

Door-to-door campaign

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Amid widespread speculation about violence during the polls, the caretaker government, constitutionally mandated to hold a free and fair election, sat yesterday and analysed its latest preparation for the election.

Chief Advisor Latifur Rahman chaired the meeting at 5:00pm, which was attended by Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed, cabinet secretary, home secretary, EC secretary and other officials concerned, who discussed the further heightening of security across the country.

Syed met President Shahabuddin Ahmad yesterday evening and apprised the president of the latest preparation for the election.

The election will continue from 8:00am to 4:00pm straight.

The candidates were on a last-minute campaign to be people's representatives in the 300-strong parliament, while the voters are making their mind for whom to support.

However, the death of a candidate in Cox's Bazar-3 has dealt a blow to the electoral race in the constituency.

According to a fresh schedule, voting in this constituency will take place later.

Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia in their addresses, aired on the state-run Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar last night, called on countrymen to cast votes for respective candidates for welfare of the country. They also rounded off their public meetings on Friday and yesterday.

Meanwhile, two of the advisors to the caretaker government, Barrister Istaque Ahmed and Muayeed Chowdhury visited the Election Commission yesterday. Both advisors saw the EC's preparation for announcement of the primary result of the election.

The CEC, informally talking to newsmen at the EC yesterday, said the election would be held in a peaceful manner. "We will go for repeated polling in case of violence and rigging at any polling station."

The CEC alleged the newspapers overplayed the speculation about violence during the polls. "In a country of 130 million people there may be some stray incidents, but it does not reflect the total situation."

This time, the EC set up 29,978 polling stations with 1,49,288 polling booths across the country to accommodate 7,50,00,656 voters, of which 3,88,84,971 male and 3,63,15,684 female ones.

According to the EC statistics, 1,933 candidates, (excluding the Cox's Bazar-3 constituency) of which 37 female candidates in 47 constituencies, are fighting the election. Fifty-two political parties have nominated 1,449 candidates while 484 independent candidates filed nominations.

Of 52 parties, only Awami League has fielded nominations in all the 300 constituencies. The BNP-led four party alliance has also fielded nominations in 300 seats. The BNP alone fielded candidates in 248, while its allies Jamaat-e-Islami 31, Jatiya Party (Nazir) 11 and Islami Oikya Jote 7.

The Islami Jatiya Oikya Front led by Ershad's Jatiya Party has fielded nominations in all the 300 constituencies. The BNP-led four party alliance has also fielded nominations in 300 seats. The BNP alone fielded candidates in 248, while its allies Jamaat-e-Islami 31, Jatiya Party (Nazir) 11 and Islami Oikya Jote 7.

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Business bodies

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Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Benajir Ahmed, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and Kutubuddin Ahmed, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) signed the statement.

To ensure a peaceful environment during the election, the administrative and security measures that have been taken up are fairly exhaustive, they observed. "We trust that the government machinery and the law-enforcement agencies entrusted with the election process will discharge their sacred duties fairly and courageously."

What is important is the goodwill of the political parties and more particularly, their commitment to strengthening the democratisation process. The major political parties have already committed themselves to peaceful election and its

results, business leaders stated.

"On behalf of the business community, we sincerely hope that through graceful acceptance of election results, our political parties will show to the world that the national aspirations for democracy and economic stability are much above party interests," the statement added.

It is well known that the country's export earnings are under threat, particularly due to the recent turmoil in the international arena. The garment sector, which is more threatened than at any time before, has already reported loss of orders worth millions of US dollars, they mentioned.

It falls on all political parties to rise to the looming economic crisis by ensuring peaceful environment during the election and accepting the people's verdict, the business leaders said.

AL team calls on President

UNB, Dhaka

A delegation of Awami League yesterday called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at the Bangabhaban to lodge a protest against harassment of AL workers and threats to the minority voters across the country.

Led by AL Election Coordination Committee Secretary Muzaaffar Hossain Poltu, the three-member delegation also made allegation against the "partisan activities" of the deputy commissioner of a particular district.

They informed the President that they already requested the chief election commissioner to transfer him immediately or appoint the additional deputy commissioner as returning officer in place of the deputy commissioner.

President Shahabuddin gave them a patient hearing and said he would talk to the authorities concerned about the matter.

