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# Dhaka polls miss voters' enthusiasm

Only 7 of 15 constituencies in the city go to election tomorrow

WASIM BIN HABIB

The people of the posh constituency of Gulshan-Cantonment (Dhaka-17) are in a dilemma about whether to vote and who to vote for tomorrow since Jatiya Party chief HM Ershad has quit the race and there are three new faces on the ballot paper.

The ruling Awami League did not nominate a candidate for the constituency and left it for Ershad, who had won there in 2008 election.

Jatiya Party (Manju) candidate Abdul Latif Mallick, newly floated Bangladesh Nationalist Front (BNF) runner SM Abul Kalam Azad, and independent MA Hannan Mridha are vying for the parliament seat.

But the runners seemed to have failed to create enthusiasm among voters.

"What we had known about electioneering is completely absent here. Only posters of candidates were hung in the area but no other form of campaigning is visible. The residents also seem not interested in talking about the elections," said Walid Rahman who works in Gulshan.

The Daily Star reporter in some areas of the constituency

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Only a day to go before the elections, the campaign camp of Awami League candidate Ilias Uddin Mollah yesterday was almost deserted as the runner was expected to win warding off the halfhearted challenge from fresh faces.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Voters in fear of violence

Many undecided on going to polling centre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With only one day left, voters in many constituencies are still undecided about exercising their franchise in tomorrow's tenth parliamentary polls in fear of possible violence.

A significant number of unhappy electorates, on the other side, have found it meaningless to go to polls centres as 153 candidates have been elected unopposed. Many others however said they would exercise their voting rights.

As electioneering ended at 8:00am yesterday, people in many constituencies missed the usual festivity and polls-time atmosphere as the battle of ballots is going to be limited within the ruling Awami League and some of its allies.

This scenario and voters' opinions were derived during visits to a number of constituencies in the capital and some other districts yesterday. Talking to The Daily Star, many grassroots level AL leaders have also given a similar picture about people's lack of interest in casting votes.

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## ILLEGAL WORKERS IN SAUDI ARABIA

# Amnesty extended by 2 more months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred Bangladeshi expatriates in Saudi Arabia will be able to correct their legal status as the Saudi government has declared another two-month grace period for thousands of illegal foreign workers.

The extended amnesty will help the foreign workers, who could not correct their legal status during the seven-month amnesty period ended on November 3, complete the rectification procedures.

"Interior Minister Prince Muhammad bin Naif has ordered to complete correction procedures of expatriates whose papers were being processed by the labour ministry during the amnesty before March 1," said Maj Gen Suleiman Al-Yahya, director general of Saudi passport department.

The new system came into effect on January 2, reported Saudi-based English daily Arab News yesterday.

"Only 2,000 to 3,000 Bangladeshis might have been left out of the last amnesty for not possessing valid documents. We are now working with the Saudi labour ministry to complete their legalisation process," Shahidul Islam, Bangladesh ambassador in Saudi Arabia, told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

More than 7 lakh Bangladeshis had already taken advantage of the last seven-month amnesty, said Shahidul.

Over 12 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates are currently working in Saudi Arabia.

Earlier, the Saudi government announced a three-month amnesty in April

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## US again calls for talks

Disappointed as parties fail to reach consensus

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US yesterday once again expressed disappointment that the major political parties in Bangladesh have not yet reached a consensus on a way to hold free, fair, and credible elections.

"Obviously, that's what we're encouraging, and we'll keep monitoring the situation and engaging as necessary," Marie Harf, deputy spokesperson of US State Department, told a press briefing in Washington DC.

On the current situation

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## TOMORROW'S ELECTION

# AL, lawmen wary of violence in 12 dists

HASAN JAHIID TUSHER

Awami League nominated candidates and law enforcement agencies fear Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir might unleash violence in more than 12 districts to foil tomorrow's elections.

Bogra, Satkhira, Chapainawabganj, Joypurhat, Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Chittagong, Laxmipur, Feni, Dinajpur and Cox's Bazar have been on the receiving end of Jamaat-Shibir terror since February last year.

