

## One-sided polls may lead to deep crisis

47 eminent citizens warn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Forty-seven eminent citizens yesterday said a "one-sided" national election might drive the country into a deep crisis.

In a joint statement, they said the Election Commission announced the polls schedule at a time when BNP and other opposition party leaders and activists were facing numerous police cases and wholesale arrests.

In such circumstances, the EC's move is helping the government hold the "lopsided" polls, they said. "This situation is very alarming for Bangladesh."

The citizens said experiences from the previous two national polls suggest that if a "one-sided and controversial" election is held, there would be no societal, political, and economic accountability in the country and the public institutions would become subservient to the government.

Besides, corruption and extrajudicial killings will increase massively, they added.

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The eminent citizens called upon the government to release the arrested opposition activists and leaders, hold talks, and create a conducive atmosphere for polls.

They also urged the BNP and other opposition parties to play their role so that dialogues can be held.

The signatories include former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder, economist Prof Anu Muhammad, political scientist Prof Dilara Chowdhury, photographer Shahidul Alam, rights activist Shireen Huq, Prof Asif Nazrul, author Rahnuma Ahmed, rights activist Nur Khan, Prof Sayeed Ferdous, neurologist Naila Zaman Khan, and Prof Shapan Adnan.



A motorcade of an Awami League nomination seeker and his supporters clogs the street in front of the Matsya Bhaban around 1:30pm yesterday. The procession was heading towards the party headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue where nomination forms were being sold and received for the January 7 polls. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Record Tk 1,600 crore to be needed for nat'l election

Estimates EC, cites high prices of materials as reason for cost escalation

MOHUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Election Commission estimates that around Tk 1,600 crore will be needed to hold the general election, which would make it the most expensive polls in Bangladesh.

EC sources said around Tk 1,000 crore would be election management expenditure while Tk 600 will be spent on law enforcement agencies during the polls.

The dramatic increase in costs has been attributed to the sharp rise in fuel prices and other necessary materials.

EC Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar

Debnath yesterday said during a routine meeting with EC officials, law enforcers discussed the possible budget, placed their demands, and mentioned how many members would be deployed.

Earlier, police, Ansar, BGB and Coast Guard demanded around Tk 1,070 crore for discharging election duties.

However, the law enforcers would be paid according to the rate approved by the finance ministry.

A total of 7.47 lakh members of various law enforcement agencies and other forces – 5.16 lakh Ansar members, 1.82 lakh police and Rab officers, 2,355 Coast Guard and 47,000 BGB personnel – would be

deployed, said Ashok.

He said it was yet to be decided how long the forces would be on election duty.

The EC had estimated a cost of Tk 700 crore for the 11th national polls. It eventually spent around Tk 1,000 crore.

It needed Tk 265 crore for the 10th parliamentary polls, when 153 MPs were elected unopposed, officials said.

The EC spent Tk 165 crore for the ninth general polls, Tk 95 crore in the eighth, Tk 71 crore in the seventh, Tk 25.56 crore in the fifth, Tk 5.16 crore in the fourth, Tk 5.25 crore in the third, Tk 5.60 crore in the second and Tk 81.86 lakh in the first general polls in 1973.

## Bail hard to come by for BNP ranks

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over political violence are being denied bail by the CMM court, but some are getting bail from the higher courts.

The officer spoke on condition of anonymity citing legal reasons.

The top opposition leaders who have been denied bail include BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, standing committee members Mirza Abbas and Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, vice-chairmen Shamsuzzaman Dudu and barrister Shahjahan Omar, joint secretary generals Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal and Mujibur Rahman Sarwar, organising secretary Syed Emran Saleh Prince, and BNP's media cell Convener Zahir Uddin Swapan.

They were arrested over violence centring on BNP's Nayapalton grand rally, which was foiled by heavy police action.

"I submitted bail petitions for 31 accused in seven cases. Not a single of them got bail from the CMM court, including the seven arrested as suspects," said Khan Md Zahirul Islam, a defence lawyer.

Another defence lawyer Gazi Muhammad Shukkur Ali said he also filed bail petitions with the CMM court for his two clients, who were arrested on suspicion from Bangshal just two days before the rally. But they were denied bail.

"Later, I filed petitions with the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, but the date for hearing on the petitions is yet to be fixed," he added.

Several other defence lawyers gave a similar version.

"Some of the accused who do not hold any post in BNP or are arrested as suspects are getting bail from the sessions judge's court. But none of my clients has been granted bail by the CMM court lately," said Syed Zaynul Abedin Mesbah, another defence lawyer.

Criminal law expert Khurshid Alam Khan said bails are considered based on the gravity of the offence.

