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## Bangladesh: Sheikh Hasina Wins a Third Term: BNP Routed

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In the elections held on December 30, the Awami League led Alliance won 288 seats with the BNP led Alliance winning only 7 sets. Three seats went to others. It is a land slide victory for Hasina and her party- the Awami League.

Though it was known that the Awami League had an edge in the elections, no one could have predicted or assessed such an overwhelming victory that had had routed the entire opposition.

After ten years Bangladesh had an 'inclusive election' and 39 political parties participated in the elections.

As in the 2014 elections, there were 18 election related deaths and over 200 were injured. Of the deaths 8 were from the Awami League Front, 4 from the BNP Alliance and one each from the Jatiya and Liberal Democratic Parties. Three civilians were also killed.

There have always been deaths related to elections as in 2010- ten deaths and 2014- 18 deaths. That the violence was not related to one single party alone was pointed out by Sheikh Hasina who said that in the current campaign ten of her leaders and workers were killed including the Awami League President in Patnitala of Naogaon.

It is reported that on the election day there were 23 major incidents of clashes between the Awami League and the BNP workers. In 22 booths re poll has been ordered by the Election Commission.

While Dhaka was relatively peaceful, elsewhere across the country there was violence particularly in Cumilla, Chattogram, Rangmati, Cox's

Bazaar, Bagura, Noakhali, Narsingdi and Gazipur.

There were allegations of vote rigging, intimidation and irregularities from several parts of the country including Dhaka city. There were some specific allegations, like non-availability of ballot papers when people came to vote, premature closing of some polling booths, polling agents of some parties being chased away etc. It is hoped that the Election Commission would go into specific allegations in due course.

Having lost very badly, a matter of surprise even for them, leaders of opposition have not taken kindly to the results. Some comments worth noting were

- Dr. Kamal Hossain of Jatiya Oikya Front- “We regret this so-called result. At the same time, we demand fresh polls under a non-partisan government.
- Alamgir- Secretary General of BNP: ‘It is a cruel farce on the nation. This election has caused harm to the nation.’

The Jatiya Party led by Ershad made a complete U turn just before the election. Aggrieved in not getting the desired number of seats (they were offered only 29 seats), the party had decided to field in 145 other constituencies. Later Ershad on his return from Singapore on the eve of elections declared that he was back for “Sister Hasina!”

The big loser is the BNP. Earlier, the BNP and the Awami League were ruling alternatively. The BNP made the big mistake in boycotting the elections in 2014 and the Awami League had a walkover. It was BNP’s belief that the international community will not accept such an election – but they were mistaken.

The second mistake they made was in unleashing an unacceptable level of violence in the aftermath of the last elections. The effect of the violence could still be seen. The BNP leaders have been going in and out of the courts for the last few years and quite a few have been sentenced. Those evading arrests could not come out and work for the elections.

The BNP also took its own time to decide to participate in the last elections and had kept even its own top leaders and the cadres guessing. Lastly, its association with extremist religious groups like Jamaat only discredited their democratic credentials. Above all, their leader could not only stand for elections, but had to spend her time in jail for various offences. Her son- her anointed successor is still in London evading imprisonment in Bangladesh.

It is hoped that Sheikh Hasina will be generous enough to close all cases except major crimes like murder or grievous injury, relating to violence in the last 2014 elections.

For India, the result is to be welcomed. The Indian insurgents who were cooling their heels in the Myanmar-China border and were hoping to return to their former bases in Bangladesh in the event of BNP coming to power cannot do so in the near future. The connectivity projects

between and through Bangladesh will get a fillip for the general prosperity of the region.

Above all what is to be noted is - there are many irritants and many more can be expected between Bangladesh and India- but Sheikh Hasina who should be expected to safeguard the sovereignty of her country will not go against the interests of India.

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