



DHAKA TUESDAY DECEMBER 19, 2023

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XXXIII No. 329

POUSH 4, 1430 BS

www.thedailystar.net

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Ballots to reach polling centres on voting day

EC decides; army to be deployed from Dec 29-Jan 10

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Election Commission has decided to send ballot papers to all polling centres, except for those in remote and hard-to-reach areas, on the morning of the election day in efforts to increase transparency.

This is for the first time in the history of national election in Bangladesh that ballots would reach voting centres on the polling day. In all previous parliamentary elections, ballot papers were sent to polling stations the day before.

In another development, the EC decided to deploy armed forces for 13 days from December 29 to January 10 across the country to assist the civil administration in holding the January 7 election.

In a circular yesterday, the EC asked all returning officers to take steps to send ballot papers to the centres before voting starts at 8:00am.

At a meeting with election commissioners on October 30, top officials of law enforcement agencies said they were in favour of sending the ballots the day before the election. They said it would be difficult to send those on the voting day for a lack of manpower.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, an election commissioner and several EC officials said sending ballots on the election day would not be that difficult a challenge.

They said election officials can use Border Guard Bangladesh and Rab to do the job.

Voting will take place in some 42,250 polling centers this year, EC officials say.

Explaining the decision to send ballots on the voting day, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal told reporters at the EC office in Dhaka, "There was a demand for this from many, and this will increase transparency.

In January 2019, Transparency International Bangladesh in a study found that stamping of ballots took place on the night before the election day in more than one centre in 33 constituencies out of the 50 surveyed.

"The ballots will be sent to as many polling centres as possible on the morning of the polling day. There could be some exceptions in some centres."

He added that the move would reduce apprehension about voting irregularities.

EC officials said they made the decision to steer clear of allegations and controversies over ballot stuffing at night instead of the polling day, an allegation that tainted the 2018 election.

In past national elections, ballot papers were sent to the polling centres in the afternoon or evening before the polling day. But the matter became contentious after the 2018 election with opposition parties alleging that ballot stuffing took place on the night before the voting day.

Jatiya Oikyafront in January 2019 told the EC that between 30 and 60 percent of the votes were cast on the night before the polling day.

Also in January 2019, Transparency International Bangladesh in a study found that stamping of ballots took place on the night before the election day in more than one centre in 33 constituencies out of the 50 surveyed.

The current EC held a number of by-elections since taking office in February last year, and ballots were sent to the centres on the voting day almost every time.

In the circular, the EC said the returning officers will determine the polling centres located in hilly, haor, baor, char or island areas or areas far from the district or upazila headquarters or metropolitan areas, where ballots may need to be sent before the voting day.

The returning officers will take approval from the EC by December 31

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Won't comment now about Jan 7 polls' acceptance

CEC tells reporters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday declined to comment on whether the January 7 polls would be accepted nationally and internationally.

"I am not going to comment on that. We'll see after the election," he said in response to a question from a journalist about whether there would be any problem regarding the national and international acceptance of the polls.

The CEC was talking to reporters at the Election Commission office in Dhaka's Agargaon after a meeting with Iwama Kiminori, the Japanese envoy in Dhaka.

Twenty-seven political parties, including the ruling Awami League and its 14-party alliance partners, are running in the election amid boycott by 17 parties, including the BNP and its allies.

Asked if the EC felt any discomfort over a major political party's boycott, Habibul said it is not a matter of comfort

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14 banks face record capital shortfall

The deficit surged to Tk 37,506cr in third quarter of this year

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Fourteen banks, including six state-run ones, faced a record capital shortfall in the third quarter of 2023, an indication of their fragile financial health caused mainly by a lack of governance.

They are Agrani Bank, BASIC Bank, Janata Bank, Rupali Bank, Bangladesh Commerce Bank, Bengal Commercial Bank, Citizens Bank, ICB Islamic Bank, National Bank, Padma Bank, Habib Bank, National Bank of Pakistan, Bangladesh Krishi Bank, and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank.

They clocked a collective capital shortfall of Tk 37,506 crore in the quarter that ended on September 30, shows data from Bangladesh Bank.

September's figure was the highest

shortfall and the previous high of Tk 33,744 crore was registered in the last quarter of 2021.

As per Basel III, which is the international regulatory framework for banks, the minimum capital adequacy ratio (CAR) is 10.5 percent with an added 2.5 percent conservation buffer. The 14 banks failed to maintain the minimum CAR.

In September, the banking sector's CAR was 11.08 percent.

In fact, Bangladesh's banking sector has maintained the lowest CAR in South Asia, according to the central bank's Financial Stability Report 2022.

In July-September, most of the 14 banks saw a rise in capital shortfall. And four new names were added to the chart with deficit.

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Fakhrul, Khasru denied bail again

Dhaka court rejects cops' remand prayer; 14 more BNP activists jailed over political violence

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected the bail petitions of BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Alamgir and the party's Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury in a case filed with Paltan Police Station over assaulting policemen in the capital on October 28.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury rejected the bail pleas and also turned down remand appeals for the two BNP leaders while allowing police to interrogate them at the jail gate for two days.

Fakhrul and Khasru were shown arrested in the case, as Paltan Police Station Sub-Inspector Sumit Kumar Saha, also investigation officer (IO) of the case, placed an application in this regard.

In the remand appeal, the IO said BNP leaders and activists, as per directions from Fakhrul and Khasru, attacked police officers on October 28.

"They need to be remanded to find vital clues about the incident and to know the whereabouts of the other fugitives responsible for committing such offences," said the IO.

Opposing the remand appeal, defence lawyer Mohsin Miah told the court that Fakhrul is elderly and has been suffering from different ailments, including heart disease, while Amir

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As parties gear up for full-throttle campaigning for the January 7 polls, posters of Jahangir Kabir Nanak, an AL candidate, were seen hung across Dhanmondi Road-9 yesterday, the first day of electioneering for the 12th parliamentary polls.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

OUST-GOVT MOVEMENT BNP, Jamaat in talks over formation of committees

Say sources in both parties

RASHIDUL HASAN

BNP and Jamaat are planning to form coordination committees across the country to bring pace to their ongoing anti-government movement and to resist the January 7 polls.

Both sides are in talks about forming a five-member "core committee" to coordinate the activities of their Dhaka north and south units, a Dhaka North City Jamaat leader, involved with its publicity unit, told The Daily Star yesterday.

A top leader of Dhaka North BNP also told this newspaper that informal discussions are going on with Jamaat. "But there was no concrete development in this regard," he said, wishing anonymity.

Asked, Rezaul Karim, in-charge of Jamaat's central publicity team, has categorically told this correspondent that such discussions are going on between Jamaat and BNP.

He, however, declined to give further details.

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