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EC still has no means to track campaign costs

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Election Commission does not have the means to effectively check whether people running for parliament stay within the limits for campaign spending.

A contestant is not supposed to spend more than Tk 25 lakh on campaigning.

The EC caps campaign spending before national elections with an aim to ensure one candidate does not have an advantage over the other by spending more, according to former election commissioner Rafiqul Islam.

The other objective is to prevent the spending of undisclosed cash ahead of polls.

But the targets remain mostly on papers, political analysts and electoral experts say.

EC officials say it is no secret that people running for parliament spend way more on their campaign than they are allowed.

The 2007-2012 Election Commission recommended forming a committee at each constituency to keep track of campaign expenses. The committees should include officials from the National Board of Revenue, the commission advised.

But that proposal never saw the light of day, four EC officials have confirmed.

Brig Gen (ret'd) Sakhawat Hussain, who was an election

It is extremely difficult to control the use of illegal money ahead of elections as there is no mechanism to monitor this, said Brig Gen (ret'd) Sakhawat Hussain.

commissioner from 2007-2012, says the EC formed a committee to examine the expenses of candidates in the 2011 Narayanganj city polls.

It is extremely difficult to control the use of illegal money ahead of elections as there is no mechanism to monitor this, he adds.

In India, the election commission has a committee that includes officials of the revenue department to monitor the electioneering expenses, says polling expert Abdul Alim.

The committee frequently checks the campaign of candidates, he adds.

On November 16, the EC issued a notification saying a candidate would be allowed to spend no more than Tk 10 per voter, and the total expenditure should not exceed Tk 25 lakh.

The permitted amounts were the same in the previous national election, said the notification.

The Election Enquiry Committee is there to ensure that the electoral code of conduct is abided by. This committee can take action if it has proof of irregularities, says an official.

"But no one gives money to people to buy their votes and keeps a proof of the transaction. With the mobile banking services available everywhere, you can't tell who is giving money to whom," the official adds.

The EC's work plan for the 12th national election mentions that the use of money and muscle power is a challenge to free and fair elections.

But several EC officials say they have yet to see any initiative to curb the use of money and muscle power.

Polling expert Alim, who worked on behalf of the UN with the 2007-2012 EC, says there should be a robust monitoring system. "If there is a violation, instant action should be taken."

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A long line of horse-drawn carts carrying goods through a sandy flood plain of the Jamuna in Gaibandha's Saghata. At the end of monsoon when vast areas become dry, locals have to rely on horses for commuting and transporting goods. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUI

Janata Bank comes short of BB's targets

Lender logs in worst numbers out of four state-owned commercial banks

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Janata Bank has failed to meet any of its performance improvement targets set by the central bank in the first half of the year -- a worrying development given that the state bank accounts for the second-highest volume of deposits and loans among the 61 scheduled lenders in Bangladesh.

Since 2007, the Bangladesh Bank has been setting biannual performance improvement targets such as cash recovery from defaulters, bringing down defaulted loan ratio, improving capital base, credit growth, profitability and so on for the four state-owned commercial banks to restore their financial health.

In the first six months of the year, Janata Bank underperformed in all metrics, according to the compliance report prepared by the central bank's department of off-site supervision.

For instance, BB has a set individual ceiling for all four banks' large loan portfolios based on their defaulted loan ratios -- and Janata overshot the limit by a wide margin.

As of June 30, large loans

Janata's performance is disconcerting given the bank accounts for the second-highest volume of deposits and loans among the 61 scheduled lenders in Bangladesh

accounted for 64 percent of Janata's total portfolio. Its ceiling for the period was 30 percent.

"It is not possible to bring down the large loan concentration at will," said Md. Abdul Jabbar, the managing director and chief executive officer of Janata Bank.

The bank has taken on a five-year plan to reduce its large loan exposure.

"We are not giving new loans to large borrowers, so the volume won't increase in the coming months," said

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GM Quader, Raushan discuss elections

RASHIDUL HASAN

Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader called on party Chief Patron Raushan Ershad at the latter's Gulshan home last night.

He met the opposition leader in parliament amid a stalemate over her collecting the JP's nomination forms for the January 7 national election.

The sale of nomination forms ended on Friday, but Raushan, her son Rahgir Almahe Ershad and most of the party leaders loyal to her did not collect forms.

Golam Moshi, political secretary to the opposition leader, Kazi Mamunur Rashid, spokesperson of Raushan, and Rahgir Almahe were present at Raushan's home during the meeting, JP insiders told The Daily Star.

The meeting, which began around 9:00pm, lasted for about an hour.

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SYLHET, CTG, MYMENSINGH AL sticks to mostly incumbents

Candidates to be unveiled today

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Former state minister for information and broadcasting Murad Hassan, who had to resign from cabinet for his misogynistic and abusive remarks, has not got the Awami League ticket to run for parliament this time.

The AL picked its central committee member Marufa Akter Poppy to vie for Jamalpur-4 constituency.

The party's Organising Secretary Ahmod Hossain and Research and Information Secretary Selim Mahmud got nominations for the first time.

AL's Parliamentary Nomination Board at a meeting yesterday chose Ahmod over incumbent lawmaker Waresat Hussain Belal for Netrakona-5 and Selim Mahmud over current MP and former minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir for Chandpur-1, said party sources.

AL presidium member and former minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya was picked for Chandpur-2 instead of incumbent MP Nurul Amin and former lawmaker Abdur Rahman over incumbent MP Manjur Hossain for Faridpur-1.

The ruling party previously picked its nominees for constituencies in Sylhet, Mymensingh and Chattogram divisions. The party has now finalised its candidates for all 300 constituencies and will unveil the full list today.

According to party sources, the nomination board at its meeting with AL President Sheikh Hasina in the chair completed the list with several surprising and fresh picks.

Former minister Khandoker Mossaraf Hossain, who was dropped from all AL committees earlier, did not

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Govt luring small parties with money to join polls

Says Rizvi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An atmosphere of fear and violence prevails across the country instead of festivity ahead of the upcoming national polls, opposition BNP has said.

"Awami League started pre-election killings and attacks centering on the nomination form submission," BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi told a virtual press briefing yesterday.

He accused the government of forming a "secret force" comprising intelligence agencies.

Through intelligence agencies, the government is bringing little-known political leaders together to form a King's party by luring them with money and membership in parliament, he said, adding that no "ethical or patriotic"

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Palestinians leaving the north walk through the Salaheddine road in the Zeitoun district on the southern outskirts of Gaza City yesterday, on the second day of a truce between Israel and Hamas. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: AFP

SEAT-SHARING IN POLLS

AL allies to seek more but may get less

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The 14-party allies will demand the Awami League set aside more seats for them this time but the ruling party will assign fewer seats to them compared to the last national election, sources in the AL said.

The AL may not field candidates in the constituencies of the top alliance leaders. The party may field its nominees in the rest of the constituencies which would also be open to the candidates of its allies. All the candidates would run with the electoral symbols of their respective parties, they added.

The ruling party will adopt this strategy to make the election look more participatory.

Some top 14-party alliance leaders will contest the polls with "boat", the electoral symbol of the AL. Workers Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Bangladesh Tarikat Federation and Samyabadi Dal are among the components of the alliance.

Before the last national election in 2018, the alliance partners demanded 120 seats, but they were given 11.

The AL may decide on seat-sharing at the last moment, meaning the decision may be made on November 30, the last day for submitting nomination papers.

After unveiling the list of the party's 300 candidates today, the AL will sit with its alliance partners over seat-sharing.

The ruling party will have the letters of withdrawal of

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