# NEWS

## Dhaka division

At least 10 people have been killed by gunshots in 34 incidents since the election schedule was declared.

The highest number of shooting incidents took place in Dhaka division (9), followed by Chattogram (7), the report added.

Police would take a zero-tolerance approach to any form of disorder around polling centres, Rezaul said.

Any mob, illegal gathering or assembly around polling centres will be dealt with firmly, he said, adding that the police will act in a completely neutral manner to ensure a free and fair election.

"No one will be given even an inch of leeway. People should not be frightened. Our request is simple: everyone should come out to vote," he said, while urging voters not to be misled or intimidated by misinformation spread on social media.

Ahead of the election, the PHQ issued a written directive instructing field officials to ensure professionalism and responsible conduct.

It clearly instructs police personnel not to show bias towards any political party, candidate or supporter and to maintain neutrality in dealing with all stakeholders during the polls.

The directive also imposes strict restrictions on the use of social media and mobile phones while on duty.

Police members are barred from making comments, posting photos or expressing opinions related to the election on Facebook or any other platform.

Political posts, comments or shares are also prohibited.

Unnecessary use of mobile phones during duty hours is not allowed and personal phone use on polling day has been banned.

The instruction stresses that any instance of fake voting or violation of the electoral code of conduct must be dealt with immediately under the law, while the use of force is permitted only if the situation goes out of control.

Police members have also been directed to ensure strict law enforcement within a 400-yard radius of polling centres, where smoking and the carrying of flammable materials, including matchsticks and lighters, are completely prohibited.

Meanwhile, police have heightened security around the transportation and storage of ballot papers and election materials following intelligence reports of possible sabotage attempts during their delivery.

## EC lifts phone

there is no room for doubt," he said.

The revised directive ensures voters, candidates, agents, journalists and observers can carry phones into polling centres, removing any ambiguity over the commission's position, he added.

The bid to ban mobile phones sparked sharp criticism, with many taking to social media to question the intent behind the move.

Critics described the decision as "unnecessary," "restrictive" and "against transparency", arguing it would undermine openness in the electoral process.

However, Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmanel Masud defended the phone ban, saying that allowing hundreds of people with cameras and mobile devices inside polling centres would create serious problems.

He acknowledged concerns about voters being without phones for hours but stressed that the restriction was part of the voting procedure.

"This is a restriction we have imposed on voters," he added.

Meanwhile, after a meeting with the EC yesterday, Jamaat leaders said their activists, particularly women, were being attacked in different areas and criticised law enforcement.

On law enforcement, Jamaat leader Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said: "We discussed the role of law enforcement officials in Khulna, Natore and Shariatpur – their actions are not conducive to a free, fair and acceptable election."

They must be given proper instructions, and if necessary, withdrawn. Otherwise, elections in those areas will not be fair.

"With only three days left before the election, we stressed the need for maximum neutrality and responsible conduct from all sides," Zubair added.

NCP Spokesman Asif Mahmud Sojib Bhuiyan said some EC activities appeared "influenced".

He also accused the EC of carrying out administrative reshuffles based on the BNP's recommendations.

"Transfers should have been neutral and systematic. Instead, we see officials being withdrawn immediately after proposals from a particular party's candidates," he said.

Meanwhile, the EC has imposed a 48-hour restriction on staying in polling areas ahead of the February 12 parliamentary election and referendum.

Except for election officials, persons authorised by the EC and residents or voters of the constituencies, no one will be allowed to remain in the polling zones from 7:30am on February 10 until 4:30pm on February 13, according to the EC.

## Governor's BB reform mission stalls

the central bank.

At the briefing yesterday, Mansur did not conceal his disappointment. "It should have been done," he said of the autonomy proposal. "We were hopeful – that is why we submitted it. Why it was not done, I cannot say. But it is in the national interest, and we will present it to the next government."

The autonomy plan, first formally proposed by Mansur in October last year, sought sweeping changes to strengthen the central bank's legal protection and align it with global standards. The package included restructuring the central bank board, elevating leadership authority and revising appointment and removal procedures for top officials – measures designed to shield monetary policy from political influence.

