

Hasina plays

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corruptionists, and patrons of militants and criminal activities.

"We want to root out corruption and criminal activities from Bangladesh. Bangladesh should be developed and emerge with dignity in the global arena," Hasina said.

Thousands of AL activists and supporters as well as a large number of non-partisan people joined the rally.

AL supporters arrived at the venue from different parts of the city, with colourful processions, chanting slogans for AL's election symbol 'boat', singing songs, and dancing to beats of drums, turning the meeting venue and its adjacent areas into a sea of crowd.

Introducing AL nominees for the parliamentary seats of Dhaka city, the AL chief urged the people to be united and to decide whether they will vote for corruptionists, criminals, and militants, or for those who will establish peace and security, and reduce prices of everyday essentials.

As the crowd expressed their support for the grand alliance in the election by raising their hands, Hasina said, "InshAllah, people will vote for the boat and ensure grand alliance's victory and will free themselves from the clutches of the patrons of criminals and corruptionists."

"We want to say, this country is for the people. We liberated the country through the war of liberation. So, there will be no place for looters, corruptionists and criminals in this country. The country must be saved from their hands," she said.

Hasina urged the crowd to go from door to door to convey AL's message seeking votes for the boat.

A four-tier security measure was arranged with deployment of around 3,000 law enforcers including the Special Security Force, Army, Rab and police. A number of intelligence officials were also on duty in and around the venue.

People were allowed to enter Paltan Maidan only after passing through several metal detecting archways. The meeting venue had been swept by Rab's dog squad and bomb disposal unit before the rally. Law enforcers were posted on top of buildings around the area with binoculars, and a number of closed-circuit TV cameras were also set up in an around the venue.

In her 22-minute address, the AL chief scathingly criticised the immediate past regime of BNP-Jamaat alliance for resorting to wide scale corruption, misrule, criminal activities, for sponsoring militancy in the name of Islam, for hiking up prices of everyday essentials, and for plundering thousands of crores of taka.

She also urged voters not to vote for war criminals and anti-liberation forces.

"We want to build Bangladesh in the spirit of the war of liberation, free from poverty and illiteracy," Hasina said greeting the crowd in the month of independence.

She pledged to reduce prices of everyday essentials, increase power generation, make education free up to the level of bachelors degree, ensure community health care in every village, and to create employment for the youth, if voted to power.

The AL president said, "We

Babar

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(ga) clause of the party constitution, Lutfozzaman Babar has been stripped of the party's post of publicity secretary and primary membership," said a party press release signed by BNP Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed yesterday.

The controversial ex-state minister for home had been a close aide to Tarique Rahman, the eldest son of Khaleda Zia, during the tenure of the previous BNP-led alliance government.

Following the promulgation of the state of emergency, the joint forces arrested Babar after recovering four firearms from his Gulistan residence in the capital on May 28.

Although a Dhaka court on October 30 sentenced Babar to 17 years' rigorous imprisonment for possessing illegal firearms and ammunition, the BNP high up did not take any action against him ignoring the party constitution.

As per the BNP constitution, a convicted person or anyone publicly known as a corrupt person cannot remain in the party.

Babar, who was released recently, filed nomination as an independent candidate for Netrakona-4 constituency since the party did not give him ticket considering his conviction. BNP nominated Ataul Haque as its candidate in the constituency.

Even the returning officer cancelled Babar's candidature, but the chamber judge of Supreme Court declared him fit for contesting the polls.

Following the court verdict, Babar tried to get his party's backing for contesting the election but failed.

However, most BNP leaders and activists in the area are now working for Babar.

Following the dispute, the BNP high-up yesterday expelled Babar from the party on disciplinary ground.

Earlier, the party expelled a few former lawmakers and party leaders including Dharendra Nath Saha, Shahidul Haque Jamal, Rustom Ali Farazi, Nazir Hossain and law affairs secretary Joyntul Abedin for contesting the polls as independent candidates.

will make Dhaka a modern city free of criminal activities, traffic congestion, and power, water and gas outages, and will improve communication with other parts of the country."

Addressing the first time voters, Hasina said her electoral alliance wants to present a developed, prosperous, and digital Bangladesh to the new generation by 2021, when the country will celebrate the golden jubilee of its independence.

"We will build a developed country full of possibilities and free of poverty, where all will have access to health care and education, there will be food security, so no one is deprived of food, and the challenges of the 21st century will be faced boldly," she said.

