

MPs-elect take oath today, tomorrow

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Members-elect of parliament belonging to Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance will take oath this afternoon at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban and the remaining MPs-elect will be sworn in tomorrow.

Outgoing Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar will administer the oath at the 'oath hall' completing all preparations in a hurry as the alliance is set to assume power on Monday or Tuesday.

The AL parliamentary party (ALPP) will convene as soon as possible to elect party chief Sheikh Hasina leader of the ALPP, and request the president to appoint her as prime minister.

Abdus Shahid, AL MP-elect and former chief whip of the



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Unused for over two years, the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban gets a good scrubbing yesterday as MPs-elect are to take oath here today and tomorrow.

Delwar for playing constructive role in parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP will play a constructive role as the opposition in parliament if the treasury bench conducts itself properly, the party's Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain said yesterday.

"Of course, they [Awami League] will have cooperation from us if they truly want the parliament to be effective and resolving all issues of national interest," he added.

He was talking to reporters at his Nam flat in the afternoon. Delwar however said his party has yet to decide when its lawmakers-elect would take oath.

His comments, which came three days after the BNP-led four-party alliance suffered a trouncing in the general election, suggest that BNP would join the ninth parliament.

He said, "We should replace the existing political culture with a fair one. I won't see your face just because you hold different political ideals or there's a difference of opinion.... this attitude can never be helpful for democracy."

Asked about AL President Sheikh Hasina's call for cooperation in running the government, he said [addressing Hasina], "You have won the election, be it by rigging or any other means. It's always the elder brother who should tell the younger one, 'let's work together'."

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BNP divided over what to do now

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN and RASHIDUL HASAN

Though BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has described the December 29 election as 'stage-managed', her colleagues put the polls drubbing down to wrong strategies and waning organisational strength.

The party policymakers are now divided over what course of action they should take. While some favour accepting the results and playing a positive role in parliament, the others stay opposed to the idea.

Several mid-level leaders allege that a group of former bureaucrats who had misguided Khaleda Zia are now insisting that she take a hard-line stance.

Though most of its MPs-elect are back in the capital, the party was yet to announce officially whether to let them take oath.

A number of senior leaders have however hinted that the party would join the ninth parliament.

Analysing possible reasons for the polls debacle, some BNP leaders said the grassroots fell far behind the rivals in the preparatory work due to the leadership's indecision over participation even a couple of weeks before the polls.

Talking to The Daily Star, they also said controversial nominations gave a wrong signal to the people, especially when AL in most part left the leaders with dubious past out of its ticket.

The leaders pointed out that intra-party conflict over reforms was another cause of the poor showing in the election. It has

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Work together rising above winner-loser feeling

Says UN panel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The new elected government and the opposition should not feel like winners or losers, rather they should work together to strengthen the democratic institutions, said the UN panel on parliamentary elections in Bangladesh yesterday.

It also said dealing with the global economic crisis will be the biggest immediate challenge for the new government.

Termining the just concluded national polls fair, credible and of international standards, the panel said the authorities, however, must pay attention to all complaints BNP is making because there might be some validity to those.

"I call on the future government and the opposition in parliament to continue showing restraint. They should not

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Impartial anti-graft drive to continue

Hasina tells visiting UN team

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the new government to be formed by her party-led alliance will continue the ongoing anti-graft drive to build a country free of corruption.

She also said they want to make the next parliament effective and for that the post of the deputy speaker as well as some chairmanship of parliamentary standing committees will be given to the opposition, and she pledged to uphold human rights more effectively too.

The AL chief made the statements to a six-member UN team headed by Francesc Vendrell who went to Hasina's Sudha Sadan resident in the capital to greet her on her party's landslide victory in the



recent parliamentary election.

The delegation also included UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Renata Lok Dessalieu, and Chief Election Commissioner of Nepal Bhojraj Pokharel.

"Impartial drive against corruption will continue and the law will take its own course," Dr Hasan Mahmud, a member of parliament (MP)

elect also a personal aide to the AL chief, quoted her as saying after a meeting between Hasina and the UN delegation.

Dr Hasan told reporters that the UN team wanted to know from Hasina how their international organisation could extend their help efficiently. In reply, Hasina told the delegation that they could provide training for the MPs-elect.

He said the AL chief told the delegation that she has plans to make the parliament effective ensuring active participation of the opposition.

