

AL in great trouble as weak partners stake strong claim

Allies in greater Rangpur, Dinajpur demand 11 seats out of 33

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Smaller allies in the Awami League-led 14 party alliance have demanded 11 seats out of 33 in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur districts in the coming election, causing to raise eyebrows of local AL leaders.

There are 22 seats in greater Rangpur comprising Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha and Nilphamari districts and 11 in greater Dinajpur covering Dinajpur, Panchagarh and Thakurgaon districts.

Talking to this correspondent, political circles said only three parties of the 14 party combine are by and large active in the region and have party organisations in certain areas. These are Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu), Workers Party and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD).

JSD demands six seats, Workers Party four and BSD demands one seat from the region, sources in the parties said.

Workers Party central politbureau member Noor Mohammad Khan said his party would like to contest from four constituencies in the eight districts. These are Dinajpur-3 (Dinajpur Sadar upazila), Gaibandha-3 (Gaibandha Sadar), Thakurgaon-2 (Pirganj) and part of Ranishankail and Nilphamar-1 (Dimlia upazila).

Possible contenders are party central leader and former Dinajpur municipal chairman Mosaddek Hossain Labu from Dinajpur-3, Aminul Islam Golap from



Noor Mohammad Khan

Gaibandha-3, Shahidul Islam Shahid from Thakurgaon-2 and Noor Mohammad Khan from Nilphamari-1 constituency.

JSD (Inu) central leader and its Nilphamari district unit president Azizul Islam said his party would seek nomination from Panchagarh-1 (Panchagarh Sadar and Tentulia upazilas), Rangpur-2 (Taraganj and Badarganj), Gaibandha-2 (Saghata), Gaibandha-1 (Sadar), Rangpur-3 (Rangpur Sadar) and Nilphamari-3 (Ujaldhaka and part Kishoreganj upazilas).

JSD (Inu) would demand 14-party alliance ticket for its central joint general secretary Nazmul Haque Prodhan from Panchagarh-1, for Kumaresh Roy from Rangpur-2, for Sirajul Islam Babu from Gaibandha-2, for Md Masud from Gaibandha-1, for Ekramul Haque Swapan from Rangpur-3 and Azizul Islam from Nilphamari-3, party sources said.

BSD leader Subhrangsu Charkabarty would seek alliance



Azizul Islam

ticket from Kurigram-2 constituency.

The Workers Party politbureau member said that his party deserves the rights to have the tickets for party men because they are playing a vital role in the on going agitation for a free and fair election.

Noor Mohammad Khan and Azizul Islam said they are pro-liberation forces and struggling together with Awami League and other parties to establish voting rights of people. So, they can expect some alliance tickets in the coming election, they said.

The claim by the smaller parties evoked a sharp reaction from Awami League leaders and workers in the region. They claimed that they have 'strong' candidates to win the election in most of the 11 seats claimed by the smaller partners.

Giving the seats to them would mean losing those as the parties have 'weak organisational

strength' in those areas and showed 'disappointing performance' in last election, they said.

Former general secretary of Nilphamari Poura Awami League Mahfuzur Rahman said, "Awami League can not endanger its existence by sacrificing a number of parliamentary seats to weak candidates of small parties in the name of alliance".

Performance of the smaller partners in the region was not satisfactory 1991, 1996 and 2001 elections, he said. In 2001 election, their candidates contested separately from 15 constituencies in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur but got less than 30,000 votes in total, he said.

JSD central leader Azizul Islam contested from Nilphamari-3 and got only 496 votes, he added.

Workers Party politbureau member Noor Mohammad Khan contested from Nilphamari-1 and got only 1,743 votes. Same was the situation in other constituencies, Mahfuzur Rahman added.

Dimlia upazila AL president Aftabuddin Ahmed, who is an aspirant for ticket from Nilphamari-1, said his party has at least five 'strong' candidates in his area.

"I do not understand why Workers Party man would be fielded and how they think of victory", he said.

Some other leaders of the smaller parties however claimed that their position is better now because they are in movement along with Awami League.

Freedom fighter journos honoured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Sathkira Press Club yesterday accorded a reception to four freedom fighter turned journalists, marking the Victory Day.

They are Prof. Abu Ahmed (Daily Star), Sheikh Abdul Wazed Kochi (Inqilab) and Kalidas Roy (Janata). Slain freedom fighter turned journalist SM Alauddin's daughter Laila Parvin Sejuti attended the reception.

Chaired by Press Club President Manirul Islam Mini, the function was addressed by, among others, Prof. Abu Ahmed, Sheikh Abdul Wazed Kochi, Laila Parvin Sejuti, Subas Chowdhury (Jugantar), Ramkrishna Chakraborty (Samakal), Ruhul Quddus (BSS), advocate Abul Kalam Azad (Patradut), Sheikh Abdus Sattar (Purbanchal), Yarab Hossain (Manab Jamin), Kazi Shahidul Haque Raju (Naya Diganta), Sharifulla Kaisar Suman (Jai Jai Din) and Mostafizur Rahman Ujjal (Amader Samaya).

