

Turnout low

FROM PAGE 1

a Jessore village, ransacking and looting 130 houses to punish them for casting ballots.

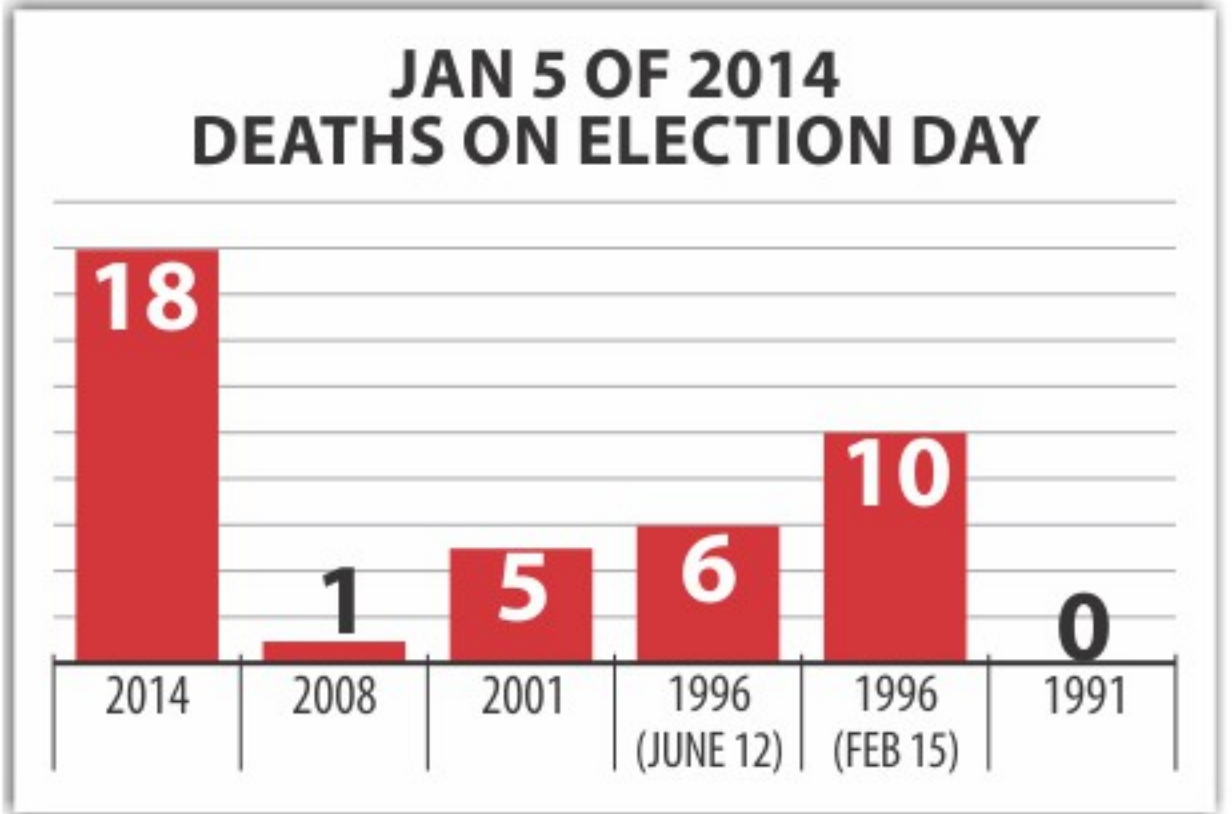
In an instant reaction after the election, BNP Chairperson's Adviser Osman Faruk said the low turnout proved that people had boycotted the "farical" election.

International reactions are yet to come. The US and the EU have already made it known that they don't support such an election and that they wanted BNP's participation in the polls.

In 26 districts, opposition activists, mostly Jamaat-Shibir men, took to the streets to thwart the election. And law enforcers were quick to swing into action.

