



Protesters fire fireworks while clashing with riot police during an anti-government protest in Tirana, Albania, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

CEC assures people of free

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the polling stations in a festive spirit, vote for the candidate of your choice, and accept victory and defeat as the natural outcome of the democratic process," he said.

The CEC requested all concerned to set aside personal inconveniences and cooperate to make the national election a success. He urged people to assist election officials, judicial and executive magistrates, and law enforcement agencies in preventing any untoward incidents.

"We want to hold the election in a peaceful and festive atmosphere," he said, expressing hope that collective efforts would ensure a fair, credible and orderly vote.

Describing voting as both a civil right and a responsibility, he called on political parties, candidates and voters to remain responsible and maintain peace and harmony.

Earlier in the day, while briefing international observers and

media representatives at Hotel InterContinental in the capital, Nasir Uddin reaffirmed the Election Commission's commitment to holding a free, fair, impartial and acceptable election.

"The elections will be held as promised to the people," he said.

He added that the commission has completed all preparations in accordance with the constitution and relevant laws for today's election and referendum.

All necessary materials, including ballot papers, have already been distributed to returning officers and are being sent to respective constituencies, he said.

"Extensive security and coordination arrangements are in place with the support of law enforcement agencies and the government," he added, noting that any electoral disputes would be resolved in line with legal and constitutional procedures.

Over 100,000 fled Sudan's Kordofan since October: UN

AFP, Khartoum

More than 100,000 people have fled Sudan's embattled Kordofan since October, the United Nations said on Tuesday, as fighting escalates across the vast southern region.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a brutal war between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced over 11 million and triggered what the UN describes as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

Data from the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Tuesday showed that an estimated 115,223 people were displaced from Kordofan between October 25 and February 5.

Security measures unprecedented

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professionalism, impartiality, and responsibility to regain public trust," he said at a media briefing on Tuesday, highlighting the growing importance of cyber intelligence and social media monitoring.

Responding to a question on whether any specific threat had prompted what appears to be the largest security arrangement in recent memory, IGP Baharul said, "It is not about a threat. The matter is that we want to hold a historic election -- the safest in our history. That is the intent of the government. That is why we have taken greater preparations."

Home Adviser Lt Gen (retired) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said that all law enforcement agencies have been placed on high alert to prevent violence and sabotage.

During a visit to the Central Control Room at Police Headquarters, Jahangir warned that security forces have been empowered to enter any location, including polling centres, if necessary, to prevent violence. "Every citizen will be protected."

BGB has launched special patrols in strategic and sensitive areas. BGB Director General Maj

Gen Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui has directed the force's personnel to firmly resist any attempt to create violence, sabotage, or chaos.

Vigilance has been particularly heightened along the Myanmar border to mitigate security risks linked to the Rohingya situation and to prevent illegal infiltration. The force is also using helicopters, drones, K 9 units, and quick response teams to monitor the situation.

In Dhaka alone, 26,515 police personnel are on duty.

DMP's Deputy Commissioner Talebur Rahman said specialised units, including SWAT, K 9 Unit, the Bomb Disposal Unit, and the Crime Scene Unit, are on standby. "There is no specific threat, but we are on the highest alert," he told reporters yesterday at the DMP Media Centre on Minto Road.

Rab DG AKM Shahidur Rahman, during a visit to several polling centres in Lalmatia, Manik Mia Avenue, and Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, said the force has completed its preparations so that people can exercise their voting rights without fear.

'Don't pay heed to propaganda'

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Uddin Pradhan was detained at Syedpur Airport in Nilphamari with a large amount of cash.

In a post made around 2:00pm, it was stated, "At a time when the nation is preparing for a free, fair, and credible election, some are spreading various forms of disinformation across the country. Frightened by Jamaat's popularity and public support, a group is engaged in such attempts to mislead voters. We urge everyone not to pay heed to such propaganda."

In the same post, Shafiqur said, "Voting is your right and a sacred responsibility. Cast your vote for the candidate and symbol of your choice. The entire nation expects this."

Earlier in the morning, in a post urging women voters to turn up at polling centres in large numbers, he said, "Empower yourselves in state governance through exercising your voting rights. A society that fails to uphold the dignity of women can never prosper. If we come to power, women will not just remain within households but will proudly lead in

the mainstream of society.

