

Irked advisers skip office

5 of them report 'sick'; Iajuddin holds emergency meet

STAR REPORT

Seething with frustration with the way Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed has been taking his decisions unilaterally and treating them with a distant interest, five advisers yesterday refrained from attending office, adding a new edge to the current situation.

Officially, all the five advisers -- Akbar Ali Khan, Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, Shafi Sami, Sultana Kamal and Mahbul Alam who did not attend office -- told the media that they were 'sick'.

Two more -- Yasmeen Murshed and Sofia Rahman -- visited their workplaces briefly only because they could not cancel their prior appointments with some dignitaries.

In the evening, Iajuddin called an emergency meeting of the advisers to diffuse their grievances. The meeting over, Adviser Mahbul Alam said the advisers did not attend office because of 'sickness'.

"They have attended tonight's council meeting," he said. "There is no question of grievance."

But when asked about his reason not to attend office yesterday, one adviser quipped: "What's the use of us going to work? He is call-

ing all the shots and we are never consulted for any important decision."

Yesterday's decision of the advisers was in fact an outburst of their frustration and grievances at the actions of the chief adviser since he took over. It only flared up when Iajuddin ignored them in his decision to address the nation Wednesday midnight.

The advisers were in the dark that the chief adviser was going on air. There was only a hint that Iajuddin would speak to the nation and the advisers requested him to let them know the content of his speech.

But the chief adviser surreptitiously recorded his speech at Bangabhaban in the afternoon and had it aired at midnight. His speech did not reflect the outcome of his talks with the council of advisers in the evening.

Iajuddin even did not disclose the whole truth about Aziz's leave plan to his advisers as was apparent from Adviser Mahbul Alam's briefing to the press at night after a meeting of the council of advisers. Aziz decided to go on leave during the day, which was not communicated to the advisers until the night's meeting. Mahbul Alam could only tell the media that Aziz

had 'verbally' informed about his leave plan. But later in the night, Iajuddin in his address to the nation recorded in the afternoon detailed out the leave plan that has a few strings attached.

The advisers were further surprised when EC commissioner Mahfuzur Rahman declared himself as the acting CEC yesterday, a move that cannot happen without the president/chief adviser's consent, they reasoned. Earlier, they came to know from independent sources that a VIP telephone line has been hooked to Mahfuz's residence.

The tension between the chief adviser and his advisers was frothing from the very beginning. On several occasions, Iajuddin failed to back his advisers for actions they took either at his instructions or at the advisers' council's consent.

"He [Iajuddin] is not listening to us or even discussing issues with us," said one adviser. "Frankly, we don't know how he takes his decision, or whether they are his own. He maintains an aloofness from us, often discarding us when we need his support."

Advisers cited a few examples in support of their observations. When two advisers -- Shafi Sami and Sultana Kamal -- went to meet

AL Chief Sheikh Hasina on November 2 acting on a decision of the Council of Advisers to persuade her into deferring the 14-party indefinite blockade programme, they immediately drew flak from the 4-party alliance. Iajuddin remained mum on this occasion, making the visit of the two advisers look like their own personal action. This inaction of the chief advisers rankled all in the council who felt 'betrayed'.

Again, Iajuddin failed his advisers when Hasan Mashhud along with the president's military attaché went to meet the outgoing Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz to request him to step aside to end the political standoff. When reporters asked Aziz, he flatly denied that any of the advisers ever met him with any such request. But the chief adviser did not come forward to let the nation know that he actually sent his adviser to Aziz. Finally, Mashhud had to speak up and told the reporters that he indeed went with a step-down request to Aziz.

"Two men cannot tell the truth or lie at the same time. I am telling you I am telling the truth," Mashhud had told reporters. The silence of the chief adviser in this

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Arms were recovered from acting CEC's house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Commissioner Justice Mahfuzur Rahman, from whose residence in the city the army had recovered arms and ammunition in 2002, took over as acting chief election commissioner (CEC) yesterday.

Only recently, he has been extending support to the controversial activities of CECMA Aziz.