In Dinajpur, Jamaat men cut off an Ansar member from his group and beat him to death. In three districts, 48 centres were burned down since the night before the election day.

Jamaat was more desperate to resist the polls, as it believes many of its top leaders, convicted of war crimes, might be hanged if the AL returns to power through this election. One of their leaders, Abdul Quader Mollah, walked the gallows last month for committing



crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

The capital wore a deserted look yesterday with only a few vehicles plying the streets. People hunkered down at homes in fear of violence, which, however, didn't occur.

The Daily Star found that there had been only a few incidents of vote rigging in the capital and elsewhere. Over the last few days, the AL high-ups had instructed all their leaders and activists to bring as many voters as possible to the polling stations.

The AL claimed it had proved that free, fair and acceptable polls are possible under a political government.

Voter turnout dipped from the highest of 87 percent just five years ago to around 30 percent yesterday, push-

POLLS PROGRESS



The same frame captured at four different moments during the polling at Azimpur Girls School and College centre in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

ing it closer to the controversial February 15 election of 1996 when only 26.5 percent cast ballots.

In at least 41 centres in 11 districts, not a single ballot was cast.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi

Rakibuddin Ahmad blamed the thin presence of voters on the boycott of the election by the opposition and the cold foggy weather.

The election also proved to be the deadliest in the country's history with 18

deaths so far. In the February 1996 polls, 10 people lost their lives in violence.

The violence and election boycott have their roots in the AL-led government's cancellation of the caretaker government system in 2011 that Bangladesh boasted as a

formula to hold credible elections in sharply divided politics.

The BNP and its allies rejected the scrapping of the system and resorted to widespread violence and shutdowns for its restoration.

18 killed, 300 hurt

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Of the dead, Joyнал and Harun of Khagrabari village were killed when police opened fire on a group of BNP-Jamaat activists who tried to seize Basudebpur Government Primary School polling centre around 1:00pm.

Abu Hanif, another BNP activist hailing from Shimuldangi village, died during a clash between the ruling party and BNP-Jamaat men at Goreya Gopalpur Government Primary School centre around 3:00pm. The clash began when opposition men tried to stop people from voting.

The BNP-Jamaat activists also attacked more than 30 polling centres in the upazila and beat up election officials, vandalised polling centres and attempted to snatch ballots. Fearing further violence, officials closed voting in 119 out of the 162 centres in the upazila within 1:00pm, local sources said.

A number of presiding officers alleged that police and strike force members did not stop the attackers despite repeated requests.

In Rangpur, two Jamaat-Shibir activists were killed as law enforcers opened fire to stop a group of Jamaat-Shibir men from capturing a polling centre at Pargachha upazila, police said.

A group of about 30 swooped on law enforcers with sharp weapons in efforts to occupy Deuty School and College polling centre in Parul union around 2:00am, prompting police to open fire.

The dead are Mirajul Islam Miraj of Gunjorkha Aminpara village and Hadiuzzaman Hadi of Chheckakandi Mirapara village.

Ten others were injured in the incident.

In Nilphamari, two Jamaat-Shibir men were killed when police opened fired on opposition activists trying to torch a polling centre and obstructing voters in Dimla and Jaldhaka upazilas.

The dead are Shibir activist Jahangir Alam of Khalishachapani Bepari Tari village in Dimla and Jamaat activist Mamtazul Haque of Kaimari Gabrol Balapara village in Jaldhaka.

Two opposition men were killed in police firing in Feni as activists of Chhatra Dal and Jubo Dal, pro-

BNP student and youth wings, were trying to snatch ballot papers from Uttar Char Chandia Government Primary School polling centre under Sonagazi upazila.

The dead are Jamshed Alam, vice-president of Uttar Char Chandia ward Jubo Dal, and Shahidullah, president of the ward Chhatra Dal. Ten other opposition men were also injured.

