

Greetings pour in for Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud yesterday congratulated Prime Minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina on her party's victory in the Sunday's parliamentary polls.

The Saudi King, also the Custodian of two Holy Mosques, sent a message congratulating the prime minister on securing her party's thumping majority in the election, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said.

He said King Salman wished success of Sheikh Hasina as well as steady progress and prosperity for the people of Bangladesh.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud also sent a message greeting the prime minister, the press secretary said.

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her party's victory.

Ihsanul Karim said the Qatari Emir wished success of the prime minister as well as continued peace, progress and prosperity of the country.

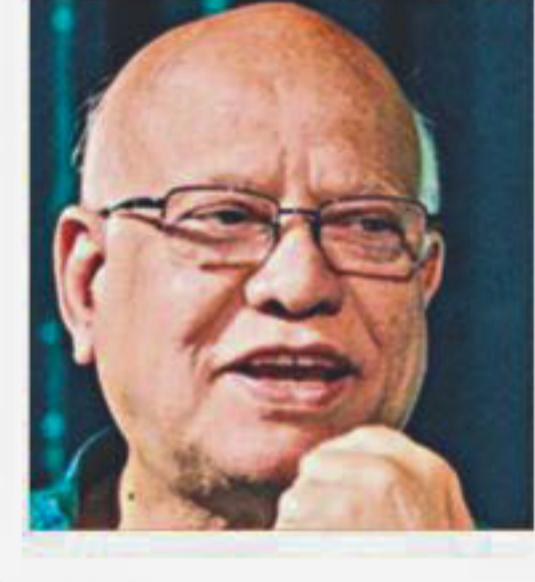
Sri Lankan President Maithripala

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Flanked by senior Awami League leaders, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina places wreaths at the portrait of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the city's Dhanmondi yesterday, two days after the party's victory in the national election.

PHOTO: BSS



If PM wants...

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

AMA Muhith yesterday said he would remain as the finance minister for another year, if Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wanted him to do so.

In this case, Muhith will set a record in presenting the national budget in parliament.

Speaking to reporters at his secretariat office, he said that the decision depended on the prime minister, adding that if the PM asks him of anything, he does not say "no".

Before the election, however, Muhith had said he would go into retirement after the polls.

The finance minister did not contest the polls this year. Instead, his brother AKM Abdul Momen contested and won from a Sylhet constituency on Awami League's ticket.

After the election on December 30, Muhith attended office yesterday.

Government high-ups said the PM may give the responsibility of being the finance minister to Muhith until the next annual budget is passed. If he presents the next national budget, Muhith will be setting a record of placing the budget 13 times. Earlier, during the tenure of the BNP government, finance minister M Saifur Rahman had presented budget 12 times.

A finance ministry official said they have not yet received any message to the effect that Muhith will not continue as finance minister. "If he had not continued, preparations for a farewell would have already been underway," he said.

Re-polling in 3 centres of B'baria-2 on January 9

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday decided to hold re-elections in three polling centres of Brahmanbaria-2 on January 9, as the polls there were suspended on Sunday.

In a notice, signed by EC Joint Secretary Forhad Ahammad Khan, the commission said that elections in three of the 76 polling centres were suspended following deterioration of law and order during Sunday's national election.

The centres were at Jatrapur Government Primary School, Badarpur Government Primary School and Sohagpur Government Primary School.

During voting hours on Sunday, supporters of two candidates were locked in a heated argument after which voting was suspended in the three centres. The incident occurred around 11:00am.

EC officials said that the BNP candidate Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan was leading the polls in the constituency with 82,723 votes while independent candidate Moyeen Uddin bagged 72,564 votes.

The number of voters of the three centres was 10,572, while the total number of voters in the constituency was 214,039.

