



GAZIPUR CITY POLL 2018

**MANIPULATION
& INTIMIDATION**

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A detailed report by

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

City Corporation Election 2018 Series

July 20, 2018.

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1. Executive Summary

Gazipur City Corporation election was followed by Khulna City Corporation election which was marred by voting irregularities, the arrest of opposition men during the campaign, and intimidation by the government agencies that resulted in an environment of fear among the voters.

The election in Khulna was termed as a controlled election due to the manner in which opposition men were first forced to leave the field, then stuff the ballot by polling agents and election officials, and in both case use police and local administration as a vanguard. This nature of election has become known as “Khulna-model”.

The election in Gazipur was crucial as it has been considered as a bastion of Awami League (AL). The AL fared well there in all the national polls since 1991, when the first democratic election was held in the country after the fall of autocrat Ershad. A defeat to BNP in Gazipur was a matter of prestige for Awami League.

Therefore, AL went on as far as it could have gone to control and win the election.

Observers suggest that the controlled model of the election was first experimented at Khulna, and then implemented at Gazipur successfully. This paper will try to verify the claim.

2. Controlled election

There are five essential features of a controlled election, according to Dr. Badiul Alam Majumder, who is the secretary of SHUJAN: Citizens for Good Governance, an expert in observing the election.¹

These features are elaborated here.

2.1 Keep the opposition men on the run

First, making the leaders and workers of the main opposition party be on the run. This is what happened in Gazipur as well as in Khulna.

For example, on May 6, the police arrested 13 people including the BNP's Vice President Abdullah Al-Noman from the surrounding areas of the home of the BNP candidate Hasanuddin Sarker for vandalising a laguna. Noman was released after six hours.

The next day, a case under the Special Powers Act was filed against 103 people, including those 12, of which 48 were members of BNP's election management team, although the laguna was later found undamaged in Tongi thana.

Also, BNP alleged that nine members of its election management team were arrested from the night of June 20, all of whom were apparently arrested under cases filed in adjoining districts. Such arrests, violating an earlier High Court order, clearly made the BNP activists be on the run.

2.2 Prevent opposition polling agents from performing their duties

Second, preventing BNP polling agents from performing their duties.

Many BNP polling agents were prevented from reporting to the polling stations, or they were forced to leave the stations.

Some were picked up by law enforcement agencies and released after polling. Some were even found in Keraniganj central jail (Prothom Alo, June 28). Picking up over 100 BNP polling agents in Gazipur is unprecedented.

¹ **Five features of controlled election**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/politics/five-features-controlled-election-1606330>

In the absence of agents, it is easier to commit many electoral offences, including ballot box stuffing, fake voting and inflating the vote count in the absence of polling agents. For example, the EWG observers have found evidence of inflating the vote count in two centres in favour of a candidate in Gazipur.

2.3 Use force on election day

Third, using force on election day. According to media reports, ruling party activists used force in Gazipur as they did in Khulna. Casting false votes and stuffing ballot boxes by temporarily capturing polling centres, and creating an intimidating environment and indiscipline in and around polling centres are among some of the excesses they indulged in.

One important characteristic of ballot box stuffing with forced, fake voting is that, with increases in the turnout rate, the vote share of the winner increases at a rate faster than the turnout rate, and the vote share of his/her nearest rival decreases at a rate faster than the turnout rate.

Thus, compared to BNP's Hasanuddin Sarker, the vote share of AL's Jahangir Alam was 33 percent higher in two centres with a turnout rate of 20-30 percent; 51 percent higher in 124 centres with turnout rate of 30-50 percent; 89 percent higher in 111 centres with turnout rate between 50-60 percent; 158 percent higher in 177 centres with turnout rate of 60-80 percent; and 309 percent higher in two centres with turnout rates of over 90 percent.

In other words, while the ratio of votes between the winner and his nearest competitor was 100:133 in centres with the lowest turnout rate, it continuously increased to reach 100:409 in the centres with the highest turnout rates.

2.4 Inaction of the EC

Fourth, the inaction of the EC. Like in Khulna, complaints were repeatedly made regarding the violation of the electoral code of conduct, harassment of opposition activists by law enforcement agencies, which the EC largely ignored.

Although law enforcers have been arresting BNP leaders and activists for quite some time, the EC issued a directive one day before the election in Gazipur not to arrest

anyone without a warrant, which amounted to doctor's showing up after a patient's death.

The Commission also took no action against the SP of Gazipur despite repeated complaints against him of partisan behaviour, although even the previous Rakibuddin Commission ordered his transfer before another election. More importantly, no action was immediately taken against anyone for misconduct after the Khulna election.

The City Corporation Election Rules, 2010 clearly states, "Any public servant who uses his official position to influence election results will be liable to be sentenced for a minimum of six months and a maximum of five years."

2.5 Make mayors from the opposition party powerless

Fifth, making mayors from the opposition party powerless. Like in Khulna, the last mayor of Gazipur, who belonged to BNP, was a victim of many cases, arrests, jailing and suspensions.

These cities were also deprived of development funds from the government, as a result of which their voters were denied many services that they deserved and needed.

The conditions of roads, sanitation and garbage management in Gazipur is particularly appalling. This left the voters of these two cities with no option but to vote for the ruling party candidate if they wanted development.

