

KHULNA CITY ELECTION 2018

A NEW MODEL OF MANIPULATED ELECTION



KHULNA CITY ELECTION 2018

A NEW MODEL OF MANIPULATED ELECTION

A detailed report by

Professor A K M Wahiduzzaman with the assistance of Bangladesh based journalist **Alif Serajuddin**

City Corporation Election 2018 Series

June 05, 2018.

Executive Summary

An election took place on May 15, 2018, at the southern Khulna city. The two major contenders for the mayoral post were BNP nominated Nazrul Islam Monju and Awami League-backed Talukder Abdul Khaleque.

Unlike many Bangladeshi elections under the government of Awami League since 2009, no one died during the campaign or electioneering in Khulna which is a “relief” to many, but like almost all the elections under Sheikh Hasina’s regime, the election was deeply flawed, which is beyond any reasonable doubt, resulting in a victory to Talukder Abdul Khaleque.

The election was a new experience in Bangladesh, where the concerned authorities were controlled by “invisible” but “powerful” forces and the opposition campaigners were kicked out of the election field.

All arrangements were in place for a fair election - police patrols, deployment of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel, and even the presence of magistrates. But, the election was marred by the forced eviction of opposition BNP candidates' polling agents from the centres, forceful balloting, vote rigging including voting by a child, and compelling voters to vote in front of the ruling party candidates' agents. In some cases, balloting ended before noon.

The police were just silent bystanders in the aforementioned incidents. Supporters of Awami League candidate Talukder Abdul Khalek extended their 'assistance' to complete the 'balloting process'.

The elections have starkly revealed the weakness of the election commission (EC).

This paper has tried to investigate and come up with a brief overview of how the election was designed to ensure the victory of Awami League (AL) supported candidate, how the entire administration was made to work for AL candidate, how the election commission itself destroyed the level playing field and how the election officials allowed irregularities to take place on the Election Day.

Table of contents

1. Background	4
2. Preparing the stage for drama	5
3. A Nightmarish Day.....	19
4. No respite from rigging	22
5. Discrepancies	33
6. Hue and cry	35
7. Conclusion.....	37

1. Background

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda announced the election schedule for the Khulna city corporation at a press conference at the Nirbachon Bhaban on March 31, 2018.

According to the election schedule, the deadline for the submission of nomination papers was April 12, while the dates for scrutinising those were April 15 and 16, and the last date for withdrawal of candidature was April 23. And the election was to be held on May 15, 2018. Khulna Regional Election Officer Md Yunus Ali was made the returning officer for Khulna City Corporation election.

After the declaration of the schedule, Awami League nominated Talukder Abdul Khaleque, and BNP selected Nazrul Islam Monju as their candidate for Khulna mayoral poll.

One interesting aspect was that, despite the City Corporation (electoral code of conduct) Rules 2016 bares Prime Minister to intervene in civic polls campaign, Sheikh Hasina herself nominated, discussed and convinced Talukder Abdul Khaleque to declare his candidacy.¹ Also, Awami League's General Secretary Obaidul Quader who is a minister in Hasina's cabinet influenced the party leaders to campaign for Khaleque flouting the election rules.

After the election commission appointed Md Yunus Ali as the returning officer for Khulna city poll, an AL delegation rushed to the commission with complaints and "special request" to curb the power of Yunus Ali as the returning officer as according to them he was involved with the politics of BNP's students' wing in his early days. The EC, without any discussion with other parties, sent a joint-secretary level officer, nominated by AL delegation to monitor Yunus Ali's activity.

This marked the first major incident of influencing EC by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her party. The incident was followed by many such steps by the Election Commission that have made the election not only faulty but also exposed how vulnerable the commission is under Awami League.

¹ **Gazipur, Khulna City Polls: Internal feud worries AL**, www.daily-sun.com/home/printnews/306345

2. Preparing the stage for drama

The election drama staged on May 15 in Khulna, by the election commission led by Nurul Huda was not merely an extempore one. Instead, the commission carefully prepared the stage long before the election takes place.

The commission went on with two major approaches: (i) intimidating the activists of a mayoral candidate other than AL-backed Talukder Abdul Khaleque, and (ii) allowing the Awami League men to rig the election by creating on the administration.

This paper can prove the above-stated arguments.

2.1) Intimidating the opposition activists

According to the provisions of law, during any election in an area, the entire law-enforcement force would be under the command of the election commission in that particular area. If that is true, then the role of election commission during the Khulna City Corporation poll is under serious question.

More than one hundred activists were arrested by the local police when they were campaigning for BNP's mayoral candidate Nazrul Islam Monju.

Monju suspended electioneering for four hours on May 3 protesting the "detaining" of his party men and urged international observers to come and monitor the election atmosphere in Khulna.

While talking to a prominent Bangladesh daily, The Daily Star, a BNP leader, wishing anonymity, said the fear of arrest haunts him. "The indiscriminate arrest of BNP men has panicked us all".

Also, Police did not let hotels to accommodate the party men who went there from other districts ahead of the polls.²

From May 10 to May 12, in only three days, Khulna police raided the houses of about 1,600 BNP men and arrested 56 of them. Many party men had to flee their homes to avoid arrest.

² **Police raids send BNP men fleeing**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/police-raids-send-bnp-men-fleeing-1575544>



BNP activists being put into a prison van after they were picked up in Khulna city yesterday morning ahead of the Khulna City Corporation polls

On May 14, 2018, The High Court asked the law enforcers not to arrest or harass any BNP leaders and activities of Khulna until the Khulna City Corporation Election is held.

The HC also issued a rule asking the government to explain as to why the mass arrest of BNP leaders and activities of Khulna and election campaigners, defying the directives of the Appellate Division should not be declared illegal.

