

US federal agents shoot two in Portland

AFP, Los Angeles

US federal agents shot and wounded two people in the western city of Portland, Oregon on Thursday, local police said.

The shooting came the day after a masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent shot and killed a woman in Minneapolis, sparking widespread anger over the increasingly militarized presence of federal agents on US streets.

"Two people are in the hospital following a shooting involving federal agents," a statement from Portland Police said.

The local police force -- which stressed its officers were not involved in the shooting -- said they had received calls for help mid-afternoon.

"Officers responded and found a male and female with apparent gunshot wounds. Officers applied a tourniquet and summoned emergency medical personnel," the statement said.

"The patients were transported to the hospital. Their conditions are unknown. Officers have determined the two people were injured in the shooting involving federal agents."



Firefighters extinguish flames from a bus that overturned after colliding with a battery-run autorickshaw and a motorcycle on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Cumilla's Baniapara area yesterday afternoon. The blaze claimed the lives of four people, including two children, and injured at least 30 others.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Young voters poised to shape next election

FROM PAGE 1

their choice could also shape the outcome of a referendum on constitutional matters under the July charter, born of the recent mass uprising.

The numbers tell a story of scale. In the 2008 election, Bangladesh had 8,10,87,003 registered voters. By November 18, 2025, that figure had grown to 12,76,95,183, including 6,28,79,042 women -- an increase of 4,66,08,180 voters over 17 years.

Election Commission data show that as of January 5, 2026, some 5,56,53,176 voters are aged between 18 and 37, accounting for 43.56 percent of the electorate. While definitions of "youth" vary internationally, Bangladesh's National Youth Policy 2017 classifies those aged 18-35 as young.

"And this huge percentage is a major factor. Because in Bangladesh, whenever you see a truly competitive election between two parties, with fierce rivalry, you'll notice that sometimes a candidate wins by just a few hundred votes, sometimes even fewer," said election analyst Abdul Alim.

"Whichever side the majority of these young voters support, that candidate's chances of winning will be significantly higher," he added.

Both Alim and Majumdar noted that many new voters were effectively denied ballots in the past three disputed elections. "Many tried to vote but were unable to," Majumdar said.

"They are a decisive factor in the national election to be held on February 12. For a referendum, they would be an even greater deciding factor," said Majumdar, who is also secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik.

The political backdrop has sharpened these stakes. In July 2024, a youth-led uprising culminated in regime change the following month and the installation of an interim government. Although elections are typically held every five years, the upcoming polls came just two years after the January 2024 vote, following the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government.

Most of these young voters, Majumdar said, were not mere observers. "Many of them witnessed their friends and

acquaintances sacrifice their lives or suffer injuries. So it is a very sensitive issue for them."

"They took to the streets for the vision of creating a new Bangladesh. This movement is captured by three priorities: one is election, another is reform, and the third is justice."

EAGERLY WAITING

That urgency is reflected in surveys. The Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre's Youth Matters Survey 2025, released in mid-December and based on responses from 2,545 people aged

parties after their demand for a nonpartisan caretaker government was rejected. As a result, 153 MPs were elected unopposed, and turnout stood at 40.04 percent.

The opposition returned to the fray in December 2018, but the vote was marred by allegations of overnight ballot-box stuffing. Opposition parties claimed that 30 to 60 percent of votes had been cast before polling day. A study by Transparency International Bangladesh found evidence of such practices in 33 of the 50 constituencies it surveyed. Official turnout was reported at 80 percent.

In the January 7, 2024 election, turnout fell to 41.80 percent as opposition parties again stayed away, refusing to contest polls held under Hasina's leadership. The ruling Awami League fielded independents -- widely labelled "dummy candidates" -- to maintain the appearance of competition.

For many young voters, these episodes remain fresh in memory. Some were prevented outright from voting; others faced intimidation at polling centres. Many ultimately chose not to cast a ballot.

Adnan Ahmed, a private service holder who first became a voter in 2018, recalls his experience clearly. After verification, he was given a voter serial number, beneath which an instruction was written: "Vote for Boat".

"When I proceeded to the voting booth, I found the so-called 'secret chamber' wasn't that secret. The booth was completely open, with several Chhatra League goons standing around it," he said.

"They were watching everyone cast their votes and instructing them to 'stamp on the Boat.' Intimidated, many were complying."

Adnan objected. "I asked, 'Who are you? This is supposed to be a secret booth with screens around it. Why are you breaching our privacy?'"

The confrontation escalated, and the men were on the verge of attacking him before a colleague of his father, serving as a polling officer, stepped in. Disillusioned, Adnan stayed away from the January 2024 polls.

In all three elections, the Awami League-led alliance went on to secure two-thirds majorities.

Tarique now BNP chairman

FROM PAGE 1

her death, the succession was considered inevitable under party rules.