Criticising the immediate past BNP-Jamaat-led four-party alliance government, Hasina said the BNP-Jamaat alliance, after assuming power in 2001 'through vote rigging', hiked prices of all essentials and looted thousands of crores of taka which they siphoned off to foreign countries.

She also alleged that former prime minister Khaleda Zia and former finance minister M Saifur Rahman 'whitened crores of black money'.

Hasina said the four-party alliance chief and Saifur Rahman 'will have to account for whitening their black money'.

The BNP-Jamaat alliance tarnished the image of the country abroad through extorting foreign telecom companies, Khaleda's son's siphoned off money was even traced abroad, she alleged.

The AL chief was also highly critical of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, BNP's key partner in the four-party electoral alliance, saying Jamaat is guilty of mass killings and rape of thousands of women during the country's war of liberation, and it is now trying to grab the state power in the name of the religion.

Saying that Islam is a religion of peace, the former premier urged voters to beware of war criminals who are only using Islam for political gains.

She said the people do not want to see the national flag flying on the cars of anti-liberation war forces.

At the end of her speech Hasina became rather emotional when she was talking about the assassinations of her family members and about the curse of poverty on the poor people.

She said she has been in politics for the welfare of the poor and the needy.

"I want to give the poor and the distressed relief from poverty and misery, and want to bring happiness to them to fulfil my father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's dream of building a golden Bangla. No matter how many threats and attempts are made on my life, I will continue to be in politics for their welfare."

Paltan packed

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joined the rally by chanting slogans, singing songs and dancing to the tune of musical instruments. The huge gathering of the rally spilled over to nearby Motijheel, Dilkusha, Fakirerpul, Gulistan and Bijoygar area.

AL men chanted 'Joy...joy...joy have, Naukar joy habe' (Victory will be for boat). People who gathered there earlier had received others by repeated clapping.

The rally began at about 2:30pm through reading out from religious text. All the roads around Paltan Maidan, including Bangabandhu Avenue, Gulistan, Muktangan, Paltan, Dilkusha and Dainik Bangla crossings, were full of people by 3:00pm.

As AL supporters continually arrived and tried to reach the venue of the rally, a huge crowd spilled over into nearby roads in front of Bangladesh Secretariat, Bijoygar and Fakirerpool on the weekly holiday.

The AL activists and workers were then seen listening to the speech of AL President and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina through loudspeakers from those places as they could not reach the venue. Many people also painted Hasina's image on their cheeks.

A banner read 'Be united in the struggle for change, vote for boat symbol' was hung on the podium. One side of the banner had the image of Hasina and the other side boat, the election symbol of AL.

Though the AL supporters thronged the meeting venue with enthusiasm, they were kept far from the highly secured dais surrounded by bullet-proof glass. Hasina also delivered her speech from behind bullet-proof glass.

The authorities opened the main gate of the ground around 2:00pm allowing people to enter through the gate, the only gate between Bangabandhu National Stadium and Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium. People had to go through several check points to enter there.

Khaleda

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"Cast your votes for the BNP candidates to keep the development activities of the previous BNP-led four-party alliance government continuing," Khaleda said at another rally at Basabo around 11:00pm.

She also urged city dwellers to attend the BNP's rally at Paltan Maidan today.

Khaleda's motorcade even visited the narrow roads of AGB Colony and Railway Colony at Motijheel and Shajahanpur.

Members of the law enforcement agencies had to struggle to control the crowd desperately trying to have a glimpse of the BNP chief, who visited most constituencies in the city.

Non-brand

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quality) is selling at Tk 60 per kg," he said adding that it was Tk 75 a week back.

Yesterday per kg non-brand soyabean oil was selling at Tk 100-102 while a week ago it sold for Tk 110-112, retailers said.

During a visit to different small city markets it was found that retailers in such markets had not yet lowered the prices. They were selling per kg palm and super palm oil at Tk 60 and Tk 80 respectively taking the advantage of the ignorance of customers.

In wholesale markets per kg palm oil was selling for Tk 44, per kg super palm oil for Tk 57 and per kg soyabean oil for Tk 97 on Thursday, city's Moulvi Bazar oil traders informed.

Prices of all brands of soyabean oil have not yet plummeted in the city markets, traders added.

Representatives of different brand soyabean oil companies assured that the prices would decrease but they did not mention to what extent it would come down, market sources said.

AKM Fakhru Alam, regional manager of Malaysian Palm Oil Council said in December one lakh tonne of palm oil had been imported in the country and distributed to different markets while recently imported 42 thousand tonnes of soyabean oil are yet to be distributed to the markets.

