

Aziz decides his fate

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difficulties to make the EC effective enough to hold a credible election, hopes that there might be a positive outcome today. The advisers believe the CEC would agree to give way to someone else, paving the way for reorganisation of the EC.

Once Aziz stands down, President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed will appoint a new CEC and the reorganised EC will announce the schedule for the next parliamentary election.

The move came after 20 days since the advisers took the initiative to reconstitute the EC.

The CEC, who had earlier declined to consider the advisory council's request to step down, yesterday said he would take two days to decide on the next course of action regarding the president's initiative.

After meeting the CEC, the three advisers rushed to the Bangabhaban to inform Iajuddin of the outcome of the talks. Later, they said they are now hopeful about an end to the crisis to come in a couple of days as the CEC himself wants to resolve the standoff.

Advocate Sultana Kamal did not elaborate on exactly what had been proposed to Aziz but said the prospective way out falls within the ambit of the constitution and hopefully, it will be acceptable to all.

Adviser M Azizul Haque said, "We cannot set him any time for decision. He [CEC] told us that he would inform the president about his decision in time."

Following the talks with the presidential delegates, the CEC declined to talk to reporters and so did the three other election commissioners who too were present at the meeting.

The council of advisers' meeting presided over by Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed discussed the developments in the talks.

Aziz, who assumed the office on May 23 last year, has been mired deep in controversy for his domineering attitude and somewhat outrageous remarks. Early in the year he went for a fresh voter list in a unilateral move ignoring the High Court directives.

Except BNP and its allies, the major political parties, civil society members, diplomats and donor agencies have long been maintaining that a credible election is not possible under supervision of the present EC.

From the outset, the council of advisers has been having difficulty in their efforts to make the EC effective, as the CEC has remained rigid on his stance not to resign.

Finally, an emergency meeting of

the advisory council with Iajuddin Ahmed in the chair Sunday night decided to send a presidential delegation to request Aziz to revisit his posture.

The information regarding the president's move was also conveyed to the two major political parties yesterday.

Earlier on Saturday night, the president said he was ready to appoint two more election commissioners if the political parties seeking reconstitution of the EC agree.

Fears for flooded Kenya refugees

BBC ONLINE

Aid workers are seriously concerned for the health of some 80,000 Somali refugees living in eastern Kenya, which has been hit by catastrophic floods.

Thousands of latrines have flooded in one camp, leading to fears of the spread of cholera, a UN refugee agency official told the BBC.

"We are sleeping in the trees... wild animals are attacking the people," said refugee Rashid Abdi Ibrahim.

Aid agencies have launched an appeal for some 1.8 million people.

Central Somalia, eastern Kenya and south-eastern Ethiopia have all been hit by the floods.

Somalia is worst affected, partly because of the lack of infrastructure following 15 years of conflict and the lack of a central government.

The region was devastated by drought last year, leaving the earth unable to absorb the heavy rains, leading to flash floods.

The UN has said the floods could be the worst in the region for 50 years.

The rains are expected to continue for another month.

Hyenas, crocodiles

Mr Rashid said the aid agencies were not doing enough to help him and the other 80,000 refugees in the camps near Dadaab.

He told the BBC's Network Africa programme that they had been attacked by hyenas and snakes.

But the UNHCR's Geoff Wordley said the road to the area had been cut off by floodwaters.

"We cannot get large trucks with assistance in there now," he said.

"Food distribution had to be abandoned... because flood waters rose again. Not only that but some food has been destroyed by water."

He said that the UNHCR would help those who wished to be moved to other camps.

Peaceful blockade

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Tista rail stations.

Only a few launches left Sadarghat Launch Terminal in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Stock Exchange defied the political drama as share prices posted significant gains yesterday while trading at Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) closed higher.

NATORE CLASH

Clashes in Natore began at noon when 14-party activists fired shots at a group of armed cadres of BNP and its student front JCD, who had attempted to attack a 14-party rally at Chhayabani Cinema intersection, according to police and eyewitnesses.

As Natore JCD President Dewan Shahin and some of his followers were hit by bullets, a large group of JCD activists retaliated by firing gunshots at 14-party men, sparking a fierce gun battle.

Natore BNP General Secretary Shahidul Islam Bachchu was shot and his office at the old bus stand was damaged.