"From the corporate world to politics, their talents will be valued everywhere without discrimination. We promise to build a country where no mother or sister will have to suffer from insecurity."

In another post describing Gen Z as the "heroes of the July revolution", he said, "Through your courage and sacrifice, an atmosphere for a festive election has been created after a long time. Tomorrow, it is time for you to lead once again. Through a voting revolution, let the world know that you are the architects of a new Bangladesh."

In a similar post in the evening, he told young voters, "Tomorrow is your day. You have earned this day with your blood. So, stand firm in line; do not fear any intimidation or threats. Cast your vote with confidence."

"Tomorrow, you are going to make history. Capture the memorable moments of the day in photos and videos and spread them online to let the world know about this 'voting festival'."

In another post, the Jamaat chief

alleged that at least 13 election offices were vandalised in several areas of his constituency, Dhaka-15. "Those who still try to stop us through terrorism and intimidation are forgetting that this nation has moved past July."

"The politics of muscle power has ended. People can no longer be suppressed. Those who have failed to engage in discussions on national policies and future planning are now resorting to violence."

Also yesterday, Shafiqur met representatives of two election observation missions from China and Japan at Jamaat's central office in Moghbazar.

Since the start of election campaigning on January 22, the Jamaat ameer has addressed at least 62 rallies. He travelled to some by road and to others by helicopter.

In his speeches, he not only sought votes but also appeared to build a political narrative against BNP, which he described as his party's main rival.

He is scheduled to cast his vote today at 8:00am at Monipur High School (Boys' Section) polling centre in the Mirpur 60 Feet area.

'Cash seizures' infringing on

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He also said judicial magistrates are being sent to the field without basic facilities. "Many magistrates have told us they were not given even minimum transport or security."

He warned that this could prevent quick action against centre-grabbing or irregularities.

Asif also accused a section of the media of returning to biased reporting. "We are observing that some media in Bangladesh are again taking partisan positions -- spreading misinformation and disinformation by helping specific groups."

Warning media owners and editors, he said, "Present accurate information. Do not show bias. After August 5, we showed patience and gave space. But after this election, there will be no more concessions."

"We are noting those who block one side's news, frame another side differently, or spread propaganda. After February 12, accountability will begin."

At another emergency press briefing later in the night, Asif alleged that irregularities had already begun.

He pointed to incidents of cash seizures in various areas and alleged attempts to occupy polling centres in constituencies, including Noakhali-6, Kurigram 2, Comilla 4, and Dhaka-11.

Asif urged law enforcement agencies to remain vigilant and called on the public, particularly young voters, to report any irregularities on social media. "If mainstream media fails to cover these incidents, alternative channels should be used to circulate information."

He also called on citizens to exercise their right to vote, warning that fear and intimidation could undermine democracy.

"If voters are scared into staying away from the polls, Bangladesh risks slipping back into the dark days..."

Rule of law

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friendly environment.

In international cooperation, Tarique would prioritise partnerships with Gulf Cooperation Council countries, especially Saudi Arabia -- home to more than 3 million Bangladeshis -- with whom strong commercial relations were established during his father late president Ziaur Rahman's rule, and which would likely be one of the first countries he would visit if he became prime minister.

"The highest number of Bangladeshi migrant workers are employed in Saudi Arabia, and the remittances they send significantly contribute to our economy," he said.

"I admire the Saudi Vision 2030, and I am sincerely looking forward to working with the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ... I would definitely like to visit Saudi Arabia early in my term. Personally, I also wish to visit the holy mosque, Al-Masjid Al-Haram, Makkah, to perform Umrah," Tarique said.

In relations with other countries, especially the regional powers India and Pakistan, the BNP's policy would be guided by national interest, which "is not about any specific country," he said.

"We want good relations with all our foreign friends, particularly our neighbours. We are committed to building relations of equality, cooperation and friendship with our neighbors. The foundation of that relationship will be mutual respect and understanding, which will ensure our collective progress," the BNP leader said.

Cast votes

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maintain restraint, tolerance and democratic conduct on polling day.

