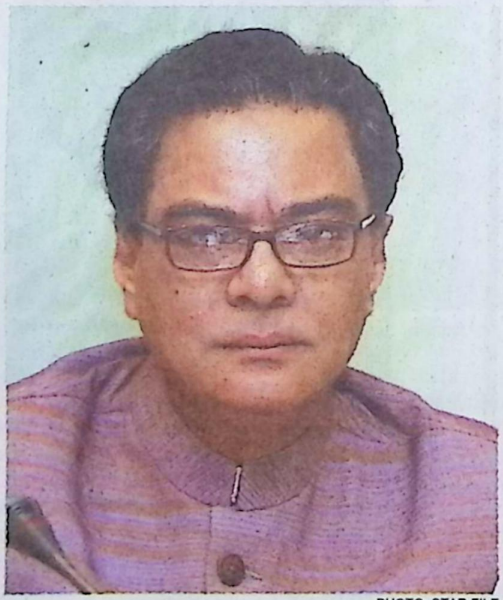
The Scapegoat

Awami League chief Shiekh Hasina should also be held responsible for the party's humiliating electoral defeat

SHAKHAWAT LITON

On December 29, 2012, several thousand councillors were present at the Awami League's council session at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh to elect the party's new leadership including the chief, general secretary and other office bearers. They enthusiastically re-elected Sheikh Hasina as the AL chief. But when the chief election commissioner picked the business of election to the post of the party's general secretary, an abnormal situation prevailed; many councillors did not at all feel enthusiastic. Without any delay, two AL leaders, as advised by Hasina, proposed and supported Syed Ashraful Islam's name for general secretary. But many councillors were seen annoyed with the proposal and they started to leave the council session. The chief election commissioner hurriedly completed the election for general secretary.



Syed Ashraful Islam PHOTO: STAR FILE

An abnormal situation prevailed as many councillors, most of them AL grassroots level leaders, were not satisfied with Ashraf's performance during his first term as the party's general secretary. What were Ashraf's faults? The common allegation against him was that the AL grassroots and midlevel leaders could not reach him and he also did not keep any contact with them. Even some senior AL leaders also had the same allegations against Ashraf: he remained out of reach. He remains missing for a major part of the day! Even the Prime Minister had once reportedly told some of her party colleagues that she could not communicate with Ashraf sometimes!

Seven months after his election as general secretary for the second term, the situation has taken a volatile turn. In the ruling AL camp, Ashraf, also the LGRD minister, appears a most unfortunate man. Some MPs at a recent AL Parliamentary Party meeting 'audaciously' criticised him for his failure to strengthen the party; they also spoke for changing the party's spokeperson. Just a few days later, some advisers of the AL advisery council at a meeting with the party chief Sheikh Hasina launched a blistering attack on Ashraf. And some of them advised the party chief to replace Ashraf with a senior and active AL leader. If Hasina allows party MPs and senior leaders to speak freely, it will open a floodgate of criticism and disgruntlement against Ashraf and some AL leaders and ministers.

A situation like this has not developed in a day. The party's humiliating defeat to rival BNP in the recently held five city corporation elections has exposed the fragile state of the ruling AL. Annoyed and frustrated, leaders and workers cannot openly question and criticise Sheikh Hasina's leadership. This is the reality of Bangladesh politics and a limitation of our democracy which always favours party's top leaders.

However, the way the AL MPs and leaders have been criticising Syed Ashraf, second in command of the AL, also indirectly questions and criticises Hasina's leadership to some extent. Everybody knows the truth. It was none other than Sheikh Hasina who made Ashraf her party's second-in command in party national council in 2009. Though his performance could not make party leaders and workers happy in the first four years, Ashraf was again made general secretary in 2012. Hasina made it possible.