

AL may review list

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who are relatively fresh, young and apparently unknown to local leaders and workers received party tickets.

"Considering candidate's popularity and acceptability among locals, party picks in many constituencies will be changed before the deadline for nomination withdrawal expires," said a member of the AL Parliamentary Board preferring not to be named.

AL Presidium member Matia Chowdhury yesterday said they would revise their nominations since they got three more days for submitting nomination papers. Talking to reporters in front of Sudha Sadan, she also said the party has not finished giving all the nominations yet.

A number of party leaders, including AL organising secretaries Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Akhtaruzzaman, Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed, AK Jahangir Hossain and Prof Abu Sayeed, not getting party tickets also flared dissatisfaction among AL grassroots in their constituencies.

Protests against party picks have been going on in different constituencies. Some of the central leaders told The Daily Star that AL might face a debacle in a number of constituencies if the party fails to deal with this discontent.

AL has changed its nominations in Faridpur-1, Panchagarh-1 and Chandpur-1 constituencies. AL had nominated Kazi Seraj, Mirza Golam Erphan Babu and Ayat Ali Patwari in the constituencies but later replaced two of them with AL Organising Secretary Abdur Rahman and Mazharul Haque Pradhan considering the grassroots demand.

If the AL-led 14-party contests the elections under an electoral alliance with Jatiya Party and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), AL would have to bring changes to its nominations in at least 70 constituencies according to the consensus reached about sharing of seats.

A delegation of LDP led by its president Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed and Secretary General Prof Jahannara Begum met AL President Sheikh Hasina yesterday. Briefing newsmen after the hour-long meeting at Sudha Sadan, both AL and LDP leader said they would take part in the elections under a grand electoral alliance and form government together if they win.

LDP leaders however said they would take part in the polls alone if BNP stayed away from elections.

NOMINATION SUBMISSION STARTS

Leaders of different political parties including AL and Jatiya Party (JP) started submitting nomination papers at local election offices across the country yesterday with enthusiasm and spontaneity. AL President Sheikh Hasina's nomination papers were submitted by party men in Bagerhat-1 and Rangpur-6 constituencies.

JP acting Chairman barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud and Presidium member Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu submitted nomination papers in Chittagong-5 and -4 constituencies.

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Oli Ahmed

25 drugged in 24 hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 15 people fell victim to robbery by drugging during the last 24 hours in and around the capital.

The criminals mixed sedatives in food items and gave them to the victims. Some were tricked into smelling chemicals that knock them out. Once out cold the criminals took away all the cash, mobile phones and other valuables they were carrying.

Even though all 15 victims were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), they were robbed in separate incidents across the city and its outskirts.

Police and locals rushed them to DMCH.

The victims are Sonargaon Degree College Associate Prof AKM Kabir Uddin Mollah, 50, Chaiti Group official Kazi Badrul Alam, 38, butchers Mohammad Shakil, 47, of Banagram and Abdul Latif, 45, of Kapantabazar, fish trader Mahfuzur Rahman, 40, of Gazipur, bakery shop manager Iqbal Hossain, 35, of Wari, AKH Knitting and Dyeing Factory worker Saidul Islam, 25, of Savar, vegetables vendor Abul Kalam Khan, 45, of Tejgaon, private firm official Fahruul Islam, 25, of Karwan Bazar, Sharif of Jatrabari, Zakir Hossain, 24, Mahbub Alam, 24, Enamul Huq, 20, Delwar Hossain, 35, and Tariqul Islam, 45.

Ex-MPs Lalu, Shahjahan get HC bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted three months' ad interim bail to former BNP lawmaker Helaluzzaman Talukder Lalu and former Jamaat-e Islami lawmaker Shahjahan Chowdhury.

Special courts earlier sentenced the two politicians to 10 years' imprisonment in separate cases. Lalu was convicted of evading tax while Shahjahan of amassing wealth beyond his known sources of income.

The HC bench of justices Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain and Mohammad Azizul Haque passed the order following the filing of separate appeals by the two.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) filed the case against Lalu while the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) lodged the case against Shahjahan.

