

Iajuddin makes

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siege illegal weapons and to thwart terrorist activities.

The new council of advisers in yesterday's meeting discussed the law and order situation and directed the home ministry to ensure public security, protect properties of the public, and to send the latest decision of keeping the armed forces in their camps to all district administrations within the night.

Sources said the president also re-initiated a process of recasting the EC in line with the package proposal soon after accepting the resignation letters of the four erstwhile advisers.

"If both the parties agree, he would request Election Commissioners Zakaria and Modabir to go on leave. I believe they will agree to go on leave if both the parties reach a consensus," the president's adviser quoted Iajuddin as telling the US ambassador yesterday at Bangabhaban.

Earlier, the president however had suddenly appeared opposed to the move of sending Election Commissioner Zakaria on a leave of absence.

Non-implementation of the package proposal regarding reconstitution of the EC caused frustration among the advisers and the president's unilateral move of ordering the deployment of the armed forces on December 9 prompted the four advisers to quit the interim cabinet.

The two resigned advisers — Hasan Mashud Chowdhury and CM Shafi Sami — on Tuesday, told the media that the chief adviser and all the ten advisers unanimously had agreed to the package proposal and signed on it, which includes reconstitution of the EC by sending the two election commissioners on leaves of absence and appointment of new election commissioners.

After the last meeting of the previous council on Saturday night, the chief adviser yesterday held a meeting of the new council to discuss the prevailing situation.

Before the first meeting of the new council, the newly appointed advisers on the first day of their office yesterday expressed their optimism for resolving the political deadlock.

A newly appointed adviser yesterday however did come up with a new formula regarding reconstitution of the EC. Adviser Shafiqul Haque Choudhury on the first day of his office said 'equilibrium' is more important to the EC than 'impartiality'.

"A fair election is possible even if the two election commissioners do not resign as demanded by 14-party coalition, Shafiq said. "There is another way out that is to bring equilibrium to the commission by appointing more commissioners," he said.

Adviser Ruhul Alam Chowdhury said he took a 'tough job' to live up to national expectations. "We have to find a way out at any cost," he told reporters at the energy ministry. "I have enough self-confidence. I will continue my efforts relentlessly to overcome the present political impasse," said the energy adviser.

NCBs attain 5pc

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was able to recover only Tk 45 lakh. Janata Bank recovered only Tk 13 lakh against a target of Tk 25 crore, Agrani Bank Tk 5.5 crore against Tk 18 crore and Rupali Bank Tk 6.4 crore against Tk 35 crore target.

Sources said the NCBs also failed to meet other targets such as reduction in operational costs, capital shortfall and the amount of classified loans.

The amount of classified loans has increased by Tk 2,125 crore during the period. Sonali Bank saw an increase of Tk 541 crore, Janata Bank Tk 305 crore, Agrani Bank Tk 223 crore and Rupali Bank Tk 1,056 crore.

Officials of Rupali Bank said their classified loans have increased sharply as the bank has categorised the loans under international standards.

Khaleda

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Tamiuddin formally joined BNP at the programme.

Accusing the AL-led 14-party for creating the ongoing political crisis, Khaleda Zia said, "The country is in crisis and Awami League and its 14-party allies caused the crisis by creating chaos. Now they want to create a constitutional crisis," said the BNP chief.

"They are creating anarchy by raising new demands one after another and now they (14-party) demand for shifting the election date, but it is not possible at all," she said blaming the 14-party for conspiring to foil the election. "They want to boycott the election as they found out from surveys that they could not win. That's why they are conspiring to foil the election by raising new demands one after another."

Urging her party men to work together in the upcoming election, Khaleda said, "The caretaker government accepted all their (14-party) demands, but they keep coming up with new demands only to disrupt the election."

BNP chairperson claimed that people are afraid of chaos and anarchy by Awami League and they don't want to see AL in power. So, AL will not be able to form the government even if they join the election.

She however said she wants participation of all parties in the election process and hoped to win the election even if all political parties participate.

Describing the development work during her tenure the former prime minister said BNP government ruled the country successfully and huge development projects have been implemented in the last five years.

She hoped that the people will again vote them into power and the country will go forward with continuing development work. "All development work cannot be completed within five years. So, the continuity of the government is necessary. The people also want this and they understand this."

Appointment

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of four advisers," he told reporters during the interview of party nomination seekers held at his Banani office. The nation would not accept the appointments of the new advisers, he also observed.

The JP chairman reiterated his party's stance of boycotting the upcoming polls if participation of all parties is not confirmed. He, however, said that they are taking preparations to take part in the election.

