



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses an enormous rally on Sheikh Lutful Rahman Government College premises in Gopalganj's Kotalipara yesterday as she embarks on the campaign trail. PHOTO: BSS



A crowd of journalists and party leaders swarm around Dr Kamal Hossain as he launches Jatiya Oikyafront's election campaign at the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal in Sylhet yesterday. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

# Give us another chance to serve

FROM PAGE 1

The PM said people would have to cast votes for "boat" to give a fitting reply to those who had joined hands with anti-liberation forces, war criminals, convicts, arsonists, and made them election candidates.

Mentioning that Bangladesh would celebrate the golden jubilee of its independence in 2021, she said, "We don't want to see war criminals, anti-liberation forces, murderers and arsonists in power at that

time. They will destroy the country and the spirit of the Liberation War."

Hasina said the AL would build a hunger- and poverty-free Sonar Bangla as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She said the government would celebrate Bangabandhu's birth centenary in 2020 and it had already declared 2020-2021 as the "Mujib Barsha".

The country's people got independence and rights to their mother tongue by casting votes for "boat" in the past, the PM told the rally.

Highlighting various successes of the two AL-led governments in the last 10 years, she said they were implementing projects one after another. "As a result, huge employment opportunities have been created in the country which in turn helped reduce the poverty rate."

The PM said the government had

attached highest importance to education to create an educated nation. Besides, over 93 percent people had already come under electricity coverage.

She reiterated that the aim of her government was to supply electricity to every house of the country.

The AL president said she was doing nothing for her personal gain. "What I have been doing is materialising the dream of the Father of the Nation through establishing a Bangladesh free

of poverty and hunger."

Hasina's younger sister Sheikh Rehana, AL leaders Sheikh Abdullah, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Abdur Rahman, Bahauddin Nasim, Afzal Hossain and film stars Reaz and Ferdous were present at the programme, chaired by Kotalipara AL President Subash Joy Dhar.

Earlier in the day, Hasina started her road journey to Kotalipara from the

Gono Bhaban around 8:22am.

After arriving at Kotalipara at 2:10pm, she paid homage to the Father of the Nation at his mausoleum by placing two wreaths as the PM and the AL chief.

On her way back to Dhaka today, she is expected to address rallies at Bhanga circle in Faridpur, Faridpur circle, Rajbari road circle, Manikganj bus stand, on the premises of Rabeya Medical College and Hospital in Dhamrai and Savar bus stand.

# Take country's ownership back

FROM PAGE 1

For decades, political parties have launched their election campaigns from the shrine.

Led by Kamal, an Oikyafront delegation, comprising BNP standing committee members Nazrul Islam Khan and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Krishak Sramik Janata League President Kader Siddique and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President ASM Abdur Rob, reached Sylhet by air around 4:15pm.

Kamal, also president of Gonoforum, alleged that law enforcers were arresting their leaders every day and insisted that there was no

sign that the election would be free and fair.

Even so, the alliance will remain in the race till the last moment, he said.

"We will force the government to hold a free and fair election," he said, adding that the opposition alliance was getting a "tremendous response" from the people across the country.

Kamal, one of the main framers of the country's constitution, said the government would not be able to materialise its "evil design" if people remained united.

"We have seen throughout the

history that people have been able to realise their demands when united," he said.

Kamal was scheduled to address a rally at Dakkhin Surma at 6:00pm.

But he did not attend the rally as he had an 8:00pm flight for Dhaka, said Ali Ahmed, Sylhet coordinator of the Oikyafront.

Earlier, hundreds of Oikyafront supporters, mostly BNP men, started gathering at the shrine since morning.

Oikyafront leaders were scheduled to hold a rally on the premises of the shrine but law enforcers did not allow them to do so, saying the

alliance of the BNP and several other parties did not take permission for any such programmes.

Around 12:00pm, a police team, led by Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Selim Miah, reached the spot and took away the microphone and other stage materials.

