

# BNP candidate

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constituency, Hannan, in a press conference held at Chandpur town, said, "It is not possible to contest the election amid such a situation where police are harassing my men continuously. That is why I have taken the decision to leave my area."

His decision came a day after the clash between BNP men and law enforcers at Faridganj upazila that left at least 20 people, including four policemen, injured.

That evening, Hannan and his supporters brought out an election procession. When they were crossing Faridganj Police Station, some miscreants threw brickbats at them. In response, the police charged baton and triggered the clash, according to our correspondent.

Harunur Rashid, officer-in-charge of Faridganj police, denied the allegation of harassing the BNP men. He said the BNP candidate's followers threw brickbats at law enforcers without any reason.

Apart from Chandpur, police arrested at least 20 BNP-Jamaat men in four districts in the last two days allegedly for planning sabotage.

Amid such arrests and cases, BNP yesterday submitted an application to the CEC requesting the commission to take immediate steps against harassment and attacks by law enforcers and AL men.

In the application signed by BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, BNP cited a list of attacks and harassment incidents by police and AL men at different districts in the last couple of days.

In Jashore, police arrested a BNP activist and filed a case against 34 others and 40-50 unnamed people on charge of planning sabotage at Monirampur upazila on Monday night.

However, family members of the arrestee, Faruk Hossain, claimed police detained him from his house on Sunday night.

In another drive, police arrested two Jamaat leaders on sabotage charges at Chougachha upazila yesterday.

In Chattogram, police arrested 14 people, including younger brother of BNP candidate of Chattogram-4, Ishaque Chowdhury at Jalilnagar on Monday night on charges of an attempt to commit subversive activities.

Moreover, Chattogram police arrested BNP activist Yakub Chowdhury Nazim, 45, on charge of planning subversive activities in Kotwali area yesterday.

In Jhalakathi, four BNP men were arrested in separate areas of Rajapur upazila yesterday allegedly for planning sabotage.

# Big blow

FROM PAGE 1

In Chhattisgarh, ruled by the BJP for 15 years, initial results showed the BJP winning just 16 seats, down from 49 in the outgoing parliament, trailing Congress on 68 in the 90-seat state parliament.

Congress also trounced the BJP in Rajasthan, governed since 2013 by the BJP's Vasundhara Raje, an unpopular local princess, winning 99 seats ahead of the BJP on 73 -- 89 fewer than in the last election.

Television footage showed jubilant Congress workers bursting firecrackers and dancing at regional party offices in both states.

In neighbouring Madhya Pradesh the BJP also suffered from voter fatigue after 15 years in office, with Congress set to be two seats short of a majority and five ahead of the BJP.

In two other smaller states also releasing results yesterday, Telangana in the south and remote Mizoram in the northeast, regional parties looked to be leading.

In Telangana the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi won handsomely -- at the expense of Congress. Mizo National Front (MNF), a BJP ally, is all set to form govt in Mizoram as Congress loses its last bastion in North East. The MNF won 26 seats in the 40-member Assembly, a gain of 21 seats since 2013. The Congress managed to bag only five seats compared to 34 seats it won in the 2013 Assembly elections.

But it was Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh that mattered most for the Hindu nationalist BJP, which swept to power nationally under Modi in 2014.

They form part of the "Hindi Belt" or "Cow Belt" region of around 475 million people -- more than the United States, Canada and Mexico combined -- where the right-wing BJP has its core support base.

Currently the BJP rules 19 out of 29 Indian states either outright or in alliance with local parties. Congress rules just two states, including one in partnership.

But the latest results are a blow to the image of Modi as an invincible vote-winner, and puts the 68-year-old on the back foot months before he seeks a second term in office.

It also strengthens 48-year-old Gandhi -- scion of the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty -- with Congress having lost more than a dozen states to the BJP since Modi took office in 2014.

The Congress yesterday hailed its good showing in assembly polls in three Hindi heartland states and thanked people for choosing "love over hate".

"Democracy has won! Thank you India, you have chosen love over hate, peace over violence & truth over lies. This victory is yours," read a tweet on the party's official Twitter handle.

Analysts have linked the BJP's apparent dwindling support to growing rural distress and unemployment rates in the country. Nearly 55 percent of India's 1.25 billion population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture, and farmers form an important voting bloc for parties.

# Spectre of violence returns

FROM PAGE 1

doctors declared him dead, said AFM Nasim, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station.

