

CONTEST AS ALLIANCE Parties may get more time to let EC know

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission may extend the deadline for political parties to inform it about their decision to contest the upcoming parliamentary polls under any alliance. The EC after announcing the poll schedule on Thursday sent letters to all the registered parties to inform it in three days [by today] if they wanted to contest the parliamentary polls under any political alliance. EC Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed, however, yesterday said it was mandatory for the political parties to inform the decision in three days (ends today), but "the commission has the authority to take any further decision regarding the matter".

SEE PAGE 12 COL 4

Garo woman

FROM PAGE 18

caught Arfan and later handed him over to police. However, the other accused managed to flee the scene. Muhammad Ruhul Amin Talukdar, officer-in-charge of Sreebardi Police Station, said police produced Arfan before a local court and sought three-day remand for him after the victim filed a case in this connection. The victim was sent to a hospital for medical examinations, the OC added.

Brutes

FROM PAGE 1

of the passengers got down, the others blindfolded the two and started assaulting them. At one point, the attackers pushed Ali off the bus, leaving him injured.

On being informed by him, a police patrol team started looking for the vehicle, said Javed Masud, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Ashulia Police Station.

Hours later, the law enforcers found Jarina's body near Moragang area beside the highway.

The vehicle fled. The body was sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College for an autopsy. Nurul yesterday filed a case with the police station.

Following primary investigation, police suspect that the victim was strangled to death, the OC said. "We are waiting for the autopsy report and trying to identify the culprits," he said. Asked, the police official said Ali could not name the bus in question.

On August 25 last year, Rupa, 27, was raped and killed on a bus heading for Mymensingh by three assistants of the driver. Her body was thrown out of the vehicle in an empty forest area beside Tangail-Mymensingh road.

This September, a mentally challenged was raped inside another bus in Bhuapur upazila of Tangail.

Inclusive polls

FROM PAGE 18

has started their election preparation and is selling nomination forms to lawmaker aspirants.

However, the BNP-led opposition parties are still on the street mobilising public support in favour of its seven-point demand for holding the polls under a nonpartisan election-time government after the dissolution of parliament. The BNP and its allies are yet to clear its stance on their participation in the poll.

In an address to the nation, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda on Thursday unveiled the election schedule. Urging all political parties to join the polls, he announced that the Jatiya Sangsad election would be held on December 23.

Plaudits for young innovators

FROM PAGE 18
also awarded crests.

The jury panel selected the winners after each of the three teams presented their business ideas at the final event yesterday at the International Convention City, Bashundhara in the capital.

A total of 150 teams from different public and private universities participated this year.

Of the teams, five were invited to present their ideas in the final round. Of the five, a panel of judges picked the three.

Meanwhile, Prof AKM Fazle Hussain of Texas Tech University in the US, has been awarded with the Amazing Bangladeshi award at the event.

On behalf of him, ASM Quasem, chairman of Newage Group, a leading garment exporter, received the crest.

The Amazing Bangladeshi award is given to a Bangladeshi expatriate for his or her outstanding contribution to uplifting the country's image abroad.

Addressing as the chief guest, Gowher Rizvi, international affairs adviser to the prime minister, said The Daily Star is not only a newspaper. It is an institution promoting what is best in Bangladesh.

"What we saw today is a fine example that when Bangladeshis are given an opportunity, they can be as good as any."

"One thing I learn from innovators is, what they need is an environment that encourages and nurtures innovation," he said.

Naser Ezaz Bijoy, chief executive officer of the Standard Chartered Bank, Bangladesh; Syed Ferhat Anwar, pro-



Members of team Misfits from Bangladesh University of Professionals replying to queries from the panel of judges, bottom left, Ferhat Anwar, professor of Dhaka University's IBA; Naser Ezaz Bijoy, chief executive officer of the Standard Chartered Bank, Bangladesh; and Rubaba Dowla, president of TiE Dhaka. Bottom right, Gowher Rizvi, international affairs adviser to the prime minister, speaks at the event yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

fessor of the IBA at Dhaka university; and Rubaba Dowla, president of non-profit organisation TiE Dhaka, were the judges.

Jahangir Alam, chairman of Crown Cement, said they started their journey with a production of 600 tonnes a day, which had increased to 10,000 tonnes.

He added that the company started its journey in 1995 and this is the first company which exported cement products from the country in 2000. It has achieved National Export Trophy three times.

The company employs over 5,000 workers and initiated the Rise High Bangladesh in 2016, aiming to create fresh entrepreneurs by harnessing their talents.

Saying that Bangladesh is full of opportunities and possibilities of skilled human resources, Alam urged the prime minister for establishing a separate ministry on human resources development.

In his welcome speech, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said, "Now we need to increase our export basket."

The Rise High Bangladesh programme aims to help diversify the export basket and to engage the young people of the country in business, he said.

Rene Holenstein, ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh, said the event was to honour the creative young Bangladeshis.

"All of you should be proud as amazing Bangladeshi youths. Bangladesh and Switzerland has very strong relations. The focus of our relations with Bangladesh is, in particular, set on young peoples' entrepreneurship," Holenstein said.

AL ignores RPO, its charter

FROM PAGE 1

the 2008 national polls made it mandatory for the parliamentary board of a political party to finalise nomination from the lists.

It was introduced to curb alleged nomination trade and strengthen democratic practice in selecting parliamentary contenders of the political parties.

But the provision was later relaxed through an amendment, leaving the issue of picking candidates from the lists to the discretion of the political parties.

In line with the RPO section, the AL included a provision in its constitution in 2008, empowering the grassroots to send lists of prospective candidates from each constituency to the central parliamentary board, which will finalise nominations from the lists, according to section 27 of the AL charter.