However, the number of arrested reached 119 by May 14, just one day before the election. The detained included polling agents of BNP's mayoral candidate.

The list of arrested leaders, activists and supporters of BNP and other parties is given below:

1. Masud Parvez Babu

Assistant Organizing Secretary, Khulna City BNP

Joint Secretary, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal

Arrested on April 22

2. Mehbubul Haque Kishor

President, Juba Dal, Bagherhat District

Arrested on April 30

3. Asaduzzaman Murad

Press Secretary, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 02

4. Mahbub Hasan Piyaru

President, Juba Dal, Khulna City

Arrested on May 02

5. Md. Waheduzzaman

Local leader, Sonadanga Thana BNP

Arrested on May 02

6. Rafiqul Islam Mithu

Local leader, Daulatpur Thana BNP

Arrested on May 02

7. Md. Faruk

Local leader, Juba Dal, Daulatpur Thana

Arrested on May 02

8. Abu Taleb

Local leader, Shramik Dal, Sadar Thana

Arrested on May 02

9. Faruk Hossen

Local leader, Shramik Dal, Sadar Thana

Arrested on May 02

10. Gaus Hossen

Local leader, Shramik Dal, Sadar Thana

Arrested on May 02

11. Nasir Hossen

Local leader, Labanchora Thana BNP

Arrested on May 02

12. Golam Mostafa Bhutto

Local leader, 10 no. ward Bastohara unit, Khalishpur Thana BNP

Arrested on May 02

13. Saiful Islam Santu

Former General Secretary, Juba Dal, Khalishpur Thana

Arrested on May 02

14. Shukur Ali

Local leader, Juba Dal, Khalishpur Thana

Arrested on May 02

15. Sumon

Local leader, Juba Dal, Khalishpur Thana

Arrested on May 02

16. Rafiqul Islam

Local leader, Khalishpur Thana BNP

Arrested on May 02

17. Ekramul Kabir Milton

Assistant Relief and Rehabilitation Secretary, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 08

18. Mohiuddin Tarzan

General Secretary, 20 no. ward unit, Sonadanga Thana BNP

Arrested on May 08

19. Alam Hawladar

Organizing Secretary, 30 no. ward unit, Sadar Thana BNP

Arrested on May 08

20. Lokman Hossen

Local leader, Shramik Dal, Daulatpur Thana

Arrested on May 08

21. Abdul Aziz Sumon

Assistant Education Secretary, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 09

22. Zahidur Rahman Ripon

Former Organizing Secretary, Juba Dal, Khulna City

Arrested on May 09

23. Shamsuzzoha Zihad

General Secretary, 10 no. ward unit, Juba Dal, Khalishpur Thana

Arrested on May 09

24. Iqbal Hossen

Local leader, 9 no. ward Bastohara unit, Khalishpur Thana BNP

Pooling agent of Mayor Candidate Nazrul Islam Monzu

Arrested on May 09



The police detained a number of BNP leaders and activists from Khalishpur area of Khulna city during their campaign for party candidate in city polls on

25. Kamrul Bishwas

Local leader, 29 no. ward, Sadar Thana BNP

Arrested on May 09

26. Shukur Ali

Local leader, 30 no. ward, Sadar Thana BNP

Arrested on May 09

27. Jahangir Hossen

Local leader, 31 no. ward, Sadar Thana BNP

Arrested on May 09

28. Ali Akbar

Local leader, 2 no. ward, Khan Jahan Ali Thana BNP

Arrested on May 09

29. Munna

Local leader, 2 no. ward, Khan Jahan Ali Thana BNP

Arrested on May 09

30. Shahidul Islam

Local leader, 2 no. ward, Khan Jahan Ali Thana BNP

Arrested on May 09

31. Md. Dalim

Local leader, 3 no. ward, Daulatpur Thana BNP

Arrested on May 09

32. Md. Masud

Local leader, 3 no. ward, Daulatpur Thana BNP

Arrested on May 09

33. Tauhidul Islam Khokon

General Secretary, 30 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 10

34. Mahadi Hasan Sumon

Local leader, Secchasebak Dal, 29 no. ward, Khulna City

Arrested on May 10

35. Saharuzzaman Mukul

Local leader, 22 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 10

36. Shah Alam

Local leader, 30 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 10

37. Tanvirul Azam

Local leader, 28 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 10

38. Md. Arif

Local leader, 25 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 10

39. Riyazul Karim

Local leader, 18 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 10

40. Tayeb Ali

Local leader, 14 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 10

41. Md. Abdul Hai Kalu

Local leader, Secchasebak Dal, 10 no. ward, Khulna City

Arrested on May 10

42. Sazzad Ali

Local leader, 26 no. ward, Sonadanga Thana BNP

Arrested on May 10

43. Golam Mostafa

Local leader, 27 no. ward, Sadar Thana BNP

Arrested on May 10

44. Shariful Islam Sagor

General Secretary, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Sonadanga Thana

Arrested on May 10

45. Shakil

Activist, 26 no. ward, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Khulna City

Arrested on May 10

46. Abu Wara

Joint Secretary, 20 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 10

47. Jahil Hasan Khasru

Joint Secretary, Daulatpur Thana BNP

Arrested on May 10

48. S.M. Jasim

Local leader, Juba Dal, Daulatpur Thana

Arrested on May 10

49. Mamun Patoyari

Local leader, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Khalishpur Thana

Arrested on May 10

50. Mohibuzzaman Kochi

Office Secretary, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

51. Ashraful Islam Nannu

Joint Secretary, Khulna District BNP

Arrested on May 11

52. Dr. Faruk Hossen

Organizing Secretary, 28 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

53. Selim Hossen Montu

General Secretary, Shramik Dal, 31 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