Khandaker Nazmul Hasan, president of Faridpur town AL, said Yusuf was a cultural affairs secretary of North Channel union unit of the party.

Mirza Fakhru's motorcade came under attack, allegedly by AL men, in Thakurgaon's Danarhat village. At least 10 people were hurt and four vehicles damaged in the attack, according to BNP leaders.

Besides, ruling party men attacked an election office of Fariduzzaman, Jatiya Oikyafront candidate in Narail-2. Miscreants also tore and snatched a huge number of BNP posters in different areas of Satkhira municipality and Sadar upazila.

Since Monday night, pre-polls violence left at least 85 people, mostly BNP activists, injured in 13 districts, BNP sources said.

After the polls campaign officially began Monday following the allocation of election symbols to parliamentary aspirants, clashes broke out in several districts, including Cumilla and Chandpur.

Later in the day, the motorcades of BNP candidates from Bogura-5 Golam Mohammad Siraj, Chuadanga-1 Sharifuzzaman and BNP-led 20-party candidate for Natore-1 Manjurul Alam Bimol came under attack allegedly by AL activists.

Houses of two local Juba Dal leaders were also attacked, vandalised, torched and looted in Sirajganj and Bogura on Monday night allegedly by ruling party men.

**NOAKHALI**  
Anwar Hossain, OC of Sudharam Police Station, said BNP men opened fire and sprayed pepper powder on an AL procession in Noakhali's Nurupaturiahat area around 6:00pm, leading to a clash.

Hanif was shot in the leg and his head was badly smashed on the ground. He was taken to Noakhali General Hospital where doctors declared him dead, he said.

The incident left at least 10 others injured.

Contacted, Noakhali Sadar AL President Shihab Uddin Shahin said BNP men were holding a meeting inside a house in Nurupaturiahat. They attacked the AL procession when it was crossing the area, triggering a running battle which left Hanif dead.

Noakhali BNP General Secretary Abdur Rahman denied the allegation and claimed his party had no such meetings near the spot yesterday.

He blamed AL's internal clash for Hanif's death.

At least 15 others were injured as the two parties clashed in other parts of the district.

**FARIDPUR**  
OC Nasim said Yusuf died after he had a fight with a local BNP man, Mohammad Majid, at a tea stall at Goldangi around 7:30pm.

Majid was also injured and was being treated at a local hospital, he said, adding that different parts of the victim's body were swollen.

But quoting local BNP men, North Channel Union Chairman Mostakuzaman, said Yusuf fell ill after he went home following the fight. He later died.

**THAKURGAON**  
Fakhru's motorcade came under attack around 1:00pm when he was on his way to Danarhat to meet the families of two party leaders arrested on Monday.

Thakurgaon BNP Treasurer Shariful Islam Sharif said a group of AL activists, armed with sticks and sharp weapons, attacked their motorcade. Four of the 10 vehicles in the convoy were vandalised and 10 BNP men were injured.

Fakhru escaped the attack unharmed, Sharif said.

Begunbari union AL president Bani Amin denied their involvement.

He claimed that BNP-Jamaat men carried out the attack as part of a conspiracy against the government and were trying to cash in on the situation ahead of the December 30 polls.

Mostafijur Rahman, OC of Thakurgaon Police station, said Fakhru went to Begunbari without informing them.

Hearing the news, police went to the spot and rescued the BNP leader who later joined an election campaign in Gorea area in the afternoon.

Fakhru condemned the "attack" and claimed that the AL was resorting to violence as it had become detached from people.

"They attacked our motorcade in a planned way. A police team was in the [nearby] Bazar but they did not take appropriate steps," he later told an election rally in the district.

He said the Election Commission could not ensure a level-playing field and that the government and the EC had to prevent such incident if it wanted a participatory election.

Pro-BNP teachers of Jahangirnagar University protested the "attack" on Fakhru's motorcade. Rights body Ain o Salish Kendra also condemned the attacks on the motorcades of BNP candidates in Thakurgaon and Bogura.

**MANIKGANJ**  
BNP candidate in Manikganj-3 Afroza Khan Rita yesterday alleged that her motorcade was attacked when she along with her party men, was electing in Kaurana village of Manikganj's Satoria upazila.

visit a shrine around 4:00pm.

Wielding bamboo sticks, around 40-45 people, led by Rezaul Karim and Abdul Khalek, convener and joint convener of Satoria Jubo League, attacked the motorcade, she alleged.

