



AL NATIONAL COUNCIL Number two is the number one question

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The ruling Awami League is all set to hold its 22nd triennial national council on December 24 with only one thing certain: Sheikh Hasina, who has been leading the party since 1981 after she returned home from a long exile, will be reelected as the AL president for the 10th time.

So, all eyes are now on the general secretary post, the second highest in the AL hierarchy.

Leaders, activists, supporters and well-wishers of the country's grand old party are eagerly waiting to see who will assume the post to help Hasina steer the party in the right direction ahead of the 12th national election slated for early 2024.

The party's manifesto for the election will focus on "smart Bangladesh" by 2041, and its leaders and activists are curious to know with whom the AL chief will make it happen.

Discussions are on among the rank and file whether incumbent General Secretary Obaidul Quader would be reelected or replaced at the council in Suhrawardy Udyan, where about 7,000 councillors and 14,000 delegates would vote to elect AL office bearers.

The twice general secretary first got the post in 2016 at the 20th AL council.

Some AL leaders believe the post should go to a younger person who is able to crisscross the country to rev up the grassroots where activities had somewhat stagnated due to the pandemic.

However, many think the council would just be a formality to ensure the status quo and they came up with statsto back it up.

The party has 78 organisational district units and of them, councils have been held in 39 where only presidents and secretaries have been elected. Seven of the units got new leaders. There was no change in 24 and eight saw minor changes.

Still, some believe AL presidium members Kazi Zafarullah and Abdur Razzaque, joint general secretaries Mahbul Alam Hanif, Jahangir Kabir Nanak and Bahauddin Nasim, chief whip Noor-e-Alam Chowdhury Liton have chances of becoming Hasina's deputy.

According to AL insiders, the number of members of the AL Central Working Committee, the highest decision-making body, will not be increased as Hasina is against making the 81-member body even bigger.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Legions of Argentina fans thronged the streets of Buenos Aires to get a glimpse of the long-awaited World Cup, brought back to the nation after 36 years by their own magician, Lionel Messi, on Tuesday. Following their arrival at the Ezeiza airport from Doha, the World Cup winners, with gold medals around their necks, took turns holding the trophy aloft and waving to fans during their open-top bus parade through the capital.

PHOTO: AFP

Messi and Co return to hero's welcome

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Thousands of ecstatic fans gave Argentina's football squad a hero's welcome in Buenos Aires in the early hours before dawn on Tuesday after the plane carrying Lionel Messi and his World Cup-winning team mates touched down at Ezeiza airport.

The Argentine capital has been in party mode since their dramatic victory over France in Sunday's final in Qatar, which gave the country its first World Cup win since Diego Maradona hoisted the trophy 36 years ago.

The players, wearing their gold winners' medals around their necks and taking turns to hold the World Cup trophy aloft, waved at fans from an open-top bus as the lights from thousands of mobile phones sparkled and flags fluttered in the crowd.

Joyous fans sang to the beat of a drum and fireworks lit up the sky as the bus slowly wound its way through the crowd.

The players are expected to spend a few hours at the Argentine Football Association (AFA) facilities near the airport before heading at noon to the huge Obelisco monument in the center of town.

"Good morning!" Messi said on Tuesday in an Instagram post in which he could be seen sleeping.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Govt revises down growth forecast

Expansionary budget next fiscal with eye on polls

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has trimmed its growth forecast for this fiscal year by a whole percentage point to 6.5 percent as the energy shortage and inflation dampened economic activities.

However, the government would be gunning for the 7.5 percent GDP growth it had initially hoped to achieve this year in fiscal 2023-24. The Daily Star has learnt from finance

ministry officials involved in drafting the budget.

"The economic situation will start to stabilise from next month," said an official on the condition of anonymity.

The pressure on reserves will subside as the opening of letters of credit has already started to drop on the back of the government measures.

"That will take care of the inflation," he said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

2.7m farmers getting govt incentives

STAR REPORT

The government is providing 27 lakh farmers with Tk 170 crore worth of incentives across the country to increase Boro production.

Each of 15 lakh farmers will get 2kg of hybrid paddy seeds, which will cost the government Tk 82 crore, according to a notice from the agriculture ministry yesterday.

Another 12 lakh will get 5kg of

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

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