

# Electioneering gains ground in Moulvibazar

RANJIT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

THE candidates of different political parties and independents have started electioneering in full swing following the allocation of election symbols. Strong or weak, all the candidates have already started poster and graffiti with renewed zeal seeking votes. Besides, candidates are also seen travelling to remote villages to establish close contact with voters and are attending meetings in different areas.

Moulvibazar district is divided in four constituencies which are Moulvibazar-1 (Baralekha), Moulvibazar-2 (Kulaura), Moulvibazar-3 (Sadar-Rajnagar) and Moulvibazar-4 (Srimongal-Kamalganj). There are 128,787 voters in Moulvibazar-1, 216,302 voters in Moulvibazar-2, 277,824 voters in Moulvibazar-3 and 287,525 voters in Moulvibazar-4 constituencies.

In the 7th parliamentary election held on June 12 1996, Awami League candidates won three seats while BNP won only one. The BNP failed to bag any seat in the district in the 5th parliament (1991).

In the forthcoming election a total of 22 candidates are in the fray to contest for the four seats. The Awami League nominated four candidates, BNP three, Jamaat one, Jatiya Party (Ershad) four, 11-party left front, JSD and Muslim League (Yousuf) nominated two candidates each and independent candidates are four in number.

According to the observation of political leaders and voters in general a triangular election battle will be held among AL, BNP and independent candidates in one seat and direct fight will take place in other three seats between AL-BNP and AL-independent.

In Moulvibazar-1 (Baralekha) BNP and four-party alliance have nominated Advocate Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury, president of Moulvibazar district BNP. He was elected MP from Jatiya Party ticket in this seat in 1988 and 1991 elections. He joined BNP in 1995 and was made district president.

AL has nominated Md Shahabuddin who was elected in

1996. Earlier he was a UP chairman.

JP (E) has nominated Md. Mokhaddas Ali. He is a new face in the election battle this time. There are no other candidates in this constituency.

According to observers, a direct fight will take place between AL candidate Md Shahabuddin and 4-party (BNP) candidate Advocate Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury.

In Moulvibazar-2 a total of nine candidates are contesting. Awami League has nominated Sultan Md Monsur again. Monsur was former president of BCL central body and vice president (VP) of DUCSU. As AL candidate he was defeated in 1991 but elected in 1996 election. As an MP of 7th parliament (1996) Sultan Md Monsur had taken mass development work for this constituency. So he appears a very strong candidate.

BNP led four-party alliance has nominated Jamaat leader Dr Shafiqur Rahman as alliance candidate. He is Ameer of Sylhet town committee of Jamaat-e-Islami. He sacrificed his own seat of Sylhet-1 for BNP central leader and former finance minister M Saifur Rahman. As a result, BNP central policy maker and MP M Saifur Rahman gave Moulvibazar-2 (Kulaura) seat to Jamaat leader Dr Shafiqur Rahman to contest. Now it appears that Jamaat leader Dr Shafique has fallen into a trap as his organisation in this seat is very weak and main partner of 4-party alliance BNP's local leaders are protesting the candidature of Jamaat leader as alliance nominee.

Moulvibazar district BNP vice president and Kulaura upazila BNP president Md Maksud Shaheen who was elected in February 15 1996 (6th Parliament) election and contested on June 12, 1996 (7th Parliament) election from this constituency failed to get BNP ticket this time. However, he submitted his nomination paper as an independent candidate. Most of the local leaders and workers of Kulaura BNP now are supporting his candidature and working for him. These leaders and workers have declared that they would work against BNP led four-party candidate Jamaat leader Dr Shafiqur Rahman.

According to them BNP men at every level are not to vote for 'scales'. On the other hand, independent candidate (BNP rebel) Md Maksud Shaheen is a strong and popular candidate. As an independent his election symbol is 'football'.

Other candidates in this constituency are ANM Yousuf (Muslim League-Yousuf group), Emdadul Islam (Independent), Md Sawkatul Islam (Jatiya Party-E), Rezaur Rahman Chowdhury (JSD), Abdus Subhan (Independent) and Khandaker Lutfur Rahman (CPB).

According to the observations of general voters, a direct fight will take place in this constituency between AL nominee Sultan Md Monsur and Independent candidate (BNP rebel) Md Maksud Shaheen. BNP led four-party nominee Dr Shafiqur Rahman of Jamaat may secure 3rd or 4th place, observers maintained.

In Moulvibazar-3 (Sadar-Rajnagar), BNP led four-party nominated central BNP leader and former finance minister M Saifur Rahman as their candidate. M Saifur Rahman was elected in 1979 and 1996 election with BNP ticket. He was minister in Ziaur Rahman and Begum Khaleda Zia's cabinet. This time, Saifur Rahman is also contesting for Sylhet-1 seat. He is a strong and popular candidate.