Advocate MA Aziz Khan stood for the NBR and the ACC while advocate Habibul Islam Bhuiyan and barrister Abdur Razzaq appeared for Lalu and Shahjahan.

Tigers made

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promptly kept on the backfoot. In the first innings, Bangladesh made 153 in just 36.4 overs. In the second innings, the Tigers made 20 for one after five overs at stumps, behind by 268 runs. Dale Steyn had Imrul Kayes out bowled for four.

Mushfiqur Rahim fought a lone battle, scoring 48 off 63 balls with the help of nine boundaries. Rahim found some support from tallender Shahadat Hossain (23), with whom he added 60 runs for the ninth wicket after the Tigers were reduced to 88 for eight.

Makhaya Ntini removed three Tigers batsmen -- Mehrab Hossain (12), Shakib (14) and Nayeem Islam (8) -- after Dale Steyn dealt an early blow by removing opener Tamim Iqbal (7) with a rip-snooper.

Shakib triggered the Proteas downfall by picking up the crucial wickets of Jacques Kallis, AB de Villiers and Mark Boucher before picking up tail-enders Morkel and Steyn to complete his second five-wicket haul in Test cricket.

First day centuries Graeme Smith and Hashim Amla fell on the same score to pacemen Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mahbubul Alam respectively but both took the score to 327 before getting out. Smith ended with 157 off 248 while Amla, the classy right-hander, took 165 balls to score 112 runs.

All govt, pvt

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Section 10 of the ordinance promulgated on October 20 has made it obligatory for all organisations to nominate an officer-in-charge for each information-providing unit within 60 days of the promulgation of the ordinance.

Apart from different ministries, departments, directorates and offices, all NGOs and private organisations that run on or receive government or foreign funds, work on behalf of the government, and supply goods or provide services on government funds are bound to provide people with information.

The much-expected ordinance came into effect on October 20 but people will have to wait 59 days more before availing themselves of the service as the authorities have to develop mechanism, set up separate cells and appoint officials for the purpose.

The government will also set up a three-member Information Commission within this period to ensure proper execution of the law and resolve public complaints regarding information.

After appointing the officers-in-charge, each authority will inform the Information Commission in 15 days the name, designation, address, fax number and email address of the official-in-charge.

The National Security Intelligence, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, Defence Intelligence Unit, Criminal Investigation Department of police, Special Security Force, Special Branch of police and intelligence units of the Rapid Action Battalion and National Board of Revenue have been kept outside the purview of the ordinance.

However, if the information sought is related to corruption and violation of human rights within these agencies, they will have to provide the information within 30 days.

People seeking information will have to apply either in writing or electronically or through email paying fees. The authorities may exempt anyone from paying the fees.

4-party says

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government has to lift the state of emergency completely on the last day of withdrawing nominations, delay upazila polls by a month, and scrap the Election Commission's authority to cancel candidature, it said.

"We gave the government four proposals for going to the elections, but on November 19 the government said it would consider three of them if we go to the polls on the deferred date of December 28," BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said at a press conference at her Gulshan office last night.

Khaleda came up with the latest stance after back-to-back meetings of the BNP Standing Committee and top leaders of the four-party alliance, ending all speculations and uncertainty over the alliance's participation in the long overdue ninth parliamentary election.

The chiefs of the components of the alliance were also present at the briefing telecast live on some private television channels.

On Monday, the four-party alliance gave the government 48 hours to meet its four-point demand for going to the election.

On Wednesday, the government said despite its frantic efforts on Tuesday with the alliances led by the Awami League and BNP, the alliances failed to reach a consensus on deferring the polls. It announced that the election would be held on December 18 as scheduled.

In an instant reaction late last night, Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda termed Khaleda's announcement "positive". He said they would sit with the BNP today to discuss the latest development.

Education and Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman also said, "It is certainly positive that everybody is showing responsibility."

The AL did not make any official statement on the four-party alliance's latest stance and is likely to issue one today.

However, AL Presidium member Matia Chowdhury in her instant reaction said Khaleda's announcement has rendered the holding of the election uncertain again.

