

Upazila election likely in March

Election Commission says it has already started preparations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has started preparations to hold upazila council elections in March.

EC Secretary Helal Uddin made the announcement yesterday while speaking with journalists at the Nirbachan Bhaban.

"We are aiming to hold the upazila elections in March," he said.

The elections have to be held in March as the SSC examinations are scheduled for February and HSC examinations for April, he added.

"We will proceed according to the decisions of the commission," he said.

For the first time in history, political parties will nominate aspirants in the next upazila council elections, EC officials said.

According to electoral law, election to any upazila council has to take place at least six months before the tenure of the local government body expires.

In 2014, elections in 487 upazilas were held in six phases between February and May.

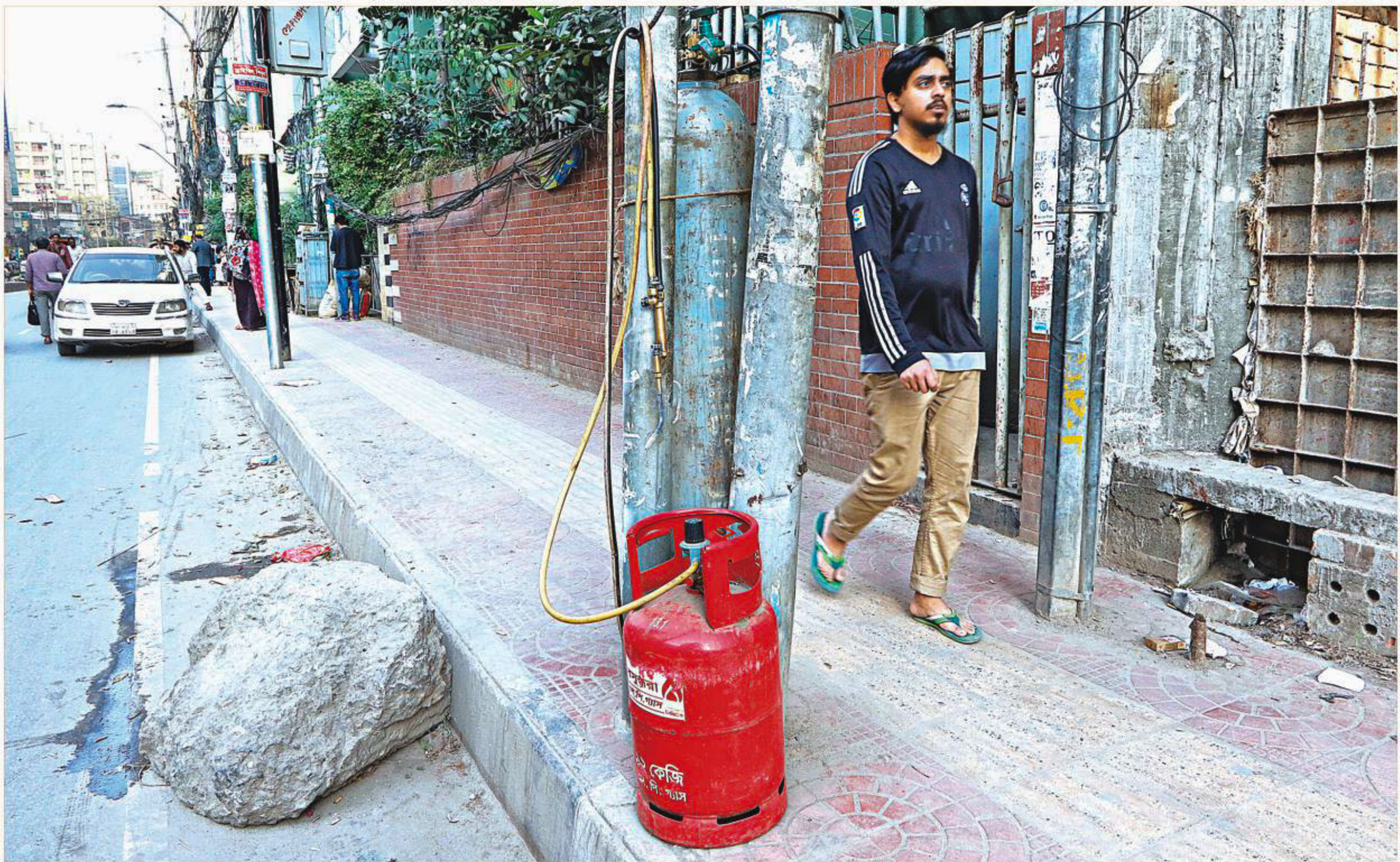
Meanwhile, responding to a query, the EC Secretary Helal Uddin said a parliamentarian would lose membership in the parliament if he or she fails to take oath or notify the speaker within 90 days of the first parliament session.

