

Road to parliamentary polls

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commissioners and the EC secretary alongside about 20 district officers and 300 upazila election officers are seen by senior opposition leaders as politically appointed by the BNP-led alliance government as part of its 'election engineering process'.

They also see Justice KM Hasan, who was a leader of BNP as either politically loyal to BNP or against AL now, and expect him to be the head of the next caretaker government.

The entire AL leadership including its President Sheikh Hasina criticises Justice Hasan for being 'too embarrassed to hold a hearing of the case in connection with the murder of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman', and believes that he will not perform the duties of the head of the caretaker government neutrally.

Believing that Justice KM Hasan will obviously favour the BNP-Jamaat alliance in the next election, the opposition coalition has long been demanding not to make him the head of the next caretaker government.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, appointed by BNP will also serve the ruling alliance by all means to ensure its victory again, the opposition leaders observed. They believe that the president, who will have the supreme power to deal with everything including the armed forces during the election, might use the army against the opposition.

The armed forces, who are usually deployed a few days ahead of the election, have also been politicised by the government and to that end the present government made a loyalist the chief of army staff without regard for seniority, the opposition leaders said adding that they believe the armed forces will perform against them in the next election.

Deputy commissioners (DC), thana nirbahi officers (TNO) and other thana level officers, who will work on the election day as

returning officers and assistant returning officers, appointed by the government, will also favour the BNP-Jamaat alliance as the government has appointed a large number of activists of BNP's student front Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) as police officials.

They said the government has already appointed at least 50 DCs, a number of TNOs and other thana level officers on political considerations as part of the ruling alliance's election engineering process.

The opposition coalition fears that the 'widely politicised' police administration will also favour the BNP-Jamaat alliance as the government has appointed a large number of activists of BNP's student front Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) as police officials.

It alleges that the law enforcers including Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), created by the present government, have already begun harassing opposition leaders and activists and the minority communities. It believes that the harassments and threats will gain momentum as the election day nears.

After assassinations of former finance minister also former AL lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria, and lawmakers Ahsanullah Master and Momtaz Uddin, and the assassination attempt on Hasina at an AL rally on August 21, 2004 which left 24 leaders and activists killed, the opposition leadership fears that such attempts might be made again ahead of the election.

The apprehension has currency among the opposition leaders as the investigations of the cases in connection with the killings, the grenade attack, and the arms hauls at Bogra and Chittagong still did not see any mentionable progress.

Moreover, they believe that the rise of militancy in the country is the present government's creation and it is still patronising the militants with an intention to use the fanatics in the next election to have political gain.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haque Inu

said the government will use around 5,000 militants still at large and different outlawed organisations in the south-western region of the country against the opposition coalition in the next election.

"Even if the electoral reforms are implemented, holding a free and fair election will not be possible until the politicised police and civil administration is cleansed, and use of black money and rise of militancy is thwarted ahead of the next election," Inu said.

He however added that these problems will have to be sorted out through discussions, off course, ahead of the election.

Persons affiliated with the BNP-Jamaat alliance looted tens of thousands of taka from the people in various ways including hiking up the prices of essentials through syndication and by collecting tolls from all kinds of construction and development works, the opposition leaders believe, and fear that the 'black money' will be used in crooked ways against the opposition in the next election. They also fear that the ruling alliance will patronise local criminals with the 'looted money' against the 14-party.

Talking to The Daily Star a number of senior opposition leaders said these challenges are understandable as the government has decorated the administration with at least five layers of flunkies to rig the next election. In addition to all these conspiracies they will have to face national and international intrigues and intra-party feuds, the leaders added.

They see no solution to these problems except implementation of the proposed reforms in the system of caretaker government and the Election Commission (EC), which they believe will help to obliterate most of the barriers to a free, fair and neutral election. But still the politicised administration will remain untouched, working for the BNP-Jamaat alliance as its last aide.

The AL will form committees at every polling centre to monitor whether the voters can exercise their right to franchise properly. It will also form Vote Protection Committees, like the one created by Chittagong City Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury in the last city corporation election there, to guard the places where votes will be counted and from where the results will be declared, so that the administration cannot manipulate any of them.