He also informed that per tonne crude palm oil costs \$592 while the soyabean (a kg) costs \$730.

Campaign ends

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The EC news release yesterday urged all to abide by the instructions.

Although official poll campaigns end at midnight today, the candidates however are expected to carry on quieter public relations in their last ditch efforts to get the voters to vote for them in the December 29 poll.

According to the amended RPO, the original schedule for the end of campaigns had been 8:00am today, but the EC extended the time limit by 16 hours.

The EC yesterday in another circular directed the returning officers (ROs) and the chiefs of law enforcement agencies to allow supporters of candidates within a radius of 400 yards of the polling centres to provide voters with their voter numbers and serial numbers.

"Such activities will not be considered as violations of the electoral rules," the EC said in the circular.

BAN ON VEHICLES
Through the circular, the EC also imposed a ban on movement of some types of vehicles across the country, from midnight of December 28 till midnight of December 29.

The vehicles are baby taxis, auto rickshaws, taxi cabs, jeeps, pick-up vans, cars, buses, trucks, human haulers locally known as 'tempo', launches, speedboats and all other types of motorised water vehicles.

The ban however will not be effective on the highways.

In the metropolitan areas, a ban on movement of motorbikes will be in effect from midnight today till midnight of December 31.

However, the ban will not be applicable to the movement of vehicles transporting election observers and journalists, both international and domestic who will have legal identity cards, to vehicles carrying law enforcers, to ambulances, and to vehicles used for providing utility services.

The ban can also be relaxed for vehicles used by election candidates and their election agents, albeit with permissions from returning officers.

4-party rally

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rally at the same venue.

Like Awami League, BNP has also exerted every effort to put up a huge showdown at the Paltan Maidan today, the last day of the election campaign ahead of December 29 polls.

BNP and its associate organizations held a meeting at the party city office on December 24 to make the grand rally a success.

The former premier who kicked off her party's electioneering from Sylhet on December 12 has already toured country's most of the places for the polls campaign.

Khaleda will also address the nation today. The Bangladesh Betar and television will broadcast her speech live.

37 bombs seized

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reports: Detective Branch of Police (DB) with the help of Boalia police recovered 25 bombs from a private dormitory named Montu Mia Student Residence at Meherchand, adjacent to Rajshahi University (RU).

Police also arrested five RU students for interrogation.

They are Shibir activists Ruhul Amin and Rafiqul Islam, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activist Kamrul Hassan and Bangladesh Chhatra League activist Habib and Rashid.

Police said they raided the building early in the morning and recovered the bombs wrapped in red and black tapes.

Sub-inspector of Motihar Police Station Alamgir said the homemade bombs are powerful.

DB Assistant Police Commissioner Mafuzur Rahman said someone might have hidden the bombs there to carry out acts of sabotage in the upcoming election.

A correspondent from Benapole adds: Police recovered three powerful bombs from the residence of Awami League activist Mobarok Hossain at Sarsa upazila in the morning.

Explosives-experts of the army defused the bombs.

On December 21, Rab recovered 10 kg of gunpowder at Goga Kaliani village.

Our Meherpur correspondent reports: Rab recovered three one-kg bombs last night near Chak Shyamnagar School of Mujibnagar upazila in the district.

Li Col Nur Mohammad Tariq Aziz of Rab said a group of criminals being chased by Rab members left the bombs there at about 8:00pm.

BSS reports: The police recovered six bombs from the house of Saiful at Hapania Bazar in Naogaon and arrested his

wife Mina Begum, son Shahid and sister Mazeda Begum in this connection.

Police said Saiful is a member of a robbing gang.

Our Thakurgaon correspondent adds: Panchagarh police yesterday arrested three suspected JMB operatives at Dokrapara in the town.

They are Mohammad Nazrul Islam, 23, of Barokumulla village, Zakir Hossain, 26, and Mohammad Anisuzzaman, 24, of Kolatia village.

Zamir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Panchagarh Police Station, said they arrested the youths at about 10:00am for their suspicious movements.

Elect honest

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electoral alliance comprising Gono Forum led by him, Bikapadhar Bangladesh led by former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and the other three parties, at Karwan Bazar in the capital.

Dr Kamal said the main objectives of Jatiya Jukta Front are empowerment of people and establishment of healthy politics. Its election manifesto assured people of establishing an education system of international standard, he added.

The Front leader stressed bringing an end to ill politics for materialising people's dream for a better future.

He criticised the previous government for massive corruption.

Another Front leader, Maj (Retd) MA Mannan, who is a candidate for Dhaka-11 constituency that includes Karwan Bazar, said they are committed to bringing all possible reforms in politics.