The AL-led alliance also has demands similar to those of the four-party alliance: complete lifting of the state of emergency before submission of nominations, delaying upazila polls by a month, and scrapping the Election Commission's authority to cancel candidature as laid down in section 91(E) of the amended Representation of the People Order (RPO).

The EC has several times informed the government that it is in favour of keeping the RPO section, which both the electoral alliances are demanding to be repealed. They said they would also leave it up to the government to decide on the two alliances' demand for deferring the upazila polls.

EC sources last night told The Daily Star that they might request the government to talk with the AL to know about its position on the four-party alliance's latest stance.

KHALEDA'S BRIEFING
In a jam-packed news briefing, Khaleda said the EC has lost its neutrality and therefore cannot be empowered with the power to cancel candidature.

"We asked the government and the Election Commission to set a congenial atmosphere

for the elections because elections cannot be free and fair under the state of emergency," she said.

The former prime minister complained that while nobody contacted the BNP for discussion, the government was visited by a number of "influential" and "powerful" individuals on Wednesday after which it came up with the "thoughtless" announcement of holding the election on December 18.

"This has surprised, disappointed and saddened the people. The people of this country have not waited two years for a one-sided, stage-managed election," Khaleda said, alleging that the government is working for one particular party.

"I am calling on the government to retract its one-sided declaration and arrange a participatory, free, fair and neutral election," she said.

She said everyone has to take decisions carefully this time so that no one can question the neutrality of the armed forces.

Khaleda expressed dissatisfaction over the government's failure to implement any of the four-party alliance's seven demands and the EC's announcement of the election schedule without consultation.

She also alleged that her family was forced to leave the country and stay away from politics.

A few BNP leaders, who think that boycotting the polls will be a wrong decision, had been mounting pressure on the BNP chairperson for reaching an agreement with the government on participating in the election whenever it is held, insiders said.

They told The Daily Star that both the government and BNP yesterday unofficially contacted each other to settle the issue.

The government side categorically informed BNP leaders that they would consider delaying the polls by 10 days only if the BNP officially announces to take part in the poll.

Many leaders and activists of the four-party alliance gathered in front of the BNP chairperson's office to hear the declaration yesterday. They became joyous at the declaration of the alliance's participating in the election and showed victory signs and chanted party slogans.

US, UK hope

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political parties as the Election Commission extended the deadline for nomination filing.

A spokesman for US embassy in Dhaka told the news agency that Washington consistently stated that it looked forward to a free, fair and credible election as soon as possible.

"We hope that the major political parties and the caretaker government can agree on a compromise to ensure free, fair and credible polls. Compromise is an integral part of a healthy democracy," he said.

A British high commission spokeswoman in Dhaka said her country noted with appreciation the extended timeframe for filing nomination papers.

"We believe that the people of Bangladesh want a free and fair election with the fullest possible participation. We urge all parties to take part in the election and meet the expectations of the people," she said.

Somali pirates

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Russia's ambassador to Nato, Dmitry Rogozin, meanwhile called for an international ground military operation in the region to crush piracy.

"It's up to the European Union, Nato and others to launch a coastal land operation to eliminate the pirates," Rogozin told AFP, insisting that "naval action alone will not be enough to liquidate the threat of piracy".

In London, Foreign Secretary David Miliband urged the world to firmly fight the "scourge of hostage taking," saying Britain was "extremely concerned by the situation in the Gulf of Aden off Somalia".

African Union commission chief Jean Ping said the surge in piracy was a result of worsening security in Somalia and called for "a rapid deployment of a United Nations peace force."

Somali Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein warned that piracy will rage unless the world helps restore a functional government in Somalia, which collapsed after the 1991 ouster of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre.

"The problems of pirates will only be resolved when the international community helps Somalia to stand on her feet," Hussein told reporters in Mogadishu.

The Somali government

signed multi-million dollar deals with French military firm, Secopex in 2008, and US firm Topcat Marine Security Inc. in 2005, to combat piracy off its coast, but of the two firms ever showed up.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal said on Wednesday that the ship's owners are in talks with the pirates, but the company that operates the vessel has remained tight-lipped about the claims of negotiations.