Falling short by five seats

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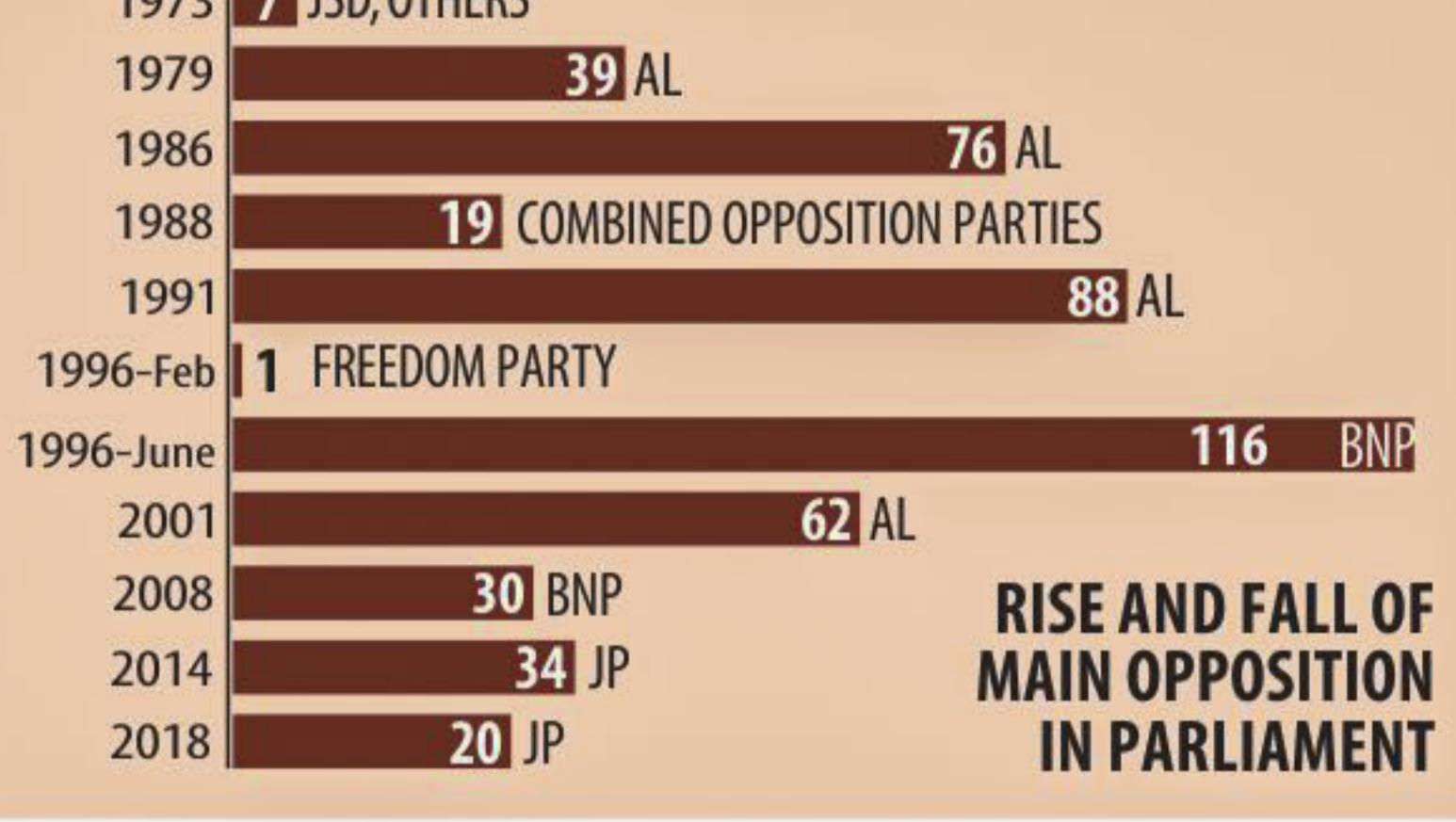
In the first parliamentary election held in 1973, the AL won 293 seats. The opposition parties -- Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Bangladesh Jatiya League, National Awami Party and others obtained only seven seats.