AL has nominated its most senior leader Md Azizur Rahman who is also joint general secretary of the central committee of AL. He was elected in 1970, 1986 and 1991 elections from this seat.

JP (E) has nominated Md Suleman Khan. He is a new face in election battle. Other candidates in this constituency are Mamunur Rashid Suhel (11 party-BSD) and M A Matin (Muslim League).

People think that a direct fight will take place between AL nominee Md Azizur Rahman and BNP nominee M Saifur Rahman.

In Moulvibazar-4 (Srimongal-Kamalganj) Awami League candidate is vice principal Md Abdus Shaheed. He was elected with AL ticket in 1991 and 1996 election and was made whip of the 7th parliament. He is contesting for third time this year. This time AL candidate Md Abdus Shaheed has been facing criticism. Mentionable number of AL leaders and workers of this constitu-

ency have been protesting his candidature. To protest his party nomination other four AL leaders had submitted nomination papers. Later three of them withdrawn but have given support to a rebel candidate.

Md Ahad Miah was a strong candidate of BNP. He was taking preparation to contest again this time. But at the final moment he announced that he has no interest to contest this time as he had not sufficient money to bear election expenditure. Following his announcement, BNP led four-party alliance have nominated Md Mohsin Miah Modhu as their candidate. Modhu is also the chairman of Srimongal pourasava where he was elected for two times. But in the parliamentary election he is a new face. His popularity in the constituency is not better like Md Ahad Miah. However he is contesting holding the image of BNP.

Alhaj Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury (Hazi Mujib) an AL leader and industrialist is contesting as independent candidate. He sought AL nomination but failed to get it. Other four top leaders of Srimongal AL were protesting the candidature of AL nominee Md Abdus Shaheed. Now they are supporting Hazi Mujib. Not only the president and general secretary of Srimongal upazila AL but almost all the leaders and workers of Srimongal AL and a big part of Kamalganj AL leaders and workers extended their support to independent candidate Hazi Mujib. They are working in full swing in favour of him. As a result independent candidate Hazi Mujib appears a strong candidate.

Jatiya Party (E) has nominated Md Askir Miah. Once a UP chairman Askir Miah is a new face in parliament election. JSD has nominated Alhaj Eleman Kabir to contest.

According to political observers a triangular election battle will take place in this constituency among AL nominee vice principal Md Abdus Shahid, independent candidate Alhaj Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury (Hazi Mujib) and BNP led four party nominee Md Mohsin Miah Modhu.



AL (left) and BNP (right) leaderships vowing victory!



PHOTO: STAR

# Party manifestos: To remain on paper or to be implemented ?

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

AS the days are numbered in connection with holding of the elections for the eighth Parliament, the electioneering campaign by the political parties has reached a high peak. In this context, all contesting political parties have announced their manifestos. Awami League was the last political party to announce its manifesto on 7 September 2001. On 5 September, Bangladesh Nationalist Party [BNP] came out with its manifesto at a select gathering of its central leaders, journalists and a group of foreign diplomats at the posh Sheraton hotel while Awami League announced its manifesto at Pan-Pacific Sonargaon hotel, later also attended by foreign diplomats.

The presence of foreign diplomats at such announcement of manifestos by political parties gives the impression that they need the blessing of foreign diplomats in their campaign for the ensuing parliamentary elections! This political manifesto is meant for voters and politically interested quarters of Bangladesh. It is no way designed to cater to the needs of foreign countries. This looks practically ridiculous on the part of our political parties to present their manifestos in the presence of foreign diplomats.

It would have been better and more appropriate to announce manifestos by two major political parties in particular at their respective party offices instead of posh hotels. This reflects extravagant expenditure by political parties and contradicts principle of simplicity of the political process upheld traditionally isolating themselves from the people whose entry into such luxurious places is restricted. Had there been shortage of space in the office of the political parties it could have been arranged at least in a public place to announce their manifestos where different segment of the society, larger number of political party activists and journalists could listen to. It seems that both the political parties have gained much financially from the nomination trade, as is alleged by some important quarters, which must have helped them to foot the

bill of posh hotels!

Going through manifestos of the two major political parties, Awami League and BNP, it shows at least on four points both of them hold identical views. These are: 1] to bring back law and order, 2] to control corruption, 3] to establish independent judiciary and 4] to increase the number of women's seats in the Parliament.

