

Political parties

FROM PAGE 1
presidium office in the capital, LDP President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury also said that hasty declaration of the schedule is a conspiracy, which is not politically acceptable.

"This has called into question the neutrality of the chief adviser (CA)," B Chowdhury, also one of the top leaders of Jatiya Oikya Front, said adding that the declaration will hamper the cases filed against the CA and the EC.

The upcoming elections will in no way be fair without correction of the current voter roll, which contains many fake voters, he noted.

The former president also said that the nation is being pushed towards conflicts and the president, also the CA, will be responsible if any unconstitutional force takes over the power.

Meanwhile, in a statement JP Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Hlawader said that the declaration of election schedule at a time when there is a writ petition in the High Court in this regard is unexpected.

Declaration of the election schedule keeping 1.4 crore fake voters on the voter list cannot be acceptable, said Gono Forum Acting President Jahirul Islam and Acting General Secretary Abdul Kashem in a joint statement.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Manjurul Hsan Khan said the EC announced the election schedule ignoring the demand of full recast of the Election Commission.

"The move will push the country towards uncertainty," read a CPB statement.

Juktafont leaders ASM Abdur Rab and Kader Siddiqui said declaration of the schedule would deepen the political crisis further.

In its reaction, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal said a February 15-like election would be held for hurried announcement of the election schedule.

Samyadai Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua said the four-party alliance would not be successful in holding another farcical election because the countrymen are fully aware of their blueprint.

In a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity, Zaker Party rejected

the declaration of the election schedule saying that the EC illegally announced the date at a time when major political parties filed writ petitions with the High Court.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Five Party Alliance, Gono Mukti Andolon and Bangladesh Muktijoddha Sangsad also rejected the declaration of the election schedule.

Dhaka University (DU) Professor of Political Science Ataur Rahman said the Election Commission had no other way but to declare the election schedule, as it has a stipulated three months time for holding the election.

It was not possible for the EC to wait until a consensus between the two major political parties over the matter, as they seemed to be too much intolerant on election related issues, Rahman said though he thought that the announcement came a bit earlier.

Businesses' Reaction
The country's top business leaders yesterday said making comments on the announcement of the election schedule and appointment of two new election commissioners is still a premature issue.

"The latest move is part of the election process. We will comment on it later," said Mir Nasir Hossain, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) while addressing a press conference organised to mark the resumption of operation of gantry cranes at Chittagong port.

International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association President SM Fazlul Haque and its former president Anisul Huq, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association Chairman MA Awal and Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry President MA Momen, among others, were present at the press conference.

However, they hoped that a free and fair election will be held in time.

Advisers kept

FROM PAGE 1
annoyance, the sources added. Mahbubul Alam told reporters, "The appointment of two election commissioners and the announcement of election schedule were not discussed at the council of advisers meeting."

He went on, "I was not aware of these two issues till now, I am hearing it for the first time from you (reporters)."

Agriculture Adviser CM Shafi Sami expressed his surprise at the two decisions: "We were not aware how the election schedule was announced or how the two election commissioners were appointed."

"The President has assured us that the two newly appointed election commissioners will not be controversial."

Industries Adviser Sultana Kamal said she came to know about the decisions at the media briefing.

In reply to a question, she said, "First we have to consider whether circumventing the council of advisers violates the law, and then we can take a decision."

Initially avoiding reporters' queries, Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath however said, "We did not have exact knowledge of the two issues."

But Adviser Yasmeen Murshed admitted that they were aware of the two decisions.

Nevertheless, Dhiraj assured, "We will be able to transfer officials concerned with the EC, including the secretary." But he cautioned "We will face some complications if we want to transfer deputy commissioners (DCs) and thana nirbahi officers (TNOs)."

GM Quader

FROM PAGE 1
He would finalise the plan for floating the party after a discussion with his 'well-wishers' in the JP, Quader said firmly adding "Many leaders of the party are with me."