In Gaibandha, a Shibir activist was killed and 46 people from both ruling AL and opposition parties sustained injuries as Jamaat-Shibir-led opposition activists clashed with AL supporters and police in Sundarganj and Palashbari upazilas.

Voting was suspended in 166 polling centres of the district.

In many of those centres, polls materials could not be sent due to resistance from opposition activists and lack of proper security measures, officials said.

At several centres, opposition men either snatched away polls materials or set those on fire.

Masuder Rahman, presiding officer of Nijpara Govt Primary School centre in Sundarganj, went missing on way to the polling centre, district election control room said.

He was still missing till filing of this report in the early hours of today.

In Munshiganj, Kangkan Mia, Shimulia union unit joint secretary of Chhatra Dal, died when he, chased by law enforcers, jumped into a roadside ditch.

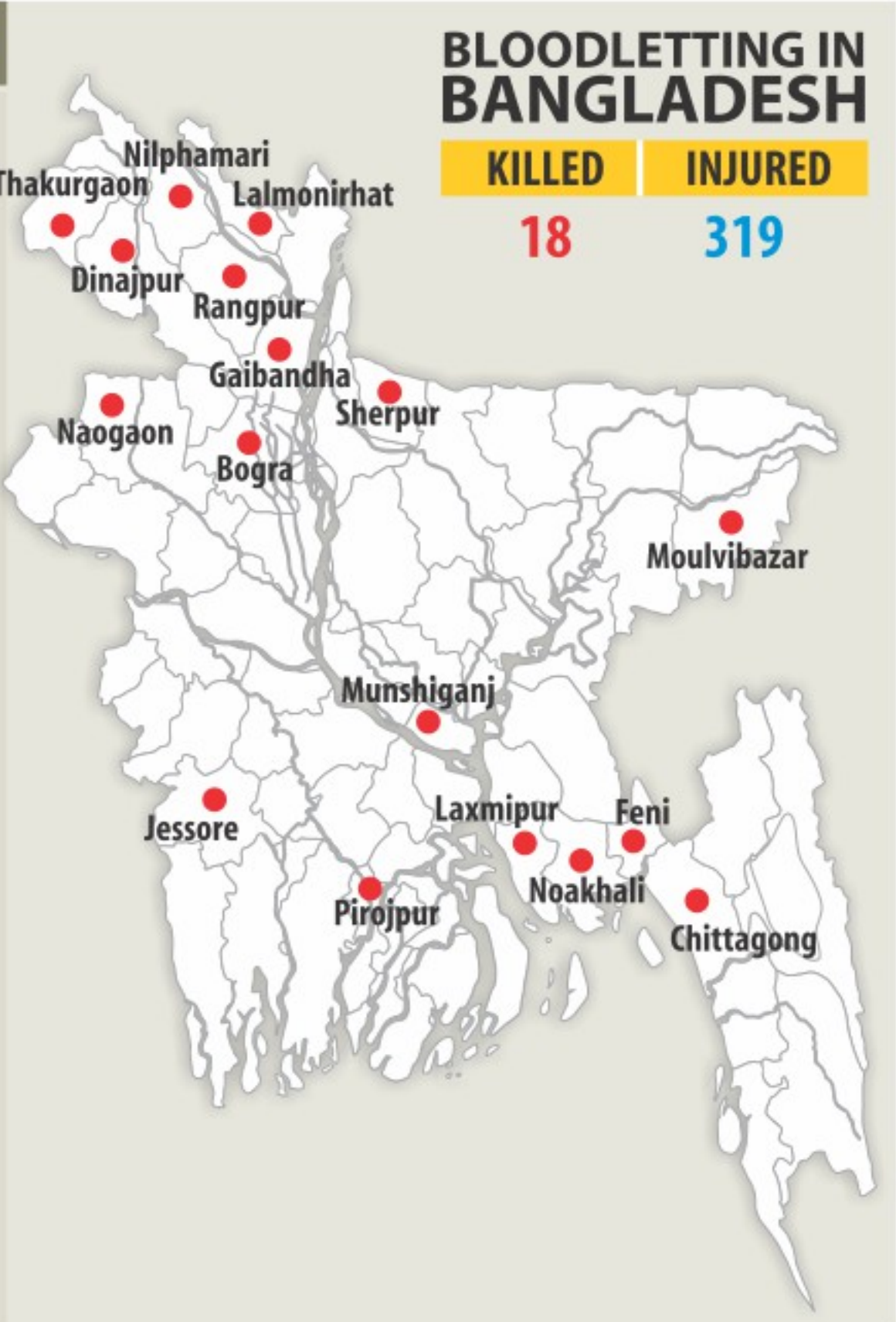
Police chased him after he tried to hurl a petrol bomb at Dakshin Kathadia-Shimulia Government Primary School polling centre around 6:00am under Tongibari upazila, said Upazila Nirbahi Officer Nasreen Parvin.