"This is not just an election or a constitutional process; rather, it is an important juncture that will reflect the country's future state system, democratic trends and the sovereign will of the people," the chief adviser said.

He said the referendum would allow citizens to express their views on the future structure of the state and system of governance, while the parliamentary election would enable them to choose competent and responsible representatives who respect the people's aspirations.

Describing the vote as the institutional expression of the people's democratic aspirations and self-respect, he noted that many citizens had long been deprived of their voting rights. Thanks to the July uprising, people would now directly take part in shaping state governance, he added.

"We must especially remember that, in this vote, a large number of young voters are getting the opportunity to exercise their constitutional voting rights for the first time," Yunus said.

He added, "It is our moral and constitutional responsibility to ensure that this referendum and parliamentary election become a joyful, fear-free and credible democratic experience for every voter."

He urged the administration, the Election Commission, the armed forces and law enforcement agencies to perform their duties with professionalism and impartiality so that every citizen can vote without intimidation, pressure or influence.

"Your active participation in this historic democratic journey will help us move forward together toward a peaceful, stable, inclusive and democratic Bangladesh," he concluded.

Cash recoveries, centre intrusions mark polls eve

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to work as a polling officer, was arrested with over Tk 7 lakh in cash from the election office of a Jamaat-nominated candidate in the Boishakhpara area of the district headquarters.

A mobile court sentenced Golam to two years' imprisonment, Lucky Das, assistant commissioner of Naria upazila administration, said, adding that his political identity, however, could not be known.

Earlier in the day, a team of army personnel intercepted and seized a microbus carrying Tk 10.48 lakh in cash in the Abdul Barihar area of Chattogram's Chandanaish upazila, said Md Eliash Khan, OC of Chandanaish Police Station.

Contacted, he said the army handed over the seized cash and the vehicle to the police station around 1:30am. Preliminary information suggests the seized money may belong to an independent candidate, but the matter is yet to be confirmed.

A video that went viral on social media shows a man standing beside a microbus, surrounded by army personnel, counting cash. When asked about his identity, the man identified himself as the "estate manager" of Mizanul Haque Chowdhury.

Sources said Mizanul is contesting from the Chattogram-14 constituency as an independent candidate with the football symbol.

The Daily Star could not reach him by phone despite repeated attempts.

In Cumilla's Muradnagar upazila, police detained local Jamaat leader Habibur Rahman Helali with cash from the Neamat Kandi area at noon yesterday, said Muradnagar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Abdur Rahman.

He, however, could not confirm Helali's party post or the amount of money seized.

According to the UNO, locals caught Helali around noon with the money, alleging that he was trying to buy votes.

Contacted by this newspaper, Muradnagar Police Station OC Zahidur Rahman said, "He is now in police custody and legal action will be taken upon directives from the administration."

In a separate incident in Khatra village in the district's Chaudhagram upazila, police detained two BNP men for distributing money along with voters' slips around 9:00am, said Mozammel Haque, assistant sub-inspector of Konkapoita police outpost.

In the same upazila, two Chhatra Dal activists were fined Tk 2,000 each for distributing money at Chapachou village yesterday afternoon, said Chaudhagram UNO Md Nurul Amin.

In Jamalpur's Madarganj upazila, a mobile court sentenced three persons to one month's imprisonment each and fined Tk 5,000 each on the charge of distributing money among voters in South Para area yesterday afternoon.

"They are supporters of independent candidate for Jamalpur-3 constituency Sadikur Rahman Siddiki," said Madarganj UNO Sumon Chowdhury.

Sadikur could not be reached by phone despite repeated attempts. However, in a post on Facebook, he claimed that the incident was a conspiracy against him.

In Laxmipur, an army team detained a close aide to BNP's Joint Secretary General and Laxmipur-4 candidate Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anee for carrying Tk 15 lakh in a vehicle last evening.

The detainee was identified as Anee's cousin, Badrul Alam Shyamal.

The army intercepted the car in Jhumur Golchattera area of the district headquarters, seized the money, and detained Shyamal, said Laxmipur Superintendent of Police Mohammad Abu Tareq.

Upon initial interrogation, Shyamal said the money was being taken to be distributed among the party's polling agents.