According to sources, Quader, also the younger brother of JP Chairman HM Ershad, held a closed-door meeting with some of his ex-colleagues yesterday, where a group of former lawmakers voiced their support for him.

Ershad, who is in London now, expelled Quader from the party on Sunday night following Quader's filing of writ against President Iajuddin's holding the post of chief adviser to the caretaker government as well as against the election commission. Quader's filing of the writ coincided with those filed on the same issue by leaders of 14-party combine.

Quader had all along been opposing JP's joining the 4-party alliance, warning that the party would split if it happens.

JP Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hlawader, however, yesterday said, "The party can not split for a person and Jatiya Party means Ershad."

Aminul made

FROM PAGE 16
Secretary Khan Md Ibrahim Hossain and Executive Director of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority Sheikh Md Wahiduzzaman replaced each other.

The government yesterday also transferred 18 additional police commissioners and on Sunday night reshuffled 52 upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs).

The caretaker government so far appointed 74 new UNOs, withdrew 35 UNOs and transferred 190 UNOs, sources said.

Housing and Public Works Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath said the government officials, who are not involved in the election process, could be changed even after announcement of the poll schedule.

The adviser said "We can transfer officials concerned with the EC including its secretary," but added "We may face complications if we transfer deputy commissioners (DCs) and upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs)."

Israel extends

FROM PAGE 16
Elected last March, the premier has only met Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, once informally since the two met took office.

Peace efforts have remained deadlocked and the internationally drafted roadmap peace plan has made next to no progress since its launch in 2003.

"If a new government (Palestinian) comes about and commits to the principles of the quartet, which will make the roadmap work, which will release Gilad Shalit, I propose an immediate meeting with Abu Mazen to engage in open, sincere and serious dialogue," said Olmert.

"In that framework and in keeping with the roadmap you could create an independent and viable Palestinian state with territory in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), a state with total sovereignty with defined borders," he said.

The premier reiterated that Israel was prepared to release a considerable number of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Shalit, and unlock funds that were frozen after the radical Hamas won a landslide election in January.

"In exchange for Gilad Shalit, Israel is ready to release many Palestinian prisoners, including some who have been sentenced heavily," he said.

"We will also unlock the funds that we have frozen," said the premier, referring to customs duties collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority that the World Bank has estimated at 65 million dollars per month in 2005.

The Hamas-led Palestinian government has been boycotted by Israel and the West because of its refusal to recognise the Jewish state's right to exist, formally renounce violence and abide by past peace agreements.

As a result Palestinians are battling with the worst economic and political crisis since the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994.

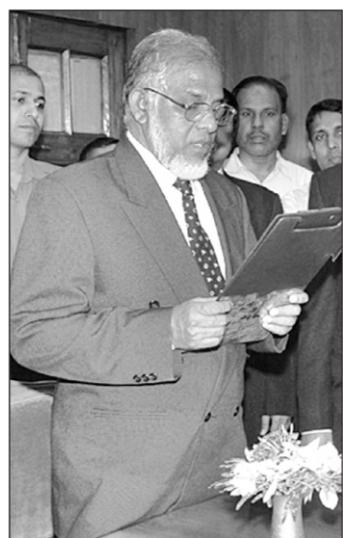
Man with political

FROM PAGE 1
election commissioners has now increased to six - the highest ever number of election commissioners in the country.

The two new commissioners went to the Election Commission (EC) office in the evening and exchanged views with the acting chief election commissioner (CEC) and other officials of the EC.

The Awami League-led 14-party alliance strongly rejected the two appointments.

Modabbir joined the Pakistan army as a second lieutenant in 1970. He served the Bangladesh Army till 1972. He joined the police service as a superintendent of police in 1973 and was promoted to



Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury, right, and Saiful Alam take oath as election commissioners yesterday.

the post of IGP in 2001. In May 2003, he was appointed secretary to the government and served till June 2004.