He made the comment while responding to a question about the BNP leaders, elected in Sunday's polls, thought of not taking oath as they rejected the polls results.

The BNP demands a re-election under a non-partisan interim administration, saying it has been proved that a free and fair election is not possible under a partisan government.

The party won five seats and its ally Gonoforum two in Sunday's national polls.

Helal Uddin said they would investigate the violence that took place during the voting day.



Gas cylinders for oxy-fuel welding are kept on a footpath on the busy Green Road in the capital. Such disregard for safety is a disaster waiting to happen. The picture was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'POLLS IRREGULARITIES' Candidates of Oikyafront to submit memo to EC today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Oikyafront candidates in the national election will submit to the Election Commission a memorandum on "irregularities" in the polls.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir in a letter to the chief election commissioner said the candidates would go to the EC at 3:00pm to submit the memorandum.

The memorandum will contain information on "irregularities, vote rigging, cases, arrests, intimidation and criminal activities by Awami League men," the letter reads.

The ruling AL-led alliance secured

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From well-contested to lopsided

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"The results prove that this was a rigged election. This was the picture in all other seats," Swapan told this newspaper.

Harisur Islam Haris, member secretary of the AL election conducting committee for Barishal-1, said, "People extended their support for the development work that the present government has done and that's why they voted for Awami League candidates."

About the reason for Swapan getting no votes in some centres, he said the voters rejected Swapan and he could not campaign.

In the 2001 polls, Swapan beat Hasnat by around 14,000 votes. He got 81,791 votes while his rival obtained 67,760 votes.

In the 2008 elections, there was also a close contest between the AL and BNP even though Hasnat did not run and Swapan was not picked by his party.

AL runner Talukdar Md Yunus had

got 98,245 votes while BNP contestant Abdus Sobhan secured 70,969 votes.

BNP candidate Sardar Sarfuddin Ahmed in Barishal-2 (Uzirpur and Banaripara) did a little better than Swapan in this election.

Sarfuddin did not get a single vote in four out of the 136 polling centres. He got less than 10 votes in six centres.

He bagged 11,137 votes and became second and his opponent ruling party candidate Shahe Alam won with 2,12,344 votes.

There was a tough battle between the candidates of the AL and the BNP in 2008. AL candidate Monirul Islam was victorious bagging more than 1 lakh votes.

In Barishal-3, the AL-led grand alliance picked Workers Party candidate Tipu Sultan with AL electoral symbol "Boat". But he lost to incumbent Jatiya Party lawmaker Golam Kibria Tipu.

BNP candidate Zainul Abedin was

second in the polls. He alone got 47,287 votes while his party contestants in the five other seats jointly got 66,744 votes.

Of the remaining seats in Barishal district, AL won two while JP won one.

VOTING TRENDS IN BARISHAL

In Sunday's election, AL candidates in the six constituencies got 82 percent of the total votes cast, 13.34 lakh.

The BNP got only 9 percent and Islami Andolan Bangladesh got 5.40 percent of the votes.

The difference in the number of votes obtained by the AL and the BNP candidates was not so wide in the 2008 and 2001 polls. The BNP had boycotted the 2014 election.