The opposition coalition has also plans to dispute the result of any poll, if its agents are thrown out or threatened by any means. And finally, the High Court will be the opposition's last resort if any untoward incident takes place regarding counting of the votes and announcements of the results. Senior lawyers have already talked to 14-party Coordinator Abdul Jalil regarding the matter recently.

They declared agitation programmes including protest rallies and processions from September 3 to September 6 at Gazipur, Tejgaon, Mirpur and Ashulia. They will declare greater agitation programmes on September 8.

NGWF President Shahida Sarker, General Secretary Amirul Haque Amin and others addressed therally.

The BPFSS also held a rally and brought out a procession on the same demand. Its leaders blamed the garment owners and government for ignoring the workers' interest.

BPFSS President Towhidur Rahman, General Secretary Khadiza Begum and other leaders addressed the rally.

General Secretary of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Karmachari Federation Kamrul Ahsan told The Daily Star that they will go for agitation from September 1 to compel the government to declare the minimum wage immediately.

Meanwhile, Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (Skop) at a press conference yesterday said the owners are playing games with the workers, dillydallying in settling the workers' minimum wage and implementing the tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU).

They reiterated that the Skop will not compromise and the government and garment owners will be responsible if fresh movements recur in the garment sector.

The Skop will declare its agitation programmes from a workers' rally at Muktangan on September 11.

Skop Convener Dr Wazedul Islam Khan, General Secretary of Jatiya Sramik League Rof Ramesh Chandra, President of Jatiya Sramik Jote Bangladesh Abdul Qader Howlader, President of Sramik Jote Mesbah Uddin Ahmed and others were present at the press conference.

He, along with Sheikh Abdus Samad Salafi, Ahab General Secretary Nurul Islam and Ahab Jubo Sangha President ASM Azizullah, was arrested on February 22, 2005 on suspicion of being the brains behind the growing Islamist militancy in the country.

Galib is still behind bars while the other three have come out on bail recently.

Land grabbers' list

FROM PAGE 1
of forestland-320 acres in Dhalghata, 200 in Charandip, 10 in Matarbari, 350 in Siradia and 32 acres in Lemshkhali. But the matter virtually ended there.

Chittagong Coastal Forest Officer MA Khaleq said, "We are still filing cases. But so far our efforts to recover the lands have seen little progress. We have published the list to draw the administration's attention and seek their help in repossessing the lands and forests."

Soon the list will be submitted to the deputy commissioner (DC) of Cox's Bazar, he added.

The failure to bring the culprits to book in fact encourages the land grabbing to go on unhindered, Cox's Bazar Forest Range Officer Kish Kumar Badhyia said.

"We have received copies of the court orders for recovery of 912 acres of land but have yet to take any action due to lack of manpower and logistics. On the other hand, the grabbers continue to warn us against any drive for land recovery," he added.

Advocate Faridul Alam, legal adviser of the Chittagong Coastal Forest Department, told The Daily Star that a section of high officials of the government helps in irregular allocation of government lands to political leaders and influential individuals.

Recently, The Daily Star has run a number of reports on indiscriminate land grabbing in the coastal area that has been going on in the

name of shrimp cultivation. Later on July 17, the coastal forest department published a list of 15 land grabbers. The first name on that list was that of ruling party lawmaker from Cox's Bazar-4 Alamgir Mohammad Mahfuz Ullah.

In response to the developments, the district administration has ordered illegal occupants to vacate the lands in Paranban on the offshore island of Moheshkhali in Cox's Bazar.

Of the 28 people on the latest forest department list, Kala Mia of Ghotibhanga has occupied 50 acres, Badsha Mia of Ghotibhanga 50 acres, Mohammed Ishaque of Fakirgona 100, UP member Bashir Ahmed 50, Mahmud of Kutobjum 50, UP Member Badsha Miya of Kutobjum 20, Mohammed Shafi of Kutobjum 20, Abu Bakar Shikder of Gorakga 150, Reduan of Batoly 130, Abdul Gafur of Kutobjum 70, Mohammed Maksud Shikdar of Kutobjum 60, Makshud Sikder 60, UP Member Abdul Monaf of Kondakarpara 20, Shaedul Quader Shikdar of Gorakga 120, Baro Moheshkhali UP Chairman Shahidullah 75, Anowar Pasha Chy of Fakirgona 30, Abdus Shukur, Kabir Ahmed, Jalal Ahmed, Akter Kamal Chy, and Mahmud Ullah each 135, former UP chairman of Baro Moheshkhali Sharif Badsha 100, Mujibur Rahman of Baro Moheshkhali 100 and Abdul Malek of Ghotibhanga 20 acres.

