

Hasina plays on people's expectation for a change

From highly-secured dais she pledges to contain food prices, graft, crime; winds up Dhaka campaign

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her grand electoral alliance wants to bring a change to the country to establish a rule of honest people and economic freedom for the people, with a popular mandate.

"We want to restore democracy and establish economic freedom for the people of Bangladesh through the upcoming election, and for that change is needed. We want a rule of honest people, not politics of criminality, extortion and corruption. We want peace, not criminal activities, we want security for the people, not militancy," Hasina said.

She was addressing a massive election campaign rally at the capital's historic Paltan Maidan amid unprecedented security measures including bullet proof glass fitted on the lectern and on almost the entire length of the front stage where she sat through the rally organised by the city unit of AL.

The former prime minister urged the audience to vote for the AL-led grand alliance nominees in the December 29 parliamentary election in order to save the country and its people from the 'looters',

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Awami League President Sheikh Hasina delivers her speech from behind bulletproof glass and surrounded by bodyguards at a rally at Paltan Maidan in the capital yesterday. More photos on page 3

Paltan packed like sardines

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The election rally of Awami League turned into a human sea at Paltan Maidan and its surrounding areas yesterday as tens of thousands of people joined the party's final show-down in the capital ahead of the national polls.

The gathering gradually wore a festive look when AL supporters from different areas started thronging the venue of the rally with colourful banners, festoons and AL's election symbol 'boat' since morning.

AL leaders, workers and supporters in processions

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Poll finances of parties kept under wraps

EC effort for transparent election economy not making that impact

RASHIDUL HASAN and HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The two main political parties, BNP and Awami League (AL), have been keeping a cloak of secrecy around their election finances with most of their policymakers left in the dark.

Aided by a select few, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and AL President Sheikh Hasina have been operating the election funds like they always did in the past.

This undermines the Election Commission's (EC) efforts to promote transparency in polls finances of the political parties, say political observers.

According to the new electoral laws, the parties can receive donations from institutions and individuals. An individual is allowed to donate up to Tk 5 lakh and an institution Tk 25 lakh in a calendar year.

The laws however call for proper accounts of day-to-day funding-raising and spending.

When these correspondents enquired about their election expenses so far, BNP and AL spokesmen said the information can be accessed once they submit their spending returns to the EC after the December 29 election.

As per provisions of Representation of the People Order (RPO), a political party cannot

spend beyond Tk 4.5 crore for its overall electoral activities and Tk 1.50 lakh for a single candidate.

However, unlike the candidates, they are not legally bound to disclose their sources of funds.

Political analysts say the way AL and BNP are handling their funds brings into question their commitment to financial transparency. Both the parties, they think, have exceeded the ceilings.

Besides funding electioneering of the needy candidates, tours crisscrossing the country, printing of huge leaflets and posters and advertisements on private television channels should already have cost them a large share of their purses.

Insiders said many businessmen have distanced themselves from the parties after the changeover of 1/11 and committed little to election funds.

AL FINANCES
Talking to The Daily Star, HT Imam, co-chair of AL election conduct committee, claimed they have around Tk 4 crore for election purposes. The amount came from various sources.

The party made over Tk 2.06 crore from the sale of 2,758 nomination papers for Tk 7,500 each.

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Dhaka dates with rallies, processions

ARUN DEVNATH

Dhaka morphed into a city of high-pitched rallies and processions as the election campaign yesterday moved closer to the final lap.

In parts of the city, different rallies continued into late evening.

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina spoke from a high-profile afternoon rally at the

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Campaign ends midnight today

Ban on vehicles to come into effect

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Contenders in the upcoming parliamentary election have until 12:00am tomorrow to wrap up their campaigns as the curtain will fall on the last two weeks' hectic electioneering at midnight today.

None will be allowed to convene, hold or attend any public meeting, and no person will be allowed to organise or join any procession within the area of any constituency after midnight today.

The restrictions will continue till forty eight-hours have elapsed since the completion of vote casting, according to a news release of the Election Commission (EC).

According to the Representation of the People Order (RPO), any violation of the restrictions is punishable by a minimum of two years of rigorous imprisonment which may be extended to seven years, and also by fines.

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Major parties overlook 2 crore new voters

Youths too found critical about political trend

EMRAN HOSSAIN

Almost no effort is being seen regarding the big challenge of winning the hearts of a large number of fresh voters in the campaigns for the ninth parliamentary elections.