But in a letter to Mansur on Sunday, Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed, himself a former central bank governor, struck a cautious tone, arguing that introducing major amendments to such a fundamental law during the tenure of an interim government would not be realistic.

"It would be more reasonable for the next elected government, after assuming office, to review and amend the Order as necessary," Ahmed wrote, adding that any amendment required "detailed review" and consultation with experts and stakeholders.

As the interim administration neared the end of its term without acting on the proposal, Mansur publicly warned that delaying reform until after elections could make passage more difficult. The International Monetary Fund echoed that institutional reforms remained a priority but would fall to the next elected government.

Irked by Ahmed's letter, officials under the banner of the Bangladesh Bank Officers' Welfare Council held a protest rally yesterday, demanding the resignation of the finance adviser for shelving the proposal.

AKM Masum Billah, president of the council, accused Ahmed of taking a "dual stance," adding that he had previously supported greater autonomy when serving as central bank governor.

"We are demanding his resignation, even if it is just a day before the end of his tenure," Billah said.

The organisation urged whichever party forms the next government after the February 12 election to implement central bank autonomy swiftly, noting that major political parties have already pledged support in their election manifestos.

The episode highlights a shift in Mansur's governorship. Early in his tenure, he framed reform as urgent and achievable. Now, his focus has turned toward preserving economic stability while waiting for political space to complete unfinished tasks.

"All central banks worldwide have legal protection," Mansur said. "Politicians often seek short-term economic gains, but central bankers must ensure long term sustainability. Pressure exists everywhere – including here – and legal protection is necessary so that financial discipline is not lost again."

He warned that without stronger safeguards, past banking sector weaknesses could re-emerge. "If we do not act, the misuse and looting we saw in banking could return," he said. "Autonomy is a permanent shield."

Mansur acknowledged that broader reform remains incomplete. "Reform is a process, not a one-day event," he said. "We drafted seven laws. Two have been implemented: the Bank Resolution Act and the Bank Deposit Protection Ordinance. If the others had passed, we could have progressed further."

Mansur, former executive director of the Policy Research Institute, assumed office as the 13th governor of Bangladesh Bank on August 14, 2024, for a four-year term. Asked whether he would remain in office if his proposed reforms failed to advance under the next government, he avoided a definitive response, saying, "We will cross the bridge when it comes."

## Disinformation swarms social media

a strong opinion are provided with disinformation that influences them to vote for a certain political party. In this process, they use religion, violence and many other aspects for provocation," said Sumon, also founding editor of fact-checking organisation FactWatch.

Over one month, from mid-December 2025 to mid-January 2026, The Daily Star documented 220 cases of disinformation circulated by various party-aligned actors.

Entities that appear to support Jamaat-e-Islami top the list, with half of the documented instances of disinformation (96) coming from them within this limited dataset. The Awami League-aligned groups follow with 78, and the BNP-aligned actors 38. No official party links were examined for this story.

Together, these 220 posts received over 2 million engagements (likes, comments, and shares) within the first 24 hours after they were published, showing how fast such content can reach voters.

Jamaat-aligned entities lead the engagement share, accounting for more than 1.8 million interactions (90.68 percent). The AL and the BNP-aligned actors trail far behind with 5.13 percent and 3.57 percent of the total engagement, respectively.

### TARGETING RIVALS
Data show that disinformation in the election season is not random noise but a deliberate tactic aimed at political rivals.

Findings show the Jamaat-aligned entities directed four of every five (78 percent) pieces of disinformation at the BNP, once an ally but now the main political rival. These posts aggressively framed the BNP and its leadership as extortionists and criminals, attempting to position Jamaat as the morally superior alternative.

For example, Uttorbongo Television, which released an AI video featuring a staged interview with an elephant handler who falsely claimed the BNP was the "real extortionist".

BNP-aligned actors countered in equal measure, targeting Jamaat with 80 percent of their disinformation campaign.

These contents frequently questioned Jamaat's Islamic credentials and portrayed the party as a threat to the Hindus.

