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WITH TODAY'S ISSUE

A Weekly Publication of The Daily Star
the STAR
stories behind the news

SOUTH SUDAN CHAOS

Emergency is declared in two states; rivals meet in Ethiopia

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THE SEABOARD

Roland Lamb introduces new instrument to Dhaka audience

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Fight or farce?

147 JS seats await formality
in one-sided Jan 5 elections

SHAKHAWAT LITON and WASIM BIN HABIB

The January 5 polling now appears nothing but just a formality.

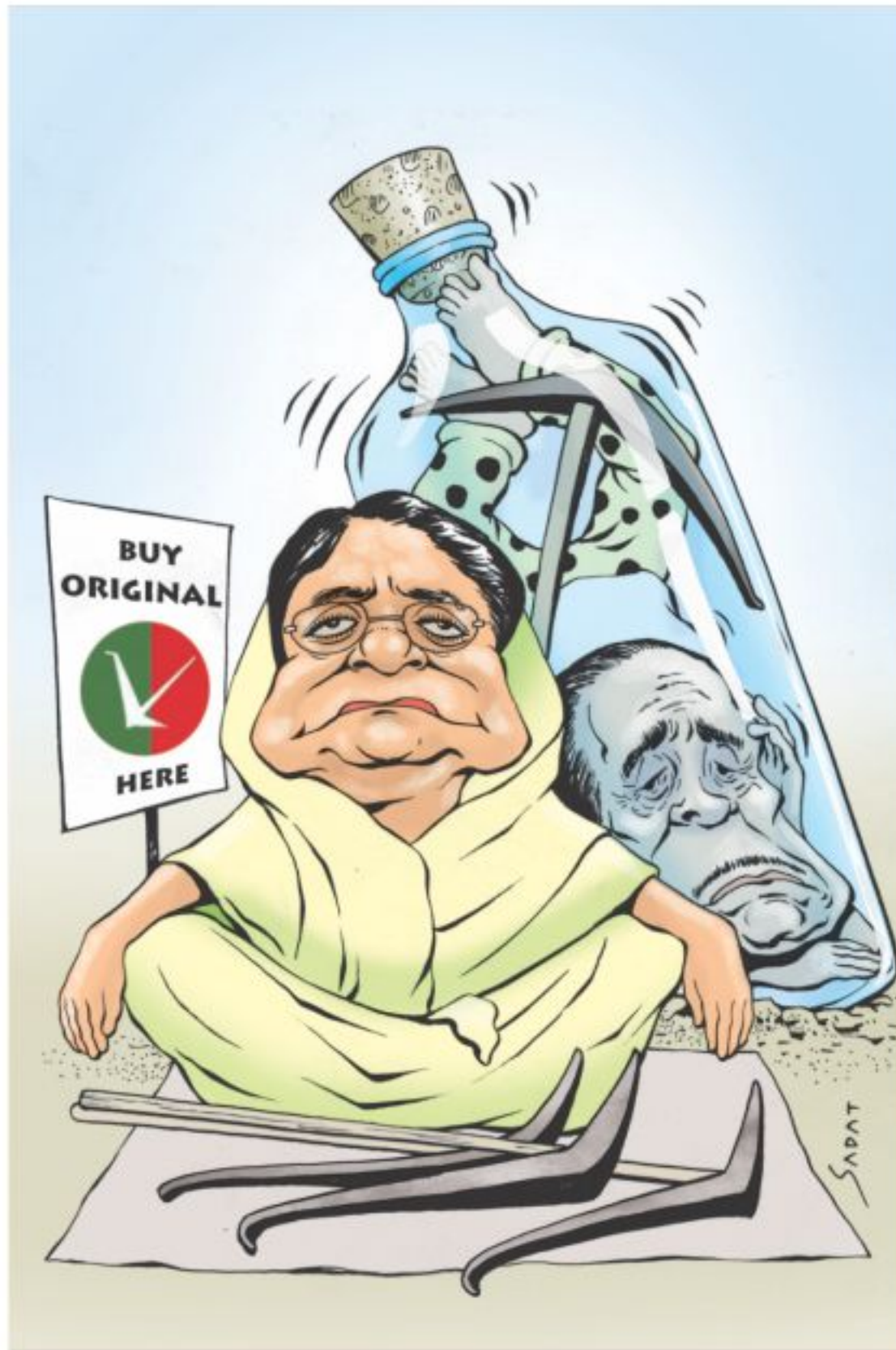
This election has already denied more than half of the electorate numbering 9.19 crore their voting rights as 153 candidates in their constituencies were elected unopposed. And the polling on January 5 for the remaining 147 seats has curbed their right to elect representatives through the ballot as they were left with little choice between candidates and parties.

