

Over one-third of candidates outside tax net, finds SHUJAN

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Online Desk : Nearly 35 per cent of the 2,026 candidates contesting the 13th parliamentary election, or 707 individuals, have no publicly available income tax records, according to data from civil society organisation Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (SHUJAN). The findings were presented on Saturday at a press conference held by SHUJAN at the National Press Club, highlighting data on candidates contesting the election.

Under Bangladesh's election regulations, candidates must submit proof of filing income tax returns (ACK Receipt) along with their nomination papers. However, the disclosure of spouses' or children's tax information is not mandatory. SUJAN's analysis showed that among political party candidates, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) nominees were the most compliant with tax rules, followed by Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami candidates, while independent candidates ranked third.

Of the 1,319 candidates who did pay income tax, 479 (36.3 per cent) paid Tk 5,000 or less. Meanwhile, 358 candidates (27.1 per cent) paid more than Tk 1 lakh, and 116 candidates (5.7 per cent) paid over Tk 10 lakh. An additional 132 candidates submitted only Tax Identification Number (TIN) certificates without filing returns. Regarding declared annual income, 832 candidates – about 41 per cent – reported earning below Tk 5 lakh, while 95 candidates declared annual incomes exceeding Tk 1 crore.

Compared with the 12th National Parliamentary Election, the proportion of candidates earning below Tk 5 lakh has declined slightly from 45 per cent to 41 per cent, while those earning above Tk 1 crore dropped from 8.77 per cent to 4.59 per cent. SHUJAN data further shows that 741 candidates earn between Tk 5 lakh and Tk 25 lakh annually, 132 earn between Tk 25 lakh and Tk 50 lakh, and 71 earn between Tk 50 lakh and Tk 1 crore. A total of 155 candidates did not disclose their income in their affidavits.

Among those earning more than Tk 1 crore, 51 are BNP nominees, 25 are independents, and five are from the Jatiya Party. The organisation also listed the top 10 highest-earning candidates. Leading the list is BNP candidate Zakaria Taher of Cumilla-8, with an annual income of around Tk 60 crore. Independent candidate Md Asadul Islam of Tangail-1 follows with about Tk 40 crore, while Zakir Hossain Patwari of Islami Andolan Bangladesh in Lakshmipur-1 ranks third with nearly Tk 19 crore.

Other candidates in the top 10 include BNP's Mirza Abbas (over Tk 9 crore), independent Salauddin Alamgir (over Tk 8 crore), BNP nominees Salahuddin Ahmed, Md Jasim Uddin, Kaiser Kamal, independent Shafikul Islam Rahi, and BNP nominee Redowan Ahmed, whose incomes range from Tk 4 crore to Tk 6.5 crore. SUJAN noted that income tax compliance has improved since the previous election, rising from 47.3 per cent to 65.1 per cent.

SHUJAN Secretary Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar cautioned that lax enforcement by the Election Commission could create complications and potential legal challenges. "There is a clear requirement to submit income tax returns," he said. The written speech at the programme was presented by SHUJAN Central Coordinator Dilip Kumar Sarker. Treasurer Syed Abu Naser Bakhtiar Ahmed was also in attendance.