Badruddoza Chowdhury, Mahi B Chowdhury and some Front nominees for different constituencies in the city also addressed the rally.

New voters

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Mohammad Harun, a resident of Bhola, could not register as a voter as he failed to arrange the travel fare to go home. But he does not regret. "Why should I regret? What would a party's winning bring for me? My fate was never agreeably influenced by any of the previous elections," he said.

"I will cast vote for the first time but this will also be my last time if I see political leaders not changing their attitudes," said Sharif, a resident of Narayanganj having business in the capital.

The fresh voters came down heavily on political parties for their contradictory approaches and breaking promises over national issues like trying war criminals. Some even spoke for discarding all the present political parties for reinstating Razakars in politics in the post-independence Bangladesh by forming alliances.

"Political parties form alliances although their constitutions contradict. They have only one policy in common--capturing power. Had the BNP not backed Jamaat-e-Islami, it would not become so stronger now," Zubayer said.

Kamal Hossain, a student of Jamia Qurania Kawmi Madrasa in Lalbagh and a voter of Magura-2, said, "I do not like Razakars but I cannot deny Quran. I will not vote for any party that does not respect Alems [Muslim scholars]."

Most fresh voters observed that introduction of casting no-vote will not be successful as most voters are illiterate and do not understand the significance of the opportunity.

"After going to the polling centres people will not want to waste their votes and will definitely cast votes for someone," said Mohammad Eman, a resident of Ganakuli sweeper colony.

CAMPAIGNS IGNORE THEM

A small number of candidates are speaking about the

fresh voters in their speeches but campaigns of most aspirants do not address the youths.

While announcing the AL's election manifesto, Sheikh Hasina said, "We dedicate our 'Vision-2021' to the young generation registered as voters this year for the first time with an aim of building a bright future for them."

"In order to prepare ourselves to face the challenges of globalisation, we want to utilise the immense potentials of our new generation of voters. We have formulated our election manifesto and work programmes for them," she added.

Referring to the AL chief's video conference with voters and campaign through SMS and internet, party candidate in Gopalganj-1 Col (retd) Faruk Khan told The Daily Star that, "These are our message to the 32 per cent young voters that we have not simply given a statement [in our manifesto] to attract them but we do mean to build a digital Bangladesh for them by 2021 if we get their support."

BNP, on the other hand, stuck to its traditional outlook about the young generation. The party's manifesto says planned efforts will be made to involve youths in productive activities and pledges to take measures to save youths from drug addiction and antisocial activities and give assistance to those willing to go abroad.

Azizul Bari Helal, BNP-led four-party alliance candidate from Dhaka-18, said, "Fresh voters are not important just for their votes but for their opinions too. Only youths can introduce a new trend of breaking old practices."

BNP candidate for Dhaka-12 advocate Khandaker Mahbub Uddin Ahmed pledged to work within and outside the party to gather opinion of the youths to bring changes in his party's political outlook.

Attorney office

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They say that the department will appoint 66 district attorneys, 130 additional district attorneys, 260 joint district attorneys and 520 assistant district attorneys. Attorneys for entry-level posts will be appointed through the Public Service Commission (PSC).

More than 1,200 government temporary lawyers are dealing cases for the state at the subordinate courts across the country. The new law officers after their recruitment will replace them in phases, sources said.

Lawyers over 30 years old who passed honours and master's in law with at least second class from any registered university will be eligible for the posts of assistant district attorneys. Assistant district attorneys with five years' experience will be eligible for the posts of joint district attorneys.

Joint district attorneys with three years' experience can apply for the posts of additional district attorney and additional district attorney will

be eligible for the post of district attorney.

Lawyers under the age of 54 and having 15 years' experience in the profession will be eligible for the post of district attorney; lawyers under the age of 45 will be eligible for the post of additional district attorney and lawyers under the age of 38 will be eligible for joint district attorney for direct recruitment through the Attorney Department.

The law ministry in August sent a proposal to the establishment ministry for creating about 3,700 posts for the department and the judiciary. But the establishment ministry on November 25 approved 2,098 posts including 976 posts for lawyers.

A high official of the government said the matter, which is a good initiative of the present caretaker government, should be finalised within a very short time.

He apprehended that if this matter is not finalised by this government, political interference might bog it down.

Dhaka dates

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Paltan ground in the final hours to the December 29 elections.

As the day wore on, hundreds of thousands of people in processions swarmed into the rallying point. Many danced to the drumbeats and music, a common election-time scenario, as they poured in from different directions.

