

CITY POLLS

EC clarifies deployment of army

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday claimed that the media reported "confusing" news over army deployment in the Dhaka and Chittagong city corporation polls.

The commission in a statement said the army patrolled "the streets and polling stations" only during parliamentary polls of 2001 and 2008. Except for these two times, the army was always kept ready as a reserved force. They rushed to the spot to tackle a situation whenever returning officers called them in.

In different parliamentary and upazila polls, the army made temporary camps across the country as per their choice and stayed there as "reserved force", read the statement.

This time elections are going to be held in Dhaka and Chittagong city and the cantonments are located at the centre of the cities. That is why, the army will stay ready as reserved force inside the cantonment and they will rush to spots whenever returning officers call them, the statement added.

The EC's statement came hot on the heels of huge criticism from the media and different sections over its decision to keep the army as reserved force inside cantonments.

In the statement, the EC also claimed that whether the army stayed at temporary camps or inside the cantonments, their effectiveness would be the same and they would take the same time to move.

As restriction would be imposed on vehicular movement on election day, there would be no traffic jams in the cities. So, the army would quickly rush to the spots, the statement claimed.

Besides, a huge number of personnel from law enforcement agencies, including police, Rab, BGB, Coast Guard and Ansar, would be deployed to maintain law and order, the EC said.

BNP leader shot during campaign

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A ward-level BNP leader was shot in the leg while campaigning for his party-backed councillor candidate in the capital's Goran yesterday afternoon.

Nazmul Huda Arzu, 40, vice-president of ward-2 BNP unit in Goran, along with 10 to 12 other party activists was campaigning in Goran Tempu Stand area around 5:00pm. Goran falls under Dhaka South City Corporation.

All of a sudden, some five to six men came to the spot, shot him in the right leg and fled, he said while talking to journalists at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The BNP leader alleged that the attackers were local activists of the ruling party. He, however, did not name any of them.

Sub-Inspector Iftekhar of Khilgaon Police Station confirmed the incident.

Smartphones are 'making Children borderline autistic'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Constant use of technology such as smartphones is making today's children display borderline "autistic" behaviour, psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist has warned.

The former Oxford literature teacher, who retrained as a doctor, said that children as young as five are becoming increasingly unable to read facial expressions or show empathy, compared to children in previous generations.

He said he had heard of increasing numbers of teachers who have had to tell their pupils what different facial expressions mean.

He added that he had spoken to some teachers who now find that around a third of their pupils have problems with maintaining attention or understanding others' emotions or facial expressions - a problem which he says is due to the increasing presence of technology in children's lives.

Speaking to The Telegraph, he said: "Children spend more time engaging with machines and with virtual reality than they used to in the past, where they don't have to face the consequences of real life."

"In virtual environments they don't have to interpret the subtle cues of real-life environments like when they are playing with children in the woods."

He added that changing family roles have meant that children are often left in front of a TV or tablet screen while parents multi-task, in a development he called "quite worrying".



Indian bystanders look at a collapsed house in Siliguri following an earthquake. A powerful earthquake struck Nepal, causing massive damage in Kathmandu with strong tremors felt across neighbouring countries.

PHOTO: AFP

Nepal quake kills 1,400

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foreign climbers and Nepalese support-staff.

AFP Nepal bureau chief Ammu Kannampilly, on an assignment to Everest together with a colleague, was among those caught up in the chaos.

"We are both ok... snowing here so no choppers coming," she said in an SMS on approach to base camp. "I hurt my hand - got it bandaged and told to keep it upright to stop the bleeding."

Experienced mountaineers said panic erupted at base camp which had been "severely damaged", while one described the avalanches as "huge".

"Huge disaster. Helped searched and rescued victims through huge debris area. Many dead. Much more badly injured. More to die if not heli asap," tweeted Romanian climber Alex Gavan from base camp.

But the worst damage was reported in Kathmandu, where the historic nine-storey Dharahara tower, a major tourist attraction, was among the buildings brought down.

At least a dozen bodies were taken

away from the ruins of the 19th-century tower, according to an AFP photographer who saw similar scenes of multiple casualties in other parts of the city.

"It was difficult to breathe, but I slowly moved the debris. Someone then pulled me out. I don't know where my friends are," Dharmu Subedi, 36, who was standing outside the tower when it collapsed, said from a hospital bed.

At least 34 people were known to have died in India, including 23 in the eastern state of Bihar, while buildings in the capital New Delhi had to be evacuated.

The United States Geological Survey said the shallow quake struck 77 kilometres (48 miles) northwest of Kathmandu at 0611 GMT, with walls crumbling and families racing outside their homes.

"The walls of houses have collapsed around me onto the road. All the families are outside in their yards huddled together," an AFP reporter said in Kathmandu.

Another resident, Anupa Shrestha, recounted scenes of panic and mayhem, saying "everything started shaking,

everything fell down."

The quake tore through the middle of highways in the capital and also caused damage to the country's only international airport which was briefly closed.

Kari Cuelenaere, an official at the Dutch embassy, said the impact had swept the water out of a swimming pool at a Kathmandu hotel where Dutch national day was being celebrated.

