

BNP demands scrapping of 'dummy polls'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming it "dummy polls", the BNP yesterday demanded cancellation of the election and resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"Sheikh Hasina's resignation is the only option. She must resign and the dummy election of January 7 must be cancelled right away," said BNP standing committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan at a press conference in the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office.

The BNP also announced a two-day mass contact programme for today and tomorrow in support of its demand for a fresh election under a non-party polls-time government.

"We will stay on the streets, conduct mass contacts, and distribute leaflets among the people," said Moyeen.

"On behalf of 63 parties, who called for boycott of the polls, we congratulate the country's people for rejecting the election."

Standing committee members Selima Rahman and Nazrul Islam Khan were also present at the briefing.

"A government of the dummy, by the dummy, for the dummy will be established if Sheikh Hasina forms any kind of government through the dummy election," Moyeen said.

He said people want a government elected by their votes, not a "dummy government".

The BNP leader added that his party and other pro-democracy

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



The wreckage of an auto-rickshaw after a truck rammed into the vehicle on Hemayetpur-Singair-Manikganj road in Manikganj's Autpara area yesterday morning. The crash left three people dead. Story on page 5. PHOTO: STAR

4 killed in Russian air strikes across Ukraine

38 hurt; critical infrastructure, residential buildings hit

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia sent dozens of missiles across Ukraine early yesterday, killing at least four civilians and hitting residential areas and commercial sites in its latest combined air attack, Ukrainian authorities said.

Two people were killed in the western Khmelnytskyi region, local officials reported, where critical infrastructure had also been struck.

In Kryvyi Rih, a 62-year-old was killed and a shopping centre and scores of private homes and apartment buildings damaged after nine Russian missiles hit the south central city, said Oleksandr Vilkul, the mayor.

"The mad enemy once again struck civilians," regional governor Serhiy Lysak wrote on the Telegram messaging app. "Directed missiles at people."

Ukraine's National Police said a total of 38 people had been wounded across

the country. Russia said it hit military-industrial targets in Ukraine from sea and air yesterday.

"This morning, a multiple attack was carried out with high-precision, long-range, sea and air-based weapons, including the Kinzhal hypersonic missile system, on facilities of the military-industrial complex of Ukraine," the defence ministry said in a daily dispatch.

Ukraine said its air defences had destroyed 18 out of 51 missiles, a much lower shoot-down rate than normal, which Kyiv attributed to the large number of ballistic missiles fired by Russia which are more difficult to intercept.

"On the one hand, you have lots of missiles not shot down," air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat said on Ukrainian television. "The explanation is simple: they were flying on a ballistic trajectory, and into the regions where we can't shoot them down."

Bomb blast kills 5 cops in Pakistan

TTP claims responsibility

REUTERS, Peshawar

A bomb blast in northwest Pakistan near the Afghan border killed five police officers on polio vaccination guard duty and wounded more than 20 yesterday, the latest in a series of attacks by militants ahead of the February 8 national elections.

The Pakistan Taliban, an umbrella group of militants also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility in a statement sent to Reuters.

The blast hit a truck full of police on their way to guard a polio vaccination drive in the Bajur tribal district, police official Kashif Zulfikar said.

Militants in Pakistan often target polio vaccination teams, believing the immunisation effort is a Western tool to spy on them and make Muslims infertile.

6 of a family burnt in fire

UNB, Narsingdi

Six members of a family, including children, suffered burn injuries in an explosion apparently from a gas leak in Narsingdi's Madhabdi early yesterday.

The injured are Shamim Mia, 40, his wife Akalima Begum, 35, their daughters Sanjida, 18, and Ria Moni, 9, and Shamim's elder brother Ghaffar Mia, 44, and younger brother Rashid Mia, 32.

The incident took place at a house in Gadairchar area of Nuralapur union in Sadar upazila around 3:00am.

The victims were first taken to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital. Later, they were transferred to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery for better treatment.

According to locals, a person named Manik Mia of Algi area has been providing illegal gas connections to houses in the area for a long time. Recently, Manik Mia provided an illegal gas connection to the house of a woman named Bilkis through the drain next to Shamim Mia's house.

13 fishermen missing in Bay for 3 days

UNB, Chattogram

Thirteen fishermen on three trawlers have remained missing for three days in the Bay of Bengal till yesterday.

During their last contact with the owner of the trawlers on Friday, the fishermen said there was an engine problem and they were stranded in the sea. At that time, they were near Saint Martin's Island.

"We sent another trawler and it searched for three days but could not find any trace of them. We have reported the matter to the naval police," said Nizam Uddin, owner of the trawler.

Md Faruk, the duty officer for the river police, said, "We are aware of the matter. However, we were on election duty for the past few days. We have made announcements so that anyone who learns of the whereabouts of the trawlers can inform us."

