

EC flouts law to start picking polling staff

DCs still predominantly appointed by last 4-party regime

SHAKHAWAT LITON
The Election Commission (EC) has directed the district administration, which is still largely dominated by the immediate past government's appointees and its selection, to prepare a panel of polling officials to conduct the next parliamentary election at field level.
The directive violates the existing electoral laws, which do not allow to officially start the process before announcing the election schedule and appointing returning officers (RO), who are legally

authorised to do the job.
The EC generally appoints the ROs soon after announcing the election schedule and the ROs prepare the panel of presiding officers, assistant presiding officers and polling officers.
But, in line with an EC decision, the EC Secretariat in an emergency written directive asked the deputy commissioners (DCs) on Thursday to prepare the panel of polling officials soon after the announcement of the election schedule.
Immediately after taking charge as the acting chief election commissioner on Thursday, Justice

Mahfuzur Rahman said the election schedule will be announced this week.
About five lakh polling officials will be recruited to conduct the next parliamentary elections, sources in the EC Secretariat said.
Defending the decision to give the responsibility of preparing the panel of polling officials to the DCs, senior EC Secretariat officials said usually the DCs are appointed as the ROs and they have initiated the move to save time.
Of the present 64 DCs, 30 were appointed by the immediate past BNP-led alliance government

while 16 were appointed this month from a "fit list" prepared by it. The caretaker government appointed 18 DCs from its own fit list.
Besides, of around 480 upazila nirbahi officers who were given appointment as the assistant returning officers, 100 were appointed by the caretaker government, but the rest have been serving since the time of the BNP government.
The EC Secretariat in its directive asked the DCs to complete the task of preparing the panel of

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Polling officers fear political pressure

SURANJITH DEARNATH

The non-government teachers who work as presiding and polling officers fear they might not be able to perform their duties freely if individuals involved with the immediate past ruling alliance remain in the governing/ managing bodies of the institutes.
"Those nominated by the BNP-Jamaat alliance to the governing bodies or managing committees of the non-government primary schools, high schools, colleges and madrasas over the last five years are still there," said Quazi Faruque Ahmed, chief coordinator of the National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE), a group of 11 teachers organisations.
He added that this has been possible due to exploitation of loopholes in a recent education ministry circular by the top authorities

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Anarchy, chaos forced CG to delay poll schedule

Khaleda says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hinting at Awami League (AL), BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said the caretaker government could not announce the election schedule timely, despite its willingness, due to the 'anarchy and chaos created by a political party'.
Describing the initiative taken by the president to resolve the political impasse, Khaleda Zia said, "All of you know what the president have done and what he said. The election schedule will be announced soon. He (the president) urged all to participate in the electoral process."
"We handed over power following the constitution on October 29 and we hoped that the caretaker

government would begin the electoral process quickly and announce the schedule," she said.
She was addressing a gathering of doctors in NAM Conference Centre in the capital yesterday, organised by the Doctors Association of Bangladesh (DAB), an association of pro-BNP doctors.
He urged the pro-BNP doctors to seek votes for the sheaf of paddy, the election symbol of BNP, and urged them not to take fees from their patients in the next two months.
"Seek votes for the sheaf of paddy and tell your patients that BNP gave them peace and stopped cheating in academic examinations," she told the doctors adding that peace, development, democ-

racy and truth will win the next election against terrorism, anarchy, chaos and falsehood.
Blasting her political opponents the BNP chairperson said they [AL] killed people, even attacked hospitals and were involved with terrorism by giving rise to criminal godfathers while in power, and created chaos by imposing a blockade when not in power. "What type of politics is that?" she questioned.
Mentioning the developments in the country during her regime, Khaleda said BNP carried out a lot of development work to ensure welfare of the people. Average income of the people, their purchasing capacity, and the average life expectancy of the people

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Iajuddin, Shafi discuss poll preparations

UNB, Dhaka

President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday held an hour-long meeting with Agriculture Adviser CM Shafi Sami at Bangabhaban.
A Bangabhaban official told the news agency that the president discussed with the adviser matters relating to his ministry, overall situation and how quickly to

14-party, allies heading towards movement on one-point demand

They think Iajuddin should resign for his 'partisan role'

