

Army in for longest

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deployments for election purposes.

Moreover, the 'excuse' showed by the home ministry for the deployment contradicts previous records of army deployment during elections.

During previous elections, the army was deployed only 14 days before the polling day in 2001 election, 18 days ahead of June 1996 election, and 23 days before the polling day of 1991 election.

Considering the pattern of deployment of the army during previous elections, the Election Commission (EC) had planned to request the armed forces division on December 26 to deploy the armed forces to maintain law and order situation during the upcoming parliamentary election.

But, President Iajuddin Ahmed in a hurried move on Saturday night ordered the deployment of armed forces disregarding objections of the advisers who said the situation did not deserve such a move at the moment.

Usually, the EC requests the Armed Forces Division to deploy army personnel to maintain law and order situation during parliamentary elections. It also holds a series of meetings with the chiefs of different law enforcing agencies including the army ahead of the polling to review the situation.

This time, the EC prepared an action plan on December 3 for sending a letter to the Armed Forces Division on December 26 requesting the deployment, sources in the EC secretariat said.

The EC also planned to hold a series of meetings with the chiefs of different law enforcing agencies before the polling day.

But directed by the president, the home ministry issued the circular on the deployment on Saturday.

During 2001 election, the troops were supposed to be deployed only a week before the polling date of October 1. Justice Latifur Rahman, the chief of the then caretaker government, said in his memoirs that according to the primary plan, the army was supposed to be deployed from September 22, 2001 back then.

"But later on, analysing the situation and orders of the authorities the army was posted at several places ahead of the planned schedule of September 17, which was completed on September 23 all over the country," Latifur said in his memoirs,

"Tatabadhyak Sarkarer Dingui O Amar Kichhu Katha (Days of the Caretaker Government and My Thoughts).

This time around the EC announced the election schedule on November 27 and it has yet to hold any meeting to review the law and order situation. The EC did not express its concern over the prevailing law and order situation as no major untoward event had occurred since the announcement of the election schedule.

Even the advisory committee to the caretaker government on law and order, which is ironically headed by Iajuddin himself, in its several meetings did not find the law and order situation grave enough to deploy the armed forces.

Political analysts observed that the president called out the army in an apparent bid to thwart the demonstrating political parties' threat to stage an indefinite sit-in around Bangabhaban.

UN calls for global decision to fight corruption

AFP, Shuneh

The head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) called on yesterday for a global political will to fight against corruption, and urged world governments to set up anti-graft task forces.

"People around the world must do more to fight corruption. We need a political decision," Antonio Maria Costa told the first session of a conference of parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

The convention, the first legally binding international tool to battle corruption, was adopted by the UN General Assembly in October 2003.

Nearly 150 countries have signed the convention but only 80 have ratified it so far, according to the UNODC.

In a message to the conference, outgoing UN Secretary General Kofi Annan urged all countries to ratify the convention, saying it was essential to accelerate world development and reduce crime.

Khaleda

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to the party chief. Among those who joined the party are Col (ret) Mokhesur Rahman, Lt Col (ret) Syed Mohammad Hossain Sayeed, Maj (ret) Sharif Hossain Mukul and Maj (ret) Golam Morshed.

Criticising the violent activities of the AL-led 14-party combine since her transfer of power to the caretaker government, Khaleda said 75 people were killed in their "anarchic" political action.

"BNP always wants peace and welfare of the people, but Awami League wants anarchy in the country," she told the function.

Khaleda blamed her opponent AL for what she said trying to push the army towards destruction.

She said the BNP-led coalition government had done a lot of work for the development of the army.

Welcoming the newcomers, she hoped they will accommodate their positions in the party through working together with party's leaders and workers.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was present on the occasion.

AL goes to EC

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"The field-level election officials are not enlisting the eligible voters," he alleged adding that the election commission's publicity campaign regarding the amendment of the voter list was not sufficient. The enumerators are more interested in deleting names of the voters from the list rather than enlist the eligible ones, Mannan further noted.

The EC secretary admitted the scarcity of voter forms and assured them of taking necessary steps to solve this problem as well as other irregularities, if any, the AL delegation said.

Two other members of the delegation were -- Asaduzzaman Lucky and Shahjahan Siddiqui.

Hailing the initiative of the AL, EC Secretary Abdul Rashid Sarkar later at a press conference said that the inclusion of the eligible voters is as much important as the exclusion of duplicate names from the voter roll.