In 2008, the AL, the BNP and the JP candidates won two seats each. The AL-led alliance, which included JP, got 48 percent of the 11.17 lakh votes cast while the BNP got 36 percent.

The BNP-led four-party alliance had a landslide victory in 2001 with its

candidates winning all six seats. The BNP-led alliance candidates got 51 percent of the total 8.58 lakh votes cast. The AL nominees got 32 percent.

In the 1996 (June 12) election, the AL had returned to power after 21 years and won two seats in Barishal. The JP had won one.

Despite their defeat in the national polls, the BNP candidates won three seats.

In 1991, the first election after restoration of democracy, the BNP came to power with a simple majority. It won three seats in Barishal. The AL managed to win two seats while the Workers Party got one.

The voting pattern in previous elections indicates that neither the AL nor the BNP had absolute dominance in Barishal. But the outcome of Sunday's election gave a different picture.

Of arms, ammo

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maker-elect Dipankar Talukder said, ".....What I can say is that the illegal firearms is enough to deteriorate law and order, terrorise innocent people and even enough to run a parallel government in CHT area."

At least 119 firearms including machines guns, and AK-47 and 3,200 bullets were recovered from CHT between January and November this year, according to officials of a security force and law enforcement agencies.

On December 22, members of Bangladesh Army arrested three people, including suspected kingpin of an arms-trading group Biswajoti Chakma alias Baganbabu Kinkar in Rangamati, and recovered a heavy machine gun and a carbine from their possession. On December 27, three suspected PCJSS members were arrested in Rangamati with an AK-22 and three bullets.

On Tuesday, the army and police detained two suspected UPDF members with a US-made M4A1 rifle and bullets in Guimara upazila of Khagrachhari.

According to Chittagong Range of Police, police alone seized 263 firearms including AK-47s, AK-22s, and M-16s, between 2014 and November this year from the three districts.

The firearms are coming through the border in Habiganj too, said an intelligence official requesting anonymity.

In 2013, Indian police seized 31 AK-47 rifles, an automatic rifle, a light machine gun and some ammunition in Mizoram when those were being smuggled into Bangladesh from Myanmar via India.

Three indigenous people of the CHT were arrested.

In October 2015, five AK-47s, three AK-56s and 12 magazines were seized in Mizoram, bordering the CHT. Indian police then said those were destined for Bangladesh's CHT.

Rangamati Superintendent of Police Alomgir Kabir said every month they recover firearms.

The groups fighting to establish supremacy puts the lives of around seven lakh people in danger. The CHT consists of 13,189sqkm and is home to 11 indigenous communities.

Around 600 people, including political leaders and public representatives, were killed even after signing of the CHT Peace Accord in 1997, according to different political organisations in the CHT.

Until November this year 67 -- 53 from ethnic minority groups and 14 Bangalees -- have been killed. At least 78 others were abducted, according to law enforcement agencies.

Senior Vice-President of PCJSS and 10th parliament lawmaker of Rangamati Ushatan Talukder told The Daily Star that sincere effort and bringing all stakeholders to account were needed to stop the use of firearms and that it would not be possible to recover all firearms through deployment of force or conducting drives.

"Why the armed groups exist? Why they have become like this? There is a long story," he said.

He, however, said drives to recover firearms could go on making sure the innocent was not harassed.

Michael Chakma, spokesperson for the UPDF, claimed that they have no arms wing and that the allegations were false.

A year after the signing of the peace accord, a group of ethnic minority people, led by Prosid Bikash Khisa, formed the UPDF opposing the accord.

The party split and UPDF (democratic), led by Tapan Jyoti Chakma (alias Borna and Jalwa) was formed on November 15, 2017.

The PCJSS also saw a split as some left the organisation in 2007 and formed PCJSS (reformists), led by Sudha Sindho Khisa.

Hasina seeks

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party's win was the result of the people's coordinated efforts.

Saying that her responsibility towards the country and its people has increased further following the victory, the PM assured people of fulfilling their desires, hopes and aspirations.

