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23 parties want to join polls so far

Mostly AL alliance members, little-known and recently-formed ones

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Twenty-three of the 44 registered political parties, mostly ruling alliance members, little-known and recently-formed ones, have shown interest to take part in the January 7 national election until Sunday. They have also written letters to the commission in this regard.

They are sending letters to the commission letting the latter know who will be signing nomination papers of candidates on behalf of their parties and whether they want to take part in the polls under an alliance.

EC sources said besides these 23 parties, Gonoforum also sent a letter to the EC mentioning its General Secretary Mizanur Rahman will sign nomination papers of their party contestants.

Contacted, Mizanur said he did this in response to a prior letter sent to the EC from a Gonoforum leader, who identified himself as the party's executive chairman. He also claimed that he would be signing the nomination papers for the party.

"We did it so that EC does not allocate our symbol to anyone. It has no relation with joining the polls. Moreover, our central committee on November 25

decided that we will not take part in the election," Mizanur told this newspaper.

EC sources said Awami League, Jatiya Party (Manju), Krishak Shramik Janata League, Gonotantri Party, Bangladesh National Awami Party (Bangladesh Nap), Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu), Zaker Party, Bangladesh Tarikat Federation, National People's Party, Gono Front, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (Mukit), Islamic Front Bangladesh, Islami Oikya Jote, Bangladesh Islami Front, Bangladesh Nationalist Front, Bangladesh Congress, Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal, Bikolpodhara Bangladesh, Trinamool BNP, Bangladesh Nationalist Movement, and Bangladesh Supreme Party, have shown interests to take part in the polls.

The six parties who want to use "boat" as their symbol alongside their own are Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu), Samyabadi Dal, Jatiya Party (JP-Monju), Bangladesh Tarikat Federation, and Ganotanti Party, EC sources said.

Meanwhile, Jatiya Party's chief patron



A group of women fight their way towards a TCB truck in front of TNT colony in the capital's Motijheel yesterday. With the prices of essentials soaring, locals, including the elderly and children, have to wait for hours and compete with others to buy daily essentials at subsidised prices.

Blockade Wednesday, hartal Thursday

BNP calls for fresh programmes; arson continues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday called for a nationwide blockade on Wednesday, and a hartal on Thursday.

Senior BNP joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi made the announcement at a virtual press briefing yesterday evening after the party's seventh spell of 48-hour blockade ended amid arson attacks on public transport.

Yesterday, Dhaka witnessed a significant increase in vehicular movement, creating traffic congestions in some places.

Meanwhile, at least eight vehicles were torched in six districts during the blockade yesterday.

2018 VIOLENCE CASE

28 BNP leaders, activists indicted

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against 28 leaders and activists of BNP, including its Publicity Secretary Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annie, in a 2018 violence case.

BNP joint secretary generals Khairul Kabir Khokon and Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel, Jubo Dal's former president Saiful Alam Nirob and BNP's Dhaka south city member secretary Rafiqul Alam Majnu are among the accused.

Annie, Khokon, Nirob and Majnu, now in jail, and 14 others, now on bail, pleaded not guilty and demanded justice after Dhaka metropolitan Magistrate Md Ali Haider read out the charges.

The court set December 6 for starting the trial.

Among the accused, Sohel, BNP's volunteer affairs secretary Mir Sarafat Ali Safu, and eight others are on the run.

According to the case statement, a group of leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations gathered in front of Hotel Bakshi Limited at Fakirapool in the capital's Paltan area around 1:45pm on February 10 of 2018 to protest the conviction of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and her son Tarique Rahman in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

They blasted crude bombs, vandalised vehicles, assaulted law enforcers and prevented them from

BNP'S NAYAPALTAN OFFICE

Abandoned, locked for a month

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP office has been abandoned, heavily guarded and padlocked for a month now.

Fearing arrests, leaders and activists have mostly avoided the area in and around its Nayapaltan headquarters, and few of those who tried making their presence felt have been subsequently held and dealt with, alleged party leaders.

