

Ministers lose seats as Tanzania counts polls

AFP, Dar Es Salaam

Tanzania's ruling party presidential candidate took an early lead yesterday as election officials counted votes for a second day, while several key ministers lost their seats.

The polls are expected to be Tanzania's tightest election race ever, with the governing party facing the first major challenge to its dominance in decades.

Amid growing tension, the election commission has called for calm and warned only it can declare results.

"People should ignore announcements by other institutions and individuals," National Electoral Commission (NEC) head Damian Lubuva told reporters.

The opposition Chadema party has alleged rigging in Sunday's presidential, general and local elections.

In Zanzibar, the semi-autonomous archipelago which also voted for its own leader, the main opposition presidential candidate declared himself the winner on Monday, ahead of any official announcement of results.

Police on the Indian Ocean islands fired tear gas to break up crowds, while foreign embassies warned visitors to the popular tourist destination to avoid large crowds.

Not a good place

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The duty physician said they expected to do the operation by mid-October, said Hanufa.

"It is claustrophobic, filthy, abominable and infectious," said Monirul's father Enamul Haq. "The condition is so terrible that I am worried we might get infected by any diseases."

He said he along with his wife and son had to travel all the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for treatment, as Faridpur Medical College Hospital lacks an intensive care unit.

The room and its adjoining narrow stretch of corridor remain an isolated area that altogether accommodates five medical beds as part of ward No-103 without any identification number. A stack of rusting junks of medical beds and metal stuffs piled in front of the Casualty Operation Theatre and a clinical waste bin are what welcomes one, who may proceed to the isolated area through a narrow access.

The room and the adjoining approach passage to the hospital building were once a part of the emergency unit nearly one and a half decades ago, said insiders.

The approach passage has been turned into a narrow stretch of corridor to accommodate three beds.

Assistant Director Khaza Abdul Gafur attributed the awful state of cleanliness to "lack of manpower" without saying what the exact requirement for manpower is and what they have.

Officially, the number of medical beds at the hospital has increased to 2,600 from 1,800 over the past two and a half years. However, the actual number of staying patients ranges from 3,300 to 3,500 on average due to enormous rush at a time, he added.

"But the manpower required for maintaining cleanliness has not increased proportionately and it remains the same as it was for 1,800 patients," he said.

The additional patients are accommodated on the floor, in the corridor and sometimes two patients are crammed on a single bed, Gafur informed.

Rajon murder

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at the court. He said the claim of the defence that his son had stolen a van was false and that none of the accused owned a van.

The investigation officer of the case Suranjit Talukdar from the Detective Branch on August 16 submitted the charge sheet to the court accusing 13 and identifying 38 others as witnesses.

The charge sheeted accused are Kamrul Islam, 24, a Saudi expatriate; his brother Muhit Alam, 32, Shamim Alam, 20, Pavel Islam, 18, Ali Haider alias Ali, 34, Moyna Mia, 45, Nur Ahmed alias Nuru Mia, 20, Dulal Ahmed, 30, Ayaz Ali, 45, Taz Uddin Badal, 28, Firoz Mia, 50, Asmat Ali, 42, and Ruhul Amin, 25.

Among them, Pavel and Taz are on the run. The 11 other had been cross-examined and were present in court yesterday.

On July 8, Sheikh Md Samiul Alam Rajon was beaten to death by Kamrul and other brutes in Kumargaon Bus Stand area of Sylhet sadar upazila. One of the culprits filmed the whole incident on a mobile phone and shared it on the social media, provoking outcries at home and abroad.

The prime accused Kamrul fled to Saudi Arabia soon after the incident. Detained by Saudi police, he was brought back home on October 16.

Turkey rounds up more IS suspects, strikes Kurds in Syria

AFP, Ankara

Turkey pressed on with its "war on terror" yesterday, just five days before a pivotal election, detaining dozens of Islamic State suspects in massive police raids and hitting Kurdish rebels across the border in Syria.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been playing the security card in the run-up to Sunday's vote with tensions running high over the renewed Kurdish conflict and a massive bomb attack blamed on IS jihadists.

