

INDEPENDENT ASPIRANTS

Dec 30 polls see lowest number

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The number of independent candidates in any parliamentary election has hit the lowest this year since 1991.

Only 96 independent candidates are up for contesting the December 30 polls nationwide.

The last election in 2014 had 104 independent candidates for 147 seats.

In the 2008 and 2001 polls, the number of independent candidates were 151 and 486 respectively. In 1996 and 1991, the numbers were 284 and 214.

Election Commission officials said one of the reasons for the decreasing number of independent candidates could be the Representation of the People Order.

The provision required individual candidates to submit signatures of one percent of the total voters of their constituencies along with their applications for candidacies in the 2008 polls, the EC officials said.

Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star, "The number of independent candidates decreased due to the participation of all the 39 registered political parties in the election."

INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE TABLE

YEAR	INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES	WON
2018	96	??
2014	104	16
2008	151	4
2001	486	6
1996 June	284	1
1991	214	25

Many of the parties enlisted multiple candidates from different constituencies during their primary selection. This could be a reason there are fewer independent candidates in the polls, he added.

When the parties picked their final candidates, candidatures of the rest were automatically ceased in line with law, the election commissioner said.

Political parties, including the Awami League and the BNP, tricked their candidates by filing multiple nominations primarily to drop the rebel candidates in the electoral race.

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Riding a vehicle decorated with a replica of boat, the Awami League's electoral symbol, two supporters campaign for party candidate Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal (Dhaka-12) in the city's Moghbazar area yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

'Guardians' honoured

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according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, which expects the total to be high again this year.

And it comes at a time when budding authoritarians have advanced by blurring the difference between tyranny and democracy.

In Sudan, freelance journalist Amal Habani was arrested while covering economic protests, detained for 34 days and beaten with electric rods. In Brazil, reporter Patricia Campos Mello was targeted with threats after reporting that supporters of President-elect Jair Bolsonaro had funded a campaign to spread false news stories on WhatsApp. And Victor Mallet, Asia news editor for the Financial Times, was forced out of Hong Kong after inviting an activist to speak at a press

prince and a really long overdue look at the devastating war in Yemen," he added.

The CIA has concluded with "medium-to-high confidence" that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman probably ordered Khashoggi's October 2 assassination, according to US media reports.

Fellow honourees Wa Lone, 32, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 28, exposed the extrajudicial killing of 10 Rohingya men during a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar's western Rakhine state last year.

They have been imprisoned for nearly a year, and were convicted under a state secrets act in September. A court will hear their appeal later this month.

Marie Ressa, meanwhile, is CEO of



This image obtained yesterday courtesy of Time magazine shows the covers for Time's magazine "Person of the Year".

PHOTO: AFP/TIME MAGAZINE

club event against the wishes of the Chinese government.

"As we looked at the choices it became clear that the manipulation and abuse of truth is really the common thread in so many of this year's major stories, from Russia to Riyadh to Silicon Valley," Time editor-in-chief Edward Felsenthal said.

"So we chose to highlight four individuals and one group who have taken great risks in pursuit of greater truth, starting with Jamal Khashoggi."

Time, which has awarded the "Person of the Year" title annually since 1927, published four different magazine covers for this week's edition, each one spotlighting different honourees.

It is the first time someone has been chosen posthumously for the prestigious cover.

Explaining the decision to honour dissident journalist Khashoggi, who was a US resident and Washington Post columnist, Felsenthal said it was "very rare that a person's influence grows so immensely in death."

"His murder has prompted a global reassessment of the Saudi crown

Rappler, a Philippine news site hit by a string of government efforts to shut it down over its critical tone of President Rodrigo Duterte.

She faces a charge -- which she has dismissed as "manufactured" -- that Rappler provided false information to tax authorities, and risks up to 10 years behind bars.

The staff of the Capital Gazette in Annapolis, Maryland, also share this year's title. Their newsroom was attacked by gunman Jarrod Rodman in June, leaving four journalists and a sales assistant dead.

US President Donald Trump, the 2016 "Person of the Year," was the bookmakers' favorite this year but in the end was runner-up.

Minutes after the unveiling, he launched the latest of his regular attacks on the media via Twitter, accusing the "Fake News" of misreporting his struggle to fill the key position of White House chief of staff.

US Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating possible collusion between Russia and Trump's 2016 election campaign, was ranked third.

One HC judge in favour, other not

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However, Justice Md Iqbal Kabir Lytton, junior judge of the bench, disagreed on the senior judge's order.

Meanwhile, Khaleda's lawyer Kayser Kamal yesterday expressed hope that his client would get justice from the HC bench which would dispose of the writ petitions.

Khaleda in the petitions sought HC directives on the EC to accept her nomination papers so that she could contest the national election.

She also prayed to the HC to issue a rule on the commission asking why its decisions on her nominations should not be declared illegal, Kayser told this correspondent on Monday.

