

## Five including 4 cops injured in police-BNP clashes

STAR REPORT

At least five people, including four police personnel, were injured in two separate clashes yesterday that took place between members of BNP and police in Dhaka and Natore.

Eight people were detained in connection with the clashes.

The incidents occurred during BNP's nationwide leaflet distribution programme, which was being carried out in the two districts to gather public support for the party's call to boycott the January 7 national election.

In Natore's Singra upazila, BNP leaders and activists, led by party Joint Convener Daudar Mahmud, began distributing leaflets in the morning, and when they reached the Singra bus stand area around 11:30am, police obstructed them, leading to a clash between the two groups, said police.

**The incidents occurred during BNP's nationwide leaflet distribution programme, which was being carried out in the two districts to gather public support for the party's call to boycott the January 7 national election.**

Superintendent of Police Tariqul Islam said three policemen were injured, while BNP men vandalised several vehicles during the clash.

The police brought the situation under control and arrested three people, including Daudar Mahmud.

However, Shahidul Islam Bachchu, convener of Natore district unit BNP, said Awami League and Chhatra League men attacked the party programme and vandalised Daudar Mahmud's petrol pump in presence of police personnel.

Meanwhile, in Dhaka's Dhamrai upazila, a police officer was injured and a police van was vandalised by BNP men when the two groups clashed at Kalampur Bazar.

Sirajul Islam Sheikh, officer-in-charge (OC) of Dhamrai Police Station, said BNP leaders and activists brought out a procession as part of its election boycott and non-cooperation movement around 7:30am.

When a police team reached the spot, the leaders and activists attacked the police van and pelted brickbats at law enforcers, he added.

A sub-inspector was injured in the attack, and he was given primary treatment at a hospital.

The OC said five individuals were detained for questioning in connection with this incident.



## An ode to the resilience of STREET CHILDREN

AYMAN ANIKA

Street children collecting scraps or sleeping on footpaths is a common scene in Dhaka but their stories of resilience often go untold. The city's landscape — teeming streets and crowded marketplaces — serves as both a playground and a battleground for these young souls.

How often do we stop and hear the stories they have to tell?

Runa, 7 or 8, comes with her two sisters to sell flowers at Dhanmondi 32. When asked what she likes about the lake, she responded, "I like playing with my sisters, and whenever we can save some money, we ride boats on the lake."

Orphaned at an early age, neither Runa nor her sisters had the privilege to attend school. Like thousands of street children in Dhaka, they live from hand to mouth.

Yet, amidst these adversities, the spirit of these children remains unbroken. They display an extraordinary sense of community, sharing their meagre resources with each other and finding moments of joy in the simplest of things — a boat ride, a shared meal, or a game played with pebbles.

Rifat, who lives on the sidewalks of Manik Mia Avenue, was seen pushing a discarded

tire with a stick. He said his father was a rickshaw puller and died in an accident. Now, his mother has to beg to survive and he pushes tyres or makes paper kites to pass his time. Rifat is a reflection of the harsh reality we have in Dhaka.

Education, a basic right for children worldwide, remains a distant dream for many of these children. The hardships they endure are not just economic but also social and emotional. These children often face societal stigma, seen as nuisances rather than children in need of care and protection. They are vulnerable to exploitation,

with many falling prey to substance abuse, child labour, and even trafficking. The psychological toll of living in constant uncertainty, without the security of a home or the love of a family, is immense. Nevertheless, these young individuals display exceptional entrepreneurial spirits — showcasing an innate ability to transform challenges into opportunities.

Noyon, who sells socks at Gudaraghat, shared his story of survival. "I lost my parents when I was about 10 and lived with my uncle. But soon I became homeless and to support myself, engaged in small jobs like selling socks or working in roadside hotels." Surprisingly, Noyon still pursues his studies, loves to play football, and dreams of becoming a doctor. But what made him leave his uncle and turn to the streets? Noyon explained, "My uncle is very abusive, and so is his wife. I felt unsafe there, and they didn't want me to continue my studies but rather work in a metal stamping plant, just as others did in our slum. So, I had no choice but to leave."

Street children pick up skills that help them navigate their challenging world — from hawking small items to passers-by to selling buckets of flowers at traffic signals for a few takas. These acts of survival, while showcasing their resilience, also reflect the grave reality of lost childhoods. It is important to acknowledge that their situation demands more than just admiration for their strength. They need policies that would protect them and give them the childhood they deserve. As we go about our lives, let us remember these children — not with pity, but with respect and a commitment to contribute — in whatever way we can, to make their world a little brighter.



PHOTO: SILVIA MAHJABIN

## 2 held over mugging of Italian photographer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, City

Police yesterday arrested two men on suspicion of mugging an Italian photographer in the port city's Kazir Dewri area on Tuesday night. A CNG-run autorickshaw which was allegedly used in the mugging incident was also seized on the day.

