

JAMAAT MEN IN RACE HC questions EC decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday questioned the legality of the Election Commission's rejection of an application for cancelling the candidacy of 25 Jamaat-e-Islami leaders.

The court issued a rule asking the EC, government and the Jamaat leaders to explain in four weeks why the EC's decision should not be declared illegal.

The HC bench of Justice ABM Hassan and Justice Md Khairul Alam came up with the rule following a petition filed by Bangladesh Tarikat Federation and Amra Muktiyoddhar Santan challenging the EC order issued on December 23.

The bench, however, refused to direct the EC to treat the Jamaat leaders as disqualified for the December 30 election as prayed by the petitioners.

The HC order means there is no legal bar for the Jamaat leaders to take part in the election, Deputy Attorney General Motahar Hossain Sazu told The Daily Star.

Of the Jamaat men, 21 are in the race as BNP nominees and four are

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EVM TRIAL Mock voting held in six constituencies

STAR REPORT

There was a thin presence of voters during a mock voting using electronic voting machines in Satkhira-2, Khulna-2 and Rangpur-3 yesterday.

The three are among the six constituencies where EVMs will be used in Sunday's national polls. The three other seats -- Dhaka-6 and -13 and Chattogram-9 -- where the mock voting was also held.

In Satkhira-2, the voting was held at 137 polling centres.

Till 1:00pm yesterday, our district correspondent found no voters out of the 3,474 at PN High School centre in Satkhira town. Only 36 voters participated in the mock voting at Satkhira Government Girls School centre where the number of voter is 3,665.

Nazmul Hasan, district election officer, said they campaigned for the mock voting at every union. Many could not attend the programme as they were busy.

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UN, US want

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Observers should be fully supported to play their role in the process."

Guterres also reiterates the continued commitment of the United Nations to support a peaceful and democratic Bangladesh, it added.

The call for a peaceful and free, fair and inclusive election comes at a time when violence continues across the country before the 11th parliamentary election.

Last week, the UN said it is closely following the situation ahead of the polls.

On December 10, Dujaaric said, "We believe, as a matter of principles, that elections should be held in a positive climate, free from any sort of intimidation."

In another development, the US yesterday expressed concern by the high level of campaign violence over the last two weeks.

Talking to reporters after a meeting with Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda at the Nirbachan Bhaban, US Ambassador Earl Miller said he asked for this meeting because the US is concerned by the high level of campaign violence over the last two weeks, says an embassy statement.

All parties have been victims of violence, including minorities and female candidates. However, it appears opposition party candidates have borne the brunt of most violence, he said.

Miller added, "I appreciated the opportunity to consult with the Election Commission to see what plans it has to create a conducive atmosphere, so all Bangladeshis, no matter their political affiliation, feel safe to go to the polls on Sunday and cast their votes for the candidates of their choice."

"Bangladesh is rightfully proud of its democratic traditions, including elections where upwards of 70 percent of the electorate turns out to vote. In any democratic election there must be space for peaceful expression and assembly; for independent media to do its job covering electoral developments; for participants to have access to information; and for all individuals to be able to partake in the electoral process without harassment, intimidation, or violence."

The US wishes all Bangladeshis a free, fair, tolerant and peaceful election day on Sunday, the envoy added.



The ransacked election camp of Shafiquel Haque Milon, BNP candidate in Rajshahi-3, in Valam village of Rajshahi's Paba yesterday. Inset, Abdul Kuddus rebuilding his tea stall burnt down in the same village. Milon blamed supporters of his rival from the ruling party for the attack.

PHOTO: ANWAR ALI

TANGAIL-5 JP leader now grand alliance candidate

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday introduced Shafiullah Al Munir, Jatiya Party (Ershad) candidate for Tangail-5, as the grand alliance contender in the constituency.

She made the announcement through a videoconference from the Gonobhaban while addressing a rally on the district's Shaheed Smriti Pouro Udyan.

During the electioneering, Hasina sequentially introduced the AL candidates of seven constituencies in the district except Sanowar Hossain, the incumbent lawmaker and AL candidate in Tangail-5.

