



Hammer not heavy

Yet Workers Party set to score its best-ever polls result

SHAKHAWAT LITON & WASIM BIN HABIB

Since the restoration of democracy in 1991, the Workers Party has been able to win only once. That was a seat at the 1991 election on its own. At the next two parliamentary elections, its candidates suffered the humiliation of not winning a single seat.

After a long break, the party was able to gain representation in parliament by winning two seats at the 2008 election. But to achieve it, it had to rely on Awami League support and had to use the AL's electoral symbol, jettisoning its own.

In the upcoming general election, two top leaders of the party, including its chief Rashed Khan Menon, have already crossed the election hurdle unchallenged with support from the AL. And two other leaders boarding the AL's electoral symbol 'boat' are set to go ashore with little

difficulty expected.

But the party's remaining 14 candidates are struggling with the party's own electoral symbol 'hammer' to win at the 10th parliamentary elections. The performances of party candidates in past elections, however, show little prospect of such hopes getting translated into reality.

Take these facts, for instance. In Dinajpur, Workers Party candidates are the only opponents of AL contenders at five of the six parliamentary seats. The left-leaning party nominated only two candidates there at the 1991 polls, one each in 1996 and 2001. They together bagged 1,580 votes in the three elections. Their security deposits were forfeited, according to Election Commission reports.

The situation in Natore-3 constituency is no less discouraging. The party nominated candidate is chal-

lenging the AL contender, who is also a sitting MP, at the January 5 polls.

The left-leaning party, led by Menon, a minister in Sheikh Hasina's election-time government, fielded its candidate in this constituency at the 1996 and 2001 polls. The vote results were embarrassing for it. In 1996, the party-backed candidate was, vote-wise, seventh out of nine candidates, bagging only 504 votes, whereas the winning candidate got 43,162 votes.

At the 2001 election, the party-nominated candidate could manage to get 666 votes and emerged fifth among six candidates. The winning candidate from the BNP bagged 88,071 votes.

In Jhenidah-4 constituency, the Workers Party candidate is the lone opponent of the AL contender. The party candidate in this seat in 1991

and 1996 polls bagged only 1,536 and 851 votes respectively.

In Chittagong-4 constituency, the Workers Party candidate has two others contenders ---from the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Jatiya Party-led Manju --- with him to challenge the ruling AL candidate.

The party nominated its candidate in this seat only at the 1996 polls. He obtained 1,534 votes. The JSD and JP-Manju did not nominate any candidate in previous polls.

In Chittagong-9, the situation is more interesting. Here, the Workers Party candidate along with contenders of the National Awami Party and the newly floated BNF is challenging Prime Minister's Advisor Ziauddin Bablu, who is contesting on a Jatiya Party ticket.

None of the three parties, except for the Jatiya Party, has fielded a candidate in this seat in any previous elections since 1991. Except for

the 2001 polls, the AL candidate has won three elections here. This time, the AL withdrew its candidate to ensure Bablu's win here.

The Workers Party has fielded a total of 18 candidates for the January 5 polls. Of them, nine are going to challenge AL nominated candidates while two will face Jatiya Party-backed candidates, with no other contestants from any other party.

The candidates of the AL and JP would have been elected to these seats if the Workers Party men were not contesting.

Three other candidates will contest two AL and one JP contenders along with other party candidates.

Workers Party leader Fazle Hossain Badsha, who was elected unopposed on AL support, told The Daily Star, "Through this election, we will be able to judge our strength."

Torch with no flame

Inu set for landslide win, for the first time with his JSD

SHAKHAWAT LITON & WASIM BIN HABIB

For the first time in more than two decades, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal led by Hasanul Haq Inu looks all set to win a seat with its own electoral symbol, the 'flaming torch'.

The party may have a landmark victory in Panchagar-1 constituency, where its candidate is up against a lone challenger backed by Jatiya Party-Manju. The JSD candidate has already gained the upper hand with support from the ruling Awami League, which won the seat at the 2008 polls.

JSD had once fielded a candidate in this seat at the 1991 polls and bagged 1,839 votes, but the track record of JP-Manju here is nil.