At least 15 BNP supporters sustained injuries.

Afroza lodged a complaint with the returning officer and the superintendent of police in the district in this connection.

Contacted, SP Rifat Rahman Shamim said he ordered an investigation into the incident to ensure a peaceful environment before the polls.

Rezaul and Khalek could not be contacted for comments.

**BOGURA**  
BNP aspirant from Bogura-5 Golam Mohammad Siraj alleged that AL activists attacked his motorcade in Hukumalir intersection area when it was heading towards Dhunat Bazar in Dhunat upazila around 11:30am yesterday.

Some 20-25 AL men armed with sharp weapons vandalised four vehicles and injured 16 of his supporters, he alleged.

Gaziur Rahman, additional superintendent of police (Dhunat Sherpur circle), said police were looking into the matter.

Abdul Hai, general secretary of Dhunat AL, blamed the attack on Siraj's party rivals.

Assistant Returning Officer Razia Sultana said necessary steps would be taken after investigation.

**CHUADANGA**  
The motorcade of Sharifuzzaman, BNP candidate in Chuadanga-1, came under attack in the district's Jehala area around 9:30pm on Monday, said party sources.

At least 10 people were injured and two minibuses were damaged, they said.

Sharifuzzaman alleged that local ruling party men, led by Abdul Hannan alias Hat Hannan, joint secretary of Jehala union AL, carried out the attack.

But Hannan said local BNP men ransacked an AL office in Munshiganj Bazar area earlier in the day. Aggrieved, some AL men "just threw a few brick chips" at BNP activists.

Abu Jihad Md Fakhru Alam Khan, OC of Alamdanga Police Station, said they heard about both the incidents but no one lodged any written complaints.

"We will take action if we get those complaints," he added.

**NATORE**  
AL activists allegedly attacked and vandalised the microbus of BNP alliance candidate Manjurul Alam Bimol on Monday evening at Trimohoni Bazar in Lalpur upazila, leaving two of his supporters wounded.

Lalpur OC Nazrul Islam Jewel said there was a "quarrel" between the supporters of AL and Bimol, a Krishak Sramik Dal leader, and that no microbus was attacked.

Besides, four people sustained bullet wounds in a clash between activists of a rebel candidate of Awami League and the candidate of grand alliance at Fatikchhari upazila in Chattogram Monday night.

The clash took place in Nanapur Bazar area around 8:30pm between the supporters of Syed Najibul Bashar Majibhandari, the alliance candidate, and the supporters of ATM Payarul Alam, an AL rebel, said Fatikchhari Police OC Babul Akhter.

In Patuakhali, at least 30 people were injured in a clash between AL and BNP supporters in Khalgora area of Rangabali upazila yesterday.

The clash took place after supporters of the two parties called meetings at the same place at the same time, said locals.

Meanwhile, at least 10 BNP men were injured in an attack allegedly by Jubo League and Chhatra League activists in Narsingdi Sadar's Belabo area, said BNP sources.

The incident happened when BNP Standing Committee Member Abdul Moin Khan, party's nominee in Narsingdi-2, was campaigning in the area.

Contacted, Shahriar Alam, additional superintendent of police in the district, said he was unaware of the incident. "Action will be taken once we receive a complaint".

Meanwhile, in a press release yesterday, Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganasanghati Andolon and also a candidate for Dhaka 12, alleged that his party men were attacked by some pro-government activists in Karwan Bazar area of the capital on Monday night.

# Thai junta

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telecoms tycoon who won a landslide election in 2001, and is hellbent on blocking the Shinawatra clan from returning to power.

A new charter embeds government policy for the next 20 years, dilutes the number of elected parliamentary seats available and introduces a hand-picked upper house and the possibility of an appointed prime minister.

"I'd like to congratulate the Thai people as today is the start of a new hope we'll get freedom and equality back," Thaksin said in a rare Facebook post responding to the lifting of the campaigning ban.

He also called for the constitution to be changed in a post accompanied by a photo of him making the three-fingered salute from "The Hunger Games" movie franchise, an unofficial emblem of defiance of Thailand's ruling junta.

Junta chief Prayut meanwhile is widely tipped to make a bid for the premiership after elections, after years insisting he was compelled by duty to seize power.

# Organic

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"The earthworms eat the dung and their waste becomes the manure. Vermicompost is an excellent, nutrient-rich organic fertiliser and soil conditioner," said Hamid.

