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Resisting polls on BNP’s mind

Party leaders say changes in strategy on the cards

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Struggling to bring its oust-government movement to a climax, the BNP now plans to resist the January 7 parliamentary election.

In order to press home its demands for polls under a non-partisan administration, the party has been enforcing hartals and blockades since October 29, the day after its rally was foiled following clashes and violence.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission has announced the polls schedule, and the ruling Awami League and Jatiya Party have unveiled their nominations for 298 and 289 seats respectively.

BNP leaders said their movement will see some changes in strategy as the focus will now be on ways to resist the vote.

They added that their campaign to oust the government appears to be running out of steam due to a flurry of electoral activities by the ruling party, especially in urban areas.

“We still demand polls under a non-partisan government. But for that to happen, we must resist the vote now.”

He, however, could not elaborate on the new strategy.

Since October 29, the BNP has called hartals and blockades for four days every week. It also rejected the election schedule, saying that free and fair polls cannot be

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PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Fishermen of Sylhet’s Gowainghat upazila casting their nets into the Piyain river yesterday. However, they say they have not been getting enough fish due to pollution and erosion in the river. Some of them said they solely depend on this river for their livelihoods.

‘Environment officials managed by kiln owners’

HC slams DoE, DCCs for failure to check air pollution, curb spread of dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday blasted the Department of Environment (DoE) and Dhaka city corporations for failing to prevent air pollution and dengue infection in and around the capital despite its repeated directives.

“They [DoE officials] give permission to the illegal brick kiln owners to operate as they are managed by the owners. They do not need fresh air because most of their children live abroad, and they have fresh air there. Dhaka city corporations could not control dengue even though numerous people died from the disease and got infected. They are apparently not trying to control the outbreak,” Justice KM Kamrul Kader and Justice Khizir Hayat Liza told the lawyers of the DoE and the city corporations while hearing a writ petition.

The court ordered the DoE and the city corporations to comply with its previous directives on controlling the air pollution in Dhaka within the next two weeks. It also fixed December 11 for passing further order on the issue.

After filing of the petition by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), the HC in February 2021 ordered the Fire Service and Civil Defence to take necessary steps to spray water using its vehicles on roads at the entrances to the capital, including Gabotli, Jatrabari, Purbachal, Keraniganj, and Tongi, on an urgent basis.

The fire service would do the job without compromising its main duty of dousing flames, the HC said.

It ordered the Dhaka Wasa managing director to take measures for supplying sufficient water for spraying on the city streets.

The court also asked the Dhaka north and the south

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Irish writer Lynch wins Booker Prize



REUTERS, London

Irish writer Paul Lynch won the 2023 Booker Prize on Sunday for his novel ‘Prophet Song’, the story of a family and a country on the brink of catastrophe as an imaginary Irish government veers towards tyranny.

The novel, Lynch’s fifth, seeks to show the unrest in Western democracies and their indifference towards disasters such as the implosion of Syria.

“From that first knock at the door, ‘Prophet Song’ forces us out of our complacency as we follow the terrifying plight of a woman seeking to protect her family in an Ireland descending into totalitarianism,” Esi Edugyan, chair of the Booker’s 2023 judges, said. “This is a triumph

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Truce in Gaza extended by 2 days

Say US, Qatar, Hamas officials

REUTERS, Cairo/Jerusalem

Mediator Qatar said yesterday a truce between Israeli and Hamas forces in Gaza had been extended by two days, continuing a pause in seven weeks of warfare that has killed thousands and laid waste to the Palestinian enclave.

“An agreement has been reached to extend the humanitarian truce for an additional two days in the Gaza Strip,” a Qatari foreign ministry spokesperson said in a post on social media platform X.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, but a White House official confirmed an agreement had been reached.

Hamas also said it had agreed a two-day extension to the truce with Qatar and Egypt, who have been facilitating indirect negotiations between the two sides.

“An agreement has been reached with the brothers in Qatar and Egypt to extend the temporary humanitarian truce by two more days, with the same conditions as in the previous truce,” a Hamas official said in a phone call with Reuters.

