three broad patterns of the election were:

### **i) Voters forced to vote for AL**

- Visiting four booths of Kashipur Government Primary School centre at 9:15 am, the correspondents of The Daily Star found that AL men, wearing the same “boat” symbol tags, snatched away ballots from voters, stamped and dropped those in the ballot box,
- Seven to eight ruling party men wearing tags of the “boat” symbol occupied each of the five polling booths for men at Kaladema Government Primary School in Barisal city and all the voters were forced to vote for Awami League's mayoral candidate,
- Around 8:40 am at Imam Gazzali Academy Dakhil Madrasa under ward 30, at least two women alleged that AL men accompanied them up to the booth for casting votes and forced them to stamp on the boat symbol.

### **ii) Police helped AL men in irregularities**

- At Imam Gazzali Academy Dakhil Madrasa, ruling party men were seen entering the centre before the very eyes of law enforcers without any obstacle.

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<sup>34</sup> **No violence required: Open ballot stuffing by AL men**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/barisal-city-election-2018/barisal-city-election-no-violence-required-open-ballot-stuffing-al-men-1613692>

### **iii) Presiding officers turned a blind eye**

- At Imam Gazzali Academy Dakhil Madrasa when two women said they were forced to vote for AL, presiding officer of the polling centre Mostafizur Rahman denied any irregularities,
- At Sahara Institute of Technology AL men stuffed ballot boxes in front of journalists but presiding officer Manjur Sohel rejected any such irregularities.

## CHAPTER VI

# CONCLUSION

### Learning from the election

The election in Barisal has brought in crucial learning that helped us to reach some important conclusions.

After observing the poll, it is now clear that Bangladesh's administration service is so poised by Awami League leadership that it cannot function properly with Awami League in power.

The role of election commission led by its chief KM Nurul Huda during the poll has proven that the commission is not capable enough to control the situation in the field when it comes to arresting opposition men, obstructing their campaign, monitoring election budget, or even guarding the centres against ruling party thugs.

Awami League as a party and their leaders have significant control over the administration that they can transfer, appoint or just withdraw the officials before the election and can replace them with their party loyalists who could help the party to rig the poll in their favour.

Therefore, no free, fair and credible election can be held under the present regime led by Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League.

However, Bangladesh is a signatory of UN Resolution 52/129, and according to the resolution Bangladesh appreciates "Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratisation". Therefore, the UN is bound to foresee a credible and genuine election, periodically, in Bangladesh.

It is high time for the friends of the people of Bangladesh to consider the levers they have to pull and ensure the people's right to vote.

Time has come for the international community, who has commitments for democracy to take the necessary steps to make the voice of the people of Bangladesh heard.