

FIRST COUNCIL MEETING

Advisers talk ways to make EC effective

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The council of advisers to the interim government yesterday in its first meeting started searching for ways to make the Election Commission (EC) factually effective by any means necessary to hold the next parliamentary election in a free and fair manner. They are scheduled to meet again at 12:30pm today.

On the first working day of the council, the advisers to the caretaker government headed by President Iajuddin Ahmed, reached a consensus that the EC must be made effective as holding a fair election largely depends on its capabilities, sources said.

In response to the opinions of his advisers, the president also chief adviser to the interim government

asked them to keep on thinking about all matters regarding holding a free and fair election, the sources added.

"In fact, we are now heartily trying to find the means to make the Election Commission effective," an adviser told The Daily Star yesterday on condition of anonymity.

The adviser however declined to make any instant comment on whether they plan to reconstitute the EC that has been mired in controversy raising questions about its ability to hold a fair election.

Contacted by The Daily Star last night, Adviser Dr Akbar Ali Khan however said the issue of reform in the EC and the electoral laws is being discussed among the public,

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PORTFOLIO DISTRIBUTION

Iajuddin retains vital ministries

UNB, Dhaka

President and Chief Adviser Professor Iajuddin Ahmed last night allocated portfolios to the advisers of his caretaker government, keeping all the vital ministries under his stewardship.

Professor Iajuddin will hold the Chief Adviser's Office, Armed Forces Division, Cabinet Division, Election Commission Secretariat, NGO Affairs Bureau, Defense Ministry, Establishment Ministry,

Bangladesh Public Service Commission, Ministries Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Education.

Adviser former justice Fazlul Huq was given the Ministries of Law and Justice, Land, and Environment and Forest.

Adviser Dr. Akbar Ali Khan was given the charge of Finance, Planning, Commerce and Post and Telecommunications Ministries.

Adviser Hasan Mashud

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10 advisers vow to work for fair polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The council of ten advisers to the non-party caretaker government yesterday sought cooperation from all as they vowed to hold a free and fair election through dedication to their responsibilities.

At their first meeting with President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday, they expressed optimism about gaining people's confidence as advisers in the interim government.

The president urged them to keep in mind all the matters needed to hold a free and fair election.

"We think it is our national responsibility and hope everybody will come to save the country's democracy," adviser Dr Akbar Ali Khan told newsmen.

Adviser Lt Gen (rtd) Hasan Mashud Chowdhury urged the

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Liquid waste from a nearby dyeing factory pollutes the water of river Shitalaxma near Kanchpur Bridge on the outskirts of the capital. PHOTO: STAR

Adviser Fazlul irked by comment to watch neutrality

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Adviser to the caretaker government former justice Fazlul Haque yesterday came down heavily on the political parties for setting a deadline for the advisers to prove their neutrality and keeping their activities under watch.

"I'll object to this. We don't have any link with politics. These kinds of statements are very objectionable," the former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court told reporters yesterday while talking on the AL-led 14-party's reaction after the advisers took oath Tuesday night.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil Tuesday night told journalists that the 14-party would follow the activities of the advisers to ascertain whether they play a neutral role for a free and fair election.

"Why would we be under

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PORTFOLIOS No talk before distribution dismays advisers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Disappointing some of the newly sworn advisers, there was no discussion on distribution of portfolios in the first meeting of the council of advisers to the interim government.

Some of the advisers expressed their astonishment, as President also Chief of the Caretaker Government Iajuddin Ahmed did not even bring up the issue for discussion in their first meeting.

Some of them also asked the president when they would get their portfolios, meeting sources said.

The president is said to have told the advisers that they would learn about their portfolios at night, but he did not discuss who

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Taher Thakur among 18 charged with Aug 15 killings

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against 18 accused, including Taher Uddin Thakur, in connection with the 14 Murder Case of August 15, 1975 in Mohammadpur. Judge Mohammad Monzurul Bachhid of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court rejected the discharge petitions filed by the defence lawyers of the five accused and framed charges against them.

Accused Taher Uddin Thakur, Lt Col Syed Farook Rahman, Lt Col Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Lt Col Muhiuddin Ahmed and Major Bazlul Huda pleaded not guilty and demanded justice before the court after the judge read out the charges against them.

The judge fixed January 25, 2007 for trial of the case and issued summons on the complainant to appear before the court on that date.

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Agitation if Iajuddin fails to do 11 tasks

14-party combine tells foreign diplomats

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine yesterday briefed foreign diplomats and donors' representatives in Dhaka about the current political situation, and said failure to carry out the 11-point immediate task it put forward to the president and chief adviser of the caretaker government would bring his neutrality into question.

The president and chief adviser's hesitation to implement the tasks or his deviation from or avoidance of those will force the 14-party to go for movements for a free and fair election and for establishing people's rights, AL General Secretary Abdul

Jalil said reading out a statement of party chief Sheikh Hasina at the briefing.

Hasina was scheduled to brief the diplomats but she could not due to illness, Jalil said.

Ambassadors of United States, Japan, China, Germany, Turkey, Sri Lanka, South Korea and the European Commission, the high commissioner of India, deputy high commissioner of United Kingdom and resident representatives of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), National Democratic Institute (NDI) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) attended the briefing.

The opposition combine

explained to them the need for a neutral approach of President Iajuddin Ahmed in the wake of a string of political violence over electoral reforms and sought support from their countries and organisations for a free and fair election in Bangladesh.

