### Polls monitoring by foreigners should end: Momen

### **OUR CORRESPONDENT,** Sylhet

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said he believes the system of foreigners monitoring elections ought to be discontinued.

He made this comment while talking to reporters after a meeting with a delegation of the International Republican Institute (IRI), a US government-supported organisation.

"I think the [foreign election monitoring] system should be stopped. We should have confidence in our people. The people of Bangladesh liberated the country. No one liberated us with a certificate. Why do we need to authenticate it [election] by others?" he said.

"We are a mature democracy, a developed democracy. We have given blood for it. Very few countries have done so. Why do we need others' certificates?" he said.

A three-member election observer delegation of IRI met with the minister at his residence in Sylhet city's Dhopadighirpar area in the evening.

The members of the delegation are IRI's senior advisor for Asia Pacific Geoffrey Macdonald, senior programme manager Amitab Ghosh and programme manager David Hoggstra.

Regarding the meeting, the minister said, "The observers asked for suggestions on how to reduce the bitterness between AL and BNP in the future. I said that there should be dialogues between the parties, and BNP should do more people-focused, issue-based politics.'

'Another topic of discussion was the BNP's boycott. I said that this was because of their lack of internal dialogue," he said.



Filthy water from clogged sewer lines floods this road in Old Dhaka's Mitford Hospital area, leaving pedestrians and motorists in trouble. The photo was taken around 2:30pm yesterday. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

### Japan quake death toll nears 100

#### **REUTERS**, Wajima

The United States said yesterday it is preparing military logistical support and aid for regions in Japan devastated by an earthquake that killed 94 people, forced about 33,000 people to leave their homes, and left over 200 people unaccounted for.

"The US is here to support our friend and ally in its earthquake response. Military logistical support, food, and other supplies are being readied," US ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel posted on social media site X.

Japan is in talks with the US about emergency assistance and rejected offers

for help from other countries including China for the time being.

We are not accepting any personnel or material aid from other countries or regions at the moment given the situation on the ground and the effort that would be required to receive them," Japan's top spokesperson Yoshimasa Hayashi said.

A US official who declined to be named told Reuters the two governments were coordinating on possible assistance from U.S. troops.

About 54,000 US forces personnel are based in Japan, the biggest US military presence abroad, according to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

**THE ARABIAN SEA** Indian navy rescues crew of hijacked ship

### NDTV ONLINE

All 21 crew, including Indians, aboard the cargo ship, 'MV Lila Norfolk', that was hijacked near the coast of Somalia have been rescued and are safe, the Indian navy said yesterday.

The elite commandos, MARCOS, sanitised the cargo ship and rescued the 15 Indians aboard the ship in the Arabian Sea. The commandos have confirmed the absence of hijackers on the ship, said the navy in a statement.

The hijacking was reported by the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), a British military organisation that tracks movements of various vessels in strategic waterways.

### 2 killed in Feni road crashes

#### **OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni**

Two people, including a Brac official, were killed in two separate road accidents in Feni yesterday.

NEWS

One of them was identified as Yasin Ullah, 38, of Hatia upazila in Noakhali. He was an officer of credit section of Brac's Sharshadi union office.

He died on the spot when a bus hit his motorcycle on Dhaka-Chattogram highway in BSCIC industrial area in Sadar upazila around 9:00am, said Mahipal Highway Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mostafa Kamal.

In Chhagalnaiya upazila, a man believed to be in his mid-30s was killed as a vehicle rammed him on the same highway around 3:00am, OC Kamal said.

The identity of the deceased could not be known immediately.

The bodies were sent to Feni Sadar General Hospital morgue for autopsy, he added.

### Woman found dead inside septic tank

UNB, Narail

A 58-year-old woman was found dead in Mangalhata Moddhyopara at Lohagara upazila of Narail yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Ambia, said Lohagara Police Station Sub Inspector (SI) Syed Ali. Locals discovered her body inside a septic tank

located next to the house of one Razzeque Mollah, a resident in the village, around noon.

Razzeque's son, Sabbir Mollah, 30, was arrested on suspicion, said Lohagara Police Station Officerin-Charge (OC) Kanchan Kumar Roy.

Informed, police recovered the body and sent it to a hospital morgue for autopsy.

The cause of the death will be known after an investigation, the OC added.

# 4 killed as moving train 'set on fire' FROM PAGE 1 As soon as the train stopped, he The BNP called a countrywide

windows of the carriages that were on fire.

Then he saw a man stuck while trying to trying to come out of a window. "As I and a few others tried to help him, the man said, 'My wife and child are inside. Please save them first. I am trying to get myself out," Shaheen told this correspondent.

