

Fight or farce?

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seats. Some of his party leaders are electioneering after the AL withdrew its own candidates in those constituencies to give them a walkover in the battle.

Candidates from the Workers Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, two key allies of the AL-led alliance, and Jatiya Party-led by Anwar Hossain Manju, an adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, are in the electoral race with their own polls symbols, with little hope of winning any seat. Their presence has become necessary for the competition; otherwise candidates in many other constituencies will be elected unopposed.

More than 100 independent candidates, many of them belonging to the AL, are in the race. But most of them may not be able to perform well against the strong candidates nominated and supported by ruling party.

The AL-nominated 127 candidates were elected unopposed and almost all of them remaining 119 candidates are set to win easily in the same number of constituencies. So the party looks all set to have a two-thirds majority in this election to form the new government any time after

completion of the formalities of polling on January 5.

Yet the Election Commission is taking all preparations to complete formalities which may cost the public exchequer around Tk 300 crore.

Around three lakh polling officials were recruited to conduct voting at 18,123 polling stations in 59 districts. Polling will not be held at all in five districts as all the seats have had their representatives elected unopposed.

Alongside around 50,000 members of the armed forces, members of almost all regular law enforcement agencies will be deployed to maintain law and order to ensure a peaceful atmosphere on January 5 for voters.

This election has sparked violent agitation by the opposition parties, resulting in huge damage to public property, the economy and boundless sufferings for people. The political situation is set to turn further volatile, causing more damage and public suffering with the BNP-led opposition enforcing an indefinite nationwide blockade to resist the polls.

BNP lawmakers

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In a press release, the Parliament Secretariat said the Speaker also called the inspector general of police.

The IGP told the Speaker that necessary and strict security measures were in place around Khaleda's home following "an evaluation of the entire situation and for the sake of her security".

The Speaker requested the IGP to make sure the opposition leader did not face any obstacles while providing her with the highest security.

Law enforcers apparently confined the BNP chief to her home since December 28, a day before the opposition's "march for democracy" programme in the city.

She was not allowed to attend a family

programme on that night or the "march for democracy" programme on Sunday. Six to eight platoons of police and Rab personnel were deployed there. Law enforcers had also parked five sand-laden trucks blocking both ends of the street on which she lives.

Last night, a riot truck replaced three trucks at one end of the street but two trucks remain on the other end.

Law enforcers also arrested a former BNP MP in front of her house while police freed two vice-chairmen of BNP and a lawmaker after detaining them in front of Khaleda's home.

A delegation of Zia Shishu Academy, mostly children, had gone to Khaleda's home last night but was turned away by the law enforcers.

Extension, if necessary

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till January 9.

A six-member EC delegation by Rakibuddin met the president to apprise him of the preparations for the January 5 elections.

When asked about the ongoing blockade enforced by the BNP-led opposition combine, the CEC said, "It (blockade) will not create any problem for the elections. Voters will face no hurdle to going to the polling centres as they will cast votes in their respective areas."

About the poll boycott by the opposition, he said, "We wanted to hold such an election where all parties would join. We even delayed the announcement of polls schedule in the hope of a political consensus. But nothing as such happened in the end."

"We have no alternative to holding the

elections within the timeframe set by the constitution. It is our constitutional obligation," he added.

The EC also requested the president to take measures to improve the law and order situation so that the national polls could be held peacefully.

"The law and order situation has already improved. We hope it will improve further before the elections," the CEC said.

Meanwhile, President's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim separately told reporters that the president has expressed satisfaction at the EC's preparations for the election, and hoped that the election would be held in a free, fair and peaceful manner.

Voting will be held in 147 constituencies out of 300 as 153 candidates are all set to be elected unopposed.

An MP's lesson

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thousands of votes are being cast; thousands of voters have turned out. No problem," he said, instructing the polling agents of Monirul Islam, AL aspirant from Jessor-2.

Afil himself has already unofficially won the January 5 polls uncontested from Jessor-1.

Giving directives to the party polling agents at Parbazar High School on Monday evening in Jessor, the ruling party MP said: "Talk of police? No problem. Come to me and I will help you. If you face any problem, any administrative problem, I will face it.... But you have to do what you must. Bring voters to the centres and make sure that the votes are cast for boat."

Monirul Islam, who is Afil Uddin's relative, was present at the time.

Rafiqul Islam, who was state minister for power and energy during the last period of the AL rule, is challenging Monirul for the parliamentary seat. Rafiqul has been expelled from the party for filing his candidacy against Monirul.