After concluding the hearing on the petitions, the HC on Monday fixed yesterday for passing orders on those.

Khaleda landed in jail on February 8 after a special court in Dhaka had sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. The HC later extended her jail term to 10 years.

On October 29, the BNP chief was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment by the same court in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case.

HC ORDER ON HAWLADER

Another HC bench yesterday dropped from its cause list a writ petition filed by Ruhul Amin Hawlader, special assistant to the Jatiya Party chairman, challenging the EC's rejection of his candidature for Patuakhali-1.

The bench of Justice Tariq ul Hakim and Justice Md Shohrwardi made the petition "out of list" as they didn't find any reason for passing an order in favour of Hawlader, Deputy Attorney General Amatul Karim Swapna told The Daily Star.

She said the JP leader could not take part in the polls following the HC order. However, he could file the same writ petition with another HC bench for an order.

Hawlader, a presidium member of the JP and also an MP, submitted the

writ petition to the HC on Saturday seeking its directives on the EC to accept his nomination papers.

SC ORDER ON DULU, TUKU

The Supreme Court yesterday stayed for a day the HC orders that directed the EC to accept the nomination papers of BNP leaders Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu and Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku and to allow them to contest the election.

Justice Hasan Foez Siddique, chamber judge of the Appellate Division, passed the order following two petitions filed by the EC seeking stay on the HC orders.

The chamber judge also forwarded the EC's petitions to the apex court's full bench for their hearing today.

Following two writ petitions, the HC bench of Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif and Justice Razik-Al Jalil on Monday directed the EC to accept the nominations of Dulu and Tuku and to allow them to contest the polls as the HC had earlier suspended their convictions and sentences in separate criminal cases.

The EC yesterday filed two petitions with the SC seeking stay on the HC orders.

Lawyers AF Hasan Ariff, Fida M Kamal and Aminul Haque Helal appeared for Dulu and Tuku.

Meanwhile, an Appellate Division bench of the SC, headed by the chief justice, yesterday upheld a HC order that stayed the EC's decision to accept the nomination papers of BNP candidate Ali Asgar for Mymensingh-1.

The HC on Sunday stayed the EC's decision following a writ petition filed by Farmers Bank which claimed that Asgar was a loan defaulter.

The apex court yesterday dismissed a petition filed by Asgar seeking stay on the HC order, his lawyer AF Hasan Ariff said.

CHAMBER JUDGE STAYS HC ORDERS

The SC chamber judge yesterday stayed for two days the HC orders that directed the EC to accept the nomination papers of BNP candidates Badal

Sarker and Abdul Muhit Talukder and allow them to contest the polls.

Justice Hasan Foez Siddique passed the orders following two petitions filed by the EC seeking stay on the HC orders.

He also sent the petitions to the full bench of the apex court for their hearing tomorrow (Thursday).

Quamrun Mahmud Deepa, a lawyer for the EC, said the decision whether Badal and Muhit could run in the polls would depend on the order of the full bench of the Appellate Division.

The EC recently upheld the RO's orders rejecting their nominations on grounds that Badal and Muhit were holding profitable posts -- chairmen of two upazila parishads in Bogura, she told The Daily Star.

Following two writ petitions, the HC on Sunday had directed the EC to accept their nomination papers and allow them to contest the upcoming election.

HC STAYS EC DECISIONS

Yesterday, the HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Md Khairul Alam stayed the EC decisions that allowed BNP nominees Tamiz Uddin and Golam Rabbani to contest the polls from Dhaka-20 and Rangpur-5 respectively.

The bench passed the orders following two writ petitions filed by AL candidate Benzir Ahmed for Dhaka-20 and Jatiya Party candidate Mesbahur Rahman for Rangpur-5 respectively.

In the petitions, they challenged the EC's decision to allow Tamiz and Rabbani to contest the December 30 polls claiming that the two were holding profitable posts (the offices of upazila chairman), Deputy Attorney General Motaher Hossain Sazu told The Daily Star.

He said the HC bench also rejected a writ petition filed by Hamidur Rahman, a candidate for Cox's Bazar-2, seeking its directive on the EC to allocate "sheaf of paddy" to him as his polls symbol.

Hasina

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party's polls campaign from Gopalganj.

She will first pay homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at his mausoleum in Gopalganj's Tungipara, AL Joint Secretary Abdur Rahman told a press conference at the AL chief's Dhanmondi office yesterday.

He added that Hasina would place a wreath at the grave of Bangabandhu and join a munajat and offer fateha.

At 8:00am today, she will leave Dhaka for Gopalganj by road from the Gono Bhavan, Rahman said.

She will address a rally at Sheikh Lutfar Rahman Government Degree College ground in Kotalipara around 3:00pm, said an AL press release.

The prime minister will stay overnight at her ancestral home in Tungipara, the release added.