Meanwhile, pro-AL entities mostly targeted the interim government and student coordinators. Examples include a widely shared claim that Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus was plotting a civil war.

Across the political divides, defamation was the dominant weapon. Of the 220 pieces of documented disinformation, 155 were categorised as defamatory. Nearly 90 percent of all such content spread by Jamaat-aligned entities targeted the BNP, while almost all those from BNP-aligned actors focused on Jamaat.

Both sides accused each other of criminality.

On December 21, 2025, a high-engagement post falsely alleged that BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and his brother ran a multimillion-taka scheme to smuggle AL leaders across the border. But there was no evidence provided against the claim.

Jamaat-aligned actors also promoted conspiracy narratives, saying the BNP is willing to compromise national interests for Indian favour, including a fabricated story that the party's Chairperson Tarique Rahman had agreed not to purchase weapons without India's permission.

BNP-aligned pages attacked with "moral corruption" narratives, including a fabricated post accusing Chhatra Shibir activists of partying and consuming alcohol after inciting nationwide unrest over Osman Hadi's killing.

Pro-AL actors, meanwhile, focused on undermining student coordinators, Jamaat, and the interim government. One post falsely claimed that student coordinators attended a "DJ party" after Osman Hadi's funeral.

### TACTICS EMPLOYED
Nearly 59 percent of the analysed posts were manipulative content, which twisted truth into a false narrative.

For example, on January 5, 2026, BNP-aligned political analyst Maruf Mallick made one such post, distorting the findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances. Although the official report stated that most individuals still missing were from the BNP, Maruf reframed this to allege a

"secret understanding" between the AL and Jamaat-Shibir, claiming detainees linked to Jamaat had been quietly released.

This pattern was widespread.

Of the 62 manipulative posts pushed by Jamaat-aligned entities, 48 targeted the BNP, while pro-BNP actors produced 18 such posts, almost all aimed at Jamaat.

Beyond outright fabrication, political actors also distorted facts by presenting information out of context. Unlike fabrication, which relies on complete falsehoods, decontextualisation manipulates authentic information to construct a misleading narrative.

Among the content analysed, 27 posts fell into this category, where real statements or events were reframed to serve partisan agendas. For example, one video post claimed

to show a scene where a BNP leader harassed a freedom fighter. However, the video appears to show someone asking another person to change his seat.

Entities that appear to support the AL mostly pushed narratives of minority persecution, exaggerating isolated incidents into claims of widespread violence, and invoking calls for foreign intervention.

### MEDIUM USED
While videos remain the dominant vehicle for disinformation, recent patterns show the growing popularity of photocards. Of the 220 disinformation items analysed, 104 were videos and 44 photocards.

Roughly one-third of the disinformation posts relied on forged documents or fabricated quotes, with 75 such instances identified. These were split evenly between pro-Jamaat and pro-AL pages and users.

Deepfakes and other AI-generated content formed the second most common category, totalling 58 documented cases. Pro-Jamaat entities produced the highest number in this category with 27 instances, followed by pro-BNP actors with 17, and pro-AL entities with 14.

### METHODOLOGY
The 220 posts analysed were collected by monitoring a watchlist of 615 Facebook pages and profiles known for spreading disinformation and hate speech.

The watchlist was compiled through a rigorous, political party-blind selection process involving manual monitoring, targeted keyword searches, and cross-referencing with independent fact-checking resources.

Political alignment was assessed by manually reviewing the most recent 30 posts of each actor before data collection began in mid-December. No official party links were examined.

In the watchlist, 27.4 percent appeared AL-aligned, 25.57 percent Jamaat-aligned and 14.5 percent BNP-aligned. The others included the National Citizen Party, meme pages, unaffiliated content creators and other foreign entities.

(The authors are interns at The Daily Star.)

Visualisation: Abir Ayon and Abdullah Hel Bubun

### AFFILIATION-WISE COUNT & ENGAGEMENT

| AFFILIATION | COUNT | ENGAGEMENT (24HRS) | ENGAGEMENT SHARE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pro-Jamaat | 96 | 18,85,889 | 90.68% |
| Pro-AL | 78 | 1,06,602 | 5.13% |
| Pro-BNP | 38 | 74,283 | 3.57% |
| Others | 6 | 12,944 | 0.62% |

## Parties outline

"sickle" symbol represents "ending exploitation, reducing inequality, and giving workers a voice in parliament."

