

Biswas elected President



Abdur Rahman Biswas

A Sun Report

BNP nominee former Speaker Abdur Rahman Biswas as expected won a convincing victory against Awami League candidate former Chief Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury in the presidential election held at Jatiya Sangsad yesterday (Tuesday).

Abdur Rahman Biswas becomes the 13th President of the Republic. He will be sworn-in at the Darbar Hall of Bangabhaban by Acting Chief Justice Habibur Rahman at 4-30 pm today (Wednesday).

Abdur Rahman Biswas polled 172 votes, two more than the party strength, to Badrul Haider Chowdhury's 92. Two independent Mps from Greater Barisal Nurul Islam Moni and Major (Retd) Hafizuddin voted for Abdur Rahman Biswas who is also from Barisal.

Suranjeet Sengupta added to Awami League's strength of 91. President-elect Abdur Rahman Biswas greeted his election with a pledge to defend the Constitution.

Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury who has been com-

forting himself with the thought of being a "consensus candidate" was left in the lurch. Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina expressed her agony at being let down by Opposition with whom she had burned midnight candles to come to an understanding. None other than his sponsors Awami League and Suranjeet Sengupta in the Opposition bench came to Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury's help.

Even such strong Awami League allies like CPB and NAP refused to toe Sheikh Hasina's unilateral decision in throwing Badrul Haider Chowdhury as a "consensus candidate".

Jatiya Party with 35 seats, Jamaat-e-Islami 20 seats, CPB five seats, NAP one seat, Islami Andolon one seat, Rashed Khan Menon, Salahuddin Qader Chowdhury and Shahjahan Siraj stayed away from voting.

Badrul Haider Chowdhury was not only banking on the support of the entire Opposition but was also dreaming of making a dent in the BNP camp. The BNP MPs stood solidly behind their party.

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nominee Abdur Rahman Biswas thus setting at rest a wild speculation that there would be defection from the Treasury Bench.

The voting began exactly at one minute past two with Prime Minister casting the first vote. She was followed by BNP stalwarts Mirza Ghulam Hafiz and others. Amanullah Aman who was brought from Suhrawardy Hospital was helped by party colleagues.

Awami League came in a group led by Sheikh Hasina. They were greeted by Treasury Bench members. Nurul Islam Moni and Maj (Retd) Hafizuddin, two Independent members, were the last to cast their votes.

The ballot boxes were opened at few minutes past five in presence of Works Minister Rafiqul Islam Miah and Awami League member Tofael Ahmed who scouted as agents on behalf of Abdur Rahman Biswas and Badrul Haider Chowdhury respectively.

The results were announced by Chief Election Commissioner who acted the Chief Returning Officer at fifteen to six in the evening. The announcement was greeted by thumping of tables by the Treasury Bench members. Many Awami League members also greeted the announcement.

President-elect Abdur Rahman Biswas, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of Opposition Sheikh Hasina were not present when the result was announced.

Mr Biswas was officially declared elected to the office of President under section 11(2) of the President Election Act, 1991 after the election held yesterday afternoon at the Jatiya Sangsad assembly hall, according to a Gazette notification of the Election Commission.

The Election Commission said the Gazette notification was published under rule 12(6) of the President Election Rules 1991.

BSS reports: With the swearing in of Abdur Rahman Biswas as the new head of state today the constitutional process of parliamentary democracy will be completed.

With this the nation witnesses the departure of the Acting President, Mr Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed who successfully ran the state of affairs at an important national juncture of country's history. The free, fair and impartial election to the 5th Parliament was held under his stewardship after he took over the Presidency in the face of the country-wide popular upsurge in response to the call of the main political alliances and parties.

After the President-elect Mr Abdur Rahman Biswas enters upon his office, Mr Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed will be eligible to return to his original office of Chief Justice under the Constitution (11th Amendment) Act, 1991 passed unanimously by

the House on August 6 last in accordance with assurances given to him by the people and the main political alliances. All his actions as the Acting President for running the state of affairs were ratified by the Parliament through passage of the 11th Amendment Bill.

During his 10-month tenure as the Acting President, the country witnessed transition to democracy, establishment of a sovereign parliament and restoration of parliamentary form of government after 16 years of the Presidential system.

Under the Constitution (12th Amendment) Act, 1991 passed unanimously by the Jatiya Sangsad on August 6, the executive power of the republic will be exercised by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet will be collectively responsible to the Parliament.

The President shall, shall, as head of state, take precedence over all other persons in the state, and shall exercise the powers and perform the duties conferred and imposed on him by the Constitution and by other law.

The President shall act in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister and can hold office for two five-year terms "whether or not the terms are consecutive."

The President shall appoint as Prime Minister, the member of Parliament who appears to him to command the support of the majority of the members of Parliament.