The Indian frigate INS Tabar, one of dozens of warships from several countries protecting commercial shipping lanes in the Gulf of Aden, on sank a Somali pirate ship late Tuesday after coming under fire, navy spokesman Nirad Sinha said.

Pirates use mother ships, deeply-sea dhows, to tow speedboats from which they launch their attacks with grapnel hooks tied to rope ladders before neutralising the crews at gunpoint.

The incident came as shipping groups reported a new surge in hijackings off Somalia, with three captured since the Sirius Star was taken.

Noel Choong, head of the piracy reporting centre at the IMB in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, said "the situation is already out of control."

US drone

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stronghold of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters.

The prime minister said, contrary to news reports, there was no "understanding" with the United States, which permitted the missile attacks.

"Being chief executive of this country I want to assure you that there is no understanding," he said.

Gilani said he hoped to resolve the issue with the US government through diplomatic measures and was optimistic the incursions would halt when the new Barack Obama-led administration takes over in January.

Foreign ministry spokesman Sadiq said the US diplomat was told that "continued drone attacks undermined public support for government counterterrorism efforts and stressed that these attacks must be stopped".

"It was underscored to the US ambassador that such attacks were a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity," he added.

Opposition MPs criticised the Pakistan government in parliament for failing to put pressure on Washington to stop violation of the country's territory.

"If we do not stop them, tomorrow they can attack Islamabad or Kahuta," MP Ahsan Iqbal said referring to the country's main nuclear facility outside the capital.

Earlier Pakistani jets and artillery killed 17 people, including some Uzbek commanders, as they pounded suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda hideouts in a tribal area, officials said Thursday.

The rebels were killed in overnight jet attacks and Thursday morning artillery and mortar bombardments at four places in Bajaur district, part of the troubled region bordering Afghanistan, government and security officials said.

A security official said the dead included four Uzbek commanders who were trained al-Qaeda militants involved in the recent killings and abductions of members of a tribal force known as a lashkar, which was formed last month to help purge the area of insurgents.

Local government official Mohammad Jamil said two Uzbek commanders had died in the attacks.

"The air strikes killed a total of 17 militants, two of them were Uzbeks," he said. Residents said helicopters circled overhead during the Thursday morning artillery attack.

Jamil said the operation was launched late Wednesday after several people were killed Monday in fighting between militants and the lashkar.

In that fighting, dozens of militants ambushed the lashkar and later besieged the house where the group of elders had taken refuge.

The heavily armed rebels killed four tribal elders and abducted several others including an influential tribal chief, Ismail Khan, officials said.

Pakistan's northwestern tribal belt became a stronghold for hundreds of extremists who fled Afghanistan after the US-led invasion toppled the hardline Taliban regime in late 2001.

The Pakistani military is fighting Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants in the Bajaur district, where officials say more than 1,500 rebels have been killed while hundreds more militants have been captured since August.

Pakistani jets also killed 20 militants in attacks on militant centres in the northwestern Swat valley, security officials said.

"The jets bombed selected targets and destroyed a training centre and five residential compounds in Matta district," a military spokesman in the area told AFP.

"The militants suffered heavy losses but we cannot immediately give the exact figure," he said.

Local security officials said at least 20 people were killed and several others wounded in the bombing of the mountainous Swat valley, which was until last year a popular tourist destination, featuring Pakistan's only ski resort.

The Swat region has been turned into a battleground since cleric Maulana Fazlullah, who has links to Pakistan's Taliban movement, launched a violent campaign for the introduction of Sharia law.

Grassroots sleep

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So, the party cannot pick tenders from the parliamentary constituencies overnight without getting proposals from the grassroots leaders.

Registration of a political party may be cancelled for violation of the RPO provision.

Meanwhile, BNP's arch rival Awami League (AL) on November 4 directed its grassroots committees to prepare such panels and send to the party's parliamentary board by November 9. The board accepted the panels till November 10 as some of the grassroots committees could not meet the deadline.

Based on the panels, the AL finalised nominations for almost all the constituencies, and the party now says it is prepared for the poll.

The EC on Wednesday extended for three days till November 23 the time limit for

filing nomination for the election.

And it appears that the EC has no way to extend the time limit again as the parliamentary polls are scheduled for December 18.