On June 18, daily Prothom Alo in a pre-election report quoted Modabbir as saying, "I have talked to the central leaders of the BNP. On the basis of their assurance I am working in my area. I have done so before. I am always by the side of the people in my area. I will soon join the BNP."

During the Operation Clean Heart on November 5, 2002, police arrested Modabbir's younger brother Motahar Hossain Chowdhury. But he was soon mysteriously released.

Requesting anonymity, a former additional inspector general (IG) of police told The Daily Star that during the caretaker government's tenure in 2001, Modabbir, who served as the additional IG (Administration), had asked several subordinate police officers to "work for BNP and Jamaat" in the 2001 elections.

Shortly after that he was made the inspector general of police. During that time, former Habiganj police superintendent Kangshadhar Tarafdar arrested a relative of Modabbir in connection with criminal activities. After Modabbir became the inspector general of police nearly three years later, Tarafdar was sacked from the police service in which Modabbir

allegedly played a role. Talking to reporters after his oath taking yesterday, Modabbir, however, denied the allegations.

He also flatly denied having any link with any political party.

"I am a very neutral person and I will be the same in future," he said. "I neither joined any political party nor sought candidature from any party," he added.

"Let us bury this kind of question today. No one should ask me this question in future," he told reporters who asked him about his political connections.

"I firmly believe that if we act honestly, sincerely and neutrally, the coming days will be better," he

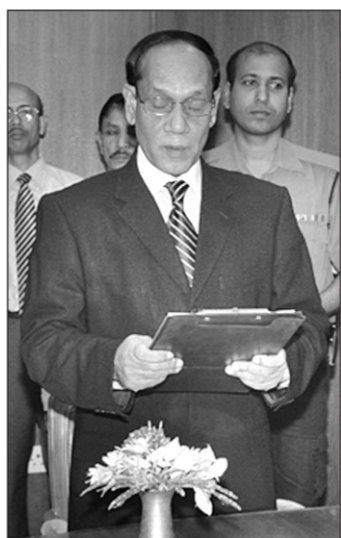


PHOTO: STAR

said, adding, "I do not feel any kind of pressure. I feel very good."

The other newly appointed EC Saiful Alam served as a district judge for several years. He joined the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) as its director in 2005. Later he was made the ACC's director general (legal and prosecution). He also looked after establishment and administration as additional duty.

His appointment at the ACC sparked controversy as one of the commissioners opposed his appointment. Alam failed to gain any high reputation in his job.

New election commissioner Saiful Alam yesterday commented to the press that this is nothing special for him to charge as an election commissioner.

Commenting on the appointment of two new election commissioners, acting CEC Justice Mahfuzur Rahman said, "To have two such experienced men in the team is a sheer luck for me. Such a fortunate thing does not happen to everybody."

On November 18, the president expressed his desire to appoint two more election commissioners. On November 22, following Aziz's announcement of taking a leave, the president told in his speech to the nation that he had decided to appoint two more election commissioners.

Clashes erupt

FROM PAGE 16
then in revenge attacks.

South of the capital, near the town of Haswa, police found four bodies of people who had been shot in the head. They had been blindfolded and their hands tied behind their back. The four, who police of Babil province estimated had been killed on Monday, also showed signs of torture.

Three US soldiers were killed and two more wounded Sunday morning in Baghdad, the American Army announced in a statement yesterday.

"Three Multi-National Division - Baghdad soldiers were killed during combat operations in the Iraqi capital at approximately 9 am Nov. 26," the statement said without giving details.

"Two other soldiers were injured in the incident." The latest victims bring to 2,876 the number of US troops and assimilated staff killed in Iraq since the March 2003 American invasion, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

At least 21 Iraqis of mixed tribe and sect were kidnapped by a band

of gunmen north of Baghdad in the restive province of Diyala on Sunday, police said.

The kidnapping took place in the small town of Kanaan, just 20km south of the provincial seat of Baquba.

Police say the victims were from three different tribes.

