BNP, shaking up the ruling AL's skyscraper of power which has been built in the last parliamentary polls.

Enforcement of dozens of hartals or blockades or any such street agitation would not have shaken the AL government in such a way. The power of ballots has exposed the fragile state of AL's political influence. The BNP's strategy to join the battle of ballots setting aside the street agitations for the time being has worked well. The party now wants more battle of ballots to defeat the AL. The party leaders are now demanding election to bifurcated Dhaka City Corporations. They want to keep the momentum alive until the next parliamentary elections.

And their movement for installation of a non-partisan election time government will get some new blood after the whopping victories in the city polls. Already demoralised by the defeats, the ruling AL leaders and workers may not be able to strongly counter the opposition men in the coming days. The government will also face difficulties to run the administration, as the heavily politicised bureaucracy will not care about much the directives of the ministers. The bureaucrats have got the message; they have understood the people's pulse. Many of them will change sides to take benefit from the new regime. The law enforcers will not be any exception. So the government and the AL will have to go through tough times in the coming days if they are not able to take some game changing moves.

Will the government be able to take extraordinary measures to divert the flow of this brewing storm? Will the AL be able to take measures to boost up party's grassroots leaders and workers to prepare them for the battles in the coming days?

Before taking such steps, the policymakers of both the government and the AL need to admit their mistakes. If they search for the reasons for the defeat they might come across factors such as the party's organisational weakness, the opposition's "propaganda" against the government, use of religion by Hefazat-e-Islam.

It is true that the AL's organisational capacity is weak countrywide, which is also true for the BNP. So, putting the blame only on organisational weakness will not work. And before that, the party policymakers should think twice before concluding that the grassroots level leaders are not solely responsible for the weakness. The central leaders must shoulder the failure.



A woman campaigner seeking votes for an independent candidate. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

And Hefajat-e Islam's campaign against the AL-backed mayoral candidates in the recent city polls is of course one of the reasons for their defeat. But the use of religion against AL is nothing new. This time the use has just got some new strength due to the prevailing political situation. In the past, the AL has fought the propaganda and it will have to continue the fight. But the way the AL has tried to take blessings from Hefazat men in Gazipur to win the battle has exposed the party's lack of confidence in its own power. The party needs to engage a cross section of people in its efforts to fight Hefazat.

The AL should immediately hold a series of meetings with its grassroots, seeking their opinion and suggestions to take measures to prepare the party for the coming days. For the AL policymakers, there is no alternative now but to listen to their grassroots level leaders who are the lifeblood of the party.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.