Meanwhile, addressing party activists from Pirganj, Rangpur in Sudha Sadan, Hasina reiterated that she will implement all her election pledges, and expressed gratitude to the voters for electing

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Commentary

Sheikh Hasina's acid test

The first cabinet will give the clearest sign of her promised change

MAHFUZ ANAM

Two recent elections have been fought on the promise of 'change' -- Barack Obama's in the US and Sheikh Hasina's in Bangladesh -- and both of them received resounding endorsement from the electorate and both now have the potential of transforming the politics of their two countries. The similarity can go further if Sheikh Hasina chooses her cabinet with the same circumspection and in-depth thinking as Obama has done, putting premium on expertise, experience and integrity.

Even before Sheikh Hasina has had time to savour her historic victory, she is having to plunge herself into the difficult challenge of picking her cabinet. It is normally a very hard task to choose between party loyalists and those who can provide an efficient government. In our case it becomes harder still as there are so many debts to repay, emotional baggage to respond to and old egos to protect.

But Sheikh Hasina has the mandate to ignore all that.

By the time this piece is printed the AL and mohajote chief will probably have already chosen most of her cabinet members. Given her masterly conduct of the elections, especially in eliminating some corrupt but important people from getting nominations, and the very heartening comments in her maiden press conference, I am encouraged to hope that her choices will be based more on efficiency, integrity and management ability, rather than 'reward for loyalty'. There will of course be some rewarding and back scratching, but they should definitely NOT involve any of the key ministries.

It will be vital for the victorious AL chief to remember that one of the core reasons why Begum Zia's government failed was because she chose a very bad cabinet. It was totally based on who helped her to win, who gave how

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Dulu freed on bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former BNP deputy minister for land Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu was released yesterday from the prison cell of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

Dulu was freed from the prison cell at about 1:15pm, said Towhidul Islam, superintendent of Dhaka Central Jail, while talking to The Daily Star.

The BNP leader, who is sentenced to 20 years' rigorous imprisonment in two cases, had surrendered to a Dhaka court on February 20, 2007 and is now facing a total of 23 cases, including six for his alleged link with militancy.

Of the cases, a tribunal court in Natoré awarded him

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POLL PLEDGE TO LOWER FOOD PRICES New govt's first task is to cut Boro output cost

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The country has a record food stock now but the coming government will have to depend on Boro production in the next season to fulfil its election pledge to lower prices of essentials including rice.

And for this, immediately after taking over, the newly elected government has to take steps not only to increase Boro output but also to bring down its cost of production. Prices of farm inputs like fertiliser have to be decreased to reduce production cost.

According to Bangladesh Bank's latest report, food stock at the end of November last stood at 14.72 lakh tonnes compared to 6.11 lakh tonnes in November in the previous year.

Food ministry sources however said the stock came down to less than 14 lakh tonnes due to food distribution through different

government channels.

Head of research wing of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Uttam Kumar Deb said the stock situation is satisfactory now. Aus and Aman harvests were good last year.

The government will have to go for higher Boro production and lower prices of fertiliser and diesel at once, Deb said.

In the global market, price of urea fertiliser dropped by 68 per cent, that of DAP by 48 per cent and TSP by 19 per cent in November compared to May last.

But in Bangladesh, prices of all types of fertiliser are still quite high. TSP is now selling at Tk 75 per kg and Potash at Tk 45-48 a kg compared to Tk 34 and Tk 30 per kg in May last year.

Rice price has decreased slightly but it is still much high.

According to a TCB report, coarse rice now

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Sri Lankan troops capture rebel Tiger 'capital'



AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka said yesterday its troops had finally captured the unofficial capital of the Tamil Tigers and urged the rebels to lay down their arms and end their decades-old struggle for a separate homeland.

But just hours after President Mahinda Rajapakse announced the news, a suspected Tiger suicide bomber attacked Sri Lanka's air force headquarters in Colombo, killing at least two airmen and injuring more than 30 others.

Rajapakse had called the army's capture of Kilinochchi

an "unparalleled victory" for the entire nation.

"For the last time, I am telling the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) to lay down arms and surrender," he added in a nationwide broadcast.

There was no immediate comment from the Tigers, for whom the loss of Kilinochchi - the political headquarters of their northern mini-state for the past 10 years -- is a huge blow.

But the immediate attack on the air force base was seen as an ominous signal of intent. Suicide bombings are an LTTE trademark.

Sri Lankan army chief Sarath Fonseka said taking Kilinochchi was the culmination of a major military offensive that began way back in March 2007 and has witnessed daily fighting for at least nine months.

There were street celebrations in the capital Colombo and elsewhere after news of the town's capture broke.

Military officials said Sri Lankan ground troops had punched through Tiger defences at two locations in the city and quickly taken full control of the area.

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