

Spend time with family instead of voting: Rizvi

UNB, Dhaka
BNP yesterday again urged the voters to boycott today's election to ensure the fall of the incumbent "fascist Awami League government."



Speaking at a virtual press briefing, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi urged the country's people to peacefully observe their party's second day hartal on the voting day by not going to the polling stations.

"The darkest chapter of another lopsided stage-managed election in the history of Bangladesh is going to be written tomorrow [January 7]. So, our call to every democracy-loving voter is to boycott those who have denied your rights for the last 15 years for a day," Rizvi said.

The BNP leader called upon the people to spend time with their families during voting hours instead of visiting the polling stations.

The darkest chapter of another lopsided stage-managed election in the history of Bangladesh is going to be written tomorrow [today].

"Let's establish democracy and voting rights and make the two-day all-out strike a success. Let's all boycott the January 7 voting and raise our voices in favour of boycotting the polls. Avoid going to polling stations," he said.

He also called upon the pro-democratic forces to encourage their family members, relatives, friends and neighbours to boycott the facade in the name of voting.

He alleged that a dangerous game has been arranged to retain power as it has been for the past 15 years through an inventory model of dummy election drama.

The BNP leader said AL along with their subservient and partisan state apparatus have once again laid the web of deception to snatch the voting rights of people.

Rizvi said Sheikh Hasina has been "shamelessly" indulging in the "farical game" using all powers. He said the government is making efforts to show the democratic world a good voter turnout by force.

Bangladesh is set to hold the 12th parliamentary election today amid a boycott by major opposition parties.

Meanwhile, BNP and its allies enforced a 48-hour hartal to protest the national election. The hartal will end at 6:00am on Monday.



Following the fire incident in Benapole Express train on Friday night, railway police set up checkpoints in front of the terminal gate at Kamalapur station yesterday. They also seized flammable objects, mostly lighters, from passengers before allowing them entry.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

BNP IN KHULNA 228 in jail, others on the run

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

As the nation heads to the polls today, the BNP continues its two-day hartal as part of a polls-boycott movement. The party has also called for a non-cooperation movement to remove the current regime and demanded elections under a neutral administration.

However, a notable absence of BNP leaders and activists are observed on the streets of Khulna, just like many other regions of the country. Many are on the run, and some even unavailable on the phone and other social platforms.

According to BNP leaders, 10 cases were filed by Khulna Metropolitan Police against BNP men since October 28 and 228 have so far been arrested.

Despite this, a few leaders from the party's women, student, and youth wings are quietly conducting limited



While the country goes to polls today, BNP office in the capital's Nayapalitan remains locked and guarded by police since October 28. The party is also observing a 48-hour hartal, which started yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

in-house programmes, in accordance with the central committee's directives.

Meanwhile, the Khulna city and district unit BNP office opened on December 14 after being padlocked for 38 days, but the party men have not been going there fearing

arrests.

Yesterday, while visiting the office on KD Ghosh Road around 11:30am, this correspondent found it locked from outside. Locals said the office now opens only for a few minutes occasionally.

Hasibur Rahman, a BNP

activist in ward-21, said the office was open on December 14 and 16 to celebrate Victory Day and has remained closed since then.

Many BNP leaders, including convener of district unit Amir Ezaz Khan, are in jail, while others are absconding, said SM Monirul Hasan Bappi, member secretary of BNP's Khulna district unit.

Shahiqul Alam Tuhin, the member secretary of BNP's Khulna city unit, said all party members in Khulna are in touch. "We have established humanitarian and legal aid cells to support those in jail," he added.

Shahiqul Alam Mona, the city unit's convener, said it is difficult to carry on the movement under the "current autocratic regime".

Contacted, Officer-in-Charge of Khanjahan Ali Police Station Md Montajul Huq said they are only arresting individuals with criminal cases against them. There are no restrictions for BNP to conduct their regular activities, he added.

CEC vows a free

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ensure that it becomes acceptable at home and abroad," he said.

Awal, without mentioning BNP's name, said, "A large party is trying to resist the polls. So, it may cause problems for us to conduct the election peacefully."

"We will face challenges if they try to create fear among the voters through vandalism or other means," he added.

The CEC said they have taken precautionary measures to face the situation, as around 8 lakh members of law enforcement agencies will maintain law and order.

Pointing at parties that are campaigning against the polls, he said, "You may peacefully campaign to form a public opinion regarding not going to polling stations, but it will be an offence if you physically resist the election or prevent voters from going to the polling stations."

He said if violence continues, it might negatively impact voter turnout. He, however, did not estimate what the voter turnout could be in today's polls.

"If the voter turnout is less than even one percent, it could be legally correct, though it may face a

legitimacy crisis," said the CEC.

Regarding the incident of setting trains on fire ahead of the election, he said, "If any party has done this, I think it is an unforgivable crime."

When asked whether there will be any impact of US visa policy, he said the policy will be applied to those who will obstruct the election; the EC is not obstructing the polls."

"So, we are not bothered about it," he added. "If there is any sort of rigging in the election, some of the responsibility will fall on us," the CEC also said.

"Presiding officers have all the power at the centres. They have been repeatedly reminded of their responsibilities, so they have to take responsibility as well," he said.

The media will have free rights in the polling centres, said CEC Awal, adding that if the media highlights the transparency of the polls, the credibility of elections can increase.

The CEC also called upon candidates to put their polling agents in every polling booth for the sake of a fair election.

"Had BNP participated in the election, it would have been more competitive, more inclusive, and more festive. This is a reality," said CEC Awal.

