

BNP-blessed people

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of little consequence as their contracts were due to expire soon.

Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Ismail Zabiullah was made the secretary to the president's office yesterday hours after Rafiqul Islam had been ordered to return to Bangabhaban on Monday night. But in a quick change of plan Rafiqul Islam replaced Zabiullah at ERD, according to an establishment ministry notification. Awami League (AL) leaders had accused Ismail Zabiullah for the disappearance of files of the Jail Killing Case.

At the very end of its term, BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government reappointed Establishment Secretary Dr Mahabur Rahman with Jute and Textile Secretary AFM Solaiman Chowdhury at midnight on Friday during the Eid vacation. The transfer was made to put a more sympathetic officer in the vital ministry, which deals with all transfers, promotions and fresh postings in the civil administration.

AFM Solaiman Chowdhury was deputy commissioner of Feni during the last caretaker government and the immediate past government awarded him by promoting him to the post of a secretary from the chief executive officer of Dhaka City Corporation. AFM Solaiman Chowdhury was made secretary on April 9 this year in only four years from the position of a deputy secretary, and sources said he superseded at least seven officers who were superior to him according to a merit list of the 1979 batch prepared by the Public Service Commission (PSC).

AFM Solaiman Chowdhury is reported to have strong leaning towards Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, a key partner of the BNP-led alliance government.

Pointing to the latest change in the home ministry, a former bureaucrat said new Home Secretary SM Jahirul Islam earlier served the immediate past government as an additional secretary to the same ministry.

Before the present posting, SM Jahirul Islam was the local government division secretary.

During his service as an additional secretary to the home ministry, SM Jahirul Islam is said to have influenced the cancellation of a home ministry initiative to transfer erstwhile Rajshahi Police Super Masud Mia who had been accused of patronising Islamist militant activities in Rajshahi and neighbouring districts.

Sources said SM Jahirul Islam had good relation with former post and telecommunications minister M Aminul Haq who is also accused of patronising Islamist militants.

So far no action has been taken against four other top officials who were also appointed on contracts mainly due to their political leanings to the immediate past government.

The officials are Power Division Secretary ANH Akhtar Hossain, Finance Division Secretary Siddiqui Rahman, Secretary to the Anti-corruption Commission Abdul Alim

Khan, and Prime Minister's Press Secretary Tajul Islam.

Sources in the administration, professional bodies, and a number of political parties termed Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed's move to reshuffle the administration as a cosmetic measure, which they said would do very little to change the situation.

A source said Abdul Aziz, who was transferred as the secretary to the agriculture ministry from his position as a member of the Planning Commission, previously had served the same ministry under the immediate past government as an additional secretary.

Primary and Mass Education Secretary AKM Shamsuddin was moved to the women and children affairs ministry, who had earlier served the PMO as its director general (DG).

Additional Secretary Badiur Rahman, named as the acting power secretary on Monday night, will move to the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED). Sources said Badiur Rahman had been promoted on political consideration superseding many other competent officials. He was listed at the 105th position of the PSC prepared merit list of the 1979 batch and at the 40th position on the combined merit/seniority list.

ANH Akhtar Hossain, who was made the IMED secretary on Monday night, will return to the power division according to a fresh notification. Widely suspected to be very close to Hawa Bhaban, he had got two promotions in a day during the immediate past government on political consideration. Such promotion had been unheard of in the administration.

The present Communications Secretary Aminul Islam Bhuiyan was also promoted superseding other officials while he had been at the 115th position on the combined merit list of the PSC.

Politicisation of each of the departments of the administration has been so thorough that the interim government will find it hard to dismantle their comprehensive control on the administration as the removal of one official will only mean another official with leaning to the four-party alliance assuming the post, noting many former and serving bureaucrats.

The immediate past government not only changed several times the rules of contractual appointment and promotion to benefit the officers with leanings to it. It also violated the same rules repeatedly when felt necessary to favour a particular official.

A former bureaucrat suggested appointing competent officials from the merit list of the PSC, who were deprived of promotions due to political reasons.

Annan

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British Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Kim Howells has called for an end to the widespread political violence in Bangladesh and urged the caretaker government to maintain neutrality in line with the constitution.

In a statement issued on Monday, he said, "I'm deeply concerned at the violence in Bangladesh in recent days," said a British High Commission press release here yesterday.

The British minister also urged the caretaker government to work in the best interests of the people, and the political parties of the country to work towards free, fair and peaceful elections.