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Maulana Mamunul Haque called for an "insaf-based, corruption-free Islamic welfare state," stressing that "changing governments is not enough; the system must change."

He promised job guarantees for youth, fair prices for farmers, women's safety, protection for workers, and governance based on justice and accountability, urging votes for "rickshaw," the party's electoral symbol, and a "yes" vote in the referendum.

"Your vote can be a stand against injustice and a step toward a humane Bangladesh," he said.

AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan Manjur described the election as an opportunity to establish "real democracy," citing the failures of past polls and promising a "Bangladesh 2.0" based on justice, accountability, and citizens' rights.

His party's priorities include constitutional and electoral reforms, national health insurance, youth employment, education reform, and zero tolerance for corruption and political violence.

Urging votes for AB Party's "eagle" symbol, he said, "This election is about returning the country to its people."

Bangladesh Labour Party Chairman Mostafizur Rahman Iran outlined plans for a justice-based welfare state addressing corruption, unemployment, and rising prices.

He pledged affordable healthcare, low-cost housing, youth employment, fair farm prices, factory reopening, and anti-corruption measures, describing the party's goal as an "insaf-based, exploitation-free Bangladesh."

Iran called for peaceful participation and asked voters to support "pineapple," the party's electoral symbol.

Bangladesh Socialist Party (Marxist) Coordinator Masud Rana criticised decades of corruption, inequality, and foreign influence, which he said triggered the July 2024 uprising.

He said elections alone cannot deliver justice. He promised workers' and farmers' rights, guaranteed employment, universal healthcare and education, land reform, women's protection, and preservation of cultural diversity.

Rana urged citizens to vote for the party's electoral symbol, "scissors," and engage in grassroots movements to ensure a fair and equitable Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Muslim League President Zubeida Kader Chowdhury highlighted the party's commitment to justice, anti-corruption governance, Islamic values, social welfare, healthcare, agriculture, employment, and infrastructure development.

She stressed national sovereignty, fair foreign policy, and protection of marginalised communities, urging voters to support the "lantern" symbol and vote "yes" in the referendum to realise a prosperous, ethical, and equitable Bangladesh.

## Shafiqur alleges

The rally, presided over by Maulana Mahfuzul Haque, chief adviser to Mamunul's election management committee, was also attended by Nahid Islam, convener of the National Citizen Party and the nominee for the Dhaka-11 constituency.

At the gathering, Shafiqur urged supporters to start guarding polling centres from now on. "We must prevent any fraud, vote theft, or manipulator from playing with people's fate."

He alleged that a particular group has become obsessed with securing victory for a party, an individual, or a family. "People have seen them in the past and are still witnessing their greed. We believe the peace-loving people of Bangladesh will not support them. They will be rejected by the people.

"Those who stand for the people and uphold the aspirations of July will be chosen by the voters. The signs are already clear."

He also opposed the Election Commission's decision to ban mobile phones around polling centres.

"When the movement against injustice and fascism began in July, the internet was shut down to conceal crimes and legitimise killings. Now, we see the Election Commission trying to walk down the same dark path – at whose behest and why?" he questioned.

The Jamaat chief further alleged that some government officials were still engaging in partisan activities and attempting to secure victory for certain candidates. "The people's votes will decide who wins and who loses. Who gave you this responsibility? Remember, you will not be forgiven repeatedly. You were pardoned for past offences, but such forgiveness will not be repeated in the future."

He also warned that any attempt to push the country back towards fascism would be resisted, as it was in July 2024.

Shafiqur added that Mamunul Haque would be made a minister if their combine wins the polls.

He later joined a procession in his constituency, Dhaka-15, and a campaign rally in Dhaka-1 (Dohar-Nawabganj) in support of their alliance candidate.