On Sunday, a car bomb ripped through the town's market, killing eight people. The agricultural region south of the capital has long been a battleground between Sunni tribes and Shiite villagers.

In nearby Mahmadiyah, meanwhile, a massive pillar of jet black smoke could be seen in the sky following an oil pipeline rupture. US forces reported that the area had been secured, but there was no immediate word on the cause of the incident.

In the restive western province of Al-Anbar, Iraqi military forces conducted several raids in the Ramadi area, arresting 50 suspects and killing 14 insurgents, reported the ministry.

Lawyers wrangle

FROM PAGE 1
crowded courtroom, where senior lawyers and former ministers Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Habibul Islam Bhuiyan and Barrister Aminul Huq, TH Khan and Khondkar Mahbubuddin Ahmed only looked on as the commotion continued for about half an hour.

Barrister Tania alleged that a group of lawyers (hinting at the pro-BNP lawyers) made an uncongenial atmosphere in the courtroom and tried to obstruct her from entering the premises.

Explaining the background for her alleged 'misbehaviour', Tania said, "At one point, the Attorney General shouted at me saying 'Shut Up,' and I instinctively reacted by saying 'you shut up'."

In an aggrieved tone, Tania said the present senior lawyers, whom she considers her 'uncles' and who once inspired her to come to the profession, worsened the situation in the courtroom by encouraging the AG instead of stopping him.

Witnesses said some pro-BNP lawyers even made offensive and derogatory remarks (not printable) at Tania in presence of the seniors, but none protested, nor took any initiative to bring the situation under control.

India tests its first missile interception device

AGENCIES, Bhubaneswar

Two nuclear-capable ballistic missiles collided in mid-air off India's eastern coast yesterday in a successful test of an interception programme, a top scientist said.

The test saw a surface-to-surface Prithvi-II (earth) missile shot down over the Bay of Bengal by a similar missile fired seconds later.

The collision of the two Prithvi-II missiles occurred over the Bay of Bengal on Monday.

The weapons were fired from the country's Chandipur-on-Sea and Wheeler Islands testing sites respectively, about 45 nautical miles (83 kilometres) apart, an officer with the Defence Research and Development Organisation, which conducted the test, said on condition of anonymity.

"The two missiles had a flight duration of six minutes before they blew up into a ball of fire over the sea after hitting each other," the defence scientist, who did not want to be identified, told Reuters by phone. "It was successful."

The test was done to observe the accuracy and operational effectiveness of short-range Prithvi missiles in providing an air-shield to Indian cities from neighbours Pakistan and China, both of which have arsenals of ballistic missiles.

The Prithvi-II missile, which is capable of carrying conventional or nuclear warheads, was last tested on November 19. It has a range of up to 250 kilometers (156 miles).

Prior to the test, local authorities evacuated more than 2,700 people from the Chandipur-on-Sea launch site area as a precautionary measure in case a missile went off course.

Wheeler Islands are an exclusive defence zone with no civilian population.

The Prithvi missile is part of India's Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme to build a missile arsenal ranging from nuclear-capable ballistic missiles to short-range weapons.

Monday's test was carried out as Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee held informal talks with his Pakistani counterpart, Khurshid Mehmoed Kasuri, in New Delhi.

On November 19, India successfully test-fired another Prithvi II into the Bay of Bengal.

CG to follow

FROM PAGE 16
Briefing reporters after the meeting, the home secretary said the committee may take help from local intelligence bodies, Interpol and United Nation's criminal list to track international criminals.

He said the home ministry will ensure security and provide necessary logistic supports to the foreign observers.

Islam said the government would allow reporters from problematic countries including Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. However, entry of foreign reporters, who do not belong to well known newspapers, will be restricted.

He said the foreign observers will have to follow Bangladesh's passport and visa rules to enter the country.

"They will have to submit formal applications to get accreditation cards to the election commission office through their respective embassies," the home secretary added.

He said the members of law enforcement agencies are currently busy with controlling agitation programmes of different political parties. "This actually bars them from making more efforts towards illegal arms recovery," Islam said.

