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Five more JP picks pull out of election race

They cast doubt on fairness of Jan 7 polls; more may quit the race, say party sources

RASHIDUL HASAN

Five more Jatiyo Party candidates yesterday quit the election race citing doubts about the fairness of the January 7 election as one of the reasons.

With them, 25 JP nominees have pulled out so far, a JP central leader told The Daily Star last night.

Wishing anonymity, he added that the actual number of such JP candidates would be higher as many contenders did not inform the party's central election conducting team of their decisions.

JP insiders said more candidates are likely to withdraw before the election day.

Sources in the JP said many aspirants are aggrieved that the party high-ups, including Chairman GM Quader and Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnun, reached a consensus with the Awami League in 26 seats where the ruling party nominees have withdrawn their candidacies.

JP leaders are contesting in 265 constituencies on paper. But most

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A boat carrying vegetables in the black water of the Turag in Dhaka's Gabtoli. Mindless discharge of effluents, sewage, and waste into the river has given the water such a hue.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Failure to hold free, fair polls will turn country into failed state'

Says Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If the national election is not free, fair and acceptable, the state itself will be a failed state, said Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman yesterday.

"In no way can we let the next election be a questionable one... We will be isolated from the rest of the world [if that happens]," he told a training session of executive magistrates in the capital.

Prompt action should be taken whenever there is any irregularity, he said.

Instructions about the polls will not come from anywhere but the Election Commission, he told the magistrates.

People all over the world are watching this election, not just the 180 million Bangladeshis, he said.

The number of foreign election observers will be the highest this time, he said, adding that the individuals will choose where they go while the EC makes travel and security arrangements.

Referring to the incidents of violence, he said many of the clashes are taking place over previous enmity.

Armed forces on polls duty from today

To assist law enforcers in maintaining law and order until Jan 10

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed forces personnel start election duties today to help ensure a peaceful atmosphere across the country for the January 7 polls.

The armed forces will remain deployed until January 10, said a statement issued yesterday by the Inter-Services Public Relations.

Members of the armed forces will be stationed in every district, upazila and metropolitan area and assist law enforcers, it said.

Army personnel will be deployed in 62 districts, while Bangladesh Navy members will perform duties in two.

The army will work with the Border Guard Bangladesh in 47 upazilas along the land border and with Coast Guard members in four coastal upazilas.

Bangladesh Air Force will provide polling centres in remote hilly areas with helicopter support.

Besides, an adequate number of air force helicopters were readied for emergencies during

- Army men to be deployed in 62 districts
- Navy will be on duty in Bhola and Barguna districts
- 1,151 platoons of BGB, 700 patrol teams of Rab already deployed
- Public transports, private cars, autorickshaws can run on election day

the election.

A joint coordination cell has been set up at the Armed Forces Division with representatives from different ministries, divisions, and law enforcement agencies.

Moreover, 1,151 BGB platoons and 700 Rab patrol teams deployed on December 29 will be on the ground until January 10.

A home ministry circular on December 21 said an executive magistrate will accompany each team of the armed forces.

The BGB, Rab, and Coast Guard will work as striking and mobile forces and they will help law enforcers if the returning officers seek assistance, it said.

The duty of police will be to maintain law and order at polling centres, carry the electoral materials, and ensure safety of the election officials.

Mustafizur Rahman, senior secretary of the Public Security Division, yesterday told reporters that there would be no restrictions on public transport, private vehicles, and three-wheelers on election day, adding that a circular will be issued in this regard in a day.

CAAB revokes licence of Biman pilots Sadia, Al-Mehedi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh has revoked the private and commercial pilot licences of Biman Bangladesh Airlines' first officer Sadia Ahmed and the commercial pilot licence of first officer Al-Mehedi Islam for forging their academic certificate and other documents.

The regulatory authority made the decision recently following an investigation against the two.

CAAB issued a notification in this regard on December 21 which was signed by Air Commodore Shah Kawsar Ahmed Choudhury, member of flight standards & regulations of CAAB.

Al-Mehedi was also fined Tk 10 lakh. Besides, legal action is under process against Sadia Ahmed, CAAB said in the notification.

CAAB also requested all carriers and organisations to take necessary measures to verify the academic certificates before submitting the application for licence.