She reiterated her strong stance against terrorism and militancy saying there would be no room on Bangladesh soil for terrorists and militants.

The AL chief also extended her gratitude to those who came to congratulate her following her party's polls victory.

Education Secretary Sohrab Hossain and Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Lt Gen Mahfuzur Rahman were present, among others.

Addressing a cross-section of people, including representatives from Bankers Association of Bangladesh and Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, at the Gono Bhaban, Hasina yesterday said she wanted a "good opposition" in 11th parliament, but the possibility of having it diminished when a party "indulged in nomination trade".

She said the opposition had a "peculiar" attitude. "The way they gave nominations, it was not for participating in the election. They just did business in the name of giving nominations."

The AL chief also said she saw people's desire for casting votes in favour of "boat", her party's electoral symbol, in the 11th parliamentary polls like that seen in 1970 and 1973.

Earlier on Tuesday night, the premier said there would be no space for war criminals and anti-liberation forces on Bangladesh soil and the country would move forward with the spirit of the Liberation War.

Hasina made the comments when a cross-section of people came to the Gono Bhaban to extend greetings to her.

Ministers, political leaders, cultural personalities, artists, poets, actors, singers, physicians, journalists, litterateurs, civil society members and senior civil and military officials greeted the PM.

She also expressed gratitude to all for the AL's victory and sought cooperation from the people of all classes and professions in maintaining the development and progress of the country.

Hasina may spring cabinet surprise

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According to ruling Awami League sources, some leaders who did not get party nomination for the December 30 polls may find themselves in the cabinet as a "reward". Besides, the cabinet is likely to have three to four technocrat ministers.

The Daily Star talked with several AL leaders about the formation of the next cabinet. But the PM did not officially discuss anything about it with them, they said.

Hasina is now leading a 49-member cabinet comprising 30 ministers, 17 state ministers and two deputy ministers. Four technocrat ministers resigned last month.

The AL sealed victory in the national polls for the third consecutive time, securing a two-thirds majority. Out of the 298 seats, the AL-led alliance won in 288 and of them the ruling party itself got 259 seats.

According to AL leaders, Public Administration Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam, also former general secretary of the party, may be dropped from the cabinet due to his illness. Disaster Management and Relief Minister

Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Food Minister Qamrul Islam, Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, Textiles and Jute Minister Emaj Uddin Pramanik and Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan are also likely to be left out.

Besides, State Minister for Information Tarana Halim, State Minister for Health Zahid Maleque, State Minister for Social Welfare Nuruzzaman Ahmed and Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports Arif Khan Joy also may not get any place in the new cabinet.

Of them, Maya and Joy didn't get party nomination for Sunday's election.

According to sources, the MPs-elect and some leaders are lobbying the prime minister and her close aides hard to be in the cabinet.

On several occasions in the past, Finance Minister AMA Muhith had said he would retire after the polls. But on Tuesday, he said he may remain as the minister for another year if the PM wanted him to do so.

In that case, Muhith may continue to be at the helm of the finance minis-

try as a technocrat minister.

Telecom and ICT minister Mustafa Jabbar and Science and Technology Minister Yeafesh Osman, who resigned from cabinet before the polls, might to be inducted in the cabinet again as technocrat ministers.

Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Health Minister Mohammad Nasim, LGRD Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Narayan Chandra Chanda, State Minister for Finance MA Mannan, State Minister for Textiles and Jute Mirza Azam, State Minister for Youth and Sports Biren Sikder, State Minister for Power Nasrul Hamid and State Minister for Environment Abdullah Al Islam Jacob are likely to continue as ministers. But there might be changes in their portfolio, party

insiders said.

Besides, some new faeces, including AL presidium members Lt Col (Retd) Muhammad Faruq Khan and Abdur Razzak; the PM's Private Sector Affairs Adviser Salman F Rahman, AL Joint General Secretary Dipu Moni, party's Cultural Affairs Secretary Asim Kumar Ukil, Liberation War Affairs Secretary Mrinal Kanti Das, Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury and central committee member RAM Obaidul Muktadir Chowdhury also have good chances to be included in the new cabinet.