Police rescued injured Kangkan from the ditch, but he died on the way to the police station.

Shibir activist Mohammad Rubel was killed in Laxmipur and two Shibir men were wounded when police shot at BNP, Jamaat and Shibir activists who attacked the Machhimpur High School polling centre in Ranganj upazila and torched ballot boxes and papers, police said.

In Naogaon, BNP supporter Babul Hossain was

DISTRICT	KILLED	INJURED
Bogra		10
Chittagong	1	6
Dinajpur	3	20
Feni	2	10
Gaibandha	1	47
Jessore	1	40
Lalmonirhat		68
Laxmipur	1	2
Moulvibazar		15
Munshiganj	1	
Naogaon	1	6
Nilphamari	2	
Noakhali		18
Pirojpur		7
Rangpur	2	
Sherpur		10
Thakurgaon	3	60



killed and six others were injured as joint forces opened fire in Manda upazila in the district. The firing occurred when opposition men, equipped with lethal weapons, were advancing towards two polling centres, ignoring the law enforcers' requests not to do so, police said.

A Shibir activist was killed when police opened fire at Bara Hatiya Bhabanipur Government Primary School at Lohagara upazila in Chittagong after a group of Jamaat-Shibir men attacked the polling

centre around 3:30pm.

The dead is Enamul Haque Lalu of Khazur Para in the upazila.

Opposition men attacked polling officials, including the presiding officer of the Baruapara Government Primary School polling centre in the upazila, and looted polling materials, including ballot papers.

In Jessore, a BNP activist was killed when law enforcers opened fire on around 60 Jamaat-Shibir activists who were looting a polling centre and setting fire to ballot

papers in Monirampur upazila in the district around 3:00pm.

The dead is Motier Rahman of Biprokona village under Monirampur upazila.

Jamaat-Shibir and BNP activists attacked a polling centre at Baniachang in Habiganj and another at Borolekha upazila in Moulvibazar and beaten four policemen severely. The attackers also torched ballot papers at a centre.

Besides, Jamaat activists allegedly stabbed an assistant presiding officer in Borolekha upazila on Saturday night.

In Bagerhat, supporters of AL candidate Mozammel Hossain allegedly attacked two election offices of two rival AL candidates at Morelganj in the district, injuring six people.

In Magura, voting was marred in at least 45 polling centres in two constituencies as the opposition activists attacked the centres.

They vandalised some of the centres and hurled petrol and crude bombs in some centres, injuring several people, including two Ansar men. They also kept polling officials confined in some of the centres.

Violence took place also after the polls ended in several districts.

In Bogra, at least 25 people were injured in clashes between supporters of AL and BNP at Sonatola municipality around 6:30pm.

AL men cut the tendons of BNP activist Milon and left him critically injured. He was being treated at Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in the district.

Both groups hurled at least 10 cocktails at each other. Police fired at least 10 rubber bullets to disperse them.

