

Matia Chowdhury to be deputy leader in parliament

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: Ruling Awami League's presidium member Matia Chowdhury is to be selected as the deputy leader in the Jatiya Sangsad (national parliament) in the ongoing 21st session of 11th parliament, started on 5 January, said sources from the party's policy making body. The decision is likely to be finalised at a meeting of the AL's parliamentary board tonight, Thursday. The Speaker will then complete the formalities.

Prime Minister and AL president Sheikh Hasina is the leader in parliament while all the MPs from the party are the members of the parliamentary board. Despite discussions during the 20th session of 11th parliament between 30 October and 6 November, Matia Chowdhury was not appointed to the post as another senior leader coveted the role. After learning about the matter, party president Sheikh Hasina postponed the decision and took some time. Veteran politician Matia Chowdhury is a five-time MP and has been agriculture minister three times. She has not been a cabinet member since 2019.

AL sources said some in the party were considering Matia Chowdhury as the next president but Sheikh Hasina wanted to keep the veteran parliamentarian as her associate in the JS. Sajeda Chowdhury was the deputy leader in parliament and she used to sit next the Sheikh Hasina in the House. Since her death on 12 September last year, Matia Chowdhury has been taking the seat next to the prime minister. AL formed the government for the third time on the trot since 2009 and the party has a landslide majority in the current 11th parliament. Sajeda Chowdhury was the deputy leader in parliament since 2009 but the post fell vacant after her death. There is no legal compulsion to fulfill the post of the deputy leader in parliament. Former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia did not choose anyone as the deputy leader in parliament during the 2001-2006 tenure but Awami League always had chosen a senior leader of the party for the post equivalent to a minister rank.

Matia Chowdhury is a presidium member of Awami League for a long time. She was seen proactive in demonstrations on the street when the party was in opposition. She also played a leadership role during the anti-Pakistan movement and Liberation War. She was dubbed 'Agnikanya' for her role on the streets. She is involved with active politics since her student days. Two central leaders and a minister, wishing not to be named, said party president Sheikh Hasina informed her close ones earlier that she would choose Matia Chowdhury as the deputy leader in parliament. But she took some time knowing the intention of another senior leader. After making Matia Chowdhury the deputy leader in parliament, the prime minister will finalise who the party would back as president.

AL party sources said the prime minister drew Matia Chowdhury close to her in recent days. The latest example is she was asked to sit by the prime minister inside the metro rail when Sheikh Hasina took the first ride after inaugurating the service on 28 December last year. Voting is not required for the post of deputy leader in parliament. The parliament leader and prime minister express his/her wishes to the Speaker who sends the proposal to the president for his approval. Upon gazette notification, the deputy leader in parliament does not need to take oath but s/he gets all the facilities of a minister. The party sources also said the gazette notification is also likely to be published within a day or two. AL joint general secretary Mahbub ul Hanif said, "The post of deputy leader in parliament is likely to be filled in the ongoing session in parliament. The matter is likely to be raised for discussion in today's meeting."