The moment we tried to open the door, the flames suddenly rose, forcing us to stand back. That man on the window was burnt to death within moments."

A man named Belal Hossain said, "I saw the train slowly passing through Gopibagh area shortly before 9 o'clock. There was a fire on a carriage and panic-stricken people were getting out of it. Many got injured

gave his three-year-old daughter through a window to a man outside

SM Joy, an assistant professor at fire.'

The BNP called a countrywide 48hour hartal that starts this morning. Anwar Hossain, superintendent

"My passport and luggage were "My passport and luggage were" suspect that some people boarded the train as passengers and set it on of Dhaka Railway Police, said, "We

At the scene, Khandaker Al Moin, director of the Legal and Media Wing of Rab, said, "Initially, we have information that it was done by miscreants.

This has been the eighth arson attack on trains since November 16.



### Most JP picks quit

FROM PAGE 1 That's why I quit the race," he told The Daily Star.

On Wednesday, JP Chairman GM Quader downplayed his party candidates' silent rebellion.

He said 35-40 candidates pulling out of the race is not that big a deal, and that the party will take action against them after the election.

Meanwhile, leaders of Rangpur city Awami League were seen campaigning yesterday for Quader, who only about six months ago was highly critical of the current government but has gone mum since his India visit in August.

of the newly-formed political parties, including Bangladesh Supreme Shahjahan said most of their Party (BSP), Bangladesh Jativatabadi Andolon (BNM) and Trinamool BNP, are hardly active in the race.

February last year and fielded 134 candidates.

BSP was registered only in September last year, and announced candidacy in 81 seats while BNM fielded 56 candidates after it secured registration with the EC late last year.

However, save for five to six top leaders of these parties, all other candidates were mostly absent from the election campaign.

Trinamool BNP Chairman Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, once an influential BNP leader, said as a new political party, they are facing some organisational problems.

He said at least 10 of their On the other hand, most candidates candidates are very much in the race. BNM Secretary General Md

candidates are active and that

BSP Chairman Saveed Saifuddin

"We are participating in the

are general people who do not have

election for the sake of democracy,'

will win in 40-50 seats.

the fund to run campaigns.

City

while jumping off the windows."

Atikur Rahman, the power car operator on the train, said when the train stopped and he came outside, "I saw the carriages next to the power car in fire. Then I turned off the generator. We then decoupled the power car from the carriages ahead."

The locomotive and the four coaches then went to Kamalapur Railway Station while the carriages on fire were left there, he added.

Atiar, 60, who was coming to the city from Kushtia, said he and his two sons-in-law jumped off the train, leaving their belongings inside.

Ashraful Haque, 50, a carpenter, along with his wife and two children, was coming from Darshana in "Chha" compartment. He has a flight to Dubai on January 9.

Two firefighters inspect one of the gutted carriages of the Benapole Express last night.

Lalmatia Girls School and College, was coming from Kolkata with his wife. They also lost their belongings.

The incident takes place at a time when over seven lakh law enforcement members are deployed across the country for the January 7 national election.

Similarly, KH Mahid Uddin, additional commissioner (crime) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said,

"This is sabotage." The injured were rushed to different city hospitals including the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

Nine travellers were killed and scores

On December 19, four people, including a woman and a three-yearold, were killed after arsonists set fire to Mohanganj Express in the capital. Railway formed a seven-member committee over the incident.

Stop motivated

### FROM PAGE 1

resulting in jail terms for them through expedited proceedings," reads the statement.

When the victims of Rana Plaza still await justice but legal proceedings in this case are concluded in incredible haste against a non-executive Chair of a board with no direct involvement in daily operations, the same can hardly be seen as being motivated by concern for workers.

"This is rightly perceived as weaponizing public systems for harassment which only conveys a negative message about the state of shrinking civic space in Bangladesh and shakes people's confidence in the justice system which often is their last resort for redress.

"We also urge upon all to recognise the importance of protecting the civic space and halt all ongoing harassing actions against the civil society groups and their leadership for Bangladesh's journey on inclusive prosperity," reads the statement.

The signatories to the statement are economist Hossain Zillur Rahman; jurist Shahdeen Malik; rights activists Hameeda Hossain, ZI Khan Panna, Khushi Kabir, Shaheen Anam, Shireen P Huq, Shamsul Huda, Khairul Islam, Faruq Faisel, and Syeed Ahamed; environmental activist Syeda Rizwana Hasan; and educationists Rasheda K Choudhury and Shahnaz Huda.

There area allegations they are Ahmed said most of their candidates running in the election under pressure.