The clash further intensified when the groups traded gunshots from a close distance several times in front of police who played the role of mere spectators during the clash that spilled over to three other points. Chhayabani Cinema, Hemangini Bridge and Fire Brigade.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) reached the scene three hours later and brought the situation under control by clubbing the rival political activists, said witnesses.

The blockaders torched four motorcycles belonging to BNP activists and damaged the local office of Janata Bank during the clash.

According to police, both groups traded nearly 400 shots while police fired 10 tear gas canisters and 60 bullets to disperse the clashing political activists.

Bullet-hit JCD activists Matin and Afroz were rushed to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital with critical wounds in the head, chest and abdomen and they were in the operation theatre till filing of this report at 7:00pm.

Bullet-hit police sub-inspectors Subir Dutt and Rezaul Karim were admitted to Police Lines Hospital.

Others who were injured are Lalpur Upazila AL general Secretary Ishak Ali, Chhatni UP chairman Tojjazz Hossain, a UP member Mozir, and 14-party activists Milon, Abu Taher, Nur Hossain, Omar, Soheli, Reza, Opir and Ujjal.

THE CAPITAL
Bangabandhu Avenue and Zero Point areas were rocking with life yesterday as demonstrators reigned over the streets the whole day, marching on the roads, chanting slogans and holding rallies to enforce the blockade.

Folk singers were singing parodies criticising the CEC calling him 'shameless' and accusing the president and chief adviser to the caretaker government of being partisan while the most popular slogan was "Aizza, Barit Ja" (Aziz, go away).

Meanwhile, the tension that had arisen in the city since JCD and Islami

Terror plot

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case or a bag onto a plane in return for payment, it added.

But the plot broke down when the as yet unidentified suspects failed to reach agreement with the airport employee on the amount he would be paid to plant the luggage.

The prosecutor's office gave no details of which airport was involved.

Six suspects were arrested in Germany on Friday in connection with the plot, but five were released the following day. A sixth person was kept in custody in connection with a different matter.

All six suspects are being investigated for allegedly belonging to a terrorist organisation.

Investigators searched nine apartments in the southern region of Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse in central Germany looking for evidence, a spokesman said.

A spokesman for the interior ministry said he had nothing to add to the information given by the prosecutor's office.

Germany was shaken this summer after it was discovered that homemade bombs hidden in suitcases failed to explode on two passenger trains, because of faulty detonators.

Two Lebanese men have been charged with planting the suitcases on trains heading for the western cities of Hamm, near Dortmund, and Koblenz on July 31.

Navy cancels

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these speedboats.

Two of these orders, worth Tk 2.66 crore and 3.42 crore, were issued to one AJA International and the other worth Tk 11 lakh to one Habib Enterprise.

Interestingly this supply will be delivered to the Bangladeshi peace-keeping mission in Sudan and not in Bangladesh where the two-year old boats are currently being used.

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

Naval sources said the real value of the spare parts would be worth Tk 1.5 crore and even with taxes included, the prices would be around Tk 4 crore.

Sources said this whole deal was pushed by a relative of the former prime minister along with a former political appointee of the then prime minister's office (PMO) and his friend in the Navy.

The prices of the parts were highly inflated in the work orders, the sources pointed out. For instance, the manufacturer sells the "socket for cockpit" at Tk 2,288 (Euro 26). But the work order priced it at Tk 26,000 each. A gasket worth Tk 1,760 (Euro 20) has been priced at a staggering Tk 8.32 lakh each. Each of different types of rubber tubes has been priced between Tk 2,000 and Tk 6,760, while these are sold at prices below Tk 1,760 (Euro 20).

The manufacturer sells a ring drive (complete assembly) at Tk 1.76 lakh (Euro 2,000), but the work order priced it at Tk 24.34 lakh.

Two bombs

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15 feet away, dodging the surveillance by intelligence officials on guard at the president's official residence.

However, the president does not usually use the south gate of Bangabhaban and its adjacent road is open to public.

The president yesterday went out through the north gate before the bombs went off.

No one was injured in the explosions.

Security personnel from inside the Bangabhaban rushed to the spot soon after the blasts, but could not apprehend anyone.

A piece of plastic used for biscuit packaging was found on the spot that had smell of explosive substances.

A Rab intelligence official told The Daily Star that the bombs were handmade but powerful and did not contain splinters.

Requesting anonymity, he said the bombs might have been hurled from a speeding motorbike or a CNG auto rickshaw.

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4-party declares

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on popular support so they do not bother who is holding the post of the CEC. They urged 14-party leaders to avoid violence and to practice 'real politics' for welfare of the people.