Information gathered about the contestants and parties suggests the polling is going to a stage-managed battle of ballots between the contenders nominated by the ruling Awami League and some of its allies, which have little electoral strength.

A boycott by the BNP-led opposition alliance and other parties has made this election one-sided, burying competitiveness, a fundamental element of democracy. Voters and candidates for the remaining 147 seats have lost interest in it.

The way the government and the ruling party are manoeuvring this election has only exposed their desperation to hold the polls in the interest of what they claimed upholding democracy.

HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party was kept forcibly in the battle of ballots. Ershad was reportedly kept confined to a hospital for more than two weeks for his rigidity about boycotting the election. So far 20 candidates from his party have been elected unopposed as the AL withdrew its candidates for those



JP 'forced' to split

Healthy Ershad kept in hospital for polls refusal;
wife-led group announces polls manifesto

SHAKHAWAT LITON and WASIM BIN HABIB

While Jatiya Party President HM Ershad remains "confined" to a hospital for refusing to join the January 5 polls, his party has split again as a group of its leaders yesterday announced the election manifesto.

Encouraged by the government, a section of JP leaders led by Ershad's wife Raushan Ershad has been speaking in favour of joining the polls since the JP chief announced his decision to quit the elections.

Claiming that they had Ershad's consent, party presidium member Anisul Islam Mahmud, who is also water resources minister in the polls-time cabinet, announced the election manifesto at a press conference in the capital.

The JP secretary general and other senior leaders loyal to Ershad were, however, not present at the media briefing.

GM Quader, a presidium member of the party and younger brother of Ershad, could not confirm whether the manifesto had a green signal from

Ershad.

"I have not been allowed to meet my brother [Ershad] for the last few days. It is embarrassing to seek permission every time I want to see him," he told The Daily Star.

He added that the party's decision not to contest this election was still in place.

Late in November last year, protesting Ershad's earlier decision to join the election, Kazi Zafar Ahmed, who has been expelled from the party for lambasting Ershad over the latter's repeated shifting of his political stance, formed a new faction of the Jatiya Party with some senior leaders.

In 2001, the party divided into three factions, each led by Ershad, Nazim Rahman Manzur and Anwar Hossain Manju respectively. The then government of Sheikh Hasina had a role behind the split.

But this time, the Hasina-led government is looking desperate to keep the JP in the vote race to make the election participatory and credible.

Ershad's initial announcement of participation

PAGE 12 Hammer not heavy • Torch with no flame • Bicycle pedalled by AL

An MP's lesson on rigging votes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Awami League lawmaker Sheikh Afil Uddin has been caught on tape instructing the party faithful on how to vote again and again.

"One hundred boys will always be in the queue. One will go inside the booth and then stand at the end of the line again. He will not go home. One hundred boys will always be in the line. One will enter the booth and then stand again behind the next one will go and stand in the queue again."

"Like this, they will come and go again and again. People and journalists will come and see the centre is full --"

AUDIO OF THE SPEECH: <http://ow.ly/sdvkl>

Sheikh Afil Uddin

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AL versus AL

Around 50 'dissident' candidates appear
as major opposition

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Dissident Awami League leaders have emerged as the main challengers to party candidates in around 50 constituencies in the January 5 polls amid a boycott by the BNP-led opposition alliance.

The AL nominees are contesting the polls in 119 constituencies out of 147 that go to polls on Sunday. A total of 153 candidates, including 127 from the AL, have already been elected uncontested to the 10th parliament.

Some rebels have made their party rivals' win uncertain, AL insiders said.

The ruling party, though, did not take any

tough stand against the rebels for ignoring party decision. It just expelled two candidates, lawmaker Shafiqul Azam Khan (Jhenidah-3) and AL president's former APS Awlad Hossain (Dhaka-4), from the party.