"Law enforcement agencies have never been faced with such problems during the tenures of the previous caretaker governments," the home secretary added.

He said though currently the militants have no open activities in the country they may return anytime to foil the next poll.

Islam said the government will soon ask people to submit their legal firearms to the government custody for the sake of holding a fair election.

4-party hails

FROM PAGE 16
he said, adding, "Why do they fear to contest the election if they think the people are with them?"

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid said the Election Commission announced the schedule as per the constitution and no one will succeed to foil the election.

He asked the caretaker government to take punitive action if anybody tries to do illegal activities in the name of political programme.

"Awami League's writ petitions on election schedule and chief adviser will be dismissed in the court," BNP standing committee member and former minister Khondkar Mosharrif Hossain said.

"They don't believe in democracy and they don't want election. So they have filed the writ petitions," he said.

Former state minister Aman Ullah Aman said the election will be held according to the schedule declared by the Election Commission.

Dhaka City Jamaat Ameer Rafiqul Islam said the Election Commission has played a responsible role by announcing the schedule.

Among others, BNP standing committee member former law minister Moudud Ahmed, Barkat Ullah Bulu and Nazim Uddin Alam, Jamaat leaders Qamaruzzaman and Azharul Islam, Bangladesh Jatiya Party leader Golam Mostafa, and Islami Oikyo Jote leaders Abdul Latif Neazami, Ahmad Abdul Kader and Mufit Waqas spoke at the rally presided over by Dhaka City Mayor and city BNP President Sadeque Hossain Khokha.

EC rushes to set poll

FROM PAGE 1
the prevailing political situation, he said,

"There's always a scope for it." In another development shortly after the schedule announcement, the president appointed two controversial former bureaucrats as the election commissioners.

Justice Mahfuz, who authorised himself to take charge as the acting CEC on last Thursday causing yet another uproar regarding the EC, yesterday evening welcomed the two newly appointed election commissioners at his office. He said he is proud of having them as colleagues in the commission.

Earlier on November 22, CEC MA Aziz, widely controversial for his unilateral actions and obstinacy, went on a three-month leave in the face of growing public clamour for his resignation.

For the first time in the country's history, the next parliamentary election is now set to be held under supervision of an acting poll chief.

Meanwhile, in another gazette the EC Secretariat yesterday afternoon appointed 68 Returning Officers (RO) and 536 Assistant Returning Officers (ARO).

The 64 incumbent deputy commissioners (DC) were appointed as the district ROs. The divisional commissioners of Dhaka and Chittagong were appointed ROs for the constituencies across the two metropolitan cities. The additional divisional commissioner of Barisal was appointed RO for the constituency comprising areas of Barisal and Pirojpur and the additional divisional commissioner of Dhaka RO for the constituency covering parts of Mymensingh and Netrakona districts.

Of the 536 AROs, 480 are incumbents upazila nirbahi officers (UNO), 29 are assistant commissioners (land), 10 district election officers and the rest are drawn from different cadres.

Of the 64 DCs, 30 had been appointed by the immediate past BNP-led alliance government while 16 have been appointed this month in line with its [BNP-Jamaat] "fit list". The caretaker government has appointed the rest from its own list.

Of the 480 UNOs, 100 have been appointed by the caretaker government while the remainder have been serving since the time of the BNP government.

The jobs of the ROs and AROs are placed under the EC with effect from yesterday, and from now on, the interim government will not be able to transfer them without approval of the commission.

According to the electoral laws, "During the period after the publication of a notification under Article 11 [announcement of schedule] and the expiration of fifteen days after the declaration of the result of the election by the returning officer under Article 39, no judicial officer below the district judge, deputy commissioner, superintendent of police or officer subordinate to any of them serving in the district concerned, shall be transferred to any place without prior consultation with the commission."

Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath, also a member of the advisory committee on administrative affairs, yesterday told reporters that it might be difficult to transfer any DC or UNO if the EC differs with the move.

