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UPAZILA ELECTION This phase also set to see low turnout Say experts as 87 upazilas go to polls today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 87 upazilas will go to polls today in the third phase of the upazila parishad elections.

According to election experts, the third phase of the elections may have a low turnout due to a lack of enthusiasm and festivity among voters, as seen in the last two phases.

They are concerned that today's polls will result in one-sided competition due to the general apathy toward the electoral process, as evidenced by 36 percent voter turnout in the first phase and 38 percent in the second phase — the lowest turnout since 2009, when it was 70.57 percent.

The battle of ballots will take place among the independents, mostly from the ruling Awami League, as other political parties have not fielded any candidates.

The BNP, among other parties, is staying away from the polls as it did in the January 7 election, saying that the incumbent Election Commission is not capable of holding the elections for local government bodies in a free and fair manner.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Ifekharuzzaman said that similar to national elections, upazila elections are increasingly witnessing one-party dominance.

"Aside from around three percent of the total candidates, the rest are all independents, most of whom are ruling Awami League leaders."

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Palestinians travel in a donkey-drawn cart loaded with their belongings as they flee Rafah due to an Israeli military operation in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

HK arrests 6 for sedition under new law

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong national security police arrested six people across the city yesterday under a new security law for alleged seditious intent, including a pro-democracy barrister already behind bars.

Security Secretary Chris Tang told reporters the six were suspected of using a Facebook page to "advocate hatred" against the governments in Hong Kong and China, which took back control of the former British colony in 1997, and against the judiciary.

He said one of those arrested was Chow Hang-tung, a prominent barrister and pro-democracy activist who has been detained since September 2021 at a maximum security women's prison.

These were the first arrests under a new batch of national security laws that were passed by the city's pro-Beijing legislature in March despite international criticism by

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Airfare to Malaysia surges fivefold

Demand soars as Bangladeshi migrant workers rush to reach KL by May 31 deadline; 'airlines exploiting situation'

RASHIDUL HASAN

Ticket prices for Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur flights have reached exorbitant levels with Bangladeshi migrant workers scrambling to reach Malaysia by May 31.

The prices have gone up to an all-time high — Tk 1 lakh — due to a high demand.

The Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) blamed mismanagement and a lack of coordination among the respective ministries and departments, especially the expatriates' welfare ministry, for this situation.

Usually, the air ticket prices for this popular route, on which Biman, US-Bangla, Batik Air and Malaysia Airlines operate direct flights, range between Tk 20,000 and 25,000.

Officials of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) said the Malaysian labour market reopened

"It's the expatriates' welfare ministry's responsibility to know the number of workers and the demand for air tickets ... It just sat idle."

Abdus Salam Aref, president of Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh

for Bangladesh in July 2022 after a four-year-long closure. Since then, more than 4.50 lakh Bangladeshi workers have gone to the country.

Several international organisations had raised concerns regarding irregularities in sending workers.

They shed light on how the workers were not being given the jobs promised, and also on other forms of exploitation. This resulted in Malaysia closing the labour market again.

However, an already-approved batch of workers were given the deadline of May 31 to enter the country, driving up the demand for the tickets, the BAIRA officials said.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines, the national flag carrier, has been operating four special flights for the convenience of

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EXTORTION CASE Two ex-cops, accomplice jailed

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court on Monday sentenced three people, including two former policemen, to four years and six months of imprisonment in a case filed over the extortion of a driver of a ride-sharing company by threatening to implicate him in a narcotics case.

The convicts are former assistant sub inspector (ASI) Monirul Islam and constable SM Julfikar Ali of Shahjahanpur Police Station, and their accomplice Nuruddin Ahmed Sumon.

Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Md Tofazzal Hossain handed down the verdict in presence of the convicts in the courtroom.

After the judgment, the magistrate denied their bail petition and sent them to Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence delivered their arguments and

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21 killed as Israeli tanks hit tent camp west of Rafah

Say Gaza health officials; Spain, Ireland, Norway officially recognise Palestinian statehood

REUTERS, Cairo

Israeli strikes on a tent camp in an evacuation area west of Rafah killed at least 21 Palestinians yesterday, Gaza health authorities said, and tanks advanced to the centre of the southern Gaza city for the first time after a night of heavy bombardment.