2 hurt as CU shuttle train rams human haulier

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

Two people were injured when a shuttle train of Chittagong University (CU) hit a human haulier at No 2 Rail Gate level crossing near the Sholoshohor Railway Station in Chattogram yesterday.

The human haulier, coming in from the wrong direction, ignored the gateman's signal and got onto the rail tracks before the gates were lowered, leading to the collision, said Sholoshohor Railway Station Assistant Station Master Shirin Akhter.

The incident occurred around 3:20pm when the CU-bound shuttle train crashed into the human haulier, leaving two people injured.

The injured were identified as Md Aziz, 48, of the district's Sitakunda upazila, and Amir Hossain, 17, of the Halishahar area of the port city. Both were passengers on the human haulier.

Correction

In our yesterday's story headlined "AL helps itself to fourth straight win," the second paragraph read: "The turnout was 27.15 percent at 3:00pm, but after voting closed at 4:00pm, the Election Commission estimated the final tally could stand at around 40 percent, a 13 percent jump in an hour."

The correct wording should have been "a 13 percentage points jump" instead of "13 percent jump." We already corrected the wording in our online and e-Paper versions. We sincerely apologise for the mistake.

Who will sit on opposition benches?

FROM PAGE 1

11. Independents, most of whom are ruling party leaders, won 62 seats.

The situation resembles the one after the first parliamentary polls on March 7, 1973.

The AL had then won 293 out of 300 seats and opposition parties and independents got the remaining seven.

The seven MPs demanded that an opposition be formed but Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had turned it down.

There was no opposition party in the first parliament but a room in the parliament was allocated for the seven.

Ahead of the fourth parliamentary election in 1988, the Combined Opposition Party was formed comprising around six dozens of parties under the leadership of ASM Abdur Rab.

Amid boycotts by the AL, the BNP, and several other parties, the combine contested the polls against the then ruling Jatiya Party and emerged as the main opposition in parliament securing 19 seats.

There was no opposition in the parliament formed after the controversial February 1996 polls, boycotted by most parties, including the AL. That parliament lasted only 11 days.

Three parties joined that election and the BNP won 278 seats. Freedom

Party got one while independents won 10 seats. The results were suspended in 10 constituencies and polling was suspended in one.

After the 2008 polls, the BNP, which got 30 seats, became the opposition.

Jatiya Party became the opposition after the 2014 polls with 34 seats. At that time, AL leader Haji Selim, elected as an independent, formed a 16-member alliance with independent MPs.

There is a chance of such an alliance this time around if the independents want to form the opposition in parliament, a political analyst says.

"As they were not elected with AL electoral symbol, there is no bar for them to become the opposition as the article 70 of the constitution will not be applicable to them," said Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of Shujan, a citizen's platform.

Under article 70, lawmakers lose their seats in parliament if they vote in the House against the party that nominated them.

Asked about the matter, a top AL leader said some of the candidates who were not "AL independents" but won could become a part of the opposition along with the JP.

"All the independent MP-elects can form an alliance and sit on the opposition bench," he told The Daily

Star, wishing anonymity.

JP Chairman GM Quader, however, said his party would be the opposition in the House no matter how many seats JP won.

"To form an opposition, there has to be a party. But the independents do not belong to any political party," he told this newspaper.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader spoke about the issue but he did not make matters clear.

Replying to a reporter's query, he said, "The new prime minister and the new leader of the house will decide considering the situation and reality."

Law Minister Anisul Huq, however, said it would not be possible to say who would be the opposition party until the independents clear their stance on forming an alliance.

"We have to wait for that," he told reporters in his constituency.

The AL leaders and activists are curious about government formation and the size of the cabinet, which will become clear within this month. The tenure of the current parliament expires on January 29.

The cabinet is likely to be formed any day after January 10, according to AL insiders. On January 10, the ruling party will hold a rally at the Suhrawardy Udyan to mark the homecoming day of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Bangladesh set an example of free, fair polls

FROM PAGE 1

Hasina said Yunus violated the labour law and deprived his employees who filed a case at the labour court. "I have nothing to do with that."

As a BBC journalist asked if she believed Bangladesh could be considered a vibrant democracy with the absence of an opposition party, the AL chief said every party has the right to make decisions.

The journalist also mentioned that 60 percent of the constituents had not cast their votes.

If a party does not participate in the election, it does not mean there is no democracy, she said. "Consider whether the people participated or not.

"The party didn't participate in the election and tried to prevent people from casting their votes. But the people had not listened to them."

The PM said she does not know if there was any other definition of democracy, adding that people's participation is the main thing.

Denouncing BNP's violent activities, the prime minister asked the BBC reporter about her definition of a democratic party. "They are a terrorist party."