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Justice Mahfuz makes himself acting CEC

CLAIMS HE FOLLOWED RULES, ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT WAS SUPPOSED TO DECIDE THE POST

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Election Commissioner Justice Mahfuzur Rahman in a surprise move yesterday convened a meeting of the Election Commission (EC) and authorised himself to act as the chief election commissioner (CEC) for the next three months in absence of CECMA Aziz.

Justice Mahfuz, who was confirmed on Wednesday that he would be made the acting CEC, claimed that he convened the meeting "on his own" and "as per the laws". The president did not give him any direction in this regard, he said.

Contradicting with the move, two former CECs, however, said it is the president's jurisdiction to decide the next step in a situation like this.

"In such an extraordinary situation, the president will decide who will act as the CEC," former CEC Abu Hena told The Daily Star yesterday.

But Mahfuz told reporters after the EC meeting, "There is no scope



Justice Mahfuzur Rahman

as an election commissioner on January 16 this year and since then has strongly supported Aziz in his move to prepare the controversial fresh voter list.

After authorising himself as the acting CEC yesterday, he said he will now complete the tasks Aziz could not complete. "As the acting CEC, I will do what MA Aziz would do," he said.

Mahfuz said the election schedule will be announced next week. He also refused to take any measure to correct the mistakes in the updated voter list, claiming that the voter list is "free of flaws".

Before disclosing the decision of Aziz's taking a leave of absence, Bangabhaban on Wednesday confirmed Justice Mahfuz that he will be made the acting CEC and directed the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board to install VIP telephone connection at his residence, sources said.

Justice Mahfuz entered his office at 9:05am yesterday and voluntarily convened the EC

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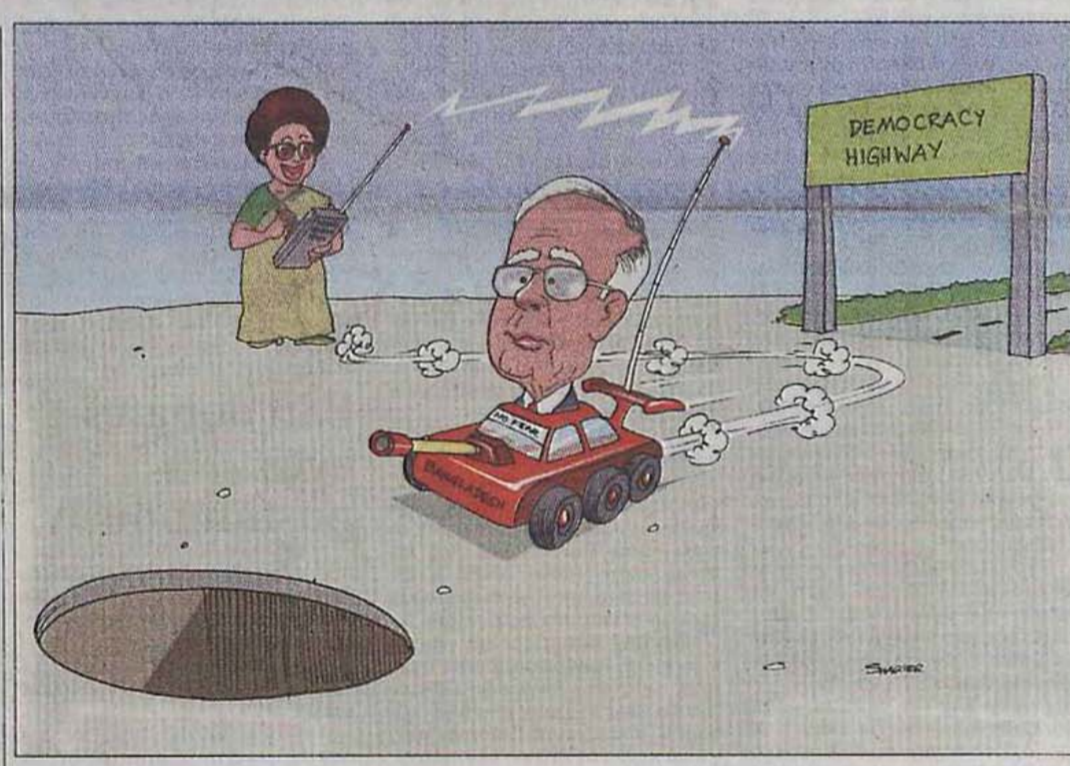
MEET WITH ADVISERS CA stresses quick completion of urgent tasks