Against this backdrop, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain told reporters yesterday, "We need at least three weeks to complete preparations (for the polls) including filing of nominations."

Contacted over telephone, BNP Standing Committee Member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said they want to participate in the upcoming polls. "But we need time to make preparations."

Mohammad Shahajan, organising secretary of BNP, said yesterday the party high had command had directed grassroots leaders three to four months ago to prepare for the polls.

Confusion over

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regarding the test of powdered milk," Manzil Murshid told The Daily Star.

"The apex court upheld the High Court ruling modifying it a bit, saying that the milk brands should also be tested in a European country. It means that all the powdered milk brands available on local market should be tested at a laboratory in a European country," he added.

The SC order came on November 17 after counsels of Red Cow and Nido Fortified filed petitions with the apex court on November 16 seeking a stay on the HC order.

The brands in question are Yashili-1, Yashili-2, Sweet Baby-2, Diploma, Dano, Red Cow, Nido Fortified and Anlene. The milk brands were earlier tested in the laboratory in Bangladesh and at a laboratory in Bangkok, but the test results were different.

STI and private laboratory Plasma Plus found melamine only in Yashili-1, while chemistry department of Dhaka University found the toxic melamine in all the eight brands and BAEC found it in seven brands. The Bangkok laboratory found melamine in Chinese brands Yashili-1, Yashili-2 and Sweet Baby-2.

Abul Kalam Azad said the government has asked BSTI to make arrangements to publish in the media the results of laboratory tests of the eight brands of powdered milk as per the HC directives.

The government would write to the WHO seeking the name of a laboratory in Europe where the milk brands can be tested, he added.

ACC's filing cases

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proceedings in over 200 corruption cases and issued rules on the government and the ACC, asking them to explain why the proceedings should not be quashed or declared illegal.

According to HC observations in Habibur Rahman Mollah's case, the provisions for all three ACC commissioners to sanction filing a case, submitting a report within 30 days since the opening of an enquiry and investigation report within 60 days since the filing of the case were directory, not mandatory.

Previously, the HC had granted bail to the accused and stayed proceedings against them.

It also issued rules to examine if the ACC officials were legally bound to submit enquiry reports within 30 days after getting charge of the probes, and investigation reports within 60 days after filing of the cases.

Besides, the court wanted to be sure whether all three ACC commissioners needed to sign the letters permitting its officials to file the cases.

ACC Assistant Director Syed Ahmed filed the case against Mollah with Ramna Police Station on October 3 last year. The charges include concealing information about wealth worth over Tk 2 crore.

On April 21, ACC Assistant Director and investigation officer (IO) Mahabubur Rahman submitted charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court in Dhaka, showing 25 people as prosecution witnesses.

Following a petition by Mollah, the HC stayed the case proceedings and directed the government and ACC to explain why the proceedings should not be adjudged illegal.

The HC judgment came after hearing for four days.

Abdul Matin Khasru appeared for the petitioner.

Joint-graft venture

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land was shown Tk 78.27 lakh lower, uncultivable land Tk 1.21 lakh lower, and privately owned land Tk 1.81 lakh lower than the original prices, causing the loss.

In many cases the category of the land was not mentioned in list which is mandatory according to laws.

The cooperatives got registered with Dhaka Zilla Cooperatives Office on September 27, 1999.

Khoka

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the mayors can be candidates in the parliamentary election if they resign from their positions before filing of nominations.

Elected on April 25, 2002, Mayor Khoka in his legal notice termed the EC's decision arbitrary and not in conformity with the existing laws. "The decision will have the evil effect of denying all the mayors of the city corporations from exercising their constitutional right to contest the parliamentary elections," the notices said.

Mayor Khoka, who was a member of parliament for three terms, claimed that he was not holding the office of profit as his status is that of a cabinet minister, which was notified by a gazette on October 14, 2002.

Khoka in his notice requested the CEC to rescind the decision within three days. Failing which appropriate legal action would be taken to vindicate his legal rights, the notices said.

Advocate Khondaker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, the counsel for Khoka, faxed the legal notice to the CEC at 2:40pm.