AL picks lose grassroots support Of unanswered calls

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internal conflicts widened in the last few years," Delwar said.

Asif Sams also became president of upazila AL unit by removing Tuku's younger brother Abdul Baten, also former municipality mayor. Baten is now the campaign chief for Prof Sayeed.

"I am not against 'boat'; I am against the man who is representing 'boat'. He is not fit for the post," said Baten.

Contacted, Tuku said, "Due to his [Baten] wrongdoings, he was removed from the party. I have no problem sharing inherited property with him, but I have no political relation with him."

Refuting the allegations, Tuku claimed those who love AL are united in his support.

Prof Sayeed said, "Due to Tuku and his family members' muscle power, corruption and nepotism, people are united to vote for me but his [Tuku] men are creating obstacles everywhere."

With several clashes happening between supporters of both

candidates in the last few days, locals are worried of further violence.

PABNA-3
In Pabna-3 (Bhangura-Chatmohar-Faridpur), incumbent lawmaker Md Mokbul Hosain got AL nomination for fourth consecutive time while veteran district AL leader Abdul Hamid Master is contesting as independent candidate after resigning from the post of Chatmohar upazila parishad chairman.

Contacted, Abdul Hamid alleged he has faced obstacles everywhere while carrying out election campaigns.

"I am contesting the polls due to pressure from locals who want to see changes here, including respite from MP Mokbul and his son's influence," he said.

Dr Golzar Hossain, a district AL unit leader, alleged depriving competent people, the lawmaker supported his loyal ones. So, local AL men have distanced themselves from him.

Mokbul's son Golam Hasnayan Russel, mayor of Bhangura municipality,

has allegedly been influencing local politics for last few years.

"Recruitments in school, colleges, and all social safety net programme allotments go through the lawmaker's son," Golzar said.

Contacted, Mokbul refuted the allegations. "I tried my best to work with all people from my constituency. I want to finish my incomplete works," he said.

All AL activists and supporters will unite for the "boat" symbol in the polls, Mokbul added.

A crime against

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"This reprehensible incident, undoubtedly orchestrated by those with malicious intent, strikes at the very heart of our democratic values," Momen said.

"The timing of this tragedy, just before the election scheduled for January 7, 2024, shows an absolute intention to hinder the festivity, safety and security of the democratic processes of the country," he said.

deployment of specialised units, including the dog squad, bomb disposal unit, and, if necessary, Rab helicopters.

He also mentioned a device named OIVS, which will help identify intruders in the area.

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He rushed to Dhaka from Rajbari, and has been looking for his son ever since.

The man was holding a photo of Talha close to his chest as he kept looking.

Meanwhile, relatives of 28-year-old Chandrima Chowdhury are desperately searching Dhaka hospitals for her.

Eager for her inaugural train journey and to witness the Padma Bridge, Chandrima embarked on the train from Rajbari on Friday afternoon. Instead of being greeted by her brother Dibakar Chowdhury at Kamalapur

Station that night, she remains untraceable.

Having recently completed her post-graduation in pharmacy from a private university, Chandrima lived with her brother in Farmgate.

Yesterday morning, Dibakar sifted through the morgue at DMC, one of several hospitals where anguished relatives are holding onto hope.

A hope of getting back their missed ones. Or whatever remains of them.

After losing track of his wife, Elina Yasmin, Sajjad Hossain Chapol has tirelessly searched hospital morgues, railway stations,

and police stations.

The family, still reeling from Elina's father's recent passing, boarded the train in Rajbari after attending family gatherings. "I'm not sure where my wife is right now..." said Sajjad.

Dhaka Railway Police Sub-inspector Setafur Rahman said they received missing person reports from three families, of whom, two could not identify bodies kept at the DMCH morgue as those were burned beyond recognition.

At the national burn institute, doctors said eight passengers who suffered burns remain in a critical condition.

Minister's relatives serve as polls

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Iman Ali, Lipika Chowdhury, and Asaduzzaman; and Kaliganj Tushbhandar Mahila Degree College's assistant professor Santosh Kumar Roy, Tapan Kumar Roy, and lecturers Abdul Latif, Pabitra Kumar Roy, and Noor Islam.

Among them, Ershadul Haque is the brother-in-law of the social welfare minister, while Lipika Chowdhury is the wife of the minister's brother and Golam Farooq is also his close relative.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sirajul alleged Nuruzzaman controls both Karim Uddin Public College and Kaliganj Tushbhandar Mahila Degree College centres.

"Teachers at these two institutions are loyal to the minister. They have been appointed as presiding

officers across various polling centres. These presiding officers will act on the minister's behalf and rig the vote," claimed Sirajul.

"It's necessary to appoint new presiding officers in the centres concerned to keep the polling environment in order. I made a written complaint to the returning officer concerned on Friday night. I have been assured that necessary actions will be taken," he said.

District Returning Officer and Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Ullah said preparations have been made to take necessary measures regarding this matter after looking into it seriously.

The minister or his relatives could not be contacted for comments. The number of polling centres in Lalmonirhat-2

constituency is 144. The number of voters in this constituency is 4,02,029, while five candidates are vying for this seat.

Curiosity

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to the bomb disposal unit, it was a timer IED. It contained a watch, batteries, gun powder, and bottles of petrol," the police official added.

A case has been filed with Siddhirganj Police Station under the anti-terrorism act, accusing unknown persons.

The SP also said, "We are trying to identify the passenger who left the bag in the bus. The staff informed us that possibly someone got on the bus with the bomb in Gabtoli and then got off at Sayedabad, leaving the bag behind."

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