

## 200 picked

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Some leaders, who had been involved with the aborted bid for intra-party reforms after 1/11, have been left off the ticket due to strong opposition from party bigwigs including Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain.

Announcement of nominations began at 5:00am at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office. Khaleda Zia left the office at 4:30am after finalising the selections.

Mirza Abbas and his wife (Dhaka-8), Salauddin Ahmed (Dhaka-5), Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and his wife (Dhaka-7), Sabera Aman, former state minister Amanullah Aman's wife (Dhaka-2), Hasina Ahmed, former state minister Salauddin Ahmed's wife (Cox's Bazar-1), Romana Mahmud, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku's wife (Sirajganj-2), Enamul Haque, former minister Aminul Haque's brother (Rajshahi-1), Sabina Yasmin Chhobi, Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu's wife (Natore-2), Majeda Ahsan, Manjurul Ahsan Khan Munshi's wife (Comilla-4), AKM Mosharraf Hossain (Mymensingh-5), Abdus Salam Pintu and his brother Sultan Salauddin Ahmed Tuku (Tangail-2) and Giasuddin (Narayanganj-4) have been nominated despite repeated appeals from the BNP ranks not to choose convicted leaders or their relatives and also those widely perceived as corruptionists.

Selim Bhuiyan, a controversial leader of the pro-BNP forum of non-government teachers and employees, might be the candidate for Dhaka-5, if Salauddin Ahmed, who was chased by locals of Shanir Akhra while attempting to break up demonstrations for electricity in 2006, is not allowed to contest the polls.

The party is getting a lot of flak also for picking Sarwar Jamal Nizam for Chittagong-12. Nizam stands accused of involvement in the kidnap and murder of BNP leader Jamal Uddin during the alliance rule.

Of Khaleda Zia's lawyers, Ahmed Aazam Khan (Tangail-8), Kaiser Kamal (Netrakona-4) and Mahbubuddin Khokon (Noakhali-1) have already won nominations, while Naushad Jamir and Nasiruddin Asim were still trying.

The BNP chief's Gulshan office was a place of high drama Friday night. An intense debate among the party high-ups over nominations raged till dawn, said those present there.

Following a difference of opinion with his colleagues, Khandaker Delwar left the board meeting around midnight without signing the letters waiting to be issued to the candidates.

Sources said some leaders including the chairperson wanted to nominate a few pro-reform leaders. But other leaders including Delwar strongly opposed the idea, arguing that BNP is better off without those who betrayed the party while it was in trouble.

After Delwar had walked out, the parliamentary board decided not to select Osman Farruk, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Rezaul Bari Dina, GM Siraj, Masud Arun, Zahiruddin Swapan, Mofiqul Islam Tripti and Ziaul Haque Mollah, among other 'reformists'.

Tofazzal Hossain Master was chosen for Narsingdi-3, the constituency of former secretary general and pro-reform leader Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

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### Speaker's vehicle

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national-flagged vehicle and addressing rallies in different areas.

As questions were raised about his use of official vehicle, Sircar sent the letter through Returning Officer and DC of Panchagarh Md Munir Hossain. Contacted, the DC said he would send the letter to the law adviser.

### Gas price hike

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On September 24, the BERC held a public hearing on the issue of gas price where Petrobangla pleaded for an average 65 percent hike. The representatives from other stakeholders opposed it.

Most of the export-oriented industrial sectors like garments and textiles oppose the price-hike idea. "If the state-owned petroleum corporation is allowed to increase the tariffs of gas, it will have chain effects on all the socio-economic sectors", they feared.

### Donors' policies

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Rabbani will hear the petitions at the Jatiya Press Club tomorrow, said MM Akash on behalf of national preparatory committee on the people's tribunal during a press conference at the Communist Party office yesterday.

Other members of the bench are: educationist Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, engineer Sheikh Muhammad Shahidullah, journalist Kamal Lohani, columnist Syed Abul Moqsood, Dhaka University International Relations Prof Akmal Hossain and author Selina Hossain.

"The policies and frameworks prescribed by these lender organisations devastate the development potentials of Bangladesh," Akash said.

"We found anti-people role of these lending agencies in our investigations. We will file petitions to the tribunal showing the bad effects of World Bank and IMF's policies on the lives and livelihoods of people," said Akash, also an economics professor at Dhaka University.

Referring to economics Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, Akash, said, "The policies and prescriptions of these lending agencies have been more harmful than helpful to the people in the last 50 years."

He said they issued notices upon Bangladesh heads of those lender agencies to be present at the hearing.

