

Grand alliance partners hail decision to boycott election

Vow to resist farcical polls

STAR REPORT

Grand alliance partners in various districts yesterday hailed a decision to boycott general election scheduled to be held on January 22 and vowed to resist any move to hold any farcical election.

Just after announcement of the decision, candidates of Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance rushed to the offices of the respective returning officers in the afternoon to withdraw their candidatures.

The aspirants included leaders of 14-party combine, HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party (JP), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and those of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ).

Our correspondents in different districts talked to the grand alliance

candidates after withdrawal of nomination papers where they expressed their determination to resist any farcical election without realising their demands.

However, many candidates in Barisal and Rajshahi termed the decision 'too late' expressing dismay over the decision.

Our Chittagong Staff Correspondent reports: All the candidates of grand alliance in 15 constituencies in the port city withdrew their nomination papers.

Candidates of AL, JP (Ershad), LDP and IOJ gathered at a city community centre at around 1.00pm where they held a brief rally.

Later, they went to the Divisional Commissioner's office to withdraw nomination papers.

City Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury who submitted nomination papers from Chittagong-8 and 9 constituencies as an AL candidate led the other candidates of grand alliance in withdrawing their candidatures.

AL leaders Kazi Inamul Haq Danu, Afsarul Amin, Monjur Alam Monju, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) leader Moinuddin Khan Badal, LDP leader Ekramul Karim Chowdhury, JP leader Solaiman Seth and IOJ leader Ashfaq Bin Yakub were present among others.

While addressing, Mohiuddin termed the decision of polls boycott as wise and timely saying, Awami League and grand alliance partners are not at all afraid of election, because 'we are pro-people parties,' he said.

Mohiuddin said the voter list prepared by the Election Commission (EC) is full of flaws which would benefit the BNP and its allies.

While withdrawing the nomination paper, LDP leader Ekramul Karim who earlier submitted his nomination paper in Chittagong-8 (Double Mooring) constituency, said, 'We were prepared to contest the election, but the caretaker government and EC failed miserably to ensure an atmosphere to hold a free, fair and credible election.'

Our Staff Correspondent from Rajshahi reports:

All the five grand alliance candidates in Rajshahi district yesterday withdrew nomination papers, but two of them expressed utter dissatisfaction over the 'late decision.'

A grand alliance candidate, preferring anonymity, said it (agitation) should have been called just after expiry of the BNP-Jamaat-led Alliance government.

Another AL leader said that the grand alliance delayed in taking the decision for agitation against the caretaker government headed by President Iazuddin.

Candidates of five constituencies in Rajshahi -- Omar Faruk Chowdhury, Fazle Hossain Badsha, Sardar Amjad Hossain, Tajul Islam Mohammad Faruk and AHM Khairuzzaman Liton -- led a big procession before going to the office of the returning officer.

After withdrawing their candidatures, they addressed a big rally on the Shahid Minar premises in Rajshahi court.

They said that there was no congenial atmosphere for election due to lack of voter list.

Our Barisal Correspondent reports: Grand alliance leaders and workers brought out a procession and held a rally in the city hailing the decision.

City AL convener Shawkat Hossain Hiron, who was a grand alliance candidate from Barisal-5 constituency said participation in polls would give legality to election engineering of the caretaker government.

He reiterated the demand of grand alliance saying no free and fair election is not possible without resignation of Iajuddin Ahmed from the post of chief advisor, reconstitution of EC and correct voter list.

Advocate Baktiar Khan Iqbal, a JP (Ershad) leader and a candidate from Barisal-3 constituency termed the decision as a wise one.

Pankaj Debnath, AL candidate from Barisal-4 constituency blamed the caretaker government for the boycott.

A number of leaders of grand alliance in Barisal said to this correspondent on condition of anonymity that the decision confused them. He also said the announcement was too late.

Our Rangpur Correspondent writes: About 48 out of 83 candidates of grand alliance in six constituencies of the district withdrew nomination papers soon after announcement of the decision.

Jatiya Party candidates led by Moshur Rahman Ranga withdrew nominations at about 4:00 pm

People of Rangpur and adjoining districts would never accept any election without participation of party chairman HM Ershad in election, he said. I think, the decision has reflected the hopes and aspirations of local people, he said.

AL leader Mosaddeque Hosen Bablu said people of Rangpur, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Kurigram, and Lalmonirhat districts had foiled the February 15 election in 1996. This time they would again foil any such farcical election, he said.

Grand alliance candidates in Sylhet, Dinajpur, Mymensingh and Rangamati expressed similar views during exchange of opinion with the district correspondents.

Kuakata sea beach bustling with tourists

MD SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Kuakata sea beach is now full of tourists.

Thousands of tourists from home and abroad have flocked here to spend the Eid-holidays and to welcome the New Year.

All hotels, motels and tourists lodges are now jam packed with visitors. The main attraction was the last sunset of the year in the Bay of Bengal.

The administration has made adequate security and safety measures and deployed police and Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) in all important points including the sea beach and tourist zone.

The tourists also include a large number of students who come in groups either for picnic or on study tour.

Mahbub Hossain has come from Dhaka with his family of five. 'I have come to beach to enjoy the New Year and to spend the Eid holidays,' he said to this correspondent yesterday.

The crowd increased this year as annual examinations already finished in schools and colleges.

However, many tourists said that hotels owners increased rent of hotels. They are charging Tk 200 to 400 for a single bed and Tk 500 to 800 for a double-bed room, they said.