3. Against the tide

Ruling Awami League party often boasts Gazipur as their bastion, sometimes “second Gopalganj”.

3.1) Legal battle

Shortly after the schedule for Gazipur city poll was declared, a conspiracy to put the poll on hold was hatched.

ABM Azharul Islam, an Awami League leader, filed a new writ petition with the HC bench on April 2. On May 6, the High Court bench stayed the city polls for three months just ten days before the voting.

The Daily Star debunked how this Awami League leader of Savar Upazila played tricks on a High Court bench to get the Gazipur City Corporation polls stayed for three months.

3.1.1) A childish ploy

Savar AL leader ABM Azharul Islam Suruj, also chairman of Shimulia Union Parishad, proceeded in a planned way to have the scheduled election postponed, The Daily Star learnt this by talking to his lawyers and analysing court documents.

The Daily Star report explained the process:

On April 2, he [ABM Azharul Islam Suruj] first filed a writ petition with the HC bench of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Zafar Ahmed, challenging inclusion of some areas of his union parishad in the Gazipur city. The court rejected his plea.

A week later, he moved the HC bench of Justice Tariq ul Hakim and Justice M Faruque and filed another writ petition on the same ground. The same day, on April 10, the HC rejected his writ plea saying it could affect the mayoral polls.

On both occasions, the petitioner took back the petitions as if those were not pressed. He, however, did not stop there.

He tried to make his case fresh and strong and added a new point in his petition. This time he also challenged the legality of the schedule of Gazipur city polls announced by the EC on March 31 along with his previous point.

Then on May 6, he filed a new writ petition with the HC bench of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Zafar Ahmed. This time, he won as the HC bench stayed the city polls for three months just 10 days before the voting.²

Bangladeshi press discovered that Azharul's son-in-law is Gazipur city AL President Azmat Ullah Khan's son.³

3.1.2) A battle won

BNP's mayor runner Hasan Uddin Sarkar filed a petition with the Supreme Court seeking a stay on the High Court's halt on Gazipur City Corporation election on May 7.

The Supreme Court on May 8, deferred the hearing on the appeal petitions filed challenging the High Court order that stayed Gazipur City Corporation.⁴

The Supreme Court later scrapped the bar on Gazipur City Corporation election on May 10.

In addition to staying the previous High Court order, the apex court has also directed the Election Commission to arrange the Gazipur city polls by June 28, which was originally scheduled for May 15.

² **Stay on Gazipur City Polls: Petitions strange, implications serious**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/stay-gazipur-city-polls-petitions-strange-implications-serious-1574137>

³ **The man behind GCC polls stay**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/the-man-who-got-the-gcc-polls-stayed-1572520>

⁴ **Stay on GCC polls: Hearing deferred for a day**, www.newagebd.net/print/article/40781

4. Police at war

In any election, the local administration plays a vital role in influencing the election results as we have seen in Khulna city election, and the local police force is the ones who can exercises power the most.

In Gazipur, the entire police force, starting from the superintendent to the sentry, seemed to be at a silent war against BNP men.

4.1) The controversial head of Police

In Bangladesh's administrative system, the districts are headed by a police officer who is called as the superintendent of police, SP in short. The SP of an area has the power to move police forces one place to another of that district, and he can devise plans on his will.

During the election, the person who was posted as the SP of Gazipur was Harun-ur-Rashid, a police officer who is known for corrupt and cruel practices, and sometimes referred as the "bull-dog of Awami League". This paper can explain, why.

(A) Awarded gold medal for beating BNP Chief Whip

Harun, while serving as an additional deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division of Police, beat up the then opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Farooque mercilessly on Manik Mia Avenue in the capital on July 6, 2011, during a strike.

Zainul Abedin Farooque, a prominent BNP leader, was leading a group of opposition lawmakers marching towards parliament during a 48-hour hartal enforced by the opposition while being beaten by Harun in day-light before the press.

Harun-ar-Rashid was awarded Bangladesh Police Medal and President Police Medal for his role in attacking the opposition leaders in 2012 by Awami League government, a claim supported by the then home minister.

In reply to a query from the press regarding the incident, the Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir said the beating of Farooque had been taken into consideration in awarding the medal to Harun.

He said, “He [Harun] did the right thing by obstructing the opposition chief whip. His job was to prevent anarchy, and he did it successfully.”⁵



Harun-ar-Rashid is seen bashing Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Farooque during opposition-enforced hartal on July 6, 2011

(B) Records of negligence

Harun-ar-Rashid was the SP of Gazipur when a member candidate of union council was killed brutally by Awami League men in 2016, but as usual, he did nothing to apprehend the AL leaders involved in the killing.

The election commission ordered the withdrawal of Harun-ar-Rashid from Gazipur on April 21, 2016, in response to that incident. Separate letters, signed by the deputy secretary of the Election Commission Secretariat Shamsul Alam, were sent to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) and the senior secretary of the Home Ministry asking for removing SP M Harun-ar-Rashid for the sake of fair polls.⁶

⁵ Home minister draws flak, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-266444>

⁶ EC orders withdrawal of Gazipur SP, 2 OCs, www.theindependentbd.com/post/41378

Interestingly enough, the home ministry reinstated Harun-or Rashid as superintendent of Gazipur police, without informing the Election Commission.⁷

The reinstating of Harun violated the Section 89 of the Local Government (Union Parishad) Election Rules, that says the government cannot transfer some officials, including deputy commissioner, SP, and Upazila executive officer, without consulting the EC before 15 days from the publication of gazette notifying the results of election in an area.