Anu Muhammad, economics professor at Jahangirnagar University, said these lending agencies work to create market for multinational global capitals. "They try to create a myth about their role in poverty alleviation but in reality they work for global capital monopoly," he said.

Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Muzahidul Islam Selim, Workers Party of Bangladesh Politburo member Haider Akbar Khan Rano were present among others.

### UN observers

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higher today than it was two years ago," he told reporters at a press conference at Hotel Sheraton.

"There is no reason to doubt about the cooperation from the political parties, the caretaker government and the Election Commission that you will have--Bangladesh will have--a good election," he said.

Vendrell said the caretaker government told them that the emergency would not be lifted before December 11, the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers.

The UN panel, which came to Dhaka on November 23, will submit its report on Bangladesh's political situation to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

During its visit the team held meetings with government representatives, including the chief adviser and the army chief, political leaders, the Election Commission, diplomats, civil society members and other stakeholders.

Vendrell said a few 'prominent' persons including HM Ershad think that the state of emergency should remain in force on polling day. "It was an unusual experience for us. I think they probably had some bad experience about election day in the past," he said.

The UN panel chief identified political freedom, freedom of speech and prevention of violence and intimidation as the most important things that need to be ensured.

Vendrell stressed the need for a friendly relation between the winners and the losers in the polls. "We would like to see all parties accept the election results with the winner extending hands of friendship to the losers," he said.

In reply to a question, Vendrell said diplomats should never interfere in Bangladesh's domestic politics. "They are here to represent their governments. They are here to ensure that the assistance they give is utilised properly," he said, adding that it is up to the Bangladeshis to tell foreigners if they latter appear to be infringing into the country's internal affairs.

The UN panel came to Bangladesh as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during his November 1 visit to Dhaka announced to send a delegation to assess Bangladesh's pre-election situation.

Nepal's Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel and former deputy director of the UN's electoral assistance division Aracelly Santana are the two other members of the panel. The panel will visit Bangladesh again on December 27.

## Mumbai siege over

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pointed a finger of blame at their neighbor and rival.

Islamabad denied involvement and promised to help in the investigation.

Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told a press conference Saturday that Pakistan will take action against any group within its borders if it was involved in the Mumbai attacks.

"Any entity or group involved in the ghastly act, the Pakistani government will proceed against it," he told reporters in a televised press conference.

Pakistan today backtracked on sending ISI chief Shuja Pasha to India in connection with the probe into the terrorist attacks in Mumbai and instead deputed a representative of the spy agency for the task.

The decision was taken within hours of Premier Yousuf Raza Gilani agreeing to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's demand to fly the ISI chief to Delhi.

At a meeting here early today, President Asif Ali Zardari, Gilani and Army chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani decided against sending Pasha to India.

Pakistan's cabinet held a crisis talks Saturday to discuss a response to the Mumbai attacks after Islamabad reversed the decision to send the head of military intelligence to India.

US President George W Bush yesterday pledged the "full support of the United States" to India as it investigates a wave of attacks on the financial capital Mumbai.

"We pledge the full support of the United States as India investigates these attacks, brings the guilty to justice and sustains its democratic way of life," Bush said on the south lawn of the White House after returning from Thanksgiving holiday.

A team of FBI agents also was on its way to India to lend assistance.

"All operations are over. All the terrorists have been killed," Mumbai police chief Hassan Gafoor said, as the special forces units emerged from the smoke-filled hotel and firemen moved in to douse a fierce blaze.

On Friday, elite troops had stormed a Mumbai Jewish centre and killed two gunmen -- but also found six dead Israeli hostages, including a US-based rabbi and his wife, who were murdered as the commandos closed in.

Another luxury hotel that was attacked, the Oberoi Trident, was declared clear of militants late Friday, with scores of trapped guests rescued and 24 bodies found.

"They were the kind of people with no remorse -- anybody and whomsoever came in front of them they fired at," an Indian commando said of the young gunman.

The head of the commando forces, JK Dutt, said his men were conducting a final sweep of the battle-scarred Taj.

"We are now going through each and every room to make sure it is safe," Dutt said, appealing to any guests still hidden in the hotel to make themselves known.

Mumbai disaster official R Jadhav told AFP that 195 people have been killed and nearly 300 injured in the battle, which began when the dozen or so militants split into groups to attack multiple targets across the city, including the main railway station and a hospital.

Commandos rescued a total of 610 people from two Mumbai hotels and a Jewish centre in the city that were seized by armed Islamist militants, India's security chief said Saturday.