They paid rich tributes to martyred freedom fighters. They said anti-liberation forces are now active to foil the spirit of the Liberation War. They also demanded arrest and punishment of killers of SM Alauddin, editor of regional daily Patradut. He was killed on June 19, 1996.

Press club authorities presented them gifts.

DURJOY PABNA HERALDS FREEDOM



PHOTO: TOPU AHMED

Pabna was liberated on this day though most areas of the country were freed from Pakistani occupation forces by December 16. Durjoy Pabna, a victory memorial in the town, will be a venue for different programmes today.

FOUR UPAZILAS IN CHALAN BEEL Outlaws realise toll from farmers, loot paddy

GOLAM MOSTAFA JIBON, back from Chalan Beel, Natore

As Amon harvest has started, outlaws belonging to Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) are realising tolls including paddy from farmers in the name of 'assistance tax' in four upazilas in Chalan Beel areas in Sirajganj and Natore districts.

They are active in Tarash, Raiganj and Ullapara upazilas of Sirajganj and in at least 70 villages in Singra upazila of Natore district. The villages include Boroichora, Paril, Deoghar, Harisona, Kundason, Innipara, Deora-Shohara, Shaarol, Shohara, Jorighi, Jamtoil, Guchohogram, Syampur, Tagra, Usakol and Uttorpaikora.

Most of the victims are well off farmers but they do not dare report

to police fearing reprisal, a number of them told this correspondent during a recent visit to the areas.

They collected Tk 2 lakh from Union Parishad member Brojendro Nath in Deora village, Tk 1 lakh from Ayaz Uddin of Innipara and Tk 1.5 lakh from Ramcharan of Boroichora village, it was gathered. The outlaws looted fishes from at least 25 ponds and paddy from several lands in the area as farmers declined to pay.

At Boroitola village, they looted paddy from 20 bigha lands of Subol Chandra though he paid them Tk 1.5 lakh.

Saiful Islam of Golta village, a peon at local sub-registry office, said the outlaws took away paddy from his 15 bigha lands as he could not pay them Tk 1 lakh.

The farmers said they send messages earlier giving deadline.

After expiry of the deadline, they come at night in gangs with firearms and loot paddy from fields.

The outlaws also pasted posters and distributed leaflets in different areas claiming responsibility for the attack on Bamihal police outpost in Natore on December 28 last year, in which three constables were killed and 10 arms were looted.

The posters and leaflets said the attack was in retaliation to drives against them by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police.

Local people said PBCP outlaws have regrouped in the areas to work for certain candidates in the coming election.

Talking to this correspondent, Natore Police Superintendent Mohammad Abdul Malek did not rule out the possibility of outlaws being sheltered by political parties for use in election.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Pickets burn tires on the road at Company More (left) and a desolate Shapla Chattar in Rangpur town during day-long hartal in greater Rangpur yesterday called by Jatiya Party protesting the court verdict against its chief HM Ershad. (Story on page 16)

Bright colours, good markets too at home and abroad

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Kewatkhali Horticulture Center (KHC) here has opened up a new horizon for farmers. It has successfully grown some foreign flowers which have great export potential.

Bright coloured gladiolus, carnation, anthurium and jerbera flowers, were grown at KHC under polythene sheds during last summer and in early winter. They can be grown round the year Bangladesh's favourable climate. These have also good markets in the country.

A grower can earn Tk. 10,000 to 15,000 from 10 decimal land by growing gladiolus flower, which costs between Tk. 2000 and Tk 2500, said Assistant Horticulturist Abu Mohammed Enayetullah at KHC.

KHC started cultivation of foreign flowers in 2004 under a project of Landscape, Ornamental and Floriculture Department under the Horticulture Research Centre of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI).

The KHC collected seeds of different varieties of Gladiolus flowers from India and of carnation, anthurium and jerbera from Thailand.

These flowers are cultivated in India and Thailand as cash crops. KHC has also trained farmers in cultivation of the flowers.

Enayetullah said experiments showed that the Bangladesh's moderate climate is suitable for cultivation of the flowers. These would be more profitable even for marginal farmers than cultivation of traditional crops like jute, rice and wheat, he said.

After planting a corm of Gladiolus flower, a farmer will get three or four plants from every corm and the

growth continues round the year, he said. He can expand the area without any additional cost. A gladiolus plant yields three or four flower sticks every season and each sells between Tk 5 and 7 in local markets.

Fashionable and artistic gladiolus flowers have also good markets in big cities and district towns in Bangladesh. These are widely used in ceremonies.

Giving an estimate, Enayetullah said, at Tk 70 lakh gladiolus flowers are sold in Dhaka city alone in a year.

Carnation and anthurium are two costly varieties of flowers, mainly

grown in cold regions. They were grown in 'green house' at KHC on experimental basis to evolve ways for their easy growth in Bangladesh weather conditions.

An anthurium flower plant in a tub is sold between Tk 500 and Tk 700 depending on quality and size while a plant is sold at Tk. 60 to Tk. 80 in local markets.