4.2) Campaign of raids and arrest

Gazipur Police, headed by the notorious SP Harun, launched a full-fledged campaign of mass raid and arrest of BNP men in Gazipur, right after the new scheduled was declared.

The campaign of raids and arrest kick-started with the mass detention of 45 leaders and activists of the electoral alliance of BNP. The detainees included District unit Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer SM Sanaullah, a former principal of a local college.⁸

The campaign continued even on the election day. Apart from the 45 alliance supporters, the police arrested another 80 people before the election, including BNP's central Vice-President and a freedom fighter, Abdullah Al Noman.



Police arrest Bangladesh Nationalist Party vice-chairman Abdullah Al Noman from near the party's Gazipur mayoral candidate Hasnuddin Sarkar's home at Tongi

⁷ Gazipur SP Harun reinstated without approval of EC,

<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2016/05/03/gazipur-sp-harun-reinstated-without-approval-of-ec>

⁸ Jamaat ameer among 45 arrested in Gazipur,

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2018/04/27/jamaat-ameer-among-45-arrested-gazipur>

This paper can produce the list of 80 BNP men arrested by Police before the poll to obstruct BNP's election campaign.

Serial	Name	Designation/Identity	Date of arrest
1.	Abdullah Al Noman	Vice Chairman, Central BNP	06.05.2018
2.	Haji Samad	Vill- Choydana Maleker Bari, P.S.- Joydebpur, Gazipur	06.05.2018
3.	Md. Farid Ahmed	Vill- College Gate Cherag Ali, P.S.- Tongi, Gazipur	06.05.2018
4.	Abdur Rashid	Vill- Choydana Maleker Bari, P.S.- Joydebpur, Gazipur	06.05.2018
5.	Md. Shafiullah Khan	VIII- Sharifpur, P.S.- Joydebpur, Gazipur	06.05.2018
6.	Md. Gazi Mosharraf	Vill- Purbo Arichpur, P.S.- Tongi, Gazipur	06.05.2018
7.	Md. Abdullah	Vill- Duttapara, P.S.- Tongi, Gazipur	06.05.2018
8.	Md. Towhid Kaiyum	Vill- Purbo Arichpur (Bou Bazar), P.S.- Tongi, Gazipur	06.05.2018
9.	Md. Alauddin Shapan	Vill- Purbo Arichpur (Gazibari), P.S.- Tongi, Gazipur	06.05.2018
10.	Md. Shahidul Islam	Vill- Fulin, P.S.- Putia, Chittagong	06.05.2018
11.	Md. Sabbir Ahmed	Vill- Ward No. 7, Holding- 30, P.S.- Monohordi Pouroshova, Rangamati	06.05.2018
12.	Shaheen	Member Secretary, Election Managing Committee, Kashimpur Area	Night, 20.06.2018
13.	Shahjahan Dillar	Member, Election Managing Committee, Kashimpur Area	Night, 20.06.2018

14.	Dr Milon	Convener, Election Managing Committee, Konabari Polling Station	Night, 20.06.2018
15.	Taijul Islam	Member, Managing Committee, Konabari Polling Station	Night, 20.06.2018
16.	Abdus Samad	Member, Bason, Ward No. 30, Baliara Polling Station	Night, 20.06.2018
17.	Shah Alam	Member, Election Managing Committee, Kaultia Area	Night, 20.06.2018
18.	Abu Sayeem	Member, Ward No. 47, Election Managing Committee, Morkun Tekpara, Tongi	Night, 20.06.2018
19.	Omar Farooq	Joint Convener, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 35, Gacha Area	Evening, 21.06.2018
20.	Abdus Samad	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 40, Pubail Area	Night, 20.06. 2018
21.	Md. Kazimuddin	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 40, Pubail Area	Night, 21.06.2018
22.	Kawsar Hossain	Member Secretary, Ward No. 35, Sunway Model School Polling Station	08.00 P.M., 22.06.2018
23.	Shahab Uddin	Ward No. 22, Vill- Bahadurpur	Night, 20.06.2018
24.	Qurban Ali	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 13	05.00 P.M., 23.06.2018
25.	Md. Zahid	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 13	05.00 P.M., 23.06.2018
26.	Abdul Majid	Pagar Zinu Market Ward No. 43	22.06.2018