In the contested previous elections --- in 1991, 1996 and 2001---

the JSD candidates took part with their own electoral symbol but their performance turned out to be very poor. The number of votes won by the party continues to drop, contributing to a failure in ensuring its representation in successive parliaments.

The party, however, succeeded in sending its representatives to the House by winning three seats at the 2008 general election. And the success came only when its candidates got the support of the Awami League and used the AL's 'boat' electoral symbol.

This time around, JSD may have the highest ever success thanks to the ruling AL's generosity. Three JSD candidates, including Inu, have been elected unopposed with support from AL. One candidate is contest-

ing with the AL electoral symbol from Narsingdi-2 and is expected to cross the electoral hurdle easily as his lone opponent is an independent candidate and contesting for the first time.

In response to the AL's generosity, the JSD fielded 19 more candidates with its own symbol, contributing to the government's efforts to give the January 5 polls a participatory impression. Of them, JSD contenders are the lone opponents of AL candidates in six seats. In three other seats, the JSD men are the lone fighters against Jatiya Party candidates, who are enjoying AL support in the seat-sharing game.

In eight other seats, JSD challengers along with other candidates are contesting against AL contenders and the remaining two against Jatiya

Party men.

Of the 19 seats, the JSD has never fielded candidates in nine constituencies in all elections since 1991.

How will the JSD candidates contest for the 19 seats? The following facts give the answer:

In Lalmonirhat-1, the JSD candidate is contesting against AL and Jatiya Party candidates. The party had fielded its candidate for this seat only in the 1991 polls and bagged only 302 votes.

In Nilphamari-1 constituency, the JSD candidate is the lone challenger of the AL contender. The party has never fielded a candidate for this seat since 1991. The situation is exactly the same in Chuadanga-1, Patuakhali-3 and Mymensingh-6.

Another example will clarify the picture. In Sherpur-1, out of nine

contestants JSD candidate got 492 votes at the 1991 election whereas the winning candidate from Jatiya Party bagged 31,108 votes.

The ruling Awami League's Atikur Rahman swept the board in all three parliamentary polls --- 1996, 2001, and 2008 --- for this seat, with a steep rise in the number of votes each time. This time, JSD candidate Monirul Islam is set to challenge the AL's three-time winning candidate.

In the view of Shah Jikrul Ahmed, a JSD policymaker, the January 5 polls will be an occasion to gauge the party's strength.

The JSD, when united, performed well at the 1979 polls, winning eight seats. It had one seat at the first election in 1973.



Bicycle pedalled by AL

Manju the important man when others missing

SHAKHAWAT LITON & WASIM BIN HABIB

This election appears as a blessing for Anwar Hossain Manju and his Jatiya Party.

Formed before the 2001 polls after Manju broke away from the HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party, his organisation fielded 14 candidates with the electoral symbol of the 'bicycle', but only one was able to win. The winner was Manju himself. Almost all of his nominees lost their security deposits.

The crushing defeat disappointed the party leaders. The party nominated only seven candidates for the 2008 election, all of whom lost their security deposits. Party chief Manju, who had been elected

MP on the Ershad-led JP ticket in all the elections since 1986, stayed away from contesting the 2008 election.

This time, his party acquired importance as the BNP-led opposition alliance has refused to join the polls under the government led by Sheikh Hasina. Manju, however, did not reject the premier's offer. He was made an advisor to the prime minister with the status of a minister. His party has joined the election.

With the support of the AL, he was elected uncontested from a seat. Thus his party has ensured its representation in the new parliament.

Of the twenty six other candidates of Manju's Jatiya Party, five are

lone challengers of AL contenders in the same number of constituencies. In the remaining 21 seats, they are contesting against other candidates nominated by AL, JP, JSD and Workers Party.

Will any of them win the election? The answer lies in the following facts.

The JP-Manju candidate is challenging an Ershad-led JP candidate in Kurigram-1, a stronghold of the former military ruler's party. In the last four elections since 1991, Ershad's candidate won the seat. Manju's candidate contested the seat at the 2001 polls and bagged only 543 votes.

