

# FAST UNTO DEATH

## Latif Siddiqui falls sick

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Tangail*

Abdul Latif Siddiqui, an independent candidate for Tangail-4, yesterday fell sick as he continued his fast unto death for the second consecutive day protesting the attack on his motorcade on Sunday.

After the attack, Latif demanded arrest of the attackers and withdrawal of the officer-in-charge of Khalihati Police Station in the district.

A two-member medical team, led by Tangail Civil Surgeon Dr Sharif Hossain, visited Latif around 11:00am yesterday and requested him to get admitted to a hospital.

But Latif refused either to go to a hospital or take saline. He said, "I will not withdraw my strike until my demands are met."

After conducting a medical check-up, Sharif told The Daily Star that Latif had acute dehydration and his heart rate was decreasing.

He could catch pneumonia due to the cold. He needs to be taken to hospital immediately, the doctor added.

He is a patient of diabetes, asthma, heart disease and high blood pressure, said Latif's nephew Mosharraf Hossain Siddiqui.

"My uncle has not eaten anything since Sunday morning," Mosharraf added.

Latif is not only a politician but also an organiser of the Liberation War, said Latif's wife Laila Siddiqui after meeting the returning officer (RO).

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## Police

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on December 4.

This newspaper has obtained a copy of the list of Subarnachar upazila under the constituency.

Police, however, denied preparing such a list.

Talking to The Daily Star, a mid-ranking official at the Police Headquarters said he was unaware of the list. He, however, said the police's intelligence wing can gather such information.

The 18-page list includes the names of the polling centres, AL men with their phone numbers and BNP-Jammat men with their fathers' names and addresses.

Earlier, the Special Brach (SB) of police had reportedly gathered personal information, including political leanings, about the probable polling officials in many districts.

It had also collected similar information about the upazila nirbahi officers (UNO), sparking concern among the officials.

Many of the probable polling officials, mostly school and college teachers, said they had previously worked as presiding officer, assistant presiding officer and polling officer without having to go through such verifications.

Expressing worries over the latest list, Noakhali district BNP leaders questioned the neutrality of police. They alleged that BNP men were being arrested and harassed by law enforcers, particularly after the announcement of the polls schedule.

Speaking at a meeting on Monday, BNP candidate Mohammad Shahjahan informed the district returning officer about the police's list.

The returning officer had called the meeting to discuss the latest situation with all candidates in the district's six constituencies.

Shahjahan urged the RO and the superintendent of police, who was present in the meeting, to take steps in this regard.

Some heavyweight candidates, including AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader and senior BNP leader Moudud Ahmed, have been contesting the polls in Noakhali.

Nizam Uddin, officer-in-charge of Char Jabbar Police Station in Subarnachar upazila, said he was unaware of any such list.

A police officer in the district said they need to prepare various lists as per demands from the high-ups. "The lists are not prepared to harass anyone," he told this correspondent preferring anonymity.

Nurul Amin is one of 10 people named in the list for assisting police on December 30 at Char Akram Uddin Government Primary School polling centre (male).

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone, he confirmed the listing of his name. He claimed himself to be an AL supporter.

"We will be at the polling centre to help the policemen maintain law and order and prevent chaos," Nurul said.

He said at least five other people named in the list were local AL leaders.

AHM Khairul Anam Chowdhury Selim, president of Noakhali district AL, said he didn't know whether police have prepared such a list.

"The police will carry out its duties and we will do ours," he said.

# WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT MANIFESTO

## ALI IMAM MAJUMDER

Ali Imam Majumder, a former cabinet secretary, said the Awami League's manifesto reflected the development works carried out by its government in the last 10 years.

"They said they would learn lessons from the past mistakes and if they do it for real, the nation will benefit," he said.

Ali Imam was critical about the ruling party's role against the opposition parties, saying it did not allow any political space to the opposition in the last 10 years, not even during the elections.

About the BNP's manifesto, he said the rosy words it had mentioned did not match their past history.

"They are promising to bring balance of power between the president and the prime minister, but unfortunately the party's power centres around only one person," he said.

That's why there is still apprehension about its sincerity to fulfil the pledges, he said.

He hoped that the party would be more sincere to materialise the promises, if voted to power.

## SYED MANZOORUL ISLAM

Noted writer and columnist Syed Manzoorul Islam said, "The Awami League's manifesto is practical and detailed. They prepared it keeping in mind what they have done and what they can do. It does not reflect many of the popular aspects like digital security act."

"The BNP is not in power, so it is

easy for them to make an attractive manifesto. They did it as they touched upon the interests of all the quarters. The BNP's manifesto is very ambitious. The proposals are more attractive but absolutely lacking the strategic details," he said.