11 major tasks

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impartiality and neutrality.

"I don't think that three or four days are enough," commented Butenis. The US envoy urged all political parties not to sponsor any more violence on the streets and hoped all the parties would participate in the upcoming elections.

"It is important not to resume street violence and agitation. I urge all the political parties and political leaders to refrain from it," added Butenis. "I was encouraged that all showed restraint during the power handover."

Briefing the reporters, Sheikh Hasina's political secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury said they informed the US envoy of the 11 immediate tasks for the president to prove his neutrality within November 3.

"We have given a chance to the president to prove that he is not partisan," Saber said adding that if the president has "keen", those tasks could be met in a matter of "three hours".

Earlier, outgoing Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri called on Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence and discussed different bilateral issues.

Sikri's meeting with Hasina lasted for about half an hour. She said after the meeting, India looks forward to seeing a free and fair election held in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi people are strongly committed to democracy and democratic traditions, Sikri observed. "We hope that people of Bangladesh will be able to hold a free and fair election as per the Constitution."

Among others, AL leaders Abdul

Jaalil, Kazi Zafarullah, Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Sheikh Helal, were present during the meetings.

Col Faruk

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filed with Cantonment Police Station on August 18, 1996.

After completion of arguments from the prosecution and the defence on October 9, the same court had fixed today for delivery of judgement of the cases.

Earlier, the court recorded statements of six prosecution witnesses in each case.

According to the prosecution, a team of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) along with the then officer-in-charge (OC) of Cantonment Police Station raided Faruk's house at DOHS in the capital at about 3:45am on August 18, 1996, arrested Faruk and seized a revolver, a shotgun, an airgun, a Sten gun, 616 bullets, eight international passports, 2,830 Pakistani rupees and 62.75 Libyan dinars.

Later, four cases were filed with Cantonment Police Station – one under the Arms Act, one under the Foreign Currency Control Act, one under the Explosive Substances Act and the other under the Special Powers Act.

Earlier on May 9 last year, the same court acquitted Lt Colonel (dismissed) Syed Farukur Rahman of charges in a case filed for possessing foreign currencies, as the charges brought against him were not proved.

Another court on October 20, 2004 sentenced Faruk to life in jail in the Jail Killing case.

Election

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speaks for their own interests. "I am holding a constitutional post to give the country a free and fair election," he stated, adding that he was hopeful that he would be able to conduct the next parliamentary election in January.

Aziz said very little time is left ahead of the next parliamentary election. A lot of time has been wasted and everybody knows the reasons for that, he added.

"I hope the next parliamentary election will be held way before January 25, the deadline for holding the election. I have talked to the chief adviser. He asked me to make all efforts to hold the election in time," the CEC said referring to his conversation with the chief adviser on Sunday night.

Asked whether he feels any pressure, Aziz said, "I don't believe in pressure."

The CEC said, "We love this country and as citizens of the country, we will try to continue the democratic process."

Another election commissioner, Justice Mahfuzur Rahman, told reporters that he would not react to any political party's demand. "We are discharging constitutional duties," he said.

AL presses

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meeting with the AL allies. Prior to the briefing, a five-member delegation comprising AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil and Suranjit Sengupta went to Bangabhaban and handed over a list of names for advisers in the interim government to the president.

"Upon the president's request, we have handed over a list of 15 names for the posts of caretaker government advisers to him," Jalil told reporters at a press briefing at the AL Dhanmondi office.

"During the meeting we emphasised the need for more changes in the civil and police administration to depoliticise them which is necessary for holding a free and fair election," he said. Termination of the contractual jobs of nine secretaries and transfer of another 18 were not sufficient, Jalil said, adding that the AL urged the president to continue the process.

Sources said the AL delegation submitted a number of names of officials from both civil and police administration for reshuffling. The posts include the chiefs of Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, National Security Intelligence, Rapid Action Battalion, and the police department.

The AL demanded that the president transfer all top police officials—starting from officers-in-charge (OC)—from Dhaka and other metropolitan cities.

The AL leaders demanded immediate removal of the OC of

Bhanga Police Station in Faridpur for helping the former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal president and his cadres flee with arms, Jalil said, alleging that the "politically" appointed police officials are still functioning as BNP's cadres.

The AL delegation told the president that the new home secretary had links to Jamaat and he must be transferred.

They reiterated the demand of the AL-led 14-party alliance for reconstitution of the EC by removing Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz, other election commissioners and the EC secretary.

