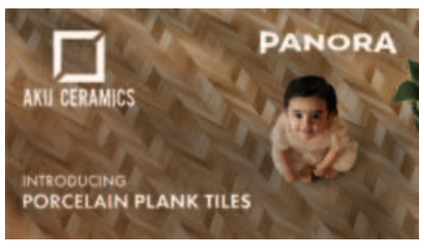

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10 DAYS TO VOTE

Parties hunting voter NIDs, phone numbers in slums

Residents also allege some even took MFS numbers

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Campaigners from major political parties have been collecting voters' national identity (NID) details and mobile phone numbers while canvassing in several slum areas of Dhaka ahead of the election, residents said.

Many residents said Jamaat-e-Islami campaigners seeking votes for Jamaat's Daripalla (balancing scale) symbol asked for NID details, sometimes along with phone numbers.

Several slum residents said BNP activists too collected NID photocopies or phone numbers during campaigning in some areas.

The Election Commission at a press release on January 22 said it had learned that certain individuals were collecting voters' personal information and NID details ahead of the February 12 national polls.

The commission warned that carrying, collecting, or transferring another person's NID information, as well as promising donations during campaigns, are punishable offences under the law.

Over the last week, this correspondent visited Bhashantek, Kafrul, Mirpur, Korail, Mohakhali Sat Tala and Tejgaon slums and spoke to at least 50 residents.

They said the trend of political activists collecting data, mainly NID information and, in some cases, phone numbers and mobile financial service numbers, had continued for weeks before declining in the beginning of the fourth week of January, when several incidents drew the attention of the authorities.

Many reported that individuals seeking votes for Jamaat went door to door asking to see NID cards and, in some instances, requested mobile numbers.

Rubina, 59, a resident of the Bhashantek Benarasi Palli field area, said that on January 21, two people came to her home asking for votes for Daripalla and requested her NID card. "When I showed it, they took photos of it on their mobile phones," she said.

The Election Commission warned that carrying, collecting, or transferring another person's NID information, as well as promising donations during election campaigns, are punishable offences under the law.

Rahela Begum, 53, of Comilla Patti in Bhashantek Slum No. 1, said that about a month ago, people claiming to be campaigners for Jamaat and another group from BNP came to her home and asked to see her NID. Both groups took photos of her NID on their phones.

In the same area, 66-year-old Mossammat Rokeya said a group gathered several men and women in the slum about two weeks ago. "Those who were voters were asked to show their NID cards and give their mobile numbers," she said. She did not provide her card as it was not with her at the time.

Munni Begum, also a resident of Bhashantek Slum No. 1, said a group of 10 to 12 people went door to door on January 21, seeking votes and collecting NID numbers. She said she challenged the group's motive, leading to an argument.

"Young men from the BNP who were nearby came over and questioned the group about seeking NID photocopies and phone numbers," Munni said. Locals then informed the police and the administration, and police and army personnel later arrived there and took the group away.

Officer-in-Charge Aslam Hossain of Bhashantek Police Station confirmed that on January 21, locals handed over eight men and four women to the police. "During questioning, they said they were collecting voter ID card details and mobile numbers from different voters," he said.

Niloy Rahman, assistant commissioner (Land) of the Gulshan circle, said the detainees told officials they were conducting an election survey and were not campaigning for any side.

However, a police officer, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the detainees could not produce any document from the EC or other authorities authorising them to conduct a survey. They were released after signing a bond, as police found no evidence of forced collection.

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Residents of the capital's Moghbazar walking along and across the railway tracks yesterday. Amid dense population and heavy traffic, many use the tracks as shortcuts to reach their destinations faster, risking life and limb.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Most of Tarique's polls pledges are area specific

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman has made over four dozen area-specific pledges over the past 10 days while campaigning in 20 districts, assuring the people of job creation, welfare, healthcare, and the development of infrastructure and agriculture.

He addressed 23 election rallies between January 22 and 31.