HASAN JAHID TUSHIER

The Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition along with several other political parties is heading towards a one-point movement to force the Chief Adviser to the caretaker government (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed to resign as they think his 'absolute partisan role' is the main barrier to creating a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election.
"The president is performing unlawful activities as the chief adviser from Bangabhaban under the direction of Hawa Bhaban only to implement the BNP-Jamaat alliance's conspiracies to rig the next election. That's why we have no option but to wage a movement against him," 14-party coordinator AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star.
The 14-party combine leaders met the chief adviser several times and asked him to bring a drastic

change in the administration from top to field levels to create a level playing field for a free and fair election but he has not taken any steps to make the administration neutral, said a senior leader of the combine.
"The chief adviser did not remove any of the most controversial home, establishment, cabinet and EC secretaries. Rather he has appointed BNP-Jamaat alliance's most loyal officials as inspector general of police, Dhaka metropolitan police commissioner, and director general of Rapid Action Battalion and to other key positions in the police and civil administration.
"The field level administration designed by the previous government has been kept largely intact as transfer of the deputy commissioners, superintendents of police, officers-in-charge and upazila

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Life returns to normal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Life came to near normality in the capital yesterday again after four days as the Awami League (AL) led 14-party alliance postponed its countrywide blockade programme.
People came out of their homes on various personal businesses while many schools and colleges ran classes yesterday—although it was a public holiday—to cover up losses caused by the four days' blockade.
Those who had been stranded in different districts over the last four days rushed to the capital.
The city markets and shopping malls were seen buzzing with activities.
Traffic jams were also noticed at different intersections of the city. A large number of motorised vehicles were seen in the city streets, which were dominated by rickshaws only in the last four days.
The services of intercity buses, trains and launches resumed as soon as the blockade was withdrawn.
The Gabtoli Bus Terminal had already started its intercity bus services on Thursday evening, sources said.

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Dancers perform at a function at the Institute of Fine Arts in the capital yesterday, marking the Nabanna Utsab (harvest festival) organised by Jatiya Nabanna Utsab Udjapan Parishad.

RMG owners' sit-in today to protest political crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's readymade garment unit owners and workers will stage a sit-in tomorrow in front of their factories across the country to protest the ongoing political impasse that has cast an adverse impact on their business as well as the whole economy.

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The bridge at Dholla on Hemayetpur-Singair road on the outskirts of the capital lies incomplete, obstructing traffic movement. Its construction started almost a year ago under an emergency rehabilitation project after flood damage.

Jamaat's 'Islamisation' of village names

ABU AHMED, from Sathkira

In an ominous development in Shyamnagar upazila, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh is quietly 'Islamising' the names of villages and educational institutions there, destroying the rich history, tradition and heritage of the area.
The move, bearing all signs of rabid communalism, was initiated following a locally issued fatwa that the names, many of which have been existing for many centuries, now smack of 'Hinduism'.
Since the immediate past four-

party alliance government had assumed power in 2001, of which Jamaat is an important component, it successfully 'Islamised' the names of many villages and educational institutions in the upazila.
Local units of Jamaat also started using the new 'Islamic names' on their official writing pads, propaganda leaflets and invitation cards, sources said.
Hari Charan Roy Chowdhury, the erstwhile Zamindar (large-scale land owner during the Mughal rule and in colonial India) of Shyamnagar, established a high

school at Nakipur in 1899 under what is now Shyamnagar upazila head quarters, and it was named after him as Nakipur Hari Charan High School.
As the name Hari Charan is a traditional Hindu name, local Jamaat leaders changed the high school's name to Nakipur Pilot High school and the school authorities hung a sign board touting the new name.
Local residents alleged that soon after the immediate past four-party alliance had assumed power

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Rejoinder, our reply

The Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate in a rejoinder on The Daily Star news headlined "Navy flouts rules in boat spares deal" published on November 19 said that Bangladesh Navy has followed the government's procurement and financial regulations duly in the tender for the boat spares.
"In each case the lowest bidder was allocated with the contract," it said, adding.
"The Navy is also unaware of any irregular involvement of and influence from any person or group

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BARAPUKURIA COAL MINE PROJECT 2,500 tonnes water wasted an hour for duplicate pump sets

SHARIEF KHAN and KONGKON KARMAKER

The alarming depletion of subsoil water table in Barapukuria coal mine area could be easily halved if the mine and its power plant shared the same water pumps, instead of using separate sets and wasting 2,500 tonnes of water per

hour.
Although both the mining and power projects were designed and implemented by the same Chinese companies, they ignored this simple design issue deliberately and chose a financially wasteful and environmentally harmful design, sources say.
The government also over-

looked the matter mysteriously, allowing the Chinese companies to spend hundreds of crores of taka for separately installing water pumps and creating a long-term water crisis.
Moreover, neither the mine nor the power plant uses the lone water treatment plant at the site. The treatment plant is just for show as it

does not operate. As a result, harmful chemicals and sludge are inundating the villages around the project area, sources mentioned.
According to tests carried out by geology and mining department of Rajshahi University, and coal mine sources, untreated waste water from Barapukuria coal mine

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