The AL also demanded measures to arrest the activists of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami who went rough on 14-party leaders in Rajshahi on Monday.

Jalil called on the caretaker government to try the family members of former prime minister Khaleida Zia, former ministers and MPs who plundered people's wealth.

"We have given the president time until November 3 to prove himself neutral," Jalil said, adding, "The president has assured us of taking necessary steps to ensure a free and fair election."

Earlier at another press briefing at Sudha Sadan, AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader demanded that the president bring about neutrality in the state-run Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar and other news and publicity media.

LDP seeks

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Badruddoza Chowdhury told reporters after conclusion of the LDP delegation's meeting with Iajuddin Ahmad at Bangabhaban.

This is the first visit of Badruddoza to Bangabhaban after his forced resignation from the then president post of BNP-led four-party alliance government on June 2002.

The LDP delegation requested Iajuddin Ahmad to discharge his task neutrally and transparently. "He has acquired both power and responsibility and he will have to perform with precision," Badruddoza told reporters. LDP submitted their eight-point demand following the 11-point demand placed by the Awami League-led 14-party combine the previous day.

Termination of the CEC, other three election commissioners and the secretary to the Election Commission, correction of the "fake" voter list, arrest of political terrorists, termination of the directors general (DG) and their deputies (DDG) at Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar and other officials who had been serving for a particular political party, and press secretary to the president are some of the major points of the eight-point demand.

The LDP chief, however, declined to disclose the list of caretaker advisers they proposed to the chief adviser by saying, "It's a secret matter. I am not going to disclose their names."

"We will call on the chief adviser frequently in the future to assess the implementation of our demands," said Badruddoza.

Reconstitution of EC

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"Nobody has confidence in the present Election Commission which is mired in an unprecedented controversy. The only way to gain people's confidence in the Election Commission is to reconstitute it as soon as possible," former adviser to caretaker government M Hafizuddin Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Echoing the view, another former caretaker government adviser, ASM Shahjahan, said the present EC should be reconstituted as it had been before the parliamentary elections in 1991 and 1996. "The first step of the caretaker government is to reconstitute the Election Commission without any delay. In case of any delay, political violence may erupt again," he said. "Besides, the Election Commission will have to complete a massive task for holding the next parliamentary elections, but time is running out."

Former CEC Abu Hena said the current CEC and the three election commissioners should respect public sentiment.

MA Aziz, who was appointed the CEC on May 23 last year, gave rise to enormous controversy, particularly by preparing a fresh voter list ignoring High Court directives and opinions of two then election commissioners. The government in a hurried move in January last year appointed Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria as election commissioners and from the outset the two supported the CEC's controversial initiative. The fresh voter list ultimately caused wastage of over Tk 40 crore as it was finally declared void by the Appellate Division.

The EC then updated the existing voter list in accordance with the High Court directives, but the accu-

ration of the updated list has also been questioned as the procedure followed for the task was controversial.

The government then appointed Hasan Mahmud Mansur as the third election commissioner last August.

The 14-party alliance has since demanded removal of the CEC and the three election commissioners.

The alliance said on Monday that it would announce its next course of agitation programmes if the chief adviser fails to initiate any steps in this regard within November 3.

The newly formed Liberal Democratic Party at a meeting with the president yesterday also asked him to initiate urgent steps to reconstitute the EC.

Referring to the constitutional provisions, legal experts said the president can informally ask the CEC and three other election commissioners to resign.

If they do not follow, the president can refer the matter to the Supreme Judicial Council for inquiry. If the council reports to the president that the EC members have ceased to be capable of properly performing the functions of their office or been guilty of gross misconduct, the president shall order removal of the members.

Before the 1991 parliamentary elections, the then CEC Justice Sultan Hossain Khan resigned from his post following severe opposition from major political parties. Former CEC Justice AKM Sadek, who conducted the February 15 parliamentary elections in 1996, also resigned from his post upon request of the then caretaker government adviser Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed.

DMP drive

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police station and was sent to the court yesterday morning, Moina said. She managed to release her son yesterday afternoon by paying Tk 450 to a broker working at the CMM court.

Akkas Miah claimed that his crime was that he attended an AL rally on Sunday. Police of Bhoshantek police outpost asked him to go to the police station on Sunday evening. As he went there, he was arrested and sent to the court the following day.

His wife Jotsna Begum became bewildered finding her 50-year-old husband arrested. She was running after brokers at the court yesterday begging them to get a release order for her husband.

