

Foreign ministry protests statement of 6 civil society organisations

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The foreign ministry yesterday protested the recent statement issued by six international civil society organisations (CSOs) that raised questions about the fairness of the January 7 national polls and called for a re-election.

On January 12, the CSOs in their joint statement said the election was neither genuine nor competitive and raised questions about its adherence to democratic principles and international election standards.

The six CSOs are Asian Network for Free Elections, World Alliance for Citizen Participation, International Federation for Human Rights, Asian Democracy Network, Capital Punishment Justice Project (Australia), and Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network.

In its own statement released yesterday, the foreign ministry termed the allegations "false and baseless" and said the 12th parliamentary election was held in a "free, fair, transparent, and festive atmosphere with the participation of the people."

"A total of 1,534 candidates from 28 registered political parties and 436 independent candidates contested the elections. The voter turnout was as high as 70 percent in many rural constituencies, and the national average turnout was 41.8 percent," the statement read.

Additionally, it stated that despite challenges brought on by the BNP's use of violence in the run-up to the election, the voting day passed with an exceptionally high degree of calm, with only a few isolated incidents at a small number of polling places.

"Many international election observers and journalists, who actively reported on the elections from the field, attested to this truth."

The foreign ministry also claimed the members of the law enforcement agency responded to the incidents of violence that occurred in the run-up to the elections with restraint, proportionality and adherence to legal boundaries.

"Those who committed arson and disrupted public life to subvert the election were arrested under specific allegations. These measures were deemed necessary to uphold the rule of law and protect the rights of all citizens."

"The joint statement of the international civil society groups is, therefore, misleading, one-sided and unacceptable. It has been issued with an ulterior motive to encourage anti-democratic and anti-election forces that made their ill attempts to thwart the elections," the ministry statement concluded.



PHOTO: STARR

A new food lane IN TOWN

RBR

Nights are just the opposite of the mad haste and the chaos that are Dhaka days. As the evening progresses and the rush dies down, the city awakes in a whole different tangent; it is time when the street food scene of this metro comes to life.

We all know the regular haunts -- Bailey Road, Taltala, Banani II, and Mohammadpur -- but there is another hidden street that is full of lively activity featuring all sorts of delights. Eskaton or Paribagh are now almost at the beginning of becoming a food hub in Dhaka.

Street Food of Paribagh, as the place is known by, is at Eskaton Garden Road, near Paribagh footbridge and



it is the latest bustling street market in town. Unlike other streets, it is situated at the dead end near BTCL (Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited) headquarters. The activities begin at 6:00pm and



continue until 11:00pm. The best part of this street is its corner placement. Unlike other food lanes, there is ample space to walk around and check out the delicious array of food this street has to offer.

The famous kalai ruti, a speciality of Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi, is a flatbread made of black gram (mashkakai) and rice flour. The dish served with mashed aubergine mixed with mustard oil, onions, and burnt red chilli, along with a piece of kalai ruti costs Tk 50. And then there are other add-ons, spicy duck curry, and beef tripe. The carts also sell rice flour bread with nihari and offer an assortment of rice cakes.

Recently, momos have become the most favoured street food in Dhaka,

mostly because the steamed, bite-size food is healthy and filling. The carts in this street have BBQ momos, which are slightly charred with a blowtorch. The gimmick of the entire act adds to the attraction. Selling non-stop with a Tk 17 profit from each plate -- this is the story of one single cart. All similar food stalls are buzzing with activity, a testament to the popularity of the place.

Pizzas are popular. The stalls selling them have live action going on; it is prepared with exotic and fresh ingredients, following a fusion-style technique and is cooked in wood-fired ovens. Plastic stools are scattered around the place which gives an alfresco dine-in feeling. Cheesy French fries, spiral potato fries on sticks, fresh fruit juice, coffee/tea -- all are present here. The tea cart has six to seven variations of motka cha alone!

However, people's real favourite are the barbecue joints. They offer assorted seafood like crabs, coral fish, tilapia, tuna, and surma. The marinated fish are on display and customers can order according to their choice. The place offers delicious poultry and meat barbecue on the menu comprising beef chaap, chicken sheek, and chicken Hariyali kabab.

Dinner at this food lane starts for only Tk 100 per head and that is not bad at all. Moreover, if you are strapped for money, treating your friends or yourself to a delicious low-priced dinner, is not an issue here. The place is a must-visit to lift your spirits on these foggy nights of January.

Two Rohingya men killed Ukhiya camps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

In the span of 24 hours, two Rohingya men were killed in the refugee camps of Ukhiya upazila in Cox's Bazar between Thursday night and yesterday afternoon.

Police claimed Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (Arsa) members were behind the killings.

Around 4:30pm yesterday, Hujit Ullah, 35, of Block C6 of Camp-19, was hacked to death at Jamal Bazar Chaumohoni in Camp-19, said Md Shamim Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Ukhiya Police Station.