Two days after an Israeli airstrike on another camp stirred global condemnation, Gaza emergency services said four tank shells hit a cluster of tents in Al-Mawasi, a coastal area that Israel had advised civilians in Rafah to move to for safety.

At least 12 of the dead were women, according to medical officials in the Hamas-run Palestinian enclave. An Israeli military spokesperson said: "As of this time, we are not aware of this incident."

In central Rafah, tanks and armoured vehicles mounted with machineguns were spotted near Al-Awda mosque, witnesses told Reuters. The Israeli military said its forces continued to operate in the Rafah area, without commenting on reported advances into the city centre. International unease over Israel's

- Israeli tanks reach centre of Rafah
- Around 1m fled Rafah in 3 weeks: UNRWA
- Death toll in Gaza rises to 36,096

three-week-old Rafah offensive has turned to outrage after an attack on Sunday set off a blaze in a tent camp in a western district of the city, killing at least 45 people.

At Algeria's request, the UN Security Council was scheduled to hold an urgent closed door session later yesterday to discuss the situation in Rafah.

Global leaders voiced horror at the fire in a designated "humanitarian zone" of Rafah where families uprooted by fighting elsewhere had sought shelter, and urged the implementation of a World Court order last week for a halt to Israel's assault.

In a diplomatic move purportedly aimed at reining in the violence, Spain, Ireland and Norway officially recognised a Palestinian state yesterday.

The three countries have said they hope their decision will accelerate efforts towards securing a ceasefire in Israel's offensive in Gaza, now in its eighth month, that has reduced much of the densely populated territory to rubble.

The health ministry in Gaza said yesterday that at least 36,096 Palestinians have been killed in the territory during the offensive. The toll includes at least 46 deaths over the past 24 hours, a ministry statement said.

Residents said Rafah's Tel Al-Sultan neighbourhood, the scene of Sunday's night-time strike in which tents and shelters were set ablaze as families settled down to sleep, was still being bombed.

Around one million people — many repeatedly displaced by shifting waves of the offensive — have fled the Israeli offensive in Rafah since early May, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) reported yesterday.

Two arrested over assault on Star journo

STAR REPORT

Police early yesterday arrested two people over the assault on The Daily Star's Savar correspondent.

The arrestees are Monir Hossen and Babul, said Sudip Kumar Gope, sub-inspector of Savar Model Thana.

"We arrested the duo in Savar early in the morning. The snatched mobile phone of the victim was also recovered the day before."

The arrestees were sent to jail after via a court order, he added.

On Sunday, Aklakur Rahman Akash, the Savar correspondent of The Daily Star, was severely beaten while covering a dispute among the owners of a ceramic factory in Savar.

Akash was rushed to Enam Medical College and Hospital with injuries to his face, eyes, and head, among other parts of the body.

Later, he was transferred to Dhaka for better treatment.

The next day, a case was filed with Savar Model Police Station over the attack.



MAN'S BEST FRIENDS ... Salam, around 50 years old, has been raising these two dogs for eight months. The two stay with him while he works as a DNCC-appointed garbage cleaner in the capital's Gulshan area. Every now and then, Salam can be seen turning around to give his boys some pats on their heads.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Philippines deploys river rangers in battle against plastic

AFP, Manila

Using a long-handled net, Ronnel Narvas scoops up discarded plastic soft drink bottles, shopping bags and palm-sized sachets as he wades through a foul-smelling tributary in the Philippine capital Manila.



Narvas, 30, is one of more than a thousand rangers employed by the government to clean up the city's waterways, where tonnes of rubbish end up every year.

"It's disappointing, because no matter how diligent we are at cleaning up, the garbage does not run out," Narvas told AFP of the never-ending battle against trash. "But we need to persevere... at least we are managing to reduce it instead of letting it pile up more."

Inadequate garbage collection services, lack of disposal and recycling facilities, and grinding poverty have been blamed for the growing problem of plastic waste across the country.

The Philippines produces about 61,000 tonnes of trash every day, up to 24 percent of it plastic, figures from the environment department show.