Big fire in Khulna, Khagrachhari

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Cash and belongings worth Tk 25 lakh were lost in two big fires in Khulna and Khagrachhari on Tuesday.

Our Khulna Staff Correspondent reports: Over 100 shanties were gutted in the fire that broke out at Sonadanga Sweepers' Colony at midnight.

As a result, over 500 men, women and children were rendered homeless. Cash and belongings including gold ornaments worth over Tk 15 lakh were looted by miscreants during the incident.

According to eye-witnesses, the fire originated from an oven of a roadside hotel. At that time, the hotel owner was enjoying a cultural function near the colony keeping the oven active. Soon, the fire engulfed the entire colony.

Fire fighters fought for over one and a half hours to bring the blaze under control, local people said.

The affected sweepers yesterday threatened stoppage of work if their demands are not met.

Our Khagrachhari Correspondent reports: Property worth Tk.10 lakh including an office of the freedom fighters was burnt to ashes at Matiranga bazaar at midnight.

Fire Brigade sources said, the fire originated from a tea stall at about 11.45 pm which spread the nearby shops and offices very fast.



PHOTO: STAR

Hundreds of tourists from home and abroad throng Kuakata sea beach to spend the Eid vacation.

LAND GRABBING

Bakkhali river now a narrow canal

MUAZZEM HOSSAIN SHAKIL,

Cox's Bazar

The Bakkhali flowing through the resort town turned into a narrow canal following massive land grabbing along its banks during the last few years.

The grabbing is going on unabated despite protests by local people and environmentalists. They were demanding of the administration proper step to check the trend for the last few years but in vain.

As a result, the river is dying fast due to encroachment. Cox's Bazar which was once a flourishing trade centre, has now lost its importance to a great extent, people and traders said.

Bakkhali originated from Nikkhinchory in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

Influentials, most of them businessmen, built houses and business establishments by grabbing lands on both sides of the river. Dumping of garbage by local people accelerated its siltation.

On contact, Cox's Bazar Poura Commissioner Helenaz Tahera said that most of the land grabbers

are influentials.

Mohammad Abdul Malek, a noted businessman here is of the opinion that the encroachers should be evicted immediately for restoration of normal flow of the river. It would help develop trade and commerce in the resort town, he said.

United efforts of people of all

strata of life will help save the river from untimely death, he said.

When contacted, Cox's Bazar Pourasabha chairman Sarwar Kamal opined that the river should be freed from land grabbers for the interest of people. He raised the issue at the district development committee meetings several times but to no effect, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Encroachers built a house on the bank of the Bakkhali in Cox's Bazar narrowing the channel of the river.

4X2

7X2

9X2

Joyful learning for slow learners

Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Plan Bangladesh innovate new project to improve quality of primary education

STAR NATIONAL DESK

It was a red letter day for the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), the nodal agency for implementing the Community Learning Action Project (CLAP), when three former slow learning children, availing the benefit of pre-school activities, came out successfully in the annual examinations of Class-5 and Class-2 in Lakshmpur Registered Government Primary School at Sreepur under Razabari union in Gazipur.

Despite being slow learners, sheer determination saw these three students come out successful, two of them with 70 per cent marks and the rest with 60 per cent. The DAM in collaboration with Plan Bangladesh was taking efforts to enable all the three to continue their primary education through joyful learning.

Pallabi Rani Das, 11, was a student of Class-5 in Lakshmpur Registered Government Primary School.

A team of DAM workers involved in a survey identified her as a slow learner. They contacted her parents and told them about Camp, a community learning programme designed jointly by the DAM and the Plan Bangladesh to meet special learning needs of the girl by imparting quality primary education. Under the programme community supported learning assistance was provided through Camps (foundation, self-learning and enrichment courses) for primary school going children. Being motivated, her parents involved the child in the special programme. Pallabi was benefitted by the periodic short learning Camps held before/ after school hours. The duration depended on the learning needs of participating children and preparedness of parents to support such Camps.

Rekha, 8, of the same area was another slow learner in Class-2 in the same school. The DAM workers identified her when her parents were thinking to stop her education due to lack of awareness. Because of timely intervention of the DAM, her parents abandoned the idea.



PHOTO: STAR

A class of Camp, a community based learning programme, jointly launched by the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and Plan Bangladesh, progressing at Lakshmpur Registered Government Primary School at Sreepur under Razabari union in Gazipur.

Rekha was given additional teaching support before school hours under Sopan tutorial course. The course offered additional education programme for slow learners before or after school hours. It promoted child friendly pedagogy and environment for the improvement of whole school with active participation of community. Pallabi utilised the programme and came out successful in the annual examination.

The story of Sandha Rani, 7, another student of Class-2 in the

same school was not different from the above two. Like them, she was also given special teaching support in her school before school hours. Finally, she came out successful honourably in the annual examination.

All the three desires to pursue education.

During a visit to the school recently, two school teachers, Chandra Mohan Roy and Shahidul Islam said to The Daily Star that as many as 220 students of Class-1 and 2 were benefited by the pre-

school activities programme launched by the DAM in 2005. Forty-three primary schools were involved with the programme, they said adding, 22 backward students of Clas-3.4 and 5 were also benefited by the programme last year.

The programme is being implemented in three unions of Gazipur district through 20 community learning centres. Rural Development Committees assisted by SMC, school teachers, and Upazila Education Department are conducting the programme.