In Pirojpur, suspected Jamaat-Shibir men hacked two AL men at Chandipur village of Zianagar upazila in the evening.

The injured are Balipara union AL Secretary Mostafa Kamal Hawlader and AL activist Majnu Matubbor.

Witnesses said the Islamist party men attacked the two when they were going to Mostafa's village under police escort around 5:30pm.

Hartal again

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no-confidence in the government to boost our movement and make it a success," said a top alliance leader.

A BNP joint secretary general last night said now the opposition's movement will continue ceaselessly until the fall of the government.

"We are planning to wage a new type of movement to ensure participation of mass people in it," he mentioned, without elaborating.

The opposition combine might go for a non-cooperation movement after January 25, the

last day of the present parliament.

Another BNP leader admitted that the opposition had a "wrong strategy" for the anti-government movement and also committed mistakes at different phases of the agitation. But by not casting their votes in the polls, people have rejected the government and there is no more lacking in opposition's movement.

The BNP leadership, he noted, is inspired to see violent demonstrations across the country to resist the elections.

"It's a reality in our politics that the number of deaths in a movement determines its suc-

cess," Hamdullah Al Mehedi, general secretary of Bangladesh Labour Party, told The Daily Star.

"On that count, our movement to resist the polls has been a success as at least 18 people have died so far on the polling day alone," he added.

On the low turnout, Osman Faruk said people have "hatefully rejected" the prime minister and the ministers' call to go to polling centres and cast their votes.

"The government has entirely been detached from people and the nation has no

support for this administration. The fall of the autocratic and undemocratic government is certain now," mentioned the BNP leader.

He demanded the government sit in a dialogue immediately with the opposition on holding free, fair and inclusive elections under a non-party arrangement.

SECURITY EASED

Police yesterday took away the water cannon from in front of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan residence.

Additional members of law enforcement agencies were also withdrawn from there.

However, no opposition man was allowed to meet the BNP leader, said party sources.

Earlier on Thursday and Saturday, law enforcers removed all five sand-laden trucks from the roads near Khaleda's residence. The vehicles were parked there to block the roads.

Law enforcers virtually confined the opposition leader to her residence since December 28, a day before the opposition sponsored "March for democracy" programme.

The government, however, claimed that all the measures had been taken to boost Khaleda's security.

It's victory of people

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AL leaders have also claimed the 10th parliamentary election has proved that a credible election is possible under a partisan government.

"The election was held in a free, fair and credible manner and voter turnout was satisfactory," said AL election steering committee co-chairman HT Imam at a briefing at Priyanka Community Centre in Dhanmondi yesterday evening.

"This election has ascertained the victory of the people," he said cheerfully.

The former establishment adviser to the prime minister thanked people for "braving all obstacles" and exercising their franchise.

"The opposition asked voters not to go to the polling centres but people rejected the call and cast their votes," he said.

Responding to a question on the percentage of turnout, he said, "It is the jurisdiction of the Election Commission to declare the

official figure."

He, however, claimed that more than 60 percent voters cast their ballots in some centres.

HT Imam also bitterly criticised the main opposition BNP-led alliance for "killing people in the name of blockade and agitation" and said such blockades were "nothing but a declaration of war against the people."

Immediately after the voting hours ended,

AL leader Tofail Ahmed, also the industries minister, expressed satisfaction at the turnout of voters.

Referring to opposition leader Khaleda Zia's call "to resist" the polls, the AL advisory council member said, "People have cast their votes spontaneously rejecting Khaleda Zia's call."

Speaking at a press briefing at the party president's Dhanmondi office yesterday, Tofail described the election as the victory of

democracy and said, "The government has successfully held the election in a free and fair manner, foiling all conspiracies."

Another advisory council member of the party MK Alamgir echoed Tofail and said, "The turnout was satisfactory in comparison to that in the developed countries."

"The turnout was low in the morning but it increased as the day progressed," he told reporters at the EC secretariat yesterday afternoon.