

BNP slams EC 'silence' over rivals' polls code violations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday alleged that the Election Commission is failing to take action against candidates and supporters of some rival parties who are campaigning in violation of the electoral code of conduct.

"The Election Commission's indifference and the silence of election officials are creating obstacles to a fair election environment. This is inappropriate, and we hope they will change their ways," said Nazrul Islam Khan, chairman of BNP's Central Election Steering Committee, at a press conference in Gulshan last night.

Calling for a level playing field and equal opportunity for all parties, he pointed out that the EC issued a show-cause notice to a less prominent BNP leader for seeking votes using the sheaf of paddy symbol at a prayer gathering.

He also said a BNP nominated candidate and his daughter were served show-cause notices over a Facebook post.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1



Iranians attend the funeral of security personnel killed in recent protests, in Tehran, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Media convention against attacks on free press Saturday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A media convention will be held in Dhaka on Saturday to protest against organised attacks on freedom of expression and democratic values, and to demonstrate a united stance in support of independent, responsible and courageous journalism.

The programme is being jointly organised by the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab) and the Editors' Council.

Titled Media Convention 2026, it will take place at the auditorium of the Krishibid Institution, Bangladesh complex, from 10:00am to 1:30pm.

Organisers said democratic values in the country have come under sustained assault in recent times, particularly through incidents of mob violence, marking an unprecedented challenge to freedom of expression and democratic principles.

Journalists will speak at the convention on the need to protect democratic space and media freedom, ensure the safety of journalists, and uphold the professional dignity and rights of media workers.

Leaders of various journalist organisations, including the Association of Television Channel Owners, Broadcast Journalist Centre, Jatiya Press Club, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Dhaka Union of Journalists, Dhaka Reporters Unity, Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh, Economic Reporters' Forum, Photo Journalists Association and Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh, have been invited to the event.

Journalists working outside Dhaka, as well as editors, publishers, invited media professionals and columnists, will also take part in the programme, which aims to stand united in defence of responsible and courageous journalism.

Discontent in 11-party combine deepens Iran, US cut contact

FROM PAGE 1

General and spokesperson Gazi Ataur Rahman acknowledged the strain openly.

"There is no scope to deny that there are problems and crises in the alliance. We carry out our politics independently. So why should we be made to accept anything imposed on us by others?" he told journalists.

"If anyone does injustice to us, or insults or ignores us, we cannot take that lightly. Everyone has a sense of self-respect," he said, adding that compromise could only work in an environment of mutual respect. "If such an environment existed, the issue of more or fewer seats would not be a major problem."

Ataur also alleged that Jamaat candidates were campaigning in constituencies as if they were the sole nominees of the alliance. "If a party's candidate or their local leaders engage in such falsehoods, then it becomes difficult to move forward together," he said.

The IAB leader also hinted at the possibility of breaking away from the existing alliance and forging a new electoral arrangement with four like-minded Islamist parties.

"Anything can happen before the January 20 deadline for nomination withdrawal," he said, adding that discussions were continuing with parties that maintained relations of respect with IAB.

Asked whether the party might contest the election on its own, Ataur said no final decision had yet been taken, as talks were still underway with several groups and the next steps would depend on an overall assessment of the situation.

At the same time, he said, the situation had not deteriorated to a point where negotiations with Jamaat had completely collapsed.

Despite mounting dissatisfaction, IAB insiders said the party ameer has yet to take a final decision on whether to leave the alliance.

On its future, IAB Secretary General Yunus said, "Jamaat didn't do justice with us. In that case, we will finalise our decision whether to remain in the alliance, after discussion with our like-minded parties within a day or two."

IAB leaders said tensions grew after Jamaat allegedly held separate meetings with the National Citizen Party, Liberal Democratic Party and Amar Bangladesh Party to bring them into the seat-sharing arrangement without informing existing partners beforehand.

They also expressed resentment over Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman's meeting with BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, where he spoke in favour of forming a national government after the election. IAB leaders said they were not informed about the matter in advance.

IAB leaders recalled that the alliance talks began after the July mass uprising, when the party took the initiative to unite Islamist forces under a single banner and field single candidates in each constituency.

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon and Bangladesh Nezam-e-Islam Party later joined the process, followed by Jamaat, and then Jatiya Ganatantrik Party and Bangladesh Development Party, as negotiations

expanded.