The BNP chief vowed to create jobs through industrial expansion, including increasing the number of EPZs in Chattogram and establishing new ones in Feni and Cumilla, to woo young voters.

In Gazipur, Tarique pledged to set up new industries, including garment factories, while industrial parks would be established in Sirajganj and Pabna if the BNP is voted to power.

Two political analysts said the area-specific promises are mainly aimed at securing votes, but without a clear framework, roadmap, funding source, and implementation plan, such pledges risk remaining unfulfilled.

During his Rajshahi visit, Tarique committed to providing special support for building agriculture-based mills in Rajshahi, Rangpur, and the northern region. He also promised tax exemptions for a certain period for IT companies to generate employment.

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This election will end 'era of Aynaghar'

Jamaat ameer tells rally in Jamalpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday described the upcoming national parliamentary election as a turning point for Bangladesh.

"It [the election] stands on the sacrifice of 1,400 martyrs. It marks the end of the dark 'Aynaghar' era. It is an election to end the tears of the martyrs' families. It is an election to bury the rotten politics of the past," he said while addressing a rally organised at the Shinghajani Bohumukhi High School field in Jamalpur.

He said that if his party is voted to power, it will ensure jobs for the youth. "The youth do not want allowances; they want work.

"We will not insult them with unemployment allowances; instead, we will give them jobs."

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13 constituencies 'highly risky'

Police cite violence, heavyweight races; security beefed up

TOUSIF KAIUM *and* MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Police have identified 13 constituencies across nine districts as "high risk" ahead of the February 12 national election, after analysing political violence since the announcement of the polls schedule on December 11.

Meanwhile, reports indicate possible sabotage and clashes.

According to a police intelligence report, the identified seats are those where heavyweights are contesting, and incidents of violence have already been reported.

At least 57 clashes occurred in 50 constituencies, leaving 257 people injured and four killed since the polls schedule was announced, police officials said.

The high-risk constituencies are: Pabna-1 and Pabna-3; Khulna-5; Patuakhali-3; Barishal-5; Tangail-4; Sherpur-3; Dhaka-8 and Dhaka-15; Cumilla-4 and Cumilla-11; and Noakhali-2 and Noakhali-6.

Police data shows that of the 57 clashes, 25 occurred between the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, while eight were intra-party clashes within the BNP, and another eight took place between the BNP and independent candidates. Around three were between the BNP and the National Citizen Party, an electoral ally of Jamaat.

"We have given instructions to increase security and police presence in these constituencies," a senior

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Fear now shapes journalism in Bangladesh

Mahfuz Anam tells Al Jazeera

STAR DESK

An overriding fear now shapes journalism in Bangladesh, where even a slight deviation from dominant narratives can invite attack, said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

Speaking to The Listening Post on Al Jazeera, he said, "Today, we have far more free mainstream media, more investigative stories. Independent thinking is definitely much more prominent than before. But that overriding fear -- that if I slightly deviate from the present popular narrative, I might be attacked -- also exists.

"To tell you frankly, we sometimes think very carefully, should I use this word or that word? This sort of thinking, which is against the culture of independent media, also exists, now."

Reflecting on the attack on The

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Chhatra Dal activists march the streets of Dhaka University yesterday in protest against what they described as a misogynistic post made by Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman on X a day earlier.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Jamaat ameer's X account posts anti-women remarks

Gets flak; party alleges hacking; BNP questions Jamaat's defence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The comment against women allegedly made from the verified X account of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman has triggered widespread debate and criticism both online and offline.

People from different walks of life, particularly women, strongly criticised the Jamaat ameer over the alleged comment and held protests at various places across the country, including the Dhaka University campus.

The party, meanwhile, claimed the account was hacked by a 'special group' and filed a GD at Hatirjheel Police Station.

At 4:37pm on Saturday, a post denigrating women was published from Jamaat ameer's verified X account. A screenshot of the post went viral on social media, sparking an outcry, particularly among women.

The post, which was later deleted, stated that women should not be in leadership roles and portrayed

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