AL presidium members Matia Chowdhury and Kazi Zafarullah, former minister Abul Kalam Azad, state ministers Monnujan Sufian and Shamsul Haque Tuku, former state minister Mujibur Rahman Fakir, party leaders Bir Bahadur, Dharendra Debnath Shambhu, Sagufta Yasmin Emili, Subid Ali Bhuiyan, Kamal Ahmed Majumder, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, MS Akbar, Biren Sikder, among

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Scope for people to pick their govt

Hasina tells nation as AL chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday claimed that the January 5 polls would create an opportunity for people to form a government of their choice.

"People's empowerment is the first precondition for establishing democracy. The parliament has brought about a permanent electoral system as in other democracies to put an end to usurpation of power by unconstitutional means," she said.



"The election will be held under an independent and powerful Election Commission, not under any unelected person," Hasina, who is also prime minister, said in her address to the nation ahead of the January 5 parliamentary election.

State-run BTV and Bangladesh Betar aired the speech.

Her statement came nearly two weeks after 154 candidates, including

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SEE ONLINE FOR FULL TEXT OF HASINA'S ADDRESS

POACHERS ACTIVE



The giant lies dead as flies take over. Just to grab a few inches of ivory, poachers had shot the elephant days ago about eight kilometres away from Naikkhangchhari of Bandarban close to the border with Myanmar. Locals claim that poaching in the area goes unabated and venison and wild chicken are openly traded in the markets of the district.

PHOTO: MUHAMMAD ALI ZINNAT

Ershad 'confined' yet campaign on

MEHEDY HASAN, Rangpur

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad is not "contesting" Sunday's polls, but posters seeking votes for him appear on the walls of his hometown Rangpur.

A local JP faction is campaigning for the party chief, canvassing for votes over loudspeakers and putting up posters across the city, leaving voters utterly confused.

With Ershad confined to a hospital in the capital, other central leaders of his party remain divided over participating in the election. Some under the leadership of his wife Raushan Ershad have been speaking in favour of joining the electoral race.

At a press conference on December 28, Moshir Rahman Ranga, president of both Rangpur district and city units of JP, said he was starting electioneering, though the party chairman had not given him permission to do so.

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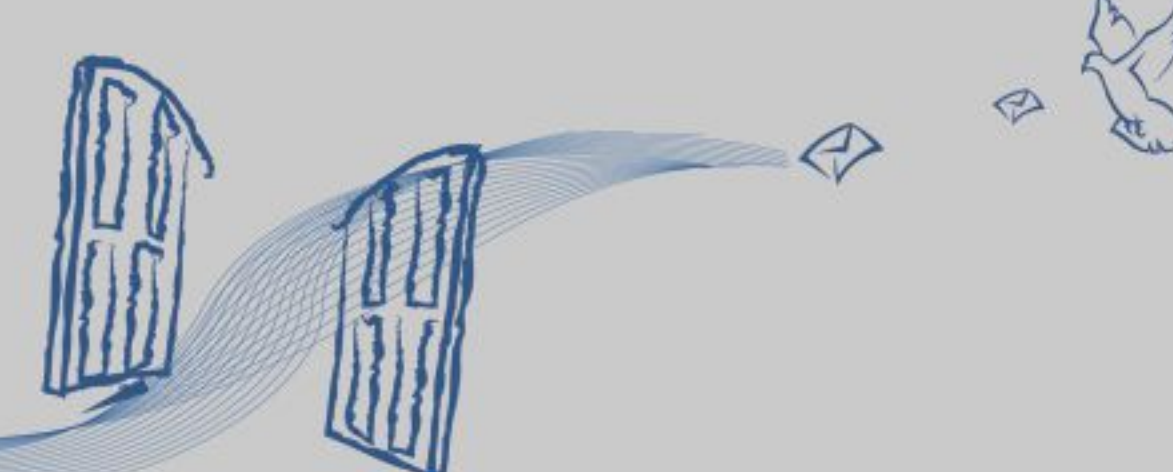
PHOTO: STAR

Despite Jatiya Party chief HM Ershad's announcement about quitting the electoral race, one of his party-employed people is seen pasting campaign posters in his constituency in Rangpur yesterday.

নির্মম হলেও সত্যই সুন্দর

খুলল দুয়ার...

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