Khoka, who presided over the rally, said they have the support of the majority of the population of the capital as well as of the whole country.

"We will prove that we are the biggest alliance in the country," said Khoka.

He said people rejected Awami League in 2001 and they are still supporting four-party alliance. He urged the leaders of 14-party coalition to take preparations for the upcoming election and to practice 'positive politics'.

He requested all supporters of four-party alliance to make their programme successful.

Mirza Abbas, a former minister, said four-party alliance did everything according to the constitution. Now 14-party coalition is demanding things that the constitution does not support, he added.

The advisers have already realised that they cannot do anything outside the ambit of the constitution, said Mirza Abbas.

Barkatullah Bulu, Amir of City Jamat-e-Islami Rafiqul Islam, and Moazzem Hossain Alal also spoke.

What will take

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challenged in the High Court where he lost. The CEC then appealed to the Appellate Division. What we found unethical and as such unacceptable, particularly from a sitting judge of our highest court, was that during the time of his appeal he completed the work of the voter list that High Court gave a verdict against. This action cost the public exchequer Tk 64 crore. Then the Appellate Division found his decision wrong, forcing him to go for a totally new operation of updating the voter list, costing the public more money to the tune of many crores. Such was the nature of waste of money that the then finance minister, Saifur Rahman, refused to release additional funds, as there was no proper accountability of Tk 64 crore that he had so recklessly spent.

It is when both the High Court and later the Supreme Court (Appellate Division) found his actions wrong that we took the editorial position of asking him to quit. Our logic was straightforward. We concluded that the CEC had lost the moral authority to occupy his post and to head a commission that will have to be trusted by the whole nation to deliver a free and fair election. He no longer commanded universal respect of the public since he was found guilty both by the High Court and the Supreme Court. As a judge, we concluded, he should have shown greater respect for the High Court verdict than he showed by carrying on with the preparation for the voter list while his appeal was being heard. This further convinced us of his declining moral authority.

Much has happened since then. Today the Chief Election Commissioner stands absolutely alone save for the support of the 4-party alliance, whose some very senior leaders wanted him to go just the other day. (A side issue. Even today, there are serious allegations of impropriety about the way contracts were given out to printers to print the voter list. People who are in the know of things have voiced serious allegations of corruption. Many printers without any experience have been given work and those with experience have been left out. In fact the printers' association has gone public on this matter alleging corruption. We grant that the allegations could have come from disgruntled elements who did not get a share of the printing pie. But shouldn't the CEC, as the head of the Election Commission, at least have made some inquiries and satisfied himself and the public that no wrong was done? How does one explain his total disinterest in the matter except to think that he does not care about financial discipline or accountability as was evidenced by the way he went about preparing the voter list? We haven't seen the CEC take any note of this public outcry, which unfortunately got buried under a bigger national crisis.)

Yes, the CEC's post is a constitutional one, meaning it is not subject to the whims and caprice of the power of the day. It has been made so to keep it above all sorts of political and official influences and pressures. It has been kept beyond the reach of all other offices (he cannot be removed except by a Supreme Judicial Council), including that of the Prime Minister and the President for the simple reason to let him carry out his work impartially to conduct a free and fair election.

All the provisions that make the Election Commission and the CEC and other commissioners so special have been made to help the CEC and the EC gain public confidence. To gain the trust of the voters, to make the people feel that the CEC will conduct an election that is beyond anybody's doubt so that we get a new set of people's representatives who truly represent the public will.

But what do we see today? Justice Aziz is using the constitutional nature of his position to save his job in the face of, what is now more than obvious, a widespread public outcry. Instead of protecting public interest he is subverting it by using the special dispensation that the constitution grants him.

The demand for removal of the CEC that was first started by the

14-party alliance has now been joined by the newly-formed LDP, a faction of the IOJ, Tariatq Federation, Jukta Front of Kader Siddiqui and ASM Abdur Rab, and CPB. There are others like the JP of Anwar Hossain Manju which have asked for reforming the EC. In addition, civil society groups have also asked for EC reconstitution. In fact, except for the 4-party alliance there is practically no other political group that wants the CEC to continue.

The donor community, being totally non-political and speaking only from the point of view of upholding democracy, has also clearly said that the solution lies in a newly constituted EC. The statement of the European Parliament has also asked for changes to the EC.