Manzoorul, a retired Dhaka University professor, however, said the manifesto was meaningless if the proposals were not implementable.

## PROF HASANUZZAMAN

Prof Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, a teacher at Jahangirnagar University, said the AL's manifesto focuses mostly on development and its pledges to continue the development works.

On the other hand, the BNP focuses on democracy and the rule of law and there are some surprises in the manifesto, he said.

The challenge for the AL is to establish good governance in the country as it has promised. If good governance is ensured, democracy and development will also be ensured, he added.

On the contrary, it is challenging for the BNP to meet many of its promises -- especially in cases where constitutional amendment is required.

To implement those pledges, it will require a two-thirds majority in parliament.

## DR IFTEKHARUZZAMAN

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of the Transparency International Bangladesh, said the AL president's call to consider her party's failures with a

forgiving attitude may be viewed as refreshing, especially in a culture where political leaders are not known to acknowledge mistakes.

"This is important because she has also promised to learn from mistakes if she is given a mandate to move on. One would wish her Godspeed as her party takes the challenge of being truthful to this commitment," he said.

He also said the party's commitment to ensure inclusive development was extremely important and raised hopes. The proponents of such a commitment are however expected to realise that inclusive development is impossible in a situation where people's voice and demand raising potentials are restricted by curtailing free media, freedom of speech and opinion, and right to assembly.

"Therefore, if truthful to this commitment, they must also pledge to amend the laws like Digital Security Act and refrain from all types of actions against free media and freedom of speech that are sine qua non for inclusive growth."

Equally important is the commitment for zero tolerance to corruption which was also reflected in AL's earlier manifestos, he said.

Iftekharuzzaman said it would take quite an effort to faithfully deliver on this pledge. The key to it would be the courage and capacity to punish the corrupt without fear or favour and depoliticise the key institutions of accountability which had been converted into monopolised territories of the ruling party.

These include the bureaucracy, law enforcement agencies, judiciary, anti-corruption commission and not least the parliament itself, he said, adding, "If these institutions are not allowed to operate in public interest, independently, transparently and with professional integrity, the talk about zero tolerance for corruption will remain a paper tiger."

# View our mistakes

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remaining on paper, the ruling party has now come up with fresh pledges to improve governance.

In its 21-point pledge, the AL also vows to show zero tolerance for corruption, make a stronger electoral system through reforms, alleviate poverty, create employments, ensure service-oriented and accountable administration, and put more focus on infrastructure development.

Just 11 days before the 11th parliamentary election, Hasina made an impassioned appeal to voters to view the mistakes she and her party colleagues made since taking office in 2009 with "kindness" and elect her party yet again.

"To err is human. My colleagues and I might have made mistakes while performing our duties. I, on behalf of myself and my party, fervently request the countrymen to look kindly on our mistakes," she told the programme attended by her party leaders, businesspersons, dignitaries and foreign diplomats.

"I promise to build a more beautiful future by learning from the past. We will build a non-communal golden Bangladesh free from hunger, poverty and illiteracy as cherished by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," she said.

Making an earnest request to the people to ensure AL's victory through a "ballot revolution", Hasina said, "Cast your vote for 'boat'. We will bring you development and prosperity.... Our victory is certain, God willing."

## NEW PROMISES

The 2018 manifesto titled "Bangladesh on March towards Prosperity" focuses on 33 sectors to be dealt with two strategic plans -- the SDG and Delta Plan 2100.

The party eyes to increase the GDP growth to 10 percent from 7.8 percent at the moment in the next five years and bring down poverty rate to zero from about 22 percent now by 2041.

It will create jobs for 1.28 crore youths, with overseas jobs for 1,000 youths -- both male and female -- from each upazila, according to the manifesto.

Pointing to recent protest for safer roads, Hasina vowed to bring discipline in Dhaka's transport sector.

"If elected, we will introduce modern bus services to curb indiscipline in Dhaka's mass transport service," she said.

Also, modern civic amenities will be made available in every village, she added.

A national minority commission will be constituted to address issues related to ethnic groups, religious minorities and backward communities.

The manifesto also pledges to ensure media freedom and free flow of information.

"Effective measures will be taken to stop spread of fake news and unexpected rumours. Journalism and news media that promote social responsibilities will get assistance [from the government]."

"A media friendly law will be formulated. There will be no misuse of any law against journalists and the mass media," Hasina said.

## WHAT ABOUT PAST PROMISES?

In her address, the AL chief said the

manifesto for the next parliamentary polls was in fact a continuation of her party's long-term plans outlined in the 2008 and 2014 manifestos.

However, after its 2008 win, the AL did not deliver on some of its vital pledges.