In Gaibandha-3, Fazle Karim Ahmed Pallab on JP-Manu ticket is challenging the AL candidate. He

contested the 2001 polls on the same party ticket and was able to obtain 3,583 votes.

Manju's candidate is alone challenging the AL candidate in Khulna-2 from where his party men have never contested in past.

In Bhola-2, JP-Manju candidate, who at the 1996 polls on the other party's ticket got only 204 votes, is the lone opponent of AL candidate.

In Naogaon-4, the party candidate has two other contestants along with him to challenge the strong candidate of the AL. But previous records do not project any encouraging picture.

Just after its formation, the party at the 2001 elections fielded its candidate who was able to manage only 220 votes. In contrast, the

ruling party's candidate this time has contested in two previous elections and won the 2008 polls with a huge vote tally of 1.15 lakh.

In Tangail-2, the JP-Manju candidate is the lone challenger against the AL contender, who is also a current MP. Manju's party fielded a candidate for this seat in 2001 polls and managed to secure only 236 votes.

The situation is almost the same in Jamalpur-5 where the JP-Manju candidate is the lone challenger of the AL contender. The JP-Manju participated in the 2001 polls and got 191. In contrast the winning AL candidate bagged 1.50 lakh votes.

The scene at other seats from where the JP-Manju candidates are contesting is almost similar.

VALIANT RIVALS OF AWAMI LEAGUE

POLLING YEAR	JATIYA PARTY (M)	WORKERS' PARTY	JSD	GONOTANTRI PARTY	BD. ISLAMI FRONT	NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY
1991 Total voter: 6.21 crore. BNP won	Party Not formed	Candidates: 35 Votes received: 0.63 lakh Result: One won; Rest lost security deposits	Candidates: 68 Votes: 1.71 lakh Result: None won; 66 lost security deposits	Candidates: 16 Votes: 1.52 lakh. Result: 1 won, 11 lost security deposits	Candidates: 13 Vote: 0.24 lakh Result: All lost security deposits	Candidates 31 Votes: 2.59 lakh Result: 1 won with AL support, 25 lost security deposits
1996 Total voter: 5.67 crore. AL won	Party Not formed	Candidates: 33 Votes: 0.56 lakh Result: None won; 32 lost security deposits	Candidates: 30 Votes: 0.50 lakh Result: None won. 29 lost security deposits	Candidates: 3 Votes: 4,114 Result: all lost security deposits	Candidates: 23 Votes: 0.23 lakh Result: all lost security deposits	Candidates: 13 Votes: 3,620 Result: all lost security deposits
2001 Total voter: 7.49 crore. BNP won	Candidates: 140 Votes: 2.43 lakh Result: 1 won. 136 lost security deposits	Candidates: 32 Votes: 0.40 lakh Result: All lost security deposits	Candidates: 76 Votes: 1.19 lakh Results: None won. 74 lost security deposits	Candidates: 11 Votes: 3,190 Result: All lost security deposits	Candidates: 18 Votes: 0.30 lakh Result:all lost security deposits	Candidates: 3 Votes: 3,801 Result: all lost security deposits
2008 Total voter: 8.10 crore. AL won	Candidates: 7 Votes: 7818 votes. Result: All lost security deposits	Candidates: 3 (AL symbol) + 2 (own symbol) Vote: 2.62 lakh. Result: 2 with AL symbol won. Rest lost; 2 lost security deposits	Candidates: 4 (AL symbol) + 3 (own symbol). Vote: 5.06 lakh. Result: 3 won with AL symbol. 3 lost security deposits	Candidates: 5 Votes: 2,550 Result: All lost security deposits	Candidates: 18 Votes: 0.31 lakh Result: all lost security deposits	Candidates: 14 Votes: 0.24 lakh Result: all lost security deposits

Note: Six other parties-- including the Awami League and the Jatiya Party-- are contesting the election. While the political strength of the AL and JP is well known, the rest 4 parties have almost no track record to mention. Of the four, the BNF is newly floated. Bangladesh Torikot Federation posted 31 candidates; Gonofront gave 14 candidates and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish 8 candidates each in 2008 polls-- all lost security deposits