None of the announcements specified how many hostages would be released, but earlier the head of Egypt’s State Information Service, Diaa Rashwan, had said the deal being negotiated would include the release of 20 Israeli hostages from among those seized by Hamas during its Oct. 7 assault on southern Israel. In exchange 60

With the release of 11 Israeli hostages scheduled to take place yesterday, negotiations remain ongoing for the release of 33 Palestinians.

Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails would be freed, he said.

The initial four-day truce was due to end last night. With the release of 11 Israeli hostages scheduled to take place yesterday, negotiations remain ongoing for the release of 33 Palestinians, Rashwan added.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The truce agreed last week was the first halt in fighting in the seven weeks since Hamas attacked Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking about 240 hostages back into Gaza, according to Israeli tallies.

In response to that attack, Israel has bombarded the enclave and mounted a ground offensive in the north. Some 14,800 Palestinians have been killed, Gaza health authorities say, and hundreds of thousands displaced.

Wide areas of the Hamas-ruled enclave have been flattened by Israeli air strikes and artillery bombardments, and a humanitarian crisis has unfolded as supplies of food, fuel, drinking water and medicine run out.

The truce agreement also allowed for aid trucks to enter Gaza.

On Sunday, Hamas freed 17 people, including a 4-year-old Israeli-American girl, bringing the total number the militant group has released since Friday to 58, including foreigners. Israel freed 39 teenage Palestinian prisoners on Sunday, taking the total number of Palestinians freed under the truce to 117.

Some foreign nations’ intent questionable

Says CEC, fair elections needed to save economy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal said the upcoming 12th parliamentary election should be free, fair, and credible for the sake of the country’s economy and future.

It is unfortunate that some countries are trying to meddle in the polls, he said.

“Other than a few exceptions, most countries are not truly sovereign. The way the US can command us, we can’t do the same to them,” the CEC said while inaugurating a training programme for the electoral enquiry committee at the Electoral Training Institute in the capital.

“To save us, to save the people, to save the garment sector, it is the demand of the country’s people and



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US policy on free polls beneficial to Bangladesh

Says Momen

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US is supporting Bangladesh through its insistence on a free and fair election, said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday.

“We want free and fair elections and the US wants the same,” he said while talking to journalists at the foreign ministry.

So, those who are trying to impede the national elections should face the US visa policy that was announced in May, he said.

Under the visa policy, the US can decline the visa application or cancel the existing visas of those found to be undermining democracy.

The poll results will be acceptable by all, including foreigners, even if the BNP does not participate if the election is free and fair, Momen said.

In many countries, even in the US, the elections are held without many parties participating in it, he said.

“So, it is not a big deal at all if the BNP does not join the polls though the government wants it to join.”

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Star SPORT

First BD-NZ Test starts in Sylhet today

Bangladesh and New Zealand will begin their campaign in the 2023-25 cycle of the ICC Test Championship with the first Test of the two-match series at the SICS in Sylhet today. Najmul Hossain Shanto is set to become the country’s 13th Test captain in absence of Shakib Al Hasan.

This will be the second ever Test at the venue, the first held between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe in 2018.

STORY ON PAGE 11



A woman carries a child as Palestinians fleeing north Gaza move southward during a temporary truce between Israel and Hamas, near Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

DRAFT DATA PROTECTION ACT

Cabinet okays it giving free rein to law enforcers

Agencies can collect any data from data subjects if deemed necessary for nat’l security or prevention of offence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved in principle the draft Data Protection Act, which retains provisions for law enforcers to have unfettered access to citizens’ data.

This was the first cabinet meeting since the announcement of the election schedule on November 15.

Since the very first draft of the act, stakeholders have been pointing out that keeping the provisions for law enforcement without oversight is tantamount to shooting oneself in the foot.

About a prior draft, Transparency International Bangladesh in March said the law would put the entire society under surveillance. It recommended that requests for access to data should be published in a monthly transparency report.

In October, Access Now and Tech Global Institute sent recommendations to the law and ICT ministries on a later draft, which was presented before the cabinet yesterday.

They pointed out that “discretion to access data

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