He also said the Oikyafront was given permission to hold the rally at Sylhet Registrar's Office field, not in front of the shrine.

Rezaul Hasan Koyes Ludhi, vice-president of Sylhet city BNP, said they could not seek permission from the police as the decision to hold the

rally at the shrine was made late on Tuesday night.

Ali said they had originally planned to hold a rally at the Registrar's Office field at Bandarabazar and took permission for it.

But later the programme was cancelled due to a lack of time for preparation, said Ali, also the general secretary of Sylhet district BNP.

Oikyafront leaders later held two rallies at Moglabazar of Dakkhin Surma upazila and Bottola of Jaintapur upazila.

At the rally, Abdur Rob alleged the

government was trying to stop Oikyafront's activities by filing cases against its leaders and arresting them.

"They are using the Election Commission as their toy," he said.

Dr Zafrulla Chowdhury said, "All the prisons have already been filled. You have nothing to fear. Remain in the field to ensure our victory."

Nazrul Islam Khan said, "Autocrats of the 1980s [Ershad] joined the autocrats of this era. They are not connected with the people, so democratic behaviour is not expected from them."

## Dulu among 40 BNP men held

STAR REPORT

At least 40 BNP men, including its Organising Secretary Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu, have either been arrested or picked up in separate drives since Tuesday night, party leaders said.

Police yesterday picked up BNP candidate for Dhaka-1 Khandker Abu Ashfaq when he was returning home after campaigning in Joypara Bazar area of Dohar upazila of the district.

Fahima Hossain Jubli, activist of Dohar upazila BNP, told The Daily Star, "Police, along with Awami League men, attacked us when we were returning home around 7:00pm. Police picked up our candidate and left 20 others injured."

But Officer-in-Charge of Dohar Police Station Sazzad Hossain said BNP men set two vehicles on fire and attacked some Awami League men in the area.

Following the incident, AL men gathered there. Ashfaq was taken to police station for his safety and to avoid a clash between the two parties, the OC said.

Around 10:15pm yesterday, Ashfaq was released. He left the police station with his family members, the OC said.

Meanwhile, Dulu was arrested in his Gulshan home yesterday morning in connection with a case filed over sabotage.

A Dhaka court sent him to jail and fixed December 23 for hearing. BNP had picked him for Natore-2. However, his candidacy was cancelled as he was convicted and sentenced in separate criminal cases.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they had an arrest warrant for Dulu in a case filed with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station in 2015.

In another incident, Mohammadpur Thana BNP President Osman Gani Shahjahan was picked up by law enforcers in Agargaon area of the capital.

BNP candidate for Dhaka-13 Abdus Salam told The Daily Star that Osman was picked up around 2:15pm when they were returning from the Election Commission after lodging a complaint for harassment and intimidation of BNP activists.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

# It's businessmen's parliament again

FROM PAGE 1

money will influence the election.

In the alliances led by the Awami League and BNP, around 62 percent of the contestants are businessmen, according to the data from 286 of 300 constituencies.

The Daily Star accumulated the data by analysing the affidavits of 572 nominees of the two tents. Information about aspirants of 14 seats is not available yet.

Things were different in the years following the country's independence.

Law, business and farming were the three most common occupations of the lawmakers elected to the country's first parliament in 1973. Of the MPs in that parliament, 31 percent were lawyers and 18 percent were businessmen.

But the rise of businessmen in politics took place over the decades, particularly after the restoration of the country's democracy, following the ouster of the autocratic Ershad regime in December 1990.

In the fifth parliament constituted through the election of 1991, businessmen outnumbered lawyers. In that parliament, 38 percent were businessmen and 15 percent lawyers.