After The Daily Star published a report on anomalies in pilot recruitment in March last year, Biman suspended Sadia.

In February, Biman recruited a batch of contractual pilots to fly its Boeing

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Israeli drone kills Hamas leader in Beirut

Gaza death toll tops 22,000

REUTERS, Beirut/Gaza

Israel killed Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Aroui in a drone strike in Lebanon's capital Beirut yesterday, Lebanese and Palestinian security sources said, as its forces kept pummeling parts of Gaza, vowing further "high-intensity" warfare against Hamas in the enclave.

Hamas' Al Aqsa Radio and Lebanon's pro-Iranian Mayadeen TV confirmed word from security sources that Aroui, a member of the Palestinian Islamist movement's politburo based abroad and a co-founder of Hamas' military wing, the Qassam Brigades, had been killed when a drone struck a Hamas office in south Beirut.

In all, the drone attack killed six people in the city's southern suburb of Daliyeh, the Lebanese state news agency reported earlier, underlining the risk of the Israel-Hamas wars spreading well beyond the Gaza Strip.

Lebanon's heavily armed Hezbollah group, a Hamas ally, has been exchanging near-daily fire with Israel across Lebanon's southern border since the Gaza war

erupted in early October.

Lebanon's caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati condemned the drone blast as a "new Israeli crime" and said it was an attempt to pull Lebanon into war.

In response to questions from Reuters, the Israeli military said it does not respond to reports in the foreign media.

Mark Regev, an adviser to the Israeli prime minister, said in an interview with MSNBC TV that Israel "has not taken responsibility for this attack. But whoever did it, it must be clear - this was not an attack on the Lebanese state... Whoever did this did a surgical strike against the Hamas leadership".

Israel had accused Aroui of supervising and ordering Hamas attacks in the Israel-occupied West Bank in support of militants fighting Israel's devastating air and ground offensive in Gaza.

"I am waiting for martyrdom [death] and I think I have lived too long," Aroui said in August 2023, alluding to Israeli threats to eliminate Hamas leaders whether in Gaza or abroad.

The war was triggered by a shock cross-border Hamas assault on Israeli towns

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Scientists find easier way to identify habitable exoplanets

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists say they have found a new and easier way to identify liquid water - and potentially life - on other planets.

The process involves measuring the amount of carbon dioxide in a planet's atmosphere and comparing those measurements with that taken from neighbouring worlds.

The researchers said that if a planet has a reduced amount of CO2 in its atmosphere compared with its neighbours, it suggests there is liquid water on its surface.

The theory is that the CO2 in the planet's atmosphere is being dissolved into an ocean - just like Earth - or absorbed by a planetary-scale biomass, the team said.

The researchers said that until now there had been no practical method for detecting the presence of liquid water.

Amaury Triaud, professor of exoplanetology at the University of Birmingham, said: "It is fairly easy to measure the amount of carbon dioxide in a planet's atmosphere.

"This is because CO2 is a strong absorber in the infrared, the same property causing the current rise in global temperatures here on Earth."

The closest scientists had come to identifying liquid on a planet's surface was to use its glint - how star light reflects off water - which can be too weak for current observatories to detect.

LAKSHMIPUR-1 Independent's threat to RO costs him his candidacy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday cancelled the candidacy of Lakshmipur-1 independent candidate Habibur Rahman Paban, also a presidium member of Jubo League, for violating the electoral code of conduct.

He is the first candidate for the January 7 national polls to have his candidacy cancelled for electoral code violation. Candidacies were not cancelled for this reason in the 2014 and 2018 elections, EC sources said.

The commission took the decision regarding Paban's candidacy after holding a hearing on Monday.

The EC issued a letter to Paban yesterday informing him of the decision.

Paban violated the electoral code of conduct and committed "pre-election irregularities".

According to the EC, Paban called the deputy commissioner of Lakshmipur, also the returning officer, made intimidating, objectionable, and indecent statements, and threatened to have the returning officer and superintendent of police transferred within three days.

The election inquiry committee sent a report to the Election Commission on December 31, 2023, recommending legal action against the candidate.



Two homeless people wrap themselves in blankets and plastic sheets to sleep in Dhaka's Central Shaheed Minar area. Low temperatures and chilly breeze over the last couple of days have put many in trouble. The photo was taken around 1:00am yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS