

# On the managed and farcical national election in Bangladesh

Sunday 6 January 2019, by [ALAM Badrul](#) (Date first published: 5 January 2019).

## **The 11<sup>th</sup> National Election in Bangladesh was held on 30 December 2018.**

Once again Bangladesh witnessed a national parliamentary election, taking place on 30 December 2018. It was long expected election at home and abroad. This is because the last election which took place on 5 January 2014 was most controversial owing to the ruling party Awami League (AL) winning 154 seats uncontested, out of 300. At that time the major right-wing bourgeois political party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) officially boycotted the election, as the election was going to be held under the incumbent government. They had been demanding a free and fair election under a neutral caretaker government. Most other political parties and left political parties had also been demanding almost the same. But it was thoroughly ignored by the government putting forward a self-contradictory verdict of the Supreme Court. They always raised their honesty and promise to hold a fair and free election under their oligarchy. They would not intervene in the election process. They would do only their routine work during the election period. The election commission will deal everything in order to ensure the law and order situation. It was not believable either by the opposition outside the parliament.

Based on speculation of the 11<sup>th</sup> election there were lots of political processes being built up towards electoral alliance formation. BNP, treated to be the main opposition party outside the parliament, was frustrated a lot because their key leaders former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia was in jail for 10 years and his son Tareq Rahman was in London as a fugitive. And a huge number of cases are pending against their leaders and activists.

However, they declared to attend the election as strategy of movement with scepticism, when the election commission declared the schedule of the election. By this time, few so-called liberal political parties tried to make alignment with both the ruling party led 14-party Grand Alliance and the opposition party led 20-party Alliance, including extreme right wing religious fanatic, communal and fundamentalist militant forces like Jamaat Islam Bangladesh which is a war criminal party of 1971 liberation movement.

Suddenly a miracle took place, which is that Dr. Kamal, a famous lawyer and the chief of the constitution formulation of the country of 1972 joined forces with BNP with his own-led party Gono Forum on condition that he will not collaborate with war criminals and the members of Jamaat e Islam should be kept away from the National Oiky Front that they built aiming at the election. However, BNP gave 22 seats for Jamaat-e-Islam which is their long-time political allied, creating lots of discontent among the Oiky Front leaders. On the other hand, Dr. B. Choudhury who was once president of the country when BNP was in power in 2001 joined hand with the Awami League.

The election was held on 30 December in place. Awami League-led Grand Alliance bagged 288 seats (Bangladesh Awami League bagged 258, Jatyo Party 20, JP-faction 1, Bangladesh's Workers' Party 3, Bikalopo Dhara 2, Tariqat Federation 1, JSD 2, JSD-faction 1), Independent 3, BNP 5 and Oiky Front

2. The Left Democratic Alliance bagged zero seat. Still there are 3 seats left-to be elected. It has become 4 as one elected member Syed Asraful Islam died on 3 January 2019.

On 3 January 2019, the member of parliament took oath except for 7 MPs of the National Oiky Front and former military autocrat Hossain Mohammad Ershad who belongs to Jatiyo Party. The new cabinet will be formed on 6 January 2019. The second major party which is part of the Grand Alliance would possibly be on the opposition in parliament. Beyond doubt, Sheikh Hasian is going to be Prime Minister for 3 consecutive terms and 4<sup>th</sup> in total. It is learnt that 2 MPs-elect of Gano Forum which got 2 seats out of 7 achieved by the National Oiky Front will take the oath. It is uncertain whether 5 MPs-elect of BNP will take the oath or not. The total parliamentary seats are 300. The poll came about for 298 seats. The election of two remaining seats will happen on 7 and 27 January 2019 respectively. This is because for one seat the election has been suspended due to violence and for other the death of a candidate.

Now, what happened in the election actually. If it is analyzed neutrally, it must be said that it is a managed and farce election. The whole election commission, public administration, police administration and even judiciary failed to play a neutral role before and during the election. They blatantly supported the ruling party to win the election.

Some people say that it is not a defeat of the opposition, rather it is a defeat of the country. The country is going to face a complete fascist (it will turn to fascist from fascist-like) authoritarian administration that has already destroyed democracy in the name of development last two consecutive terms of 10 years. Even in the election campaign, the Grand Alliance could not raise the issue of democracy as much as they made publicity of their development works. It seemed to have been the secondary factor in terms of Bangladeshi perspective for them. In effect without democracy the development cannot sustain any way in the long run.

There was no congenial atmosphere for election. Those who came to the voting centers were compelled to making themselves vote for the Boat, electoral symbol of the Grand Alliance. Before the election the opposition candidates could not campaign among the voters. Even they cannot hang their electoral posters in the public places. They were constantly under threat by the police administration and violence were created so that opposition activists and voters could not go to the election constituencies for propagation. It is an election which is the combination of the partial role of Election Commission (EC) and administration.

Deputy Commissioners (DC) and Upazial (sub-district) Nirbahi Officers (UNO) were briefed that vote should be ensured for the Boat. Somewhere the ballot box were filled last night with 30%-60%, with the help of police. Agents of the opposition were not allowed to enter the election centers. Oppositions were not allowed to build any election booths to provide with the voter's numbers to the voters. Previous night of election, polling agents of opposition were arrested in maximum constituencies. Voters were threatened continuously from the declaration of schedule not to give votes for other symbols besides boat. Some voters entered the election centers but could not vote for aspirant candidates, especially for a sheaf of paddy, electoral symbol of BNP because their vote were cast before. However, their nails were colored by ink forcefully in order that they cannot deny about the franchise.

Election engineering has been performed so cleverly

In some centers presiding and polling officers themselves asked the voters to stamp on boat mark. In order to show the foreign observers same women voters were set in a queue from dawn to dusk in centers.

18 were killed in electoral violence - 8 out of 18 are from the ruling party. More than 200 people were injured in violence at different places. Police arrested the opposition's polling agents submitted to election commission night before the election day without reason. Since the declaration of election schedule thousands of BNP activists were arrested and imprisoned to weaken their election campaign.

In 6 constituencies, there was a pilot voting system with Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) where 42-45% voting were cast. It is also a controversial project about which the opposition opposed from the beginning. In all EVM voting constituencies, the Awami League has won.

Apart from all the other violence, a cruel incident took place in Noakhaili. A women was asked not to vote for the Sheaf of Paddy. The lady was adamant on her wish and boldly exercised her right to vote for BNP. The polling agents of AL, threatened her to rape and at night on the election day on 30 December, they broke her house and enter inside. They tied up her husband and 4 children with ropes in a room and gang raped her cruelly in front of them. This incident exposed how the election was brought about in the entire country. It is a great shame for the whole nation! The perpetrators were arrested to bring to justice although.

The result of the election has been rejected by the opposition National Oiky Front which demanded fresh elections under a caretaker government.

Existing left parties who participated in the election in the name of the Left Democratic Alliance (coalition of few traditional left political parties) also demanded reelection rejecting the performed one.

In conclusion, it can be said that this was an election which was highly managed and controlled. It does not reflect the people's wish at all. Now there is a big task for the left block, which rejected the outcomes of the election, to figure out their future political strategy, and parties which rejected the election before, understanding what could be happening in the election under the ruling party as well.

**Badrul Alam**

General Secretary

Communist Party of Bangladesh-ML (CPB-ML)

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