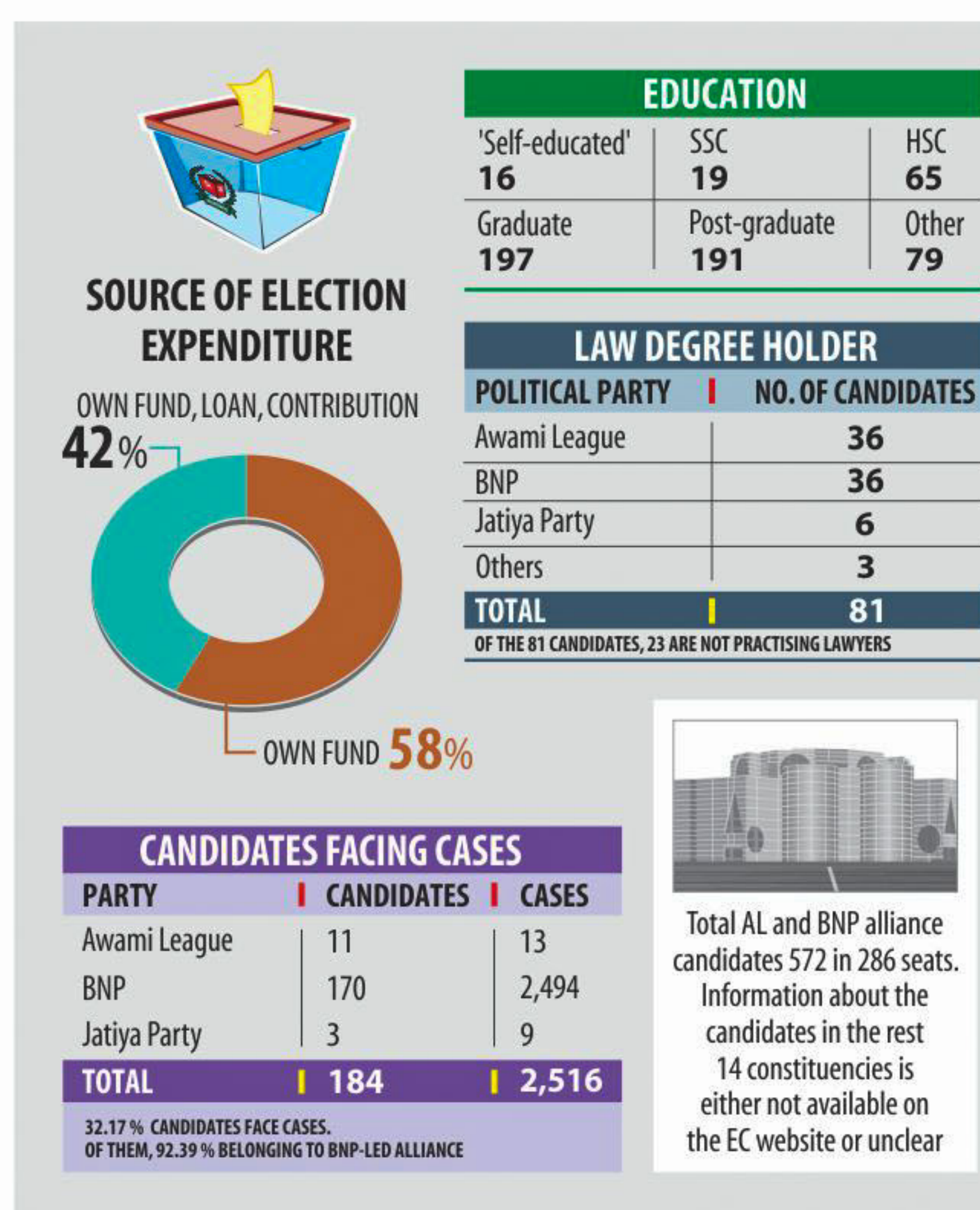
In the 2008 polls, 57 percent of the lawmakers elected were businessmen. That was the last competitive and participatory election. The 2014 election was boycotted by most of the parties, but the number of businessmen increased.

Political analysts say the major political parties' dependency on businessmen has effectively turned politics itself into a business.