The Awami League (AL) addresses this new generation of about two crore youths who will cast votes for the first time on December 29 in its electoral manifesto but the BNP still sticks to its traditional view of them.

However, only a small number of candidates of both the alliances led by the AL and BNP address these fresh voters in their speeches and leaflets.

These people who have become eligi-

ble as voters since 2001 believe their voting will not bring any qualitative change in the future politics but most of them still want to vote for the "ineligible candidates" as they have no other options.

Abdur Rahman, a 22-year-old resident of Mohammadpur, said, "The political trend in Bangladesh is of the lowest standard—politicians tell lies, cannot keep prices of essentials within people's reach and patronise militants and Razakars."

Sonia Rahnuma, a student at Jahangirnagar University, said, "I do not think my vote has any use in bringing a change in politics. I should elect a qualified person but where can I find that person? Had political leaders sacrificed

even 25 percent of their personal interests, I would have considered them eligible."

Educated and conscious, these fresh voters are aware about the political parties' manifestos, their electoral pledges and speeches although they do not believe much that these would be implemented.

"The election appears to be a farce to me as both the Awami League and BNP have nominated candidates who are accused in corruption cases and we would be voting for them knowing everything," said Zubayer Ahmed Khan, a master degree student under National University.

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2 top leaders' speeches on Betar-TV today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar will broadcast the speeches of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia today ahead of the ninth parliamentary election.

According to a BTV announcement, the two former premiers' speeches will be broadcast on BTV, BTV World and Bangladesh Betar after the 8 o'clock Bangla news on BTV.

Sources said BTV yesterday recorded the 40-minute speeches each of the two top leaders.

Hasina's speech will be broadcast first, sources added.

100 short-term EU observers to watch polls

UNB, Dhaka

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) yesterday deployed nearly 100 short-term observers across the country.

They will be joining the long-term observers who have been in the field for the past five weeks, following all electoral preparations including candidate scrutiny, campaigning and the work of the Election Commission.

With the deployment of short-term observers, the number of EU election observers in the country now stands at 150.

The short-term observers

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Vote for 4-party for peace, development

Khaleda urges voters

RASHIDUL HASAN

In a whirlwind election campaign in the city, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night sought votes for the four-party alliance candidates in different Dhaka constituencies.

Hundreds of party leaders, activists and supporters standing on both sides of the city roads greeted the former premier and chanted slogans in support of the BNP and its alliance.

A large number of curious women, girls and children came out of their houses to have a glimpse of Khaleda.



Khaleda waved at them from her car escorted by the Special Security Force and other law enforcement agencies.

After completing the recording of her address to the nation at Bangladesh Television studio at Rampura, the BNP chief started her campaign around 10:00pm from Khilgaon. Bangladesh Television, BTV World and Bangladesh Betar will broadcast her speech along with that of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina today evening.

In a brief speech at Khilgaon Staff Quarter, Khaleda called upon the voters to cast votes for the four-party alliance nominees.

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Babar expelled from BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former state Lutfozzaman Babar has been expelled from the party for contesting the ninth parliamentary election as an independent candidate.

"Following directives of the chairperson and according to 5

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4-party rally at Paltan today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will address an election rally of 4-party alliance at the city's historic Paltan Maidan today, a day after her political archrival Sheikh Hasina's grand election

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TRYING ELECTORAL OFFENCES

Judicial magistrates face admin hurdle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Judicial magistrates are facing difficulties in discharging their duties of trying electoral offences in the upcoming parliamentary polls due to non-cooperation of local administration.

Many of the judicial magistrates yesterday informed the Election Commission (EC)

Secretariat about the problems, sources said.

They also requested the EC Secretariat to immediately issue instructions to district administration to cooperate with the judicial magistrates in their job. But it did not issue any such instructions until last night, officials said.

The establishment ministry, which appoints

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Four-party alliance candidate Shamsul Alam of Chittagong-8 constituency brings out a large procession from Andurkilla mosque after Juma prayers yesterday. The procession used at least 40 horn speakers and blocked traffic on Andurkilla Road.

Election takes over Business

The Daily Star has converted most of the business section into election coverage. The regular four-page Star Business in pink will remain on hold until December 31, but we will continue to bring you stock updates in one page as long as the market is open. In the extended election coverage, two pages will carry the latest on Bangladesh elections, which is the demand of the time. Another page will be dedicated to world news, largely about the fast-unfolding financial recession. As the stock market is closed on Election Day in Bangladesh, we will not be

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