In reply to a question, Ershad said that the discussion with 14-party combine is going on, adding that he would take a decision about joining any alliance soon.

He also demanded that the correction in the updated voter roll be completed in a proper way adding that the election date should be deferred for at least 30 days in order to carry out reforms in the Election Commission (EC) for an acceptable poll.

Meanwhile, the party parliamentary board led by its chairman yesterday interviewed about 500 aspirants from 109 parliamentary seats from Khulna and Rajshahi division.

Parliamentary board members and also the party presidium members Roushan Ershad, Kazi Zafar Ahmed, Anisul Islam Mahmud, MA Sattar, Kazi Firoz Rashid and party secretary general Ruhul Amin Hawlader were present among others.

According to party sources, Ershad have decided to contest the election from five constituencies of Rangpur, Sylhet, Habiganj and Lalmonirhat districts. The JP chairman will disclose the names of his party candidates after finalising the electoral understanding with Awami League led 14-party combine, they added.

Ershad's case

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HC bench comprising Justice Sarifuddin Chaklader and Justice Sheikh Abdul Awal.

The bench fixed today for the hearing of the appeal petition against the conviction of Ershad in a corruption case.

Advocate Yusuf Hossain Humayun, the name listed in the cause list as Ershad's counsel, yesterday said he would no longer continue with the case.

Dhaka Divisional Special Judge on February 1992 convicted Ershad on corruption charges and sentenced a three-year imprisonment after law enforcers found around Tk 1.99 crore, 11 sets of jewellery and other valuables from his residence.

Former dictator Ershad filed an appeal the same month, but its hearing did not take place until yesterday.

The government, however, filed another appeal against the conviction to extend the period of the sentence.

Meanwhile, Ershad's counsel Azmulul Hossain, in another graft case regarding Japanese boat purchase yesterday placed a two-month time prayer for preparations.

A single-member bench of Justice Faisal Mahmud Faizee fixed today for the hearing on the prayer.

The lower court convicted Ershad in the case in 1995 and handed down a three-year jail term for corruption in purchasing Japanese boats while he was the president of the country.

AL prepares for polls

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The AL has already demanded the election schedule be deferred by at least 46 days, the time the caretaker government has wasted without taking any step to create a level playing field for all parties.

The AL demands also include preparation and publication of a correct voter roll by the Election Commission, resignation of the chief adviser and reconstitution of the caretaker government.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jaill yesterday told a meeting with the leaders of Tanqat Federation, a component of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) led Jatiya Oikya Front, that a fair and free election is not possible under Iajuddin Ahmed.

Describing the way the voter list is being corrected as 'farical', Jaill said election will not be possible even under the 'corrected' voter roll.

AL President Sheikh Hasina yesterday sat with her party's joint and organising secretaries at Sudha Sadan and instructed them to make all-out preparations for the election alongside the ongoing movements for a free and fair poll.

With a view to participating in the election, the AL-led 14-party alliance has also planned to form a greater coalition with a few other parties soon and make combined preparations, sources said.

The AL chief had earlier directed party leaders and workers to observe the procedure of correcting the voter

list so that names of all party activists and supporters are included and excess or fake names cannot be registered in the voter roll.

Hasina yesterday asked the six organising secretaries authorised for monitoring party activities in six divisions to start talking to aspiring candidates and district leaders and then finalise nominations for the next polls.

The meeting decided to inform the leaders who will not get party ticket of the party decision and request them to work for the party.

"We are making preparations with the hope to participate in the next poll if a level playing field for a free and fair election is finally created in the country," AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the party chief has finalised a total of 190 nominations and a parliamentary board to give party ticket is likely to be formed tomorrow. Around 80 seats will be given to the AL allies, he added.

Sources said the AL is ready to give 42 seats to Jatiya Party (Ershad), 20-25 seats to the LDP, around 15 to the AL allies in the 14-party coalition, and 18 to others including Islami Oikya Jote and Zaker Party.

The AL joint and organising secretaries have been tasked with finalising seats with the allies within a shortest possible time.

New advisers hopeful

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party. But, they expressed their full commitment to holding a credible election within the stipulated 90 days of the caretaker government with the participation of all major parties.

Shafiqul also said 14-party will not be able to boycott the election if the 'package proposal' is fully implemented to recast the Election Commission (EC), including the proposal of sending the two 'controversial' election commissioners on leave.

"We will take all necessary steps to implement the proposals," assured Shafiqul.

"The resignations of four advisers have made it easier to implement the proposals," he said adding that the government has been put under pressure by Monday's resignations, which he feels, were prompted by the failure to implement the package proposal.