27.	Shamsul Huda Sarker Mamun,	V.P. Tongi Government College, Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 48.	23.06.2018
28.	Basir Uddin Bacchu	Ward – 13	4.00 PM 22.06.2018
29.	Nazrul Islam	Ward – 13	10 PM 22.06.2018
30.	BDR Mojibur Rahman	Convener, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 31	24.06.2018
31.	Kabir Hossain	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 32	24.06.218
32.	Adv. Anwar Hossain	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 32	24.06.2018
33.	Shaheen Parvez	Ward No. 31	24.06.2018
34.	Abdul Mannan	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 24	24.06.2018
35.	Nasir Uddin Ahmed	Ward No. 31	24.06.2018
36.	Russel	Ward No. 31	24.06.2018
37.	Shakil	Ward No. 31	24.06.2018
38.	Selim Reza	Ward No. 31	24.06.2018
39.	Omar Ali	Ward No. 31	24.06.2018
40.	Saiful Islam Sobuz	General Secretary, Konabari, Ward No.11 Jubodal	24.06.2018
41.	Adv. Yousuf	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 32	24.06.2018
42.	Joyinuddin Morol	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 24	24. 06.2018
43.	Helen Badsha	Member, Ward No. 29, Pourbo Dhisrom, BNP	24.06.2018
44.	Alamgir	Member, Pashchim Dhirasrom BNP, Ward No. 29	24.06.2018
45.	Mosharraf Hossain Badsha	Convener, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 29	24.06.2018

46.	Mojibur Rahman	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 29	24.06.2018
47.	Liton Mollah Giash	Member, Election Managing Committee, Gacha Kolmeshshor Adarsha School Centre	25.06.2018
48.	Md. Yusus Miah	Member, Election Managing Committee, Mudafa, Ward No. 52	25.06.2018
49.	Ramzan Ali	Secretary, Kashempur Union Jubodal,	25.06.2018
50.	Haris	Member, Election Managing Committee, Kaultia Porabari, Ward No. 23	25.06.2018
51.	Bakir Hossain	Member, Election Managing Committee, Former President, Kaultila Chatradal, Bauraed	25.06.2018
52.	Shova	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 30, Kanaiya Village	25.06.2018
53.	Abdur Rahman	Member, Election Managing Committee, Ward No. 30, Kanaiya Village	25.06.2018
54.	Iqbal Hossain	Choto Deyora Pashchim	25.06.2018
55.	Amir Hossain	Chief Agent, Shamontopur Polling Centre	25.06.2018
56.	Saiful	Pani Sheil, Kashimpur	25.06.2018
57.	Abdul Ali	Amtoli, Tongi	25.05.2018
58.	Maksudur Rahman Munna	Chief Agent, Madinatul Ulom Madrasa	25.06.2018
59.	Abdus Salam	Vice President, Jubodal, Ward No. 32, Gacha	25.06.2018
60.	Rafiquzzaman	Ward No. 10, Konabari	25.06.2018
61.	Shirazul Islam	Ward No. 40, Pubail	25.06.2018
62.	Md. Munna	Agent, Ward No. 26	25.06.2018

63.	Shiraz Uddin	Mazukhan, Former Mazukhan Union Chatrodal President	25.06.2018
64.	Adv. Hasanuzzaman	Secretary, Ward No. 31, BNP	Night 25.06.2018
65.	Motaleb	Chief Agent, Shimultola Polling Centre	Early morning 26.06.2018
66.	Abdul Awal	Agent, Lakhipura Polling Centre	Early morning 26.06.2018
67.	Adv. Manik	Chief Agent, Ward No. 31, Dhrisrom	Early morning 26.06.2018
68.	Abdus Sattar	Member, Ward No. 55, BNP	Early morning 26.06.2018
69.	Selim Reza	Alternative Agent, Ward No. 31, Dhrisrom GK Adarsha High School	Morning 26.06.2018
70.	Habibur Rahman	Agent, Anjuman Hedayetul Ummot Polling Centre, Ward No. 49	Morning 26.06.2018
71.	Farooq	Agent, TDH Govt. Primary School, Ward No. 49	Morning 26.06.2018
72.	Rajan	Bonmala, Ward No. 48	Morning 26.06.2018
73.	Zakir	Member Bonmala BNP, Ward No. 48	Morning 26.06.2018
74.	Muktijodha Jahangir Alam	Agent, Sahara Khatun Kinder Garden Polling Centre, Ward No. 35	Morning 26.06.2018
75.	Sharif Miah	Sromo Kollan Polling Centre, Ward No. 55	Morning 26.06.2018
76.	Monir Hossain Motahar	Sharifpur Gov. Primary School, Ward No. 34	Morning 26.06.2018
77.	Shahab Uddin	Vice President, Tongi Thana Chatrodal, Ward No. 48	Morning 26.06.2018
78.	Dr Abdul Hamid	Agent, Dhumketu School Polling Centre, Ward No. 48	Morning 26.06.2018

79.	Kazi Shaheen	Arichpur Govt. Primary School Polling Centre, Ward. 56	Morning 26.06.2018
80.	Alamgir Hossain	Nowagaon M.A. Mazid Miah High School Centre (Centre of Local Member of Parliament)	Morning 26.06.2018

5. Rules not for all

Awami League leaders and activists did not care much about rules while campaigning and many of them, including the AL-backed mayor candidate himself, was spotted violating rules as if the electoral regulations are not for them.

But most importantly, the election commission and the administration, who were assigned to ensure a level playing field for all, did not step up and in fact, helped the ruling party men to flout the rules.

This paper can prove the claims.

5.1) EC allows MPs to campaign

On April 13, an AL delegation, led by Prime Minister's Political Affairs Adviser HT Imam, proposed the commission arguing that allowing MPs' participation in election campaigns would ensure a level-playing field for all candidates.