They extended their support to Jatiya League leader Ataur Rahman Khan and demanded that he be recognised as the leader of the opposition.

During the debate over recognition as opposition, Bangabandhu said a party could not be recognised as opposition if it did not have at least 25 MPs.

If any group has less than 25 MPs and at least 10 MPs, it can be termed a parliamentary group, not a parliamentary party, said Bangabandhu.

"The speech delivered by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the only directive," wrote Khandaker Abdul Haq in his book "Parliamentary Practice and



Procedure" published by the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat in 2001.

"His directive has been derived from experiences of the Pakistan National Assembly and East Pakistan Provincial Assembly and it is consistent with the parliamentary culture of

India and this sub-continent," wrote Haq, who was a senior official at the Parliament Secretariat.

If Bangabandhu's directive is taken into consideration, JP would need five more seats to qualify to become the opposition party in the new parlia-

ment. If JP is not the official opposition, none of its MPs could be the leader of the opposition.

The JP became the main opposition in the current parliament formed through the 2014 election, which the BNP-led alliance boycotted. It won 34 seats and its senior leader Raushan Ershad was recognised as the leader of the opposition with a status of a minister. Three JP MPs were also made ministers.

Their dual role has been criticised. The party could not play its due role as the main opposition in parliament in the last five years.

JP Secretary General Mashirul Rahman Ranga yesterday said his party would hold a joint meeting of the party's presidium members and MPs-elect today to decide whether it would join the government or sit on the opposition bench.

"We will also discuss it with the grand alliance," he said at a discussion at the party's Banani office.

BNP to collect centre-wise anomaly info

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP high command has directed the party candidates of Sunday's polls to collect centre-wise results and information on "election anomalies" by today.

The party would compile all the data and submit them to the Election Commission soon, its Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile on Monday night, the Jatiya Oikyafront leaders decided to submit a memorandum to the EC tomorrow after compiling information on all "polls irregularities".

Fakhrul will hold a meeting with the candidates at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office tomorrow morning, said Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, senior joint secretary general of the party.

Copies of a letter was sent to each of the candidates yesterday asking them to provide eight types of information, including on election anomalies, arrests and killing of BNP men, to the party, he said.

The ruling Awami League secured a landslide victory in Sunday's polls. The Oikyafront, led by the BNP and several

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Ershad picks brother GM Quader as future chair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Jatiya Party Co-chairman GM Quader will act as its chairman in the absence of party's incumbent Chairman HM Ershad.

In a statement last night, Ershad also hoped that the party's national council would elect Quader the chairman like him and give Quader all responsibilities of the party.

Ershad added that Quader would cooperate with him until he is the party chief.

US-made rifle recovered in remote CHT area

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A joint force led by the army yesterday recovered a US-made M4A1 assault rifle and 53 bullets from members of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) in Khagrachari's remote Laxmichhari area, police say.

During the special arms recovery drive, they detained UPDF members Sumanta Chakma, 20, and Dipankar Chakma, 22, said Abdul Jabbar, officer-in-charge of Laxmichhari Police Station.

They also recovered a magazine of a firearm, some locally-made sharp weapons, and several mobile phones from their possession, he said.

During a primary interrogation, the detainee claimed to be members of UPDF (Prasit group), which opposes the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts peace accord.

Harassed by stalker, girl kills herself

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A 13-year-old girl has died by suicide following harassment by her stalkers in Jessore's Benapole, said police.

The victim is Halima Khatun, a class-VIII student of Darul Chunnat Mozaddia Dakhil Madrasa in Ramnagar area.

Halima's elder brother Mohammad Abdullah said she was found hanging from the ceiling of her room around 11:00pm on Monday, a day after she was harassed by local stalkers.

The stalkers also tried to abduct her, said Abdullah, who was accompanying her at that time.

Hearing their screams for help, locals rescued Halima. The stalkers fled, he said.