In fact, inclusion of such provision in the party charter is one of the criteria for getting registered with the Election Commission. Registration of a political party may be cancelled for violating the provision.

The AL largely followed the newly introduced provision in nominating its parliamentary candidates for the 2008

national polls. It had asked its grassroots committees to send lists of a maximum of five possible candidates from each constituency.

But this time, the situation is different.

A number of AL grassroots leaders told this newspaper that they were not asked by the party to prepare any lists of parliamentary aspirants in their areas for sending those to the party's parliamentary board.

A day after the ruling AL started selling nomination forms among aspiring candidates, The Daily Star yesterday talked to more than a dozen grassroots leaders of the party in Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Comilla, Khulna, Jessore, and Chattogram.

"In the previous election [in 2008], the party central committee directed us to draw up a list of nomination seekers, so we prepared a list and forwarded it to the central committee," said AL lawmaker from Pabna-5 Golam Faruk Khandaker, also general secretary of the district AL unit.

Advocate Shakhawat Hossain, president of Chatmohor upazila AL unit, Mokhlesur Rahman, secretary of Ishwardi upazila AL unit and AL

Mahamud Delwar, president of Santhia upazila AL unit, also confirmed that they didn't get any instruction to prepare lists of prospective candidates.

"We didn't hold any meeting to select possible candidates. We have confidence in the prime minister's decision on selection of our parliamentary candidate," said Sahinuzzaman Shahin, general secretary of Sujanager upazila AL unit in Pabna. Talukder Abdul Khaleq, president of Khulna city AL, and Panchanon Biswas, president of Khulna district AL, also said the party high-ups didn't instruct them to make any list of prospective candidates.

M Salam, general secretary of Chattogram [north] district unit AL, said they had been directed to send a list of prospective candidates in the last local government polls. But they didn't get such an instruction for the next national polls.

Layeb Uddin Lablu, joint general secretary of Rajshahi district unit AL, said, "A few months ago, our party chief told us that she has employed different mechanisms to conduct surveys. She will nominate candidates

on the basis of the survey findings."

Talking to this newspaper, former election commissioner Sohul Hussain said the EC should look into whether political parties are following the RPO provision.

Contacted, Rafiqul Islam, an election commissioner, said that if the EC intervenes in this matter, political parties would use different means to show that they have selected their candidates as per the grassroots' recommendations.

"Besides, the Election Commission does not have powers to take action against a political party if it violates the RPO provision," he claimed.

Asked about the RPO provision, AL Presidium Member Abdul Matin Khashru said party President Sheikh Hasina is the chief of the party's nomination board, and she knows all about the grassroots leaders.

"She knows who have the possibility of winning the election as she keeps all information about the grassroots leaders throughout the year. She has all the details..."

"The party chief knows better than anyone about who are the party's prospective candidates in the next election

... This is our policy for selecting the prospective candidates," he mentioned.

Seeking anonymity, several grassroots leaders said the party high-ups didn't ask them to send lists possibly because it could intensify intra-party conflicts.

Now in each constituency, at least five to six AL leaders are in the race to obtain party nomination for contesting the national polls.

Over the last two days, around 3,200 AL leaders collected the forms, and 460 of them already submitted those to the party's election steering office in the capital's Dhanmondi area.

The AL parliamentary board sits today to discuss how to scrutinise the forms of a big number of nomination seekers.

"Tomorrow [today] we will set a modality to scrutinise the nomination forms and select the right candidates. Besides, we will decide whether to take interviews of the prospective candidates individually or group-wise," AL Joint General Secretary Mahabubul Alam Hanif told this newspaper.

[Our correspondents in Rajshahi, Pabna, Chittagong and Comilla contributed to this report.]

BNP to join election

FROM PAGE 1

Senior BNP leader Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain will coordinate the party's nomination process. He will sign the letters for the leaders who will get the party tickets, insiders said.

At the 20-party meeting, allies were asked to inform the BNP by today whether they want to contest the election with the party's "sheaf of paddy" or their own symbols.

This instruction is applicable to the components that are registered with the EC.

The Jamaat-e-Islami, on the other hand, sought one day to take decision whether its leaders will contest the

polls as independent candidates or with BNP tickets. The party lost its registration with the EC.

Emerging from the 20-party meeting, Liberal Democratic Party President Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed told reporters that the combine will make public its stance on participation in the national election within two days.

Tomorrow, the BNP will brief foreign diplomats stationed in Dhaka about the current political situation and the outcomes of the two-round talks with the ruling AL-led alliance.

The announcement of election schedule on Thursday put pressure on

the opposition to make some crucial decisions over polls without delay. Otherwise, there will be strict time constraints in finalising candidates and seat-sharing among alliance partners, said leaders of the two alliances.

As announced by the EC, November 19 is the last date for filing nomination papers and November 29 is for withdrawal.

Against this backdrop, the opposition parties opted for urging the EC to revise the schedule to have the timeframe for filing nomination papers extended. In their defence for revising the polls schedule announced on Thursday, the alliance may refer to

the previous records, sources said.

In 2008, the election was deferred by 11 days. In the original schedule, the election was scheduled for December 18, but it was rescheduled for December 29 by extending the timeframe for filing nomination papers.

This time the EC announced the schedule much earlier.

After the beginning of the 90-day countdown to the polls, each of the past ECs since 1996 had taken one month on average to announce the schedule. The current EC announced it just after a week since the beginning of the 90-day countdown.

The Oikyafront, which held two-round parleys with the ruling alliance over their seven-point demand including dissolution of parliament before the polls and formation of a neutral election-time government, is still hopeful for a solution to the ongoing political impasse.

At the meetings of the BNP standing committee and the alliances, the leaders agreed that they will continue agitations in the run-up to the election to keep up pressure on the government.

They will also continue protesting the police harassment of its grassroots leaders and activists and filing of

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