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Army assures all-out efforts for credible polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Army will do everything required within the law to help ensure a free and fair election and referendum, Brigadier General Dewan Mohammad Monzur Hossain, director of the Military Operations Directorate at Army Headquarters, said yesterday.

Speaking at a press briefing at Gulistan's Roller Skating Complex on the army's "In Aid of Civil Power" operation, Monzur said troop deployment had been increased in phases to restore public confidence so voters can go to polling centres "without fear".

Deployment rose from 35,000 to 50,000 troops on January 10 and was further increased to 1,00,000 on January 20, he said.

Since January 20, troops have been conducting between 2,000 and 2,500 patrols daily, operating from 544 temporary camps set up across districts, upazilas and metropolitan areas. The army has also been running joint operations with the police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB),

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Thousands of army troops stand in formation during a briefing at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. They are among more than one lakh soldiers set to be deployed for the 13th national polls on February 12.

PHOTO: STAR

Couple, 2 children found dead in their Pallabi home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered the bodies of a couple and their two children from their home at Wapda Bihari Camp in the capital's Pallabi.

The deceased were identified as Md Masum, 35; his wife, Fatema Akter Sumi, 32; and their two sons, three- and a half-year-old Minhaz and 18-month-old Asad.

Their eldest, 11-year-old daughter Mahfuza, was found sleeping next door with her grandmother.

The discovery was made around 11:30am when Masum's sister-in-law went to their room. Masum was found hanging from the ceiling, while Sumi and the two toddlers were lying motionless on the bed.

AKM Alamgir Jahan, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said police were looking into how the deaths occurred.

"Preliminary findings suggest the parents were involved in the incident, but still we are investigating whether there was any third-party involvement."

The bodies would be sent for autopsy to determine the cause and time of death, he added.

Md Alauddin, a local resident, said people became concerned after getting no response from the house for several hours. "Suspecting something was wrong, they informed police after repeated attempts to contact the family failed."

Meanwhile, relatives spoke about financial stress in the household.

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Transfer of power by Feb 18: Shafiqul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government will transfer power to the newly elected representatives within three to four days of the national election, according to Shafiqul Alam, press secretary to the chief adviser.

He assured that the handover would be completed swiftly, leaving no reason for doubt.

Speaking at a press briefing yesterday at the Foreign Service Academy, following the Advisory Council's weekly meeting, Shafiqul clarified that the interim government will have no role in the next administration, which will be formed by the newly elected members of parliament.

Once MPs are sworn in, the leader of the majority party will be invited to take oath as the new prime minister.

Shafiqul said the process could be completed by February 15 or 16, and not later than February 17 or 18.

Addressing rumours, Deputy Press Secretary Azad Majumder also dismissed claims of a possible delay.

On the issue of asset disclosures of Advisory Council members, Shafiqul said the details would be published soon, likely before the government's term ends.

Providing a performance update, Shafiqul reported that since taking office, the interim government has issued 116 ordinances and signed 14 bilateral treaties. Across 68 weekly Advisory Council meetings, 526 decisions were taken, of which 439 have been implemented, reflecting an 83% implementation rate, he said. Another 16 ordinances are currently being processed.

Among recent policy decisions, the Advisory Council approved a reduction in VAT on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The previous 7.5% VAT at production and business stages, along with a 2% advance tax on imports, will be removed. Instead, a 7.5% VAT will be imposed at the import stage.

Additionally, several ordinances received final approval, including "Domestic Violence Prevention Ordinance, 2026," "Sexual Harassment Prevention in Workplaces and Educational Institutions Ordinance, 2026," "Bangladesh Gas (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026," "Postal Service

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Ensure safety of journalists during polls

Editors' Council urges authorities, parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Editors' Council has called on authorities and political parties to ensure the safety of journalists covering the upcoming elections.

In a statement yesterday, the council said, "Journalists face various risks while carrying out their duties of collecting and disseminating news during elections, and ensuring the safety and security of journalists working in the field is a very important issue at this time."

It appealed to the government, the Election Commission, and relevant law enforcement agencies to provide adequate security for journalists during election coverage and also requested political parties to play an effective role in safeguarding reporters.