Following the proposal, the commission held a quick meeting where a committee, led by Election Commissioner Kabita Khanam, was formed to evaluate the issue and submit a report to the commission.

In line with the ruling Awami League's recommendations, the Election Commission decided to allow lawmakers to participate in city corporation election campaigns right before the Gazipur City Corporation election.

Though one of the five election commissioners issued a 'note of dissent' in this regard; the amendment proposal was approved as the majority of the commissioners supported it.

The note of dissent by Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar read:

"It is unprecedented incident how the EC hurried to amend the Code of Conduct to exclude MPs from the list of 'very important persons' only to fulfil the demands of a certain political party and not due to its own need. We will be criticised by all quarters; so far no one has opined supporting the amendment."

No wonder the certain political party according to the note is Awami League. This incident is enough to prove how much subservient the entire commission is towards the government.

5.2) AL candidate campaigns in a Police car

Under the electoral code of conduct, where any sort of motorcade for the campaign is strictly prohibited, use of police vehicle for the campaign is unthinkable.

But not for Jahangir Alam. The Ruling Awami League-backed mayor candidate in Gazipur city election Mohammad Jahangir Alam was seen riding a police car during his election campaign at Salna in the city on June 23 violating election code of conduct.



Ruling Awami League-backed mayor candidate in Gazipur city election Mohammad Jahangir Alam rides a police car during his election campaign at Salna in the city on Friday violating election code of conduct. — Sourav Lasker

This act, not only violates the election code of conduct but also puts the neutrality of the police under heavy question.

The election commission turned a deaf ear to the incident.

5.3) AL-men campaign defying timeframe

Mohibul Hassan Nowfel, Central Organising Secretary of Awami League, was spotted campaigning for his party's mayoral aspirant in Gazipur City Corporation elections during a ban on outsiders, on June 24.

While on June 22, the Election Commission issued directives asking outsiders to leave the Gazipur City Corporation area within June 23 midnight for the election to be held in a free and fair atmosphere.



Mohibul Hassan Nowfel, Central Organising Secretary of Awami League, attended a news conference arranged in favour of AL mayor candidate Jahangir Alam violating the ban on outsiders' stay in the polling area, imposed by the EC

Also, Talukdar Abdul Khalek, the recently elected mayor of Khulna City Corporation, did some electioneering for Jahangir on June 24 defying the election commission directive.

Returning Officer Md Rakib Uddin Mondol did not respond to the phone calls and texts from for comments. He was not found at his office around 4 pm, either.⁹

⁹ Ruling Awami League leaders defy EC rules for Gazipur city polls,

<https://bdnews24.com/politics/2018/06/24/ruling-awami-league-leaders-defy-ec-rules-for-gazipur-city-polls>

The AL candidate, Jahangir Alam himself held a press conference ahead of the poll. It was attended by former BGMEA president and mayoral candidate for Dhaka North City Corporation Atikul Islam and Sramik League leader Roy Ramesh Chandra flouting the rule.



Khulna city mayor Talukder Abdul Khalek took part in electioneering in the Gazipur city in favour of AL candidate Mohammad Jahangir Alam violating the ban on outsiders' stay in the polling area, imposed by the EC

6. Unfair-play

Ruling Bangladesh Awami League showed more effective techniques of coercion in Gazipur civic polls than it did in Khulna, for holding a stage-managed ballot.

The day before the voting on June 26, some agents of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) candidates were allegedly picked up but released later from different locations.

The AL men applied an 'innovative technique', first to kick out BNP polling agents of the centres, then the AL activists joined the 'celebration of ballot stuffing'.

6.1) Polling agents picked up right before the poll

Most of the election coordinators and polling agents of BNP backed mayoral candidate Hasan Uddin Sarkar were picked up right before the election by Police, and some of them were freed only after the election ended.

Some of the BNP agents were detained a day before the polls and from homes, while others were picked up either from inside polling centre or outside of it, said the victims.

Prothom Alo, the largest daily of Bangladesh, talked with many of them to confirm the incidents, but they were afraid of police harassment and unwilling to name themselves.

Around 250 BNP men, mostly polling agents of Hasan, were detained between June 25 evening and June 26 morning and released after the voting.

- Shahab Uddin, a convener of the election coordination committee of BNP's mayoral candidate Hasan Uddin Sarker, was forced away by detective branch officials while distributing voter lists and other relevant documents among Hasan's polling agents standing in front of a polling centre at Dhumketu Pre-Cadet and High School at ward-48 and released after the voting ended at 4:00pm,¹⁰

¹⁰ 'Picked up before polls, freed after', <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/picked-polls-freed-after-1597051>

- BNP agent Alamgir Hossain was detained while he was entering a polling booth at Noagaon MA Mazid Mia High School centre,¹¹
- Member of Arichpur Primary School centre committee Kazi Shahin was picked up in front of the respective polling centre,
- Chhatra Dal leader Rajan, a polling agent of Dhumketu Pre-Cadet and High School centre, was rounded up while entering the centre,
- BNP activist Zakir was assigned as the polling agent of Arichpur Primary School centre but could not enter the centre as police picked him up in the morning,
- Joint secretary of BNP's ward no. 46 Kazi Nazrul was picked up while moving toward Noagaon MA Mazid Miah Primary School centre for performing his duty,
- Tongi thana Chatra Dal joint secretary Shah Alam and Shimultali centre's chief agent Motaleb was rounded up on the night before the election,
- Madinatul Uloom Madrasa's polling agent Md Munna were detained on the night before the election,
- BNP's ward no. 31 president Hasanuzzaman was arrested on the election day from his polling booth,
- Amir Hossain of ward no. 29 was picked up by police from polling booth on election day,
- Taij Uddin High School centre's agent Abu Bakar Siddique was detained from his polling booths by police,