Of these so-called "King's parties", Trinamool BNP got its registration with the Election Commission in he said.

BNP men asked

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS FROM PAGE 1

In many constituencies, rifts within the ruling party will lead to clashes, and the government will want to shift the blame onto the BNP, said another leader.

"If a free and fair election is held, voter turnout would not be more than 20 percent. So, why should we take the blame of violence?'

Since July 12, the BNP has been carrying out a movement with a onepoint demand: Polls under a nonpartisan interim government.

After BNP's October 28 rally, which ended in clashes with law enforcers, the party called hartal and blockades for four days every week.

Realising that hartals and blockades had become ineffective, the BNP on December 24 began what it called a mass contact

### Ensure rights to protest, fair trial FROM PAGE 1

Since the law enforcement authorities refuse to register complaints of enforced disappearances, the families find little to no avenues for redress, it said.

Amnesty also recommended that the government form a law criminalising enforced disappearance. The government must also ratify the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, it said.

"Launch effective, independent and impartial investigations into the conduct of the Rapid Action Battalion, Detective Branch and other departments of law enforcement, particularly in relation to allegations of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings perpetrated by its agents," urged Amnesty.

It recommended that Bangladesh

programme. The party also called for a non-cooperation movement from December 21, asking people not to cooperate with this regime.

The party started distributing leaflets on December 24 to discourage people from casting their votes.

In the February 15 election of 1996, the Awami League enforced a nationwide strike.

Selima Rahman, a BNP standing committee member, said her party called hartal as part of its move to boycott the election.

"We appeal to the people to observe the strike and boycott this election. This is why we will carry out the programme in a peaceful manner," she said.

The party will take post-election programmes depending on the situation on election day.

ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and issue a declaration under Article 22 of the Convention Against Torture so that individuals facing violations of human rights guaranteed by these treaties can send complaints

directly to the Human Rights Committee and Committee Against Torture.

Amnesty said the Cyber Security Act must be amended and sections 21, 25 and 28 of the law should be removed, because they criminalise legitimate expression of opinions or thoughts. Similar sections of the Digital Security Act have been used to stifle dissent.

It urged Bangladesh to abolish the death penalty and called for a moratorium on the death penalty pending full abolition.

## EC, govt, parties to blame for current situation

#### FROM PAGE 1

"Additionally, those who are boycotting the election, especially the BNP, had been rigid on polls under a caretaker government."

In politics, there is no such fixed formula, said Ali Imam. Had the BNP run this time, it

would have been good for the party, he observed.

The former bureaucrat thinks that the BNP lost its political strength by not participating in the 2014 polls.

"If the BNP had run in 2014, it would have won more seats in 2018 to have become the main opposition party in parliament."

He said the most of the opposition parties had participated in polls during the Pakistan period despite knowing they would lose.

"The Awami League also followed the same strategy during the military regime in Bangladesh. This strategy helps political parties to keep themselves energised. As an observer, I think it is a good strategy."

According to Ali Imam, if the October 28 violence had not happened in Dhaka, the international community might have tried to bring the BNP to the

electoral race, and the government office... Maybe there will be some might have agreed to a compromise. However, after the October 28

incident, the scope for the BNP's participation evaporated, he added.

The former cabinet secretary said like many national and international platforms, he also thinks that the BNP's October 28 rally was foiled to keep the party away from polls.

Talking about the importance of participatory polls, Ali Imam said when a key political party pulls out, the choices for the voters are reduced.

"Most of the MP aspirants are from the Awami League and independents. A few seats will see contests between the Awami League candidates and independents, but the figure would be less than 100," he said.

According to him, the overall competition will be between "the AL vs the AL".

"This time I didn't find any reason to be curious about the polls or taking any interest in going to the polling centre as we can certainly say the ruling party will form the next government, and the incumbent prime minister will continue in

changes in the next cabinet," the

retired bureaucrat said. In a few constituencies, voters will go to polling centres where the battles of ballots would be close, but it would not impact the overall polls environment nationally, he said.

"We hope candidates will be elected through tough competitions in all 300 constituencies."

He said for sustainable development, a party needs to continue in power for a long period as it was seen during Jawaharlal Nehru's rule in India, but this should happen through fair elections.

"The main basis of our Liberation War was the historical six points. The first point was to form a parliament through voting. When voters don't see competitive elections, they don't feel interested in casting ballots. Such elections would not be considered acceptable at home and abroad.

Ali Imam said although there is nothing to be hopeful about in domestic politics, politicians should find an acceptable solution to the political crisis through meaningful talks.

injured in the incidents so far.