

# Tunisia votes in first free municipal polls

AFP, Tunis

Tunisia's first free municipal elections got under way yesterday as voters expressed frustration at the slow pace of change since the 2011 revolution in the cradle of the Arab Spring.

The election has been touted as another milestone on the road to democracy in the North African country, which has been praised for its transition from decades of dictatorship.

But Tunisia has struggled with persistent political, security and economic problems as well as corruption since the revolution, and observers expected a low turnout for yesterday's poll.

Around 15 people trickled into a polling station in central Tunis to cast their ballots after voting officially began at 8:00 am.

## Abduction

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Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that they picked up Aslam, his wife Ripa and father-in-law Alal for interrogating them in connection with the kidnapping.

"Aslam was feeling sick yesterday morning and he was taken to Rajarbagh Police Lines Hospital first. Then he was moved to DMCH. We heard that he was a hernia patient. He vomited in the afternoon while being treated at the hospital. He died afterwards," the DB official claimed.

Asked, Baten denied the allegation of torture on Aslam while he was in DB custody.

"It could not happen. How can he be tortured? His wife and father-in-law were also there," the DB official added.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (Media) of DMP, said one Nazmul lodged a general diary with Shah Ali Police Station on April 26, mentioning that his brother Niamul was abducted. The family received a phone call from an unknown caller who demanded Tk 1 lakh as ransom for Niamul's release.

A DB team tracked the phone number and found that it was Aslam's cellphone.

Detectives picked up Aslam, his wife and father-in-law from Gazipur on Saturday. His wife and father-in-law were later released, the DC said.

Aslam was the brother-in-law of the complainant, police said.

## 7-year-old

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after the case was filed, the OC said.

SM Raju, Assistant Police Super (ASP) of Habiganj police told this correspondent, "I have spoken to the victim. This incident is tragic. We are investigating the incident."

## Police detain

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released Noman last night after an interrogation. They were still interrogating the others.

A team of plainclothes and uniformed policemen of Tongi Police Station detained them, hours after the High Court deferred the GCC elections, scheduled for May 15, for three months.

Talking to The Daily Star, the police station's Officer-in-Charge Kamal Hossain said they released the BNP Vice-Chairman around 11:00pm but kept the others for questioning.

He said the number of detainees might increase as they were "continuing their drive" and kept policemen deployed in front of Hasan's house.

Several BNP leaders and activists remained confined to the house as of filing of this report at midnight, according to our Gazipur correspondent.

Additional Superintendent of Police in Gazipur Russel Sheikh said, "Noman and some of his associates were detained in connection with vandalism of vehicles, obstructing traffic, and creating panic yesterday."

He could not say how many people were detained, although the BNP leaders in Gazipur claimed that the number was 12.

Gazipur BNP President Fazlul Haq Milon outright rejected the police claim of vandalism.

He said Noman and other BNP leaders had gone to Hasan's home to hold a press conference after the HC had deferred the polls.

"After the end of the press conference, our leaders were coming out of Hasan's home around 5:30pm when Tongi police detained them," Milon said, adding that a total of 12 BNP-men had been detained.

Milon told the newspaper that several hundred law enforcers cordoned off Hasan's home confining many party leaders and activists, including him.

Asked about the matter, ASP Russel said police could stay at any place if they feared deterioration of law and order. He, however, refuted the claim that police cordoned off Hasan's house.

# Justice elusive, all along

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Over the last six months, at least 17 people were reportedly killed in Khagrachhari and Rangamati. Of the victims, nine were from UPDF, two from PCJSS-MN Larma, four from UPDF (Democratic) and one was a UPDF supporter.

Besides, many others became victims of abduction or enforced disappearance.

Mithun Chakma, an organiser of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), was going home after appearing in court around noon on January 3, 2018.

Some armed youths picked him up as he reached in front of his house in Aparna Chowdhury Para of Khagrachhari town.

While being taken away on a three-wheeler, he tried to escape but was shot dead in the busy Sluice Gate area.

UPDF, which was formed opposing the CHT Peace Accord in 1997, blamed its rival groups UPDF (Democratic) and PCJSS-MN Larma for the murder.

Six days later, Mithun's cousin Bikash Chakma filed a case with a court over the murder as police were reluctant to accept it.

After the hearing, the court ordered police to register the case.

Some 17 people including leaders of PCJSS-MN Larma and UPDF (Democratic) were named as the accused.

PCJSS-MN Larma held a press conference on January 11 and said this case was false and motivated, and demanded its withdrawal.

Nobody has been arrested over the killing till now.

Shahadat Hossain Tito, Khagrachhari Police Station's officer-in-charge, told The Daily Star, "After filing of the case, police began investigation."

However, there is no visible headway so far, he added.

Locals say had the law enforcers taken proper action following the murder of Mithun Chakma, other killings could have been averted afterwards.

### CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

Goutam Dewan, chairperson of Ngorik Committee of Rangamati, told this newspaper, "Armed conflict is nothing new in the CHT. But there is a culture of impunity because of negligence by law enforcement agencies and the frightening situation for the victims' families."

He added, "The government should take steps to ensure justice for the victims and take immediate measures to restore peace in the hills."