'Picked up before polls, freed after'

BNP says its 250 men were detained in 12hrs till morning of Gazipur voting; police deny

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

It was around 7:30am on Tuesday, barely half an hour before the start of voting in the Gazipur City Corporation election.

Standing in front of a polling centre at Dhumketu Pre-Cadet and High School at ward-48, Shahab Uddin, a convener of the election coordination committee of BNP's mayoral candidate Hasan Uddin Sarker, was distributing voter lists and other relevant documents among Hasan's polling agents.

All of a sudden, several men appeared before them, forced Shahab into a

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The Daily Star report on the hourly detention of BNP agents on June 29, 2018

¹¹ **Gazipur polls rigging proves 'more innovative' than Khulna model,**
en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/178689/Gazipur-polls-rigging-proves-more-innovative

- Ambagh Govt. Primary School centre's polling agent Bazlur Rahman Badal was detained right before the poll by police,
- A group of plainclothes men, identifying them as detective branch official, picked up Mohammad Idris, a polling agent at Gacha Kamaleshwar Adarsha School centre in ward no. 34,
- Kashimpur's Sarupaitoly Govt. Primary School centre-2 polling agent Abdul Aziz Master and three others were taken to Bhaluka area of Mymensingh and left alone on the roads after the poll ended,
- Young lawyer Selim Reza, who was a BNP agent at GK Adarsha High School polling centre, was picked up from home in the morning of the election day. The police detained him from home while he was taking preparation to go to the polling centre,
- Plainclothes police officers picked six people - Anowar, Kabir, Mozibur, Helen Badsha, Alamgir, Mosharraf Badsha - from the city's Dhiram area.

6.2) Irregularities at centres

The extent of irregularities at Gazipur can be measured by this information alone. To cover the election, The Daily Star assigned nine correspondents and three photographers. They visited 72 polling centres and witnessed how AL activists and supporters influenced voting in many of the centres.

They found people wearing badges of the boat, the electoral symbol of Jahangir, were in total control in and outside many stations in violation of the election code.

During the voting, no campaigns and showdowns are allowed within 400 yards of the centres. Anyone violating this provision may face up to two years in prison.

Many AL men also took position inside polling booths and wandered from one booth to another at will.

At 13 centres, they were seen snatching ballots from voters and then putting the seal on them.

i. **Voter list snatched from BNP men¹²**

Madinatul Ulum Senior Madrassa polling centre

Agents and supporters of BNP mayor candidate in the Madinatul Ulum Senior Madrassa polling centre at Gazipur Sadar Upazila alleged that all their voter lists were snatched by the Awami League mayor candidate's supporters right before the election began.

Since they had no voter list, they could not verify voters or if anyone is casting a fake vote.



A man, seen roaming around with Awami League agents, talking in mobile phone inside a polling booth at Pubail Ideal University College during Gazipur City Corporation election on June 26, 2018. It is against the rules to have mobile phones at polling booths.

¹² **GCC polls: Voter lists snatched, BNP alleges**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/gazipur-city-corporation-gcc-election-2018-voter-lists-snatched-bnp-alleges-1595623>

ii. **'Forced casting' in front of helpless BNP agents in Pubail¹³**

Pubail Ideal University College

Allegations of 'forced casting' surface from Pubail Ideal University College. Ruling party men were seen talking in mobile phones amid strict ban of using mobile phones during polls.

Cries of forced casting during the Gazipur City Corporation election echoed from a centre in Pubail by ruling Awami League in favour of their candidate front of submissive BNP agents.



Around 20-25 unknown men allegedly staffed ballot papers with boat symbol at Shaheed Smriti High School centre in Joydevpur on Tuesday, June 26, 2018.

Multiple voters of Pubail Ideal University College complained that the ruling Awami League agents at the eight booths were forcing them to cast a vote for ruling party's mayor runner Md Jahangir Alam.

The Daily Star found two to three people in front of each of the polling booths, who wore badges of Awami League. They were going in and out of the polling booths. Some were using mobile phones in polling booths against the rules.

¹³ **'Forced casting' in front of helpless BNP agents in Pubail**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/gcc-election-2018-vote-rigging-front-helpless-bnp-agents-in-pubail-1595641>

However, BNP polling agents were silent in this regard. They seemed helpless and submissive in front of the Awami League's polling agents.

Meanwhile, outside the polling booths, the women who were standing in long queues claimed of unusual delay and said people who were not in line were casting votes.

It is to be noted that Pubail Ideal University College has a voter base of 3,364.

iii. **"This is how voting takes place."**¹⁴

MAH Arif College polling centre

At MAH Arif College polling centre in Konabari, a group of people were stuffing ballot papers at 11:30 am.