Before the election, it had pledged to appoint an Ombudsman, make public the wealth statements and sources of income of the prime minister, ministers and their close relatives every year. It also pledged to stop extra-judicial killings. But all of the pledges are unfulfilled.

Its pledge to take steps to inculcate tolerance and decency in politics also remains on paper to this day.

The AL also did not deliver on its 2008 promise to keep 100 parliamentary seats reserved for women with the provision for direct election.

In the run up to the 2014 election, the AL was silent on issues such as extra-judicial killings, the appointment of an Ombudsman and disclosure of wealth statements.

But it had pledged to make efforts to

## AWAMI LEAGUE MANIFESTO



### KEY POINTS

- Bullet trains between Dhaka and divisional cities; underpass/overpass near educational institutions; a tunnel under the Jamuna river
- Fraudsters in the banking sector will be brought to book
- 5G internet services in 2021-23
- Uphold independence of judiciary
- Zero tolerance for militancy, drug abuse
- Youth training centres in all upazilas
- Ensure freedom of religion; but no law that goes against the Quran and Sunnah

build national consensus among political parties and professionals on fundamental issues such as upholding democracy and unhindered development. But no such effort has been made.

Its pledge to make necessary laws and rules to ensure transparency in the performance of MPs in and outside parliament and their accountability to the people also remain unfulfilled.

Like in the past, the party in 2014 also spoke of taking measures to make parliament effective and strengthen institutions.

It also promised to strengthen the Election Commission by developing a strong electoral system through reforms.

But the current EC is finding it difficult to ensure a level playing field for the candidates in the December 30 polls.

# No black laws, no revenge

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government bodies stronger.

"I am announcing the manifesto on behalf of former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and I want to assure you that no revenge will be taken on anyone if the BNP is voted to power," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir at a press conference at a city hotel.

Since Khaleda's taking the helm of the BNP in 1984, this is first time the party announced its election manifesto when she is behind bars.

The BNP chief has been in jail since February 8 being convicted in a graft case. Her hope of participating in the polls has been diminished as the High Court yesterday summarily rejected three writ petitions challenging the Election Commission decision that upheld the cancellation of her nomination papers by returning officers.

"We hope that you [people] will cast your votes for establishing honour and dignity of Khaleda Zia and Tarique Rahman," Fakhrul said.

## BROKEN PROMISES

In the manifesto, the BNP says annual wealth statements of prime minister, ministers, lawmakers and high government officials will be made public every year.

The party had made such a pledge in the run-up to the 2001 parliamentary polls. But it seemed to have forgotten that after assuming office.

The manifesto says the party will scrap the Special Powers Act, 1974. It made the promise earlier in 2001.

While in office from 2001 to 2006, the party did not ensure the separation of the judiciary from the executive branch.

It now pledges to place the lower judiciary under the control of the Supreme Court instead of the president through an amendment to the constitution.

A commission will be formed to bring necessary reforms to the judicial system, according to the manifesto.

The party will put in place an institutional system to appoint efficient judges to remove the current case backlog.

The manifesto says the party will stop extrajudicial killings, a menace that began when the BNP was in power in 2001-06. It did not take any step to prevent its recurrence.

It promises to ensure freedom of speech and lift all restrictions on social media use to let people express their opinion freely.

But it is the BNP-led government that enacted the Information Technology Act in 2006 keeping section 57, a controversial provision widely abused to gag freedom of

speech and expression in recent years.

## NEW MODEL OF POLITICS?

If voted to power, the party wants to introduce a "new model" of politics free from vengeance and revenge.

For this, it wants to form a "national commission" to reach a social agreement and introduce a new political culture. The commission will be formed with the leader of the House, the opposition leader and eminent citizens of the country.

But when the party was in power, a heinous grenade attack was carried out on the then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina's rally on August 24, 2004 in an attempt to assassinate her.

A number of BNP leaders and senior officials of intelligence agencies were allegedly engaged in the conspiracy to launch the attack.

The BNP promises to introduce an election-time caretaker government in consultation with all the other political parties.

Interestingly, the party was blamed for doctoring the now defunct non-partisan caretaker government system in 2004. In that year, the BNP-led government had increased the retirement age of the Supreme Court judges by amending the constitution.

This had ensured that a certain chief justice would assume office of the chief adviser after his retirement during the 2007 parliamentary polls.

The then AL-led opposition strongly opposed it and launched massive street agitations. The country was plunged into chaos.

The BNP, however, now seeks to introduce a "future-oriented" political culture which would be against the politics of vengeance and revenge.

It pledges to promote a culture of tolerance in politics which will encourage political leaders not to make objectionable comments on national leaders.

On Monday, Jatiya Oikyafront, a combine of BNP and some other political parties, rolled out its electoral manifesto. Most of the promises of Oikyafront are similar to that of BNP.