The elite forces brought 300 people out of the five-star Taj Hotel, where the siege ended earlier in the day, India's Internal Security Secretary M.L. Kumawat told a news conference in New Delhi.

He said 250 others were rescued from Oberoi Trident hotel and 12 families comprising 60 people were brought out of the Jewish centre.

Kumawat did not specify how many of the 610 had actually been held hostage by the militants, who launched their assault on Wednesday evening.

TV channels described the attacks as 'India's 9/11'.

There were concerns that the death toll could rise as emergency services combed the warren of rooms at the main siege sites for more bodies.

The 26 foreigners killed included a total of eight Israelis, five Americans, two French nationals, two Australians, two Canadians, a German, a Japanese, a British Cypriot, an Italian, a Singaporean, a Thai and a Mauritian.

Around 15 security personnel were killed, including the head of Mumbai's anti-terrorist squad who was cremated with full honours Saturday at a funeral attended by thousands.

Eleven militants were confirmed dead and one captured. Indian intelligence sources said the detained gunman had confessed to coming from Pakistan.

One group entered Mumbai by boat, while others were believed to have rented prop-

erty in the city -- stockpiling arms and explosives -- before the attacks were launched.

India's prime minister was Saturday meeting the chiefs of the country's army, navy, air force and intelligence services to discuss the Islamic militant attacks in Mumbai, his office said.

"The prime minister wants a detailed report on the terrorist attacks in Mumbai and actions being taken," an aide to premier Manmohan Singh said.

The official said "ways to prevent such attacks" from happening again were being discussed in the meeting but gave no further details.

In an address to the nation on Thursday, Singh said that those behind the coordinated attacks were based "outside the country," and he warned "neighbours" who provide a haven to anti-India militants.

The crisis risked escalating into a major stand-off between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, with Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee saying that "some elements in Pakistan" were responsible for the assault.

A number of Indian officials suggested the militants were from the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba -- notorious for a deadly assault on the Indian parliament in 2001 that pushed New Delhi and Islamabad to the edge of war.

Pakistani leaders insisted their government had nothing to do with the attacks and appealed to India not to get drawn into a dangerous "blame game."

The two countries have fought three wars since gaining independence from Britain in 1947.

Survivors have given terrifying accounts of the carnage in the hotels. Many said they hid in the dark for hours, barricaded in rooms or hiding under beds, inside wardrobes or bathrooms.

"I cannot believe what I have seen in the last 36 hours. I have seen dead bodies, blood everywhere and only heard gunshots," said Muneer Al Mahaj after he was rescued.

South African security guard Faisal Nagel was having dinner with colleagues at a restaurant in the Taj hotel when the assault began.

"We basically put the lights off in the restaurant just to create an element of surprise. And we armed ourselves with kitchen knives and meat cleavers," he told AFP.

They ended up helping around 120 people escape -- including a 90-year-old woman carried in her chair down 25 flights of stairs.

Television footage of the inside of the hotel showed half-eaten meals left on tables as diners fled for their lives. The restaurant walls were pockmarked with bullet holes and the floor covered with a thick layer of glass.

Witnesses said the attackers had specifically rounded up people with US and British passports.

Both the United States and Britain expressed condolences and offered to help investigate the assault on Mumbai, which has been hit by terror attacks before. Nearly 190 people were killed in train bombings in 2006.

India's newspapers laid much of the blame at the door of the intelligence agencies.

(AFP, AP, PTI)

### CA

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Vendrell appreciated the overall performance of the caretaker government and the Election Commission for holding a free and fair election.

He lauded various institutional reforms and completion of digitised voter list with photographs within a short period of time.

Chief Election Commissioner of Nepal Bhojraj Pokharel, ex-deputy director of Electoral Assistance Division of UN Department of Political Affairs Aracelly Santana, UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Renata Lok Dissellien, and Political Affairs Officer, UN Department of Political Affairs Andrew Bruce were in the delegation.

The UN team that came here for a pre-election assessment emphasised a culture of gracefully accepting election results, particularly by those who are defeated in the elections.

After the meeting, CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim, who was present at the meeting, briefed reporters about it.

The CA said his government has done everything possible for holding a free, fair and acceptable election, as the government was committed to this end since its assumption of office in January 12, 2007.

He hoped that the future governments would continue the reform process and strengthen the institutional reforms further.

The UN team left Dhaka yesterday and will come again on December 26.

### Alliances ready

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peacefully. They will help maintain law and order till December 31, Sohul told reporters at his office.

According to an earlier decision taken at a high level meeting at the EC, the armed forces were supposed to be deployed from December 12 as the polls were previously scheduled for December 18.

