

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 Nagorik 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 victims' family doesn't want to file a case or cooperate with us, how can be 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

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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 Sambars, 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

Mentioning the killing of Naniarchar Upazila Parishad chairman Shaktiman Chakma on Thursday, the DIG said, "Police asked Shaktiman's wife to file a case but she refused to become the plaintiff."

Rangamati Bar Association President Rafiqul Islam, also the public prosecutor, said, "In this type of cases, no witnesses are found. Police just have to submit final report due to the lack of witnesses and circumstantial evidence."

He added, "Investigators need witnesses to solve a case. If there is no witness, there is no charge-sheet."

Referring to some killings in Rangamati, he said, "The CID investigated some cases but failed to submit charge-sheets."

"Besides," the lawyer observed, "after any incident of killing, the victim's family members get panicked and worry over their security. So, they do not want to file any case."

Jonok Bala, mother of Sujan Chakma, one of the five who were killed in a gun attack on Friday, told The Daily Star that they were not willing to file any case. "We have been receiving threats and feeling insecure."

Tujim Chakma, a central member of UPDF (Democratic), said, "We think the administration does not discharge their duties properly and take any action despite a series of killings."

Niran Chakma, member of publicity cell of UPDF led by Prasit Bikash Khisa, said, "After the killing of our men, we have seen that there is no breakthrough in investigation into the cases."

"The families also don't want to file cases fearing police harassment and complicated procedures."

[Our Rangamati correspondent Anvil Chakma and Khagrachhari correspondent Saikat Dewan contributed to this report]

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.

WHO begins

FROM PAGE 2

members from WHO, Unicef, Médecins Sans Frontières and International Federation of the Red Cross, the release says.

The vaccines and supplies are financed by Gavi, the vaccine alliance, it adds.

"This vaccination campaign is a part of the ongoing efforts of the government and the health sector partners to protect nearly a million people, including at least 1,35,000 Bangladeshis, who have been affected by the influx since last year," says Abul Kalam Azad, director general of directorate general of health services under the health ministry.

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.

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.

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

The WHO-led health sector is supporting setting up of diarrhoea treatment centres, including five supported by Unicef and managed by icddr,b.

13 Afghans

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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.

Keep peace

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She urged the students to be more attentive to their regular studies and develop themselves as the country's qualified citizens.

Hasina called upon all to remain alert so that the country's hard-earned independence did not go in vain.

She expressed satisfaction as Bangladesh has become eligible to graduate to a developing country and hoped the country would soon be a developed and prosperous one.

The premier congratulated the students who passed the examinations and requested the guardians of unsuccessful students to encourage their children so that they can succeed next time.

Talking to people in Barisal, she said the region would no longer fall behind as her government took steps to ensure balanced development of the entire Barisal region.

Steps have been taken to connect Barisal with rail network and efforts are on to grow paddy and other crops tolerant to salinity, she added.

Cambodia

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AFP that the buyer is the head of Asia PR, a public relations firm based in Kuala Lumpur whose website describes its CEO "Siva Kumar G" as a journalist by training.

The website lists as a former client Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, whose government stands accused of a sweeping crackdown on independent media, NGOs and rival politicians ahead of July polls.

An Asia PR spokeswoman declined to comment.

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.

"The journalist community is concerned about what the implication (of the sale) could be. It's just two months until the election and there's not much independent media left," she added.

In his statement, former owner Clough acknowledged that "turbulence" in Cambodia ahead of elections had put a spotlight on the Phnom Penh Post and left it as "the last remaining truly independent media group in the country".

The Post's chief rival, the Cambodia Daily, was forced to shut in August 2017 after it was handed an unpayable tax bill -- announcing its closure the same day authorities arrested opposition leader Kem Sokha on treason charges.

English, maths

FROM PAGE 1

Although the pass rate across all boards dropped, the result in Comilla Board saw a tremendous boost with 80.40 percent students passing compared to last year's 59.03 percent. The board's results had been showing a downside for the last two years and a steep fall last year pushed down the overall success rate.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid blamed the introduction of the evaluation method of the answer scripts last year as one of the reasons behind the drop in the pass rate.

"It [the new method] might have some impact on the results. But it is not the only reason," he said while announcing the results at a packed press conference at his ministry at 1:00pm yesterday.

He said the government introduced the method following a research conducted by the Bangladesh Examination Development Unit (BEDU) on the existing evaluation system.

"Many teachers did not check answer scripts seriously. We introduced the method for proper evaluation and to bring equality in numbering," Nahid said.

"But we will try to find out the reasons behind the fall in result."

As per the new evaluation method, the government trained chief examiners, who later trained other examiners following a strict guideline. The chief examiners, along with other teachers, set model answers to the SSC questions and forwarded them to the examiners. The examiners checked the answer scripts thinking that the model answers were the standard answers.

Despite the fall, the minister found some positives in the results, including the rise in the number of GPA-5 achievers, increase in the number of science students and better results of the girls.

Asked whether the question leak had an impact on the results, he rejected it outright.

"There is no impact of question paper leak on the results," Nahid claimed.