54. Abdul Zabbar

Agent, 14 no. ward Councilor candidate

Arrested on May 11

55. Manowar Hossen

Local leader, Bastohara unit BNP

Arrested on May 11

56. Haydar Hawladar

Executive Secretary, 14 no. ward, Electioneering Committee BNP

Arrested on May 11

57. Habib Babu

Executive Secretary, 25 no. ward, Electioneering Committee BNP

Arrested on May 11

58. Rabiul Alam

President, 21 no. ward, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Khulna City

Arrested on May 11

59. Bellal Hossen

Agent, 29 no. ward Councilor candidate

Arrested on May 11

60. Khandokar Aqirul Islam

Joint Secretary, 16 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

61. Atiyar Rahman

Activist, 24 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

62. Meher Ali

Activist, 9 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

63. Sakil Ahmed

Local leader, 2 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

64. Md. Shamim

Local leader, 2 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

65. Sahib Ali

Local leader, 22 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 11

66. Tokaccher Ali Hawladar

Vice President, Khan Jahan Ali Thana BNP

Arrested on May 12

67. Hedayet Hossen Heddu

Senior leader, 25 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 12

68. Md. Kamruzzaman

Assistant General Secretary, Shramik Dal, Khulna District

Arrested on May 12

69. Shahidul Islam

Local leader, 22 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 12

70. Motiur Rahman

Local leader, 31 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 12

71. Jakirul Islam

Local leader, 17 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 12

72. Musa Hossen Khan

Local leader, 17 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 12

73. Sadi

Local leader, 19 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 12

74. Md. Dalim

Local leader, Juba Dal, 26 no. ward, Khulna City

Arrested on May 12

75. Barek Faraji

President, Shramik Dal, 1 no. ward, Khulna City

Arrested on May 12

76. Engg. Jahid Hossen Shovon

General Secretary, Khulna District BNP

Arrested on May 12

77. Masud Reza

Executive Secretary, 27 no. ward, Electioneering Committee BNP

Arrested on May 12

78. Bellal Hossen

Joint Convener, 3 no. ward, Electioneering Committee BNP

Arrested on May 12

79. Shariful Islam

Shibir Activist

Arrested on May 12

80. Mahbub Hossen

Shibir Activist

Arrested on May 12

81. Rasel

Shibir Activist

Arrested on May 12

82. Sazzad Hossen Jitu

Press Secretary, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Khulna City

Arrested on May 13

83. Ismail Hossen

Vice President, Shramik Dal, 16 no. ward, Khulna City

Arrested on May 13

84. Khokon Gazi

Local leader, 22 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 13

85. Milon

Local leader, Juba Dal, 21 no. ward, Khulna City

Arrested on May 13

86. Mujibor Rahman

Local leader, 17 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 13

87. Shahidul

Local leader, Matsyajibi Dal, Khulna City

Arrested on May 13

88. Maruf

Local leader, Matsyajibi Dal, Khulna City

Arrested on May 13

89. Roni

Son of President, 28 no. ward, Khulna City BNP

Arrested on May 13

90. Saiful Hasan Rabi

Religion Secretary, Rupsha Thana, Khulna District BNP

Arrested on May 13

91. Mujibor Rahman Jholu

General Secretary, Noihati 5 no. ward, Rupsha Thana, Khulna District BNP

Arrested on May 13

92. Shamsuzzoha Zohor

Vice President, Noihati 1 no. ward, Rupsha Thana, Khulna District BNP

Arrested on May 13

93. Mahbubul Alam Mona

Vice President, Noihati 1 no. ward, Rupsha Thana, Khulna District BNP

Arrested on May 13

94. Md. Ebadul

President, Noihati Union, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Rupsha Thana

Arrested on May 13

95. Mostafa Ul Bari Lavlu

Vice President, Khulna District BNP

Arrested on May 13

96. Golam Mostafa Tuhin

General Secretary, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Khulna District

Arrested on May 13

97. Abdur Rahman

Activist, Aichgati Union, Rupsha Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

98. Farhad

Activist, Noihati Union, Rupsha Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

99. Jahangir Ahmed

Local leader, Secchasebak Dal, Rupsha Thana

Arrested on May 13

100. Abdul Aziz

Local leader, Rupsha Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

101. Zia Sardar

Assistant Press Secretary, Jabusa ward, Rupsha Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

102. Sheikh Md. Ali Mintu

UP Member, Assistant Organizing Secretary, Digholia Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

103. Kamal Hossen Bishwas

UP Member, Joint Secretary, Barakpur Union BNP

Arrested on May 13

104. Md. Jakir Shikdar

UP Member, Former leader, Juba Dal, Digholia Thana

Arrested on May 13

105. Sardar Abdul Malek

President, Magurghona Union, Dumuria Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

106. B.M. Habibur Rahman

UP Member, Self-help Secretary, Khulna District BNP

Arrested on May 13

107. Abdus Salam Mahaldar

UP Member, President, Atliya Union, Dumuria Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

108. Abdul Kadir

UP Member, Former Joint Secretary, Shovona Union, Dumuria Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

109. Sheikh Abdur Rashid

Former UP Member

Former President, Juba Dal, Shovona Union, Dumuria Thana

Arrested on May 13

110. Mohsin

Local leader, Dumuria Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

111. Sheikh Abdul Mannan

President, Chalna Municipal, Dacope Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

112. Pappu Shaha

Joint Convener, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Dacope Thana

Arrested on May 13

113. Noni Gopal

Former President, Dacope Union, Dacope Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

114. Badshah

Joint Secretary, Jolma UP, Batiyaghata Thana, BNP

Arrested on May 13

115. Md. Liton

Joint Convener, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, Koyra Thana

Arrested on May 13

116. Abdul Halim

General Secretary, 6 no. ward Kopilamuni Union, Paikgaccha Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

117. Saiful Islam Shafi

President, 4 no. ward Haridhali Union, Paikgaccha Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

118. Pir Ali

President, 1 no. ward Radhuli Union, Paikgaccha Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

119. Md. Nur Islam

Activist, 4 no. ward Haridhali Union, Paikgaccha Thana BNP

Arrested on May 13

2.2) Creating pressure on local administration

The local administration during the election is one of the most crucial parts as they assist the election process.

