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[Home](#) > Bangladesh: Post Election Developments:

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Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Sun, 01/06/2019 - 10:50

Paper No. 6476 **Dated 6-Jan-2018**

S.Chandrasekharan

As expected, in the highly charged political atmosphere, the overwhelming victory of the Awami League in the National Elections held on 30th December, has raised allegations that the election had been marred by violence and that it had not been fair. In fact, one of the editorials in the Daily Star described the victory of the Awami League as an “overkill”.

The logic goes this way. It is generally believed that both the Awami League and the BNP have one third of the committed voters and it is only the third one third group that decides the fate/chances of one of the groups coming to power.

But this time it has not worked this way. The BNP had explicitly associated itself with the JEI who had contested in twenty-five seats. The JEI being a religious fundamentalist organization had been banned by the Court from participating in the elections. Yet they did openly and when they saw the trend of their losing badly, they withdrew their candidacies. Another 22 of the BNP also withdrew from contesting when they found that it was going to be tough.

True, there has been violence with eighteen deaths. So it was in 2014 elections and it was equally bad in 2010 when the death toll was less.

The BNP has to blame itself for the poor showing. The leadership took its own time to decide whether they should go for confrontation or participation in the elections. With Khaleda in jail, all decisions appear to have been taken in London by Khaledha’s son, Tareque Rahman. The ever faithful and loyal Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir did his best in patching up an alliance -the Jatiya Oikya Front and getting the eminent lawyer and the Constitutional expert Dr. Kama Hossain into the alliance with his Gono Forum.

The international reaction was on predictable lines. While the Western Powers, the UN and associated establishments focused on the violence that marred the elections which in turn affected the credibility of the elections, others generally sent in their congratulations to Sheikh Hasina on her victory.

Those who sent congratulatory messages will include India, Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Russia and UAE.

The Western Powers mentioned about “credible reports that polls irregularities marred the voting.” Strongly worded statements emanated from USA, UK and the European Union. It is likely that these powers would, in the near future mount pressure on Bangladesh for a ‘transparent’ examination of alleged irregularities, violent incidents, intimidation and harassment. Canada joined the chorus and said that it was disappointed by “credible” claims of irregularities and called on the Government to work transparently with all parties to address the claims.

Given the alleged violence, had the BNP won I am not sure whether these Powers would have reacted similarly. What has been noticed is that the Western Powers generally for reasons not known have a general dislike for Hasina.

While the Human Rights Watch in making the allegations had asked for an independent impartial commission to determine the extent of violations, the Transparency International has gone further in demanding a judicial probe.

On 3rd January, the opposition front submitted a joint memorandum detailing all the irregularities to the Chief of Election Commission of Bangladesh. Three leaders of the BNP.-Their Secretary General Alamgir, a Standing Committee member and another Executive member met the American Ambassador at the embassy on 4th Jan. and discussed various issues relating to the General Elections.

There are enough built in legal remedies to sort out the complaints on the irregularities in the elections. The BNP has eminent lawyers to conduct the cases and instead of going to court, the leadership has chosen once again to boycott the parliament and none of the members of the BNP were present for the oath taking ceremony. The Gono Forum led by Dr. Komal Hossain and a part of the Jatin Oikya Front broke ranks from the alliance and decided to let its two members take the oath in the next meeting.

The Jatiya Party led by Ershad and known for its somersaults now decided to be the main opposition. A day earlier, the Parliamentary group of the Party that met had decided to join the Awami led Government. The next day when Ershad returned to Dhaka he declared that the Jatiya Party will be the main opposition and that he will act as the ‘Leader of the Opposition’. He was not present for the earlier meeting, but it looks that he has been advised to take the role of opposition!

An unprecedented mandate has given Sheikh Hasina many challenges. An overwhelming majority by itself does not give good governance as we saw in the Delhi State. People’s expectations will be high. Sheik Hasina is quite conscious of the problem. She cautioned the

Parliamentary members who had assembled for their first meeting that “People who remain in power for long become monsters.” But we should not, she added.

It is expected that Hasina will choose her cabinet carefully to be announced anytime now. Those who had proved to be a failure and unpopular in the last cabinet may be eliminated. Some technocrats may be included. She should not forget those freedom fighters who had remained faithful to her and had not asked for any returns are rewarded at least now and tried.

For the BNP too, the challenges are many. They made the big mistake in boycotting the last general elections of 2014 but worse still, unleashed a level of violence the reverberations of which are still being felt. Having lost the elections decisively, it is hoped that they do not make the same mistake in opposing the Government. Their main challenge in my view will be to keep its flock together after the huge disappointment in the current elections. I have said earlier- Hasina could go out of the way and end once and for all the ever-permanent enmity between the two top leaders.

Tags:

[BD National Elections](#) [1]

[Sheikh Hasina](#) [2]

[BNP](#) [3]

Category:

[Papers](#) [4]

Countries:

[Bangladesh](#) [5]

Topics:

[Political](#) [6]

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- [2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/218>
- [3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/80>
- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/bangladesh>
- [6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>