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## Grand alliance finally goes to election

### They will file nomination papers tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a major policy shift, the Awami League (AL) led grand electoral alliance yesterday said that it will participate in the January 22 election as the Election Commission (EC) brought some changes in the polls schedule.

The AL and its allies who forged the largest ever alliance on December 18 will file their nominations tomorrow.

The change in the AL-led alli-

ance's stance came after a series of negotiations for over one and a half months between the council of advisers to the caretaker government and the two major political alliances.

In the morning, the EC extended the deadline for submission of nominations by two days, setting December 26 as the last date. Earlier, the closing date was yesterday.

The grand alliance, consisted of the AL-led 14-party combine, Jatiya

Party (Ershad), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Islami Oikya Jote and Islamic Front, last night decided in favour of participation in the election and accordingly step up discussions between themselves over seat sharing.

At the December 18 grand rally, AL President Sheikh Hasina announced that they would boycott and resist any election according to the current schedule.

Besides, she observed that a lot was yet to be done to create an

atmosphere congenial to a free and fair election.

Seeking to rationalise the decision to take part in the election, the senior AL leaders said it's all part of their ongoing movement.

"Our movement has always aimed at having a level playing field ready for the election," said Abdul Jalil, co-ordinator of the 14-party alliance.

He was speaking to reporters after a seat-sharing meeting with

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## Accord with Khelafat sparks widespread condemnation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The accord between Awami League (AL) and Khelafat Majlish sent shockwaves throughout the country yesterday as widespread condemnation of the agreement poured in.

The AL and Khelafat Majlish on Saturday signed an agreement where AL pledged that they would allow alem (experts on Islamic law) to issue fatwa (religious decree), if the AL-led grand alliance was voted to power. Earlier, the Supreme Court banned the issuing of fatwa but the Appellate Division has placed a stay order on that rule.

Different political, social, cultural, human rights and business organisations yesterday condemned the five-point pact where

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## AL-bigots electoral deal stuns all

### Party faces protest from within; allies threaten to split unless pact scrapped

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) faces severe criticism from its 13 allies who yesterday said the party must scrap its Saturday's controversial deal with Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish (BKM) that shattered the promise of secularism or face a split.

AL General Secretary Abdul

THE DEAL

No law will be enacted that contradicts with Quranic values, sunnah and shariah. Steps will be initiated to ensure government recognition of certificates awarded by Qaumi madrasahs.

Laws will be enacted acknowledging Prophet Muhammad as the ultimate and greatest prophet. Laws will be enacted allowing certified Hakkani Alems to issue fatwas and barring any other from issuing the same.

Criticisms of Prophet Muhammad and his disciples or snide remarks about them will be banned.

Jalil Saturday signed a five-point memorandum of understanding (MoU) with BKM. AL promised that certified Alems (Islamic clerics) will have the right to issue fatwas (Islamic religious edicts) if the grand electoral alliance comes to power through the upcoming election.

The other points of the MoU

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## Zakaria's 42-day leave effective from Dec 21

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Commissioner SM Zakaria took leave for 42 days effective from December 21, acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice Mahfuzur Rahman said yesterday.

"The leave of Election Commissioner SM Zakaria would be effective from December 21 to January 31," he said referring to the council of advisers' request to keep Zakaria aloof from the entire electoral process, which will be completed by January 25.

The council of advisers on December 20 requested Zakaria to

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## BNP leaders submit nomination papers amidst festivity

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Many BNP leaders, including Chairperson Khaleda Zia and her son Tarique Rahman, yesterday submitted nomination papers across the country amid festive mood although the party high-ups are facing deep trouble convincing its rebellious leaders frustrated over nomination issue.

Thousands of leaders, workers

and supporters followed their aspirants beating drums and chanting slogans and carrying portraits, banners and festoons at the time of filing their leaders' nomination papers.

The BNP high-ups have already finalised its candidates and secretly confirmed many of them, asking them to file their nominations, sources said. The party is, however, yet to disclose its candi-

datures officially.

Sources said the BNP is likely to release the list of its candidates today, one day before the last date of nomination filing.

"We will release the names of our candidates timely," Nazrul Islam Khan, BNP joint secretary general, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Tayaba Majumder, mother of

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## Eminent citizens shocked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent citizens yesterday expressed their utter surprise and disappointment on the much controversial deal between Awami League (AL) and Khelafat Majlish, which will allow alem (Islamic scholar) to give fatwa, if AL-led alliance goes to power.

They found the deal undesirable and said it is against the spirit of the country's independence.

In his reaction to The Daily Star, National Professor Kabir Chowdhury said, "This is against the spirit of our independence."

"No one could support this," the

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## Hasina sings 'secularism'

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon all irrespective of their caste and creed to work for building a secular democratic Bangladesh.

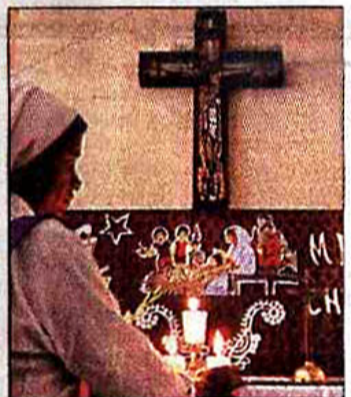
"I seek blessings of all so that we can build Bangladesh as a secular democratic country," she told a delegation of the Christian community while exchanging Christmas greetings at Sudha Sadan on the eve of Christmas Day.

She sought the blessings when the Awami League-led grand alliance decided to participate in the general election 2007, slated for January 22.

"We want people of all religions to enjoy their religious festivals freely," she said.

The 65-member delegation from Bangladesh Christian Association, led by its president former MP Advocate Promod Mankin, met the Awami League

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## Xmas today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Christian community of Bangladesh celebrates Christmas today as elsewhere in the world in commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

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## AL struggles to share seats with partners

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The Awami League (AL) could not finalise the constituencies it will share with its electoral alliance until 1:00am, making Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) upset.

The AL President Sheikh Hasina was all out busy to finalise the constituencies she will share with its electoral alliance till 1:00am and finalised around 275 seats.

Complexities arose as the Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) were stuck to their earlier demanded seats 60 and 40 respectively.

The AL could not reach a consensus on the delicate issue although AL President Sheikh Hasina and General Secretary Abdul Jalil held several lengthy meetings with the two main allies.

JP demanded 60 seats while LDP demanded 30 seats, but AL was

ready to give a total of 52 and 27 seats until 1:00am to two parties.

Till filling this report bargaining between the two party top leaders was going on for another three seats. Following the bargaining a LDP leader MA Zinnah has quit the party and returned his earlier party BNP after being informed that he was not getting nomination.

The JP and LDP became upset as the AL struggled to offer parliamentary seats as it promised earlier, sources said.

Though the AL is still working on its list of candidates, the party top brass has given green signal to over 200 leaders to get ready for the polls.

The party has almost finalised candidates for the constituencies across Dhaka. They are Salman F Rahman (AL) for Dhaka-1, Mostafa Mohsin Montu (Gono Forum) for Dhaka-3, HM Ershad (JP) Dhaka-5,

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