The delegation included former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury and AL leader Ataur Rahman Kaiser, said a Bangabhaban press release.

tenure of the previous political

Some police officials claimed that there would be little scope for use of the illegal arms yet to recover as the huge number of law enforcers would remain on "high alert" during the post-election days.

During the previous month-long special drive that ended on June 28, police recovered 1152 firearms and arrested 236 'wanted criminals', 34,642 'wanted criminals' and 14,164 people accused in various cases.

Firearms recovered during the tenures of 1991 and 1996 caretaker governments totalled 693 and 862 respectively.

"Success of the current drive can not be judge by comparing the results with those during tenure of 1991 and 1996 caretaker governments because inflow of illegal arms has greatly increased now," a senior police official said seeking anonymity.

Longest police drive

But a top police official said they are "happy with the achievement" in the on-going drive. He however said they apprehend more incidents of violence during and after the election. "We are ready to face it", he said.

"This election will not be like the previous ones. There will be more incidents of violence", he said referring to reports from different areas. But he did not elaborate.

There was large scale transfer and reshuffle in the civil and police administrations after take over by the caretaker government to ensure a free, fair and peaceful election.

But the results achieved so far during the special police drive belied people's expectation as regards recovery of illegal arms and arrest of terrorists and criminals, sources said.

There were complaints from the police administration earlier that criminals could not be nabbed due to political interference during the

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BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia

called on President Shahabuddin

Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday

evening.

She stayed with the president for

some time and expressed her

apprehension that the unruly mobs

may try to capture different polling

stations during the polling time.

Khaleda Zia requested the presi-

dent to advise the authorities con-

cerned to ensure peaceful atmos-

sphere during the polling time.

President Shahabuddin gave her

a patient hearing and assured that

the election will be held peacefully

and that there should be no appre-

hension or any fear for disrupting the

election.

BNP election coordinator Syed

Hasan Ahmed was present on the

occassion.

Ctg blast

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Double-Mooring thana while they

were allegedly making bombs at

about 8:30pm, police said.

They alleged that Jatiyatabadi

Chhatra Dal cadres were making

bombs when the explosion occurred.

Later police recovered huge

quantity of explosives from the spot.

Identity of the victim was not

known immediately, as the body

was taken away from the scene,

police said. Police were trying to

recover the body till filing of this

report at 10pm.

The 15 accused include chair-

man of Rarhipara Union Parishad

and others.

Police arrested four people in

this connection.

At the same time, another bomb

went off at a water tank of Anand

Salt Factory in Bakulia thana on

Abdul Latif Road that left one

worker, Shah Alam, dead and 10

others injured.

Motives behind the bomb explo-

sion that created panic among local

people could not be ascertained im-

mediately.

Besides Nepal, other SAARC

countries sending observers are

India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. India

is sending two representatives from

the civil society while Pakistan is

sending two high officials of its

election commission. Sri Lankan

team comprises members of an

experienced observer group.

Thailand is likely to send at least

two observers, including a former

foreign minister.

Nigeria, a D-8 member, is sending

a six-member team from the

country's electoral reform com-

mission.

Besides, some observers are

likely to come from the Philippines

and Indonesia.

300 foreign observers

FROM PAGE 1
Austria to Australia and Nepal to

Nigeria are already in the country

while others are arriving.

The largest contingent of foreign observers is from the 15-member European Union under the umbrella of EU Observer Mission in Bangladesh (EUOMB). With participation from most of the member countries, the EU has set up bases in different parts of the country with some 67 long and short term observers including a core group of six. All the team members are already in their designated locations.

Several European countries are also sending country-specific observers. They include a 12-member team from the UK. Lord Peter Shore, known as a great friend of Bangladesh for rallying support during its Liberation War, was scheduled to be in the British team but he died recently. The delegation will comprise eminent citizens of Britain.

The nine-member observer group from Norway represents different professions while Germany is having a five-member team and the Netherlands an eight-member delegation. Other European countries who are deploying observers are Sweden, Portugal, France, Austria, Spain, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Belgium and Finland.

Canada is sending a four-member team who will be joined by two from its mission in Dhaka.

Australia is expected to send a small team. Bruce Chamberlain, Speaker of the Legislative Council

is also due to come.

The US team will now comprise

more than 30 of its embassy staff.

The Washington-based NDI,

which had announced cancellation

of Dhaka visit of its team following

the September 11 incidents, later

said that Peter Manikas, head of