The audio of the speech went viral on the social media over the past two days. Reportedly, Rafiqul's supporters recorded it and then posted online.

Shaheen-ul-Kabir, Rafiqul's chief polling agent, lodged a complaint with the district Election Commission in this connection on Wednesday.

Mostafizur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Jessor, said the election inquiry committee will investigate the matter and recommend action.

The Daily Star made repeated attempts to reach Afil Uddin and Monirul Islam over the phone yesterday, but none of them picked up the phone.

Mahabubul Alam Lablu, director of Afil Group that Afil Uddin owns, said the lawmaker would not talk about the matter.

In the audio, Afil is also heard to compare himself with a tractor that can cultivate acres of lands for days after days without having to need any fuel or water.

At one point, he said: I can't say everything in public. Come to me and I will tell you in private what to do."

normal speed due to the blockade, railway sources said.

In Chittagong, the blockade passed off almost peacefully as no untoward incident was reported in the 14 upazilas yesterday, reports our bureau office in the district.

However, Jamaat-Shibir men allegedly torched a passenger bus in the city's BRIC area around 6:30pm, said Mohiuddin Selim, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotwali Police Station, adding that none was hurt.

Fire service sources said fire fighters of Nandankanan Fire Station extinguished the fire around 7:30pm. The damage caused by the fire was estimated at Tk 2 lakh.

Zakir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Bara Awlia Highway Police Station, said vehicular movement on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway was very thin.

Passengers at the Kamalapur Railway Station were present as usual. But the train schedule was disrupted as trains ran slower than the

AL versus AL

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others, are facing a tough challenge from party rebels in the polls.

Apart from this, over 15 AL leaders are in electoral battles against the MP aspirants of its allies and like-minded parties. The ruling party did not field any candidates in these seats.

THE REBELS

Among the AL rebels are sitting MPs Meraj Uddin Mollah (Rajshahi-3), Shafiqul Azam Khan (Jhenidah-3), Sheikh Abdul Wahab (Jessore-4), Nani Gopal Mandal (Khulna-1) and Mostaque Ahmed Ruh (Netrokona-1).

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury (Sherpur-2) is facing a tough challenge from party dissident

Badiuzzaman Badsha. AL insiders said both the candidates are in a strong position and it could be anybody's race.

In Faridpur-4, Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury is taking the electoral race to AL presidium member Kazi Zafarullah. Mujibur Rahman alias Nixon Chowdhury is the nephew of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Former minister Abul Kalam Azad (Jamalpur-1) is fighting the electoral battle with AL rebel Aziz Ahmed Hasan, while state ministers Shamsul Haque Tuku, Monnujan Sufian and ex-state minister Mujibur Rahman Fakir are facing former state minister Abu Sayeed, Moniruzzaman Khokon and Naznin Alam in Pabna-1, Khulna-3

and Mymensingh-3 constituencies respectively.

AL Organising Secretary Bir Bahadur is contesting against party rebel Prasanna Kanti Tanchaingya in Bandarban.

The ruling party leaders are challenging Workers Party nominees in Satkira-1 and Narail-2, Jatiya Party candidates in Mymensingh-7, Kishoreganj-3, Sylhet-2, Moulvibazar-2, Brahmanbaria-2, Comilla-3 and 4, Feni-3 and Dhaka-4, Tarikat Federation aspirants in Lakshimpur-1 and Chittagong-2.

Candidates of Workers Party and Tarikat Federation are contesting the polls with the AL's electoral symbol "boat".

increase in his assets. He bought the car at Tk 56.79 lakh from his legal source of income.

For tarnishing his image and questioning his honesty, Ali had decided to go for legal action, said the clarification.

Contacted, Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shujan, said his organisation put down the exact information mentioned in Ali's affidavit that was submitted to the election commission.

"It is his [Ali] duty to explain the matter," he added.

Clarification

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Shushashoner Janney Nagarik (Shujan). It mentioned that Ali's income had gone up by 4,435 percent and his properties increased by 238 percent between 2008 and 2013.

But Shujan did not mention how Ali's income rose so significantly, which gave a wrong impression about him, said the clarification.

Ali said he used to earn Tk 44,000 in 2008 when he was not holding the post of deputy speaker. The increase in his annual income was legal.

He is taking salary and allowances as deputy speaker for around five years since 2009. According to that ratio, his annual income in 2013 can be raised up to around Tk 20 lakh. Apart from salary and allowances, his other income sources include pension, honorarium for participating in BTV programmes and royalties on his book.