RMG workers

FROM PAGE 1
The NGWF activists held their demonstration at Muktangan at 11:00am. They said the pay structure has not been declared yet because of the indifference of garment owners and the government.

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Abah leaders addressing yesterday's rally threatened to go for a tougher movement against the government, if Galib is not released within a month.

"In the last election, we cast votes for the BNP-Jamaat alliance so that an Islamic state is established. But they have betrayed our trust and arrested our ameer (Galib)," said Nurul Islam, general secretary of the Islamist outfit.

He alleged that Galib was arrested because he wrote against the activities of Jamaat-e-Islami.

"Jamaat made the government arrest Galib as they feared that Galib might disclose its misdeeds in the name of Islam," said Azizullah.

Among others, Prof Sirajul Islam, SM Abdul Latif, Muhammad Sakhawat Hossain, Moulana Jahangir Alam, Moulana Abdul Mannan spoke at the meeting.

A procession followed the grand conference. Chanting slogans against the 'misrule' of BNP-Jamaat government, it paraded through different city streets.

Regional dialogue
FROM PAGE 1
society representatives of the district will speak at the dialogue.

Members of the Nagorik Committee 2006, who are preparing a Vision Paper for Bangladesh, will also be present at the dialogue to receive public feedback.

FROM PAGE 1
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Expressing her reaction to the verdict, Atika said the verdict was not according to the law of the Quran and Sunnah that had been demanded by the mujahids for long.

Besides, the government should consider all the matters properly before delivering such verdict, she added.

Atika's husband Md Abdul Kadir said he tried several times recently to meet Shaikh Rahman, Ataur Rahman Sunny and Abdul Awal to seek their consent to filing an appeal but the authorities did not allow him.

He termed the verdict as 'too quick'.

Senior assistant judges Jagannath Pandey and Sohel Ahmed were killed in a suicide bomb attack at Purba Chadkati in Jhalakathi town on November 14 last year in the wake of a series of bomb attacks by the militants across the country.

Criminal killed
FROM PAGE 1
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Family to appeal

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One home-made gun, five live cartridges and one used bullet shell were recovered from the spot.

Rab said Mujibar was wanted in several criminal cases, including two for murder, recorded with Swarankhola Police Station.

Khulna factions

FROM PAGE 1
factions against each other.

On Thursday, hundreds of Manju supporters led by Whip Ashraf Hossain marched in a procession and attacked the Lobi faction at noon demonstrating near Kadamtala area under Khalishpur as the Lobi faction showed black flags to Whip Ashraf and branded him a black sheep of BNP.

Two leaders of Khalishpur thana BNP, Sajjad Ali and Abul Kalam, were injured and four shops were vandalised during the clash.

Followers of Ali Asgar Lobi filed a case at around 10:00pm against Whip Ashraf Hossain and eight others -- followers of lawmaker Nurul Islam Manju -- accusing them of attacking on a peaceful demonstration brought out by followers of Lobi.

Soon after that, Manju followers also filed a case at 10:40pm against Abdul Malek, president of Khalishpur thana BNP, and four others from Lobi faction making similar accusations.

Ahab to float

FROM PAGE 1
the upcoming elections.

"We've completed our preparation for launching the new party. The announcement regarding the launch is now only a matter of time," said Salafi adding that they will contest the next election mainly from the constituencies across the northern districts.

Ahab and Ahab Jubo Sangha organised the conference demanding immediate release of Ahab Ameer and Rajshahi University teacher Muhammad Asadullah Al Galib.

14-party to lay siege

FROM PAGE 1
The 14-party aims to besiege the EC Secretariat in the city and election offices across the country on September 6. The following day will be observed as 'Day against Repression'.