The vermicast fetches money, makes the land fertile and ensures fair prices for the region's crops. "Why would I hate this?"

On average, he makes around Tk 15 lakh profit annually.

At least 70 people, most of them women, from his locality and neighbouring villages are now following his organic method. They even collect the earthworms and training from him to launch their own initiatives.

On average, Hamid produces 48 tonnes of fertiliser a year, which is 6.52 percent of the total production of the region covering four districts -- Rajshahi, Natore, Naogaon and Chapainawabganj.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, the region's annual production of 652 tonnes of fertiliser comes from 1,621 private and 1,265 commercial producers while a total of 9,340 farmers use the fertiliser.

"Vermicomposting is especially beneficial for the dry Barind land," said SM Mustafizur Rahman, DAE additional director for the region.

The organic matter improves soil health and ensures that the dry land can retain more water, requiring less irrigation, he added.

"I was incurring losses in agriculture alone," said Hamid, who is now solvent with commercial fertiliser production.

He often had to borrow money to continue cultivation. But he suffered a financial blow during political turmoil and road blocks in 2013-14 when he failed to sell off his crops worth Tk 12 lakh.

With the help of a relative, he collected 1 lakh earthworms from the Indian Malda district in 2015. Unaware of the proper methods, he was not able to produce quality vermicast.

He visited several successful vermicast farmers in 2016 to learn the tricks of the trade.

Witnessing a growing demand, he expanded his vermicompost farm in 2017, setting up a 735 square-foot tin shade net to his home.

The shed now has eight beds, similar to the seed beds of crop fields. Each of these beds carry millions of earthworms that are fed cattle dung to produce the fertiliser.

Hamid sells the fertiliser at Tk 60,000 a tonne. He sells the earthworms too.

He also uses the fertiliser in his own mango and guava orchards and in his pond as fish feed.

"With this new venture, I paid off all my debts within a year and a half," Hamid told The Daily Star.

"At several local markets, the buyers' first choice is the produce from Hamid's land," said Amreto Sarker, a development activist.

Three fruit vendors of Billi market have become financially solvent by selling guavas from Hamid's land, as buyers prefer organically produced fruit, added Amreto.

# US

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campaign and hold peaceful rallies and meetings," he said.

The US ambassador made the remarks while talking to reporters after a meeting with Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda at the latter's office in the city.

Noting freedom of expression vital for healthy democracy, he said democracy flourishes through frequent and lively debate.

"Everyone, no matter of the political party or sentiment, should act peacefully and responsibly. All should refuse violence," said Ambassador Miller adding, "Violence hinders the democratic process. It only serves those who want to undermine that [democracy]."

The US does not support any party or candidate but it supports democracy and democratic values, he said.

"I encourage everyone to participate in the election process and democratic process by collectively expressing the wellbeing of Bangladeshi people," said the US envoy.

Ambassador Miller said the United States encourages the government of Bangladesh to hold, as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said, a "free, fair and credible election".

He said the US will be supporting election observation teams adding that US-funded National Democratic Institute (NID) sent a five-member pre-assessment mission in October followed by the second pre-assessment mission in December.

Miller said, in cooperation with the UK and Switzerland, it is funding 15,000 local election observers working under Election Working Group (EWG), a consortium of civil society organisations.

The US Ambassador said the NDI's sub-grant partner, the Asian Network for Free Election, has dedicated two international electoral analysts to cover the election and will be sending international long-term and short-term observers.

# 4th grader

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their child go with her for the sake of her husband's treatment.

# 999 proving handy

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water around 10:00am after an accident. As panic gripped the passengers, one of them -- Shohag -- called 999.

The dispatcher informed the coast-guard, river police and fire service without delay, after which all of the passengers were successfully rescued.

**INTRODUCTION OF MULTIPLE CHANNELS**  
In the primary stage of the helpline, the only way to call the toll free 999 number was from T&T and cell phones. But on December 1, the desk introduced multiple channels.

"Citizens can now avail the helpline service from Facebook messenger and by downloading the app -- BD police helpline," Tabarak Ullah, superintendent of police of the emergency helpline, told The Daily Star.

The service would soon be available in Twitter and WhatsApp messaging as well, he said.

**THE 'DISPERSE SYSTEM'**  
In the second phase of work that began on July 1, the authorities began setting up "disperse systems" in 321 police stations of eight metropolitan and eight range police units, according to officials.