Besides, the local body who oversee the election include the returning officer and the presiding officers of different centres.

The commission made sure that both the returning officer, his office staffs and the presiding officers are under significant pressure so that they succumb and work for Awami League men.

To destroy the morale of the election officials the election commission made two unprecedented moves prior to the election: (i) sent an official of joint secretary rank to Khulna to monitor the returning officer, and (ii) handed over the list of presiding officers to police and replaced a few officials after police scrutiny.

The details are provided in the following part of the report.

2.2.1) EC sent high official to 'assist' KCC polls returning officer

The Election Commission sent an official of joint secretary rank to Khulna to “assist” the returning officer, who is said to be a former leader of Chhatra Dal, during the city corporation polls.

The decision came after an Awami League delegation, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Political Advisor HT Imam, met the Chief Election Commissioner and alleged that the returning officer of Khulna City Corporation (KCC) was a biased person and urged the EC to send a joint secretary to oversee the activities of the official

Imam, also the co-chairman of AL National Election Steering Committee, told CEC KM Nurul Huda during the meeting at the Nirbachon Bhaban that he had no confidence in Yunus Ali, deputy-secretary ranked returning officer of KCC.

The AL delegation, however, requested the EC not to replace the returning officer for the polls set to be held on May 15, fearing that such an action would give a negative message.

They rather told the EC to send a joint secretary level officer there to monitor the activities of Yunus.

Immediately after the meeting, EC Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed told reporters that an official of joint secretary rank was sent to Khulna.

“Yunus Ali has become the returning officer for the first time. He may not manage all the things properly and he has some limitations. EC joint secretary will assist him as per law,” Helal said.³

2.2.2) Replacing and intimidating polls officials

Law enforcers started interrogating presiding officers over the phone. They have been asked questions on several issues right after the election commission handed over the list of presiding officers to Police for scrutiny.

Several presiding officers, seeking anonymity, told the Bengali language daily the Prothom Alo that law enforcers wanted to know whether they or their family have any past or present involvement with politics.

Some of the presiding officers also alleged that police officers in plainclothes visited their homes to inquire about them, making them and their families scared.

KMP additional deputy commissioner (media) Sonali Sen told Prothom Alo that the police do not have any list of presiding officers and interrogating them is not the task of the police.

Her lie was immediately caught as officers at the election commission said that a list of 289 presiding officers (names and phone numbers) had been finalised and it has been handed over to the police for scrutiny.

He added a few of the presiding officers have even been changed according to Police’s suggestion.

³ Unprecedented move by EC, 103.16.74.132/frontpage/unprecedented-move-ec-1574308

3. A Nightmarish Day

8:00 am- Khulna City Corporation election begins. Voters start casting their votes.

8:05 am- Awami League mayor candidate for Khuna City Corporation election Talukder Abdul Khaleque cast his vote at Government Pioneer Girls High School.

8:50 am- BNP mayor candidate for Khulna City Corporation polls Nazrul Islam Monju casts vote at a polling centre in Rahima Government Primary School.

9:05 am- Nazrul Islam Monju claims BNP polling agents being driven away from all polling centres in Khulna.

9:38 am- Awami League mayor candidate for Khuna City Corporation election Talukder Abdul Khaleque visits BK Union Institute with cadres.

10:00 am- Presiding Officer Atiur Rahman says: "Polling agent Shirajul has claimed that he was beaten up by Awami League supporters."

10:15 am- Monju's Media Coordinator GM Rasel claims: "All their polling agents have been driven away from all the centres under Ward No 31."

10:33 am- BNP candidate Monju's claims they are not being able to wear their cards because of fear.

11:39 am- A female voter at PTI polling centre claims that Awami League supporters snatched away ballot paper from her hand.

11:43 am- Monju' Media Coordinator GM Rasel claims: "Awami League supporters vanDalized the polling centres at Zohra Khatun School, Boala Ideal Secondary School Moila Sonakota and Gani School after 10 am.

"The attackers gave Joy Bangla slogan."

11:50 am- Awami League supporters vanDalize BNP agent's stand at Sonapota polling centre, voters claim.

12:28 pm- Yunus Ali says: "Voting suspended at Iqbal Nagar Girls School."

12:46 pm- Voting suspended at Fatema Hgh School and Hijolnagar Secondary School, returning officers say.

01:00 pm- BNP's mayor candidate Monju tells the Dhaka Tribune: "My agents were driven out from at least 30 polling centres."

01:30 pm- Wishing anonymity, an official of the Election Commission tells the Dhaka Tribune that one of their observers was assaulted by some unidentified people at Nurani Bahumukhi Madrasa BidDaloy polling centre around 9:50 am.

02:00 pm- Talking to the Dhaka Tribune at Khulna Aliya Madrasa polling centre, Election Commission observer Mithun Kumar Roy says the election is underway peacefully.

02:30 pm- Monju's supporter Rejaul Islam says: "Nearly 30 people could not cast their votes at Khulna Aliya Madrasa centre."

Ten women also brought such allegations, our correspondent Fazlur Rahman Raju reports.

03:38 pm- Returning Officer Yunus Ali says: "Election Commission has cancelled voting of centre No 278 in Lobonchora after finding allegations of vote rigging."

04:00 pm- Voting ends.

4. No respite from rigging

Khulna city has 31 wards. During the election, one-third of wards of the city was marred by violence, rigging and muscle flexing of ruling Awami League men.

