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Light finally seen at end of the tunnel

EC to announce new polls schedule today; steps to recast EC likely today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a major breakthrough in the near debilitating political crisis, the Election Commission (EC) yesterday decided to rearrange the entire election schedule including the polling date, following a tedious negotiation among the caretaker government and the two rival political alliances.

The new schedule will be announced sometime today through a gazette notification, ten days after the surreptitiously hasty announcement of the current schedule.

"The election commission will refile the poll schedule in its tomorrow's meeting," a press release

issued by the EC Secretariat disclosed yesterday, apparently clearing the clouds regarding holding of the next parliamentary election by January 25.

The EC finally took the decision following a negotiation between the caretaker government and Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition on a package proposal offered by the council of advisers. AL-led 14-party has been demanding scrapping of the current election schedule since its announcement.

As part of the package deal, sending two controversial election commissioners -- SM Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury -- on leaves of absence is under way

and a decision is likely to come today, sources said. Appointment of new election commissioners is also likely to be completed today, the sources added.

In another development, 14-party coalition that has been demanding cancellation of the updated voter list, decided yesterday evening to direct its grassroots level leaders and activists to register their names on the voter list and to assist the EC staff in detecting fake voters on the list.

Earlier in the afternoon, a delegation of 14-party met a team of advisers in the state guesthouse Padma and reiterated their five point demands. Emerging from the meeting, the advisers rushed to

Bangabhaban to apprise the president of the outcome of the talk and sat in a council meeting in the evening, which ended at 10:00pm.

Information Adviser Mahbul Alam told reporters after the meeting, "We hope that the negotiations with the political parties will come to a positive conclusion tomorrow. We also hope that steps to reconstitute the Election Commission will be taken by tomorrow."

The caretaker government yesterday transferred some high level secretaries as part of the package deal wooing 14-party to participate in the polls.

About rescheduling the election, sources in the EC Secretariat

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Traffic system chokes as sit-in rolls into day 2

STAR REPORT

The 14-party combine's non-stop sit-in around the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat continued for the second day yesterday without any untoward incidents.

A number of major roads leading to the EC were made off-limits to motorised vehicles during the programme, causing immense sufferings to the commuters, especially the school-going children who had to attend examinations.

During the sit-in held from 10:00am-2:00pm, the Awami League (AL) led alliance declared to go for tougher programmes.

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President asks all to protect sanctity of highest court

UNB, Dhaka

President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed has called upon all to protect the sanctity of the highest court, as function of the Supreme Court remained halted for the second day yesterday.

"Keep the highest court of the country above controversy," the president said when a delegation of Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum, led by Justice TH Khan, met him at

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PHOTO: STAR

Supreme Court lawyers stage demonstration on the SC premises yesterday to protest against filing of cases against eminent lawyers over the recent vandalism at the SC.

Drastic changes in top level civil admin

Cabinet secretary retires; home and establishment secretaries changed; 54 joint secretaries reshuffled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a major policy shake-up, the government brought dramatic changes in the top level of civil administration yesterday evening. The changes include reshuffling in different ministries and sending the cabinet secretary on retire-

ment. A previous circular of the establishment ministry issued yesterday afternoon, however, had sent Cabinet Secretary M Abu Solaiman Chowdhury on forced retirement. The decision was changed later upon his appeal to go on voluntary retirement.

Four secretaries, including the establishment and home secretaries, were transferred under the package proposal in a bid to regain people's confidence in the caretaker government.

In another circular, the government posted 54 joint secretaries to

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No scope for polls beyond 90 days

Bhuiyan threatens agitation if time limit extended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said there is no scope in the constitution to extend the 90-day limit for holding election and those who are speaking in favour of expanding the time are trying to make the people confused.

"We will begin movements if the caretaker government bows down to any illegical demand or if it seems to us that a neutral election would be hampered due to any government decision beyond the constitution," Bhuiyan said.

The polls schedule could be changed without shifting the election date and power should be handed over within 90 days after completing the electoral process,

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14-party moving towards polls

Hasina asks party men to prepare for election

HASAN JAHID TUSHIER

With the clouds on the political horizon running off following caretaker government's latest initiatives, the Awami League (AL) led 14-party alliance in a dramatic move decided to start making all-out preparations to participate in the next parliamentary elections within constitutional provision.