Asked why the election schedule was declared before completion of

SC order

FROM PAGE 16
sentences was stayed by a Supreme Court rule following submission of jail petitions and it will continue until disposal of the petitions.

On May 29, a Barisal court awarded death sentence to Abdur Rahman and his six associates in the sensational Jhalakathi judges' killing case. Of them, suicide bomber Asadur Rahman Arif has been absconding since the incident.

On August 31, the High Court confirmed the death sentences awarded by the trial court.

Senior Assistant Judges Jagannath Pandey and Sohail Ahmed were killed in a suicide bomb attack at Purba Chadkati in Jhalakathi on November 14, last year.

39 killed in Iran

FROM PAGE 16
elaborate on the cause of the crash until the investigations are over."

A Revolutionary Guards commander in charge of security of Iranian airports, Ahmad Haghtalab, said the black box which could help determine the cause of the accident had still to be recovered.

"The plane) crashed at the end of the runway, at 7:12 local time (0342 GMT) and burst into flames," he said.

The director of the airport confirmed to state television that there had been no survivors. He said the plane was heading for Shiraz in the south of Iran.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards are the Islamic regime's ideological army. Mehrabad international airport is used for civil and military purposes. It is situated in a western district of the capital.

The accident was the sixth military plane crash since 2003 in which a total of 450 people - not all of them military staff - died, according to an AFP tally.

Around a week ago, six people were killed in a military helicopter crash in the central Iranian town of Najafabad near the ancient city of Isfahan. No further details about the accident were given.

In January 2006, an Iranian military plane crashed in the northwest of the country, killing all 13 people aboard including a top military officer.

The plane, a Falcon, came down near Orumiye, near the Turkish border, according to the dead were Ahmad Kazemi, the commander of the ground forces of the Revolutionary Guards, and seven senior officers.

The Falcon crash came barely a month after a decrepit Iranian military

administration reshuffle, the secretary to the EC Secretariat said it has nothing to do with the admin reshuffle.

Asked if he thinks the country will see another election like February 15, 1996, Sarkar replied in the negative. He also ruled out the notion that the latest developments would mean violent confrontations between the opposing political parties towards street fights.

The EC Secretariat yesterday afternoon in a circular directed the ROs to issue public notices in respective constituency or constituencies announcing the election schedule and inviting people to file candidatures.

But sending election materials to field level election offices could not be completed as of yesterday as the secretariat was earlier informed that the schedule might be declared either on November 29 or 30.

The essential materials like different types of forms relating to filing and withdrawal of candidatures, deposit receipts, income-expenditure statement and affidavit forms to furnish information about candidates in line with the High Court directives did not reach many district and upazila election offices. But as per the laws, any person can demand the necessary forms to file candidature soon after the announcement of the schedule.

The EC Secretariat yesterday evening also prepared another circular to be sent to the Bangladesh Bank and the finance ministry, seeking their cooperation in detecting the loan defaulters, if any of them, files candidatures, suppressing the information, sources said.

It also issued instructions for the ROs regarding some legal provisions that include among others the issues of election expenditure and electioneering.

Besides, the same day the EC Secretariat sent a letter to the law ministry regarding formation of 70 electoral enquiry committees each comprised of a joint district judge and a senior assistant district judge to contain pre-poll irregularities. The committees are likely to be formed today, the sources at the EC Secretariat added.

SCHEDULE
The schedule did not specify when the polling will start or end. Usually, the voting opens at 8:00am and closes at 4:00pm and there will be no exception this time as well, said an EC Secretariat official adding that an announcement to this end will soon be made.

The polling timetable has come on the 31st day since dissolution of the last parliament on October 27. The constitution says the election will have to be held within 90 days since the dissolution.

Earlier on Sunday, three writ petitions were filed with the High Court, challenging the legality of the president's assuming the office of the chief adviser and validity of the updated voter roll prepared without