The incidents of violence in one-third of centres shaped the result of the poll. This paper has provided some authentic cases of violence, which are collected from the renowned newspapers of the country.

“There will be no existence of sheaf of paddy”

Mawlana Bhashani Bidyapith centre, Ward 10

The ‘Sheaf of paddy’ is the electoral symbol of decades-old Bangladesh’s most popular party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party. On the day of the election in Khulna, Awami League men in front of the Mawlana Bhashani Bidyapith at Ward 10 were chanting slogans like, “Vote only for Boat,” “voters of BNP go back home”; and “there will be no existence of sheaf of paddy”. And this is how the election began.

One reporter of The Daily Star who was present at Mawlana Bhashani Bidyapith centre in Khalishpur Residential Area under ward-10 for more than one hour observed that voter presence was very thin till 11:30 from the morning.

Surprisingly the Presiding Officer of the centre identified as Gosto Biswas said 60 percent of the 1,508 voters already cast their votes at Mawlana Bhashani Bidyapith at Ward 10 by noon.

Mission Ending Monju’s Politics underway

Mollapara Government Primary School centre, Ward 10

Nazrul Islam Monju was the Member of Parliament from Bangladesh Nationalist Party in Khulna and was among the whistleblowers of corruption and repression of Awami League men in the region. This made him an enemy to local Awami League leaders who are involved in massive corruption.

As a result, goons from AL who were chanting slogans at Mollapara Government Primary School stormed into the centre and stuffed votes for Awami League's mayoral candidate Talukder Abdul Khaleque.

At the entrance of the centre, one youth was heard saying: "We will bring an end to Monju's (BNP candidate Nazrul Islam Monju) politics in Khulna."

Presiding officer on leave!

Panchtala Bayashka Madrasa centre, Ward 11

Oddly enough, the presiding officer of Panchtala Bayashka Madrasa of the Ward-11 was not found inside the centre. Instead, the centre was teeming with ruling Awami League supporters, and not a BNP agent could be seen.

At Platinum Secondary School, under the same ward, where there were two separate centres, a large number of people were seen trying to enter forcefully and cast votes. Some even succeeded.

SM Morshed Ul Morshed, a hopeless presiding officer of one of the voting centres, admitted that the votes were being illegally and forcefully cast."⁴

No vote for BNP supporters

Khulna Zila School centre, Ward 22

AL supporters drove out the agent of BNP-backed mayoral candidate Nazrul Islam Monju from Khulna Zila School centre under Ward 22.⁵

Though Monju took the agent there with him when he cast his vote at the centre, but he was soon ousted by ruling AL men in support of the police.

Meanwhile, one former BNP lawmaker faced obstruction by the AL men when she went to exercise her franchise.

⁴ **Irregularities, power play mar KCC election**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-election-irregularities-power-play-everywhere-1576678>

⁵ **KCC polls: No BNP agents at 4 centres**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-corporation-election-2018-no-bnp-agents-4-centres-1576684>

Ballot papers ended within 2 hours

Iqbal Nagar Girls High School centre, Ward 24

Iqbal Nagar Girls High School centre ran out of ballot papers by 10 am only two hours of the commencement of voting in Khulna city polls.⁶

The allegations of casting fake votes by activists of the ruling Awami league sparked violence in the area. The ruling party men stuffed the ballot boxes with fake votes.



Next to the ballot box, a man is seen casting fake votes in front of an Assistant Presiding Officer at Fatema High School during Khulna City Corporation election on Tuesday, May 15, 2018

Kakoli Khan, a BNP polling agent, said, “The voting was going on peacefully since morning. Suddenly, some Awami League leaders and supporters came in, stamped ballot papers, stuffed the boxes with fake votes and left the centre.”

At around 10 am, Nurul Islam, who queued for casting his vote at the school, told: “We are told that there are no ballot papers. We have been waiting for an hour. Let’s see how much time they take.”

⁶ **Irregularities, power play mar KCC election**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-election-irregularities-power-play-everywhere-1576678>

Even at 11 am Assistant Presiding Officer Nurul Islam of Iqbal Nagar Girls High School centre was found saying: “I have no ballot papers. I’m waiting for ballot papers from the presiding officer.”⁷

Authorities later suspended voting at Iqbal Nagar Girls High School under Ward No. 24 in a midday decision, hours after the voting began at 8 am.



Vandalised election camp of BNP mayoral candidate Nazrul Islam Monju in front of Iqbal Nagar Girls High School centre

Camps vandalized, BNP supporters beaten

Abdul Gani Darul Ulim Madrassah Centre, Ward 24

At least five BNP polling camps were vandalized according to the news reports.

Meanwhile, at Abdul Gani Darul Ulim Madrassah at Ward 24, Awami League activists were seen preventing BNP activists.

⁷ **Violence shuts polling centre as Khulna city goes to election,**
<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2018/05/15/violence-shuts-polling-centre-as-khulna-city-goes-to-election>

Two supporters of BNP were beaten up when they tried to enter the polling centre.

BNP supporters protested the 'vote rigging' and ransacking some electoral camps outside the polling centre.

Election observer assaulted by AL men

Nurani Bahumukhi Madrasa Biddaloy Centre, Ward 24

An observer of Election Commission from Dhaka was assaulted by supports of Awami League-backed Khulna City Corporation (KCC) mayoral candidate at a polling centre in Khulna city right after voting began.

The EC official, requesting to be anonymous, barely managed to come out of the Nurani Bahumukhi Madrasa Biddaloy polling centre after the assault, he told journalists at the spot around 9:50 am.⁸

The AL mayoral candidate supporters also tried to vandalise the vehicle of the EC official at the polling centre, our staff correspondent covering KCC polls, reports quoting the official.