"We gave nomination to Sanowar Hossain in Tangail-5. Jatiya Party's [Ershad] Shafiullah Al Munir is also a candidate for the constituency. We have made a compromise with the JP as a member of grand alliance. Now, it is necessary to keep our unity intact," Hasina said.

Meanwhile, terming the AL president's announcement "technical",

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Violence taints last day too

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and vandalised [the vehicles]," Sayeed said, while talking to The Daily Star.

Asked, Tapon Haider Sun, Santhia upazila unit AL general secretary, said, "We are busy with our campaign. I don't know any news of such attacks."

Contacted, Md Jahangir Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Santhia Police Station, said, "There was a police protection team but the attackers came suddenly and attacked. Police charged batons to disperse the attackers and brought the situation under control quickly."

Sayeed had come under criminal attacks repeatedly around 17 to 18 times since campaigning began on December 10.

Elsewhere in Chattogram, at least three persons were injured when miscreants attacked the motorcade of JP aspirant for Chattogram-16 Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury in Green Park area of Banshkhal upazila yesterday morning. However, the candidate was unhurt.

"I was campaigning in the area and when my motorcade reached Green Park area, miscreants threw stones targeting our motorcade and attacked us with sharp weapons," Mahmudul, also a former mayor of the Chattogram City Corporation, told The Daily Star.

He, however, could not identify the attackers. But he alleged that police were present on the spot and played a silent role.

Contacted, Kamal Hossain, OC of Banshkhal Police Station said, "It was not a big incident. While they [the candidate and his supporters] were returning after electioneering some miscreants threw stones at their vehicles."

This was the second attack on Mahmudul in a span of a week. On December 21, at least 24 of his activists sustained bullets injuries when alleged ruling party men attacked his rally in Banshkhal upazila's Chambal Bazar area.

In Cumilla, nine BNP men were injured when alleged AL men attacked the campaign of BNP candidate for Cumilla-5 constituency Md Yunus in Nimshar Mokam area under Burichang upazila around 2:00pm yesterday.

Md Masud, president of Nimshar Mokam union unit Jubo league, denied the allegation and said BNP men attacked AL men who were holding a meeting in the area.

Akul Chandra Biswas, OC of Burichang Police Station, said, "Hearing news of the violence, police

rushed to the spot and safely rescued the BNP candidate from the spot and took him to his residence. If the candidate files any complaint, then we will take action."

In Mymensingh, miscreants allegedly attacked the campaign of BNP's candidate for Mymensingh-3 M Iqbal Hossain and vandalised his car in Tangadipara village under Bokainagar union of Gouripur upazila yesterday afternoon.

Talking to journalists, Iqbal alleged that he had been campaigning at different spots since morning but when he came to Tangadipara at afternoon, miscreants attacked him with local weapons and vandalised his car to create panic among the BNP men and common people.

After the incident, Iqbal filed complaint with the local returning officer.

Iqbal also alleged that he, along with his supporters, faced obstructions in electioneering since the beginning of electioneering. He also claimed that police filed case against those who were involved BNP politics and even arrested some of them.

Contacted, OC of Gouripur Police Station Abdullah Al Mamun, said none filed any complaint regarding the incident. But he later heard that that villagers had clashed with Iqbal as he had gone there to distribute money.

Meanwhile in Kishoreganj, a local BNP leader died after suffering a cardiac arrest which was apparently triggered by police firing blanks at the residence of BNP's candidate for Kishoreganj-5 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Sarachar union under Bajitpur upazila yesterday evening.

The deceased was identified as Shaheed Miah, vice president of Sarachar union unit BNP.

BNP men alleged that Mujibur had held a press conference at noon at his residence where he expressed concerns over his life's security ahead of the polls. Later in the evening, police raided his residence where they fired blanks and beat up BNP men.

At that time, Shaheed Miah was in his nearby office.

Hearing the sound of gun fire and seeing police action on BNP men, Shaheed panicked and went into a cardiac arrest. Then, Shaheed was taken to the local hospital where on-duty doctors declared him dead, said Mazaharul Islam, nephew of Shaheed.