On her way back to Dhaka, Hasina will speak at roadside rallies at seven places -- Bhanga intersection in Faridpur, Faridpur intersection, Rajbari intersection, Paturia ghat in Manikganj, Manikganj bus stand, Rabeya Medical College and Hospital premises in Dhamrai and Savar bus stand, Rahman told the briefing.

AL sources said Hasina would not enjoy government privileges during the campaign.

After spending a couple of days in the capital for the Victory Day celebration and unveiling the party's election manifesto, Hasina may visit Sylhet to offer prayers at the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Paran (RA).

The party is scheduled to announce the manifesto on December 18, PM's Political Affairs Adviser HT Imam told reporters at a city hotel on Monday night.

For Oikyafront, an alliance of BNP and several other political parties, a delegation led by Dr Kamal Hossain will begin its polls campaign from Sylhet today after offering prayers at the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Paran (RA).

The team, comprising of Kader Siddique, Nazrul Islam, Mahmudur Rahman Manna and Zafrullah Chowdhury, will go to Sylhet by air in the afternoon, said Syrul Kabir Khan, a staffer of BNP chairperson's media wing.

The BNP, a major component in the Oikyafront, for the first time starts its electioneering without party chief Khaleda Zia, who used to kick off her party's election campaign after offering munajat at the two shrines in Sylhet.

Talking to our Sylhet correspondent yesterday, Ali Ahmed, district coordinator of Oikyafront, said Dr Kamal and other alliance leaders are slated to address a roadside rally near the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) in Sylhet-1 constituency.

They will also speak at two other roadside rallies each in Sylhet-3 and Sylhet-4 constituencies, added Ali, also general secretary of Sylhet district unit BNP.

After staying overnight in Sylhet, the Oikyafront leaders will return to Dhaka on Thursday.

In JP Chairman HM Ershad's absence, his Special Assistant Ruhul Amin Hawlader will start the party's election campaign from the capital's Korail Bosti (slum) in favour of Ershad, who is contesting in Dhaka-17, the party said in a Facebook post.

Workers Party of Bangladesh chief Rashed Khan Menon, who is contesting in Dhaka-8, will hold a view exchange meeting at the city's Abu Jar Gifari College in Malibagh today.

He will also inaugurate his election office in Kakrail, party sources said.

Crammed beyond capacity

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In the three months from May to July, some 42,000 suspected drug peddlers landed in 55 district and 13 central jails, according to prison officials.

In addition, in September-October, police arrested hundreds of BNP men across the country ahead of the party's founding anniversary and its rally in the capital.

The BNP has claimed that as of November 14, at least 10,513 of its leaders and activists had been arrested.

The Daily Star could not verify the claim, and the prison authorities say they do not keep separate records of arrestees who are political leaders and activists.

However, they said about 43 percent of the total prisoners face drug-related charges.

Jail officials in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions said they were facing a hard time accommodating and looking after prisoners three to five times the capacity. Many are left with no choice but to lie in the corridors although winter is here.

"It is not that big a problem in summer. But keeping inmates outside cells in cold may result in a series of problems," said an official at the prisons directorate, describing the situation in northern districts.

The Cox's Bazar district jail is

among the most crowded, holding prisoners about seven times its capacity.

"The jail shelters 3,800 prisoners against its capacity of 530. Of them, 2,500 are accused in drugs-related cases. The number of such inmates is rising as courts are denying bails in such cases," said Jail Superintendent Bazlur Rashid Akhand.

Crowded prisons hamper the routine activities and violate prisoners' rights, officials said.

They are also perfect breeding grounds for corruption, said a former high prison official.

Corruption in jails can be controlled through efficient management, which is difficult in an overcrowded prison, the official added, asking not to be named.

Sometimes, convicts who are chosen as leaders in prisons offer undue favour to inmates in exchange of money. A portion of that money reaches some corrupt jail officials as well, said sources in different jails.

With a large number of the inmates being drug dealers, drug abuse also continues inside jails dodging surveillance, they added.

For example, six inmates in the district jail in Cox's Bazar, the hub of yaba trade, were caught carrying yaba pills in their rectums very recently. Similar recoveries were made at least

five other times in recent months, officials said.

Asked how they are accommodating the prisoners, Chittagong Jail Superintendent Prashanta Kumar Banik said, "We are trying to manage the pressure by arranging sleeping spaces for inmates in verandas in regular wards."

There are 9,695 inmates in the jail against its capacity for just 1,853.

He added that four new wards had been constructed to accommodate 800 prisoners.

Contacted, Abdullah Al Mamun, assistant inspector general at the Directorate of Prisons, said some jails had already been renovated to accommodate more prisoners.

Renovation of other prisons are underway, he told The Daily Star on November 27.

In January 2010, a year after the AL took office, the prison population stood at 90,000 in 67 jails against their capacity for 27,000, according to the Directorate of Prisons.

It came down to 75,000 in September 2015 when the combined capacity was 33,430. The number went up again in July this year to 83,350.

(Our correspondents from Chattogram, Barishal, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet and Mymensingh contributed to this report.)