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## Ensure safe participation of women in polls UN urges all

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations has called on all stakeholders, including political leaders and their parties and supporters, to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to intimidation, harassment, and any other form of violence against women throughout the electoral process.

The participation of women candidates and voters and safety are essential to inclusive democratic processes, said the UN Resident Coordinator's office in a statement issued yesterday, on the eve of today's consequential polls.

Ahead of the 13th national election, the UN stressed that safe, inclusive, and meaningful participation in public life is a fundamental right.

"This includes the rights of all women and girls, including women with disabilities, women from minority communities, gender-diverse people, and others who may face heightened barriers, discrimination, or gender-based

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Security personnel stop a CNG-run autorickshaw for checking on Sat Masjid Road in Dhaka's Dhanmondi yesterday, as a sweeping security blanket covers the nation ahead of the 13th parliamentary polls and referendum.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## BNP mobilises grassroots to boost turnout

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

BNP is focusing on increasing turnout, with party leaders saying rival parties may attempt to sabotage or slow down the voting process and create fear among voters to keep them away from polling centres.

As part of this, according to party sources, BNP candidates in various areas are communicating with local leaders of Awami League, whose activities are now banned, to seek support from them.

The AL already directed its supporters to refrain from voting.

Last night in the chairman's Gulshan office, party chief Tarique Rahman enquired about the situation in constituencies and told party leaders that voter turnout must be increased.

He instructed grassroots leaders to ensure that voters are brought to polling centres, even by providing security if necessary, and to persuade them to cast their votes.

Senior BNP leaders said the party has taken extensive organisational measures to ensure a peaceful environment at the polling centres and to maximise participation.

The party has directed its grassroots leadership to deploy 100-500 activists outside each polling centre, depending on the number of voters, so that any unwanted situation can be resisted immediately.

The directives came from the meetings of BNP Central Election Steering Committee (CESC).

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## 'Guard polling centres until results are in'

BNP leader Nazrul Islam asks activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday urged its leaders, activists and voters to guard the centres in turns and not to leave polling stations until the results are officially declared.

"You will all go to the polling centres and cast your votes. Then you will receive the vote results



and only leave after that -- we want this for a free and fair election and to form a strong government with people's support," said Nazrul Islam Khan, chairman of the BNP's electoral steering committee, at a press briefing at the party's Gulshan office around 12:00am.

At the briefing, referring to media reports, Nazrul said they had received around 127 complaints alleging that Jamaat-e-Islami leaders were detained with cash while attempting to influence voters, engage in ballot stuffing, intimidate voters and run propaganda against BNP candidates.

"On the path to the election, there are many obstacles, and efforts are being made in different ways to create more barriers. Some are doing

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Cash recoveries, centre intrusions mark polls eve

At least 21 detained or jailed across country

STAR REPORT

At least 21 people were detained or jailed for possessing cash, intruding into polling centres, and other anomalies in different districts last night.

Two others held and later released were Thakurgaon district Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Belal Uddin Prodhhan and Badrul Alam Shyamal, a close aide and cousin of BNP candidate Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anee.

At Saidpur Airport, a team from the Bangladesh Army detained Thakurgaon district Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Belal Uddin Prodhhan with around Tk 74 lakh at around 12:00pm and later handed him over to police, said Nilphamari Superintendent of Police Sheikh Zahidul Islam.

Belal was later taken to the upazila health complex after he felt unwell and was subsequently moved to Rangpur Medical College.

He was later handed over to his family, said Saidpur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Rezaul Karim.

Police have filed a General Diary in this connection. Besides, police have filed an appeal before the Election Inquiry and Judicial Committee to take legal action in this regard, he added.

Speaking to police, Belal, who travelled from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, claimed he is a

teacher at Thakurgaon Salandor Alia Madrasa and also runs a garment business, and that the money came from his business.

Police said they have yet to confirm whether Belal's claims are true.

HSIA Executive Director Group Captain SM Ragib Samad said the matter was reported to airport customs authorities, but they confirmed there was no objection to the money being carried.

"Additionally, there are no restrictions on carrying money on domestic routes."

Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, assistant secretary general of Jamaat and chief of its central publicity and media department, at a press conference in Dhaka's Moghbazar yesterday, described Belal's detention as a "drama staged by law enforcement agencies" and alleged the incident was an attempt to tarnish the party's image and drag it into controversy ahead of today's election.

