

Sylhet in election mood following PM's rally

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Sylhet buzzed with election excitement yesterday as hundreds of Awami League activists, decked out in national and party flags, gathered at Alia Madrasa field for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's grand rally.

The vibrant spectacle included a stage crafted in the shape of a massive boat. The city, decorated for the occasion, welcomed the PM after five years, with festoons and banners adorning all routes travelled by her motorcade.

Although the campaigns for the January 7 national election kicked off last Monday, it seemed the real festivities surrounding the polls officially started with this rally.

Following a longstanding custom, Hasina, also the AL president, officially started her polls campaign after offering prayers at the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shahporan (RA).

Bangladesh Railway organised four special trains at AL's request, carrying people from Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts. Almost all inter-district buses were also seen carrying party activists in and out of the city.

Sheikh Mohammad Ilias of Gopalganj's Kotalipara was seen with a unique boat-shaped hat on his head.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



With a replica of a "boat" (the electoral symbol of Awami League) leading the way, AL supporters bring out a procession in the capital's Farmgate area yesterday in support of their candidate.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

No AL independents in 16 Dhaka seats

Some competition in 3, one left for JP

MD ABBAS and ASHIK ABDULLAH
APU

While the ruling Awami League nominees will face strong challenges from their party colleagues running as independents in many constituencies across the country, the picture seems to be quite different in Dhaka.

It will likely to be smooth sailing for AL picks in 16 out of 20 seats in the capital due to the absence of strong opponents. Besides, in Dhaka-18, AL withdrew its candidate to facilitate an easy run for Jatiya Party candidate Sherifa Quader.

AL has candidates in 266 constituencies, while party leaders who didn't get nominations, including former lawmakers, are running as independents in at least 128 seats.

In Dhaka-13, AL presidium member Jahangir Kabir Nanak is likely to get an easy run as all five of his opponents are from little-known parties like Bangladesh Islami Front and newly formed parties like Bangladesh Supreme Party.

No one from Jatiya Party is vying for the seat, and there's no strong independent candidate as well in the constituency comprising Mohammadpur, Adabor, and Sher-e-Bangla Nagar areas.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan will not face any independent candidate in Dhaka-12. Although a JP candidate is running against him, he is unlikely to cause any headaches for him.

The situation is similar in Dhaka-1 and Dhaka-2 where AL heavyweights Salman F Rahman and Md Kamrul Islam are the party's candidates.

The main competitor for Salman is Salma – an MP from a reserved seat for women and co-chairman of the Jatiya Party. Salman won when the two faced off in 2018 at Dhaka-1 (Dohar and Nawabganj).

Likewise, in Dhaka 3, 4 and 5, it will be smooth sailing for Nasrul Hamid, Sanjida Khanom and Harunor Rashid Munna respectively. The same can be said for Sayeed Khokon, AL candidate in Dhaka-6 and Mohammad Solaiman Selim in Dhaka-7.

The pattern continues as heavyweight candidates AFM

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

BOALKHALI-CHANDGAON Ctg-8 to get fourth lawmaker in 5 years

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

The Chattogram 8 (Boalkhali Chandgaon) constituency will get its fourth lawmaker in five years in the upcoming national polls.

When Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal executive president Mayeen Uddin Khan Badal was nominated as Awami League-led 14-party alliance candidate from Chattogram-8 in 2008, local AL men were not pleased, but accepted the party decision.

Badal went on to become a three-time lawmaker from the constituency till 2018.

However, the situation changed after Badal's demise on November 7, 2019.

Chattogram South district unit President Moslem Uddin Ahmed was elected following by-polls held on January 12, 2020. After three years, Moslem passed away from cancer on February 6, 2023. Then AL's Chattogram city unit Organising Secretary Noman Al Mahmud got elected from by-polls on April 27, 2023.

Noman secured the AL's nomination for this constituency for the upcoming national polls. Yet, on the last day of candidacy withdrawal, AL opted to sacrifice the seat for a Jatiya Party candidate following negotiations, thwarting Noman's chance for a second term as a lawmaker.

JP nominated its Central Vice Chairman Solaiman Alam Seth for Chattogram-8.

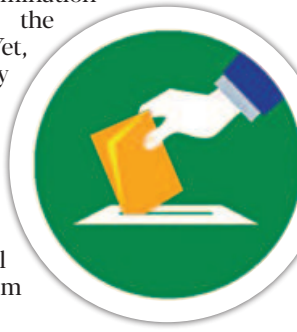
IT'S SOLAIMAN VS SALAM

The voting battle in the seat will be held mainly between Solaiman and Abdus Salam, an independent candidate who failed to secure AL's nomination.

Nine other candidates from eight other parties are also contesting in this constituency.

Salam was a former chairman of Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) and treasurer of Chattogram city unit AL.

According to sources, none of the 10 candidates have ever been elected lawmaker before. So, no matter who the voters elect, the constituency will have a new lawmaker.



SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

'King's parties' offices gather dust

No election activities visible in BNM, BSP, Trinamool BNP headquarters



The office of Trinamool BNP on Topkhana Road.

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

A few months ago, much speculation surrounded the roles of "king's parties" (allegedly created or sponsored by strong actors to further their cause) in the upcoming national polls.

However, as time progresses, it is becoming evident that these parties might be contesting the polls just for the sake of it.