Returning Officer Dr Mizanur Rahman of the polling centre confirmed the incident to the correspondent.⁹

AL men flouts election conduct, stuffs fake votes

Pioneer Higher Secondary School Centre, Ward 25

Pioneer Higher Secondary School, situated at a walking distance in Ward 25, on the other hand, was teeming with Awami League men who were walking about both outside and inside the voting centres, which is against the electoral conduct.

⁸ **Irregularities, power play mar KCC election**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-election-irregularities-power-play-everywhere-1576678>

⁹ **EC observer assaulted at Khulna polling centre**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-corporation-kcc-election-2018-ec-observer-assaulted-at-polling-centre-1576630>

Presiding Officer of this centre, Shamim Mahmud, was indifferent to the Awami League men who were inside the polling rooms displaying agent identification cards. No opposition BNP polling agent could be seen in sight.

Two reporters of The Daily Star saw seven to eight youths enter one booth and put the seal on ballot papers. They did not have any ID cards.

Presiding Officer Aatur Rahman said he was outside the centre. "Let me look into the matter."

Sanjoy Saha, an assistant presiding officer, however, defended the incident saying voters need not carry their ID cards to vote. It is enough if they can remember their ID numbers.

Presiding officers turns voter

Darul Alam Siddiquia Madrasa Centre, Ward 25

Serious allegations surfaced at Darul Alam Siddiquia Madrasa at Ward 25. Voters claimed that the presiding officers were casting their votes.

Assistant Presiding Officer Shyamoli Bepari told: "I just helped them."¹⁰

Also, the lawmen were seen gesturing to the Awami League men to move away in silence when journalists were visiting the centre. Only one agent was hanging the BNP identification in this polling centre, who could not give satisfactory answers about his identity.

Rigging in front of election commissioner

Nurani Multipurpose Madrasa Centre, Ward 25

In Nurani Multipurpose Madrasa, also in Ward 25, an election commissioner caught one Awami League supporter rigging votes and an altercation ensued. Presiding Officer Mizanur Rahman admitted to The Daily Star of such an incident.

¹⁰ Irregularities, power play mar KCC election, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-election-irregularities-power-play-everywhere-1576678>

AL men run riot, presiding officer flees

Panchtala Bayashka Madrasa Centre, Ward 25

There was a huge number of AL supporters present at Panchtala Bayashka Madrasa centre who took control of the centre. But no BNP agent could be seen, allegedly were driven out.¹¹

The presiding officer fled the centre and was not found during a visit to this centre around 11:00 am.

AL men snatch away ballots

Siddikia Kamil Madrasha Centre, Ward 25

At Siddikia Kamil Madrasha vote centre premises, Mahmuda Rahman, aged over 60, was seen lamenting for not being able to cast her vote.

"Some people wearing badges of boat snatched away my ballot paper and cast my vote," she said.

Second-grader votes for boat!

Nurani Bahumukhi Madrasa Centre, Ward 25

Vote rigging in Khulna City Corporation elections reached to the extent that even a minor boy was found voting for ruling Awami League-backed mayoral candidate Talukder Abdul Khaleque.¹²

The correspondent of Bangla language daily Prothom Alo found a man coming out of a polling station with his son, a student of class II. Both of the father and son had indelible ink marks on their fingers.

¹¹ **Irregularities, power play mar KCC election**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-election-irregularities-power-play-everywhere-1576678>

¹² **Second-grader votes for boat!**, en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/175671/Second-grader-votes-for-boat

Asked about the ink, the man said, "My son has cast his vote, too."

And the second-grader said, "I voted for boat and Tipu uncle (the AL-backed ward councillor Ali Akbar Tipu)."

Both the father and son were found in front of Nurani Bahumukhi Madrasa centre, under ward 25.

"Go home, your vote's been cast"

D Ali Islamia Government Primary School, Ward 27

Two councillor candidates have alleged that their opponents are not letting their supporters cast votes in the Khulna City Corporation polls.

Mehedi Rezvi and Majeda Khatun claimed that supporters of their opponents were stuffing ballots at the D Ali Islamia Government Primary School in Ward No.27.



Md Shariful Islam could not cast his vote on May 15, 2018, during the Khulna City Corporation election. His vote was already cast when he got to the centre

Many voters, like 50-year-old Abdus Sattar, had to return home without casting their votes.

Sattar told reporters that at the polling centre, he was told to go to another room.

"When I went there, the people there told me, 'your vote has already been cast and there are no more ballot papers. Go home'," he said.

Centre taken by AL, 40pc votes in 2 hours

West Tutpara Secondary School polling centre, Ward 28

AL men took position at West Tutpara Secondary School polling centre under Ward 28.

Total voters at the centre are 2433 and by 11:35 am 810 votes were cast.

Stuffing, muscle flexing mar KCC polls

Voters obstructed, BNP agents driven out

**Manzur H Maswood and
Mamun Khan · Khulna**

KHULNA city mayoral elections ended amid allegations of widespread rigging, ballot stuffing and muscle flexing by ruling Awami League activists on Tuesday.

There was no major incident of violence but the polls were suspended at three centres due to ballot stuffing and anarchy, said election commission secretary Helaluddin Ahmed.

Continued on page 2 Col. 5

Khulna election was free, fair: EC secretary

Staff Correspondent

ELECTION Commission secretary Helaluddin Ahmed on Tuesday said that the commission was happy that the Khulna city election was held in a 'free and fair' manner.