## Rab, DGFI need to be disbanded

posted to Rab were allegedly misled into carrying out extrajudicial killings, the former army chief noted he had access to extensive intelligence through the Army Security Unit, the Director of Military Intelligence, and his interactions with Rab officers.

Speaking before the tribunal, drawing from what he said were countless interviews with army officers, Iqbal recounted three exchanges.

In the first account, Iqbal spoke about a junior officer who had just returned to the army after serving in Rab and came to his office for a routine interview.

He mentioned that his standard question to such officers was how many people they had killed and said he asked this officer the same.

"The officer answered: 'Six'."

Iqbal stated he then asked the officer whether all six killings had been carried out by him directly. "The officer explained that he had personally killed two, while in the remaining four cases he was present during the killings."

When Iqbal asked how much money he received for each killing, he said the officer replied, "Ten thousand".

"I asked what he did with the money. He told me he donated it to a mosque in his village," Iqbal said. "I realised that he had carried out these acts against his will, and out of guilt, he donated the money."

In the second incident, a lieutenant colonel also admitted to killing six people, saying he had acted on orders from his superior.

Iqbal challenged him, saying, "If I ordered you to eat excrement, would you do it?"

The officer replied in the negative. "Which is more despicable: killing an unarmed civilian or eating excrement?" Iqbal asked.

"Killing an unarmed civilian," the officer responded, before falling silent.

The third incident, Iqbal recalled, concerned a major accused of involvement in the killing of suspects linked to the rape and murder of a young woman employed at Hotel Radisson while returning home at night.

He noted that when he confronted the officer, the major defended the killings, insisting the suspects were "anti-social elements" who "had no right to live".

Iqbal told him, "By breaking the law and killing them, you too have become an anti-social element", after which he said the major gave no response.

Iqbal said the officer promised never to engage in such acts again, but he later saw him standing alongside Ziaul Ahsan, then a colonel, their arms over each other's shoulders, in a photo taken against the smoky backdrop of "Shapla Chattar" – the site of the deadly crackdown on a Hefazat-e-Islam rally in 2013.

"We all know what happened at Shapla Chattar," he said, referring to the killings during the operation.

### 'GUTTED AND DUMPED'
The former army chief also described chilling accounts of how Rab had allegedly disposed of the bodies of the victims killed in their operations.

"I have heard that those killed by Rab were disembowelled, their bodies weighed down with bricks and stones, and then dumped into rivers," he told the tribunal.

Horrified by such reports, he said he visited various army divisions and training institutions to warn officers, summoned all commanding officers to Dhaka, and reminded them of the fate of those involved in the assassinations of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman.

Observing that killings had not stopped, he said he halted the posting of army officers to DGFI, BGB, and Rab and ordered those already serving there to return to the army.

"Many reminded me that what I was doing was tantamount to mutiny," he said. "But my response to them was: ultimately, I have to answer to Allah," he added.

### 'INTENSE BACKLASH'
He remarked that his actions drew intense backlash.

"I received constant phone calls from the Military Secretary to the Prime Minister [MSPM] lodging postings."

Furthermore, Rab Director General Benazir Ahmed personally came to

him seeking officers, to which he said he gave no commitment.

During the inauguration of Hotel Radisson in Chattogram, he recalled, then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina summoned him during a meeting with police officials and instructed him to provide Rab with officers.

"I replied that due to a shortage of officers, it was not possible."

The pressure continued until his retirement, but he stressed that he stood his ground.

"Because of Rab's actions, my tenure was a deeply painful period," Iqbal said. "The pain of being unable to do anything weighed heavily on me at all times."

### 'TAINTED ARMY'
He concluded by explaining to the tribunal that his testimony was intended to cleanse the institution.

"Some believe I have taken a stand against the army," he said. "But no matter how much we try to deny it, the army has been tainted. We must not waste the opportunity for self-purification that has now come."

"This will not diminish the army's glory; rather, it will elevate it to even greater heights," he added. "The entire nation will know that the army never spares the guilty."

After his deposition was completed, a defence lawyer cross-examined him for a few minutes, and then the tribunal adjourned the proceedings till February 18.