"If the magistrate fails to exercise his discretion in any case, the aggrieved persons can seek bail from a higher court," he said.

Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Md Abdullah Abu said, "It is completely the discretionary jurisdiction of the court to grant or reject bail. I only perform my duties as a state lawyer."

**THE ARRESTS**  
Of the 3,067 arrestees, police produced 1,620 defendants before the CMM court in the 11 days preceding BNP's October 28 rally. The rest 1,447 were produced in the 11 days after the rally.

Charges in most of the cases include blocking the road through unlawful assembly, deterring police

from carrying out their duties, damage to properties, vandalism, creating panic among the public and blasting explosives.

Of the accused, 300 were arrested in 14 cases with Palton Police Station, 198 in 18 cases with Jatrabari Police Station, 167 in eight cases with Pallabi Police Station, 154 in four cases with Mirpur Police Station, 130 in 10 cases with Wari Police Station, 123 in 11 cases with Demra Police Station, 108 in 15 cases with Ramna Police Station and 103 in five cases with Kairul Police Station.

Some 70 to 92 people were arrested in the cases filed with Khilgaon, Shyampur, Kadamtoli, Banani, Badda, Darus Salam, Shah Ali, Shahjahanpur and Hatirjheel police stations each. The number of arrests by Mugga, Uttara East, Bangshal, Chawkbazar, Kamrangirchar, Bhatara, Motijheel and Gendaria police is between 41 and 69 each.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi slammed the government for the wholesale arrest and imprisonment of his party leaders and activists ahead of the election.

"We have said this before. Through the latest arrests, it is now clear that the government is using the legal system to scare our leaders and activists. It has exposed how the government is abusing the laws," he told The Daily Star.

## JP polls-bound but won't say it

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said, adding that the party was completing some election-related formalities as there were obligations to complete those on time.

"The party chairman will decide on participating in the election before November 30, the last day for filing nomination forms."

Chunnu called upon the government to create an environment conducive to casting ballots in a peaceful manner.

Responding to a question, the JP secretary general said they were planning to field candidates in all 300 constituencies and that the nominees would run on the party's electoral symbol "plough".

However, JP co-chairmen Ruhul Amin Hawlader and Kazi Firoz Rashid told reporters that the party would run in the 12th parliamentary polls in the greater interest of the country and the people.

"We all have to work together to make sure that development work continue in the country. We believe the election will be free and fair."

Hawlader said.

Several JP leaders told The Daily Star that the party adopted the strategy not to make the final announcement on running as its high-ups want to bargain with the AL over some election-related benefits.

"The high-ups want an assurance that at least 40 to 50 Jatiya Party leaders would win the elections without having to face Awami League candidates," a JP presidium member told this correspondent wishing anonymity.

Quader also wants the government not to attach importance to party Chief Patron Raushan Ershad and also not to create any "trouble" by using her, added the JP leader.

Visiting the JP chairman's Banani office yesterday, this correspondent saw the office premises full of leaders and activists. Eight booths were set up on the third floor for selling nomination forms.

On Saturday, Raushan and Chunnu sent two separate letters to the Election Commission.

Raushan, also the leader of the opposition in parliament, told the

EC that the JP will participate in the election under the AL-led grand alliance and that the party nominees would run on its electoral symbol "plough".

Chunnu in his letter said Quader will sign the party's nomination forms.

Asked about the rift within the JP, Chunnu claimed there was no division in the party.

"She has no authority to send such a letter to the EC," he told journalists.

The JP told the media that Raushan collected a nomination form yesterday about later on said she did not do so.

Raushan's Spokesperson Kazi Mamunur Rashid said the opposition leader was yet to collect the nomination paper.

Meanwhile, the JP yesterday earned Tk 1.67 crore selling 557 nomination forms at Tk 30,000 each. Selling of nomination papers will continue until November 23.

After interviewing the nomination seekers, the party will declare the final list of its candidate on November 27.

## 'It feels unreal to be free'

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Khadija looked forward to eating the beef curry her mother cooked for her. It was a delicacy made on special days for the family, which runs on the meagre earnings of her migrant worker father – a house staffer in Kuwait.

"But I won't be able to eat until the evening. I am fasting," said Khadija about a practice she developed in prison.

"Every day I prayed for a miracle. I used to fast only on Mondays and Thursdays. But I have been fasting every day from last month till November 16 [the day she was granted bail] and praying for this miracle."

After her bail pleas were repeatedly rejected by a lower court, the High Court granted her permanent bail on February 16.

However, the state immediately filed two petitions with the Supreme Court, challenging the bail order, which was then stayed by an SC chamber judge.