The weekend holiday worked as an advantage for the campaigners.

Md Rajib, a BBA student, who went to Paltan ground, told The Daily Star: "The rally pulled in many more people than before."

Rajib noticed a high level of discipline among political activists, which was almost absent in the past.

The four-party alliance also meandered through Dhaka thoroughfares in colourful processions. Adherents of the four-party alliance impersonated farmers and folk singers on the truck-mounted stages.

One procession snaked out of Siddheswari Road shortly before 5pm yesterday, creating brief traffic jams on the road. Farther up, some campaigners were pumping out pop music from a sound system on the roadside. RAB officers were on guard, just yards away.

Dhaka residents found themselves caught in the pockets of gridlock, which was a bit unusual for a Friday. But the days to the elections will be marked by crowds, traffic jams and an unknown number of processions and rallies as expected.

Signs are already out there. As the evening deepened, many election rallies continued much across the city. Political leaders spurred their campaigners with calls to intensify the last-minute door-to-door campaigns.

Election takes

FROM PAGE 1
able to provide you with capital market news on December 30; but the page will be refashioned into a space for more election news and pictures. Star Business comes back in pink with New Year's flavour on January 1.

Judicial

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deputy commissioners and upazila nirbahi officers who are chiefs of the district and upazila administration, had earlier appointed 319 executive magistrates to run mobile courts for holding trial of electoral offences.

But the ministry's bid did not work as the Supreme Court (SC) viewed that only judicial magistrates could try electoral offences as executive magistrates do not have the authority to do the job.

The EC then sought approval of the SC for assigning judicial magistrates to try polls offences.

Following the SC's approval, the EC on Wednesday assigned 286 judicial magistrates. But the EC Secretariat took two days to get the gazette notification on it published.

Finally, the judicial magistrates started doing their job yesterday.

But on the very first day, they faced non-cooperation of the field level administration who did not provide them logistic support like transport. So, they could not move to different places to watch whether any electoral offences were being committed, a number of judicial magistrates told the EC Secretariat over telephone.

As per the gazette notification, judicial magistrates will take cognisance of electoral offences till December 31. They will hold summary trial in their specified constituencies.

As per the RPO, judicial magistrates are assigned to hold trial of electoral offences that include interfering or attempting to interfere when a voter casts vote, defacing or destroying ballot paper, creating obstacles to polling or counting of votes, resorting to violence, and intimidating voters or those involved in polls activities or duties.

Trains collide

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station while Brahmaputra to cross the station.

Getting the news of the collision, railway DG Belayet Hossain along with other senior officials rushed to the spot while army personnel and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), police and fire service members conducted the rescue operation.

Railway sources said two salvage trains--one from Mymensingh and another from Dhaka--rushed to the spot and cleared the rail track. Rail communication was restored on the routes around 3:00pm.

Indian ships still

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The Indian ships made counter claims yesterday that the Bangladesh Navy frigate Khaled Bin Walid was 60 miles inside Indian waters.

However, tension between the two countries was minimal as there were no Indian warships visible. Bangladesh Navy also withdrew Khaled Bin Walid from the spot and replaced it with a smaller naval ship to keep watch until the Indian survey ships leave the disputed waters.

A source said that it looked like the Indian ships would be leaving the spot within a couple of days.

Meanwhile, a foreign ministry spokesman yesterday said the Indian survey vessel and its two support ships had initially moved towards Indian waters but were spotted inside Bangladesh waters Thursday afternoon.

A ministry press release quoted the spokesman as saying that the government was going to lodge a formal complaint to the Indian authorities asking them not to do any exploratory work until the maritime border issue is solved through mutual agreement.

This is the first time Indian oil and gas survey ships entered Bangladesh maritime economic zones. Last month, a tensed situation developed when Myanmar sent a drilling rig well within Bangladesh waters along with warships. The situation calmed down

when the South Korean company operating the rig withdrew to avoid a conflict forcing Myanmar to stop the operation.

100 short-term

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were briefed on the Christmas Day and will now travel to the areas where they will observe the opening, voting, closing and counting processes in polling centres.

All EU observers are bound by an internationally accepted code of conduct. This means that they maintain strict neutrality in the course of their work and cannot interfere in any way in the electoral process.

Graham Elson, deputy chief observer of the EUEOM, said the observers' assessment of the election day will form part of the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions that the mission will issue on December 31.

"It's our hope that polling on Dec 29 will proceed smoothly and peacefully," he said.

The long-term EU observers, led by chief observer