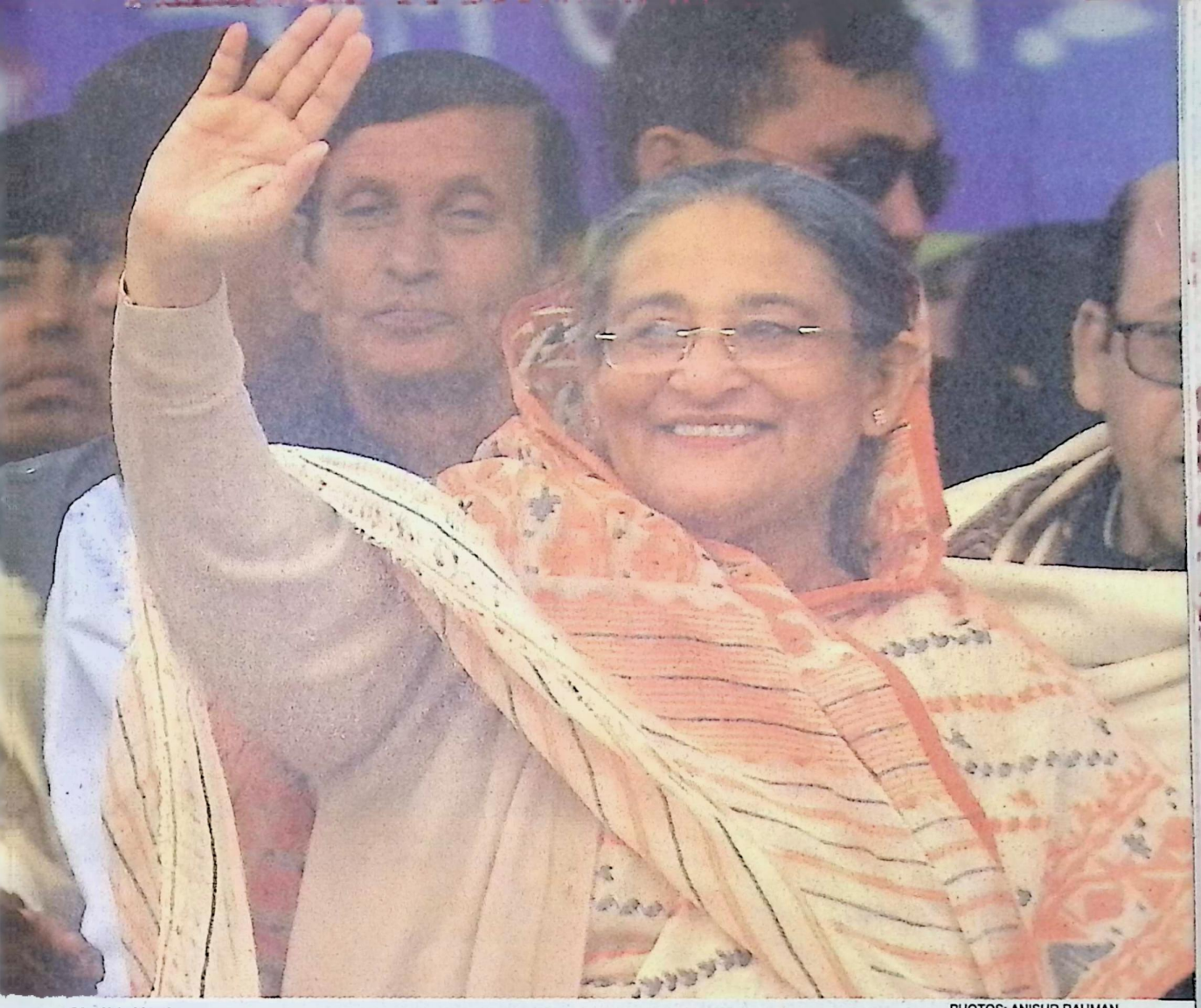


Sheikh Hasina

PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN

Hasina, if she wished, could have led her AL to an absolute majority by winning all the 300 seats in the January 5 polls. But she will lead her AL only to secure a two-third majority. In a gesture of generosity of course, she has withdrawn many of her party's candidates to ensure a walkover for other parties including the Workers Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal. Her level of generosity is so high that she has made 21 Jatiya Party leaders win unopposed, though former military dictator had announced to quit the electoral race. And some more leaders of Jatiya Party will win in the January 5 polls thanks to her magnanimity. The former military dictator should be grateful to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for this. She proved her critics wrong this time by making compromise over seat sharing. She has the courage to admit this. She has announced last Saturday that her party had reached a "compromise" over sharing seats with other parties that are in the polls-time government. The AL, she added, would have conceded a "walkover" to the BNP in some constituencies if it had joined the polls-time cabinet. Poor BNP missed the opportunity as it failed to rise to the occasion. Khaleda did not agree to take part in the friendly match.

The record of uncontested election victory has shown us the mettle of Hasina's leadership. For instance, the AL under her leadership won only 76 seats in the 1986 parliamentary polls and 88 seats in the 1991 election and 146 seats in the 1996 parliamentary polls. For those seats, she and her party colleagues have made huge efforts to defeat the opponents in the battle of ballots. But this time her party's 127 leaders were elected uncontested. The number could have been more had her party not withdrawn many candidates to give a walkover to other leaders belonging to Jatiya Party, etc. The skyrocketing popularity of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the 1973 parliamentary polls did not ensure such a big win for his party, as only 11 AL leaders were elected uncontested at that time. Doesn't it show Sheikh Hasina's popularity?

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.