About the increase in his property, Ali said, actually a small quantity of property has increased in 2013 compared to 2008. It is a tax free car (entitled as a lawmaker) which contributed to the



The skin of vegetables trader Lokman's face melted off after a petrol bomb landed on his face in Gazipur on Wednesday night when he was in a pickup. Driver of the pickup Moksed, right, also received burn injuries but he was released from the burn unit of DMCH yesterday.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Two more burnt

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coming out of his lips was in fervent prayer to God.

Lokman's wife Mosammam Sabila Khatun was weeping under her veil non-stop. She seemed inconsolable.

The driver of the vehicle, Mokshed Ali, 31, suffered five percent burns. He has been released after treatment.

Meanwhile, Rehana Akther Kajol, 30, was brought into Dhaka Medical College Hospital that night after a cocktail hit her, blowing away a chunk of the muscle on her right shoulder.

"She was in a rickshaw with her cousin when a cocktail was thrown at them," said her husband Mohammad Billal, a wholesale trader at Nawabganj.

The incident happened near Nilkhel in the capital at 8:30pm as Rehana was returning home in Kamrangir Chor from Jatrabari.

She requires immediate plastic surgery, without which her wounds will not recover, doctors said.

"The injury is so deep that the bone is exposed," Billal said.

He clings to the hope that she will recover. As he says, "It could have been worse. I am glad her head was not hit. She might not have lived."

been kept "isolated" there in the name of medical care.

Besides, his party leaders were not allowed to resign from the polls-time cabinet and withdraw from the election. Ershad, who filed nomination papers in three constituencies, will have to contest from two seats.

The story has more to unfold. Despite Ershad's announcement of a boycott of the polls, 20 of his party candidates have been declared elected unopposed. The ruling Awami League had withdrawn its candidates from those seats to give the JP candidates a walkover.

The ruling AL also withdrew its candidates from 21 other seats to ensure easy win for JP contestants. Now, 64 JP candidates are officially in the electoral race, as many of them were not allowed to drop their candidacies.

Scope for people

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127 from the ruling AL, were elected uncontested as they had no other contenders in their constituencies.

The party now needs only 24 seats to have a majority in the 10th parliament.

In her speech, the AL chief highlighted her government's achievements and urged people to vote for the boat, the party symbol, in Sunday's polls.

Rolling out her party's future plans, she said if the AL was voted back to power, it would put emphasis on establishing good governance, democratisation and decentralisation of power.

"We want to establish peace, discipline and stability by curbing militancy, terrorism and communalism."

The AL president also vowed to ensure accountability of the lawmakers and transparency in their activities in and outside parliament.

She also promised to protect the dignity and independence of the judiciary. "The process of establishing the rule of law and human rights will be expedited."

The local government system will be made more effective through a decentralisation of power, said Hasina.

The AL chief pledged that power genera-

tion would be raised to 16,000 megawatts by 2016 and 24,000 megawatts by 2021. And there would be electricity in every household within the next five years.

If the AL returns to power, it will complete the two big power projects -- the coal-fired power plant in Rampal and the nuclear power plant in Rooppur, said the prime minister.

Her government will implement the Women Development Policy-2011 and refrain from enacting any laws that conflict with the Qur'an and Sunnah. It will also see to it that the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord is implemented in full.

The media will enjoy full freedom and the Information Commission will be made more effective. A policy would also be framed to make sure that the online and social media play their role responsibly, she said.

Hasina also pledged to make Bangladesh a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed country by 2041.

She also said her government would not allow any militants, terrorists and separatists to take shelter in the country.

Hasina urged all voters to exercise their franchise in Sunday's election and elect candidates of their choice.

Triumph

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of textbooks to distribute among 3,73,36,672 students of primary and secondary schools, ebtedai and dakhil madrasas and technical institutions.

Over 11.59 crore copies of 33 subjects are for over 2.31 crore primary students, 1.74 crore copies of 34 subjects for some 26 lakh ebtedai students, over 13.59 crore copies of 114 subjects for 92.58 lakh secondary and English version students, 16.63 lakh copies of 16 subjects for 1.86 lakh SSC vocational students and 2.86 crore copies of 71 subjects for 21.17 lakh Dakhil and Dakhil vocational students.

The education minister greeted the students in his speech: "We are delighted that we have been able to give the students books on the very first day, despite many obstacles like hartals and blockades enforced by the opposition."

He urged them to concentrate on studies to get the best possible education.