

Latif Siddiqui 'quits' race

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Abdul Latif Siddiqui, independent candidate in Tangail-4, has quit the race.

He met Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday noon and submitted a letter. "I am not contesting the election. Ideal environment, scope of free participation and peaceful situation do not exist at any of the places in my electoral area," he said in the letter addressed to the CEC.

Before leaving the EC secretariat, he distributed copies of the letter addressed to the CEC among reporters.

"It's regrettable that under your leadership and direction, the playing field has become so level that I was repeatedly trampled by police...", the letter reads.

He mentioned that four of his vehicles were vandalised by drug traders, drug addicts and sand lifters using police clout.

In protest, he went to the Returning Officer's office and went on a hunger strike.

"But I didn't get any remedy even after going on strike for 96 hours."

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Allow only

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the video footage.

In blatant violation of the electoral code of conduct, Shimul was seen in a video footage threatening BNP men of "tougher actions against them" and asking them to work for the boat symbol to save their lives.

"I am directing my people...any worker or supporter of the 'sheaf of paddy' will not go to the vote centres."

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the footage which had been shared by many people over the last few days.

"If you want your own good, if you want to remain in good health and live in the area, work with our leaders and activists by joining them," Shimul was seen saying in the video.

"If you go on another path, you have to face tough actions after the December 30 elections... no one can stop the boat [symbol] from achieving victory on December 30."

He said the people of the district are living in peace under the present government and he said he would do whatever it took to maintain that peace.

In the constituency, after BNP Organising Secretary Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu's nomination was



Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, inset, addresses a large gathering at a rally at the grounds of Pirganj Govt High School in Rangpur.

PHOTO: PID

No place for arson attackers in Bangladesh

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who was from Pirganj.

Earlier in the day, Hasina also addressed another rally in Rangpur's Taraganj.

In Pirganj, the AL chief urged all to vote for her party for the sake of the country's development and prosperity. She said the next election is very important and asked people to cast their votes in favour of boat, the AL's electoral symbol. "I do believe the wind is now at the sail of boat ... the victory of boat is sure."

Recalling the miserable days of 2014 and 2015 when the BNP-Jamaat was involved in killing people through arson attacks, she said those who killed people in such a way are not human beings, but just devils.

Hasina said BNP chief Khaleda Zia embezzled orphans' money while her son had been convicted of money laundering, arms smuggling and the August 21 grenade attack.

"What development will be done by the convicted fugitive; what type of welfare will they do for the country? The people of the country need to be

aware of them."

The PM said whenever the AL comes to power, the welfare of people is ensured.

She said the government had taken steps for the employment of the youths. "Using their potential, we'll take the country towards prosperity. We'll build poverty-and hunger-free Bangladesh as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

Introducing the AL candidate for the next general election from Pirganj, Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Hasina said, "She's my daughter; I'm handing my daughter to you ... you'll cast votes in favour of me, but the name will be Shirin Sharmin."

Briefly describing various development programmes of her government in the last 10 years, she said the government has numerous plans for the coming days to make the county a developed one.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin, AL central leaders Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Abdur Rahman, Ahammad Hossain, BM Mozammel, AFM Bahauddin Nasim and Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury,

Rangpur district AL acting president Momtaz Uddin Ahmed, Jubo League President Omar Faruk Chowdhury and Chhatra League President Redwanul Haque Chowdhury, among others, spoke at the rally.

Pirganj upazila AL acting president Azizur Rahman Ranga presided over the programme.

Pirganj Upazila Parishad Chairman Nur Mohammad Mandal, who recently joined the AL, quitting the BNP Pirganj upazila president post, also spoke on the occasion.

TARAGANJ RALLY

Addressing another campaign rally at Taraganj Government Degree College ground, Hasina urged the people of Rangpur region to cast their votes for "boat" to complete the unfinished projects taken for the development of the northern region.

"For the overall development of this region, we've taken so many projects ... we've taken steps so that every road of this area is developed ... we've to complete those work and for that we need your votes for 'boat'."

Taraganj upazila AL organised the

rally with its president Atiar Rahman in the chair.

Introducing local AL candidate (Rangpur-2) Abul Kalam Md Ahsanul Haque Chowdhury, she called upon all to cast their votes for her party to give it another chance to serve them. "Please, vote for our candidates so that we can work for you."

