

## Aziz decides his fate in two days

Advisers appear upbeat after hectic parleys; CEC may even quit

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz might tender his resignation to the president sometime today, an adviser to the caretaker government hinted last night.

Aziz sought two days' time yesterday to decide on how to respond to the president's initiative aiming to break the stalemate over reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC).

In the morning, Iajuddin sent a group of emissaries to the CEC in a last-ditch effort to settle the crisis.

Through the three-member delegation, he asked Aziz to make a swift decision, realising the gravity of the situation arisen out of the call for his resignation.

The presidential delegation comprising Advisers Mahbubul Alam, MA Azizul Haque and Advocate Sultana Kamal reached the CEC's office at around 9:50am. They communicated the president's message to the poll chief.

Later addressing a news conference at night, Information Adviser Mahbubul Alam said, "We have found a way to resolve the ongoing national crisis."

The press briefing followed a meeting of the council of advisers to the caretaker government.

"We hope we will get a result by the next 24 to 48 hours," he added.

Mahbubul, however, declined to answer whether the EC will be expanded through appointing a few more election commissioners or it

will be reconstituted in the event of MA Aziz standing down as the CEC.

He indicated that at the moment they are not thinking of any other alternatives. "We believe the solution to the crisis that we are expecting will be acceptable to all."

At the meeting, the advisers expressed optimism that the CEC will inform the president of his decision today and after that they will sit to discuss the next course of action.

An adviser seeking anonymity told The Daily Star last night that they are in fact awaiting an announcement of resignation from the CEC. "If he does not quit, it will not be possible to reconstitute the Election Commission," he added.

About the other election commis-

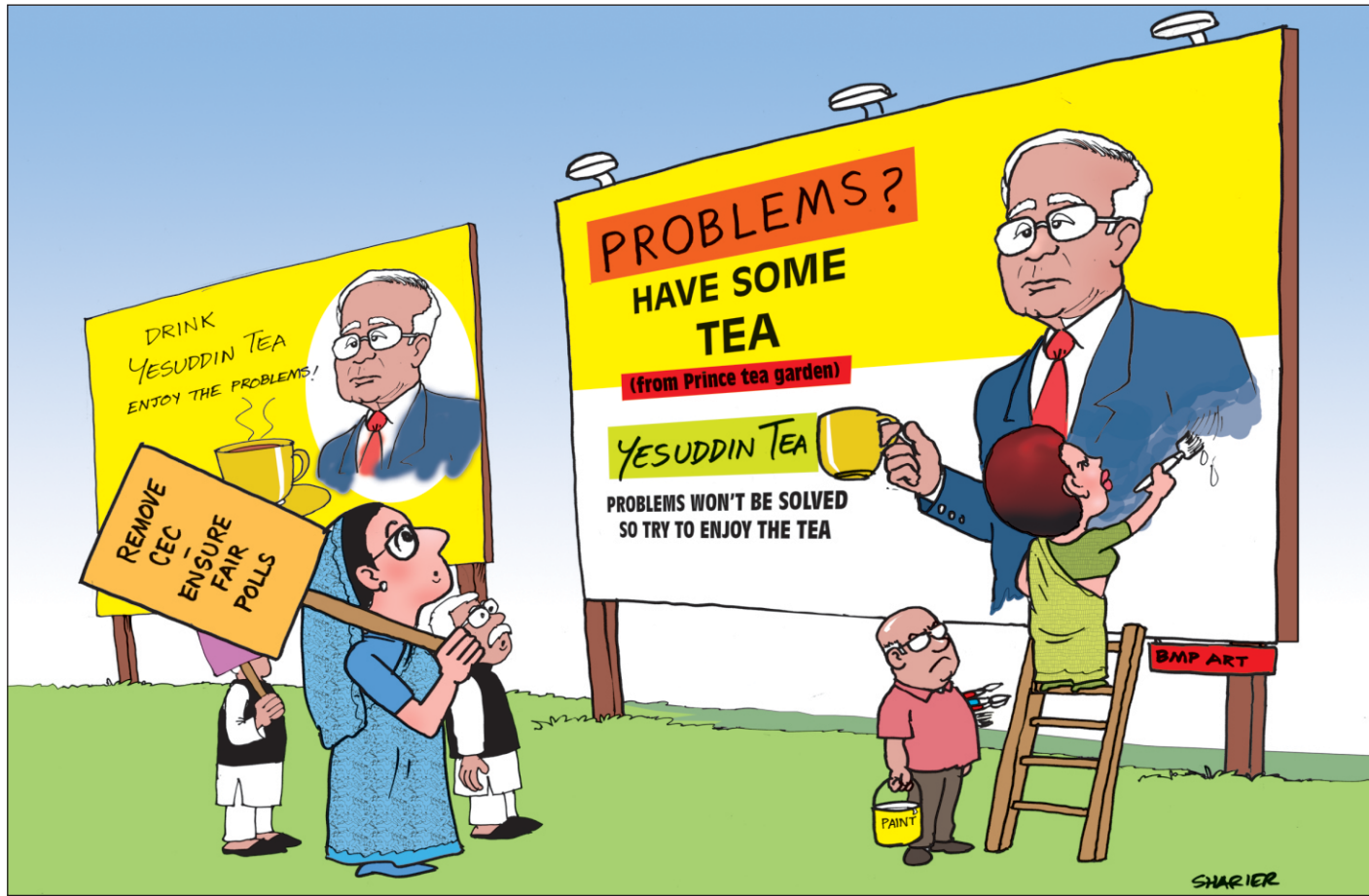
sioners, the adviser said, "Let's resolve the problem regarding the CEC first."