Continued on page 2 Col. 1



Stamped ballot papers in favour of ruling Awami League-backed mayoral candidate are seen lying on the desk on a polling officer at Labanchora Government Primary School polling centre in Ward 31 of Khulna City Corporation on Tuesday. — Sourav Lasker

First page of English language daily New Age on the very next day of the election

Mostly, young and new voters were seen at the polling station when the correspondent of The Daily Star visited the spot in the morning.¹³

Fake voting at full-scale

Kailaghat Government Primary School centre, Ward 29

Several voters brought allegations of vote rigging at the polling centre under Ward 29, near to AL-backed mayor candidate Talukder Abdul Khaleque's residence.

First-time voter Abdul Alim of Ward 29 was seen walking along the corridor of Kailaghat Government Primary School about 1:00 pm. He told English language daily New Age's correspondent that he could not cast his vote as the **polls officials told him that his vote was already cast.**

No agent of Manju was found at the centres. An agent of councillor candidate said that the BNP candidate's agents were driven out about 10:00 am.

When asked, assistant presiding officer Nirmol Chandra Bairagy said the agents were there but they left for an unknown reason.

Ghost voting continues

Rupsha Bahumukhi High School, Ward 30

Voting at Rupsha Bahumukhi High School stopped around 11:00 am as the presiding officer said they ran out of ballot papers.

Asked why and how so, he could not give a satisfactory answer.

Shariful Islam, a voter of the centre, said he went to vote in the morning but he was told that his vote was already cast. "As I went there again at noon, they told me the same thing," he said.

¹³ **KCC polls: No BNP agents at 4 centres**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-corporation-election-2018-no-bnp-agents-4-centres-1576684>

Go outside the polling station, or you will be in trouble

BK Union Institution, Ward 30

In BK Union Institution polling station at Benibabu road, several people were seen wearing journalists' pass issued by the election commission and taking voters inside the polling booths around 2:00 pm.¹⁴

One of them was Anisur Rahman, who introduced himself as a reporter of Desh Songjog from Dhaka.

Pressed, he got angry and said, "Go outside the polling station, or you will be in trouble."

Turbulent situation discourages voting

Mollahpara Government Primary School polling centre, Ward 31

AL supporters drove out agents of BNP-backed mayoral candidate Nazrul Islam Monju from Mollahpara Government Primary School polling centre under Ward 31.

Here total voters are 1329 and by 11:00 am 415 votes were cast.¹⁵

¹⁴ **KCC polls: No BNP agents at 4 centres**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-corporation-election-2018-no-bnp-agents-4-centres-1576684>

¹⁵ **KCC polls: No BNP agents at 4 centres**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/khulna-city-corporation-election-2018-no-bnp-agents-4-centres-1576684>

5. Discrepancies

AL's strategy was not to create havoc and resort to extreme violence in all the centres. Instead, they targeted some major centres with greater number of votes and the areas where BNP is more popular.

On the election day, the AL supporters stormed into those polling centres according to their plan, driven out the voters and BNP agents of the centre by force, and stuffed the ballots within half an hour to one hour. Then they left the centre accordingly.

Some major discrepancies in the result can explain how the election was rigged.

At least 54 polling centres witnessed unusual voting.

The three polling centres of high turnout witnessed more than 90 percent votes while other three others saw 85 percent turnout, another six around 80 percent, 12 others 75 percent turnout and 30 other centres slight over 70 percent turnout.

5.1) 99.94pc turnout in one centre

The number of voters at ward no 10 of the Khalishpur's Hazi Shariatullah Bidyapith voting centre was 1817. The results show all voters except one cast their votes. The voter turnover was 99.94 percent.¹⁶

The AL's mayoral candidate got 1,114 votes while the BNP candidate got 373 votes.

5.2) Ghost voting

Another voting centre at Maulana Bhashani Bidyapith of ward 10 also witnessed 'ghost' voting.

¹⁶ **Khulna city sees new model of 'manipulated polls'**,
en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/175780/Khulna-city-sees-new-model-of-manipulated-polls

A total of 1,467 votes out of 1,503 were cast at the centre. The AL candidate polled 997 votes as against the BNP candidate's 390 votes. The voter turnout there was 97.60 percent.¹⁷

5.3) Far more than average

The voter turnout at Natun Bazar Government Primary School centre was 91.38 percent. But, the total voter turnout in the Khulna City Corporation elections was 62.19 percent.

5.4) Unconventional results

According to the final results, out of 493,000 votes in Khulna city, five mayoral candidates bagged 306,636 while 6,565 votes were cancelled.

AL's Talukder Khaleque polled 178,000 while his four rivals including the BNP's Nazrul Islam Manzu got 111,000 votes. Manju, the nearest rival, bagged 109,251 votes.

A total of 411 more votes were cast for mayoral candidates than what councillors secured, results show.¹⁸

The casting of 411 more votes for a mayoral candidate, more precisely in favour of Talukder Abdul Khaleque, than that of councillor candidates is unconventional.

As the voters are provided with three ballots at a time- one for mayor, one for councillor and another one for reserved women councillor- it is highly unusual that a voter would cast just one of the three ballots and would not cast the remaining two.

¹⁷ **Khulna city sees new model of 'manipulated polls'**,
en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/175780/Khulna-city-sees-new-model-of-manipulated-polls

¹⁸ **Khulna city sees new model of 'manipulated polls'**,
en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/175780/Khulna-city-sees-new-model-of-manipulated-polls

6. Hue and cry

The election in Khulna sparked sizeable controversies as well as hue and cry both among the civil society and political parties.

6.1) Civic reaction

The Ambassador of United States Ms Marcia Bernicat expressed her disappointment over the widespread irregularities and intimidation during the poll. She said¹⁹:

“The reported irregularities and intimidation are very disappointing. It necessitates transparent investigation.”

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), an independent body that foresees good governance in Bangladesh, opined that, as the recent Khulna City Corporation elections were marked by “peaceful rigging”, there is no scope to term it free, fair and flawless.²⁰

Dilip Kumar Sarkar, central coordinator of Shujan, said:

“We feel the Khulna City Corporation elections were a questionable one.”