Police recovered Tk 10,000 from the arrestees — Nuruddin and Rubel.

Cristina Gemma, an international photographer, whose exhibition was recently held at Alliance Française de Chittagong, was mugged in front of Karnaphuli Tower on SS Khaled Road in the Kazir Dewri area.

She said she had around Tk 30,000 in cash, two bank cards, and two mobile phones inside her bag.

However, police could not immediately identify the muggers who robbed her.

Subsequently, law enforcers came under flak as the incident occurred at a time when the port city was swarming with police, Rab, and other security forces patrolling ahead of the election.

Chattogram Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner (Kotwali Circle) Atanu Chakraborty said, "We're trying to arrest the other muggers of the group and recover the remaining stolen contents."

Police said Cristina Gemma came under target when she withdrew Tk 30,000 from a local ATM booth. The muggers following Christina on a CNG-run autorickshaw slowed down to snatch her bag before speeding up to get away.

## Explosive-like object found at election office

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Rab yesterday recovered what appeared to be an explosive-like object from the election office compound in Naogaon's Mohadebpur upazila, said police.

Mohadebpur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Ruhul Amin said, "After the suspicious-looking object was discovered in the premises of the upazila election office, I called in the Rab bomb disposal team."

Later, a Rab team from Jourpurhat, led by Major Md Sheikh Sadiq, arrived at the spot and recovered the object wrapped in red coloured tape.

"Police are investigating the matter," said OC.

## Japan Airlines pilots had no 'visual contact' before collision

AFP, Tokyo

Pilots on a Japan Airlines plane that burst into flames just after all 379 passengers and crew escaped had no "visual contact" with the other aircraft in the collision, the airline said yesterday.

The three pilots were also unable to see the fire from the cockpit when it first broke out and were informed of it by cabin crew, a JAL spokesman told AFP.

The airliner hit a coast guard plane after landing at Tokyo's Haneda Airport on Tuesday evening. All but one of the six people on the smaller aircraft were killed.

A ball of flame erupted from the airliner before it came to a halt and was consumed by a huge blaze, eventually leaving a charred husk on the tarmac.

## 93pc centres to get ballots on vote day morning

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On December 18, the EC in a circular asked all ROs to take steps and send ballots to the centres before the voting starts at 8:00am.

That day, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal told reporters at the EC office in Dhaka, "There was a demand for this from many, and it will improve transparency."

At a meeting with election commissioners on October 30, top

**This would be the first time in Bangladesh that ballots would reach centres on voting day.**

officials of law enforcement agencies said it would be difficult to send ballots on voting day due to a lack of manpower and that they were in favour of sending them the day before the election.

During all previous parliamentary polls, ballots were sent to polling centres the day before voting.

But the matter became contentious after the 2018 election with opposition parties alleging that ballot box stuffing took place the night before election day.

In January 2019, Jatiya Oikyafront alleged before the EC that between 30 and 60 percent of the votes were cast the night before.

The same month, Transparency International Bangladesh in a study found that stamping of ballots took place the night before election day in more than one centre in 33 of the 50 surveyed constituencies.

## Two killed in polls violence

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Faisal said his supporters were not involved in violence, adding that Mirinal's men attacked each other because of rifts within the camp.

Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge of Munshiganj Sadar Police Station, last night said a suspect named Shipon Patwari was arrested at Dhaka airport while he was trying to flee the country.

In another incident, Jahangir Panchayat, 55, a resident of Badura area of Pirojpur, died at DMCH yesterday morning hours after he was stabbed, said his family members.

He was a supporter of Shamim Shahnewaj, an independent vying for Pirojpur-3, and he was attacked by a supporter of another candidate, said his family members.

The attacker is a local man named Sirajul Faraji, they added. The victim's nephew Shah Alam said the killing took place due to rivalry over the election.

Jahangir's uncle Tuku said Jahangir and the attacker had enmity for years, and the assault took place using the election as a pretext.

Shah Alam said Jahangir was

stabbed on his head and hit by a hammer by Sirajul near Badura Bazar on Wednesday afternoon.

Sirajul is a supporter of independent candidate Rustum Ali Faraji.

Neither Rustum nor Sirajul could be contacted over phone.

Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Mathbaria Police Station, said Sirajul and Jahangir earlier filed cases against each other over land dispute.

In Chandina, Cumilla, AL nominee Pran Gopal Dutta's supporters assaulted the supporters of Muntakim Ashraf, a local AL leader running as an independent, in Hossainpur area, said the latter.

Pran Gopal's supporters again attacked Muntakim's men in the evening in Kaliarchar area, he added.

The journalists injured are Sobel Rana of Daily Mukto Khabar, Abdul Baten of The Daily Jugantor, and Jakir Hossain of Naya Diganata.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Baten of Jugantor said, "We were beside the motorcade of Pran Gopal. When we heard a commotion a little ahead, we went there. But the campaigners assaulted us because we were filming the violence."