Abdullah filed a case with Jessore Kotwali Police Station against seven people.

The accused in the case are Yusuf Ali, Nirob, Jibon, Rashid, Ashik and Shanto.

Apurba Hasan, officer-in-charge of Jashore Kotwali Police Station, said actions would be taken against the accused.

Smells of new books fill little souls

FROM PAGE 1

nine years.

This year, the government will provide 35.21 crore copies of textbooks to 4.26 crore students from pre-primary grades to 10th grade.

The textbook distribution will continue for the next few weeks so that schools that are yet to admit new students can distribute the books among all pupils within this period.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid at 11:00am inaugurated the festival at Residential Model School and College in the capital's Mohammadpur area. There, he handed over books to students from four schools.

Nahid earlier inaugurated the festival at Azimpur Govt Girls' School and College in the capital around 9:30am yesterday. He, along with other officials of the ministry and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) released balloons before Nahid handed over the books to seven students of class VI to IX from different educational institutions.

The school's atmosphere was splashed with colours as several thousand students from different educational institutions attended the programme. Some students played drums and waved placards. Parents and teachers too joined the ceremony.

Greeting the students, Nahid said Bangladesh was the only country in the world where such a huge volume of books were being handed over to students of all educational institutions on the very first day of a year.

The government has been distributing books to students since 2010 and there has been no deviation in its efforts, he said.

"The new generation will have to be given modern education to take them to global standards. Keeping this in mind, the government has been printing new books every year," Nahid said.

The minister urged all teachers to teach their pupils properly.

Meanwhile, the primary and mass education ministry organised a separate programme to distribute books at

the Dhaka University Central Playgroud yesterday.

Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman was not present at the programme due to health issues. He, however, gave his speech through a mobile phone.

"The government's efforts in the education sector have stunned the world," he said.

Renowned writer Prof Muhammed Zafar Iqbal also gave an inspiring speech at the programme.

"Tell me how many copies of textbooks Bangladesh will provide to the students?" he asked the students.

"33 crore," came the reply.

Prof Iqbal, also a teacher of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet, said no other country in the world printed such a huge volume of books; only Bangladesh could do it.

"These books are being printed for you. So read the books once you get to home today," he added.

Popular writer and journalist Anisul Haque told the students how lucky they are to get new books.

Amid persisting textbook crises, the government in 2009 had taken the decision to distribute them for free. Since then the government has handed out over 296.07 crore textbooks.

"We did not get new books. We used to take old books from elder brothers," he said.

He advised the students to read more books and take part in sports as well.

Bangladesh's top cricketer all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who was present as the special guest, exchanged New Year's greetings with the students in his speech.

"You are the future of the country. And providing you with books is the biggest task," he said, thanking the prime minister for such an initiative.

He said, "I hope that you all will concentrate on your studies and play sports side by side. You have to do these two things simultaneously and have to do them well."

Earlier on December 24, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina formally inaugurated the distribution of free textbooks.

Amid persisting textbook crises, the government in 2009 had taken the decision to distribute them for free. Since then the government has handed out over 296.07 crore textbooks.

The election in Brahmanbaria-2 was suspended as voting at three polling centres was suspended over violence. Polling in those centres will be held on January 9.

Polls in Gaibandha-3 were rescheduled for January 27 following the death of a candidate.

New MPs to take oath tomorrow

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Seeking anonymity, a senior AL minister told The Daily Star that the new cabinet would be sworn in on Sunday.

However, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the process to form the new government was likely to be completed by January 10.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, was talking to reporters after placing wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the city's Dhanmondi.

"After the oath-taking of the new

MPs, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will meet the president. The president will then request the prime minister to form the government."

Asked about the Jatiya Oikyafront's decision not to take oath, Quader said, "The Election Commission will deal with the issue. Everything will be done according to the constitution. If any candidate fails to take oath, the Election Commission will take necessary steps in line with the constitution. A new schedule will be announced for holding a by-election in that constituency."