Bangladesh’s most circulated Bangla-language daily Prothom Alo termed the election as a manipulated one. The newspaper published a report with the title, Khulna city sees new model of 'manipulated polls' on May 18, 2018.

The report detailed:

“... the election was marred by the forced eviction of opposition BNP candidates' polling agents from the centres, forceful balloting, vote rigging including voting by a child, and compelling voters to vote in front of the ruling party candidates' agents. In some cases, balloting ended before noon.”²¹

¹⁹ **US disappointed over reported irregularities in Khulna city polls**, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2018/05/16/us-disappointed-over-reported-irregularities-in-khulna-city-polls>

²⁰ **Peaceful rigging marked KCC elections: Shujan**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/peaceful-rigging-marked-khulna-city-corporation-kcc-election-shujan-1579924>

²¹ **Khulna city sees new model of 'manipulated polls'**, en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/175780/Khulna-city-sees-new-model-of-manipulated-polls

6.2) Reaction from political parties

Bangladesh's largest political party BNP rejected the results of Khulna poll pointing out the incidents of irregularities.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi at a media briefing, on the next day of the election, said:²²

"In yesterday's voting, the illegal government has flexed its muscle. On behalf of the party, I reject the Khulna polls outcome and demand the resignation of the chief election commissioner."

Communist Party of Bangladesh mayoral candidate Md Mizanur Rahman Babu said in a press release that voters and polling agents were not allowed at many polling centres.²³

²² **After loss in Khulna city polls, BNP demands chief election commissioner's resignation,**
<https://bdnews24.com/politics/2018/05/16/after-loss-in-khulna-city-polls-bnp-demands-chief-election-commissioners-resignation>

²³ **AL takes lead in KCC polls marred by threats, stuffing,**
www.newagebd.net/article/41246/al-takes-lead-in-kcc-polls-marred-by-threats-stuffing

7. Conclusion

This report has compiled some major findings and has recommended a few steps that need to be implemented to overcome the problems that have come to fore during the Khulna city poll with a brief remark.

7.1) Major findings

Kamal Ahmed, a noted journalist, based in London, identified at least 11 incidents of concern that took place during the campaign and on the election day.

They are²⁴:

1. The commission was obliged to halt voting in three polling centres
2. An observer of the election commission was assaulted in a centre
3. The percentage of votes cast in 54 centres was abnormally higher than the average. This 10 to 30 percent higher number of votes cast is not a matter to be overlooked
4. The official of a centre could give no explanation of pre-sealed ballot paper in the centre.
5. Ballot boxes were stuffed with ballot papers though the ballot book had no signature or thumbprints of the voters.
6. The BNP had no agents in 80 centres
7. Voters in a number of voting centres only went to find out that their votes have already been cast
8. In many centres, there were hardly any voters in the morning but by the afternoon over half the votes had been cast
9. In some places, the voters were forced to stamp the ballot papers in the open

²⁴ **'Excellent' election and observation on Khulna polls!**,
en.prothomalo.com/opinion/news/175953/'Excellent'-election-and-observation-on-Khulna

10. There were gunshots in one of the centres

11. The election commission did nothing about the undeclared operation by the police to arrest BNP leaders and activists before the election and so the party had to resort to the High Court

7.2) Remarks

Khulna City Corporation election that took place on May 15, 2018, is a unique election in the history of democracy, after the enactment of the Bill of Rights. This election can be compared to the elections of Roman republic, where election was largely manipulated with a view to reflecting the will of kings.

Though the presence of voters was good despite complaints of opposition agents being forced out of polling centres at the beginning of the voting, it started deteriorating from 11:30 am when ruling party men forcefully entered the voting centres and stuffed votes into ballot boxes at various polling centres, creating panic among the general voters.

They left the voting centres within half an hour between 11:30 am and 12:30 pm after completing their task, witnesses said. Only after that did the law enforcement become alert about law and order.

The complaints came till the last moment of voting. No voters were found afternoon. Some of the cast ballots were found abandoned at various polling centres.

The elections have starkly revealed the weakness of the election commission (EC). The commission failed to control the situation despite the apparent support of the law enforcement and the administration.

The EC could not or did not respond to most of the complaints filed by different candidates before and during the polls.

7.3) Recommendation

- 01) It is high time to reform the election commission as the election commission has completely failed to take appropriate measure to check the election irregularities
- 02) There should be significant pressure over the government to bare them from influencing the election like they did during the Khulna poll twice, first by forcing the election commission to send an official of their choice to monitor the returning officer and then by using police to arrest the opposition supporters from taking part in the election campaign
- 03) The need for an election time the neutral government has been proven again by this election and for that our international partners who want to see democracy flourishing in Bangladesh need to act actively
- 04) The role of police needs to be reviewed during the election
- 05) If the police officials fail to check their attitude toward the opposition activists the international training programmes for Bangladesh's police should be reduced as they are failing the countries from which they are getting trained time and again
- 06) The international community should remind Bangladesh government of Article 25 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights that states:

Every citizen shall have the right....

(b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors
- 07) European Union should ask Bangladesh to ensure the voting rights of the citizens and refer to why a suspension of GSP may follow if another January 5

like poll takes place, as the Article 19 of the European Union regulation 978/2012 sets out the circumstances in which temporary suspension can take place in the tax exemption facilities, if 'serious and systematic violation of principles laid down in the conventions listed in Part A of Annex VIII' happens.²⁵ Part A of Annex VIII includes the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which includes, as we have seen, Article 25 and the Right to Vote.

²⁵ **REGULATION (EU) No 978/2012 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL**, trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2012/october/tradoc_150025.pdf