Admitting the allegation that the EC circular on voter list correction was not published in many well-circulated newspapers, Sarkar said that directives have been given to the section concerned in this regard.

"We have got some complains, particularly from Chittagong," the EC secretary said adding that they have got the allegation that a vested quarter there, is creating pressure not to exclude names from the voter list.

Sarkar also noted down complains from the reporters who found irregularities during their spot visit to different parts in the capital, including ward no 42, where 5000 voters were wiped from the voter roll in 2000.

SHEIKH HASINA AND HER FAMILY ENROLLED AS VOTER
AL president Shiekh Hasina and her family members yesterday submitted the voter forms to the assistant registration officer (ARO) concerned, EC sources said.

A total of 11 voter forms were submitted to Deen Muhammad, the ARO of the Dhanmondi from the Sudha Sadan, the sources added.

Stalled EC talks

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In separate post-deployment reactions to the news agency, they regretted stalling negotiations to break the pre-election political impasse and urged the parties to continue efforts to find a solution to the deadlock. They would also monitor the deployment.

A spokesman for the US embassy here said, "We regret that negotiations to break the political impasse have stalled. We hope the army deployment will not undermine efforts to create a positive election environment."

He said, "In the near future, we assume the government will fully explain the army's mission and its rules of engagement, and take action to ensure that the army is seen acting in a nonpartisan manner."

A spokeswoman for the British High Commission hoped the army deployment will be temporary and made only in support of legitimate civil authorities.

"We will monitor the deployment and trust that military personnel will perform their duties impartially and with due respect for human rights and the rule of law," she said.

Canadian High Commissioner Barbara Richardson also said they were monitoring the situation and urged all parties to continue their efforts to find a solution to the current impasse.

"Dialogue is the only means to ensure democracy, peace and security, not only today but also for the future," she said.

The top diplomat from the North American country observed that the Bangladeshis look to their leaders to protect democratic principles and to find a way to move forward to a free and fair election.

Hasina lashes out at CA

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advisers' request and instructed our leaders to go their localities to help updating the voter list, what situation has led to the army deployment?" Hasina posed the question.

The AL chief instructed her party men to remain prepared with whatever they have to lay siege to the Bangabhaban when she calls upon them.

"The president did not do the right thing by deploying army at this time. He violated the constitution repeatedly. If I survive, justice will prevail," said Hasina, warning that they will see how long the president stays at the Bangabhaban.

Her party is ready to participate in the next election at any time but the package deal negotiated between the advisers of the caretaker government and the major political alliances has to be immediately implemented, updating of voter roll is to done properly and a congenial atmosphere should be created before holding the election, the AL president said.

Prior to the briefing, the AL chief held several meetings with her party's Presidium members, leaders of 14-party alliance and Liberal Democratic Party to discuss the latest political situation following the army deployment.

Earlier in the morning, Hasina held a crucial meeting with British High Commissioner in Dhaka Anwar Chowdhury and US Ambassador Patricia A Butenis at her Sudha Sadan residence.

The election will have to be held as per the constitution after preparing an updated voter list, she said.

"We accepted the package proposal offered by the advisers, but it has not been implemented yet as the BNP-Jamaat coalition leader [Khaleda Zia] has hindered implementing the deal by using the president and chief adviser in a bid to foil the election," said Hasina.

She announced a countrywide demonstration tomorrow (Tuesday) demanding full implementation of the package offered by the advisers. Hasina observed that as they (14-party) announced to lay siege to Bangabhaban, the president besieged himself by surrounding the Bangabhaban with army.

The president has lost confidence of the advisers for his unilateral move to deploy army, she said, adding that the president's disregard for the advisers' opinion over the deployment of army has made the situation complicated.

Hasina accused the president of not having any ethics and always following Khaleda Zia's direction. She also questioned whose purpose the president was serving by playing with the army.

"The BNP-Jamaat coalition during their five-year tenure has destroyed the three main institutions of the country -- the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. This time they are trying to make the army controversial through using the president," the AL chief said.

Hasina demanded Iajuddin Ahmed's immediate resignation from the post of the chief adviser and accused him of creating obstacles to the advisers performing duties.

Over suspending the sit-in demonstrations around the Bangabhaban, the AL chief said, "People are ready. They will take to the streets whenever I call upon them."

Referring to the updating of the voter roll, she said their leaders and workers have been monitoring the process. She also said massive irregularities were found in different parts of the country and it would not be possible to correct the list in such a short time.