Later, Khadija sought justice from the Appellate Division, praying that the chamber judge's stay order be vacated.

But on July 10, her prayer was stood over for four months by a full Supreme Court bench, led by Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique.

The student received bail only after Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan took over the helm of the judiciary.

During the hearing, he had asked the lawyers how long Khadija had been in jail – and was visibly astonished when he heard the answer.

Khadijatul Kubra was arrested on August 27 last year after police pressed charges against her in two Digital Security Act cases, filed by Kalabagan and New Market police on October 11 and October 19, 2020.

The student was sued at the age of 17 for hosting the Facebook webinar, where guest speaker Delwar Hossain, a retired army officer, made the contentious remarks.

Although Khadija was sued as a minor, she had to undergo a full adult trial and incarceration.

Even after getting bail, her release was fraught with difficulties.

The jail authorities received the bail order finally on Sunday evening and though her family waited the

entire day in front of the gate of Kashimpur Females' Central Jail, they had to return home without her.

Khadija's sister Munira said, "When we asked the jail authorities why Khadija was not yet being released, a police official came out and told us that they were waiting for clearance from other agencies and law enforcement units because the cases were under the Digital Security Act."

Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, her lawyer, termed it a contempt of court.

A student of political science, Khadija went back to university right after being released.

While the law enforcers and the judiciary debated whether or not it would be safe to release her, all Khadija cared about was not failing out of college.

"My fourth semester final exams are going on and I'm prepared for them. I sat for my statistics exams today and was able to answer three out of the four questions!"

"I should be able to do better in the coming exams as I can study at home now."

## Hearing adjourned amid chaos

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As voices grew louder, the judge asked the prosecution to submit an application seeking the hearing's adjournment and left the courtroom.

He came back after 15 minutes, took his seat and then fixed November 22 for hearing on the bail petition.

On October 28, police filed the case against Fakhrul following the attack on the chief justice's residence.

The next morning, he was picked up from his Gulshan house by the Detective Branch of police.

The same day, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka turned down his bail plea after he was produced before it.

He was shown arrested in the case filed with Ramna Police Station and sent to jail.

Along with Fakhrul, BNP Standing Committee Member Mirza Abbas and 59 other party leaders and activists were accused in the case on charges of attacking the chief justice's residence.

The court acquitted Rois Ahmed, former general secretary of Rangpur BNP, and Samsul Haq, general secretary

of Jubo Dal, as they have passed away.

Police arrested Don on October 28 and he was in the courtroom.

According to the prosecution, the accused were arrested while they were preparing on the Rangpur Polytechnic Institute ground to torch a bus. Police claimed to have seized 56 crude bombs and various incendiary materials from their possession.

Defence lawyer Aftab Hossain said the judgment was politically motivated and that they would appeal.

[Our Dinajpur correspondent contributed to this report]

## VIOLATION OF DIRECTIVE SC summons IG prisons, home secy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court has summoned Inspector General of Prisons ASM Anisul Haque and Home Secretary (Security Service Division) Abdullah Al Masud Chowdhury for violating its directive to promote six prison officials to the posts of senior jail superintendent.

The apex court yesterday ordered the IG prisons and home secretary to appear before it at 9:00am on December 4 to hear their explanations for not complying with its directives.

Petitioners' lawyer Ibrahim Khalil said the Appellate Division, in a verdict on April 7, last year, directed the authorities concerned to promote six prison officials to the posts of senior jail superintendent under the Recruitment Rules of 1984.

The six officials are Md Gias Uddin Bhuiyan, Iqbal Kabir Chowdhury, Md Anwaruzzaman, Munir Ahmed, Md Bazlur Rashid Akanda and Nurunabi Bhuiyan.

## Microsoft hires OpenAI's Sam Altman after sacking

AFP, San Francisco

Microsoft yesterday announced the hiring of OpenAI co-founder Sam Altman following his shock sacking from the company whose ChatGPT chatbot has led the rapid rise of artificial intelligence technology.

OpenAI has appointed Emmett Shear, a former chief executive of Amazon's streaming platform Twitch, as its new CEO despite reported pressure from Microsoft and other major investors to reinstate Altman.

OpenAI's board sacked Altman on Friday, with US media citing concerns that he was underestimating the dangers of its tech and leading the company away from its stated mission – claims his successor has denied.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella wrote on X that Altman "will be joining Microsoft to lead a new advanced AI research team," along with OpenAI co-founder Greg Brockman and other colleagues. "The mission continues," Altman posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Altman shot to fame with the launch of Open AI's artificial intelligence chatbot last year, which ignited a race to advance AI research and development, as well as billions being invested in the sector.