Later, his body was recovered and sent to Cox's Bazar General Hospital for autopsy, the police official said.

On Friday, around 8:30pm, Rahim Ullah, 35, a former community leader of Block M 27 of Camp-20, was stabbed to death allegedly by the Arsa members.

According to locals, Rahim left Arsa around five months ago and went into hiding. Members of Arsa visited his house in search of him several times, they added.

2-year-old girl beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A two-year-old girl was beaten to death allegedly by her stepmother in Jashore town yesterday afternoon.

The victim was identified as Ayesha Mariam, daughter of Pintu Mia of Kharki Bamanpara area of the district town.

Meanwhile, police have detained the child's father and stepmother Parveen Khatun, for interrogation, said Abdur Razzak, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

Neighbours said Ayesha's father Pintu is a painter by profession and leaves home every morning for work.

Parveen beat Ayesha this morning when Pintu was out of the house, leaving her seriously injured.

As the girl lost consciousness, neighbours rescued her and took her to Jashore General Hospital where doctors declared her dead, said Rahima, a neighbour.

Pintu said he came to Jashore from Chandpur a few years ago to work.

Pintu said after getting the news around 1:00pm, he went to the hospital and found Ayesha dead.

Two children drown in pond

UNB, Chandpur

Two children drowned in a pond in Purbo Kalchho village of Kachua upazila in Chandpur yesterday, said police.

The deceased were identified as one-and-a-half-year-old Abu Sayeed, son of Yeasin Talukdar, and his cousin Abrar Hossain, 2, son of Mahin Talukdar, hailing from Talukdar Bari of the Kalchho village.

Locals said the children fell into the pond when they were playing on the bank of the pond in the morning.

At one stage of a frantic search that followed the discovery that they were missing, the bodies of the children were found floating in the pond.

They were taken to Kachua Upazila Health Complex where physicians declared them dead on arrival.

Confirming the matter, Kachua Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mizanur Rahman said an unnatural death case will be lodged in this connection.

Cold wave may worsen this week

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Rajshahi, Pabna, Naogaon, Chuadanga, and Kushtia, and it may continue."

Temperatures between 8 and 10 degrees Celsius are considered mild cold waves, 6 to 8 degrees Celsius are moderate cold waves, and less than 6 degrees Celsius are severe cold waves.

The lowest temperature in the country yesterday was recorded at 8.8 degrees Celsius in Dinajpur, while the highest temperature was recorded at 26.4 degrees Celsius in Teknaf.

Moderate to thick fog may occur over the country between midnight and morning, and it may continue till noon in several places.

Air navigation, inland river transport, and road communication may be disrupted temporarily due to fog.

The weather may remain dry, with temporary partly cloudy skies over the country.

Night and day temperatures may remain nearly unchanged across the country. Cold weather conditions are likely to prevail in places across the country.

People in the country, including residents of Dhaka, have been feeling the pinch of winter in the last couple of days due to the dip in the mercury.

Most people preferred to stay indoors due to the shivering cold.

Low-income people were seen sitting around makeshift campfires to protect themselves from the cold. And there was also a rush to buy warm clothes in the second-hand winter clothing markets.

People in the northern parts have been experiencing shivering colds for the last couple of days, which has disrupted daily activities.

Day labourers, children, and the elderly are worst hit by the bone-chilling cold.

In Barishal, more than 1,200 children were admitted to hospitals with cold-related illnesses over the last week, said Divisional Health Officer Shyamal Krishna Mondal.

How Arav Khan preyed on migrants in Dubai

FROM PAGE 1

After the sudden death of his son in July 2022, Aynal decided to move back to Bangladesh for good.

That was when he was approached by Arav, who offered to send his savings back to Bangladesh.

"He [Arav] addressed me as baba (father) -- I was amazed by his behaviour. He told me that 'you are mentally devastated, give me the money, I will send it to your family,'" he added.

For Tariqul Islam, a software engineer in Dubai, Arav's approach was different.

In December 2022, he requested Tariqul to deposit AED 178,000 to his account for five minutes so that he could show the requisite account balance to sign the lease agreement for Arav Jewellers.

"Being a Bangladeshi, I helped him and deposited the amount in December last year. But the five minutes never came," Tariqul told The Daily Star.

It was the opening of this jewellery store three months after he took the sum from Tariqul that catapulted him to the public eye.

He managed to get cricketer Shakib Al Hasan and other celebrities to attend the launch event.

It is under the garb of Arav Jewellers that he swindled Yousuf Ali and six others.

Convinced by Arav's pitch that he would "make a fortune", Yousuf invested AED 37,500 in Arav Jewellers. Yousuf never got any stake in Arav Jewellers.

Mohammad Hosain Faisal though did end up getting 50 percent shares

of Arav Jewellers through a court.

Faisal originally gave Arav AED 12.7 lakh as an investment in Arav Jewellers.

"But soon I realised my mistake and returned the share to Arav through a local court."