From the outset, IAB sought to contest more than 100 constituencies under the alliance, later scaling down its demand to more than 50 seats.

Jamaat, however, has offered 40 seats, an offer many IAB leaders remain unwilling to accept.

Khelafat Majlis, meanwhile, has demanded 25 to 30 seats, while Jamaat is reportedly willing to allocate a maximum of 20. If no agreement is reached, the party wants to keep its candidates open in those constituencies.

Several leaders of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, led by Mamunul Haque, also voiced concern over the renewed uncertainty. Its Secretary General Ahmad Abdul Qader said, "I believe the unity will remain. But some seats may have to be left open. We have said this before as well."

Multiple sources said Jamaat wants to retain around 190 to 200 seats for itself and negotiate with other parties for the remainder.

Responding to the allegations made by alliance partners, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General and alliance coordinator Hamidur Rahman Azad said, "Those who are making such allegations [regarding mistrust, division and conflict in the alliance] -- it is their own views."

Without naming IAB, he added, "If someone expects a lot, not all expectations can be fulfilled. We have to move forward together, taking everything into account."

On the postponed press conference, Azad said it would be held "soon", adding that the seat-sharing issue would also be finalised "very soon".

FROM PAGE 1

According to an Israeli assessment, Trump has decided to intervene, although the scope and timing of this action remains unclear, an Israeli official said.

The three diplomats told Reuters that some personnel had been advised to leave the US military's Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar by Wednesday evening. One of the diplomats described the move as a "posture change" rather than an "ordered evacuation".

Defying Trump's warnings and international pressure, Iranian authorities vowed to fast-track trials for what they describe as "rioters". Tehran has branded the protests as foreign-backed "acts of terror".

Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said on a visit to a prison holding protest detainees that "if a person burned someone, beheaded someone and set them on fire then we must do our work quickly", in comments broadcast by state television.

Iranian news agencies also quoted him as saying the trials should be held in public.

Iranian prosecutors have said authorities would press capital charges of "waging war against God" on some detainees.

Trump has been openly threatening to intervene in Iran for days, though without giving specifics.

In an interview with CBS News on Tuesday, Trump vowed "very strong action" if Iran executes protesters. "If they hang them, you're going to see some things," he said. He also urged Iranians on Tuesday to keep protesting and take over institutions, declaring "help is on the way".

The Iranian official, a senior figure speaking on condition of anonymity, said Tehran had asked US allies in the region to "prevent Washington from attacking Iran".

"Tehran has told regional countries, from Saudi Arabia and UAE to Turkey, that US bases in those countries will be attacked" if the US targets Iran, the official said.

Iranian Defence Minister Aziz

Nasirzadeh said that his country has "many surprises" in store for any enemy that attacks it.

"If these threats are turned into action, we will defend the country with full force and until the last drop of blood, and our defence would be painful to them," Nasirzadeh said at a security meeting, according to Press TV.

He also warned countries that provide assistance for any strike on Iran that they "will be legitimate targets".

The flow of information from inside Iran has been hampered by an internet blackout.

US-based HRANA rights group said it had so far verified the deaths of 2,403 protesters and 147 government-affiliated individuals. An Iranian

of large funeral processions for people killed in the unrest in Tehran, Isfahan and Bushehr, and other cities. People waved flags and pictures of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and held aloft signs with anti-riot slogans.

Hengaw, an Iranian Kurdish rights group, has reported a 26-year-old man, Erfan Soltani, arrested in connection with protests in the city of Karaj, was to be executed on Wednesday. Hengaw yesterday told Reuters it had not been able to confirm whether the sentence had been carried out. Reuters could not independently confirm the report.

UN and the Amnesty International yesterday called on Iran to immediately halt all executions, including Soltani's.

While Iranian authorities have weathered previous protests, the latest unrest is taking place with Tehran still recovering from last year's war, and with its regional position weakened by blows to allies such as Lebanon's Hezbollah since the October 7, 2023 Hamas-led attacks against Israel.

Asked what he meant by "help is on its way", Trump told reporters on Tuesday they would have to figure that out. Trump has said military action is among the options he is weighing.

"The killing looks like it's significant, but we don't know yet for certain," said Trump upon returning to the Washington area from Detroit.