The flower has good demand in China, Japan, Thailand, India, Holland and in Middle East countries.

jerbera, another foreign variety with charming bright colours, has also good market at home and abroad.

To make flower cultivation popular, KHC has taken various programmes including training for farmers. Since 2002, it has trained some 250 farmers from Mymensingh and some other districts on floriculture.

"The training programme will continue and we have a target to train 1000 farmers", said Enayetullah.

"It is a good news for us that many private organisations and interested persons have made contacts with us to learn cultivation of foreign flowers", he added.

B'BARIA FIVE MURDERS Domestic help involved

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Domestic help Renu Begum had mixed sleeping pills with curry to abet the five murders committed last month at the house of Haji Rafiqul Islam at Charchertala village in Ashuganj upazila.

She was given Tk 5000 for this, she said while giving statement before First Class Magistrate Mahmudul Alam here on Tuesday.

She also disclosed names of five killers and gave description of some others involved in the murders committed on the night of November 20.

Ashuganj police arrested her on the night of December 9. Police said they also extracted from her some vital information about the murder during interrogation.

Investigation officer of the case, Sub Inspector Sayed Nurul Alam said they got more information from some others arrested earlier but declined to elaborate in the interest of investigation.

School boy beaten dead in land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A school boy was beaten to death at Hatalia Badghat in Sadar upazila yesterday, allegedly in a land dispute.

The victim was identified as Masud, 15, a student of class eight at Latif Municipal Seminary. He was son of Abu Ahsan of Bahalgachia village.

Police said, three youth allegedly led by Khokon beaten up Masud when he went to a market. Local people rushed him to Patuakhali General Hospital where doctors declared him dead. Later, angry local people attacked the house of on Khokon, caught his father Abdul Khaleq and handed him over to police.



PHOTO: STAR

A garden of different varieties bright coloured gladiolus flowers on KHC compound.

RU Sangskritik Jote protests Shibir vandalism

RU CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred cultural activists under the banner of Rajshahi University unit of Sammilito Sangskritik Jote (SSJ) staged three-hour sit-in demonstrations in front of the Teachers Students Culture Center (TSCC) and RU Vice-chancellor's house yesterday evening protesting foiling of its scheduled cultural programme on the premises of Martyred Memorial Archive.

Campus sources said that at around 4pm, Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) activists and police obstructed SSJ activists when they went to Martyred Memorial Archive premises to hold a scheduled cultural programme.

Being barred, the cultural activists cancelled their scheduled programme and staged a demonstration on the campus, protesting the incident.

Earlier, Shibir activists swooped on the venue at about noon, occupied the podium and took away loud speakers.

The SSJ had taken taking written permission from TSCC authorities on December 10 for the two-day programme scheduled for December 16 and 17 to observe the Victory Day.

On December 15, TSCC authorities sent a letter to SSJ president stating that Bikalpa Sangskritik Sangha (BSS), a cultural organisation of Islamic Chhatra Shibir, would hold their

functions at the venue on December 16 and 17.

The letter however mentioned that SSJ could hold their cultural function at any other place on the campus, sources said.

ATSCC source claimed that the authorities had allowed BSS to hold its programme on the venue following threats by ICS cadres.

At a rally, in front of VC houses, SSJ protested the Shibir vandalism. Speakers urged the RU authorities to stop 'Shibir terrorism' on the campus.

They said Shibir wants to ban all progressive cultural activities on the campus and demanded immediate removal of TSCC director Abdur Rahman Siddiqi.

They also urged students and other progressive organisations on the campus to launch agitation against such activities by Shibir.

They announced that they would hold sit-in on the campus today (Monday) protesting the vandalism.

TSCC Director Abdur Rahman Siddiqi did not make any comment when contacted over telephone.

Progressive Teachers Society, Bangladesh Chhatra League, Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, RU Drama Group, Udichi, Gonoshilpi Sangstha and other cultural organisations also condemned the incident and protested the Shibir vandalism.

Flare test begins at Bibiyana

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

US Company Chevron started flare tests on gas wells drilled at the North Pad of Bibiyana gas field Saturday afternoon.

located at the remote village of Nabiganj upazila under Habiganj district.

"It was a good start and we hope to complete the tests one after another in 4-5 days", an official of the company told The Daily Star yesterday.

Last week, the US company failed to run the test to ascertain gas flow in the wells in the face of agitation by local people to press their demands.

The company has drilled seven wells in the gas field.

With completion of flare tests in all the seven wells in the North Pad, the gas field will be ready for production, the official said.

The company is also getting prepared to start drilling of new wells at the South Pad soon.

Transportation and erection of rigs is going on there, he said

"We hope, drilling of a new well will begin this month. As many as six gas wells would be drilled in the South Pad", he said.

The local people under the banner of Bibiyana Dabi Aday Bastabayan Parishad are agitating since in 1997 to meet their demands which include pipeline gas supply in the area, jobs for locals in the gas field, reconstruction of roads and bridges and setting up of gas-based industries.