The family of Mohammad Shamim, 20, a Jubo League worker of Lalbagh area, is lucky as his party-men are paying the lawyer's fees.

Her mother Jarina Begum said Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) men arrested Shamim, an employee of a scrap metal shop, in possession of a razor at Rahmatgaj of Bakshibazar in Lalbagh area.

Mohammad Liton, 23, owner of a small shop at Hazipara in Khilgaon, said police arrested him when he was talking to his customers around 8:30pm on Sunday night and placed him before the court with a seven-day remand prayer.

The police stations of the city were crammed with family members of the arrestees and the people picked up. The stations were very busy with brokers working and police bringing in and releasing the picked-up people.

A similar picture was seen on the court premises. Hundreds of brokers were found hunting down innocent and poor parents, wives and family members of arrestees. A large crowd was also seen in front of Dhaka Central Jail waiting either for the release of arrestees or to meet the arrestees.

Meanwhile, a DMP press release said out of the 170 arrests made yesterday 25 people were arrested following warrants of arrest, 83 in regular cases, six under section 54 and the rest 65 under DMP Ordinance.

Nagorik Committee

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public mind, the meeting observed.

"To ensure a free and fair elections it is expected that the caretaker government will take steps as soon as possible to implement the recommendations of the Nagorik Committee 2006 made public earlier regarding reconstitution of the Election Commission and correcting the electoral roll," said the committee.

The Nagorik Committee will continue to strengthen public support for the recommendations formulated on the basis of regional dialogues over the past few months.

Chaired by M Syeduzzaman, co-convener of the Nagorik Committee 2006, the meeting was attended by Anisuzzaman, Samson H Chowdhury, M Mujibul Huq, Mahmuda Islam, Lala Rahman Kabir, Sultana Kamal, M Hafizuddin Khan and ASM Shahjahan. Debapriya Bhattacharya facilitated the meeting as member secretary of the committee.

Country coming

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again. During the week of political turmoil, the businessmen across the border had also suspended export-import.

Benapole, the country's premium landport, got back in operation yesterday morning after remaining closed for three consecutive days due to the political upheaval in the country. The suspension of transport had left hundred of passengers stranded at the port, said sources.

Export and import through the landports in the northern districts were normal after over a week's break due to Eid vacation and political troubles, added the sources.

According to a BSS report, over 650 trucks laden with perishable goods had been stranded on either side of the Hilli, Burimari, and Sonamasjid landports during the last three days.

Restriction

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were barred at the Secretariat entrance on Monday night when the government cancelled the contract of nine secretaries and transferred 18 others.

The new home secretary angrily reacted and said that there would be no further change, so journalists do not need to enter the Secretariat after office hours.

When a journalist asked how he could be sure of no more changes in the administration, Zahirul Islam replied that the transfer orders would be sent to the press club if there were any change.

The new home secretary at that time was accompanied by the outgoing home secretary Safar Raj Hossain and the inspector general of police. But none of them made any comment.

N Korea set to scrap nukes for concessions

AFP, Beijing

North Korea reaffirmed during talks here yesterday a pledge made last year to scrap its nuclear weapons in return for concessions, US negotiator Christopher Hill said.

Hill, after a meeting with his North Korean and Chinese counterparts to six-party talks, said Pyongyang had agreed to return to the talks as early as November without conditions.

Additionally Pyongyang promised to abide by the pledge to scrap its nuclear weapons made at the forum in September 2005.

"We all reaffirmed, including the North Koreans, our commitment to the September statement and the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula," Hill told reporters.

The discussions on Tuesday in Beijing involved Hill, his North Korean counterpart to the six-party talks, Kim Kye-Gwan and Chinese envoy Wu Dawei.

"They did not make any conditions," Hill said.

"For us it was very important that no-one should create conditions for attending the talks."

North Korea pulled out of the six-nation talks in November last year in protest at US financial sanctions imposed against it for alleged counterfeiting and money laundering by Pyongyang.

North Korea had insisted since then that it would not return to the talks until the financial sanctions were lifted.

However Hill said that North

Korean envoy Kim Kye-Gwan had told him on Tuesday that Pyongyang was now ready to deal with the issue of the financial sanctions in the six-party forum.

"They wanted our reassurance that we would address the issue of the financial measures in the six-party process," Hill said.

In what was seen as a major breakthrough last September, North Korea committed to giving up its nuclear weapons in return for security guarantees, normalisation of relations, energy and other aid.

Within hours, however, North Korea attacked conditions of the deal and in November announced it was boycotting further talks.