This newspaper found the offices of Bangladesh Nationalist Movement (BNM), Bangladesh Supreme Party (BSP), and Trinamool BNP deserted in a recent visit.

At first glance, there is an apparent disconnect, with no visible signs of participation in an election less than a month away.

However, the scenario was different a month ago, when long



The locked BNM office in Gulshan-2.

lines of nomination aspirants were seen in front of their office premises. But over the last two weeks, no senior leaders, activists, or candidates have been visiting the offices, said party insiders and locals.

According to Election Commission data, 1,895 candidates will run in the upcoming parliamentary election. Of them, 133 are from Trinamool BNP, 79 from BSP, and 54 from BNM.

The three parties have been registered with the EC during the tenure of the incumbent commission.

During a visit to BNM's Gulshan-2 office around 11:00am on Tuesday, this correspondent found the main gate was locked, with no party members visible even after an hour of waiting.



The "deserted" BSP office in Mirpur-1.

Only a tiny signboard perched above the entrance of a white building that reads, "BNM Office, Third Floor," confirms the existence of a political party in the area.

"The BNM office doesn't have a fixed opening time; occasionally some activities are seen around late afternoon," said Kamal Hossain, who works in an electronics shop opposite the party office.

Similarly, this newspaper only saw a security guard while visiting the BSP office in Mirpur's Shah Ali Bagh recently. The building that hosts the office is locally known as "Khanka Sharif," and most locals are seemingly oblivious to any political party's existence in the area.

The BSP central, Dhaka, and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Polls campaign goes online

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Aspirants from the constituencies in Dinaipur, Rangpur and Joypurhat have geared up their electioneering ahead of the 12th parliamentary polls following the distribution of electoral symbols on Monday.

The campaigns are gaining momentum, particularly on social media platforms, notably Facebook, alongside the usual trend of using loudspeakers, banners, and posters which started from yesterday.

After the symbols were distributed, a wave of vibrant black and white election posters of the candidates flooded social media, urging voters to rally for them in their respective constituencies.

Both Awami League and independent candidates from different constituencies in Dinaipur, Rangpur, and Joypurhat, and their supporters actively engaged in social media by sharing their posters on Facebook immediately after securing their electoral symbols on Monday.

The posts on Facebook sparked interactions, with individuals expressing their opinions through comments while some were sharing candidates' portraits alongside their electoral symbols, said Sohel Rana from Hakimpur upazila of Dinaipur.

The digital space is essentially becoming a crucial battleground for candidates to connect with voters, showcasing the power of social media in influencing public opinion.

Masud Rana, a resident of Dinaipur town, who shared a poster and portrait of AL candidate M Iqbalur Rahim from Dinaipur-3 (Sadar), said Facebook is an effective way to reach maximum voters without any hassle, complementing traditional election campaigns.

Biswajit Ghosh Kanchan, a candidate from Dinaipur-3, garnered attention as netizens shared videos of him on Facebook.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Demand for locally-made firearms on rise: police

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Ctg

The demand for locally-made firearms has risen in Chattogram and Cox's Bazar ahead of the upcoming national election slated for January 7 next year, according to the law enforcers.

The information came to light after Chattogram police seized a firearms consignment of at least six locally-made pistols this month.

The seizure of firearms has highlighted the possibility of violence during polls as many independents are contesting against Awami League candidates in different constituencies of Chattogram and Cox's Bazar.

Chattogram Metropolitan Police officials said criminals are trying to smuggle in illegal locally-made firearms from Cox's Bazar's Ramu upazila and the border areas along the hills.

"Police are trying to trace out the whole syndicate," said a CMP official.

According to CMP officials and Rab sources, each locally-made firearm sells for Tk 20,000-40,000.

Mostafizur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Chattogram

(south), said, "We have information that locally-made firearms are being smuggled in the city from border areas ahead of the election. We don't want to elaborate the details now as an investigation is ongoing."

The issue was discussed during a meeting on the district's law and order on December 11 at Chattogram Circuit House, where officials expressed concerns that firearms may be used illegally during the polls.

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Meanwhile, Rab-15 in Cox's Bazar busted a firearms factory in a hilly area on December 13 and seized at least eight such firearms and raw materials for making guns and ammunition.

"It's true that the demand

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



PHOTO: TITU DAS

A man sets up a loudspeaker on top of a battery-run three-wheeler near Bangabandhu Udyan in Barishal city yesterday. With campaigning going on in full swing, many are hiring such vehicles to roam the streets and alleys from 2:00pm to 8:00pm every day to seek votes. The 12th national election is slated for January 7.

RAJSHAHI POLLS AL grassroots 'siding' with independents

ANWAR ALL, Rajshahi

At least four Awami League candidates in Rajshahi contesting the upcoming national polls with the "boat" symbol are facing hurdles to win the support of the party's grassroots.

Many local AL activists are rallying behind independent candidates within the party's ranks, putting the ruling party candidates in an uncomfortable position.

The pattern has been visible since campaigning began.

"I have doubts about having support of local Awami League leaders and activists," said Fazle Hossain Badsha, Workers' Party general secretary who is contesting with the "boat" symbol from Rajshahi-2.

City AL vice president Shafiqur Rahman Badsha, who is contesting as an independent candidate from the same constituency, almost lost his candidacy first by the order of the returning officer, then the Election Commission and finally the High Court.

But he managed to find his way back into the race after the Supreme Court declared his candidacy legitimate.

"Local [AL] leaders won't side with

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7