Even a month ago, a festive mood prevailed in the place with thousands of BNP activists chanting anti-government slogans to press their demand for the government's resignation and election under a non-partisan government.

The vibrant scene changed following the violence centring the party's October 28 rally. The rally was foiled within 1 hour and 38 minutes due to clashes between party activists and police.

Now, policemen in two groups guard the office round the clock.

Meanwhile, BNP is holding press conferences virtually from "undisclosed

locations", with party leaders alleging police are preventing them from entering their office.

During a visit yesterday afternoon, a chair with a handful of Bangla newspapers on it was visible through

During a visit yesterday afternoon, a chair with handful of Bangla newspapers on it was visible through the collapsible gate, and the front desk and surroundings were covered in thick layers of dust. No activists were seen nearby, although a countryside blockade called by the party was underway.

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No way to defer polls after Jan 28

Say 3 ECs

STAR REPORT

Three election commissioners yesterday said they are bound by the constitution to hold the national election by January 28.

Even if the BNP or any other party applies for rescheduling the polls, the Election Commission has nothing to do without following the constitutional bindings.

"We want all parties to join the polls, but we never said we will defer the election date. If any party applies for rescheduling, we will sincerely try to consider it in the commission's meeting, and decide after discussion. We have bindings to conduct the oath [for the next elected candidates] by January 28," said election commissioner Md Ahsan Habib Khan.

"If it [rescheduling] is possible by the time frame, we must do it," he said at Khulna District Commissioner's office after conducting a view-exchange meeting with government officials in Khulna division.

"The ongoing political problems are not our headache. We have no pressure. If there is any pressure [from outside] on the government, that will be taken care of by the political persons," he added.



4 suffer burns in chemical drum blast

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four persons were burnt in a chemical drum explosion in Dhaka's Agargaon area yesterday morning.

The injured were rushed to National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

They are Rafiqul Islam, 19, Mozaffar Haque, 26, Saralal Das, 45, and Rafiqul Islam, 35. The accident took place as they were working in the basement of an under-construction building in Taltola around 9:30am.

Mozaffar said the chemical drum was taken to the basement for use as a water storage container. As workers started cutting the upper part of the drum with a grinding machine, an explosion took place, leading to the fire.

Four of the workers suffered burn injuries.

The injured suspected that gas had accumulated inside the drum and there was an explosion when it came into contact with the spark caused by the grinding machine.



It has been a month since the BNP headquarters in the capital's Nayapaltan remains padlocked following the violence centring its October 28 rally. Meanwhile, law enforcers continue to stand guard in front of the party office once vibrant with activists and supporters.

DECLINE OF FEMALE WORKERS

Harassment, lack of security key reasons: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and inadequate security at workplace are key reasons for the declining women workers' participation in the readymade garment sector, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

The roundtable titled "Investing to Prevent Violence Against Women", was organised by IndustriAll Bangladesh Council (IBC) at CIRDAP, marking International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women.

According to Bangladesh Gender Platform and Institute of Labour studies, sexual complaints committee exist at most factories. However, most of them are inactive.

"The rights of female workers need to be protected to building a strong future workforce. Ratification of ILO Convention 190 and proper implementation of HC's 2009 rule can bring positive change," said Md Anamul Hoque, director of labour department.

Kutubuddin Ahmed, secretary general of IBC, asserted the importance of mandating anti-harassment committees at all factories and raising awareness on the existing laws and policies among workers to combat this issue.

"Women must hold management level positions and actively participate in decision making to ensure safety at workplaces," said Monika Hatsel, deputy country director of Solidarity Center Bangladesh.

ANM Saifuddin, chairman of Standing Committee of ILO and labour affairs, BGMEA; Md Shakil Akter Chowdhury, chairman of WRC; and Bablu Rahman, country manager of Fair Wear Foundation, also spoke.

PHOTO: SAJJAD HOSSAIN