So what else can be done to get the message to the CEC that he is no longer an implement of free and fair election but an impediment to it. He has become the biggest obstacle toward an election that should be participated by all parties. The CEC now stands between peace and confrontation and has become the most controversial person in the country. By all accounts he has lost acceptability to a large number of voters and as such has become incapable of presiding over a free and fair election.

We have tried to bring together the facts that the CEC now faces. These facts clearly show that he cannot carry on the function that the constitution bestows on him. For him to still hold on to his present position amounts to using the constitution for personal gains. It would mean a total disrespect for the very documents he is pretending to protect. We sincerely urge him to take a note of the public mood and resign immediately and save the nation from further turmoil.

People serve history mostly by doing heroic deeds. But some serve it equally by not doing anything, in fact by withdrawing from their designated responsibilities. For Justice Aziz that time had come much earlier but he refused to acknowledge it. Like the passengers of the Titanic who refused to acknowledge that their ship could sink until the freezing Atlantic water touched their very feet, our CEC refused to see the water of public discontent surround him from all sides. (That is perhaps why he has closed the door on the journalists who can't enter his office anymore.)

But unlike the passengers of the Titanic, Justice Aziz can still make an face-saving exit if he resigns now and thus save himself from future ignominy and the nation further loss of lives, resources and precious time left for holding the election.

Ershad's JP

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upcoming polls under him.

"The CEC can resign from his post as per the constitution as the present political crisis is persisting just for one person," JP Chairman HM Ershad said at a press conference at his party central office yesterday. "Through his resignation, we want a congenial atmosphere for all for the next general elections," he added.

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) under the banner of Jatiya Oikya Front and several other alliances have already joined the movement for ouster of the CEC.

The deposed ruler also said that his party would not participate in the next general elections, if other parties boycott it. "We are in a dilemma as to whether or not to take part in the elections under the current CEC... it seems to me, we will not take part."

Replying to a query, Ershad said that his party is yet to decide about joining any alliance.

Answering to another query, the JP chief said they have no other option but to accept the president as the chief adviser (CA) of the caretaker government, adding that they hope that the CA would act neutrally.

Ershad said, "We [AL] made the country a bottomless basket after the independence from Pakistan but we made the country an emerging tiger."

The BNP chairperson said people will vote for her party again as they observed the development works during the four-party's tenure in power.

"Awami League don't want elections as they know they will not win the elections," she again said adding that they (AL) want to make the country an inactive state.

Asking the media for a balanced coverage of news, she said, "What you are showing now is harmful for the country." She said the images on TV of singing, dancing, chaotic and anarchic scenes on the streets are demeaning the nation.

Presided over by Siddique Ahmed Chowdhury, president of University Teachers Association of Bangladesh, the meeting was also addressed by Abu Ahmed, Akhtar Hossain Khan, Tahmina Akhtar, Moinal Islam, Aminur Rahman Majumdar and Atiqur Rahman.

"Now they [14-party] are trying to stop development of the country and create obstacles for exports and imports. People were not happy during the AL regime's tenure for their terrorist activities. The country was not safe in their hands. They tried to destroy the country in a planned way," she said.

Khaleda said, "They [AL] made the country a bottomless basket after the independence from Pakistan but we made the country an emerging tiger."

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HC benches to get senior, efficient judges

CJ assures SC Bar

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Husain yesterday assured the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) of reconstituting the High Court benches with senior and efficient judges.

"At least three division benches with jurisdiction of writ, criminal and VAT and customs motions will be reconstituted by Sunday next," SCBA Secretary AM Amin Uddin quoted the CJ Syed JR Mudassar Husain as saying.

Amin said he was asked to meet the CJ at his chamber in the morning. "When I met him, the CJ informed me about the reconstitution of the benches."

The news came a day after the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) criticised the recent actions of the chief justice for his "punitive de-constitution" of the High Court benches sidelining the senior judges.

The SCBA had also warned the CJ of launching an agitation programme for his resignation if its demands are not met by November 30.

Oli asks CEC, commissioners to step down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, City

Executive President of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Col (Retd) Oli Ahmed yesterday urged the chief election commissioner and the election commissioners to resign immediately to rid the country of the present political crisis.

Oli Ahmed made the statement while addressing a mammoth public rally at Chandanai Gachhabaria Degree College ground – first public rally in Chittagong after forming LDP.