Addressing a rally on October 12, 2015, President Abdul Hamid decried this trend. "It's a matter of regret that today's politics has gone into the pockets of businessmen.... We have to get rid of it."

The trend negatively impacted the functioning of parliament.

"In our neighbouring country, India, parliament sits in the morning. But in our case, as most of the MPs are businessmen, the parliamentary session in most of the time starts in the afternoon because businessmen lawmakers remain busy with their business the whole day," said parliamentary affairs expert Prof



10 CANDIDATES FACING MOST CASES		
CONSTITUENCY	CANDIDATE	NUMBER OF CASES
Dhaka-12	Saiful Alam Nirob	267
Dhaka-5	Md Nabiullah	221
Tangail-2	Sultan Salahuddin Tuku	139
Noakhali-3	Barkatullah Bulu	106
Khulna-4	Azizul Bari Helal	101
Sirajganj-4	Rafiqul Islam Khan	85
Dhaka-4	Salahuddin Ahmed	80
Cox's Bazar-2	Hamidur Rahman Azad	63
Feni-1	Mushi Rafiqul Islam	57

PROFESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARIANS					
JS	LAWYER	BUSINESSMAN	FARMING	TEACHER	OTHERS
1973	31%	18%	11%	12%	28%
1979	26%	24%	13%	6%	31%
1990	15%	38%	11%	7%	29%
1996	16%	43%	8%	8%	25%
2001	12%	58%	7%	8%	15%
2008	14%	57%	7%	1%	21%
2014	13%	59%	5%	2%	21%
2018*	10%	61%	5%	2%	22%

\*2018 PERCENTAGE BASED ON NUMBER OF CANDIDATES FIELD BY THE ALLIANCES LED BY AL, BNP IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION

Nizam Ahmed, a teacher of public administration at Chittagong University.

Despite limitations imposed by the article 70 of the constitution, MPs still can play an important role in the parliamentary committees that enjoy the power to hold the government accountable, he said.

"From our experience, businessmen cannot give enough time in politics and they are also not that much serious in parliamentary functions."

"Businessmen join politics to become politician but now a days we see people joining politics to become businessmen within a very short span of time," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

There is no substitute to full-time politicians in an effective parlia-

ment, he added.

According to available data, only 12 nominees of the two major alliances are full-time politicians.

Political science professor at Jahangirnagar University Al-Masud Hasanuzzaman said the number of businessmen in politics is increasing because money dominates politics.

The data gathered by The Daily Star from the nomination forms also exposed how money plays a role in the polls.

In the nomination forms, they mentioned the sources of the money they would spend for campaigning.

As many as 329 of 572 candidates mentioned that they would not need to depend on others for election expenditure. They can spend up to Tk 25 lakh each.

The remaining 243 say they will

meet their election expenditure from their own sources as well as contributions from relatives and friends.

In the December 30 polls, a candidate can spend Tk 10 per voter for electioneering. The ceiling of maximum expenditure is Tk 25 lakh, even if the number of voters in a constituency is more than 2.5 lakh, according to a notification issued by the Election Commission.

But exceeding the limit of expenditure is an "open secret". None of the past ECs had been able to take any effective measures to contain the influence of unauthorised money in electioneering.

A Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) study on the 2008 parliamentary polls revealed that candidates who contested the ninth parliamentary election spent about

Tk 30 lakh each on average in excess of the expenditure limit set by laws.

The study published in April 2009 also said the money was spent for campaigning between the last day for withdrawal of nomination and day of the voting. Electoral laws had allowed a candidate to spend a maximum of Tk 15 lakh. The EC had fixed Tk 5 per voter.

Money spent beyond the limit is considered to be unauthorised money in polls.

Election experts fear that influence of such unauthorised money may appear as a major obstacle to ensuring a level-playing field for all political parties and candidates in the campaign that began on Monday and will continue until December 28 midnight.