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EC RECONSTITUTION STANDOFF

CA offers to appoint 2 new commissioners

Decision comes after meeting with BNP; Iajuddin may address nation today; AL hints at accepting proposal if new ECs replace Aziz, Zakaria

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed last night proposed appointment of two new election commissioners in his last ditch effort to strike peace between two major parties wrangling over reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC).

The proposal that came after BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia met Iajuddin at his Bangabhaban office at 6.40pm was summarily ruled out

by the Awami League with the exception that it is ready to accept the peace formula if the two new appointees replace the Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz and Commissioner SM Zakaria.

Iajuddin, who postponed his meeting with his advisers in the morning, will address the nation today or tomorrow to explain his efforts in resolving the tenuous political crisis that dogged the nation since the caretaker government took over on October 29.

Sources said the advisers, after their three days of hectic meetings with the major political parties to find a solution to the debate of whether to reconstitute the Election Commission, had sat with Iajuddin in the morning yesterday, a day ahead of the scheduled date proposed by the chief adviser. The CA however did not give any decision to the advisers' majority advice that the EC be reconstituted with Aziz requested to step down. As Iajuddin adjourned the

meeting until 9 in the night, Khaleda met the CA and clearly laid down her terms that if anything is done beyond the constitution, her party would not cooperate with the caretaker government.

After Khaleda left Bangabhaban, Iajuddin again met his advisers and told them that he would address the nation to throw his proposal for appointment of two new commissioners to the EC.

"We discussed about the possibility

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Milon rebuts Barrister Zia's kidnap claim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former state minister for education Ehsanul Haq Milon yesterday denied the allegations made by Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leader Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan of attempting to kidnap him and claimed that Zia wished to return to BNP willingly.

"Barrister Zia asked me to communicate with Hawa Bhaban (BNP's Banani office) as a mediator about his return to the party," Milon said at a press briefing at BNP's central office at Naya Paltan in the city.

"He phoned me about 50/60 times and requested me to manage the BNP high command for his return. As per his request, I went to his house two times and had discussions in this regard," said the BNP leader adding that Barrister Zia's wife, brother and uncle had

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BNP tightens noose on chief adviser

Presses for polls schedule, talks against transfer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson and immediate past prime minister Khaleda Zia last night met President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed, urging him to start the electoral process, including announcement of the election schedule, immediately.

"We asked the president and chief adviser to start the election process and announce the election schedule without delay," BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said at a press conference referring to the discussion with the caretaker government chief at Bangabhaban.

"We also inquired him about the progress of the preparation for the

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BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia speaks to President and Chief Adviser Prof Iajuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban last night during a meeting of a BNP delegation with the president.

Navy flouts rules in boat spares deal

Set to procure Tk 1.6cr spare parts at Tk 6.19cr

SHARIF KHAN

Bangladesh Navy is procuring Tk 1.5 crore worth of spare parts for its six high-speed boats for an exorbitant Tk 6.19 crore violating rules and bypassing the director general of defence purchase (DGDP), sources said.

On November 5, based on a restricted tender the Naval Store Sub-Depot (NSSD) issued three separate work orders for spares for these speedboats. Two of these work orders worth Tk 2.66 crore and Tk 3.42 crore were issued to one firm -- AJA International -- and

the other worth of Tk 11 lakh to a firm -- Habib Enterprise.

Interestingly, this supply will be delivered to Bangladeshi peace-keeping mission in Sudan, and not in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi peacekeepers there are using these boats purchased in 2005 only for Tk 8.5 crore. The boats were delivered in Bangladesh.

Sources said while the price of Tk 6.19 crore itself is highly inflated, it includes import duty and taxes to be payable to Bangladesh. But these will not be paid to Bangladesh as the goods will be delivered in Sudan this

month and in January. Navy sources said actual price of the spare parts would be Tk 1.5 crore, and even if taxes are included, the price would be around Tk 4 crore.

The deal was pushed by a relative of the immediate past prime minister along with a former political appointee of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

One of the in the deal includes a former official of the PMO during the Awami League (AL) rule. He was included as a 'future strategy'. In case the AL returns to power in the next elections and starts punishing

those involved in corruption in naval procurements, he would 'save' them. The suppliers who were given the job do not include names of any of these beneficiaries.