For the immediate past government party Awami League it sounds illogical to suggest that stringent measures would be taken to stop deterioration of law and order situation in the country if voted to power again when reign of terror was practically unleashed by terrorists in south western part of the country, Narayanganj, Barishal and Feni in particular during its rule which provoked even pro-Awami League columnists to write against terrorism, but apparently no action was taken against even identified terrorists. Had appropriate action been taken by the immediate past government the situation could not have deteriorated to such an extent that draws criticism from all sections of people now. No judicial inquiry commission has been set up as demanded by the opposition parties to find reasons for bombblast and bring the culprits to book. It was an eyewash to conduct police inquiry into the bombblasts incidents. How the law and order situation will improve if black laws like 'special power' act and 'public safety act' 2000 remain in place. Under the influence of the black laws political opponents receive inhuman treatment as has been demonstrated during the regime of immediate past Awami League government.

The Awami League again pledges for the separation of Judiciary from the Executive and the appointment of an ombudsman. Although Awami League was committed to separate judiciary and the appointment of ombudsman, neither establishment of the office of ombudsman nor separation of judiciary has taken place during its tenure. The much talked about National Human Rights Commission also was not constituted. Despite calls by human rights activists for the Special Powers Act

to be withdrawn no efforts were made by Awami League government in this regard. Moreover, another black law, Public Safety Act was enacted despite widespread protests by opposition parties and lawyers of the country. In the manifesto presented by Awami not a single sentence has been written about the annulment of two infamous black laws. The same is the case with manifestos issued by BNP. The BNP also did not say anything about these two laws although their workers and leaders are reportedly harassed as alleged by BNP leaders. It appears to be mystery why BNP did not make any commitment about repeal of Public Safety Act in particular. Possibly BNP will make best use of this act as did Awami League if voted to power. That means tit for tat policy will continue, but how long the innocent and people will continue to tolerate such an unhealthy trend?

There is one redeeming feature in two manifestos that both the parties have committed eradication of corruption from the country and BNP's stand sounds more positive as it proposes to establish constitutionally mandated independent anti-corruption commission alongwith the appointment of ombudsman to make the administration accountable and transparent.

On the role of mass media both Awami League and BNP hold almost identical views but BNP promises to make Radio and TV 'real autonomous bodies.' It may be recalled in this connection that all the political alliances in a joint declaration on 19 November 1990 declared to make Radio and TV responsible and accountable autonomous bodies. During the tenure of BNP in the fifth Parliament no attempt was made to make Radio and TV autonomous while Awami League enacted law to make Radio and TV autonomous towards the end of its tenure in July 2001, but critics opined that the law lacks autonomy status of the two electronic media in real sense.

Most disturbing is the absence of commitment by the two major players in Bangladesh politics about non-boycott of Parliament sessions and discouragement of hartals, which cause dislocation in normal

life and business. This reflects that both the leaders or parties backed out from their pledges to former American President Jimmy Carter in the first week of August, who had been to Dhaka as a leader of a five member pre-election delegation of Washington based National Democratic Institute and Atlanta based Carter Center.

The absence of these commitments also caused concern in the business circle here. Only Jatiya Party of Ershad group has made it clear in the manifesto that they would not boycott the Parliament and would refrain from calling hartals. At least on one point both the political parties honoured their commitment to former American President Jimmy Carter, which related to increasing the number of women's seats in the Parliament.

There was suggestion by international financial institutes and Public Administration Reforms Committee to carry out reform in administration. Instead of sizing down different irrelevant ministries BNP in its manifesto promises introducing three more Ministries, one each for garment industries, freedom fighters and Bangladeshi expatriates to protect their interest and to facilitate investment of Bangladeshi nationals living abroad. For a poor country, which is financially at a disadvantageous position, setting up more Ministries will be tantamount to luxury while some of the existing Ministries may be reorganized to cover the new areas. On foreign affairs BNP manifesto gave detailed plan in line with the constitutional provision (251). It is appreciable that the manifesto reflects the party's pledges for the socioeconomic developments as well as the external policy to be pursued if the party is voted to power.

Manifesto is the indicator of the policy the political party generally pursues. Therefore, voters expect logically that the political leaders should explain the manifesto while seeking votes. And it is no use keeping manifesto on paper if its contents are not implemented as is usually their experience.

Mahammad Amjad Hossain is a retired diplomat.



AL (left) and BNP (right) activists are on campaign trail in Dhaka.



PHOTO: STAR

# Election fever grips Sirajganj

AKHTERUZZAMAN BABLU, Sirajganj

THE candidates of four-party alliance, Awami League and Jatio Party have started electioneering in full swing following the allocation of party symbols. All the candidates have already started poster and graffiti and are also seen travelling to remote villages to establish close contact with voters.