Eligible voters were not included

edly bowing his head in small nods, as if to show his gratitude to this huge crowd.

Then the piano in the corner rang out as the Norwegian pianist Christian Ihle Hadland played Bach.

Eight minutes later, Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee Ole Danbolt Mjos went to the dais to deliver his lecture. As he finished, the hall room was suddenly flooded with another serenity as speakers blared a Tagore song to the footsteps of the Nrittanchal dancers. The audience sat spellbound.

Then came the golden moment. Yunus stepped out to receive the Peace Prize. A pin drop silence fell in the hall. He reached out and touched the recognition, unknown emotions playing on his face. And then the silence shattered as claps after claps drowned any other noise. The audience rose in a standing ovation.

The woman in the red sari was clapping with all her might, her cheeks glistened as tears rolled down. Her four-year old daughter clapped, knowingly or unknowingly. The young Bangladeshi girl in jeans and blouse clapped. The man in flowing beard clapped. The young girl, Zaman, Anisur Rahman. Everybody.

For the first time in Oslo, they held their heads high.

in the voter roll in different parts of the country on different grounds, alleged Hasina demanding inclusion of all eligible voters in it.

"When the people are working on correcting the voter roll, the president has declared war against the people and taken the strategy to place the army against the people only to ensure the implementation of the vote rigging conspiracy by the BNP-Jamaat coalition," Hasina said.

She asked the army not to follow the list created by the BNP-Jamaat coalition, but instead follow the newspaper reports when raiding criminals for arms or black money.

The AL president said the people would appreciate the army if they arrest criminals, corrupt persons and illegal arms possessors in December -- the month of victory. But any torture and threat to leaders and workers of AL, 14-party, Jatiya Party, LDP and other parties taking part in their movement would not be tolerated, she warned.

Senior 14-party leaders Zillur Rahman, Amir Hossain Anu, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Obaidul Quader, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Bimal Biswas, Nurul Islam and Panjaj Bhattacharya were present at the press conference.

Iajuddin

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proposals virtually fizzled out on Saturday when the president decided on his own account to deploy the armed forces, ignoring strong objections from the advisory council.

The advisers had initiated elaborate measures to resolve the political standoff last week. After a series of meetings among themselves and with the two major political alliances, the council headed by Iajuddin Ahmed on Monday came up with a package of proposals aiming to break the deadlock.

The proposals include reconstitution of the EC by sending Election Commissioners Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury on leave and appointing new election commissioners, transfer of secretaries, rescheduling of the election and correction of the errors on the updated voter list.

The proposals had rekindled hope for an amicable resolution of the dispute. But suddenly, things began to change for the worse, as the president on Wednesday emerged adamantly opposed to the steps to make Zakaria take time off work.

In sync with the BNP-led four-party alliance, he stuck to his stance forcing the advisers to look for alternatives.

Then on Saturday night, he informed the advisers of his order for the army deployment.

Since the caretaker government's assumption of office, the president had decided twice to deploy forces but retreated in the face of opposition from the advisers.

After Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Azid took a leave of absence, the president had appointed two election commissioners--Modabbir and Saiful Alam--again without consulting the advisers.

He also made the EC announce an election schedule hurriedly on November 27, keeping the advisory council in the dark.

Besides, the CA on November 22 addressed the nation without discussion with the advisers who described the speech as the president's very own. Upset by the president's unilateral action, some advisers refrained from attending office the following day.

Seething with frustrations, some of the advisers yesterday threatened to take a tough stance.

Judicial

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Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mohammad Mujibul Haq passed the order when advocate ASM Iqbal Hossain, joint convener of Lawyers' Union for Protection of People's Right, filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM's) Court for the matter.

In his complaint, Iqbal mentioned that Moudud, while holding his portfolio, in the preface to the publication of the constitution printed on August 1 this year, said Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the national leader of the majority party, was arrested from his residence and taken to the then West Pakistan.

"The elected political leadership failed to give directions to the people at that critical moment.

"In that situation, in response to the indispensable demand of time, the then Major Ziaur Rahman of the Army, made the historic declaration of independence from Kalurghat radio station in Chittagong as leader of the war of resistance."

Moudud's statement is contrary to the fact regarding the proclamation of the independence and nothing but a lie, the complainant said.