Tarique thus becomes the fourth chairman of the BNP. The decision was unanimously endorsed at a meeting of the BNP Standing Committee held last night at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

Briefing journalists after the meeting, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the transition had been completed in accordance with the party constitution.

"The Standing Committee meeting was held. Under the party constitution, the acting chairman, Tarique Rahman, has assumed the role of chairman. We ask everyone to pray for his success in leading the party," he said.

After Khaleda's death, the issue was discussed within the party, but its constitution left little room for ambiguity. As senior vice chairman, Tarique automatically moved into the top position.

Tarique returned to the country on December 25 last year after 17 years in exile in London. Khaleda passed away on December 30, leaving the post vacant until Tarique formally took charge 10 days later.

Article 7 (Ga), sub-clause 3 of the BNP constitution stipulates that if the chairmanship falls vacant for any reason, the senior vice-chairman shall assume the post for the remainder of the term and continue until a new chairman is elected. Under sub-clause 2, Tarique had already been serving as

acting chairman since February 8, 2018 after Khaleda was imprisoned.

The party's leadership lineage traces back to September 1, 1978, when Ziaur Rahman founded the BNP and became its first chairman. He was later succeeded by then president Justice Abdus Sattar. Khaleda was elected vice-chairman in March 1983 and assumed the chairmanship in August 1984.

Tarique's political journey began early. At 22, he joined the Ghabali upazila BNP in Bogura in 1988, having been politically active even before formal membership. He rose steadily through the ranks, becoming senior joint secretary general in 2002, senior vice chairman at the party's fifth national council in 2009, and re-elected to the post at the sixth council in 2016.

Since Khaleda's imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case in 2018, he has effectively led the party as acting chairman.

VISIT POSTPONED

Meanwhile, the new party chief has postponed a planned visit to northern districts following a request from the Election Commission.

Fakhrul announced the decision after the Standing Committee meeting. Tarique had been scheduled to begin a four-day tour tomorrow, with stops in Bogura, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Nilphamari and Lalmonirhat.

Questions had arisen over whether the visit, planned ahead of the election campaign, might breach the election code of conduct.

Party leaders said the decision was taken to avoid controversy and to ensure the BNP is not accused of violating the code of conduct.

Fakhrul told reporters that the tour had been intended to pay respects to Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and the martyrs of the July uprising, including Abu Sayed, and to attend to family matters.

"Following the Election Commission's request, the BNP chairman's trip has been postponed," he said.

CONCERNS OVER KILLINGS

Fakhrul also warned that continuing violence could undermine the election environment.

"The election is scheduled for February 12, but certain groups are plotting in various ways to cast doubt on the polls and sabotage the process," he said.

Referring to recent incidents, he added, "Osman Hadi was shot dead. Several political leaders, particularly from the BNP, have been shot. Swechchhasebak Dal leader Musabbir was also killed. We have demanded the immediate arrest of those responsible and their prosecution under the law."

Addressing the interim government and the Election Commission, Fakhrul cautioned that if such killings continue, the country's electoral atmosphere would be gravely affected.

"We once again urge the government and the Election Commission to take all necessary measures so that the election environment is preserved and not allowed to deteriorate," he said.

80 health facilities lie idle

FROM PAGE 1

NON-FUNCTIONAL HOSPITALS

Residents of Talia and four nearby villages in Gazipur's Kaliganj upazila were supposed to receive healthcare at the Talia hospital from 2021 when the structure was handed over to the health authorities.

Muktar Hossain, whose family donated two acres of land for the hospital, said, "What was the point of donating the land? The hospital has been built, but it has not been made operational. People are not getting any medical services."

When asked, Gazipur Civil Surgeon Mamunur Rahman said, "The authorities have neither assigned health workers nor made allocations for medicines."



The 20-bed hospital in Gazipur's Talia village.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

The unused Bangladesh Institute of Health Management in Savar.

A 100-bed children's hospital on 1.65 acres of land in Rangpur city has also remained unused for around six years due to a lack of manpower and medical equipment, show documents.

The three-storey facility was built at a cost of Tk 31.08 crore in November 2019 and handed over to the Civil Surgeon's Office in March 2020.

When contacted, Rangpur Civil Surgeon Shahin Sultana said several letters had been sent to the health ministry, requesting the recruitment of doctors and nurses as well as medical equipment for the hospital. But none of those yielded results.

Similar situations were found in other districts. Several structures at Sadar hospitals in seven districts -- Panchagarh, Netrakona, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Sylhet, Meherpur and Narsingdi -- were completed by June 2024, seeking to upgrade the 100-bed facilities to 250-bed ones. But all of them remain unused.

In Madaripur, a trauma centre was built at a cost of Tk 12 crore in Shibchar Upazila in November 2022 to treat victims of road crashes following a rise in accidents on the Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway.

But the three-storey facility has remained idle since then, as the authorities are yet to create posts for health workers to run the facility, said one of the officials.