The information adviser said, "Now we can see a light at the end of the tunnel. And we are very happy that our efforts to break the deadlock are going to pay off."

"The CEC told us that he will inform the president about his decision tomorrow (today)," said Advocate Sultana Kamal, a caretaker government adviser and member of the presidential delegation that met Justice Aziz yesterday morning.

In the wake of the latest developments, the council of advisers that has been encountering

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## Writ petition filed against Iajuddin

Challenges his authority to hold CA's office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A writ petition was filed in the High Court (HC) yesterday to issue a rule to the President and Chief Adviser (CA) of the caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed to show cause under what authority he is holding the office of the CA.

Adnan Anwar, a businessman and nephew of late president Ziaur Rahman, filed the writ stating that President Iajuddin did not comply with all the provisions of the constitution before assuming the office of the CA.

The respondents are the chief adviser, the president, and secretaries of Law and Establishment ministries.

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## Peaceful blockade marred in Natore

50 bullet-hit as 14-party, BNP clash

STAR REPORT

The entire country came to a grinding halt yesterday as Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition resumed an indefinite blockade for the third time amid noticeable support from people for reconstitution of the Election Commission.

At least 150 people were injured, including 50 with bullet wounds, in gunfights between 14-party and BNP activists over capturing streets in Natore town.

Clashes between the rival political activists in Sirajganj and Bagerhat saw 24 people injured.

Otherwise the blockade passed

peacefully elsewhere in the country yesterday with an increase in the number of blockaders on the streets.

General population seemed to be more or less in agreement with the blockaders all over the country, making it easier for them to enforce it rather peacefully.

AL-led 14-party joined by Jatiya Oikya Front comprising Liberal Democratic Front (LDP), Jatiya Oikya Mancha and Bangladesh Tarikat Federation, resumed the blockade yesterday demanding reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC) as the third deadline for President and Chief

Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed to meet its 11-point demand ended on Sunday.

Rail communication across the country, particularly in the western zone, came to a halt due to the blockade, according to railway sources. Although some trains on Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet routes in the eastern zone operated, seven of them were stranded due to barricades at Sathkhamar, Manikkhali, Sarishabari and Gouripur stations.

Blockaders also put up barricades in Khulna, Abdullahpur, Dinajpur, Syedpur, Shantahar, and

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## Blockade unto EC reconstitution

14-party renews vow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 14-party coalition yesterday expressed its firm resolve to go on with its blockade programme until its demands including reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC), removal of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and three election commissioners and correction of voter list are met.

"The blockade programme will continue until the Election Commission is reconstituted and 11-point immediate tasks placed before the president/chief adviser are implemented," Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina said in a statement.

At a press briefing at AL's Dhanmondi office in the capital

yesterday, AL-led 14-party Coordinator Abdul Jalil also echoed the same view.

The AL president alleged that instead of taking any measures to create a congenial atmosphere for free and fair polls, the president/chief adviser (CA) has pushed the country into a crisis.

Without implementing the 11-point tasks, President/CA Iajuddin Ahmed has destroyed the concept of non-party caretaker government as per Hawa Bhaban's (BNP's Banani office) dictates, Hasina said.

On people's sufferings due to the blockade, she said, "I know they have to suffer a lot for this. We are also suffering. We don't want to

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## Take action against creating anarchy

Khaleda tells CG of blockade, presses for polls schedule soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday demanded the election schedule be announced immediately and urged the caretaker government (CG) to take punitive measures against those who are "creating anarchy" in the name of realising their demands.

Urging the CG to assist the Election Commission (EC) in holding the polls, she said, "The advisers to the caretaker government should start preparing for the elections and our party will also begin election preparations soon."

"The only duty of the advisers is

to do the routine works and conduct the elections, nothing else," she added.

Pointing towards the leaders of Liberal Democratic Party, Khaleda said all of them were involved with corruption and now they have taken a stance against corruption.

"I know them very well. But I don't want to say anything more about them. We want to make the country corruption free and it will be possible only by us," she said while addressing a views-exchange meeting with the teachers and officials from different universities at the Engineers Institute of

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PHOTO: STAR

The 14-party alliance holds a rally in front of the Awami League central office on Bangabandhu Avenue as their countrywide blockade resumed yesterday.

## Two bombs blasted near Bangabhaban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two handmade bombs exploded last evening near the south gate of Bangabhaban -- minutes after president and chief adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed left the premises for a meeting with his council of advisers at the CA's office in Tejgaon.

