Congratulations, Sheikh Hasina!

SHAKHAWAT LITON

All 154 parliamentary aspirants who did not face any opposition to win in their respective constituencies deserve to be congratulated. They proved that they really love the people. They relieved the voters in their constituencies of the burden of going to the polling stations, abandoning their important daily activities. So, voters should wholeheartedly thank the leaders who did them such a favour.

Voters in the remaining 146 constituencies are not so lucky, as they have to cast their votes on January 5. They have been discriminated against, which is undoubtedly unconstitutional. The constitution should have a provision to relieve the voters of the burden of voting. However there is still some good news. The election to their constituencies will not be at all competitive. The battle of ballots will mainly be confined among the leaders of AL and their colleagues in Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Workers Party–the two components of the AL-led alliance.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the ruling AL chief, is leading the show. For this she also deserves to be congratulated. But there are some more reasons for which she deserves exclusive kudus. She should share this remarkable achievement with her archrival Khaleda Zia. It was not possible for Hasina to achieve this without the cooperation of Khaleda. In fact they are grateful to each other. Hasina had cooperated with Khaleda to make the record of holding a one-sided election on February 15, 1996 by boycotting the polls. In that election, Khaleda-led BNP won 278 out of 300. Thanks to the boycott of the opposition parties led by Hasina, 49 BNP aspirants were elected uncontested, making a new record.

This time, Khaleda has returned Hasina the favour. She led the opposition parties to boycott the January 5 polls, allowing Hasina to break her archrival's record. As many as 154 parliamentary aspirants were elected unopposed without a single vote being cast. It is difficult to find such an instance in any nation across the globe. Hasina also made world record. Will Khaleda be able to break it in the future?

Hasina has already made another record– she has led the AL for almost 33 years of its 64 year-long history. Since the inception of the party in 1949, none of the previous leaders including her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had the opportunity to be in the helm for so long.

During her long leadership, Hasina has faced very little opposition within the party or handled little intra-party conflicts, except during the last military-backed caretaker government when a good number of central leaders had moved to reform the party, curbing her absolute power.

However, the absence of any intra-party challenge within the party has helped Hasina emerge as the supreme leader of the party and her cabinet. She has been leading the party since 1981 and she was re-elected as the president of the party in successive councils in 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2008 and 2012. She led the AL to win the parliamentary election in 1996 after a long break of 21 years since the assassination of Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975. At that time her party was close to the magic number of 151 that is required to form the government. So she needs support from others to form the cabinet. But in 2008 election, her leadership led the party to an overwhelming victory– AL alone got 230 seats, more than two-thirds majority.