Both the alliance and the party pledge to appoint ombudsman, a constitutional post to ensure transparency in the administration.

BNP's promises also include ensuring the balance between the powers of the president and the prime minister by amending the constitution.

In 2002, the then ruling BNP was widely criticised for forcing Badruddoza Chowdhury to step down as president.

It also promises to check corruption.

But during its 2001-06 term, Tarique Rahman, elder son of Khaleda, set up an alternative centre of power. It was

Hawa Bhaban, a two-storey building in Gulshan, which eventually became a symbol of corruption, reckless power abuse and patronising terrorism.

Though Oikyafront promised to continue the war crimes trial, BNP manifesto remains silent on this.

## OTHER PLEDGES

The party says steps will be taken so that one-party rule doesn't return to the country. No person will hold the post of prime minister for more than two consecutive terms, and the deputy speaker will be picked from the opposition.

The promises also include restoration of referendum system in the constitution for establishing people's democratic rights, introduction of upper chamber of the House involving people of all walks of life, increased representation of women in all constitutional institutions.

Like the Oikyafront, it also pledges to amend article 70 of the constitution to allow a lawmaker to vote against his party in parliament on issues except for finance bill and no-confidence motions against the government.

The party pledges to make public the probe reports on BDR carnage and Bangladesh Bank reserve heist and conduct more investigation into the incidents.

It also vows to place honest and efficient people in the boards of state-owned banks and Securities and Exchange Commission to prevent recurrence of share market and banking scams.

The party also says it will stop political intervention in running state-owned banks. The banking division of the finance ministry will be abolished to vest all powers in the central bank to run and oversee the banking system.

If BNP forms government, GDP growth will be pushed to 11 percent, reads the manifesto.

The party also promises to investigate "any corruption in the ongoing mega projects" although it will not stop any work in progress. After probe, the culprits will be brought to justice.

It will form a committee to review the projects taken up in haste in the last two years of the current government.

A taskforce will investigate the reasons for high cost of quick rental power projects, its manifesto said.

The BNP will bring all the foreign workers under work permit to stop money laundering and will bring them under the tax net.

It also promises to withdraw all the cases filed against students during the protests over VAT exemption, quota reform and road safety.

The party says special measures will be taken to ensure uninterrupted traffic movement when the president or the prime minister commutes.

# Fear of Jamaat violence

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Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Kachpukur village's Nazrul Islam, a victim of Jamaat's atrocities in 2013, said, "It seems Jamaat men were plotting something over the election".

Several others in the district echoed his views.

Nazrul claimed that he survived with injuries two attacks on his life by Jamaat-Shibir men in 2013. "First they opened fire on me and when they failed, they hurled bombs at my business establishment. It all happened for my links with Awami League politics."

He also claimed that the attackers killed his brother and burned down at least 10 houses belonging to his family members and other relatives.

In between February 28 and December 15, 2013, at least 18 people in Satkhira, mostly leaders and activists of the AL, lost their homes and valuables to Jamaat's atrocities.

The district had been made isolated as the Jamaat men blocked roads felling trees after party leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee was sentenced to death for war crimes.

Law enforcers could hardly reach the district as large holes were dug on roads at different points. People also could not get out of the district, locals recalled.

Mir Mostak Ahmed Robi, Awami League candidate in Satkhira-2, said, "Intelligence reports suggest that they [Jamaat-Shibir] may unleash violence again in Satkhira. The Border Guard Bangladesh and the Rapid Action Battalion told me that they are on alert."

Sazzadur Rahman, superintendent of police in the district, said he had been focusing on the issue since he joined office a year ago.

"Using different video footage and documents, we are still identifying and arresting those involved in the 2013 attacks," he said.

"According to intelligence reports, there are possibilities of further attacks. But they will not be able to do anything as our capabilities have increased," the SP said. "We are raiding various Jamaat-dominated areas".

Police sources said law enforcers were trying to prevent Jamaat-BNP men, out to create violence, from gathering in different areas. According to Satkhira police, 11,338 people were arrested in the district between June and November this year.

However, there were allegations that some unscrupulous policemen were detaining innocents and releasing them in exchange of money.

Locals in Debhata, Assasuni and Kaliganj upazilas also alleged that AL men were leading police to the arrests and some innocent people, who have enmity with the ruling party men, were becoming victims.

Locals said they were wrapping up their daily activities and returning home before dusk. "You will hardly see anyone outside after 8:00pm as they fear they might get arrested," said Asaduzzaman, who runs a shop in Debhata.

Asked about the allegation, SP Sazzadur denied it. "If anything happens to anyone, the individual can come to me. I will take action immediately".