"It was horrible, all of a sudden all the water came up out of the pool and drenched everyone, the children started screaming," Cuelenaere told AFP. "Some parts of the city fell down, there was dust rising... There were many (rescue) helicopters."

Aftershock tremors could be felt more than two hours after the initial quake.

USGS initially measured the quake at 7.5 magnitude and later adjusted it to 7.8, with a depth of 15 kilometres. It said in a predictor graphic that there was a 17 percent chance the quake could claim more than 100,000 lives.

India dispatched two military transport planes to help with the rescue

and relief efforts and there were similar offers from around the region, including Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

"We are in the process of finding more information and are working to reach out to those affected, both at home and in Nepal," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a tweet.

China's official Xinhua news agency said that two people, including an 83-year-old woman, were killed in the Tibet region.

The earthquake was also felt across large areas of Bangladesh, triggering panic in the capital Dhaka as people rushed out onto the streets.

In the garment manufacturing hub of Savar, on the outskirts of Dhaka, at least 50 workers were injured after the quake set off a stampede in a garment factory, according to the private Jamuna television.

The area has a history of earthquakes, with a 6.8 magnitude quake that hit eastern Nepal in August 1988 killing 721 people. A magnitude 8.1 quake killed 10,700 people in Nepal and eastern India in 1934.

Shocks spark panic

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At least two women, in Pabna and Tangail, died of heart attacks during the jolts while over 200 people, including students and workers at garment factories, were injured as they tried to get out of buildings hurriedly.

Cracks developed in some factory buildings while some high-rise buildings in the capital had tilted.

The earthquake devastated Nepalese capital Kathmandu and many parts of India. It left at least 1,341 people killed in Nepal, 45 in India, and 13 in China.

Panicked people of the capital and other parts of the country rushed out of buildings and high-rises to the streets below.

"I was walking down Dhanmondi-32 and suddenly saw large waves in Dhanmondi Lake. The water leaped a few feet upwards during the tremor," claimed columnist and rights activist Syed Abul Maksud over the telephone.

Former school teacher Rokeya Khanam Eti, 60, died of a heart attack in Pabna, reported our Pabna correspondent quoting her husband Sohrab Hossain.

Housewife Parina Begum in Tangail died of a cardiac arrest in Syedpur village in Mirzapur upazila during the earthquake, reports our correspondent there.

Several buildings were reportedly damaged in the capital and elsewhere in the country, including in Bogra, Narayanganj, Natore and Rajshahi.

There were reports of damaged buildings from the capital's Shakhari Bazar, Bangabazar, Jatrabari, Shyam Bazar areas and on Kamal Ataturk Avenue in Banani.

GM Jainal Abedin Bhuiya, chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan

Kartripakkha, said building-259/1 constructed without approval in Bangshal was leaning on the under-construction building next door.

"We have evacuated both the buildings and sealed them off," he said, adding, "We will check whether Ahmed Tower on Kamal Ataturk Avenue had tilted."

The 25-storey Ahmed Tower was leaning on the adjoining FR Tower on Kamal Ataturk Avenue. During a visit, The Daily Star correspondent saw that there was a gap of around two feet between the two buildings on the ground floor but the tops of the two buildings were touching each other.

Asha Tower in Shyamoli, Ershad Colony in Islambagh and Barisal Plaza near Bangabazar also tilted and cracks had developed in four buildings in Old Dhaka, Tejaon and Sheorapara of the capital.

The administrative building of Islamic University and the General Hospital in Kushtia and a 10-storey building in Feni also reportedly developed cracks.

Over 200 people, including garment workers and schoolgoers, were injured in different places in the country when they rushed out of buildings.

At least 50 garment workers were injured inside the 10-storey building of Al-Muslim Group at Ulaail in Gazipur when the workers were rushing towards the exit, reports our Savar correspondent.

Our correspondents reported that around 15 workers of a garment factory in Ishwardi EPZ, 20 workers in two apparel factories in Fatullah, 40 in Nilphamari, and 40 in Manikganj were injured. About 40 students of Chatmohar Pilot School, Atgoria

Pilot School, and Pabna Central Girls School fell sick during the tremor.

Ten schoolchildren at a Kalikabari Primary School in Dhubaura of Mymensingh and 20 people in Rajshahi were reported to have been injured.

Panic left about 50 workers injured in a garment factory in Savar as they were trying to rush out of the building believing it would collapse. The factory is in the same upazila as was Rana Plaza, which collapsed two years ago killing over 1,100 people.

Shumi Akter, a worker of the factory of Al-Muslim Group said, "We thought that the building was collapsing like Rana Plaza, which was only half a kilometre away from our factory..."

Farhad Hosen Khan, assistant general manager of Al-Muslim Group, said all the workers of the factory dashed for the exit around 12:15pm.

Following rumours that the Al-Muslim factory was collapsing, relatives of the workers rushed to the factory area and started demonstrations.

They also threw brick chunks at the factory and vandalised its windows, said Farhad.

The injured were rushed to the Enam Medical College Hospital and Savar Upazila Health Complex, hospital sources said.