Contacted, Shafiqul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Bajitpur police station, said a clash had erupted between the supporters of AL and BNP and police opened fire to disperse them.

Asked about the death, Shafiqul said he knew nothing about the death.

In Cox's Bazar, at least seven people were injured when police charged baton on the activists of BNP's nominee for Cox's Bazar-3 candidate Lutfor Rahman Kajol in Kurushkul while they were going to attend the last day's election rally yesterday.

Police lobbed two rounds of tear shells and fired several rounds of blanks.

Sources said activists of Kajol were coming from Cox's Bazar city and the adjoining city areas to attend the rally at the tourist city at 3:00 pm.

But police charged baton on them at several places, including Kurushkul connecting road, Kolatoli, Kalur Dokan area and Bus terminal area.

Officer-in-charge of Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station Farid Uddin Khandokar said they were carrying sticks during the procession.

They tried to disperse them when they refused to leave, he said.

In a different sort of incident in Manikganj, BNP candidate for Manikganj-1 Khondaker Abdul Hamid Dablu, whose nomination was declared valid by the High Court on December 24, has been virtually confined to his residence at Pachuria village under Ghiorupazila for the last two days.

Police were maintaining a round the clock presence in front of Dablu's residence and were arresting any BNP activist who came out of his home.

Talking to The Daily Star, Bablu said none of their supporters now come to meet Dablu in fear of arrests. Besides, AL men on motorcycles ride around the residence in intervals to spread panic.

Currently, Dablu has not been able to get out of his house and conduct electioneering, alleged Bablu.

Rifat Rahman Shamim, police superintendent in the district, rejected the allegation and said police had not gone to Dablu's residence.

Meanwhile in Narayanganj, police arrested five of a family, including the parents of a supporter of independent candidate for Narayanganj-3 Abdullah Al Kaiser, from Senpara area under Kanchpur upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

Police claimed that they had recovered drugs and locally-made weapons from the arrestees. The victims' relatives rejected the allegations.

Meanwhile, an Awami League supporter has been beaten to death allegedly by BNP supporters at Nolkot village of Sylhet Sadar upazila under Sylhet-1 constituency yesterday

night at around 10:00pm.

The deceased, Koysor Miah, 35, son of Mahmud Ali of the village, is a Kuwait expatriate and had recently returned to Bangladesh.

Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran, president of Sylhet city AL and the convenor of AL candidate for Sylhet-1's electoral management committee, said, "He, along with some other supporter, went out of his house with the AL candidate's leaflet to distribute in the village and locked into an altercation with some BNP supporters."

BNP supporters then apparently beat him to death.

Denying the allegation, Ali Ahmed, general secretary of Sylhet district BNP, said that the incident might have been related to an intra-party feud of AL.

SM Shahadat Hossain, officer-in-charge of Jalalabad Police Station, confirmed the incident without naming any accused and said police were looking into the matter.

Besides, police arrested eight BNP-Jamaat men in Mymensingh, two in Chattogram, two in Chapainawabganj and 28 in Sylhet yesterday on different criminal charges.

Since electioneering began on December 10, motorcades, campaign rallies and offices and even houses of at least 56 contestants, mostly from BNP, have been attacked by alleged supporters of AL at different places across the country.

Around 790 BNP-Jamaat men were arrested during the time while 1,175 people, including candidates, were injured from many parties, including the left ones.

The attacks did not even spare the candidates of Jatiya Party and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, both electoral allies of the AL.

There was even no respite from violence even after deployment of army on December 24.

'SITUATION UNDER CONTROL'

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (Retd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury yesterday claimed that the situation was under control. "I admit that a bit of tension is prevailing centring the election. I want to term it 'political heat'," he told reporters at the Nirbachan Bhaban.

He also said that armed forces would act only when police, Rapid Action Battalion and Border Guard Bangladesh failed to control any untoward incident during the election.