Once he has the numbers, he said, "We'll act accordingly."

Trump on Monday announced 25 percent import tariffs on products from any country doing business with Iran, drawing strong reaction from China which relies on Tehran for its oil needs.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov yesterday vowed to continue working with Iran despite threats of attacks and tariffs from the US.

Asked about US pressure on Iran, Lavrov said Russia will implement bilateral agreements, adding no external power can alter the nature of ties between the two countries.

- Defying Trump, Iran vows fast trials for 'rioters'
- US intervening; scope, timing unclear: Israel
- US withdraws some personnel from ME bases
- Russia says US actions damaging global order

official told Reuters on Tuesday that about 2,000 people had been killed.

A Western official said it did not appear the Iranian government was facing imminent collapse and its security apparatus remained in control. The crackdown had restored some calm, though the authorities had been impacted, the official added.

An Israeli government official said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet was briefed late on Tuesday about the chances of regime collapse or US intervention. Israel fought a 12-day war against its arch-foe last year.

Iranian state TV broadcast footage

Bangladesh, 74 countries to be hit

FROM PAGE 1

"The Trump administration is bringing an end to the abuse of America's immigration system by those who would extract wealth from the American people," Fox News quoted State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott as saying.

"Immigrant visa processing from these 75 countries will be paused while the State Department reassesses immigration procedures to prevent the entry of foreign nationals who would take welfare and public benefits," he added.

The spokesperson did not elaborate on the plan. According to the report,

the pause will begin on January 21.

Fox News said Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Somalia, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Brazil, Nigeria, and Thailand are among the affected countries. The State Department has not yet released a full list.

US President Donald Trump has long expressed his desire to reduce immigration from non-European countries.

The State Department said Monday that it has revoked more than 100,000 visas since Trump returned to office, setting a one-year record. The Department of Homeland Security reported last

month that the administration has deported more than 605,000 people, while 2.5 million others left voluntarily.

The latest measure does not affect tourist, business, or other visas, including those for soccer fans attending this year's World Cup, though the Trump administration has pledged to vet all applicants' social media histories.

In November, Trump vowed to "permanently pause" migration from all "Third World countries" following a shooting near the White House by an Afghan national that killed a National Guard member.

Stick to polls code or face action

FROM PAGE 12

Local party units have been asked to immediately report any incidents involving offensive language, provocative slogans or actions that could be used by rivals to file complaints or trigger legal complications.

Sources said the BNP's Central Election Steering Committee reviews such reports daily and, when necessary, contacts candidates directly to caution them against repeat violations.

In several cases, party leaders said candidates were advised to publicly clarify or tone down remarks after concerns were raised by the central leadership.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission has issued show-cause notices to at least five BNP nominees over violating the electoral code of conduct.

In Rajshahi-1, BNP candidate Sharif Uddin was served a notice for allegedly distributing warm

clothes and party flags among drivers. Joypurhat-2 BNP contender Abdul Bari and Sherpur-3 candidate Mahmudul Haq also received a notice for breaching the election rules.

In Chattogram-15, the EC took action against BNP nominee Nazmul Mustafa for seeking votes during a prayer event. Naogaon-6 BNP candidate Sheikh Md Rezaul Islam was served a notice for allegedly putting up posters and stickers before the official start of campaigning.

The BNP has also intensified surveillance of social media platforms, which party leaders see as a growing risk area for reputational damage.

Party sources said monitoring teams are tracking Facebook, YouTube, X and other platforms to identify speeches, video clips or live broadcasts by party leaders and activists that could harm the BNP's image or provide ammunition to rival parties.

In some instances, party officials

said statements made by local leaders on digital platforms were found to be poorly worded or politically counterproductive, opening the door for criticism from opponents.

"We have seen how a single clip can be taken out of context and spread widely. That is why we are paying close attention to what is being said online," said a party insider.

According to party insiders, some leaders have already been asked to remove or edit posts, while others have been advised to avoid live broadcasts without proper preparation.

BNP has circulated internal guidelines reminding candidates and activists of acceptable language, campaign etiquette, and legal boundaries to address the issues.

Party leaders said the guidelines emphasise issue-based campaigning, focusing on economic challenges, governance, public services and voter concerns rather than personal attacks or emotional rhetoric.

Mahfuz Anam
Editor and Publisher