Meanwhile, South Korea yesterday welcomed North Korea's decision to return to stalled six-party talks on its nuclear programme.

"The government welcomes the agreement, reached at a meeting of the United States, North Korea and China, on the resumption of six-party talks," foreign ministry spokesman Choo Kyu-Ho said.

China's foreign ministry said the agreement came at surprise talks involving nuclear envoys from the three countries.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted an unidentified foreign ministry official here as saying the six-party talks may restart sometime in November.

Once transferred

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Meanwhile, officer on special duty (OSD) Akram Hossain (secretary) was transferred to the Planning Commission as a member yesterday.

Sources said the BNP high command put pressure on President and Chief Adviser of the caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmad soon after the transfer order of Akhter Hossain to the IMED.

Akhter was returned to his previous post to thwart any move by the interim government to investigate corruption cases in the power sector during the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance rule, the sources added.

Additional Secretary Badiur Rahman, who was made acting power secretary Monday night, will move to the IMED, according to an establishment ministry notification yesterday.

Sources said Ismail Zabiullah, another high official politically loyal to the immediate past government, was posted at the Bangabhaban due to pressure from the BNP which wants to get him at the power centre of the country during the three-month tenure of the interim government.

Meanwhile, contractual appointments of Abdul Aziz Sarker, director general of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Farrukh Ahmed Chowdhury, additional inspector general of police (administration) were cancelled yesterday.

The BNP also tried to influence the president and chief adviser to cancel the order against these two high ranking law enforcement officers but the president ignored it, sources said.

Akhter Hossain, a secretary under the president's quota, was promoted as secretary in charge of the Power Division by the im-

Pro-AL, BNP

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secretariat to meet the establishment secretary for justice.

Some 50 pro-AL officials and employees staged demonstrations at the secretariat on Sunday and Monday, which continued yesterday, witnesses said.

A group of officials and employees led by Alauddin Ahmed Chowdhury, assistant private secretary (APS) to the former leader of the opposition, met the establishment secretary and demanded promotion of those deprived in the last five years, new postings of around 700 officials made OSD and punishment to those responsible for politicising the administration.

Sources said that the deprived officials are determined to continue creating pressure on the caretaker administration to meet their demands.

On Monday, a group of officials and employees led by the APS of former prime minister Shamsul Alam held a gathering at the secretariat in the name of exchanging Eid greetings.

State radio, TV

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foreign ministry, Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB), Directorate of Film and Publication (DFP), and Principal Information Officer (PIO). Most of the top brass of these important state organs has been appointed politically in the last five years of the alliance rule.

Sources said though the senior officials of the state-owned Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television have reputation for unflinching loyalty to BNP and Jamaat, the caretaker administration of President Iajuddin Ahmed has yet to take any step to correct the situation.

All political parties except BNP and its allies have already demanded that the chief adviser bring the state-owned media to a neutral ground by cancelling the controversial appointments.

Both the institutions have failed to perform neutrally in the last two days, allege the leaders of Awami League (AL) led 14-party combine.

During a meeting with Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday, the leaders of newly launched Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) also demanded that the president dismiss the officials who had been selected for the key positions at BTV and Betar merely for their affiliations with the four-party alliance.

Surprisingly, Press Secretary to the president Mokhlesur Rahman Chowdhury who was a senior journalist of BNP mouthpiece daily Dinkal is still continuing in his post.

The LDP leaders yesterday asked the president to remove Mokhlesur as they feared he might seek to disclose the plans and moves of the chief adviser to the immediate past ruling party as 'someone closely affiliated' with Dinkal, which is published by Senior Joint Secretary General of BNP Tarique Rahman.

Sources said just a few days before completion of its term in office, the alliance government appointed Abdul Hye Siddique as Director General of PIB. Hye, a

pro-BNP journalist, has been trying to get the party nomination for the next general election.

Despite his overt political activities, he has yet not got the axe.

Meanwhile, M Muhaddes, who was appointed PIO, a vital post under the information ministry, by the BNP government, is still in service.

The 14-party combine has already called Iajuddin for ensuring neutrality of the Press Information Department (PID). They said they believe the department could help the caretaker administration in free and fair conduct of the upcoming election by playing a robust and impartial role.

Besides, Zahirul Haque, director general of External Affairs Division, is going on with his contract-based job. Known as a staunch BNP supporter among the journalist community, he was made the DG at the very beginning of the coalition rule.

The caretaker government has