Rejecting the allegation of negligence, Chittagong Range DIG Md Abul Fayaz said police get into action after every incident. "But if the victim's family doesn't want to file a case or cooperate with us, how can the perpetrators brought the book?"

"If the victim's family does not want to file a case, police become the plaintiff and start investigation. But it gets difficult to find witnesses, which prolongs the investigation."

Due to non-cooperation from plaintiffs, especially the members of victim's family, circumstantial evidence is hard to get."

He added, "It is not like that all the perpetrators are going unpunished but the number would be very low."

## Mro life

FROM PAGE 16

Once they climb the river bank, they need to cross another set of twin ladders stuck to the perimeter fence of the compound with each side having at least six to seven steps. Then comes the final test: climbing a ladder to the platform housing the main shade. This ladder is of a single lanky log having several steps cut out two to four inches wide, placed at a 45 degrees angle to the platform.

Once perched on the machan, the ladies unload the water pots and finally decant the water into drinking pots made of dried up shell of Gourd (kodu). The gourds are often dried over a wooden furnace kept burning in the bamboo huts for 24 hours day, 365 days a year, indicating no paucity of firewood in the vicinity.

Soon after they put rice to boil or cook some dried wild tuber. They may also warm up leftover snails cooked the previous night.

The men and children soon wake and after the morning chores consume the old rice with water or hot rice with curry and then break out for resuming their work from the day earlier.

Men usually head for the forest either for mending crop fields or for getting suitable logs to mend the house. They also go to hunt wildlife, including Sambar, squirrels or any animal that moves and is not less than the size of mice. All households have guns, as they have had for ages. They also see many people with guns loitering in deep forest.

If there isn't a gun, they use catapults, bows and arrows or traps of many kinds to get their daily or weekly morsel of protein, if they are lucky.

When not hunting, almost all the

WHO has raised an early warning, alert and response emergency surveillance system. It is also monitoring water quality and working with the Department of Public Health Engineering to enhance local laboratory capacity.

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# 13 Afghans

FROM PAGE 16

council elections scheduled for October 20.

On April 22 a suicide bomber blew himself up outside a voter registration centre in Kabul, killing 60 people and wounding more than 100.

That was among a series of attacks across the country on places where people were signing up to vote.

### LOW TURNOUT FEARS

The Taliban and IS have made clear their intentions to disrupt the elections.

Officials are concerned that a low voter turnout will undermine the credibility of the poll.

Just over 1.2 million adults had registered by Saturday, three weeks after the two-month long process began, data compiled by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) showed.

The IEC, which is overseeing

preparations for the vote, hopes to register up to 14 million adults at more than 7,000 polling centres.

But if the current trend were to continue, fewer than three million people would be registered by the mid-June deadline.

Authorities have deployed planes to drop leaflets in a number of provinces raising awareness about the elections, which are seen as a test run for next year's presidential poll.

A radio and television campaign is also under way and civil servants have been granted a day off to sign up.

The IEC has placed many of the voter registration centres inside schools and mosques, triggering concerns that students and worshippers could be at risk.

Another hurdle to voter registration is a sticker placed on national identification certificates showing the holder has signed up for the poll.

There are concerns that the stickers could put voters in restive districts at risk of being targeted by Taliban or Islamic State militants.

## The man

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Azharul Islam Suruj, chairman of Shimulia Union Parishad in Savar, over phone after the court issued the order.

Azharul, also Savar upazila unit AL's labour and manpower affairs secretary, said he yesterday filed the writ challenging the inclusion of six mouzas of Shimulia Union Parishad of Savar in Gazipur City Corporation (GCC).

He had been elected chairman twice from the area. In 2016, he contested the union parishad polls with "boat" symbol and won the election and in 2011, he also won the election.

Talking to this correspondent, he said he was elected chairman with the votes of people of those six mouzas in both 2011 and 2016.

The six mouzas have been included in GCC, but all the services like issuance of trade licence and birth certificates take place from his union, he said.

He said he earlier filed writ petitions twice, but the petitions had been rejected.

Azharul's son-in-law is Gazipur city AL President Azmat Ullah Khan's son.

Azmat wanted to be the AL mayoral candidate of Gazipur city polls, but he was not picked by the party.

Election to GCC was scheduled to be held on May 15.

adult members of a household head for the Jhum field either to first cut all the plants and allow these to dry for 30-60 days. After this, before the monsoon sets in, all the fields are burned.

Then comes the final test: climbing a ladder to the platform housing the main shade. This ladder is of a single lanky log having several steps cut out two to four inches wide, placed at a 45 degrees angle to the platform.

The sale, which caught the newspaper's staff by surprise, swiftly raised

concerns about a contracting space for independent media in a country that lost its other main English newspaper last year.

"The Post is really the last remaining newspaper that comes out every day and does long investigations on corruption, illegal logging and politics," said Abby Seiff, a Cambodia-based freelance journalist and former Phnom Penh Post editor.

In addition to vaccination, consistent efforts are being made to improve access to clean water and sanitation and promote hygiene. Unicef has been scaling up interventions and communication on safe practices.

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Both WHO and Unicef have prepositioned life-saving supplies to ensure rapid response to any outbreak.

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