Remembering the miserable days when Rangpur was infamous for "Manga" (famine), Hasina said the situation had changed here when her party formed the government in 2009 after the 2008 election.

She said the government had introduced cards for farmers so that they could get their subsidy easily. "We've ensured fertilizers, seeds, irrigation for agricultural production as well as ensured fair price for their produce."

The PM said every inch of the country's cultivable land would be utilised so that food security of the country was never endangered and "Manga" never staged a comeback.

Hasina also spoke at a number of roadside rallies in Dinajpur before leaving for Dhaka at night.

Khaleda goes to SC to revive her polls bid

Files pleas for stay on HC order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday submitted three petitions to the Supreme Court, seeking a stay on the High Court orders on cancellation of her nomination papers.

The HC on December 18 summarily rejected three writ petitions by Khaleda, saying the EC rightly upheld the returning officers' decision to cancel Khaleda's nomination papers for Feni-1, Bogura-6 and Bogura-7, as she was convicted and sentenced to 17 years in jail in two cases.

The petitions were submitted to the office concerned of the Appellate Division of the SC through advocate-on-record, AKM Ehsanur Rahman, said a lawyer representing Khaleda.

In the petitions, Khaleda prayed to the apex court to direct the EC to accept her nomination papers, to allow her to contest the December 30 election and to allocate the "sheaf of paddy" as her symbol, the lawyer said, adding that the SC chamber judge may hear the petitions today.

In the December 18 rejection, the HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan passed the order saying if a person is convicted and sentenced to more than two years in prison for moral turpitude, they are not eligible to participate in elections in five years after serving in prison.

On December 11, the HC bench of Justice Refaat and Justice Md Iqbal Kabir Lytton passed split orders on the three petitions. The next day, the chief justice assigned the bench of Justice Hassan to dispose of the petitions.

Khaleda landed in jail on February 8 after a special court in Dhaka sentenced her in the Zia Orphanage Trust case. On October 29, she was sentenced in another case.

Also yesterday, eight upazila chairmen, whose candidacy was cancelled by the HC, filed separate petitions with the Appellate Division of the SC to regain their candidacy.

They submitted the petitions to the apex court through their lawyers seeking a stay on the HC orders and to direct the EC to allow them to contest the election.

The chamber judge of the apex court may hear the petitions today, Shah Monjurul Hoque, the lawyer for the writ petitioners who challenged the candidacy of the upazila chairmen, told The Daily Star.

The eight upazila chairmen are Khondokar Abu Ashfaq (BNP) for Dhaka-1, Faridul Kabir Talukdar (BNP) for Jamalpur-4, Fazlur Rahman (BNP) for Joypurhat-1, Abdul Majid (BNP) for Jhenidah-2, Mahmud Hasan Suman (independent) for Mymensingh-8, Abu Sayeed Chan (BNP) for Rajshahi-6, Md Asaduzzaman (independent) for Rangpur-1, and Moslem Uddin (BNP) Brahmanbaria-4.

The HC recently disqualified them from contesting the election as their resignations from the posts of upazila chairmen were not accepted by the government.

A total of 18 candidates, including 15 BNP nominees, lost their candidacy following orders from the Appellate and HC Divisions.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO



cancelled, his wife Sabina Yasmin Chhobi was selected as the BNP candidate.

Speaking to The Daily Star over phone, Chhobi said, she had been refraining from campaigning in most areas of the constituency fearing attacks. "Due to the lawmaker's statement, AL leaders and activists have assaulted the BNP men who were electioneering with me," she said.

"Attacks on our men are occurring every day. It appears that a reign of terror has been prevailing in my area," she said.

The BNP candidate said she had filed a complaint regarding the video footage with the returning officer and emailed him a copy of the footage on December 20.

She claimed at least 150 of her men were injured since electioneering began and her complaints with the RO in this regard were ignored.

Contacted, RO Mohammad Shahriaz said he came to know about the video footage yesterday.

"I will send this video and the information to the law enforcers and if they find it to be true, we will take action," he said.

Ensure free

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campaign should be carried out in a calm and responsible manner by all concerned. This includes protection of the political and electoral rights of minority and other vulnerable groups and ensuring free space for civil society," said the High Commissioner.

US statement 'disheartens' Bangladesh

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revoked its 32-member delegation citing "Bangladesh government's inability to issue visas within the timeframe."