In Dhaka's Sutrapur area, a mobile court sentenced Md Habibur Rahman, nayebe-ameer of Sutrapur Jamaat, to two days' imprisonment immediately after his arrest, Md Nazim Uddin Al Azad, additional deputy commissioner of DMP's Lalbagh division, told The Daily Star, adding that Habibur was earlier detained over "buying votes" in the area.

Meanwhile, in Shariatpur, Golam Mostafa, a primary school teacher assigned

SEE PAGE 5 COL 5

## 'We will not leave the field'

Jamaat alleges targeted attacks before election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Alleging attacks on party activists across the country, Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday vowed not to leave the field on election day under any circumstances.

"We, the Jamaat, will stand firm against terrorists at every polling

centre, together with the people, and ensure a fair, acceptable and peaceful election. For this, we will need the cooperation of the media," said Ahsanul Mahbob Zubair, assistant secretary general of Jamaat, speaking to reporters at the Election Commission's headquarters in Dhaka's Agargaon in the evening.

Earlier, around 4:00pm, a delegation from the 11 party electoral alliance, including Jamaat and the NCP, met with the chief election commissioner.

Following the meeting, Zubair, also chief of the party's central publicity and media department, said, "This nation drove out terrorists and fascism on August 5, 2024, and the country was freed. The country will not bow its head again."

He alleged that Jamaat activists are facing attacks in various parts



SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Sports adviser's U-turn puzzles BCB, cricketers

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh's cricket community expressed collective shock at some recent remarks from Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul, in which he appeared to shift responsibility for the country's decision to not participate in the ongoing ICC Men's T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka onto the board and the players.

During a press meet on Tuesday, Nazrul said there was "no question" of having any regrets over Bangladesh's non-participation in the marquee T20 event and claimed the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials and the players had decided to make this "sacrifice".

"The decision was made by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the cricketers. They themselves made sacrifices for the safety of the country's cricket, for the safety of the people of the country. The role they played in upholding Bangladesh's dignity will always be held as exemplary," he said on Tuesday.

This remark contradicted what he had said on January 22, two days before International Cricket Council (ICC) replaced Bangladesh with Scotland in the World Cup.

"I am making it clear to everyone: the decision not to play the World Cup in India, considering security concerns -- is the government's decision," he had said right after a meeting with the cricketers about the World Cup participation situation.

That was the only time the players were invited to speak on the issue and afterwards, many of them expressed frustration, saying the decision was already made so there was no point to the discussion.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



## Buddhist monks reach DC after 2,300-mile trek

REUTERS, Washington

Draped in burnt-orange robes, two dozen Buddhist monks arrived in Washington, DC, on Tuesday on a 2,300-mile "Walk for Peace", a self-described spiritual journey across nine states that has been cheered on by crowds of thousands.

"People want this," said Joan Donoghue, 59, from Silver Spring, Maryland, who had come out with four of her friends on Tuesday to see the monks. "I went on Sunday in Virginia and I waited outside for a long time and I talked to so many people and they all said the same thing: that our country needs this. We feel divided and people want more kindness and more compassion and more peace."

The monks began their walk in Texas more than three months ago, at times braving frigid winter temperatures, sometimes with bare feet, to raise "awareness of peace, loving kindness, and compassion across America and the world."



Although long-distance public transport is allowed during the election, there were few or no passengers on the eve of voting as most homebound travellers had already left Dhaka. This photo of buses parked at Sayedabad bus terminal was taken from Mayor Hanif Flyover yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

## Venezuelan authorities move Machado ally to house arrest

AFP, Caracas

A close ally of Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado was placed under house arrest Tuesday, detained just hours after his release from prison along with other dissidents jailed under ousted leader Nicolas Maduro.

Juan Pablo Guanipa, a former National Assembly vice president, walked out of jail on Sunday after spending more than eight months behind bars on vague charges of the kind often leveled against government critics, including "terrorism," money laundering and inciting violence.

The 61-year-old was released with other political prisoners under a promise made by interim leader Delcy Rodriguez, who filled Maduro's shoes after his toppling in a deadly US military raid in January.

During his few hours of freedom, Guanipa met relatives of other political prisoners, toured Caracas in a motorcycle caravan, shouted slogans outside the feared Helicoide prison, and demanded new elections.