Around 200 Turkish police swooped at dawn on suspected IS hideouts in the conservative central Anatolian city of Konya, detaining 30 people including one woman, the Dogan news agency said.

Backed up by helicopters, counter-terrorism police also raided addresses in three districts of Istanbul, detaining 21 suspects, including seven children, Dogan added.

Another 20 were arrested in a similar operation in the town of Kocaeli, east of Istanbul, it said.

Rebels from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) were also targeted in raids in the eastern town of Elazig, with 13 arrests, Dogan said.

The cross-country raids followed a similar operation Monday in the main Kurdish majority city of Diyarbakir which left two policemen and seven IS suspects dead during a fierce gun battle.

It was the first such shootout on Turkish soil since Ankara joined the US-led coalition against the extremist group earlier this year.

The two slain policemen were victims of a suicide bomber, Diyarbakir police said in a statement, after officials earlier blamed a booby trap bomb.

Several of the seven dead IS suspects had blown themselves up, a security source told AFP.

The Turkish army also said security forces had detained 17 foreign jihadists as they attempted to cross into Syria from the border region of Kilis on Monday.

Turkey has been on the hunt for IS extremists since the twin bombings on a peace rally in Ankara on October 10 that killed 102 people and wounded 500 more, the worst such attack in the country's history.

Erdogan, an increasingly polarising figure in Turkey, on Monday vowed to press ahead with operations against all "terrorists" including Islamic State and the outlawed PKK.

Media reports at the weekend said

security forces feared an IS cell was plotting large-scale attacks to disrupt the election.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu also confirmed Monday that the military had struck Kurdish fighters across the border in northern Syria.

In an interview with pro-government A Haber television, Davutoglu said Turkey had warned members of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) not to cross to the west of the Euphrates river and if they did, Turkey would attack.

"We struck twice," he said, without giving any further details.

Ankara regards the PYD as the Syrian offshoot of the PKK, which resumed deadly attacks against Turkish forces in July after a bomb attack in a Kurdish majority town near the Syrian border that killed 34 activists.

Turkey responded by launching an air war against PKK bases in northern Iraq, shattering a delicate 2013 ceasefire and hopes of an end to a conflict that has raged for three decades.

Davutoglu's comments came after Syrian Kurdish fighters accused the Turkish military of attacking their positions near Tal Abyad, where the Kurds expelled the Islamic State group after fierce clashes in June.

Kurdish fighters known as the YPG control large parts of northern Syria on the Turkish border, where they have for months engaged in bitter fighting with IS.

The Kurds in Syria last week said they had incorporated Tal Abyad into their "autonomous administration" in the north of the country.

Alarmed by the growing strength of Syrian Kurds, Turkey fears they could eventually create an independent state to threaten Ankara.

With Kurds making up 20 percent of Turkey's population, its ultimate nightmare would be Turkish Kurds cooperating with their Syrian brethren in search of autonomy on both sides.

Ankara has warned Syrian Kurds to stay away from any attempts to create a "de facto situation" in Syria.

Long criticised by its Western allies for not doing enough to stem the rise of the extremist jihadist group, Turkey launched air strikes against IS targets in Syria after a deadly bombing on a border town in July.

But most of the firepower was concentrated on PKK fighters based in northern Iraq, rupturing the truce between Ankara and the rebels.

Hunt on for survivors

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communication lines have been disrupted and roads blocked so we cannot say anything about the damage there," a police official in the northwestern city of Peshawar told AFP.

The bulk of the casualties recorded so far were in Pakistan, where 248 people were killed, including 202 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and more than 1,600 injured, disaster management authorities said.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif flew to Shanga in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa -- believed to be one of the worst-hit districts with 49 reported dead so far -- where he pledged compensation for damaged homes, state media reported.

In Gandao village in Shanga the quake left homes completely flattened or riddled with cracks, forcing most of the population to camp out in the open amid freezing winter rain.