Later, he was served with a show-cause notice and replied within 30 minutes, giving the same explanation.

Shyamal was later released with the money, the SP added.

In the capital's Korail slum, a scuffle broke out between female activists of BNP and Jamaat. One Jamaat activist was reportedly injured.

Banani police OC Khalid Monsur told The Daily Star, "Female activists of Jamaat were holding a discussion with their polling agents. Hearing the news, some female supporters of BNP went there to obstruct them, leading to a scuffle.... Action will be taken if a complaint is filed."

In Patuakhali's Kalapara, a Coast Guard team detained Joint Convener of Kalapara municipality Swechhasebak Dal Kajol Mridha with Tk 50 lakh.

Police said several BNP leaders and activists entered the Demra Shamsul Haque Khan School polling centre around 6:30pm along with the school's principal, Mahbubur Molla.

On receiving the information, Jamaat leaders and activists gathered in front of the school, leading to tensions. Police later went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Meanwhile, in Dhaka-16 constituency, a mobile court sentenced two individuals -- Abu Raihan and Mehedi Hasan -- to two years' imprisonment each for forcibly entering the Mirpur Shaheed Smriti High School polling centre.

In Gopalganj-2 and -3, at least seven crude bomb explosions were reported near different polling centres after 8:00pm.

Gopalganj Additional Deputy Commissioner Sarwar Hossain said no casualties were reported.

In Chattogram city, a heated altercation broke out between Jamaat's Chattogram-8 candidate Dr Abu Naser and local BNP activists when he visited the Khalashi Pukurpar Government Primary School polling centre under Bahaddarhat Police Station at night.

The situation was later brought under control by police and army personnel.

In Bogura's Dhunat upazila, Milon Mia, 25, president of Dhunat Government Degree College Chhatra Dal, was stabbed in front of a polling centre around 8:00pm, police confirmed.

In Cumilla's Debidwar, eight supporters of NCP and Jamaat were sentenced to two days' imprisonment each by a mobile court following unrest at the Padmakot polling centre, said Debidwar police OC Md Moniruzzaman, adding that the sentences were handed down on the spot to bring the situation under control.

He said that although the identities could not yet be confirmed, the individuals were believed to be supporters of NCP, Jamaat, and the local BNP.

In Barishal's Babuganj upazila, two BNP activists were detained with more than Tk 1 lakh last night, hours before the election. Commanding Officer of the Army's 62 East Bengal, Lieutenant Colonel Faiz Ahmed, said that as part of ongoing election security operations, two motorcycle riders were detained in Madhabpasha area in the afternoon.

After a search, Tk 1,02,000 in cash and election-related slips were recovered from them. They were later handed over to Babuganj Police Station.

In Salimunnesa Girls' School polling centre in Kaliganj of Jhenidah-4, the administration seized 23 blank result sheets signed in advance by a polling agent last night.

Following the incident, presiding officer Jesmin Ara, an assistant engineer of the Department of Public Health Engineering, was withdrawn from duty.

New result sheets were supplied, confirmed District Returning Officer and Magistrate Abdullah Masud.

The seizure took place around 8:30pm in the presence of Executive Magistrate Selim Reza, Upazila Nirbahi Officer and Assistant Returning Officer Rizwana Nahid, journalists, police, and members of the army.

Magistrate Selim explained that agents of different candidates had come to submit appointment documents when the presiding officer asked them to sign blank result sheets in advance to "speed up the process".

He termed it "a mistake on part of the presiding officer", noting that Jesmin admitted the error.

Selim added that complaints from other agents prompted verification by the upazila nirbahi officer and assistant returning officer, leading to the discovery and reporting of the irregularity.

District Returning Officer Masud confirmed Jesmin Ara's withdrawal for negligence in duty and said a new presiding officer had already been appointed.

Meanwhile, tensions erupted at a polling centre in Siddhirganj of Narayanganj following allegations by a BNP candidate that Jamaat leaders and activists, with the support of a polling officer, attempted to seal ballot papers on Wednesday night.

The Jamaat candidate, however, denied the allegation.

The incident took place at Dhanakunda Popular High School polling centre in Godnail area under Siddhirganj area of Narayanganj-3 constituency.

(Our district correspondents contributed to the report.)