"But, they (the four resigned advisers) could have resigned one by one instead of resigning together," lamented Shafiqul.

Regarding the proposal of sending Election Commissioners Modabir Hossain Chowdhury and SM Zakaria on leave, he said, "The election cannot possibly be stopped because of just two people. If the need arises, they will be sent on leave."

Meanwhile, newly appointed Power and Energy Adviser Major General (ret'd) Ruhul Alam Chowdhury said he has already proved himself as capable of working under pressure. "I have faced much more severe crises in the past, particularly in 1996 during an abortive military coup," he said.

He was also hopeful of a quick solution to the electoral deadlock. "There is only a little difference between the two political alliances and bridging the gap is not impossible if we all devote our efforts collectively," he said.

Shoeb Ahmed, the new finance adviser, said, "We will make an all-out effort to bring all major parties to the election, we will create a situation where everyone will participate in the election."

Regarding 14-party coalition's rejection of the four new adviser appointees, Shoeb said, "They (14-party coalition) might have said that in light of past and recent experiences, but our efforts will focus on holding a free and fair election."

Meanwhile UNB reported that all four newly appointed advisers visited the National Mausoleum in Savar at 4:00pm yesterday to pay their respect to the liberation war martyrs. The four advisers lay wreaths and observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect for the war heroes.

Nation recalls today

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organisations have planned elaborate programmes, including discussion and wreath-laying at the monuments at Mirpur and Rayerbazar.

The Awami League (AL) will place wreaths at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in Mirpur, the Rayerbazar monument and the portrait of Bangabandhu at Dhanmondi. The party will hold discussion in front of the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum with its President, Sheikh Hasina, in the chair.

BNP will place wreath at the Mirpur memorial at 10:00am and hold a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club at 3:00pm. Dhaka University, which lost many of its illustrious teachers on the day, has chalked out various programmes to observe Martyred Intellectuals' Day. On the occasion, black flags will be hoisted at the main buildings of Dhaka University including all its dormitories and the Vice Chancellor's residence.

University teachers, students, officials and employees will bring out a procession from Aparajoge Bangla at 7:00am and will place wreaths at the graveyard, adjacent to university central mosque, and mausoleums at Jagannath Hall and other residential areas and Mirpur Intellectuals' graveyard. A discussion will also be held at TSC with Vice Chancellor SMA Faiz in the chair.

Bangla Academy will hold a lecture of poet Asad Chowdhury at the academy seminar today at 11:00am. The Liberation War Museum will hold a programme titled 'Voices of Martyrs' families' at the museum premises at 5:00pm today.

Communist Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Party (Manju), Jukto Front, Jatiya Samjantrik Dal (JSD), Bangladesh Socialist Party (BSD), National Awami Party (NAP), Dhaka Union of Journalists, Dhaka reporters' Unity, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Bangladesh Chhatra Union and Bangabandhu Lalitokola Academy, Garment Workers Unity Council also have programmes to mark the day.

14-party to lay siege to election offices at dists, upazilas today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League-led 14-party combine will lay siege to all the district and upazila election offices today to press home its demands for extension of time for correcting voter list and a new election schedule.

Coordinator of the alliance Abdul Jaill, also the general secretary of AL, yesterday asked all leaders and activists of the combine to make the programme a success.

He said the ongoing process of correcting the voter roll is not sufficient to make a flawless list.

The 14-party alliance announced the siege programme on Monday.

HC grants bail to Galib

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted bail for six months to Asadullah Al Galib, leader of Ahle Hadith Movement, in a bomb blast case of Bogra.

After hearing both sides, a division bench comprising Justice Sheikh Rezwan Ali and Justice M Abu Tariq passed the order as the prosecution failed to make out the case.

Galib, also head of the Arabic Department of Rajshahi University, was accused of bomb blasts at a mela (fair) at Laxmikola Shah Rawshan Jalal High School ground about two years ago that left one person dead.

The 61-year-old leader of the Islamist outfit was accused in eight cases following a series of bomb blasts at NGO offices and cultural functions. He was arrested on February 26, 2005 from his Rajshahi residence.

Of the eight cases, the lower court had acquitted him of charges in five, as police investigation did not find his involvement in the blasts. Now he is facing trial in two cases and the other is under investigation.

RMG workers

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busy streets causing untold sufferings to the commuters.

The agitating workers also ransacked Samsung Garments in the area and injured at least five of the factory.

The workers of the Palmal Garments situated at the Post Office Road, staged the blockade from 8:30am to 12:30pm to protest the sudden closure of the factory.

