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“Without an immediate and major injection of funding, emergency operations will grind to a halt, and people will die.”

UN chief Antonio Guterres on drought in Horn of Africa



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ZAIDA KHATUN 2,38,934 (All 480 centres)



AZMAT ULLAH KHAN 2,22,737 (All 480 centres)



Flanked by her son, former Gazipur City Corporation mayor Zahangir Alam, Zaida Khatun flashes the victory sign after casting her vote at the Kanaia Government Primary School Polling Centre in ward-30 of the city yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

US VISA CURBS

Who said what

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday announced that the US would impose visa restrictions on individuals and their immediate family members “if they are responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh”.

Bangladesh won't let polls be compromised: foreign ministry

STAR REPORT

Taking note of the new US visa policy, the foreign ministry yesterday said Bangladesh appreciates that the international community, including the US, firmly stands by the prime minister's commitment to ensure free and fair elections.

The ministry said the government would like to view the announcement in the broader context of the US government's unequivocal commitment to free and fair elections at all levels.

The government apparatus would take necessary measures to prevent and address any unlawful practice or interference by any individual, group or entity, which can compromise elections, the ministry said in a statement.

The electoral process will remain under strict vigilance and international observers would be there too, said the statement.

The government expects that the local undemocratic forces that resort to violence, arson, and destruction would remain cautious and refrain from their misguided efforts to jeopardise the electoral process, it said.

“It is entirely up to the people of Bangladesh to sustain the hard-earned democratic process, political

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‘It’ll help us hold free, fair polls’

Says Momen; Haas termed it ‘show of support’ for those seeking fair polls

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen hoped that the new US visa policy will help Bangladesh hold free and fair elections.

“We hope it will help us conduct free and fair elections, especially violence will not be there. Those who resort to violence will refrain from it,” he told reporters after a meeting with US Ambassador Peter Haas at the foreign ministry yesterday afternoon.

The minister said bilateral issues and the new

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AL loses in its bastion

Zaida elected Gazipur city mayor, defeats Azmat by 16,197 votes in peaceful polls; voter turnout around 50pc

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA, RASHIDUL HASAN, MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and ASHIK ABDULLAH APU from Gazipur

It all happened quietly.

There were hardly any polling agents for Zaida Khatun. Even her supporters could barely be seen in the largest city corporation of the country. Even during the campaign, her posters were rarely seen.

But in Gazipur City Corporation polls, Zaida has won defeating ruling Awami League mayor nominee Azmat Ullah Khan by 16,197 votes.

Unofficial results show that Zaida bagged 2,38,934 votes while her nearest contender Azmat got 2,22,737, said Returning Officer Faridul Islam.

The voter turnout was 48.75 percent.

Zaida will be the country's second woman mayor of a city after Salina Hayat Ivy of Narayanganj.

Zaida is the mother of suspended Gazipur mayor Zahangir Alam. After the ruling Awami League nominated Azmat to run for mayor, a disgruntled Zahangir attempted to run as an independent.

He collected nomination papers for himself and his mother. After the Election Commission scrapped his nomination, he started campaigning for his mother.

After Zaida was unofficially elected early today, Zahangir said he would help his mother run the city corporation.

On the election day, the presence of Azmat's

supporters was overbearing at most of the polling centres.

The electronic voting machines (EVMs) slowed down polling as the devices took a long time to detect the voters' fingerprints at some centres.

The Daily Star correspondents visited at least 50 polling centres and found a thin presence of voters when polling started at 8:00am, but as the day progressed, people started pouring in.

After casting their ballots, Azmat and Zaida both expressed satisfaction over the voting atmosphere and said they were confident of victory.

At different polling centres in Gazipur, Azmat's supporters wearing badges of boat, the AL electoral symbol, were seen outside the polling stations in violation of the electoral code of conduct.

About the presence of AL supporters inside the polling centre at Rising Sun Academy, presiding officer Delowar Hossain said, “This was not supposed to happen. We will definitely look into it.”

At 22 polling centres in Tongi, the correspondents of this newspaper could not find any agent for Zaida.

A correspondent of this newspaper who visited 15 polling centres, found an agent for Zaida only at Sharifpur Government Primary School.

Abdul Kader, presiding officer at Shaheed Britti School and College told The Daily Star that only Azmat's supporters contacted him about being polling agents.

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‘We’re very satisfied’ Says Election Commissioner Md Alamgir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Commissioner Md Alamgir yesterday said they were satisfied with the Gazipur city polls.

“We are very satisfied... Voters and candidates are also satisfied,” he said while briefing reporters at the Election Commission office after the polling ended in the afternoon.

Alamgir said that they got information from their observers, law enforcement agencies, returning officers, election officials, and the media that the polls to Gazipur City Corporation was “very fair and peaceful”.

The mayor candidates said the election was held impartially and they would accept whatever the results are, he added.

Asked about the turnout, Alamgir said it was tough for him to mention any percentage. “But it was not less than 50 percent.”

About slow casting of votes at some polling centres, the election commissioner said, “Some voters might have faced difficulties understanding how to cast votes using EVMs. This might be a reason for the slow voting.

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“We believe Bangladesh is a true democracy that deserves to have free and fair elections.”

US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu



“Those who set fire to buses, vandalise those in the name of movement ahead of the election are engaged in political violence, and so they are the ones who will be in trouble.”

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader



“The US move has sent a message that the people of Bangladesh can't exercise their right to franchise and their constitutional rights have been taken away.”

BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury

POLLING CENTRES Admin, police to be engaged in selection

EC brings changes to guideline; number of centres may come down

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Election Commission has made major changes to the guidelines for selecting polling centres for the national elections, including a provision for involving the local administration and the police in the selection process.

The polling centres in the last several national polls were selected by the commission officials.

The guideline, passed by the election commissioners at a meeting yesterday, dropped a provision that allowed polling centres to be kept for use unless they were destroyed.

“We repealed the provision for retaining previous polling centres as many of them are old, some are dilapidated, and some had gone into the river or were destroyed,” Election Commissioner Md Alamgir told The Daily Star.

He said new polling centres would have to be set up ahead of the next general election. “The number of centres might decrease.”

In the last general election, there were 40,051 polling centres.

The next national election is likely to be held in late December this year or early January next year.

According to the guideline, a five-member committee

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A woman buys rice from an OMS truck in Khulna city's Sheikh Para yesterday. Inset, women line up under the scorching sun to buy the staple at subsidised price. They had to wait for about three hours before being able to buy a maximum of five kg rice at Tk 30 per kg.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

DEATH THREAT TO PM Rajshahi BNP leader arrested, remanded

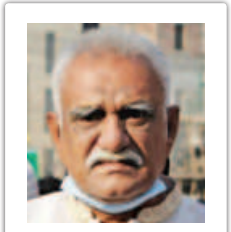
STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

BNP's Rajshahi district unit Convener Abu Sayeed Chand, arrested for issuing a “death threat” to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was placed on a five-day remand yesterday afternoon.

The court of Judicial Magistrate Mahbub Alam granted the five-day remand in the case filed with Puthia Police Station under the Anti-Terrorism Act, said the court's Public Prosecutor Jalal Uddin.

The police produced him before the court at 3:30pm and submitted a 10-day remand appeal, he added. Earlier in the day, a special team of police apprehended him at a checkpoint in the Bheripara area around 11:15am, said Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) Commissioner Anisur Rahman.

The police commissioner briefed journalists detailing the arrest at a press conference held at the RMP headquarters in the afternoon.



Abu Sayeed Chand

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