Faisal asked Arav to return the amount and Arav wrote him a cheque of AED 5 lakh. The cheque was declined by the bank and Faisal filed a cheque bounce case against Arav.

Since then, Arav has been threatening to kill him if he asks for the money back.

He is making the same threat to Aynal. He also threatened to implicate Aynal's family members over possession of yaba if he continued to pursue legal channels to get his money back.

Network of ancient cities found in the Amazon

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as archaeological excavations, to uncover 20 settlements -- including five large cities -- connected by roads.

Stephen Rostain, an archaeologist at France's CNRS research centre and the lead author of a new study, told AFP it was like discovering "El Dorado".

The scale of this urban development -- which includes

earthen homes, ceremonial buildings and agricultural draining -- has never been seen before in the Amazon, Rostain said.

"It is not just a village, but an entire landscape that has been domesticated," he said.

Rostain said he detected the first traces of this lost civilisation 25 years ago, when he spotted hundreds of mounds in the area.

Yemen's Houthis vow 'strong response'

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(continue) to stand with our brothers in Palestine and Gaza until victory and until all Palestinian land is liberated -- not just Gaza," he said.

On Friday, hundreds of thousands of people rallied in Sanaa, chanting slogans denouncing Israel and the United States, footage broadcast by the Houthis' Al-Masirah TV showed.

Even as Houthi leaders swore retaliation, US President Joe Biden warned on Friday that he could order more strikes if they do not stop their

attacks on merchant and military vessels in one of the world's most economically vital waterways.

"We will make sure that we respond to the Houthis if they continue this outrageous behavior," Biden told reporters.

White House spokesperson John Kirby said the initial strikes had hit the Houthis' ability to store, launch and guide missiles or drones, which the group has used to threaten shipping. He said Washington had no interest in a war with Yemen.

The Houthis said five fighters were killed in the initial strikes.

Biden, whose administration removed the Houthis from a State Department list of "foreign terrorist organizations" in 2021, was asked by reporters if he felt the term "terrorist" described the movement now. "I think they are," he said.

The Red Sea crisis has added to the spread of conflict through the Middle East since Hamas rampaged through southern Israel on October 7.

Ensure a single authority

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"I think at the moment the main responsibilities of the Dhaka city mayors, if I'm not mistaken, are to control mosquitoes, which they aren't doing that well it seems, and to keep the streets clean. I don't know how you'd rate them on that front."

Sobhan also said over-urbanisation has been increasing Dhaka's traffic congestion rapidly and a lack of coordination among the two mayors is not helping.

Lambasting the allocation of 24 SUVs for new cabinet members at a time when the country is facing a foreign exchange crisis, he said, "I see now, one of the first things that was done was ordering 24 air-conditioned SUVs for the incoming ministers."

When Bangabandhu was prime minister, he used to ride a 1300cc Toyota, he added.

"It only speaks of where the development and social commitment priorities are now."

Meanwhile, Professor Nazrul Islam, chairman of the Center for Urban Studies, suggested forming a separate ministry for urban development.

Also speaking at the programme, economist Atiur Rahman, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, said urbanisation is not only about road construction.

"We must ensure urban ecology. The government should prioritise public utilities, and the authorities concerned should create more walkways, public transport and playgrounds for the public."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, said, "In recent years, Dhaka has been consistently ranked as one of the most densely populated cities globally, with approximately 35,000 people living per square kilometer."

She said that in such densely populated urban areas, ensuring opportunities and amenities for civilians is a challenging task.

"It's only feasible when urban planning and laws are

comprehensive, and standards for formal organisation, capacity management and accountability are clearly defined."

Public transport specialist Prof Shamsul Hoque said Bus Franchising System -- under which the deregulated bus market is suspended and bus operators are only able to provide services under contract to the local transport authority -- is a transformative step towards creating a sustainable, disciplined, and efficient public transport system in Dhaka, adding that, "For that, proper planning, regulatory frameworks, and collaboration of stakeholders is essential in this regard."

BAPA President Nur Mohammad Talukdar presided over the conference, in which 15 papers were presented in four sessions.

BAPA Vice President Iqbal Habib, Khandaker Bazlul Haque, general secretary Alamgir Kabir also spoke at the event.

Taiwan

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rejects China's territorial claims, was seeking a third successive four-year term, unprecedented under Taiwan's current electoral system.

Lai also only won 40 percent of the vote in Taiwan's first-post system, unlike current President Tsai Ing-wen who was re-elected by a landslide four years ago with more than 50 of the vote.

Still, Lai lauded his victory. "We've written a new page for Taiwan's history of democracy," Lai, long the frontrunner in the polls, told reporters after both his opponents conceded defeat.

Lai said he would maintain the status quo in relations across the Taiwan Strait, but that he was "determined to safeguard Taiwan from threats and intimidation from China".

At the same time, he emphasised the need for cooperation and dialogue with Beijing on an equal basis to "replace confrontation", though he didn't give specifics.