Before laying siege to the PMO on September 12, the opposition parties will go on a mass public relations campaign in the districts adjacent to the capital from September 10 to 11.

A team comprising senior leaders of the 14-party will lead a countrywide mass awareness campaign from September 14 to 17. Then at a grand rally in the capital on September 18, the opposition line-up will announce the final round of agitation programmes aiming to make the government concede the demands for reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems.

Briefing the newsmen, 14-party Coordinator Abdul Jalil warned the government against holding elections before carrying out the reforms.

Referring to the prime minister's recent speech where she said that the elections would be held under the caretaker government of

Justice KM Hasan, he said the comments are devoid of political decency.

"Trampling on the popular demand for electoral reforms, the prime minister has in fact challenged us to a confrontation," Jalil said adding, "When the people are calling for reconstitution of the Election Commission, Khaleda Zia has appointed yet another election commissioner on political considerations."

He said the BNP-Jamaat government is doing everything possible to manoeuvre the next election in its favour as they fear that if the election is held in a free and fair manner, the alliance would not get the people's mandate for its 'corruption and misrule'.

The opposition will not allow any election without implementation of the electoral reforms, Jalil warned.

Chaired by AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu, the 14-party meeting was attended among others by Rashed Khan Menon, Bimal Biswas, Dilip Barua, Obaidul Quader, Abdur Rahman, Syed Zafar Sazzad, Pankaj Bhattacharya, and Nurul Islam.

Syria to respect
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Lebanon if UN peacekeepers were deployed on it under the UN resolution that led to the August 14 ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel.

Annan said he also discussed with Assad the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon.

"The president informed me that Syria is prepared to establish normal diplomatic relations with Lebanon... and that Syria is prepared to go ahead with the delineation of its border with Lebanon," Annan said.

That could include the disputed Shebaa Farms district, located at the junction of Lebanon, Syria and Israel, and captured by the Jewish state during the 1967 Middle East war.

Although the tiny territory is now claimed by Lebanon with the approval of Syria, the United Nations wants Damascus to sign a formal document to that effect.

Annan's 10-day tour is aimed at implementing Resolution 1701 which halted the 34-day conflict that killed more than 1,200 people in Lebanon, overwhelmingly civilians, and 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

Meanwhile, five ships carrying nearly 2,500 Italian troops reached the Lebanese coast on Thursday. The troops are to make a beach landing in

the southern coastal city of Tyre on Saturday, a UN spokesman said.

The troops are part of the vanguard of the expanded UN force that will eventually total up to 15,000 troops.

Indonesia said Friday it would send up to 1,000 troops, after Israel eased its previously blanket objection to the participation of countries with which it does not have diplomatic relations.

In Israel, tens of thousands rallied in Tel Aviv late Thursday, putting pressure on the government to secure the release of two soldiers captured by Hezbollah and a third held captive by Gaza militants.

"We do not abandon soldiers on the battlefield," read white banners emblazoned in red hanging behind a stage in Rabin Square.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, who is demanding the end of an Israeli air and sea blockade, has said his government has not been contacted by Israel for negotiations on the two soldiers seized by Hezbollah.

Siniora was in Stockholm, where donor nations on Thursday pledged 940 million dollars in aid to help Lebanon rebuild smashed infrastructure, shelter the homeless and remove unexploded Israeli ordnance.

Iran air disaster
FROM PAGE 1
skidded off the runway and crashed into the nearby barriers, leaving gaping holes in the fuselage.

The incident was the latest tragedy to hit Iran's aviation industry, whose fleet is made up largely of Soviet or old Western planes owing to the US sanctions imposed after the Islamic revolution in 1979.

According to figures published in the Iranian media and not counting Friday's accident in Mashhad, more than 1,460 people were killed in 17 air crashes in the past 25 years, including an Iranian plane shot down over the Gulf by a US warship in 1988.

The first television pictures showed the plane, owned by the Iran Airtour carrier, lying flat without its wheels on the outskirts of the airport, with one huge hole burned out in the centre of the fuselage.