Sources said the procurement process is a gross violation of defence rules that demand purchases through the DGDP. The navy authorities are buying these parts directly without holding any open tender despite such high cost involvement.

An official of Bangladesh Navy, requesting anonymity, said,

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WB committed to microcredit despite Yunus criticism

AFP, Washington

The World Bank is committed to microcredit, an official said Friday after Nobel Peace prize winner Muhammad Yunus attacked the lender for all but ignoring tiny loans for impoverished people.

Bank director Elizabeth Littlefield rejected Yunus's criticism, at a microcredit summit in Canada this week, that "not even one percent" of the World Bank's total lending goes to microcredit funding.

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14-party warns CA of mass upsurge

Says blockade to start again if demands not met by today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) led 14-party coalition will resume non-stop blockade across the country tomorrow if President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed does not meet by today its 11-point demand.

"If the conspiracy to rig the election continues, our blockade

programme will culminate in a one-point mass movement for the ouster of Iajuddin," 14-party Coordinator Abdul Jalil told a press briefing at the AL's Dhanmondi office yesterday.

Earlier on November 15, AL President Sheikh Hasina postponed the blockade, considering public sufferings and the combine's confidence in the talks with

advisers. She gave the chief adviser four more days to prove what she said was his neutrality.

Meanwhile, the 14-party line-up from a rally at city's Muktangan yesterday threatened to lay siege to the Bangabhaban in the event of the president not conceding the demands that the former leader of the opposition submitted on

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PHOTO: STAR

Mirpur Road in Dhanmondi sees gridlock yesterday as city dwellers rush to get their essential tasks done fearing resumption of the 14-party blockade.

Hill districts lack proper atmosphere for fair polls

Says Santu Larma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chairman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, also known as Santu Larma, yesterday said the political atmosphere of the hilly region is not suitable for holding a free, fair and credible election.

Following an hour-long meeting with Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday at her Sudha Sadan residence, Larma said they discussed the present political atmosphere of the hilly region and the current political crisis in the country.

Larma said, "I told her [the AL chief] that a suitable atmosphere to hold a free and fair election in the hill tracts is not prevailing."

He said they focused on the

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ROW OVER CTG PORT GANTRY CRANES

Container yard kept besieged for a week

RAFIQ HASAN

The dockworkers loyal to Chittagong City Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury have kept the vital container yard of the Chittagong Port besieged for over a week demanding cancellation of the agreement signed with a private company on the gantry crane operations.

On the other hand, the private company -- Saif Powertec Limited -- yesterday served a notice against the port authority demanding Tk 10 lakh compensation per day for not allowing them to operate, sources said.

Although the port resumed operation after postponement of political agitation on Wednesday, the dock workers have halted the operation of the four vital cranes at the container terminal.

Consequently, the operation at

the premier port is yet to start in full swing.

All of the three berths and four gantry cranes at the Chittagong Container Terminal (CCT) have remained idle since November 12, sources said.

Besides, two large vessels anchored at the terminal are incurring loss of \$15,000 each per day due to non-operation of the cranes. Saif Powertec Limited that had been awarded the task of operating the gantry cranes served a notice against the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) yesterday demanding compensation of Tk 10 lakh per day for losses due to suspension of operation of the vital equipment.

Giving 24 hours time to restore operation of the cranes, the company threatened of legal actions against the CPA.

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Iajuddin must quit if fails to resolve crisis

B Chy sets 24-hr deadline

DU CORRESPONDENT

President of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday said the President and Chief Adviser of the caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed will have to resign if he fails to solve the prevailing political crisis within 24 hours.

Urging the chief adviser to implement the recommendations of the advisers by the time, he said otherwise, a united movement will be launched by all the political parties except BNP and Jamaat.

Addressing a programme at a city hotel where around 500 leaders and activists from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) Jubo Parishad, JSD Chhatra League, Jubo Dal, Chhatra Dal and Sramik Dal joined the LDP, Badruddoza

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