Intermittent processions with party symbols are being brought out by party activists and supporters of respective candidates in the main streets of the town and also in the rural hats and bazaars of the district. Discussions in markets, business establishments and public places are mostly centered on politics and prospects of parties as well as candidates in their respective constituencies.

Sirajganj is divided in seven constituencies which are: Sirajganj-1 (Kazipur), Sirajganj-2 (Sadar), Sirajganj-3 (Rayganj-Tarash), Sirajganj-4 (Ullapara), Sirajganj-5 (Belkuchi-Kamarkhand), Sirajganj-6 (Chowdhali) and 4 unions of Shahjampur and Sirajganj-7

Shahjampur while there are a total of 18,26,189 voters, of them 9,47,090 males and 8,79,099 females. In the district 700 centers including 3600 polling booths would be set up for the ensuring general election. In the last election held on June 12, 1996, Awami League candidates won five seats while BNP won two seats. In the year 1991, BNP won six seats while Awami League won only Kazipur seat. In the forthcoming parliamentary polls scheduled to be held on October 1, a total of 37 candidates are the fray to contest for the seven parliamentary seats. The AL has nominated five candidates, of them Alhaj Mohammad Nasim is contesting in three seats, AL leaders Dr Mohammad Selim is contesting against his younger brother Alhaj Mohammad Nasim as independent candidate while Saidur Rahman Belkuchi upazila AL president is contesting against AL candidate former MP Abdul Latif Biswas as independent candidate. BNP has nominated seven candidates under the banner of 4-party alliance. Jamaat demanded two seats out of seven but did not get a single seat. JP (E) has nominated

five, Workers Party one, BSD three, JSD three, and the rest are independent.

Sirajganj-1: Former home and tele-communication minister of AL Alhaj Mohammad Nasim is contesting former upazila chairman and leader of BNP Abdul Mojib Minu and Nasim's elder brother Dr Mohammad Selim.

Sirajganj-2: The four-party nominated industrialist and former Zila Parishad chairman Iqbal Hasan Mahmood Tuku is contesting former home minister Alhaj Mohammad Nasim of AL. Alhaj Mohammad Nasim contributed a lot in the development work of the constituency as minister and local MP in the last five years but BNP also has strong support in the area.

Sirajganj-3: Former home minister Alhaj Mohammad Nasim is likely to face hard contest against former MP Abdul Mannan Talukder of BNP. Talukder Mannan elected MP for two terms in 1991 and 1996 defeated AL local leader Ishaque Hossain Talukder in the year 1996 by a margin of four thousands votes.

Sirajganj-4: AL candidate free-

dom fighter former MP Abdul Latif Mirza will contest former MP M Akbor Ali of 4-party alliance. At present image of Akbor Ali seems better than Abdul Latif Mirza, as he contributed in many development works of the constituency as MP in the year 1991 while Abdul Latif Mirza contributed a lot in development work of the constituency as MP during the last five years.

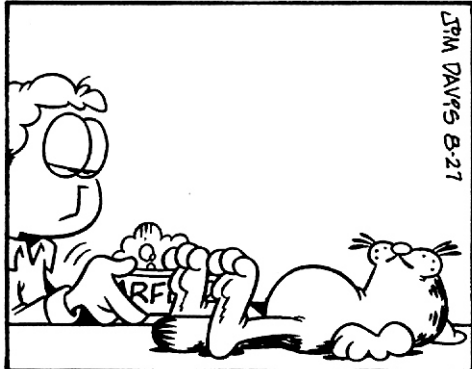
Sirajganj-5: AL candidate former MP Abdul Latif Biswas will contest Justice (Retd) Mozammil Hoque of 4-party alliance and Saidur Rahman (also of AL) as independent candidate.

Sirajganj-6: Former state minister during Ershad regime Major (Rtd) Monjur Kadir of 4 party alliance is contesting against local AL leader Alhaj Abu Bakkar.

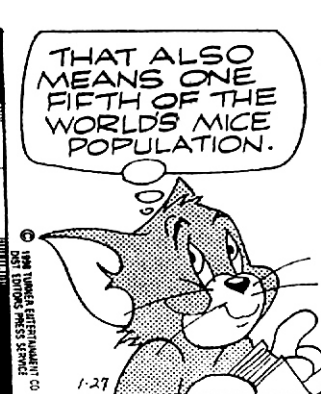
Sirajganj-7: JP (N-F) leader, professor M A Matin, former prime minister of Ershad regime, and 4-party alliance candidate former MP of AL Choyan Islam contributed a lot in development work of the constituency in the last two years. But 4-party alliance has strong support in the area.

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