People desperately appealed to the government for quilts, blankets, sweaters and food rations as snowy conditions set in.

"We have nothing to eat and wear in the cold," resident Hakim Khan, 60, whose 12-year-old nephew was killed in the quake.

"My family members are forced to wait for help under the open sky."

Afghan officials said at least 115 people were confirmed dead and hundreds more injured, with casualties reported from around half a dozen of the country's 34 provinces, and more than 7,600 homes reported damaged.

In one of the most horrifying incidents to emerge so far, a dozen Afghan schoolgirls were trampled to death as they rushed to escape their classrooms in remote northern Takhar province when the quake struck.

Bystanders rushed the dazed and terrified survivors to hospital, many lying limp in the arms of their rescuers, as doctors tried reviving some of them by pumping their chests.

Flag-draped coffins arrived at a local cemetery yesterday as tearful relatives of the girls gathered for mass burials, as some of the survivors were flown in military choppers to Kabul for treatment.

"Children in earthquake-hit areas... are facing further deadly threats as extreme conditions and insecurity cut off communities from aid," the UN children's agency Unicef said.

Large swathes of Badakhshan, the remote province where the epicentre is located, and other quake-stricken

areas are effectively controlled by the Taliban, posing a huge challenge to any official aid efforts.

The growing presence of Taliban fighters is hindering access of aid workers to earthquake victims in urgent need of help, the head of a Western charity told AFP.

But the militants yesterday urged aid organisations not to hold back in delivering emergency relief, and vowed their fighters would provide "complete help" in the affected areas.

For many in Pakistan, Monday's quake brought back traumatic memories of a 7.6 magnitude quake that struck in October 2005, killing more than 75,000 people and displacing some 3.5 million.

Muzaffarabad resident Shehnaz Rasheed, 34, whose daughter was killed in the 2005 disaster, said that as the quake struck she feared "doomsday was being repeated".

"I ran towards my children's school leaving everything behind -- I did not even close the doors of my house," she told AFP, explaining she was frantic to reach her two sons so she could "die together with them if we have to die".

Authorities were struggling to ascertain the damage in the northern district of Chitral, where a local official said the quake had damaged the water supply system.

"Around 80,000 people don't have access to clean drinking water and it's our top priority to restore the water supply," he said.

In other remote areas residents -- including children and the elderly -- were helping with relief work, many of them digging through piles of rubble for survivors.

Pakistan army helicopters were evacuating victims yesterday to the provincial capital Peshawar and Rawalpindi, which borders Islamabad.

The military has also sent medical teams, tents and rations to affected areas.

The quake was centred near Jurm in northeast Afghanistan, 250 kilometres (160 miles) from the capital Kabul and at a depth of 213.5 kilometres, the US Geological Survey said.

Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

In Nepal a quake in April and a strong aftershock in May killed more than 8,900 people.

Toxic gas kills three workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three construction workers died after inhaling toxic gas in a septic tank of an under-construction factory in Chittagong's Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone yesterday.

The dead are Rezaul Alam, 31, of Mithapukur upazila of Rangpur, Shah Alam, 30, and Mohammad Arif, 28. The details of the last two could not be known immediately.

The workers entered the septic tank of the under-construction factory, SOS Outfit Ltd, around 12:00 noon, said Gazi Shawkat Akbar, assistant sub-inspector of EPZ Police Station.

The construction of the septic tank was completed around a month ago, and the workers went into it to put the finishing touches to the tank, the police official said.

As their co-workers, who were outside, did not get any response from the three, they informed police of the matter, he added.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies, said the ASI.

'Super tomato'

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phenylpropanoid compounds on an industrial scale in plants, and potentially production of other products derived from aromatic amino acids.

"Our work will be of interest to different research areas including fundamental research on plants, plant/microbe engineering, medicinal plant natural products, as well as diet and health research."

The key to turning tomatoes into natural medicine factories is a protein called AtMYB12, found in the garden weed thale cress.

Introducing the protein to tomatoes acted like opening a tap to boost levels of phenylpropanoids, a family of organic compounds that give rise to a wide range of plant chemicals.