Police and workers sources said that the workers of the factory have been agitating for the last one month over dismissing of a worker Titu. They intensified their movement further when Titu was arrested in a 'criminal incident' recently, suspecting the role of the factory authorities behind it. The authorities finally came to an understanding with the workers in this regard.

But suddenly on Tuesday, the authorities fired 26 workers who led the agitation, workers alleged. "And surprisingly, they also close down the factory that prompted the workers to take to the streets," a worker said.

Workers from at least 15 garment factories of Post Office Road, Shibub Market, Kutubail, Katherpool area of Fatulla joined the blockade.

The workers' leaders also held a rally at Shibub Market area where they demanded that the Palmal Garment authorities reinstate the dismissed workers immediately.

Assistant Police Superintendent Noor Ahmed of Fatulla said that a meeting was held between the workers and the garment authorities that decided to investigate into the allegations against the 26 dismissed workers.

Yunus

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The revenue from the CD will go towards building eye clinics in Bangladesh for cataracts.

Sunde told Dagbladet she became interested in Yunus and his work to give microcredits to the poor several years ago, after she studied the project and visited Bangladesh.

"I understood that there weren't so many who knew about it, and I decided I wanted to help to create more attention," Sunde told Dagbladet.

"When I learned that he had won the Peace Prize I was shocked. But I can't think of anyone who deserves it better."

Reitan, one of the major retail groups in Norway, will distribute the CD.

"If all the CDs we have printed are sold, there will be enough money to build three hospitals," Sunde said.

Yunus himself admitted that he doesn't usually listen to pop music.

"I don't listen to Western music, only folk music from Bangladesh. But my children are fond of Western music," he said during his stay in Oslo.

33 killed in Iraq violence

AFP, Baghdad

A series of vehicle bombs and shootings killed at least 33 people and wounded scores more across Iraq yesterday, stoking sectarian anger in the run-up to a national unity conference. A car bomb exploded in a busy market near the Al-Kamaliyah mosque in a mainly Shiite district of east Baghdad, killing at least 10 civilians and wounding another 26, a security official said.

Bodies of the victims lay scattered around the street amid pools of blood and the burning wreckage of at least two cars and a row of market stalls set up by a nearby bus station.

Two more car bombs were set off later near the nearby Sunni Al-Samuri mosque in Baghdad Jadida, a mainly Shiite neighbourhood, killing five day labourers waiting for work and wounding 10.

The Samuri mosque is not far from the Kamaliyah mosque where the earlier car bomb was detonated.

The bombings mirrored an attack Tuesday, when two suicide bombers blew their cars up amid another crowd of casual workers, mostly Shias, killing 70 and wounding more than 200 in Baghdad's Tayaran Square.

In another attack, two truck bombs smashed into a base of Iraq's oil infrastructure protection force, killing 10 soldiers and wounding six, an officer on the scene said, adding that three civilians were also injured.

One after another, the trucks ploughed into the military base near the town of Riyadh, 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the oil centre of Kirkuk and along the pipelines carrying crude to the massive Baiji refinery.

The Strategic Infrastructure Brigade, an army unit formed out of local tribesmen, is tasked with protecting the northern oil fields and the hundreds of miles of pipeline snaking across the plains of northern Iraq.

Iraq's national security adviser, Muwaffaq al-Rubaie, said the answer to the violence was to withdraw US troops from the capital to enable them to chase Sunni insurgents while Iraqi forces put down sectarian bloodshed.

"It is very important that the coalition forces should not be seen siding with any factions. This is basically a war between the two extremists, the Sunni extremists

and the Shiite," he said, in an interview with CNN.

"The multinational forces should not be in the middle. This is a job for the Iraqi security forces," he said, adding that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki had agreed this change of tactics with US President George W. Bush.

The surge in bloodshed came three days ahead of a national reconciliation conference called by Maliki in what might be his last chance to curb the violence.

Saturday's talks will aim to bring the leaders of Iraq's warring sects and political factions under one roof to allow them to solve their differences without recourse to the rival militias backing almost every party.

The conference will be boycotted by a Sunni religious body, the Muslim Scholars' Association, which is accused of links with some of the insurgent groups fighting the US-backed government.

Kurdish lawmaker Mahmud Othman, a member of Maliki's national reconciliation committee, said there would be no point in inviting the association.

"The association's continual rejection of the political process and its announcement that it will not take part in this process make it unnecessary to extend an invitation," he said.

Maliki, who is under tremendous pressure from within his own ruling Shiite coalition, has failed to bring security to Iraq and especially Baghdad, and the sectarian war now threatens to turn into a regional conflict.