Asked, they claimed they were AL supporters. One of them, who identified himself as Selim, made no efforts to hide it: "This is how voting takes place."

There were no polling agents of the BNP mayor aspirant at the centre, as police picked all of them right before the poll.



An empty polling booth at MAH Arif College polling centre in Gazipur's Konabari area during the city polls. Polling officials halted voting at the centre for around an hour as there was no ballot book. The photo was taken at 11:30 am.

¹⁴ **GCC polls: Irregularities at some centres alleged**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/gcc-election-2018-no-bnp-agents-few-voters-konabari-centre-in-gazipur-bangladesh-1595632>

iv. Voting suspended for an hour¹⁵

Great Mack Primary School centre

Voting was suspended at Great Mack Primary School centre, adjacent to the Arif College centre, for around an hour as a group of four to five people snatched and stuffed ballot papers.

v. A celebration of ballot stuffing¹⁶

Shaheed Smriti High School polling centre

At Shaheed Smriti High School polling centre in Joydevpur, around 20 people were seen stuffing ballot papers with boat symbol around 11:45 am. Polling agents of the BNP mayor candidate were not found there at the time.

Presiding Officer Kafil Uddin Bhuiyan said the illegally-stuffed ballot papers were cancelled.

Later, law enforcers drove those people away.

vi. Vote cast without voter's knowledge¹⁷

Deo Ali Bari Degree College polling station

Momena Parvin, a voter, was wandering in front of the Deo Ali Bari Degree College polling station at Gazipur's Konabari.

"When I went to the Jail Gate centre, they told me I was a voter of another centre. When I went there, they asked me to come here. When I came here, the polling officials said my vote had already been cast," she said.

¹⁵ **GCC polls: Irregularities at some centres alleged**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/gcc-election-2018-no-bnp-agents-few-voters-konabari-centre-in-gazipur-bangladesh-1595632>

¹⁶ **GCC polls: Irregularities at some centres alleged**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/gcc-election-2018-no-bnp-agents-few-voters-konabari-centre-in-gazipur-bangladesh-1595632>

¹⁷ **GCC polls: Irregularities at some centres alleged**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/gcc-election-2018-no-bnp-agents-few-voters-konabari-centre-in-gazipur-bangladesh-1595632>

Asked, Presiding Officer Abul Kalam Azad said she was not a voter of this centre and asked her to go to another centre.



Almost no voters are seen at Deo Ali Bari Government Primary School amid the ongoing Gazipur City Corporation election on Tuesday, June 26, 2018.

vii. AL men intrude into polling booths defying rules

Kolomeshwar Government Primary School polling centre

At Kolomeshwar Government Primary School polling centre in Sadar Upazila, no BNP polling agents were seen, but dozens of AL mayoral candidate's supporters were found going inside the centre and later chanting slogans inside the centre.

Presiding Officer Kawser Ahmed said that the AL supporters had been driven away by a striking force once in the morning, but they came again. They will call the striking force again, he said.

About the absence of the BNP mayor candidate's agents, the presiding officer said that they did not allow the agents as they did not bring proper documents with them.

viii. A celebration of fake votes after driving out BNP agents¹⁸

Nilerpara High School

Visiting the Nilerpara High School at 1:45 pm, a correspondent of The Daily Star saw no queue of voters. Only a few female voters were inside.

There was no BNP agent in the polling centre either.

Rozina Akter, an agent of a ward councillor candidate, said someone entered the polling centre and asked the BNP polling agents to leave.

"Leave the centre. Go home, take a bath and have a sleep after lunch. We will take care of it," she said, quoting the man.

Razia said the BNP polling agent then left.

Around 50 to 60 men with AL badges were inside the centre during voting. Many of them even went inside the booths and stuffed ballots at booth 1, 4, 6, 7 and 8.

One man identifying himself as Jubo League leader Ashraful Alam said, "We have a target to cast around 2,700-2,800 votes here for the boat."

Inside the centre, the ruling party men were asking each other how many ballots they had stuffed.

"I cast 50-60 votes alone. 100-200 is not a big deal," one of them was heard telling another.

Another said women's votes were easy to cast because they don't protest.

¹⁸ **Gazipur City Polls: AL set to post runaway win**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/gazipur-city-polls-al-set-post-runaway-win-1595959>

ix. Violation of electoral rules¹⁹

Bymile Government Primary School polling centre

Some Awami League polling agents were seen working inside a polling centre wearing badges with the 'Boat' symbol in Bymile area of the city, which is a violation of the electoral code of conduct.

The agents were seen working inside several booths wearing the badges at no. 79 Bymile Government Primary School around 11:00 am, our staff correspondent reports from the spot.

x. Stuffing festival continues²⁰

Komolleshwar Rokeya Girls High School polling centre

A large number of young men were seen at the polling centres. The Daily Star reporter stationed at the Komolleshwar Rokeya Girls High School polling centre, saw people casting fake votes using the names of other voters.

6.3) 46.5% polling centres found faulty

The Election Working Group, an alliance of 28 polls monitoring organisations, said that they saw irregularities were committed at 46.5 per cent polling centres during the mayoral elections in Gazipur City held on June 28.

The EWG released its findings at a news conference at the National Press Club.

