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CANDIDATES' WEALTH INFO

# EC can but doesn't verify claims properly

BAHARAM KHAN

The Election Commission accepts the aspirants' wealth statements but never takes any initiative to properly verify the accounts.

This raises questions over the commission's sincerity in holding the candidates accountable and ensuring transparency, say campaigners for good governance.

According to former NBR chairman Badiur Rahman, the EC could exercise its inherent powers and ask the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to verify the wealth claims.

"The Election Commission can ask the NBR to scrutinise the claims. If there are doubts, the Anti-Corruption Commission can be engaged too," he told The Daily Star.

As article 126 of the constitution makes it mandatory for all executive authorities to assist the EC, the institutions are bound to cooperate if the EC seeks their support.

On the other hand, the Representation of the People (amended) Act, 2023, does not make it mandatory for the EC to scrutinise the candidates' wealth statements.

Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman said it is not the EC's responsibility to scrutinise wealth statements.

**As article 126 of the constitution makes it mandatory for all executive authorities to assist the EC, the institutions are bound to cooperate if the EC seeks their support.**

If the NBR or ACC want, they can verify the claims about wealth, Anisur told The Daily Star recently.

However, Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said even though the EC is not bound to verify wealth statements, it can and should do it for the sake of ensuring transparency.

"The Election Commission's way of recording the candidates' wealth information is nothing but paperwork. We don't know if any candidate was ever quizzed about their wealth," he said.

The EC is supposed to upload the candidates' affidavits on its website immediately after receiving them, but it takes weeks to do it, he said.

Former election commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain said the wealth details submitted by candidates must be scrutinised.

"If they could not do it on a short notice, there should be a system to do it after the election," he added.

Affidavits are a requirement for anyone participating in an election. Lying in the affidavits is punishable by up to three years in prison under the criminal law.

There is a provision in the Representation of the People Act, 2023, to cancel the candidacy of an aspirant for lying under oath.

The Supreme Court in 2007 asked the EC to collect the wealth

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**FIELD OF GOLD...** Farmers harvesting Aman paddy grown on the Gumai beel – one of the largest paddy fields in the country, with an area spanning 3,000 hectares. The second largest beel in the country after Chalan beel, it starts from Mariamnagar in Rangunia upazila and ends at Rangamati's Nishchintapur. For its fertility, Gumai is known as the grain storehouse of Chattogram. Earlier this year, there was a bumper yield of Boro paddy on this field as well. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## BB reconstitutes National Bank board

Ron and Rick Sikder, their mother no longer directors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank yesterday reconstituted the board of National Bank, in a move that is expected to steady the ship at the country's first private sector bank beset by financial irregularities.

The step was taken in the interest of the depositors and the bank and to ensure good governance following a recommendation from the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, the BB said in the order to dissolve the previous board of the National Bank.

The board disrupted good governance and banking discipline, which went against the interests of the bank and the depositors, the order said.

The previous board violated rules while approving loans, made undue interference in the day-to-day running of the bank, abused their positions to cannibalise the shareholding of the bank to one family, indulged in financial irregularities and created complexities in electing or re-electing directors.

Besides, the bank's financial health deteriorated due to the weakness of the board

in policymaking, the BB order added.

Syed Ferhat Anwar, a former professor at the University of Dhaka's Institute of Business Administration, is the new chairman of National Bank, replacing Monowara Sikder. He was appointed the chairman on the condition that he resign as the independent director of Meghna Bank, a post he held since October 2020.

Moazzem Hossain, who is the chairman of Hosaf Group and one of the founders of National Bank, has been reinstated on the board. At the bank's 39th annual general meeting, Hossain and his son Mabroor were ousted from the board.

Md Serajul Islam, a former BB spokesman, and M Kamal Hossain, a former managing director of Southeast Bank, have been added to the board.

KDS Group Chairman Khalilur Rahman, Awami League MP Parveen Haque Sikder and Md. Shafiqur Rahman stay on as directors.

Parveen's brothers Ron Haque Sikder and Rick Haque Sikder were removed from the board along with Zakaria Taher, Murshid Kuli Khan and the AL's Panchagarh-1 candidate Md. Naimuzzaman Bhuiyan Mukta.

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## Won't tolerate any violence

Hasina warns AL leaders and activists, asks them to carry out electioneering peacefully

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for maintaining peace during campaigning for the January 7 national election.

"Don't interfere in another's rights. In case of any violence, even if members of my party get engaged in it, they won't be spared. I will take proper action against them. Keep it in mind," she said.

Hasina, who is also the prime minister, issued the warning while addressing rallies in five districts – Panchagarh, Lalmonirhat, Natore, Pabna and Khagrachhari – through a virtual platform from the AL office in the capital's Tejgaon.

She said the people will cast their votes in the 12th parliamentary polls as it is their constitutional right.

"We want the people to exercise their votes freely. They can pick and vote for whoever they want."

Democracy will have to be further strengthened or else

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POLLS VIOLENCE

US team to arrive today to analyse incidents

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A US team of experts is scheduled to arrive in Bangladesh today to record and assess incidents of electoral violence before, during, and after the January 7 national polls, a diplomatic source told The Daily Star.

The team, comprising officials from the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), will include five long-term analysts who will stay in Bangladesh for six to eight weeks.

The technical assessment will include a thematic analysis of different types of election-time violence, including inter and intra-

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Police officials were seen frisking and checking the passengers at the Agargaon metro rail station yesterday. Due to recent arson attacks on trains and buses, law enforcers have been deployed at metro stations across the city to assist the MRT police unit and amp up security ahead of the January 7 polls.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## 135 BNP-Jamaat men sentenced in a single day

They were sued between 2010 and 2018 over political violence

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Another 135 leaders and activists of BNP-Jamaat and their front organisations were sentenced to different jail terms yesterday in five cases filed in 2010, 2013, and 2018 over political violence in the capital.

With this, at least 1,231 BNP-Jamaat activists have been jailed since November 7 this year in 69 cases lodged between November 2010 and December 2018 on charges of illegal gathering on the streets, rioting, damaging properties, arson attacks on vehicles, vandalism, and assaulting police and obstructing them from discharging duties.

In a case filed with Turag Police Station in September 2018, 93 BNP-Jamaat activists were sentenced to three years in prison by a Dhaka court yesterday.

No convicts were present in the courtroom when Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Sheikh Sadi delivered the verdict.

During the trial, eight prosecution witnesses testified before the court. BNP's Turag unit President Atikur Rahman, General Secretary Md Mostofa, Organising Secretary Md Salam, Uttara Paschim unit President Kudrat-e-Elahi Liton, and Jamaat's Turag unit General Secretary Md Muzammel are among the convicts.

According to the case statement, on September 13, 2018, a group of leaders and activists of BNP-Jamaat illegally gathered near Dhaur intersection.

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