UNB, Dhaka

The council of advisers headed by President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed in a meeting last night underscored the need for completion of immediate tasks to prepare ground for the general elections.

"We've many tasks ahead...we need to complete all these quickly,"

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Khaleda welcomes Iajuddin's solution 'within constitution'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday welcomed the president's decision on Election Commission (EC) reconstitution and said the solution of political crisis under constitutional framework is victory of democracy and the peace loving people.

"We demanded the solution under framework of the constitution and finally that has happened despite various obstacles. The president has done everything to resolve the matter according to the constitution," she said at a press conference at Hotel Purbani in the afternoon. The last press confer-



Hasina sees people's victory as Aziz goes

Blockade postponed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz's going on leave as 'victory of the people's movement', the Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the coming election is to free people from the grip of the corrupt and looters.

"People will vote against those who caused public sufferings through hiking up price of essentials and creating power crisis," Hasina said at a press conference at her party's Dhanmondi office in the capital.

Postponing the non-stop blockade, the AL chief declared staging



ATTACK ON BILU Bogra journos demand arrest of attackers within 24 hrs

STAR REPORT

Journalists of Bogra yesterday gave the deputy commissioner (DC) of the district an ultimatum of 24 hours to arrest the criminals who attacked The Daily Star journalist Hasibur Rahman Bilu on Wednesday, a correspondent in Bogra reports.

Submitting a memorandum to the DC, they also demanded the deployment of law enforcers at the offices of local and national dailies in the town.

Meanwhile, journalists' organisations across the country

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Car bombings kill 143 in Baghdad

3 GIs slain, US forces gun down 4 civilians

AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents killed 143 people and wounded another 220 in a series of car bombings on Thursday in Baghdad's Shia district of Sadr City, security and medical sources said.

The attacks were by far the deadliest this year in Iraq and among the worst since the US-led invasion of March 2003.

"Of those killed, 88 bodies are in the Imam Ali hospital and 55 in Sadr City hospital," a medic told AFP.

One car bomb exploded at a market in Sadr City, a regular target for Sunni insurgents in the sectarian conflict that has killed thousands in Iraq.

Minutes before the blasts masked gunmen launched a raid on the health ministry, trapping about 2,000 people inside the building.

The Sadr City explosions included at least three car bombs, the security source said.

He said one device went off at a market, a regular target for Sunni insurgents in the sectarian conflict that has killed thousands in Iraq.

In a daylight raid about 100 masked gunmen also attacked the health ministry in central Baghdad, clashing with guards and Iraqi army soldiers, deputy health minister Hakim al-Zamili told AFP.

He was trapped in the building with around 2,000 employees.

"First a series of mortars were fired at the building from the nearby Al-Fadhel neighbourhood, and then about 100 masked gunmen holding machine guns attacked the building," said Zamili.

"About 2,000 employees are trapped in the building. I am also in the building," he added.

"The gunmen came in civilian cars and pick-up trucks and started shooting at the building and wounded a number of employees."

A security source said: "Fierce clashes are going on at this moment between the gunmen and guards of the building who are backed by Iraqi army soldiers."

"There are casualties but we do not have any details."

On Sunday gunmen kidnapped deputy health minister Ammar al-Assafar from his home in Baghdad's northern Adhamiyah district, and Zamili himself escaped an assassination bid on Monday. Two of his guards were killed in the ambush.

Insurgents have recently stepped up attacks against the government by targeting state-owned institutes and buildings.

On November 14 dozens of men wearing security forces uniforms

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