Genes encoding specific enzymes were added to switch on production resveratrol or genistein, the researchers reported in the journal Nature Communications.

They believe the same technique could be used to manufacture other compounds that form the basis of many medicines.

Tomatoes are a high-yield crop, with up to 500 tonnes of the fruit per hectare being harvested in some countries, and cheap to grow.

The scientists hope they will provide a more cost-effective way of producing valuable plant compounds than synthesising them artificially or extracting tiny amounts from natural sources such as grapes and soybeans.

Co-author Dr Yang Zhang, also from the John Innes Centre, said: "Medicinal plants with high value are often difficult to grow and manage, and need very long cultivation times to produce the desired compounds."

"Our research provides a fantastic platform to quickly produce these valuable medicinal compounds in tomatoes. Target compounds could be purified directly from tomato juice."

Foreign diplomats

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these activities," he alleged.

After failing to achieve any good result by enforcing movement and carrying out militant attacks, they killed two foreigners, he said.

The two murders and the bomb attack on Hossaini Dalan are related, he said.

About the recent study published by the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) on parliament, he said, "So far I have never seen any positive report by TIB."

"We are heading towards a middle income country from a lower middle income one. The US president has praised us for our progress but TIB has not."

Tofail said, "TIB is not a political party at all but it seems to us that it has turned into a political wing of BNP."

Responding to a query, the senior Awami League leader said TIB was working so that a midterm election was held, but it would never happen in the country.

Termining the latest TIB report "biased and intentional", he said the allegation of quorum crisis in parliament was false.

TIB does not publish any report on Bangladesh's development when many research organisations of the world talk about the country's development potentials, he said.

The minister also said Bangladesh would sign a "Free Trade Agreement" (FTA) with Sri Lanka soon to boost bilateral trade through removing barriers.

Bangladesh has already proposed to reduce the tariff rate on trade between the two countries to 5 percent from 13 percent for increasing trade, he said.

According to the commerce ministry website, in 2014-15 fiscal, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$26.80 million and imported goods worth \$66.65 million.

The minister said, "If the FTA is signed between the two countries, the trade gap will reduce significantly."

Egyptians return to vote as election run-off begins

AFP, Cairo

Egyptians returned to polling stations yesterday as a first round run-off got underway in a parliamentary vote expected to elect lawmakers firmly backing President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Turnout for the first round of voting held in 14 of Egypt's 27 provinces last week was just 26.6 percent and there was no immediate sign that more voters were casting their ballots yesterday.

One polling station in the capital's central district of Dokki saw 20 people vote in the hour after polling opened at 9:00 am, a polling officer said.

Among voters who had turned out were government employees, retired bureaucrats and ex-servicemen, an AFP correspondent reported.

The previous general election held in late 2011, months after the ouster of longtime leader Hosni Mubarak, saw a turnout of 62 percent in the first round.

The subsequent parliament, dominated by Islamists led by the Muslim Brotherhood, was dissolved in June 2012, days before the election of Mohamed Morsi as the country's first freely elected civilian leader.

Morsi was deposed a year later by then army chief Sisi after mass street protests against his sole year in power.

Sisi himself was elected president in

May 2014 after he brutally crushed all forms of opposition -- Islamist supporters of the Brotherhood as well as several secularists and leftists.

The current election is widely anticipated to vote in lawmakers firmly backing Sisi in the absence of any opposition.

While the Muslim Brotherhood, the country's main opposition group for decades, has been banned from competing after it was declared a "terrorist group," several secular parties are either boycotting the vote or are badly represented.

A government crackdown targeting Morsi's supporters after his ouster has left hundreds dead in street clashes with security forces, while tens of thousands more have been jailed.

Coal-laden

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assistant forest conservator (Chandpai Range) of the forest department, was formed to probe the incident.

Md Saidul Islam, divisional forest officer of Sundarbans (east zone), said the coal might harm the ecosystem of the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest.

The salvage operation to recover the vessel didn't start till filing of the report around 1:00am today.