The bombs exploded at around 6:00pm on the road adjacent to the south gate of Bangabhaban, almost

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## Ershad's JP now to join street movement for CEC's removal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (Ershad) yesterday declared to join the movement along with the 14-party alliance demanding immediate resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz, only days after confirming that it would contest the

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## Commentary

## What will take for the CEC to get the message?

Save last vestige of honour and resign

MAHFUZ ANAM

It is possible that Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz will not read this piece. We will understand if we are not his favourite newspaper. He may have concluded, and rightly so, that we are against his holding on to his post. To end the story here would be unfair to us. It would be in the fitness of things to ask why we took the position that we did several months ago.

In his latest press briefing, the spokesperson of the advisory council, Mahbubul Alam, said 'there is probably a light at the end of the tunnel' that we will see between the next 24-48 hours. We ardently hope that 'light' will constitute of the CEC's resigning that the majority of the nation today expects him to do.

The CEC embarked on his controversial journey from the very start. He created unnecessary fuss in the way he conducted his first dialogue with the political parties and exhibited preconceived hostility

toward Awami League, compelling the latter not to participate in that exchange of views session. For us the real problem began when he started marginalising the two sitting election commissioners from the very day they disagreed with his decision to go for a new voter list instead of updating the existing one. After one meeting where the dissenting views surfaced the CEC did not call a second meeting of the commission for several months until two new commissioners were appointed whose views coincided with his own. And suddenly he started calling meetings of the full EC knowing that his decisions will now be passed with a 3-2 majority. Meanwhile, during the period that he did not call any meeting of the EC, he signed files on his own authority starting the process of the new voter list.

His actions were then

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## People lost trust in EC

4 envoys tell advisers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Envoys of four nations including the United States and United Kingdom yesterday said the people have no confidence in the present Election Commission (EC) and the next general election if held under it will not be credible overseas.

Meeting two advisers of the caretaker government, the diplomats also stressed on immediate changes in the EC to make sure the election is acceptable both at home

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## Armed Forces Day today

UNB, Dhaka

The Armed Forces Day will be observed today.

On this day in 1971, Bangladesh Armed Forces comprising army, navy and air force came into being and launched an all-out attack on the Pakistani occupation forces.

President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Iajuddin Ahmed gave a message on the

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## Trades stop dead on tracks at all ports

RAFIQ HASAN

Operations at Chittagong port came almost to a standstill yesterday as the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine enforced a countrywide rail, road and port blockade.

Activities at Mongla port and all land ports including Benapole were also hampered due to the indefinite blockade programme to press home the combine's 11-point demand for ensuring free and fair elections.

The business community is

worried over the persisting political stalemate that is having crippling effects on all economic activities, including port operations.

"Ports should be kept out of the purview of all political programmes," said Mir Nasir Hossain, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, he said Chittagong port is the lifeline of the national economy, and its operation should not be hampered. Activities of this port

were not halted even during the struggle for independence in 1971, he added.

The FBCCI said the country suffers a loss of nearly Tk 500 crore per day due to such work stoppage programmes.

They would make an appeal to political leaders, including Mayor of Chittagong Mohiuddin Chowdhury, to keep the country's premier port free from any political agitation.

According to sources, loading and unloading of cargo on a limited

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## Blast rocks train in West Bengal

Six die, 60 injured

AFP, Kolkata

Six people died and at least 60 were injured yesterday in a blast that rocked a passenger train in the West Bengal, a spokesman for the Indian Railways said.

The train was on its way from Haldibari to New Jalpaiguri in the state when the explosion hit one of its carriages at Belakoba station, 500km from the state capital Kolkata, said Prasad Ranjan Roy, West Bengal's home secretary.

"Six people were killed and 60

wounded in the blast," Trikal Rabha, a spokesman for Northeast Frontier Railway, told AFP from Guwahati city in neighbouring Assam state.

"The toll may go up as 25 people are in a critical state."

Rescue workers have reached the spot and are shifting the injured to hospitals in New Jalpaiguri, 18 kilometres (11 miles) from site of the blast, Rabha added.

It was not immediately known what caused the explosion as the

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## CA's sitting on the fence vexes top businesses

Leaders threaten agitation against him if crisis not solved soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Business leaders of the country again voiced their concern over the ongoing political impasse and expressed dissatisfaction over the chief adviser's dilly-dallying to find a peaceful solution to the deadlock.

In a joint statement yesterday, they also declared that they would have no choice but to declare demonstration programmes if the chief adviser (CA) of the caretaker gov-

ernment fails to resolve the problem shortly.

Noting that the prevailing stalemate would have a serious negative impact upon the country's business activities, the business leaders said that it is the principle duty of the CA to take steps to end it immediately and save the whole nation from a continuous turmoil. "But unfortunately, we have yet to receive any positive direction from the chief adviser, also the president," the

statement said.

They also urged the political parties to withdraw such 'dead end' programmes considering the country's growing economic activities.

The statement was released after a meeting of the top business leaders at the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) office.

Mir Nasir Hossain, president of the Federation of Bangladesh

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