



A parliament of 'all stripes' on AL's mind

Ruling party moves to help out a select few in polls

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

In a bid to make sure the next parliament looks like it has representatives from different political parties, the Awami League is asking its grassroots to support several aspirants from other parties.

The ruling party had decided to allow its leaders to run as independents in the January 7 national election so that the polls appear competitive and participatory and more people get out to vote. But now it is favouring aspirants from other parties in some constituencies, insiders say.

Some chosen aspirants from Trinamool BNP, Kalyan Party, and Jatiya Party and several former BNP leaders will get the free ride to parliament, said sources, adding that these individuals otherwise stand no chance of becoming MPs.

In six constituencies, leaders of AL's allies are running with the AL symbol. They are pitted against the AL leaders running as independents. In most of such constituencies, the ruling party has asked its grassroots to support the person who has the boat symbol, not the so-called AL independent.

"The 14-party leaders competing with our symbol are our candidates, and our grassroots must work to ensure their win. This is our directive," an AL central committee member involved in the process told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

Over the last few days, AL activists in Sylhet-5 constituency were asked to campaign for Moulana Husamuddin Chowdhury, president of



THE HANGING VILLAGE ... After losing everything to river erosion, the locals of Kalabagi in Sutarkhali union of Khulna's Dakop upazila -- a village bordering the Sundarbans -- have had to build makeshift bamboo homes over the river Shibsra. This cluster of dwellings is now known as "Jhulantapara" (the hanging village). Living precariously, people there are also deprived of safe food and water, along with hygienic toilets or medical facilities. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

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a social organisation named Anjumane Al Islah, who is running as an independent.

Sylhet AL President Mashuk Uddin Ahmed was nominated by the AL to run for parliament with the party's boat symbol. But he is not likely to get the grassroots support.

JP leader Shabbir Ahmed, who was vying for the constituency, yesterday quit the race, citing the "absence of a level playing field".

In Sylhet-6, AL leader and former minister Nurul Islam Nahid got the party ticket while another AL leader named Sarwar Hossain is an independent candidate.

But local AL leaders have been on the campaign trail of Trinamool BNP Chairperson and former BNP vice-chairman Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury.

Most leaders of Golapganj upazila AL shared the stage with Shamsher at his campaign rally yesterday.

In Chakaria and Pekua upazilas of Cox's Bazar, AL men are favouring Major General (ret'd) Syed Mohammad Ibrahim, the expelled chairman of Kalyan Party, over AL leader and current MP Zafar Alam.

The AL nominee for the constituency, Salauddin Ahmed, lost his candidacy because of a defaulted loan. Salauddin himself has been seen working for Ibrahim.

At least three JP leaders known as Raushan loyalists -- Rustum Ali Faraji of Pirojpur-3, Mashiur Rahaman Ranga of Rangpur-1, and Ziaul Haque Mridha of Brahmanbaria-2 -- are enjoying the ruling party support in their campaign as independents.

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Vote as you will but don't cause trouble

Hasina tells polls rallies

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged people to vote for her party and ensure its victory to give a befitting reply to the atrocities of BNP-Jamaat.

She was addressing a campaign rally in Rajshahi, Gaibandha, Tangail, Cumilla, Brahmanbaria, and Chattogram's Sandwip virtually from the party office in Dhaka's Tejgaon.

The prime minister said she wants the January 7 election to be held in a free, fair, and neutral manner, which

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BASIC BANK SCAM

Bacchu at large as arrest warrant ever elusive

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Sheikh Abdul Hye Bacchu, the former BASIC Bank chairman accused in 58 cases of embezzling Tk 2,265 crore, remains at large due to delay in issuing the arrest warrant by the court.

Bacchu is the main accused in the charge sheet of the cases submitted by the Anti-Corruption Commission on June 12 with a Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court in Dhaka.

While the law enforcers can arrest Bacchu and the others accused in the charge sheet any time, they are

not doing so as the applications for issuing the arrest warrant against him are pending with a lower court, said Khurshid Alam Khan, ACC's principal lawyer.

When a charge sheet is submitted to the court, there is an option to attach an application for issuing an arrest warrant.

Separate prayers have been placed before the court along with the charge sheets for issuing arrest warrants against Bacchu and others, said Mir Ahmed Ali Salam, public prosecutor for ACC at Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court in Dhaka.

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Polls code breach sees twofold rise in eight days

Shows EC data

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Violation of the electoral code of conduct has more than doubled in the last eight days compared to the previous 34 days, shows Election Commission data.

Until yesterday evening, the electoral enquiry committees, formed by the EC to probe polls irregularities, issued show-cause notices to 589 candidates and their supporters over allegations of breaching the code of conduct.

The number was 256 for the period of November 23 to December 26.

Several EC officials said about 40 percent of violators of the electoral rules are either candidates of the ruling Awami League or their supporters.

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Soldiers returning to their makeshift camp after they reconned the Bangabandhu National Stadium area in Dhaka. The army has been deployed in 62 districts yesterday to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for the January 7 polls.

US closely following case against Prof Yunus

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US is closely following the case against Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof Muhammad Yunus and noted the international condemnations after he was convicted by a court.

A spokesperson for the US State Department noted Yunus's Nobel prize and other honours and said he made a significant contribution to fighting world poverty.

The official, however, stopped short of criticising Monday's ruling by the court that found Yunus, 83, guilty of violating labour laws.

Yunus is credited with lifting millions out of poverty with his pioneering microfinance bank, Grameen Bank.

"We have encouraged the Bangladeshi government to ensure a fair and transparent legal process, and will continue to follow any further developments closely," the spokesperson added.

AFP did not reveal the name of the spokesperson.

Meanwhile, Kerry Kennedy, president of US-based Robert F Kennedy Human Rights, called for immediate reversal of the "unjust conviction" handed to Yunus.

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Covid cases creep up

Experts fear Omicron's subvariant may be responsible

AHMED DEEPTO

The Covid-19 infection rate has been on a sudden rise in the country over the past few days but the reason is yet to be confirmed.

Experts fear that JN.1, a subvariant of Omicron, may be behind it.

Health officials said they have been collecting samples from infected patients for genome sequencing so that they could find out whether JN.1 has infiltrated the country.

They said that though the infection rate saw a sudden rise over the past few days, it might come down within this

month. However, it may spike again around February-March.

"There is no danger in the JN.1 variant, but we are still definitely at risk. We haven't seen such a fast growth in the infection rate in such a short period of time before. This, however, cannot be called the sixth wave," Mushtaq Hossain, public health expert and former advisor of Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star yesterday.

He added that it was also unusual for Covid infection rates to rise in winter.

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