"Following the initiatives of the caretaker government, it seems to us that a level playing field is going to be created for the next general elections. The Awami League is an election-oriented party and is ready to take part in the next elections," an AL Presidium member told The Daily Star last night.

If everything goes normal and the caretaker government initiatives go on in creating a level playing field for holding fair polls, the AL-led alliance has plans to form a grand electoral alliance with different other parties soon and make combined preparations for the polls.

AL President Sheikh Hasina in a positive development last night instructed her party leaders to make all-out preparations for the next election alongside the ongoing movements for a free and fair election.

Earlier on Tuesday night, at the meetings of the AL Central Working Committee and 14-party alliance with Hasina in the chair some party

members expressed their feeling that they should not take part in the next election within 90 days as per the constitutional provision on grounds of preparing of a fresh voter roll.

Hasina even hinted that the election date could be deferred for another one to two months.

The AL chief at a meeting of her party's front organisations at her Dhanmondi office yesterday also directed the party leaders to keep watch on the voter list correction process so that the names of all activists and supporters of the party are included in the list.

She also instructed all the leaders and activists to remain alert so

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Judges skip work for second day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) judges yesterday continued their unprecedented protest by abstaining from work for the second consecutive day to press home their demands.

Although only the High Court (HC) division judges were supposed to refrain from court proceedings for two days that started yesterday, the Appellate Division judges also refrained from work. They, however, attended their

offices.

The judges started work abstention demanding apologies from the SC lawyers and punishment of vandals responsible for the vandalism at the SC premises on November 30 that was triggered by a stay order by the chief justice.

On November 30, minutes before a High Court bench was preparing to announce rulings on three writ petitions filed by 14-party alliance leaders, Chief Justice

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Rise above personal differences, protect constitution

Eminent jurists urge lawyers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading jurists Dr Kamal Hossain, barrister M Amir-Ul Islam and barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud yesterday appealed to the judges and lawyers to rise above personal differences and act together to uphold and protect the constitu-

tion, its values and institutions.

Expressing profound sorrow for the 'events of November 30' on the Supreme Court premises and all that led up to them, they said, "We unreservedly condemn any acts of violence resulting from the outburst of emotions of that day. Such

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PHOTO: STAR

An employee of a looted jewellery shop inspects empty ornament boxes while others look on.

4 jewellery shops in Uttara looted

Robbers take away Tk 12.8cr gold, cash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a major gold heist yesterday burglars made off with stolen ornaments and cash worth about Tk 12.80 crore, breaking into four jewellery shops in Mascot Plaza at Uttara in the capital.

The total amount of gold stolen is 7.821tola, according to the robbed jewellers. The jewellers' association said this is the biggest ever gold heist in the history of the country.

Two guards of a private security company, Security Management Services (SMS), in league with the burglars drugged two of their on-duty colleagues before breaking into the 16-storey shopping complex off Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, according to police and the owners of shops in the complex.

Angry shop owners took to the streets and blockaded the busy highway for over two hours yesterday protesting the heist and demanding immediate apprehension of the burglars.

The shop owners threatened greater movement if the burglars are not arrested within 24 hours.

"We may even announce programmes like laying siege to Bangabhaban if the people involved in the incident are not arrested immediately," said Anwar Hossain, president of Bangladesh Jewellery Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association.

According to local businessmen, the burglars entered the building soon after midnight after sedating with drugs security guard Monjurul Islam in the basement, and guard Salahuddin at the rear entrance on the ground floor. The shopping complex closed at 11:00pm.

Picking the locks on the collapsible gates at the stairs on the

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Security beefed up as 5 bombs found near Bangabhaban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law enforcers tightened security around the Bangabhaban yesterday afternoon following recovery of five abandoned bombs at the south-eastern end of Paltan Maidan, some 200 yards off the president's house.

Officials of the bomb disposal unit of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) dismantled the bombs contained in bottles and wrapped in red Scotch tape.

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