Manpower export

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Media reports said a Saudi employer last month chopped off a hand of an Indian woman as a punishment for poor work. The incident called into question the Saudi government's sincerity in protecting foreign workers.

Kashturi Munirathinam, 55, is now receiving treatment at a hospital in the Saudi capital Riyadh, her family told the Indian media.

The Indian government had lodged a complaint with the authorities in Riyadh in this regard. "We are very much disturbed over the brutal manner in which the Indian lady has been treated in Saudi Arabia," Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj wrote in Twitter.

The Baira on February 10 entered into an agreement with Saudi Arabian National Recruitment Committee for sending female workers to KSA for a monthly salary of SR 700 (around Tk 14,525).

Private recruiters were hopeful they would be able to send 10,000 maids to Saudi Arabia a month, but they fell well short of the target.

Officials at Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) said around 3,000 female workers have joined Saudi jobs since the signing of the agreement, while several hundred others have been receiving training.

An October 8 report of the Arab News said "Bangladesh failed to send five lakh maids to KSA" as per the promise it had made earlier this year.

The Baira, however, said women were not interested in taking up house-

maid's jobs in Saudi Arabia as their offered monthly salary was quite low compared to SR 1,200-1,500 of women workers from other countries.

"After conducting a survey in all the 64 districts, we found that our women were unwilling to go to Saudi Arabia. There are some problems in the kingdom that discourage females from going there. Only some very poor women showed interest in Saudi jobs," said Baira Secretary General Kalam.

Kalam claimed that the Saudi authorities were not hiring male workers as housekeepers though the agreement stated that both male and female workers would be recruited under 12 categories.

Talking to this newspaper, Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Nurul Islam said women didn't want to accept Saudi job offers.

"There is no bar on women from working in Saudi Arabia. We are just not finding enough female workers," he added.

Rights bodies said some 10,000 Bangladeshi female workers are currently employed in KSA.

The Saudi embassy official concerned in Dhaka didn't respond to emails and text messages from this correspondent seeking his comments.

Meanwhile, the expatriates welfare ministry yesterday told a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry that manpower exporters could not send enough housemaids to KSA as there is a negative perception about the Saudi job market for women, said meeting sources.

Probe on to check

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Tazia procession early Saturday.

"We are scrutinising the security measures taken on that day to see if there was any fault in the security planning or execution," said Additional Commissioner (Crime & Ops) Sheikh Maruf Hasan of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

He said this while visiting Hossaini Dalan, where the blasts killed a minor and injured scores, and Gabtoli where assistant sub-inspector (ASI) Ibrahim Mollah was stabbed to death two days earlier.

"The killing and the blasts are related as the unexploded grenades found at Hossaini Dalan and those recovered from Kamrangirchar following information from Chhatra Shibir leader Masud Rana, arrested from the spot [where the ASI was murdered] were similar," said Maruf.

The DMP official is heading two committees to investigate the cop murder and the blasts.

"The killer is Enamul Haque Kamal, who managed to flee the scene. He is a former president of Shibir's Adamdighi upazila unit and, to our knowledge, was lately serving as the president of the Bogra district chapter," he said.

Jamaat-Shibir men are planning further subversive acts, Maruf said. "Police foiled some of their conspiracies but they still are searching for opportunities [to strike]."

SC stays Tangail-4 by-election

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Sirazol Islam told The Daily Star.

The EC on September 16 announced the schedule of the election setting the voting date on November 10 and aspirants were called to submit nomination by October 11.

Later on October 13, the returning officer (RO) cancelled nomination of Krishak Sramik Janata League President Kader Siddiqui on charge of having default loan.

Siddiqui filed an appeal with the EC against the decision, but the commission on October 18 rejected his appeal.

He later filed an appeal with the HC against the EC's decision. After hearing the HC on October 21 directed the EC to accept his nomination.

The Tangail-4 constituency was declared vacant from September 1 after former minister and ruling Awami League lawmaker Latif Siddique tendered his resignation letter to the Speaker.