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Operation Devil Hunt launched

Joint forces begin nationwide drive to maintain law and order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has launched Operation Devil Hunt, a drive of the joint forces, to maintain law and order across the country following Friday night's attack on "students and common people" in Gazipur.

The home ministry made the decision at a meeting with law enforcement agencies yesterday, according to a press release signed by Faisal Hasan, director (public relations) of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The joint forces are conducting the operation in Gazipur and areas concerned across the country "to bring the criminals to justice", said the release.

Ministry sources say the officers will go after "the saboteurs who attacked the students, individuals against whom there are warrants and troublemakers" in order to lower the incidents of mob violence and to restore law and order.

Details of the drive will be announced at a press conference today.

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Top officials of the agencies concerned will meet in the morning today to work out a coordinated plan for the operation, Shahjada Ashadujjaman, additional deputy inspector general (operations) at Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star.

The Police Headquarters have issued primary instructions to superintendents of police in different districts, he said, adding that more coordinated instructions would be given today.

In Gazipur, several individuals were seriously injured in Friday night's attack by "criminals with ties to the fallen dictatorship", said the home ministry release.

Yesterday evening, Gazipur Metropolitan Police Commissioner Nazmul Karim Khan said, "Operation Devil Hunt will be conducted to combat Awami fascism."

Sixteen people have been arrested in connection with the attack, he told reporters.

Chowdhury Zaber Sadeque SP Gazipur told The Daily Star last night that eight people had been arrested.

"A thorough search will be conducted [Saturday] night. Everyone involved will be brought under the law. A decision has already been made by the home ministry."

Last night, army vehicles patrolled different streets and highways in Gazipur.

The attack took place around 10:00pm on Friday, when a group of individuals gathered near the residence of former Liberation War affairs minister AKM Mozammel Haque in Gazipur.

Then somebody announced from a nearby mosque that robbers had attacked the house. Soon, a large group

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Leaders of Students Against Discrimination demonstrate at Rajbari Math in Gazipur city in protest at Friday night's attack on "students and masses" in the Dhirasram area.

PHOTO: MONJURUL HAQUE

6 MONTHS OF INTERIM GOVT

Citizens still in fear for safety

MUNTAKIM SAAD and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The law and order situation remains a huge concern six months after the interim government assumed office, with incidents of mugging, extortion, and even murder continuing to occur.

Many citizens feel unprotected and vulnerable since law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, have not been able to regain control despite arresting a significant number of suspected criminals, including muggers and extortionists.

In parts of Dhaka, residents are afraid of venturing out after dark as machete-wielding muggers targeting people in broad daylight have made headlines several times in recent months.

Tanvir Islam, a software engineer, said he was mugged two times in the Mohammadpur area — once in September last year and again in January this year.

"I don't feel safe after dark any more. In fact, no hour is safe in Mohammadpur. People are not only being robbed, but also stabbed and hacked," he said.

Meanwhile, law enforcers' inability to control large crowds was evident

during the demolition of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's residence in Dhanmondi and structures linked to the Awami League and its leaders across the country.

Official data also show a rise in the rate of crimes.

- Official data show rise in crime rates
- Lack of trust between police, people blamed
- Police officers say they fear public outrage
- Criminologists say deterrents to crimes are not sufficient

Between September and December 2024, police reported a significant increase in dacoity, with 243 cases filed, up from 98 during the same period in 2023.

In these four months, 553 robbery incidents were recorded, along with 302 kidnappings and 949 burglaries,

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BUSINESS

In fragile trust, economy falters

Six months since the interim government took charge following the fall of the Awami League government in August last year, the country's economy remains fragile.

Although inflation eased slightly in the past two months, it continues to burden low-income families as they struggle to afford food and other essentials.

Economists point at stagnant private investment, slowed credit growth and rising default loans, with GDP growth dropping to 1.81 percent in the first quarter of FY25 — the lowest in four years.

While some ongoing reform measures offer hope, economic headwinds like high price pressures, supply chain disruptions and a weak law and order situation hinder recovery. Business confidence remains low, with fears of prolonged economic stagnation.

STORY ON B1

ATTACK ON STUDENTS IN GAZIPUR OC suspended as students protest all day

GMP chief apologises for delay in police response; man shot near Gazipur DC office

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

After day-long student protests, the authorities yesterday suspended the officer-in-charge of Gazipur Sadar Police Station for negligence during Friday night's attack on leaders and activists of the Students Against Discrimination.

In the afternoon, GMP Commissioner Nazmul Karim Khan at a protest rally held by the student platform in front of the Gazipur deputy commissioner's office said, "On behalf of the police force, I apologise for the incident that happened Friday night. I admit my failure. No attacker will be spared. Action will be taken against all the policemen for their delayed response."

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Govt has no intention to extend its stay in power Says law adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul yesterday assured political parties that the interim government has no intention to "prolong its stay in power" by unnecessarily wasting time.

"We want to move towards the national election after ensuring the urgent, fundamental, and necessary reforms based on political consensus, which are crucial to ensure free and fair election polls," he told a press briefing at the Foreign Service Academy.

The briefing was held on the report submissions of six major reform commissions — constitution, election, judiciary, police, civil service, and anti-corruption commission. The reports were published on the Cabinet Division's website.

He said political parties are suspecting that the reforms are not being made because the interim government is trying to extend its tenure. The necessary reforms can be completed if this suspicion is removed, he said.

Nazrul also said said the government is keen on beginning talks with political parties from mid-February. "If the parties agree, the discussions could continue even during Ramadan."

"We've already said the election could be held between December 2025 and June 2026. Considering monsoon, it might be brought forward to March or April 2026... Everything will be finalised based on political consensus."

About how long it might take to carry out the necessary

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DIG Molla Nazrul among 4 cops held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Molla Nazrul Islam, a deputy inspector general (DIG) at Bangladesh Police Academy in Rajshahi, has been detained.

Three officials with the rank of a superintendent of police (SP) have also reportedly been detained.

Molla Nazrul was held yesterday afternoon with the assistance of Rajshahi District Police, a top official of Bangladesh Police's Rajshahi Range told The Daily Star.

Later, a team from Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Detective Branch arrived and took Molla Nazrul with them, the Rajshahi Range official said.

Molla Nazrul had served at the Criminal Investigation Department. After being promoted to DIG, he worked as the commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police for several months in 2022. Then he was transferred to the Armed Police Battalion.

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A person taking away bricks while others look for recyclable construction materials from the ruins of the Dhanmondi-32 residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Election rigging was catastrophic for country

Says Electoral Reform Commission about last 3 nat'l polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The extent of rigging and irregularities in the last three elections under the Sheikh Hasina-led government was not only surprising for Bangladesh but also for the world and had a catastrophic result, said the Electoral Reform Commission.

In the past decade and a half, Bangladesh has faced numerous crises, all of which began with the collapse of its electoral system, said the commission's full report, which was submitted to the interim government yesterday.

As institutions were destroyed and elections went into exile, the government led by Hasina unleashed "a steamroller of tyranny and oppression on the entire nation, severely trampling human rights and the rule of law".

Oligarchy, kleptocracy, and coterie politics have created a highly discriminatory society, turning Bangladesh into a haven for corruption.

As part of her plan to "cling to power illegally", Hasina in 2011 had amended the constitution to remove the election-time caretaker government system.

Subsequently, the old culture of rigged elections returned to Bangladesh, said the report, which contains more than 200 recommendations that would ensure citizens' voting rights and make the democratic system effective.

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 3

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