BNP would no longer exist as it has turned into a camp of terrorists, corrupts and collaborators – whom the people had always rejected. The people will definitely vote the pro-liberation war forces of LDP and the 14-party alliance into power in the next parliamentary election, observed Oli.

Colonel Oli said he had declared a crusade against corruption and terrorism and the people of Chittagong were united behind LDP determined to banish BNP for harbouring corrupts, terrorists and anti-liberation war forces.

"As BNP started harbouring and indulging in corruption and terrorism I had repeatedly made vain requests to Khaleda Zia to control her sons and the evil elements in the party," said Oli.

The LDP executive president alleged that President and Chief Advisor Iajuddin Ahmed failed to be the president of the country and rather, he proved himself to be the president of Tarique Rahman.

He blamed the president and the BNP chief for the present political unrest and consecutive violence in the country that left 30 people killed so far.

"... I had suggested Khaleda Zia several times to subsidise essential commodities to curb prices, but not a single paisa was provided for subsidy," complained the LDP chief.

LDP would subsidise essential commodities and bring the prices within the reach of the common people, if LDP is elected into power, the LDP leader said.

He pledged that if LDP forms government he would not hesitate to produce the lawmakers and ministers from the party before the court and ensure their trial and punishments.

Oli alleged that two attempts on his life were made after forming LDP and he warned against any further attempts in future.

Former state minister Ridwan Ahmed of Comilla, former lawmaker Salahuddin Mahmud of Chakoria, Jatiya Krishak Dhara President Enamul Haq of Dinajpur, LDP central Joint Secretary and Chittagong divisional coordinator Shahadat Hossain Selim, LDP Banskhalhi upazila President Advocate Kafil Uddin, LDP Chittagong city unit leaders Syed Abul Bashar and Kamal Uddin Chowdhury also spoke at the meeting among others.

Chandanai upazila LDP convenor Abdul Mannan Chowdhury, also the former chairman of Hashimpur union, presided over the rally.

Salahuddin Mahmud, former lawmaker of Chakoria in Cox's Bazar, and recently elected chairman of Salkania Municipality Mohammadur Rahman joined LDP formally at the rally.

Blockade unto EC

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make them suffer and bring the country to a standstill."

She went on, "We have repeatedly given the president time (to implement the tasks) and kept patience. But he did not pay any heed to our demands. The president is mainly responsible for the present situation, and we have been forced to enforce the blockade again as there was no other way for us."

The AL chief said the people are now determined to ensure a free and fair election. Conspiracy by the evil forces cannot foil the movement for implementing the 11-point demand. Victory of the people is a must as the evil forces are going to be defeated through a united resistance, she asserted.

Hasina thanked the people for observing the blockade ignoring, what she said, threats and harassment by the BNP-Jamaat alliance.

14-PARTY BRIEFING
Briefing newsmen, Jaill accused Iajuddin of pushing the country towards 'blockade-movement' by not taking steps to create a level playing ground for free and fair elections.

"Our movement will continue until the 11-point demand is met. There is still time to implement those," said the AL general secretary.

Prior to the briefing, the 14-party at a meeting discussed the current political situation.

Referring to the BNP chairperson's demand for announcement of election schedule without delay, Jaill said they will not allow this until their 11-point demand is met. Announcement of polls schedule before that would simply mean departure of Iajuddin and CEC MA Aziz together, he warned.

The BNP-Jamaat coalition wants polls schedule now for holding an election under its blue-print to come back to power. "But we will resist any such bid," Jaill said.

Jaill announced that all programmes marking the Armed Forces Day today would be out of the purview of the blockade programme. On this occasion, he congratulated the armed forces on behalf of the 14-party.

Jaill reiterated the demand for immediate cancellation of all contractual appointments through a single notice, and drastic changes both in the civil and police administration for creating a congenial atmosphere for election.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who received a copy of the panel's findings on Monday, has already vowed to implement the recommendations.

But analysts doubted the government would punish the monarch. "In the past, the government has not been able to take action against wrongdoers," said Lok Raj Baral of the Nepal Centre for Strategic Studies, a private think-tank.

"Generally, people don't have faith in the government that it will take action against the king."

The panel, formed in May, interrogated nearly 300 people, but the king failed to reply to its questions.

Maolist rebels plan to sign a comprehensive peace deal with the multi-party government on Tuesday and join a new interim cabinet by Dec. 1.

That administration is meant to hold special elections in 2007 for an assembly charged with preparing a new constitution and deciding