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MEDIA RELEASE

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Annan renews alarm about pre-election unrest in Bangladesh

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called for restraint and compromise among Bangladesh's major political players amid concern at the continuing violence and tensions ahead of national parliamentary elections scheduled for next month.

In a statement released by his spokesman, Mr. Annan said he "hopes that all parties will make the necessary compromises to ensure a peaceful and transparent electoral environment."

Under the Bangladeshi constitution, when an election is called, a non-party caretaker government is charged with overseeing the polls and ensuring they are free and fair.

Mr. Annan urged the caretaker government "to ensure a level playing field... particularly through the restoration of confidence in the Bangladesh Election Commission."

The statement also called on the national army to continue to play a neutral role, "thereby creating an environment conducive to peaceful elections."

Spokesman Stephane Dujarric expressed the Secretary-General's appreciation for "efforts by political parties to refrain from the use of violence in their programmes" and urged continued restraint.

Demonstrations and clashes between supporters of rival political parties in recent weeks have left dozens dead and hundreds injured, according to media reports.

Late last month Mr. Annan issued a statement expressing concern at the situation and dispatched a senior UN elections official to Bangladesh to hold meetings with key political and election figures.

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