Rucsu election ends peacefully, tallying underway

Photo: Star

After 35 years, the Rajshahi University Central Students' Union (Rucsu) and hall union elections were held yesterday amid student panels' allegations of irregularities against each other.

The university's observer team said the polls were largely peaceful, but some instances of mismanagement were noticed.

At a press briefing at the administration building around 6:00pm, Prof Rafiqul Islam, who led the 10-member observer committee, said, "We monitored the voting across centres and submitted a report to the registrar. In our observation, the Rucsu election was conducted fairly and peacefully."

Chief Election Commissioner Prof F Nazrul Islam said voter turnout was 69.83 percent.

Shibir-backed panel sweeps Rucsu polls, wins 20 of 23 posts

A total of 28,901 registered students were eligible to vote for 902 candidates contesting for 23 Rucsu, five senate, and 15 hall union posts. Polling took place from 9:00am to 4:00pm across 990 booths in 17 centres located in nine academic buildings.

By 5:30pm, all ballot boxes were transported to the Kazi Nazrul Islam Auditorium, but the counting, which was slated for 6:00pm, started around 8:30pm.

The vice-president and the assistant general secretary nominees of the Shibir-backed panel were leading race in Mannujan, Rokeya, Taposi Rabeya, and Khaleda Zia centres as of 12:40am today. The general secretary candidate from the Adhipottobirodhi Oikya panel was ahead in the four centres, according to the RU Election Commission.

Students were seen waiting at the venue, where the live election results were being displayed on a screen early today.

Voting at most centres ended by 4:00pm but polling at the Shahidullah Academic Building centre continued after polling agents raised objections to some ballot papers that had already been signed by a polling officer.

Presiding Officer Prof Mahbubar Rahman said, "One polling officer had signed some ballots in advance to speed up the process, but a polling agent raised objections. To make up for the delay, voting continued about 20 minutes past the scheduled time."

Sheikh Nur Uddin Abir, vice-president candidate of the Chhatra Dal-backed Oikyaboddho Notun Projonmo panel, alleged that around 100 ballot papers had been signed in advance.

The panel also accused the Islami Chhatra Shibir-backed Sommilito Shikkharthi Jote of vote rigging and using force at several centres.

At a press conference around 3:30pm in the Paribahan Market area, Abir said the polls environment was fair in the morning but turned bad as outsiders entered the campus. "People wearing Shibir-panel jerseys were seen roaming around. Even armed cadres were reportedly stockpiling weapons nearby," he alleged.

The Sommilito Shikkharthi Jote, backed by Chhatra Shibir, accused the university administration and the Election Commission of negligence and blamed a Chhatra Dal leader for spreading propaganda online.

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Rucsu elections: Vote counting begins

While briefing reporters in front of the Central Library around 2:00pm, the panel's General Secretary candidate Fahim Reza alleged, "Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal, and BNP outsiders are entering the campus and spreading lies online..."

"We have lodged our complaints with the Election Commission, but no steps have been taken," he added.

In another development, Gonotantrik Shikkharthi Parishad VP nominee Fuad Ratul said although the election was participatory, there was no level playing field from the beginning of the election process.

"We received complaints that security staffers at Shahidullah Hall were campaigning for the Shibir-backed panel," he told a press briefing around 5:30pm.

Besides, several students and candidates alleged that the ink used to mark voters' fingers washed off easily.

Contacted, CEC Prof Nazrul said, "If anyone rubs it [ink] with water or a chemical immediately afterwards, it may fade. However, we have implemented four steps, including verifying voters' names and photos, so there is no risk of fake or multiple voting."

[Our correspondents, Shohanur Rahman Rafi, Tangila Tasnim, and Arafat Rahaman, contributed to this report.]