Moreover, Colonel (rd) Ahmad and General (rd) Mir Shawkat, close associates of Ziaur Rahman, admitted that Zia proclaimed the independence on March 27 but the accused hid the fact and distorted the history, Iqbal added.

Advocates Abdul Jaiil Gazi, Shahadat Hossain, Hasina Akhter and Mahmud Hossain appeared for the complainant.

US, UK envoys

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Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury told the news agency that the Awami League chief categorically told the envoys that her only demand is to create a level playing field for free and fair elections where voters can choose a government of their choice.

The AL president said her party and 13 allies declared the election reform agenda 18 months ago and "we've consistently maintained our stance in this regard."

The diplomats' meeting with Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence, which lasted for one and half hours, came on the heels of the army deployment across the country.

In reply to a question, Saber said it was a pre-scheduled meeting requested by the envoys.

In the evening, the envoys called on BNP Chairperson and immediate past-prime minister Khaleda Zia at her Hawa Bhaban office.

As both sides avoided press, it could not be known what were the issues they discussed during the nearly 45-minute meeting from 6:40pm.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and BNP Chairperson's Adviser Reaz Rahman were present.

No new voter

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given the enumerators copies of the updated voter list and the enumerators, having only the year 2000 voter list, are busy deleting names of voters who died or moved from the areas. The year 2000 voter list was updated in August this year.

M Kamrul Islam, an enumerator of Asker Dighir Par area of Jamal Khan ward, said, "Many people are interested to include their names in the list but we cannot do that as we were not given the two forms required. We are still working with the list of year 2000 and have not received the updated list."

Amir UI Islam, district election officer (Chittagong-4), said they ordered all the AROs to send the copies of the updated list to the field-level officers. Blaming shortage of manpower, he said a number of enumerators might not get the copies in time.

Meanwhile, Dilshad Begum, deputy director of local government (deputy commissioner's office), was given the additional duty of acting district election officer of Chittagong-2, which was vacant for several months.

Swaraswati Puja

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day instead of January 21. Leaders of Bangladesh Puja Ujapon Parishad (BPUJ) yesterday called on the EC secretary and said the Hindu community got aggrieved due to the fixing of the polling date on the earlier fixed date of Swaraswati Puja.

Urging the EC secretary to shift the polling date, they handed over a letter of request in this regard.

Swaraswati Puja is held mainly in the educational institutions that are also the venue of polling centres.

"We could not know the date of puja as we did not have any calendar with us when we fixed the revised poll schedule," said the EC secretary.

They are trying to contact the major political alliances, he said, adding that a political alliance has already agreed to bringing the polling date forward by one or two days.

List righting limps

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none having such names ever lived here.

Locals alleged that the ward commissioner was involved in the foul play. Badal however denied the allegation and said these voters have gone out and will come back.

Enumerator Sabiha Mobarak, who was correcting the voter list in the area yesterday, admitted the mischief and said she is deleting the names.

Badal's brother Monir Hossain offered Tk 500 to the correspondents for tea and requested them to leave the area.

Around 60 people at Sonargaon slum at Golapbagh in the same ward, alleged that their names were not included in the updated voter list. The EC staff visited them yesterday but did not list their names. One of them, Sheikh Mohammad, said, "We heard that our names were not listed on the ground that we support Awami League."

MIRPUR, PALLABI
Residents of Mirpur and Pallabi feared that many voters, who moved to other houses in the same areas or to other localities might be dropped from the updated voter list.

Since the field staff do not have clear instruction from the EC, some of them in Pallabi are deleting the names of those voters who moved to other houses in the last three months, and enlisting those who came to the houses they had left.

On the other hand, some other EC staff in Mirpur said they are neither listing the names of those who came to the area in the last three months nor deleting the names of those who left the area.

Meanwhile, many EC staff alleged shortage of forms to enlist new voters. Twenty-five people who recently bought flats in Pallabi area could not be listed as voters due to lack of forms, one of them said yesterday.

A number of staff alleged that some local leaders of both the BNP and Awami League are pressuring them to give them forms for listing their supporters as voters.

More than 500 voters, lived in a ten-storey building stands next to the ward commissioner's office at Sukrabad, are yet to be listed as voter.

The Daily Star correspondents talked to Mohammad Anur Uddin, one of the tenants of the building and also a Madrasa teacher at West Rajabazar, who regretted as saying this is for the third time he heard that the field level election officials are enlisting names but he didn't see anyone so far.