Meanwhile, components of both the major alliances have been holding a series of meetings over sharing of seats for the election, limiting the polls race mainly between the two major combines for the first time since restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1990.

Registered with the EC, a total of 39 political parties are qualified for contesting the polls, but most of them have joined the two coalitions led by archrivals BNP and AL.

Aspirants are filing nominations for the second time for contesting the 9th parliamentary election.

Earlier in December 2006, they filed nominations for the election slated for January 22 last year, but it could not be held due to a grave political situation that prompted the president to declare the state of emergency on January 11.

In the run up to that scheduled (cancelled) polls, most of the candidates from the BNP-led combine filed nominations before expiry of the last date for it while the AL-led grand electoral alliance stepped into the electoral race on the last day.

An almost reverse situation is being witnessed this time. At that time, the AL-led alliance stepped back from the polls race on the last date for withdrawal of candidature, alleging that all electoral preparations by the government were intended to 'stage-manage' the election in favour of BNP-Jamaat-led four-party alliance.

But this time the AL-led alliance is firmly preparing for the upcoming polls while doubts still persist as to whether the BNP-led four-party combine will finally remain in the battle of ballot as their demands for withdrawal of the state of emergency and scrapping of the EC's authority to cancel candidates have not yet been met.

The four-party has also been alleging that the present caretaker government is working to ensure victory of a 'certain' political party in the polls.

### Bhuiyan

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of the "nomination trade".

"I know the chairperson was in my favour but a few leaders involved in the nomination trade played a nasty game against me," Zahiruddin Swapan, former lawmaker from Barisal-1 said last night. BNP has nominated Engineer Abid Sobhan there.

Swapan said local leaders, workers and supporters may file his nomination paper today.

The BNP yesterday cancelled the nomination of Masud Arun, a close aide of Bhuiyan, a few hours after declaring his candidature.

Asked about his plan now, Arun expressed his belief to The Daily Star that the party will review the decision as "the people of my constituency want me as the BNP candidate".

Sources said Mosharraf Hossain Mongu, Shah Abul Hossain, Sarder Shakhawat Hossain Bakul and Rustum Ali Faraji, among other so-called reformist leaders, may submit nomination papers as independent candidates in the upcoming poll.

Earlier, BNP high-ups decided to nominate many reformist leaders including Saifur Rahman, Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, Maj (retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, Osman Farruk, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Masud Arun and Zahiruddin Swapan.

But later, the parliamentary board of BNP decided not to nominate any of them except Saifur, Mahbub and Hafiz.

A BNP leader, however, said the chairperson may bring some changes at the last moment to include a few reformist leaders considering their popularity in their constituencies.

About 106 former lawmakers of BNP had expressed solidarity with Mannan Bhuiyan to make the party more democratic after state of emergency was declared. Khaleda expelled Bhuiyan and Ashraf Hossain from the party just before her arrest.

Many of these leaders shifted their position in the last few months and got party ticket for the coming parliamentary polls but a few including Bhuiyan failed because of strong opposition from leaders like Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain.

## AL, JP closing

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greater electoral alliance with Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the AL-led grand alliance is little. If the formation of the greater alliance fails, a number of LDP leaders might get offers to join AL, sources hinted.

A JP leader said their party high-command is ready to curtail their demand for seats but are standing firm on the power balance issue.

JP high-ups were very firm on the issue during a party presidium meeting held after JP acting Chairman Anisul Islam Mahmood and presidium member Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu had a meeting with AL President Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan home last night.

"We have had fruitful talks with AL President Sheikh Hasina over seat sharing and we expect to get more than 40 seats," acting JP Chairman Anisul Islam Mahmood, however, told reporters after the meeting with the AL chief.

Earlier in the day, the two JP leaders had a two-hour meeting with AL leaders on the issues.

Sources said they finalised a number of JP candidates for some constituencies after reviewing 2001 election results and the report of a survey conducted by AL election conducting committee.

Leaders of both parties said they selected candidates considering who is more likely to secure the seat in the

December 29 polls and disregarded their party affiliation.

AL spokesman Syed Ashrafur Islam yesterday said AL has got rid of the seat-sharing issues with its allies in the 14-party combine, now reduced to a nine-party coalition. Workers' Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal got three seats each while Gonatantri Party got one.

He hoped to settle the issue with JP soon.

AL and JP, two components of the grand alliance, have been in talks over sharing seats for the last couple of weeks.