Experts said Bangladeshis felt the ground shaking really hard this time. The country had not experienced such a high magnitude tremor so close to its border (500 kilometres) since 1934, when an earthquake of 8.4 magnitude hit the same area.

The Met office in Dhaka said the epicentre of the earthquake was at a shallow depth in the Barpak region of

Nepal, 745km from Agargaon.

The office recorded eight foreshocks and aftershocks from 12:14pm.

"People who live in houses built on soft soil are supposed to feel the shaking more," said Prof Syed Akhter Humayun of the geology department of Dhaka University. He has been researching on earthquake for years.

The quake was caused due to the slip of the Indian tectonic plate and Eurasian plate in the shallow depth, just 10 kilometre below the ground, Bangladeshis

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The Daily Star last evening.

"Members of Bangladesh under-14 football team are doing well at their hotel. A government delegation and a group of army officers are also visiting Kathmandu at the moment and they are also safe and sound," she said.

There are many Bangladeshi tourists visiting Kathmandu and other places in Nepal. The ambassador, however, could not confirm their status immediately.

The embassy has opened two help desks in this emergency situation in Nepal and embassy officials could be reached at +977 9808 184014 and +9779808 765071 for necessary information, diplomatic sources said.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh government is sending humanitarian assistance including medical teams and medicine to Nepal in the wake of the quake, according to another press release issued by the foreign ministry last evening.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has conveyed her deep condolences and sympathy to her Nepalese counterpart on this tragedy, says the release.

EU calls for peaceful city polls

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

European Union has stated that all sides must refrain from any actions that could spark further violence in Bangladesh in the run up to the vote for the mayoral elections in Dhaka and Chittagong.

"We look to political leaders to create favourable conditions for peaceful, inclusive, transparent and credible elections to take place. Voters must be given the opportunity to express freely their democratic choice," an EU spokesperson said in a statement issued in Brussels on Friday.

All political actors should take concrete steps to end violence, de-escalate tensions and engage in a constructive manner, for the long-term stability and democratic development of Bangladesh, the statement added.

BNP asks

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assist in detection of personation during the voting on behalf of their candidates.

In Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), a mayoral candidate can field 5,892 agents at as many booths in 1,093 polling centres. The numbers of election agents are 4,746 in 889 centres and 4,906 in 719 centres in Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and Chittagong City Corporation (CCC).

According to BNP insiders, the party is training more than 16,000 leaders and activists for the election duty in the DNCC and the DSCC, to keep adequate manpower ready as backup in case a polling agent needs rest or fails to perform.

The same is being done in the CCC so that they don't face any problem in making replacements if required, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, president of the Chittagong city BNP, told our correspondent there.

"We fear the ruling party men would exercise every unfair means possible, including intimidating our men, to clinch victory for their candidates," Bazul Karim Chowdhury Abed, campaign coordinator for BNP-backed mayor candidate Mirza Abbas in the DSCC, told The Daily Star.

"The party high-ups and our election experts have given tips to our men, who will work as polling agents, so that they do not break down in the face of intimidations," he said, adding that the same was being done for the agents in the CCC election.

In the DNCC, Manirul Huq Chowdhury, campaign coordinator for BNP-blessed mayor aspirant Tabitha Awal, said they would provide all kinds of support to their prospective agents, as instructed by the party high command.

The BNP's workshops for election agents will continue till tomorrow. And they have picked tomorrow, the day before the voting day, to submit the agents' list to the returning officers due to "strategic reasons", BNP sources said.

NO TENSION IN AL CAMP

The situation in the AL camp is completely different as their elections agents, unlike the BNP ones, face no security risks, party insiders said.

They are, however, facing some difficulties in finalising the agents' list as they need to have photographs of the agents.

"To manage the photographs of all the agents and assign them to the polling booths is a very tough job, but we are trying our best to complete the procedure," an AL leader, engaged in the party's election overseeing activities, told The Daily Star.

Sources said the party may appoint Abdullah Abu, Dhaka metropolitan public prosecutor, as the chief election officer who will monitor and give instructions to all agents.

The list of polling agents will be finalised by today and there will be backup agents for necessary replacements, according to AL's Deputy Office Secretary Mrinal Kanti Das.

The party sources said the list will be submitted to the presiding officers, instead of the returning officers, in the morning of the voting day.

HASINA, KHALEDA TO HOLD PRESS CONFERENCES

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to hold a press conference at Gono Bhavan at 6:00pm today.

Besides speaking on her latest visit to Indonesia, she is expected to talk about BNP chief Khaleda Zia's campaign for the city elections.

Khaleda too will address a press conference at her Gulshan office at 2:00pm today. She is likely to instruct BNP leaders and activists to remain vigilant at every polling centre till vote counting ends, said party insiders.

The BNP chief refrained from electioneering yesterday, following the Election Commission's notice asking her not to campaign with motorcade and processions as it obstructs traffic movement.

Mayor and councillor hopefuls wrap up their 16-day campaign at midnight today in the three city corporations that will go to polls on Tuesday. They are likely to carry out vigorous last-minute