The Council further said it hoped all parties concerned would understand the importance of the issue and take effective measures to ensure journalists' safety

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World watches Bangladesh election showdown

PORIMOL PALMA

Global and regional powers are closely watching the upcoming election to see how participatory and fair it is, as well as from a geopolitical and economic lens.

The interest is reflected in the number of international observers dispatched: about 500 foreign observers from 16 countries and organisations are coming, with the EU alone sending about 200 observers, its full-fledged delegation since 2008.

Foreign policy analysts say this election has garnered closer global attention because any changes here have implications not only in the region but also beyond.

"The international community has collective support for the election—they want Bangladesh to be a stable and moderate Muslim country," said M Humayun Kabir, a former ambassador and president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

Closer to home, India is closely monitoring the situation, as bilateral ties have hit rock bottom following the ouster of the Awami League government and its sheltering of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her party members.

Both countries have imposed restrictions on each other's exports, while India has drastically restricted visas for Bangladeshis.

India has security concerns for the Northeast region, while Pakistan's improving ties with Bangladesh under the interim government are another worry for New Delhi, said Shahab Enam Khan, a professor of international relations at Jahangirnagar University.

"Therefore, it is likely to engage with Bangladesh, sacrificing its ego after the polls," he said.

India is likely to be concerned from political and security standpoints if Jamaat-e-Islami wins the election but would be comfortable with a BNP-led government, said Michael Kugelman, senior fellow for South Asia at the Washington-based think tank Atlantic Council.

The BNP has already expressed its interests about wanting to engage with India, he said.

However, Khan says Indian diplomats in Dhaka also met with Jamaat leaders, suggesting New Delhi is also ready to work with Jamaat if elected.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has boosted its relations with Bangladesh.

In February 2025, the two nations resumed direct trade for the first time since 1971, and recently resumed direct flights after 14 years. The two countries also held military and defence dialogues.

"The international community has collective support for the election—they want Bangladesh to be a stable and moderate Muslim country."

M Humayun Kabir, former ambassador

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Even the CEC can administer oath to new MPs

Says Asif Nazrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul yesterday detailed the constitutional procedures for administering oaths to newly elected members of parliament amid the absence of the speaker and deputy speaker.

"Under the constitution, MPs are required to take their oath administered by the speaker. If the speaker is unavailable, the deputy speaker assumes this responsibility. If neither is available, there are provisions for that as well," Asif Nazrul said while speaking to reporters at the Secretariat.

Noting that the current situation is exceptional, the law adviser said, "One of them is missing while the other is in jail, and both are facing serious cases. Under these circumstances, I do not see any scope for them to administer the oath," he said.

According to the law, if the speaker and deputy speaker are unable to conduct the oath-taking, a person nominated by the president on the advice of the chief adviser may administer it. That could, for example, be our chief justice," Asif Nazrul explained.

He added that if the oath is not administered within three days of election results, the chief election commissioner has the authority to administer oaths.

"Now, this is a policy-level decision of the government.

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PHOTO: MONJUR MORSHED

A WATCHFUL GUARDIAN

A brown fish owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*), photographed recently in Jhenaidah, fixes its piercing gaze on the camera as it perches quietly atop a high branch. This large nocturnal raptor, commonly found near rivers, canals, and wetlands, preys on fish and amphibians and plays a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance of Bangladesh's wetland ecosystems. Recognisable by its piercing yellow eyes and powerful build, the brown fish owl is found all across South and Southeast Asia and is currently listed as "Least Concern" on the IUCN Red List.



Government reconstitutes NHRC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has reconstituted the five-member National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), appointing former High Court justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury as the new chairman. He was previously the chief of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.

Two more members of the inquiry commission — Md Nur Khan and Nabila Idris — were also made NHRC commissioners, according to a notification issued by the law ministry last night with immediate effect.

The other new members of the NHRC are Dhaka University Prof Md Shariful Islam, who was a member of the National Independent Investigation Commission, formed to re-investigate the 2009 BDR massacre at Pilkhana, and rights activist Ilira Dewan.

The notification states that the president made these appointments following the recommendation of the selection committee.

The institution remained largely inactive since the previous chairman resigned in November 2024, following the July mass uprising.