The districts, considered BNP-Jamaat strongholds, have been witness to attacks on police, minority communities, freedom fighters, journalists, AL nominated candidates and party men and their homes and businesses.

Dozens of people have been killed in the attacks.

Many believe the opposition, which is boycotting the polls and threatened to resist it, called the 48-hour hartal, while a countryside blockade programme was still on, to instigate fresh violence centring the elections.

With this in mind, law enforcement agencies would deploy a four-tier security system in those districts and constituencies during the election, intelligence sources said.

The Election Commission has given necessary directives to the law enforcers

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## Rats sniff out landmines!

THE TELEGRAPH ONLINE

Giant rats are being trained to sniff out buried landmines in Mozambique with the help of funding from British taxpayers.

Apopo, a mine-clearance charity, uses African giant pouched rats for its life-saving work because the animals are light enough to walk

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Criminals torched the campaign office of an Awami League candidate at Panchdhubi of Comilla in the wee hours of yesterday which also burnt down five adjacent shops. Army, Border Guard Bangladesh and police personnel are seen looking at the damage yesterday morning.

PHOTO: STAR

# Manmohan rules out another term

Backs Rahul as successor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday ruled out serving another term after general elections due by May and threw his support behind Rahul Gandhi to lead the country if their party wins the vote.

Addressing a rare press conference at the National Media Centre in New Delhi, he said, BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi would prove to be "disastrous" for India if he were to become the premier.

"Without discussing the merits of Narendra Modi, I sincerely believe that it will be disastrous for the country to have Modi as the PM," Manmohan, who has been India's PM for the last ten years, said.

He said he was fully confident that the next prime minister, after the Lok Sabha election, will also be from the Congress-led UPA coalition.

"In a few months' time, after the general election, I will hand the baton over to a new prime minister," Manmohan told the press conference, his third during a ten-year tenure.

During his 70-minute media conference, the premier answered questions on a range of issues including corruption, inflation, economy and internal political situation.

Manmohan said he hoped his successor would be one chosen by the current coalition and added that Congress Vice President

## Bangladeshi beaten to death in India

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A Bangladeshi cattle trader was beaten to death allegedly by Indians along Dhabolguri border in Patgram upazila of Lalmonirhat early yesterday.

The dead is Abdul Haque, 46, son of Kafor Uddin in Tepurgari village of the upazila.

Quoting sources of Falakata 35 camp Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in Coochbehar district of

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PRAYER TIMING		January 4
Fajr	5:30	6:05
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:00	4:15
Maghrib	5:30	5:35
Esha	7:00	7:30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

## RMG WAGE HIKE DEMAND IN CAMBODIA

# 4 workers killed in unrest

REUTERS, Phnom Penh

Cambodian military police yesterday opened fire with assault rifles to quell a protest by stone-throwing garment factory workers demanding higher pay in a crackdown a human rights group said killed four people.

Chaos during nationwide strikes erupted for a second day as security forces were deployed to halt a demonstration by thousands of workers, who refused to move and threw bottles, stones and petrol bombs at an industrial zone in Phnom Penh.

The clash represents an escalation of a political crisis in Cambodia, where striking workers and anti-government protesters have come together in a loose movement led by the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

Unions representing disgruntled garment workers have joined opposition supporters protesting against the government of Prime Minister Hun Sen to demand a re-run of an election in July that the opposition says was rigged.

Military police confronting the protesters fired live ammunition,

Reuters journalists said, and bullet casings were later seen scattered across the ground at the scene.

The clashes took place at Canadia Industrial Park in Phnom Penh, home to dozens of factories that make clothing for western brands that include Adidas, Puma and H&M Hennes & Mauritz.

Human rights group LICADHO described the incident as "horrific" and lambasted military police, adding that their own investigation and surveys of hospitals had found four people were killed and 21 wounded.

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The Daily Star



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ONLINE POLL

Do you agree with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that people will cast their votes in a festive mood as they did in 5,803 local government and by-elections?



Yes (56%)



No (44%)

TOTAL VOTES: 434

TODAY'S POLL

Do you think the post-election situation will be more critical?

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