

Selection in garb of election?

Sohag, Jakir new BCL president, secretary

HASAN JAHID TUSHER and MAHDI AL MUHTASIM

Though the Chhatra League yesterday elected its new president and general secretary through a "battle of ballots" in line with the guidelines of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, there was no competition in it.

Everything was pre-determined as to who would be president and general secretary of the country's oldest student body, sources said.

Yesterday's polls were nothing but a formality, as several media outlets on Saturday and Sunday reported that Saifur Rahman Sohag and SM Jakir Hossain were going to be president and general secretary respectively.

Only one panel -- of Sohag-Jakir -- contested the election and won with 95 percent of the total votes cast.

Former BCL president Liaqat Sikder nominated this panel, which got full support from outgoing BCL president HM Badiuzzaman Sohag and outgoing general secretary Siddiqui Nazmul Alam.

Individually, eight president candidates and 16 general secretary candidates contested the polls.

Out of 3,138 councillors from the BCL's 111 units across the country, 2,819 (89.83 percent) cast votes. Of them, Sohag bagged 2,690 votes and Jakir 2,675 votes.

Until yesterday, Sohag was the environment affairs secretary

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Sohag

Jakir

Selection in garb

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while Jakir was assistant secretary of the BCL central executive committee.

Soon after their victory, the new president and the general secretary along with their outgoing counterparts met Hasina, also the prime minister, at the Gono Bhaban. From there, the four along with some other BCL leaders visited Liaqat at his Segunbagicha residence.

Almost every councillor of the BCL who came from different units already knew who was going to be their leaders, after Hasina inaugurated the BCL council on Saturday and said the new BCL leadership would come through ballots.

BCL leaders loyal to Liaqat immediately finalised the panel following the AL chief's announcement. Apart from the outgoing president and general secretary, several former leaders faithful to Liaqat made no delay to convey the message to the top leaders of each of the 111 units over which they have control, according to BCL insiders.

They asked the councillors to vote for Sohag-Jakir panel.

Sensing sure defeat, no other former BCL leaders gave any panel.

"We did not give any panel or support anyone as we knew who was going to be the new leaders," said a former BCL leader.

"The election was simply eyewash," a senior BCL leader told The Daily Star preferring anonymity.

BCL insiders said around 40 unit committees were announced by outgoing president Sohag and general secretary Nazmul to influence the voting.

Not only that. Non-councillors were also seen voting. The Daily Star correspondent found Xahid Hasan, a fourth-year student of Mass Communication and Journalism at Dhaka University, collecting ballot paper posing as the councillor from Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology University.

This newspaper yesterday talked to 10 councillors from Jhenidah, Chuadanga, Madaripur, Sylhet, Chittagong and Rajshahi.

Syed Farid Ahmed, organising secretary of Chuadanga district, said, "Badiuzzaman Shohag directed us to cast vote for Saifur Rahman Sohag. Our

unit president and secretary also gave similar directives."

Another councillor said, "The president and the general secretary have been made on Saturday. It's a mere formality today [yesterday]."

Most president and general secretary candidates pulled out of the race just before the voting began at the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh at 10:00am. Several candidates quit the race after the polling started.

Later in the night, the BCL announced ex-general secretary of Dhaka Metropolitan South unit of BCL Azizul Haque Rana as vice-president, former assistant secretary of BCL Asaduzzaman Nadim as joint secretary and Dhaka University's Surja Sen Hall BCL president Mobarak Hossain as organising secretary.

The names of other members will be announced soon, said the outgoing BCL president.

Sources said Liaqat influenced the formation of the previous BCL committees as well.

Talking to The Daily Star, Liaqat said the council elected competent leadership and that the election proved that the BCL was united, strong and disciplined.

He dismissed the allegation that he hand-picked the leadership. "I only assist the Chhatra League."

BCL began its journey on January 4, 1948, with the fundamentals of education, peace and progress. The student body played very crucial roles in the Language Movement in 1952, the 1969 uprising against the Pakistan junta, the 1971 Liberation War and the anti-dictatorship movement in 1990.

BACKGROUND OF SOHAG AND JAKIR

Sohag hails from Madaripur and is currently doing his master's in Disaster Management at the DU.

Earlier, he completed his honours and master's from the DU linguistics department.

Jakir is from Moulvibazar and is doing MPhil in political science at the DU. He did his honours and master's from the same department.

Incidentally, both are from Ziaur Rahman Hall where they were BCL general secretary and member respectively.