Bangladesh has wonderful relations with its neighbours and India is a great friend, she said.

Replying to an election observer from the US, she said, "Our

relationship is wonderful with every country, even the United States of America. So, from our part there is no problem. We have a good relationship. Now it depends on you and your government."

In reply to another question, she said she does not want to be compared with the great women leaders like Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, and Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

"They were great ladies. I'm a simple person."

"Economic progress and ensuring a better life for the people is my main aim," she said, replying to a question from a foreign journalist.

China, India, Russia felicitate Sheikh Hasina

FROM PAGE 1

yet to greet the prime minister or issue any statement on the much-discussed polls held on January 7 amid a boycott by the major opposition BNP and like-minded parties.

The EU may issue a statement today, while the US will issue a statement after the official announcement of the poll results, according to people informed with the proceedings.

The US in May last year announced a visa policy for Bangladeshis who are found undermining the democratic election process. The ban will also apply to their immediate family members.

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday spoke to Hasina and congratulated her on her victory in the elections.

"I also congratulate the people of Bangladesh for the successful conduct of elections. We are committed to further strengthen our enduring and people-centric partnership with Bangladesh," he said in X (formerly Twitter).

In a congratulatory letter sent yesterday, Modi expressed confidence that Hasina as the PM will prepare to lead her country for a fourth consecutive term, and the historic and close ties between Bangladesh and India will continue to deepen in all areas of their irreversible partnership, reports UNB.

As a close friend and trusted development partner of Bangladesh,

India will continue to support Bangladesh's aspirations and growth, Modi said.

He also conveyed his best wishes to the people of Bangladesh for their continued progress, peace and prosperity.

Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen called on Hasina at the Gono Bhaban. He conveyed warm congratulations and best wishes to the PM on behalf of Chinese leaders. He gifted a decorated replica of a boat, the AL's electoral symbol, to Hasina.

The envoy reaffirmed that the Chinese leaders are committed to working with Hasina to carry forward the long-established friendship, enhance mutual trust and deepen practical cooperation, thereby uplifting the China-Bangladesh strategic partnership and cooperation to a new height.

Both China and Bangladesh are at a critical stage of development and revitalisation, and China would always be the most trustworthy partner and the most reliable friend of Bangladesh on the way to modernisation, Wen said.

China will firmly support Bangladesh in safeguarding national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and in opposing external interference.

The world's second-largest economy will support Bangladesh in maintaining unity and stability and in playing a more active role in international and regional affairs.

China is prepared to expand trade and investment with Bangladesh, promote high-quality China-Bangladesh Belt and Road cooperation and make its own contribution to realising "Smart Bangladesh", Wen added.

Pranay Verma, the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka, also greeted Hasina at the Gono Bhaban on behalf of India and PM Modi.

Verma and his wife presented bouquets to Hasina. The envoy expressed optimism that under the new term of Hasina's government, the India-Bangladesh bilateral partnership will be strengthened further.

Alexander Mantysky, the Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh, also congratulated Hasina at the Gono Bhaban.

Outlining promising areas of bilateral partnership, he expressed hope for further cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh.

The King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, sent a letter of congratulations to Hasina through the Bangladesh ambassador to Bhutan, Shib Nath Roy.

Under Hasina's dynamic and strong leadership, Bangladesh has enjoyed peace, stability and unprecedented economic development, he said in the letter.

The envoys from Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Brazil and Morocco and the dean of the diplomatic corps in Dhaka also met the PM.

BNP shelves plans for hartal, blockade

FROM PAGE 1

were put behind bars before the January 7 election, as per the discussions of a virtual meeting of the party's standing committee members on Sunday.

People did not go to the polling centres responding to the BNP's calls to boycott the election, the leaders said quoting the standing committee members.

The voter turnout was not more than 10 percent as there was no queue at the voting centres.

"The turnout of 40 percent is simply unbelievable. In the last one hour, 13 percent of the votes were cast when 27 percent of the votes were cast in the first seven hours. This is absurd."

Besides, there are several media reports and video footage where irregularities were captured.

"So this election will not be acceptable to the international community," said a standing committee member of the party.

The US and the Western nations will be critical of the election and may come up with some harsh measures that will mount pressure on the government.

The party has already collected documents on vote rigging and violence relating to elections.

Those documents will shortly be sent to the diplomatic missions stationed in Dhaka. The BNP higher-

ups may brief the diplomats too.

A staggering 30,000 partymen are now in jail and their release should be in focus right now, said another standing committee member of the party.

Because of that, the party will not go for any tough programmes, he added.

"Our movement will continue until a democratic government is established in the country," said Abdul Moyeen Khan, a standing committee member of BNP, at a press conference held at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

The office was locked up since the party's October 28 rally was disrupted by law enforcement agencies.