Rescue workers used hoses to douse the plane, turning the ground around into a quagmire of mud and water. Several corpses were on the ground beside the plane, swathed in blankets.

"As the plane was landing one of its tyres burst, forcing it to swerve off the runway before hitting nearby barriers and bursting into flames," an airport official in Mashhad told AFP.

An Iranian civil aviation official was quoted in the media as saying the plane did not ask for an emergency landing before the accident.

US sanctions mean that Iran can only shop for Airbus or Boeing planes on the used market, and Iranian officials have blamed the blockade for the regular plane crashes in the Islamic republic.

Iranian media are reporting that regular flights have been resumed in Mashhad international airport.

The sanctions cover not only US-made airplanes and spare parts, but also European ones, like Airbus, when they use significant elements of US origin.

Tehran reaction
FROM PAGE 1
suspending enrichment.

According to a Western diplomat in Vienna, those talks would be followed by a meeting in the German capital of Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States.

Once the UN deadline expired, Washington said it was now time to act.

In a speech to a US veterans' group, President George W. Bush said, "It is time for Iran to make a choice."

"We will continue to work closely with our allies to plan a diplomatic solution, but there must be consequences for Iran's defiance and we must not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon."

Iran's ambassador to France told France-Info radio that Tehran would repel any US military attack.

Shia reprisals

FROM PAGE 16
Their deaths bring to 17 the number of US servicemen killed in Iraq since Sunday, and to 2,637 since the March 2003 invasion, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

The four-hour vehicle curfew to protect Friday's worshippers came and went without reports of violence, but preaching at the mosques was marked by anger.

The Iraqi government should stop these acts and the ministries of defence and interior should work to prevent such terror," said Mohammed Al-Haidari, a follower of Shia spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Haidari told worshippers that in one of Thursday night's attacks, extremists had hired a flat in a Shia residential block and rigged it with explosives, bringing down the whole structure and crushing entire families.

"The enemy wants to exploit local strife and chaos so that Iraq will move into a civil war. Iraqis should be hand in hand against terror to deny these criminals a chance to provoke conflict between Sunnis and Shias," he said.

The official figures for those killed and wounded across Iraq in August are expected to be released on Sunday, and US and Iraqi commanders expect them to be lower than July's record levels, especially in the war-torn capital.

Iraqi and US troops have launched a large-scale security operation in the city and officers boast that they have cut the daily death toll from sectarian death squad attacks by more than 40 percent.

The final days of the month, however, were marked by a spike in violence across the country, and an AFP tally of official reports put the toll since Sunday at 17 US soldiers and more than 400 Iraqis dead.

Against this background, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government is pressing forward with plans to take responsibility for Iraq's security back from its allies in the US-led coalition.

On Saturday, Iraq will announce the creation of a joint military command to oversee the work of its navy, airforce and 10 army divisions, five of which are already the lead security force in their areas of responsibility.

Hitherto, Iraqi divisions had been coordinated by US commanders, but over the coming months the national command centre will gradually integrate them into one chain of command leading down from Maliki himself.

In the coming days, the government will also take charge of security in Dhi Qar, the second of Iraq's 18 provinces deemed secure enough for British-led coalition forces to take a back seat while local forces lead the way.

Both of these steps have been hailed by US commanders as a sign that Iraq is finally ready to lead the fight against insurgents, who oppose the US-led overthrow of former leader Saddam Hussein or are inspired by militant Islam.

The US commander in Iraq, General George Casey, said this week Iraq would be able to handle its own security within 12 to 18 months and President George W. Bush reiterated his vow to leave US forces in place until this is achieved.

Previously the government appointed SM Zakaria and Justice Mahfuzur Rahman as election commissioners, prompting the opposition to strongly protest their appointments.

Opposition sources said both of them are also known as BNP supporters.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said to a TV channel yesterday, "According to the law there is no scope for discussing the matter with the opposition."

BNP sources said the party high ups took the decision to appoint an election commissioner to keep pressure on the opposition, which is agitating for implementation of its proposal for electoral reforms.

An influential section of the government is now planning to appoint yet another election commissioner to ensure its control on the EC as the government policy makers are determined to dominate the commission at any cost, government sources said.

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