The US also demanded space for peaceful expression and assembly required for a democratic election and encouraged the government to uphold its commitment to a democratic process by ensuring an election where people can freely exercise their franchise.

In response, the foreign ministry, in its statement, said the elections were being conducted by the Election Commission of Bangladesh, which is a constitutional body and independent in the exercise of its functions.

It also said, "While Bangladesh welcomes international election observers to monitor the elections, it certainly has the responsibility to ensure that the applicants meet all required criterion as per applicable laws and guidelines of the Election Commission."

As of now, 175 foreign election observers from different countries and

organisations have been accredited to undertake election monitoring missions in Bangladesh, the release added.

"Accreditation of international election observers from a number of organisations including ANFREL is currently under process," it said, adding that the EC had registered 118 local organisations and approved 25,920 local observers to monitor the polls.

"In this context, the decision of ANFREL to cancel its observation mission is entirely their own despite the fact that, nearly half of its applicants have already been approved and the rest is under process," it added.

It is reiterated that Bangladesh would continue to grant credentials to eligible international and local election observers to observe the upcoming national polls.

The foreign ministry press release noted that "Odhikar", an NGO of Bangladesh, is the founding member of ANFREL.

"Odhikar" is widely known for its disproportionate bias and prejudice

against Bangladesh, in particular the government of Awami League, which is evident in its various reports including the recent ones published in October and December 2018," the release added.

Besides, the release said, one of the top-ranking Bangladeshi members of this NGO was earlier appointed by the BNP-Jamaat government as the deputy attorney general, which provides ground for disqualification of his organisation and related entities as independent and neutral observer of the national elections.

Under section 91 (C) (1) of the Representation of the People Order 1972, the commission is supposed to "permit a person as election observer who is in no way associated with or affiliated to any political party or contesting candidate and who is not known for his sympathy, direct or indirect, for any particular political ideology, creed or cause or for any manifesto, program, aims or objects of any political party or contesting candidate," read the statement.



Second from left, BNP candidate for Chattogram-2 Azim Ullah Bahar, heavily bandaged and in a bloodied panjabi, and former justice Faisal Mahmud Fayezi with his arm in a cast, address a press conference at Chattogram Press Club after they were attacked in Fatikchhari upazila by alleged ruling party men.

PHOTO: STAR

Shutting down mobile internet or social media?

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blocking or partly blocking mobile internet services or decrease internet speed.

"It will be an EC call and we will take preparation according to their direction as BTRC have no issues here. We have already deployed a team to help them round the clock," Haque added.

According to the regulator, a complete shutdown of mobile internet would be a huge blow to many sectors.

A indefinite shutdown or partial block would impact local and international businesses, ATM services, e-commerce and communications but saving lives was more important than that, said a commissioner of the regulator, requesting anonymity.

Such a shutdown was against the spirit of "digital Bangladesh", said another top BTRC official related with the process.

The telecom watchdog, in its second option, said they could block social media and video-sharing sites like

Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, along with other communication applications -- Whatsapp, Viber, WeChat, Imo -- for the time being, which would be less harmful.

The third option is downgrading the wireless mobile communications technology from 4G and 3G to 2G.

The telecom regulator's engineers visited all the mobile phone operator offices to find out how long it would take to block 3G and 4G services and the time it would take to block the services in

select parts of the country.

It would take 15 to 20 minutes to downgrade the mobile networks to 2G and block 3G and 4G services that are mostly used for mobile internet, reads BTRC's option.

According to the regulator, users will not be able to upload pictures or videos if the mobile internet speed is brought down to a minimum level.

To block mobile internet services in certain areas, which is the fourth option, it would take more than two hours for

small areas and while for larger ones could take up to four hours.

"Whatever the EC chooses, we will comply and our special team will be ready to work round the clock on voting day," said the commissioner.

There are currently no such plans regarding broadband internet services.

According to BTRC, as of October 2018 the total number of active mobile internet users stands at 8.83 crore.

Following requests by different law enforcement agencies, the telecom

regulator at different times minimised mobile internet speeds. BTRC had decreased internet speed for 24 hours following a recommendation by law enforcement agencies during the demonstrations for road safety in August.

The telecom regulator has already blocked some websites in the country, leading to users facing different problems when using Google services including Gmail, Google Ads, Google drive and cloud service.