Moinul Islam, an official of the same area, said this is not an aberration. "Huge numbers of voters have been kept away from the list... My younger brother's name was also not on the list and the same happened at different places of Kalabagan staff quarter area," Islam said.

When asked about the incident, an assistant registration officer (ARO) and also an assistant headmaster of Dhanmondi Boys School, said, "Lots of floating people are here in Dhaka and it's really tough to carry out the enumeration process properly."

Mohammad Abdul Baker, a teacher of the same school and also a field level election official, said numbers of voters have been decreased in Sukrabad area after updating the voter list.

According to Baker, the numbers of voters were 17,000 at the fresh voter list, while the number reduced to 14,000 at the updated list. However, he ruled out any possibility of dropout.

The inhabitants of Mohammapur area feared they might not be listed, as none of the field level officials was front to come to register their names.

Police officials, deployed in front of the house of the acting chief election commissioner, were also not listed at

all. Meanwhile, the residents of Shantinagar area expressed satisfaction over the enumeration activities. Those, who were left out from the voter list, were seen enlisting their names enthusiastically.

At Sabujbagh, Monindra Kar, a retired government official and his family members were excluded from the list though the names of the rest of the tenants lived in the same building were listed.

GM Patwari, a field level official said 10 teams are now working at ward no. 31 and they were given only 100 forms.

Teachers, who are taking part at enumeration process, expressed dissatisfactions, as they will get only Tk 500 this time. The teachers were given Tk 2,000 in two phases earlier, sources said.

However, surprisingly, the activists of both the major parties were seen assisting people enlist their names.

Our Gazipur correspondent said the field level officials were seen going to each and every house. However, the residents of Baria, Chandnao, Noagaon, Amuna, Kaultia and Jhajar villages alleged that none has yet to come to them.

Around 100 eligible voters of Awami League dominated Tahir, Ekdala and Laupara villages of Ganipur union at Bagmara upazila were shown 'dead' in the updated voter list, which was revealed yesterday during the correction work, reported our Rajshahi correspondent.

The district election officer issued a show-cause notice against ARO Abdul Anam after the inhabitants brought an allegation against him saying Anam, a BNP loyalist, intentionally committed 'error'.

Our Netrakona correspondent quoted Farid Uddin, one of the upazila election officers of the district, who admitted incidents of some major irregularities in the correction process.

The field level election officials did not get proper instruction about the procedures for including and deleting names on the voter list and they also were not provided with enough forms, said Mohammad Naimuddin, an ARO of Atpara upazila.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reported that scarcity of forms is hindering the correction process in the northern district.

22 civilians killed as violence flares anew in Darfur

AFP, Khartoum

Twenty-two civilians were killed in a weekend attack in western Sudan which the government blamed on Darfur rebels and which threatened to deepen the crisis in the war-torn region.

The latest violence erupted as US envoy in Sudan Andrew Natsios stepped up efforts to persuade Khartoum to accept a joint African Union-UN peacekeeping force for Darfur.

African Union spokesman Nureddin Mezni said 22 civilians were killed and 10 wounded on Saturday when gunmen ambushed a vehicle in Sirba, 40 kilometres north of Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state.

Mezni did not identify the attackers but said an investigation would be launched into the attack.

The governor of West Darfur said the attack was carried out by rebel groups who refused to sign the May peace agreement reached between Khartoum and the main faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement.

Major UN powers

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close economic and energy ties with Iran -- have been trying to water down the European draft, while the United States has sought to harden it.

Monday's informal talks at ambassador level come less than a week after political directors of foreign ministries of the six nations failed in Paris to agree on the scope of the proposed sanctions.

But in Washington, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Friday that the six had now narrowed their differences over the terms of the draft.

"The sense is the differences are narrowing," he told reporters after US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice discussed the issue here Friday with Russian Security Council Secretary Igor Ivanov.

But a diplomat close to the negotiations here said tough bargaining lies ahead, notably to win over the Russians who are keen on maintaining a dialogue with the Islamic Republic.

US and European officials however said they were hopeful that an acceptable text would be agreed by Christmas.

"The goal is still unanimity (on a text) but not at any price," a Western diplomat said.

Meanwhile Iran, which ignored an August 31 deadline to freeze uranium enrichment, has said it will not give up its nuclear programme even if faced with UN sanctions.

Uranium enrichment is used to make nuclear fuel as well as the core of an atom bomb. Iran insists it only wants to enrich uranium to generate electricity.

Troops take to streets