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AL NOMINEES

In quest for convenient rivals

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Many Awami League nominees find themselves in a dicey situation, as they may have to face a tough challenge from party colleagues running as independents or incur the high command's wrath for an uncontested win.

They have figured a possible way out though. They are requesting smaller political parties to field candidates in their constituencies. If they have a half-decent opponent, they will try to dissuade the party from allowing other AL leaders to run as independents because the latter would pose a formidable challenge.

AL sources said the nominees believe this will achieve two goals: the election in their constituencies will not go uncontested and the candidates of smaller parties will be easier to beat on January 7 than their AL colleagues.

The AL ticket winners are being picky about which parties they are reaching out to.

They do not want too weak an opponent as it will reflect badly on them and may not be enough to keep the party from fielding "AL independents".

They are going for parties that have a decent number of votes in the bank.

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Six-year-old Siyam is determined to get his baba back. Accompanied by his mother and cousin, he holds aloft the photograph of his father, Abul Kalam, 35, ex-organising secretary of Mirpur-6 T-block Swetchhasebak Dal, at a human chain outside the Jatiya Press Club, where families of arrested BNP members yesterday gathered to demand the release of their dear ones.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

'Give back our loved ones'

Families of detained BNP leaders, activists hold human chain demanding their release

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Six-year-old Siyam stood in front of the Jatiya Press Club with his mother yesterday, showing everyone a photo of his father and pleading, "Release my father."

His father Abul Kalam, 35, was arrested on November 17 from their Mirpur house as part of the police crackdown on opposition BNP.

Kalam is a former general secretary of Swetchhasebak Dal, a pro-BNP organisation, in the capital's Mirpur-6. "I want to see my father," he said, and sobbed hard.

Siyam's mother Ruma Akter said she is clueless as to why police arrested her husband.

"I went to see him in jail three days ago. He said police tortured him in custody. He is sick," she said.

Like Siyam and his mother, more than 70 relatives, mostly women, of recently detained BNP leaders and activists joined the human chain. The event was organised under a newly formed platform named

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

More and more people now flocking to OMS trucks

SUKANTA HALDER and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Leaving his chicken shop to his salesman, Abul Kashem rushed to gate-1 of New Market around 11:00am yesterday to buy essentials from a mobile shop of the government's Open Market Sale programme.

But he found some 20 people waiting in a queue behind the truck to buy the goods at subsidised prices. "The soaring prices have forced me to come here. My small business is not doing too well either," said 55-year-old Kashem, whose shop is at a nearby kitchen market.

He said his daily sales was around Tk 20,000 just about a year ago, but it has almost halved now.

"Things have become very difficult for me. Buying commodities for my five-member family at subsidised rates gives me some relief. But I don't know how long I will have to wait in line," said Kashem.

It took him almost an hour to buy 5kg rice for Tk 150. But some people had to return home empty-handed as the shop soon ran out of goods.

The Open Market Sale programme

is aimed at cushioning the blow of rising food prices for the low-income people. The food ministry runs 964 OMS shops across the country, including 110 in the capital where rice and flour are sold, while the

inflation stood at 12.56 percent in October this year, the highest in at least a decade. Non-food inflation advanced 48 basis points to 8.3 percent last month.

TCB data shows the price of

PRODUCT (IN KG/LITRE)	YESTERDAY'S PRICE	PRICE A MONTH AGO
Fine rice	Tk 62 to Tk 75	Tk 60 to Tk 72
Coarse rice	Tk 50 to Tk 52	Tk 48 to Tk 52
Flour (loose)	Tk 45 to Tk 50	Tk 42 to Tk 45
Soybean oil (loose)	Tk 150 to Tk 155	Tk 140 to Tk 145
Onion (local)	Tk 100 to Tk 120	Tk 95 to Tk 100
Onion (imported)	Tk 90 to Tk 100	Tk 75 to Tk 85
Sugar	Tk 145 to Tk 150	Tk 130 to Tk 135

SOURCE: TCB

Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) has 30 in the capital selling onions, potatoes, lentils and soybean oil.

The TCB sells essentials at fair prices to one crore low-income families that have the "family cards", officials said.

According to BBS data, food

fine rice increased by 2.24 percent in the last one year, coarse lentils increased by 2.38 percent, potatoes 85.11 percent, local onions 193.33 percent, imported Indian onions 153.33 percent and broiler chicken by 6.78 percent.

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AL to share seats with 14-party allies Says Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The confusion over the Awami League sharing seats with its 14-party allies is apparently clearing up as AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said his party will share seats with its alliance partners after observing the political situation.

"The Awami League will have candidates in all 300 seats. But if there is a consensus, some seats will be left for the alliance members," he told journalists at the AL president's Dhanmondi office in the afternoon.

Quader said December 17 is the last day for withdrawal of candidature in the upcoming national election and the AL will observe the situation till the date and will adjust strategy.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

BB goes shopping to private banks for dollar

Buys \$70m from crisis-hit Islami Bank this week

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Bangladesh Bank is hunting for dollars to rebuild its depleting foreign exchange reserves ahead of the January 7 national election.

As part of the move, the banking regulator has approached private commercial banks, most of whom are in short supply of the greenback and have been struggling to settle letters of credit, The Daily Star has learnt from bank executives who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Finally, the BB was able to buy \$70 million on Monday and Tuesday from Islami Bank, which is facing a shortage of both taka and dollar.

BB Spokesperson Md Mezbaul Haque acknowledged the dollar purchase from Islami Bank: \$50 million was bought on Monday and \$20 million on Tuesday at the interbank exchange rate of Tk 110.5 per dollar.

"We will buy more dollars from commercial banks if they are sitting on excess and this type of transaction is normal. We need to raise our foreign exchange reserves," Haque added.



SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



An elderly man showing a token that mentions his spot in the queue for buying essentials from a TCB truck. Employees of the TCB outlet issued 300 tokens after reaching the spot in the Malibagh Level Crossing area yesterday. Inset, people buying potatoes, soybean oil, and pulse after enduring a long wait in the queues.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র থাকলেই ভোটার নয়

নির্বাচন কমিশন ১৮ বছর বা তদুর্ধ্ব বয়সী বাংলাদেশী নাগরিকদের পাশাপাশি ১৬ ও ১৭ বছর বয়সীদেরকেও জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র প্রদান করে থাকেন, তবে তারা ভোটার নয়।

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