## Be forgiving if we've made any mistake

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and fulfill the dream of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

Hasina said during her three consecutive terms (2009-2023), the country witnessed the continuation of a "democratic trend and stability".

"If we can form the government again by securing your valuable votes, we will be able to continue the programmes taken up by us," she said, adding that this would give the AL an opportunity to further improve the people's living standards.

Hasina thanked the people for giving the AL the opportunity to serve them by voting for "boat" in the past.

She urged all political parties and institutions that believe in democracy and the rule of law not to pamper and fuel any idiosyncratic ideas that would disrupt the constitutional process in the country.

The AL chief said her party is expecting a free, fair and impartial national election.

Talking about the AL's election manifesto, Hasina listed 12 priorities for the socio-economic development of the country.

These are protecting and promoting the practice of democratic system at every level; making every effort to keep commodity prices within the purchasing power of all; ensuring employability in education system and youth employment; building smart Bangladesh based on modern technology; mechanising integrated agricultural system and taking measures to preserve the produce with the aim of increasing production; and ensuring the development of agricultural products and food processing industries.

The other priorities include creating employment opportunities

Pran Gopal could not be reached for comments.

In Chattogram's Mirsharai upazila, locals said four activists of independent candidate Gias Uddin were assaulted yesterday by supporters of the ruling party nominee.

Shahidul Islam, OC of Mirsharai Police Station, said police were aware of the incident.

The incident took place when both the groups came face to face at Kalibaria area under Jamalpur Sadar upazila around 8:00pm on Wednesday.

In Jamalpur-5 constituency, at least 20 people including five journalists were injured and three motorbikes were burnt in a clash between supporters of AL candidate Abul Kalam Azad and independent Rezaul Karim.

Rezaul and Azad blamed each other for violence. Mohabbat Kabir, OC of Jamalpur Sadar Police Station, said law enforcers rushed to the spot and calmed the situation.

Criminals set fire to two rooms of a primary school, a polling station for Sunday's 12th parliamentary election, in Barishal's Babuganj upazila on Wednesday midnight.

Teachers of Ghatak Char Government Primary School yesterday found that furniture in two rooms were burnt down overnight.

Contacted, OC of Airport Police Station Lokman Hossain said police were looking into the matter.

In Chattogram, a campaign office of independent candidate Abdul Motalab was set on fire early yesterday, said Sohridul Kabir, coordinator of Motalab's campaign.

In Narsingdi's Shibpur, a supporter of independent candidate Sirajul Islam Mollah was injured and one of his election campaign offices was vandalised on Wednesday night.

Police visited the scene and saw evidence of vandalism, said Farid Uddin, OC of Shibpur Police Station.

In Jhenaidah town, the administration yesterday imposed section 144 in two places in the town as AL candidate Tahzeeb Alam Siddiqui announced holding a rally at a place close to where independent Nasser Shahriar Zahedi was scheduled to hold an event.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to this report]

Shahjalal International Airport has been inaugurated.

"We have constructed South Asia's first underground road — "Bangabandhu Tunnel" in Chattogram. The Dhaka-Cox's Bazar rail route has been established with an eye-catching railway station in Cox's Bazar. The Bangabandhu Satellite-1 has been launched."

Referring to critics, she said, "It is a pity that they do not present the correct information to the nation. It is in their character to mislead people with false information. It seems that those people get frustrated when they see the socio-economic development of the country."

The AL president said there is a huge difference between the Bangladesh of 15 years ago and today's Bangladesh. People's quality of life has improved and they now dream for a better life, the PM added.

## MYANMAR CONFLICT 6 killed after armed group downs junta helicopter

AFP, Bangkok

An armed Myanmar ethnic group yesterday claimed that it had downed a military helicopter, killing six soldiers onboard in a northern region of the country.

The junta is under increasing military pressure in the north from armed groups, but retains dominance in the sky thanks to its Chinese- and Russian-built aircraft.

A spokesperson for the Kachin Independence Army, which has fought the military for years, told AFP the helicopter had crashed Wednesday afternoon.

## BNP calls hartal

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parties are boycotting the January 7 election demanding the polls under a non-partisan interim government.

He said many candidates are quitting the election race. "In this way, the people will win. By using the state power to oppress people, they [Awami League] cannot win.

Rizvi also urged all government officials, including the Bangladesh army, police and judiciary, not to cooperate in the election.

Law enforcers arrested more than 24,862 BNP leaders and activists in 1,141 cases across the country from October 28 until yesterday, he said.

In the 24 hours to yesterday afternoon, 185 party leaders and activists were detained and 11 cases were filed against 938 named and many unnamed party activists, said Rizvi.

Since October 29 last year, the BNP and other like-minded parties have already enforced nationwide hartals for five days in four spells and blockades for 23 days in 12 phases.

The party came up with the call for a non-cooperation movement on December 20.