A recent visit to the centre revealed that electrical sockets and equipment had been taken away from the control room.

When contacted, Madaripur Acting Civil Surgeon Sardar Mohammad Khaliluzzaman declined to comment.

In Savar, the government constructed four buildings, including a 12-storey one, for the Bangladesh Institute of Health Management (BIHM) in 2023, primarily to train doctors. But they remain unused as the authorities have yet to prepare an organogram for the institute.

Bangabandhu's Homecoming Day

FROM PAGE 1

arrested him from his Dhanmondi residence and sent him to a West Pakistani jail the following day.

In the jail, he had been counting days to the execution of the death sentence he was handed down in a farcical trial.

"I was a prisoner in the condemned cell awaiting hanging. Since the day I went to jail, I didn't know whether I would be alive or not. I was mentally ready to die, but I knew Bangladesh would be liberated," Mujib spoke emotionally about his ordeal in Pakistani prison at a news conference in London.

On arrival at Dhaka (Tejgaon) airport in the afternoon of January 10, Bangabandhu was greeted by tens of thousands of jubilant people who had been eagerly waiting to see their beloved leader since the victory on December 16.

From the airport, he was escorted to the Racecourse Maidan (now Suhrawardy Udyan) where he addressed a mammoth gathering.

Two days later, he took the oath of office as the country's prime minister on January 12.

Iran 'won't back down' in face of 'saboteurs'

FROM PAGE 1

and the aftermath of last year's war with Israel and the United States.

Khamenei yesterday insisted that the Islamic republic would "not back down" in the face of protesters who he called "vandals" and "saboteurs", in a speech broadcast on state TV.

Speaking to supporters in his first comments on the escalating protests since January 3, Khamenei said, US President Donald Trump's hands "are stained with the blood of more than a thousand Iranians" and predicted the "arrogant" US leader would be "overthrown" like the imperial dynasty that ruled Iran up to the 1979 revolution.

Iranian protesters on Thursday night stepped up their challenge to the clerical leadership with the biggest protests yet of nearly two weeks of rallies, as authorities cut internet access and the death toll from the crackdown mounted to 45.

The internet blackout has sharply reduced the amount of information getting out. Phone calls into Iran were not getting through. At least 17 flights between Dubai and Iran were cancelled, Dubai Airport's website showed.

Trump meanwhile threatened on Thursday to take severe action against Iran if its authorities "start killing people", warning Washington would "hit them very hard".

Reza Pahlavi, exiled son of the late shah, told Iranians in a social media post: "The eyes of the world are upon you. Take to the streets."

However, the extent of support inside Iran for the monarchy or for the MKO, the most vocal of émigré opposition groups, is disputed.

Trump said yesterday he would not meet Pahlavi and was "not sure that it would be appropriate" to support him.

On Thursday, the Norway-based NGO Iran Human Rights said Wednesday was the bloodiest day of demonstrations, with 13 protesters confirmed to have been killed.

Iranian media and official statements have reported at least 21 people, including security forces, killed since the unrest began, according to an AFP tally.

A former senior official from the establishment's reformist wing said the Islamic Republic's core ideological pillars -- from enforced dress codes to foreign policy choices -- did not resonate with those under 30 -- nearly half the population, reports Reuters. "The younger generation no longer believes in revolutionary slogans -- it wants to live freely," he said.

ATTACK ON PROTHOM ALO OFFICE

Eight sent to jail after remand

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent eight people to jail in a case filed over the vandalism and arson attack on the office of Prothom Alo in Dhaka's Kawran Bazar area on December 18 last year.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Raunak Jahan Taki passed the order after the Detective Branch (DB) of police produced the eight before the court on completion of remand in the case, said a sub-inspector at the court.

The eight include Naim Islam, 25; Saidur Rahman, 25; Abul Kashem, 33; Pranto Sikdar, 21; Raju Ahmed, 33; Sagar Islam, 37; Mohammad Jahangir, 28, and Mohammad Hasan, 22.

DB Sub-inspector Tridip Barua said they took the eight accused in custody for interrogation, several hours after the remand order. The accused were produced before the court after interrogation.

However, the investigator declined to speak in detail.

On December 22 last year, Prothom Alo authority filed a case with Tejgaon Police Station against 400-500 unidentified people over the attack at their office.

In the case, the complainant brought charges under the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Special Powers Act and the Cyber Security Ordinance.

Besides, The Daily Star on December 22 last year filed a case with the same police station against 350-400 unidentified people under the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Special Powers Act and the Cyber Security Ordinance over the attack at their head office in Dhaka.

Contacted, investigation officer Jahirul Islam, a DB Sub-inspector, said, "In connection with the attack on the Prothom Alo office, 26 accused are currently in jail. Among them, those involved in the attack on The Daily Star office will be shown arrested in the case filed by The Daily Star."