Regarding the system, SP Tabarak said 999 dispatchers contact local duty officers in police stations after receiving a complaint. In some cases, the dispatcher finds the duty officer's number busy due to which the service may get delayed, he said.

To combat this issue, the "disperse system" had been introduced. "We have already set up separate 999 telephone sets in 200 police stations so that helpline

officials are able to connect with the local police stations without any delay. The setting up of 121 more 999 sets will be completed shortly," he said.

Once the police stations under eight metropolitan and range police units come under coverage, they would set up similar sets in 309 other police stations across the country, he added.

Besides, the service provider also started installing "mobile data terminal (MDT)" sets in all 1,300 police patrol cars to ensure quicker service, said Tabarak.

MDT sets were already installed in 92 patrol cars, he said, adding that the disperse system and MDT would also be installed in 350 fire stations and their vehicles in phases.

**ENHANCING CAPACITY**  
With 463 employees, the national helpline desk was now capable to respond to 60 calls every minute, according to officials.

The construction of a 30 storey building for the help line's central command centre is under progress in the capital's Demra.

10-storeys of it is expected to be constructed by 2021 and the service provider would be able to respond to 500 calls at a time, said SP Tabarak, adding that steps were also being taken to build a secondary emergency service of 999 in Jashore so that the service was not interrupted in case the main command centre faces a natural disaster.

"Moreover, we have plans to provide one patrol car and two motorbikes for each of the police stations in the third phase of our plan," he added.

# Atmosphere

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Security expert and former election commissioner Brig Gen (Rtd) M Sakhawat Hussain said the EC's limits were apparent during the process of the scrutiny of the election aspirants' nomination papers.

Some papers were rejected due to lack of knowledge among field-level officials while others were not accepted because of them hurrying to finish the task. Some were also rejected "consciously", he said.

Crediting the EC for accepting a number of nomination papers during the appeal period, he said as a neutral body it should investigate the rejections, he said.

On voting, Sakhawat said it could be free with participation of large number of voters on election day with the presence of women voters being a determinant in gauging the polls atmosphere.

Yet, the election could be riddled with questions if the vote counts did not take place in a fair manner, he added.

Referring to the much-debated polls of 2014, News Today Founding Editor Reazuddin Ahmed said a repeat of that would be unacceptable as the nation was still paying for it.

Referring to the movements over job quota reform and road safety, former ambassador M Shafulullah said young voters had shown that they were capable of making a difference.

Young voters were willing to cast their votes as they had vowed to "repair the state", said Prof Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, chairperson of development organisation Unnayan Onneshan.

Manjur Ahmed, vice chairman of CGS, said the issue of holding fair and credible election would remain on the table unless the EC's dependency on the administration and police was reduced.

prerequisites for a country's prosperity.

BNP Joint Secretary General Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal said his party had decided to contest the polls despite facing obstacles and that the government continued to oppress his party men.

Whether the election would be fair and people would be able to cast their votes depended on those responsible for arranging the election, said Mir Nasir Hossain, former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries.

He said although the EC was constitutionally empowered for holding a credible election, it was important to see whether it had the willingness to carry out their constitutional duties and also how far it could go even if was willing to.

Both the ruling and opposition parties were responsible for holding credible election, said Nasir, adding the ruling party had more responsibility to this end.

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# Maintain

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symbols to contestant and opened the field for campaigning.

Some 640 judges are attending the three day-long briefing that began on Monday.

**EC OFFICIAL'S MISBEHAVIOR**  
Sadaqat Khan Fakuu, an independent candidate of Dhaka-16, yesterday accused EC Joint Secretary Selim Mia of misbehaving with him when he went to the latter's office to collect the certified copy of refusal of his candidature.

He lodged a complaint with the CEC demanding Selim's punishment.

Our correspondent went to Selim's office for several times yesterday but failed to reach him as he was busy with the briefing.

EC Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star that it was an administrative issue and they would look into it.

# Dec 30 polls

FROM PAGE 2

According to the EC, the BNP primarily nominated 696 leaders for 295 constituencies while AL picked 281 leaders for 264 seats.

Besides, 486 independent candidates submitted nomination papers.

On December 9, the last day for withdrawal of candidature, the BNP finally kept 240 candidates and the AL kept 258, leaving other seats for alliances.

Former Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hussain said political parties issued warnings to many individual candidates to withdraw their candidacy this year.

Non partisan individuals' lack of interest, overall expenditure and use of muscle power were some of the reasons for the decreasing number of individual participants in the polls, he said.