

# DU admits ballot papers printed at undesignated press

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Dhaka University authorities on Sunday admitted the allegation of printing ballot papers for recently held elections to the Dhaka University Central Student Union and hall unions in the capital's Nilkhet area.

The university vice-chancellor, Niaz Ahmed Khan, admitted the allegation while addressing a press conference at Abdul Matin Chowdhury Virtual Classroom on the campus.

He, however, claimed, 'The place of printing the ballot papers or the number of ballots in no way affects the election fairness.'

His comments came three days after intensified controversy following a private television channel report that revealed ballot papers had been printed at an unprotected press at Gausul Azam Market in Nilkhet, adjacent to the campus.

Reading out a written statement, the VC, without mentioning the vendors' names, said that the work of ballot printing was awarded through a tender, and another associate institution was also engaged under the same tender due to the huge number of voters and time constraints.

'The associate vendor did not inform the university authorities about printing the ballot papers in Nilkhet,' he said.

He added that works were done in several stages to prepare a ballot for voting.

After printing, the ballots must be cut to the specified dimensions. And then, security codes are applied and scanned through optical mark recognition machines to make them machine-readable, the VC explained.

He also stated that the work of applying the security codes and making the ballot papers machine-readable was done at the vendor's main office.

A ballot paper becomes eligible for voting only after being signed by the returning officers of the polling centres, he said.

'The voting was conducted with utmost due diligence after completing all these processes,' he said.

Referring to the associate vendor's explanation to the university administration, the VC said that the vendor used 22 reams of paper to print 88,000 ballot papers in Nilkhet.

After the processes of printing, cutting and pre-scanning, a total of 86,243 ballots were prepared, sealed in packets, and delivered to the university authorities and the extra ballots were destroyed, he said.

The vendor admitted that, due to a huge workload, they forgot to inform the authorities about printing and cutting the ballot papers in Nilkhet, said the VC.

He said that the university authorities would take action against the vendor for such an 'anomaly'.

He said that 2,39,244 ballot papers were prepared for the election.

There were 39,874 voters and six ballot papers were allocated to each voter. 29,821 voters cast their votes using 1,78,926 ballot papers, while 60,318 ballot papers remained unused, he said.

Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir-backed panel won 23 of the 28 posts, including the vice-president, general secretary and assistant general secretary posts in the DUCSU elections held on September 9.

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The elections were marked by allegations of irregularities, including rigging and violations of the electoral code of conduct.

MRM Engineering and Anza Corporation reportedly printed about 86,000 and 1,53,000 ballot papers respectively in unprotected presses for the DUCSU polls.

Earlier, candidates from different panels and student organisations, including Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, Boishommo Birodhi Sikkharthi Sangsad, Swatantra Sikkharthi Oikyo panel, and Bangladesh Students' Union, raised allegations over the issue.