US Ambassador Patricia A Butenis asked if it is possible to fully implement the 11-point task by November 3, and if street violence resumes in case of failure to do so.

In reply, eminent jurist and senior 14-party leader Dr Kamal Hossain said, "We have been demonstrating for a free and fair

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EC reconstitution demand appears new to Bhuiyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said 14-party coalition's demand for restructuring the Election Commission (EC) is 'new' to him.

Terming the demand a 'new one' the BNP secretary general, in a press briefing yesterday morning in his party's central office at Naya Paltan in the capital, categorically said, "There is no scope in the constitution to take any action against anyone in the EC."

Welcoming the newly appointed advisers to the caretaker government, Mannan Bhuiyan said the interim government will hold a general election in three months time and appointing the advisers was a step forward to that direction.

"All of them are neutral, non-

partisan, respected citizens of the country and I think the appointments were not made on the basis of their political leanings," he said about the advisers to the caretaker government.

"I hope the caretaker government will give us a free, fair and neutral election," he said in reply to a question of a reporter adding that his party will help the interim government in holding an election in a free and fair manner. He urged all political parties to help the interim government.

When asked about the 11-point charter of demands of the Awami League-led coalition, which includes the demand for restructuring the EC, Bhuiyan said he does not know whether it is possible to

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Yunus gives A+ to chief adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday expressed satisfaction over performance of the chief adviser to the caretaker government.

"He is doing a wonderful job, I will give him an A+ for what he has done," Yunus commented on Prof Iajuddin Ahmed, the chief adviser (CA) to the caretaker government.

"It's not the time for disputes over the appointment of the chief adviser, it's time to move forward," said Yunus while talking to the diplomats of four European countries.

Four Ambassadors from Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and France yesterday called on Prof Yunus separately at his Grameen

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21 die in Sirajganj road mishap

OUR CORRESPONDENT, back from Sholomile, Sirajganj

Twenty-one people were killed and more than 50 others were injured in a fatal road accident on the Bogra-Nagarbari Highway in Rayganj upazila of Sirajganj yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said that the accident occurred at around 11:00am, when a Nagarbari-bound passenger bus coming from Bogra collided head-on with a Panchagarh-bound bus while the drivers of the buses tried to overtake a rickshaw van. In the meantime, another truck hit one of the buses from behind, leaving 18 dead on the spot and 53 injured.

Three of the injured later died on their way to hospitals.

Of the dead, 12 had been identified. They are Liton, 22, son of Digen Das of Uddurbaria village in Dhunot upazila of Bogra, Tukku Khan, 28, son of Shukur Ali of Belgari Colony in Sherpur upazila of Bogra, Abu Taleb, 42, of Shibpur upazila in Bogra, Lokman Hossain, 36, Ashraf Ali, 23, of Rail Colony in Bogra, Nabakumar, 41, of Vanudanga in Kazipur upazila in Sirajganj, Abhiram Shaha, 28, of Dhunot upazila in Bogra, Shatka Mian, 25, of Sherpur upazila in Bogra, Prof Fazlar Rahman, 35, Saheb Ali, 35 and Shimu, 8, from Singra in Natore and Nazrul Islam,

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Poor become poorer despite steady growth

Income of 50pc people decreases

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh saw a steady rise in its annual GDP rate in the five years of the BNP-led alliance government's rule. But at the same time, the country saw the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer due to ever-increasing corruption.

Studies show income of half the 14 crore people has decreased by the end of the alliance government's regime. On the other hand, income of 30 percent people marked moderate increase and the top 20 percent



made sharp increase.

The rising GDP (gross domestic product) rate however implies that the country's overall poverty level has marked a downward trend.

Though the ruling BNP in its 2001 election manifesto had categorically promised of "transparency

and competition in all financial transactions", corruption in the last five years remained totally unchecked. In fact, corruption has dominated government procurement, although the government had framed some stringent rules to curb corruption.

At the macro-economic level, most fronts of the economy enjoyed stability for most of the last five years. But as the government failed to check inflation, people could not reap the benefit of the macro-economic stability.

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Medicare at public hospitals goes costlier

Charges hiked at end of alliance tenure

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Treatment cost at government hospitals across the country have abruptly become higher as the user fee rates of several items were increased besides imposing the fees on a few other facilities without any prior notice.

Even patients admitted in free beds will now have to pay for all diagnostic tests, even blood and urine tests, X-ray, ultrasonography and ECG that were earlier performed free of charges.

Many said poor patients will face great difficulties as nothing would be free at hospitals from now. The government hospitals have 60 per

cent free beds that provided the patients with most tests free of cost.

The circular, dated October 18, for the increased charges was allegedly prepared hurriedly at the 11th hour of the BNP government's tenure but was not sent to the hospitals in time, sources said.

Service charges at hospitals were similarly increased in September 2005 which was later cancelled.

Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, health minister of the immediate past BNP-led four-party alliance government, said the previous circular was a little faulty as the

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'BDR men' beat to death Hatia AL leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) men reportedly beat an Awami League (AL) leader to death and wounded 30 others at Hatia upazila Tuesday night as they were watching the oath taking ceremony of the advisers on TV.

The dead was identified as AL Vice-president of Hatia upazila Abdus Shahid. The injured were admitted to the local clinics.

Witnesses said a large number of people gathered at a tea stall in Ahmad Miar Bazar to watch the swearing in of the advisers to the caretaker government on TV around 10:00pm. A team of BDR men led by Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Hatia, Imam Uddin Kabir,

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