"There are police, Rab and BGB to maintain law and order. The armed forces will intervene where police, Rab and BGB fail. The armed forces are our last resort," he added.

BNP senses polls defeat

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Hasina, also the prime minister, asked AL leaders and activists to inform the law enforcement agencies about any subversive activity, and also asked them not to obstruct BNP candidates from carrying out campaigns.

"We want every political party to contest the election. It's their right and people will cast vote as they choose... so every political party should conduct their election campaign freely and fairly," said Hasina, who is looking for a third straight term.

She hoped people would vote for "boat" to ensure victory of pro-liberation forces.

Before her speech, a documentary on the development that took place in each of those area over the last 10 years were presented before the audiences on big screens.

Earlier, Hasina introduced the AL candidates to the people of their respective constituencies and urged the voters to elect them.

The candidates are Subid Ali Bhuiyan (Cumilla 1), Selima Ahmed (Cumilla 2), Yusuf Abdullah Harun (Cumilla 3), Rajib Md Fakrul (Cumilla 4), Abdul Matin Khasru (Cumilla 5), AKM Bahauddin (Cumilla 6), Prof Ali Ashraf (Cumilla 7), Nasimul Alam Chowdhury (Cumilla 8), Md Tajul Islam (Cumilla 9), ANH Mostafa Kamal (Cumilla 10) and Mujibul Haque (Cumilla 11).

Hasina said her party always sincerely fulfilled the promises it made before elections.

All 13 upazilas of Cumilla are now under full electricity coverage, she said.

The PM said Bangladesh would attract huge foreign investments after peaceful elections. But the BNP and Jamaat are out to "destroy the peaceful atmosphere" and push the country to an anarchic situation like in 2014 and 2015.

Addressing the rally in Jessore, Hasina said her government would reduce poverty by four to five percent in the next five years if re-elected.

People are now confident of building Bangladesh as a prosperous nation as dreamt by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, she said.

A hi-tech park, a land port and rail link from the Padma Bridge up to Mongla Port are being constructed in Jessore while the existing road is being turned into four lanes, she said.

Hasina mentioned BNP's torture on minorities since 2001 election, saying they burnt and looted their houses and destroyed property.

Law enforcers strictly handled the mayhem, she said, adding that people did not want those days to return.

She also introduced the Awami League candidates in six constituencies there.

They are Sheikh Afil Uddin (Jessore 1), Nasir Uddin (Jessore-2), Kazi Nabil Ahmed (Jessore 3), Ranjit Kumar Roy (Jessore 4), Swapan Bhattachariya (Jessore 5) and Ismat Ara Sadek (Jessore 6).

"We've already implemented many

projects in the country while many mega projects are underway," she said.

This year's election manifesto has given utmost importance to the youths as they are the country's strength and they will bring prosperity for Bangladesh, the PM added.

The nation will celebrate the birth centenary of Bangabandhu in 2020 and the golden jubilee of independence in 2021.

So Hasina hoped the pro-liberation force would remain in power when the two auspicious occasions would be celebrated.

"We want to celebrate the two occasions with much festivity by establishing Bangladesh a hunger and poverty-free Sonar Bangla as dreamt by Bangabandhu," she said.

Hasina also introduced the AL candidates from Tangail, Pabna and Panchagarh.

Later, she addressed people of her own constituency, Gopalganj-3, by phone.

There is no connecting road between the mainland and the chars. One has to cross the river by a boat and then walk at least two kilometres to get a transport to reach the district, according to the char dwellers.

Sheuli Akhter, a student of class V at Smriti Ray Crystal Primary School in Falimari, stressed the need of a high school.

On this, GM Quader said if elected, he would place a dyke first to ease the difficulties of char people. "We will arrange medical facilities and set up educational institutes there," he further said.

Asked why people in the chars were forgotten after elections, the Jatiya Party leader, with a smile on his face, said he and his men had been in touch with the char people. They took updates of their condition whenever possible.

Similar accounts came from Jatiya Oikyafront candidate Asadul Habib Dulu. He claimed that he had maintained a good relation with the char people.

However, the char people felt differently.