

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 on Thursday at 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 Salahuddin 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-1) and Mahbubuddin Khokon (Noakhali-1) have already won nominations, while Naushad Jamir and Nasiruddin Asim were still trying.

The incident took place in the heavily guarded Green Zone in the centre of Baghdad where the Iraqi parliament and a number of government buildings and foreign embassies are located.

Jatiya Party leader Ahsan Habib Linkon showed up at Khaleda's office at 1:00am. He has joined the party following a promise of nomination from Kushtia. As of yesterday evening, he did not get the go-ahead.

Harun or Rashid, former Jatiya Party leader who joined BNP Thursday was chosen for Dhaka-7. But later detained former lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and his wife bagged the nomination.

For Netrakona-1, Kaiser Kamal was picked only to be replaced by Abdul Karim Abbasi, who too joined BNP Thursday from Liberal Democratic Party.

The BNP top brass were in talks with leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh Jatiya Party and Islami Oikya Jote to talk seat-sharing. But anything conclusive was yet to come out.

WOMEN CANDIDATES

Khaleda Zia (Bogra 6 & 7) Shabida Akhter Rita (Jamalpur-1), Afroza Khan Mita (Manikganj-2), Helen Zerin Khan (Madaripur-2), Sabina Yasmin Chhobi (Natore-2), Majeda Ahsan (Comilla-4), Romana Mahmud (Sirajganj-2), Elen Bhutto (Jhalakathi-2) are among the women who will compete in the upcoming polls.

2 die in Baghdad rocket attack

ALJAZEERA.NET

At least two foreign contractors were killed and 15 others wounded after a rocket fell near a UN compound in the Iraqi capital Baghdad, according to a UN official.

An official said several of the injured in the rocket attack on the organisation's compound are in serious condition and that the death toll might rise.

Their nationalities of the victims have not been released.

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Khaleda, Hasina

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After the changeover of 1/11, the country's two top leaders reportedly faced tremendous pressure from a certain quarter to quit politics and leave the country.

Hundreds dead

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Christians, who had been arrested for taking part in the riots and who were at police headquarters.

He also reported having seen around 100 people with gunshot wounds who said they had been shot by the security forces.

Another Jos-based reporter for the Punch newspaper had told AFP Friday he counted 55 bodies in three hospitals.

Aminu Manu said the bodies in the hospitals are thought to be those of Christians and those in the mosque.

"So far over 10,000 people have been displaced from their homes and are now seeking refuge in churches, mosques and army and police barracks," a Nigerian Red Cross official in Jos said.

"I can't give any figures but there are dead bodies on the streets that are yet to be evacuated. We are afraid of an outbreak of an epidemic if they are allowed to decompose," he told AFP.

"In these places where people are taking refuge, there is no water and no food. We call on the Nigerian emergency management agencies to come to their aid," he added.

On Friday night Red Cross spokeswoman Umo Okon told AFP from Abuja that there were "over 300 injured" in different health centres in the town. She declined to estimate the number of dead.

A brief government statement late Friday said that President Umaru Yar'Adua had sent in army troops to contain the situation.

Local residents said several churches and mosques were razed in the violence, which started with a rumour that the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) had lost the election to the federal ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP).

The ANP is perceived locally to be a predominantly Muslim party, and the PDP is mainly Christian.

Jos is the administrative capital of Plateau state. It was the scene of a week of violence between Christians and Muslims in September 2001 that also left hundreds dead.

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: educationalist Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, engineer Sheikh Muhammed Shahidullah, journalist Kamal Lohani, columnist Syed Abu Moqdad, 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 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 Bangladeshi to tell foreigners if they later 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.

Netal's Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel and former deputy director of the UN's electoral assistance division Aracely 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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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 Yousaf 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 into a house a firebrand.

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 whomever came in front of them they fired at," an Indian commander said of the young gunmen.

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 had 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.

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