The examinations, held in February, were marred by widespread allegations of question leak that drew fierce criticisms. The government probe committee found question papers of "Kha" set of multiple choice ques-

BOARD	PASS RATE 2018	PASS RATE 2017	GPA-5 2018	GPA-5 2017
Dhaka	81.48	86.39	41,585	49,481
Rajshahi	86.07	90.70	19,498	17,349
Comilla	80.40	59.03	6,865	4,450
Jessore	76.64	80.04	9,395	6,460
Chittagong	75.50	83.99	8,094	8,344
Barisal	77.11	77.24	3,462	2,288
Sylhet	70.42	80.26	3,191	2,663
Dinajpur	77.62	83.98	10,755	6,929
Total	79.40	81.21	1,02,845	97,964

tions (MCQ) of 12 out of 17 subjects leaked, but the education ministry decided not to retake the exams as "an insignificant number (4000 to 5000)" of students benefited from the disclosure.

Asked what action the government would take against the students who benefitted from the leaks, Nahid said none would be spared.

The pass rates in several public examinations have been witnessing a gradual rise in the last several years but simultaneously there have been questions about the quality of education. Many even alleged the examiners might have been instructed to check the answerscripts "more liberally".

When queried on this issue Nahid said, "No, there is no role of it here. Proper evaluation of answer sheet is the reason behind it."

POOR PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS

The poor performance of students in English and maths -- two key subjects that always make a difference in the pass rate -- pushed down the overall success rate.

Analysing the data provided by the boards, it was found that there was a significant fall in the pass rate in these two subjects across all boards. Only the students of Comilla Board did well in the subjects while students of Barisal did well in maths.

For Dhaka Board, the success rate in English came down to 91.18 percent from last year's 95.46 percent. Similarly, in mathematics the pass rate dropped to 87.76 from 90.40.

The pass rates in English and Mathematics in Jessore Board registered a fall of 5.67 and 4.19 percentage points respectively, according to the data provided by the boards.

The students under Sylhet Board performed poorly in maths as its pass rate dramatically dipped by 14.58 percentage points from last year's 91.19 percent. The success rate in English in this board declined to 90.45 percent from 95.26 percent.

An official of Dhaka Board blamed poor performance in these two subjects for the fall.

"These two subjects have always been considered the major factors in the result chart. But many students flunked them, pushing down the tally of total passed students," he said, wishing anonymity.

"We don't have quality teachers in these subjects in many schools in the rural areas. Although the teachers are being given training, we need to give rigorous training to them," he said.

Asked about the poor results in mathematics and English even after taking up of projects, the education minister said they can introduce Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) in only 250 upazilas with half the country still out of its purview.

"Where the project was implemented, students performed well in English and mathematics," he claimed.

SURPRISING RESULTS IN COMILLA BOARD

After a significant fall in the results for two previous years, Comilla Board seemed to have turned around with a rise in the pass rate reaching 21.37 percentage points, making it the third most successful board.

Contacted, Professor Abdus Salam, secretary of the board said, "We were strict about the instructions of the ministry and did not allow those students who failed in the test examinations especially in English and maths."

JUBILATIONS

Schools across the country wore a festive look ahead of the results yesterday. Students and their parents, with frayed nerves, erupted in jubilation as soon as they received the results.

Some danced while others took selfies flashing the V-sign. A feeling of sheer happiness was writ large on their faces. However, there were some gloomy faces as well.

"My hard work finally paid off. I want to give all the credit to my teachers and parents," said Adity Halder, an examinee from Monipur High School and College, who got GPA-5.

YEAR AND PASS RATE

YEAR	PASS RATE
2018	79.40
2017	81.21
2016	88.70
2015	86.72
2014	92.67
2013	89.72
2012	86.32
2011	82.16

BOARD	PASS RATE 2018	PASS RATE 2017	GPA-5 2018	GPA-5 2017
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More than 20,26,574 students -- 10,22,320 boys and 10,04,254 girls -- from 28,558 institutions across the country took this year's SSC and its equivalent examinations under the 10 boards. Of them, 17,81,962 students passed the tests that began on February 1.

Of the 450 Bangladeshi students who sat for the tests under eight foreign centres, 422 passed making the pass rate 93.78. Ninety of them got GPA-5.

This year, some 1,574 institutions saw a 100 percent pass rate against last year's 2,266. No students passed from 109 institutions, a jump from 93 last year.

Such successes, however, lead to a concern for many students as they would now have to face stiff competition to get enrolled in good colleges.

GIRLS DID BETTER

Girls again fared better than boys in the SCC exams. The pass rate of the girls was 1.95 percentage points higher than that of the boys across all 10 educational boards.

The pass rates of the girls and the boys were 80.35 and 78.40 percents.

However, in terms of GPA-5, boys were slightly ahead of girls. A total of 55,701 boys and 54,928 girls secured the highest grade.

As usual, students from the science group produced the best pass rate of 93.07 percent, followed by 80.91 percent from business studies and only 69 percent from the humanities groups.

MADRASA AND TECHNICAL BOARDS

Madrassa and technical boards saw a drop in this year's success rate. However, the number of GPA-5 achievers rose.

The pass rate in Madrasa board came down to 70.89 percent from last year's 76.20 percent. A total 3,371 students secured GPA-5 this year. The number was 2,610 last year.

Some 2.03 lakh out of 2.86 lakh successfully completed their Dakhil examinations.

Under the Technical board, 1.15 lakh students took part in SSC (vocational) and Dakhil (vocational) exams. The pass rate was 71.96 percent against last year's 78.69 percent. A total of 4,413 students got GPA-5 this year. Some 4,187 got the highest grade last year.