The 10 candidates who got AL nominations are Tajul Islam Mohammad Faruq for Rajshahi-5 replacing Abdul Wadud Dara, Ishtiaque Ahmed for Jamalpur-1 replacing Abdul Kalam Azad, Junaid Ahmed Polok for Natore-3 replacing Hanif Ali Sheikh, Azizul Haque Chowdhury for Dinajpur-6 replacing Abu Hanif Sarkar, Anwarul Azim Anwar for Jhenidah-4 replacing Abdul Mannan, Shafiqul Azim Khan for Jhenidah-3 replacing Principal Nabi Newaj, Ali Ashraf Khan Khosru for Netrakona-2 replacing Lt Col (retd) Abu Noor Khan, Shafi Ahmed for Netrakona-3 replacing Rebeka Momin, Shamsul Alam Dudu for in Joypurhat-1 replacing Principal Khwaja Shamsul Haque and Khaledur Rahman Tito for Jessore-3 replacing Ali Reza Raju.

## Thai protesters

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Police said they had given formal warnings overnight to protesters at both Suvarnabhumi international airport and the smaller, domestic Don Mueang airport to leave immediately or face action to evict them.

"Police have already issued two warnings since last night (Friday) to ask them to leave," Major General Piya Somtrakoon, deputy commander of Thailand's central region, told AFP.

At Suvarnabhumi, demonstrators headed inside as rumours of a police raid circulated. Protesters set up a medical corner to treat anyone injured if clashes broke out, while water and other supplies were stacked up.

Some women carried pink helmets, readying themselves for any action. Children are also among the crowd.

Suvarnabhumi has been shuttered since late Tuesday, and every day the siege continues, 30,000 more passengers miss flights and the kingdom loses seven million dollars in tourism revenue, ministers and officials have said.

The army chief has said he does not want to remove the protesters for fear of bloody clashes, and on Wednesday urged Somchai to dissolve parliament and hold new elections -- calls the premier promptly rejected.

In signs of further rifts between the government and security forces, Somchai on Friday removed national police chief General Patcharawat Wongsuwan, as police failed to take action after the emergency rule order.

The protesters are calling for the resignation of the government elected in December, saying it is running Thailand on behalf of former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted in a coup in 2006 and is banned from politics.

The government said it tried to start negotiations with the PAD, but protest leaders have so far rebuffed the overtures, and say they will stay remain at the airports until the resignation of Somchai -- Thaksin's brother-in-law.

A police officer estimated Saturday that 3,000 protesters were camped out at Suvarnabhumi, about 1,000 were at Don Mueang, and only 700 remained at the premier's Government House offices.

Numbers are expected to swell over the weekend.

The PAD, a loose coalition with the backing of elements in the military, the palace and the urban middle classes, began its campaign in late May.

Protests have steadily escalated, with the PAD seizing Government House in late August. On October 7, two protesters were killed and 500 people injured as PAD supporters and police clashed outside parliament.

The leaders called for a "final battle" against the government on Sunday and have since caused the biggest disruption since the anti-Thaksin coup, although their airport-blocking tactics have alienated some supporters.

Government spokesman Suparat Nakbunnam has said Somchai will remain in the northern city of Chiang Mai indefinitely, a pro-government stronghold, "as there are still uncertainties in the tensions between the government and army."

Meanwhile, the repatriation of thousands of foreign passengers following protests which have paralysed Bangkok's airports could take up to a month, the deputy premier said

yesterday.

Thailand's main international airport will officially remain closed for another two days, airport authorities said Saturday, as protesters continued to occupy the building.

Anti-government demonstrators occupied Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok on Tuesday and the domestic Don Mueang airport was closed on Thursday, stranding tens of thousands of travelers.

Despite the declaration of a state of emergency at both sites by embattled Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, police have failed to act against the protesters amid fears of violence.

The effects on Thailand's tourism industry are set to be "mammoth", with up to one million Thais facing losing their jobs and the number of visitors from abroad falling by half next year, Olam Chairprawat said.

Around 30,000 passengers a day are missing flights because of the closures, and with travellers currently being evacuated from a Vietnam War-era navy base in eastern Thailand, progress has been slow.

"The operation to help return passengers home may take around one month from now to be done," Olam told a news conference.

Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi international airport closed on Tuesday after protesters stormed the terminal and authorities shut Don Mueang domestic airport on Thursday after a similar blockade.

Olam said up to 50,000 Thais were stuck abroad because of the occupation, which police have shown no signs of wanting to end amid fears of bloody clashes with protesters.

### 4-party

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Meanwhile, BNP late last night agreed to leave Dinajpur-3 seat for Jatiya Gonatantrik Party President Shafiqul Alam Pradhan.