Of them, the name of Faruq Khan is being discussed as the foreign minister.

Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who won from Narail-2, is likely to be a state minister if he does not participate in the cricket World Cup starting in May. If he plays in the WC, he will get the position after the tournament.

Besides, leaders from the AL's allies, including Jatiya Party, Jatiya Party (Manju), Workers Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), would be in Hasina's new cabinet, insiders added.

Western powers denounce polls day violence

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harassment that created obstacles for the opposition candidates to campaign freely.

The UN also echoed the concerns, saying that it was aware of violent incidents and reports of irregularities in the Bangladesh general elections.

"We encourage the parties to address electoral complaints in a peaceful manner and through legal means," the spokesperson for the UN secretary-general said in a statement on Monday.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl Miller and UN Resident Coordinator Mia Seppo separately met with Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque yesterday and discussed issues raised in the US and UN statements on the Bangladesh polls.

According to diplomatic sources, the US ambassador at the meeting mentioned about a resolution adopted unanimously by the US House of Representatives on December 12.

The resolution (H. Res. 1169) titled "Reaffirming the commitment of the United States to promote free, fair, transparent and credible elections in Bangladesh" had called on the Bangladesh government to respect the freedom of speech and of the press and to heed the Bangladesh Election

Commission's request to ensure security for minorities and maintain communal harmony for a peaceful election.

It had also urged the Bangladesh political leaders and judicial authorities to respect the will of voters and ensure that all Bangladeshis would be able to participate freely in the elections, and that the polls would be impartial and inclusive.

Conveying the message of their respective authorities to the foreign secretary, the US and UN envoys said Bangladesh should ensure addressing the claims and allegations of irregularities, said diplomatic sources.

Issues of cooperation and future engagement between Bangladesh and the US and the UN also came up for discussion at the meetings.

Meanwhile, Canada in a statement yesterday said it was disappointed by credible claims of irregularities exhibited during the campaign.

"While welcoming the increased participation of opposition parties in this election, Canada remains disappointed by credible claims of irregularities exhibited during the campaign and calls on the relevant authorities to work transparently with all parties to address these claims," said Global Affairs Canada.

It called upon all concerned to proceed in a peaceful and lawful manner and to ensure that the rights to freedom of expression and assembly are protected in the transition period leading up to the installation of a new government.

Earlier on Tuesday, Mark Field, British minister of state for Asia and the Pacific at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in a statement said, "I am aware of credible accounts of obstacles, including arrests, that constrained or prevented campaigning by opposition parties, and of irregularities in the conduct of elections on polling day that prevented some people from voting."

He called for a full, credible and transparent resolution of all complaints related to the conduct of the elections.

"I deplore the acts of intimidation and unlawful violence that have taken place during the campaign period, and am deeply concerned by the incidents that led to so many deaths on the polling day. My thoughts are with the families and friends of those who have lost loved ones," he added.

Free, fair, peaceful, and participatory elections were essential to any functioning democracy, said the British minister of state.

"It is vital for the government and all political parties to now work together to

address differences and find a way forward in line with the interests of the people of Bangladesh."

He said the UK would continue to support the people of Bangladesh in their aspirations for a more stable, prosperous, and democratic future.

In another statement on Tuesday, EU Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Maja Kocijancic said, "Violence has marred the election day, and significant obstacles to a level playing field remained in place throughout the process and have tainted the electoral campaign and the vote."

He said the relevant authorities should now ensure a proper examination of allegations of irregularities and commit to full transparency in their resolution.

The USA in a press statement said, "We note with concern credible reports of harassment, intimidation, and violence in the pre-election period that made it difficult for many opposition candidates and their supporters to meet, hold rallies, and campaign freely."

"We are also concerned that election-day irregularities prevented some people from voting, which undermined faith in the electoral process," Robert Palladino, deputy spokesperson at the US state department said on Tuesday.