The New York Times reported Wednesday that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia had warned Vice President Dick Cheney two weeks ago during Cheney's visit to Riyadh, the daily reported, citing Arab diplomats.

On Tuesday, the White House said Bush will unveil a new Iraq strategy in early 2007 that will aim to tackle the sectarian bloodletting and facilitate an eventual troop withdrawal.

US public support for the war has collapsed, with one poll showing that only 15 percent of Americans think Bush can win.

The president is consulting with US diplomats and military officials as well as senior Iraqi leaders in order to draw up a new strategy.

Elsewhere in Iraq, eight people were killed in rebel attacks, including five in the restive city of Baquba, northeast of Baghdad.

Entire Savar village

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and several other areas it was discovered that most of the inhabitants were unaware of the correction of the voter list. Youths who became eligible to vote in the last 2 to 3 years complained that no-one turned up to enlist them.

"No-one came here to correct the voter list. I was enlisted along with my husband 3 to 4 years ago. My husband is dead now and nobody came to update this," said Rezia, a resident of Aitor village in Savar. Her 25-year-old son Nazrul is yet to be enlisted as a voter.

Over three hundred people from Manikganj settled in the village about six years ago after losing everything in river erosion. Since then staff from the EC have only visited the area only once.

A total of 5, 45,750 voters were enlisted during voter listing in Savar this year while the number was 3, 53,784 in 2001.

Rejecting the allegations of not going from door to door Itefazzul Hoque Akand, election officer of Savar, said, "Our staff is working as per direction and if any local people lodge a complaint we definitely will look into the matter."

CHITTAGONG
Our Chittagong bureau office reports: Field level enumerators here are continuously facing problems with people pressing them to include their names as voters.

Pulak Chakrabarti, of Saleh Jahur City Corporation High School, an enumerator in Jamal Khan ward said, "During the first three days we were only busy in correction on the basis of the list of 2000 and told the people who wanted to be voters to contact the district election office."

NETROKONA
Our correspondent in Netrokona reports: Due to a lack of forms two election officials could not register 55 indigenous Garo and Hajong

voters of Senpara and Bhasankura villages in Kharnai union under K a l m a k a n d a u p a z i l a . Kalmakanda's 14 party leaders claimed that local BNP and Jaamat activists are assisting the field level officials in correcting the voter list

When the Daily Star visited the two villages, an on duty Assistant Returning Officer (ARO) of Kalmakanda upazila told the correspondent that 123 indigenous voters of Senpara and Bhasankura were deleted from the voter list in the last update on the grounds that they had left the village. However our correspondent found this to be incorrect.

This ARO also said that over a thousand indigenous Garo and Hajong voters were deleted from the last updated voter list in Langura, Kharnai and Ranghati unions, the three bordering unions of Kalmakanda upazila, due to pressure of local BNP and Jamaat leaders and activists.

Our Correspondent in Moulavibazar reports: Enumerators are advising voters who want to enlist their name in the voter list to visit 'registration officers' as they do not have forms for new voters. Local people alleged that field level election commission staff did possess the forms but were unwilling to make them available.

Moumita Dhar, college teacher in Moulavi Bazar alleged that her name was included in August but had now been dropped.

Sheikh Mohibur Rahman, an officer of the district election office told this correspondent that sufficient fresh enlistment forms have been supplied to the registration officers. He said his office will investigate the allegations.

LDP demands polls

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date should be deferred by two months for implementing the 'package proposal' including the election commission reconstitution."

Meanwhile, Badruddoza Chowdhury said at a meeting held at LDP Moghbazar office, "President Iajuddin himself is the responsible for creating an anarchic atmosphere in the country. Advisers to the caretaker government offered a 'package proposal' to the political parties aiming to hold a fair election, but Iajuddin himself did not agree to implement the 'package proposal' even though major political parties agreed with the proposal."

Badruddoza also questioned, "The last date of submitting nomination is December 21 but caretaker government is yet to implement the 'package proposal'. Without implementing the 'package proposal', how could the election date be announced?"

It is impossible for political parties to select the candidates for the constitutional seats within this short period, he claimed.

He also accused President Iajuddin of violating the constitution by grabbing the chief advisers position of the CG and blamed him for deploying army disregarding strong objections from the council of advisers that apparently forced the four 'honest' advisers to resign who

HC rejects

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The ACC, after screening, absorbed a number of staff from the now-defunct Bac and asked the government to withdraw the rest.

Former Bac officers Ahsan Ali and AKM Zayed Hossain Khan filed two separate writ petitions challenging ACC's withdrawal decision.

A HC bench yesterday rejected both petitions after hearing.