According to EWG director M Abdul Alim, the platform monitored polling at 129 out of 425 polling centres. EWG observers monitored polling in all the 57 wards in the Gazipur City.²¹

¹⁹ **Gazipur City Polls: AL set to post runaway win**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/gazipur-city-polls-al-set-post-runaway-win-1595959>

²⁰ **Gazipur City Polls: AL set to post runaway win**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/gazipur-city-polls-al-set-post-runaway-win-1595959>

²¹ **EWG recorded irregularities at 46.5 pc centres**, www.newagebd.net/article/44765/ewg-recorded-irregularities-at-465-pc-centres/article/35972

The group of observers recorded 159 incidents of electoral irregularities including ballot stuffing, casting fake votes, the presence of unauthorised persons inside polling centres and obstructing vote casting.²²

The observers witnessed:

- a. Five incidents of preventing voters from casting votes
- b. Three incidents of not allowing voters to enter polling booths
- c. Three incidents of preventing a candidates' polling agents entry into polling booths
- d. Six incidents of throwing out polling agents of a candidate
- e. 28 incidents of campaigning during polling in close proximity of polling centres
- f. 24 incidents of voters being ferried to polling booths by candidates in their transports
- g. 30 incidents of unauthorised person presence inside polling stations
- h. Nine incidents of using violence inside polling stations
- i. 21 incidents of using violence just outside the polling stations
- j. 21 incidents of ballot stuffing
- k. Five incidents of law enforcers working for a certain candidate

159
INCIDENTS
Irregularities
In 57 wards

An EWG observer observed that in a polling centre at Ward No 55, polling officials were stuffing ballots in favour of ruling party candidate. He said similar incidents at other polling centres also.

But the Election Commission suspended polling only at nine centres.

²² Election observer EWG finds irregularities at 46% Gazipur polls centres,
<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2018/06/28/election-observer-ewg-finds-irregularities-at-46-gazipur-polls-centres>

7. Outcry

Irregularities of Gazipur City election raised many eyebrows including US ambassador in Bangladesh. According to the Election Working Group, the margin of irregularities raised significantly than that of Khulna city poll.

The reaction from different groups can give a glimpse of the overall election. The opinion of people from different background are given below:

“This was merely a mockery in the name of elections. Different strategies of vote rigging were invented and used.”²³

Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir

Secretary General, Bangladesh Nationalist Party

“The US remains concerned by reports of irregularities, including ballot box stuffing and intimidation of political players and polling agents both before and on the day of the vote.

Marcia Bernicat

Ambassador, United States of America

“The recently-held Gazipur City Corporation (GCC) election was “controlled” like the Khulna City Corporation (KCC) polls, where the main rival candidate was “removed from the field” with the help of law enforcement agency.”²⁴

Official Statement

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan)

²³ **BNP demands re-election**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/bnp-demands-re-election-1596586>

²⁴ **Gazipur election followed the 'Khulna model'**, <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/gazipur-election-followed-the-khulna-model-1600948>

“The electoral code of conduct was violated on several occasions, such as snatching of ballots, intimidating opposition party workers and more, in an attempt to put fear into the heart of the voters.”²⁵

Official Statement

Communist Party of Bangladesh

“Irregularities in Gazipur included stuffing of ballot papers by force, campaigning within 400 yards of the stations and presence of unauthorised people at the centres.”²⁶

Abdul Alim

Director, Election Working Group

²⁵ GCC election “staged” and result “unacceptable”: CPB, www.unb.com.bd/bangladesh-news/GCC-election-staged-and-result-unacceptable-CPB/74102

²⁶ Election observer EWG finds irregularities at 46% Gazipur polls centres, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2018/06/28/election-observer-ewg-finds-irregularities-at-46-gazipur-polls-centres>

8. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Gazipur election was far calmer than the ones we are used to see. It also saw far less violence as there was no intra-party clash and as such it was peaceful.

However, there are two distinct ways to have a peaceful election -- one where all parties diligently follow the rules set by the Election Commission; and two, by an overwhelming power play of the ruling party activists so that the opponents dare not protest even for clear and blatant violations of election rules.

Now, understanding why the election saw less violence is the most important thing to know before we analyse the election.

The election is not a one-day affair. It is a process that starts far in advance of the polling day and is subject to, among many other things, the behaviour of the political parties and the roles of state institutions like law enforcement agencies, local administration and, most crucially, the Election Commission.

As we can see above, the entire process of election was no way free or fair.

The first hindrance to the election came from local AL leaders who filed a writ using forged papers only to stop the poll.

After the high court removed the barriers, the police started arresting BNP men all across Gazipur. Only a week before polling, eight election coordinators of the BNP candidate were arrested.

The BNP and its mayoral candidate met the EC and the returning officers and filed a complaint alleging harassment of their leaders and workers. But things remain almost unchanged.

As the presence of opposition men was thin and many of their polling agents were arrested right before the election, the casting of fake votes or stuffing ballots faced little resistance.

In a nutshell, the election was no way fair and credible, the election commission proved completely inept in holding a fair election, and the administration served as polling agents of Awami League.

Under this circumstance, no fair election can take place. For the free, fair and credible election, a neutral government needs to be in charge of the country.