



Aziz agrees to go on 90-day leave, but doesn't say when

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz yesterday informed the president verbally that he will take a three-month leave of absence in response to the presidential initiative to resolve the political deadlock centring the popular demand for reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC).

Even President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed in his midnight address to the nation did not mention from when Aziz will go on leave.

The CEC chief has also set a condition that he will stay in the country under full security protection from the government, Iajuddin revealed in his address.

Ending a three-day long suspense, an emergency meeting of the council of advisers to the caretaker government (CG) last night

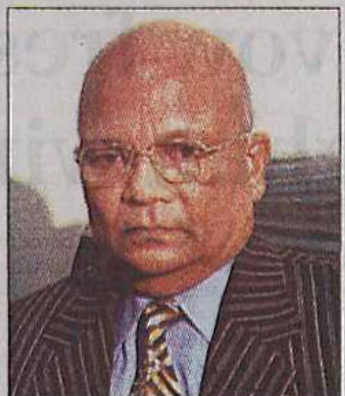
confirmed the CEC's verbal communication and also decided that the president will appoint two more election commissioners. But the president did not inform the council when the appointments will be made. He however told the advisers that they will be informed in due time, according to sources.

If things go the way they seem to be going, the next general election will be held for the first time under an EC headed by an acting CEC and with the highest number of election commissioners in the history of the commission.

But, Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition's demand for removal or resignation of Election Commissioner SM Zakaria has not been met yet. A delegation of the coalition last night met the president with the demands for removal of Zakaria also, and a thorough reconstitution of the EC immediately.

Meanwhile, the coalition led by AL told the media last night that its indefinite countrywide blockade will continue until all of its electoral demands are met.

Sources said Zakaria will be



MA Aziz

made inactive just like former election commissioner Saffur Rahman was made inactive before the last parliamentary election in 2001 on objection from BNP.

The plan was made by the council of advisers following BNP's strong opposition to removal of Zakaria from the office, the sources added.

One might be made the acting CEC from the two new election commissioners, in absence of MA Aziz, the sources said.

BNP also demanded enough security from the caretaker government for holding its electoral campaigns and put a condition that 14-party cannot be allowed to bring out any victory procession following the disclosure of Aziz's decision of taking a leave of absence.

Meanwhile, the advisers yesterday at an informal meeting in the secretariat finalised five names and

proposed them to the president for appointments to the posts of two new election commissioners. The president short listed three names comprising former cabinet secretary Dr Sad'at Hossain, and former secretaries MM Reza and Faizur Razzak, the sources said.

The president also discussed the plan with the 14-party delegation and he will decide his next course of action on receiving reaction from the delegation, the sources added.

"The chief election commissioner has verbally informed the president that he will take a three-month leave of absence. The president is now waiting for an official written confirmation," Information Adviser Mahbul Alam told reporters last evening emerging from the council meeting held in Bangabhaban.

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Aziz's decision should end political standoff

Iajuddin says he will appoint 2 more commissioners

UNB, Dhaka

President and Chief Adviser to caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed announced late last night that Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz agreed to go on a leave for three months to stay aloof from the election process.

"This should end the political standoff," Iajuddin said in an address to the nation over radio and television network.

The president said he has decided to appoint two more election commissioners under article 118(1) of the constitution.

"I believe the initiative taken by the government to resolve the political unrest has been successful," he said, adding that there is no alternative for the political parties and the people but to move forward with the election.

"I believe the people of the

country will evaluate that an atmosphere has been created for a fair election through reforming the Election Commission," he added.

The president appealed to all political parties and the people to



Prof Iajuddin Ahmed

contact the Election Commission if they have any complaint or advice regarding election as per rules.

"I hope all concerned will start electioneering without delay," Iajuddin said, adding, "We will have to keep the national interest above all else. We will have to be alert in carrying out the national responsibility so that personal and party interests cannot outweigh the country's interest."

The president urged the government officials to play their respective part. "I firmly hope the people of the country and all concerned will extend their sincere cooperation in holding the election freely and fairly within the scheduled time and handing over power to an elected government."

He said concerted and tireless efforts of those involved in the election process will ensure

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14-party to observe 'victory' today

To decide blockade this morning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed's announcement last night of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz's going on leave "victory of the people's movement", the Awami League (AL) led 14-party alliance said it will observe its blockade programme as a "victory festival" today.

"We will declare the next course of programmes after discussing it with like-minded parties and within the 14-party alliance today,"

14-party Coordinator Abdul Jalil said emerging from an emergency meeting with AL President Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence last night.

Sources said the 14-party will sit in the morning today to withdraw its ongoing blockade across the country before observing its victory celebration.

After a meeting with Iajuddin last night, Jalil rushed to Sudha Sadan to discuss the president's midnight address to the nation.

Terming President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin's address "ambig-

uous, mysterious and obscure", Jalil said the president's claim to have reformed the administration and created an atmosphere for a free and fair election is not logical and objective.

"In the name of reshuffle, he (president) has kept the same controversial administration designed by Khaleda Zia," Jalil said, alleging that still there are controversial persons in the EC under whose supervision a free and fair election is not possible.

"The demand for reconstitution

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Festivity marks day 3 of blockade

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of people in a festive mood gathered round the Mirpur 10 roundabout. If you, for any reason, happen to miss the banners hanging from the foot over bridge at the roundabout, you would surely consider this a festival. But in fact, this seemingly cultural event is organised as part of the ongoing campaign to create public opinion against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz.

As they say, every cloud has a silver lining. The eerie calm over the uncertainty of chief election commissioner's stepping down started to dissolve as soon as adviser Mahbul Alam saw 'light at the end of the tunnel' after

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BLOCKADE CONTINUES

Cars start streaming on to streets

STAR REPORT

With added sufferings due to the non-stop road-rail-waterways blockade programme by the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine, people yesterday streamed onto the streets of the capital.

Normal life and business, however, remained largely halted yesterday, the third day of the third-phase blockade enforced by the 14-party to press home their demand of Election Commission reconstitution.

An attack on Jatiya Party men by Islami Chhatra Shibir and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal at Bijoyagar left at least 22 injured, and a bus helper died after he fell from his bus that was chased by blockaders in Mirpur yesterday.

No other incident of violence was reported from anywhere in the country.

The demonstrators sang patriotic and parody songs and danced with beats of drums the whole day, expecting Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz would resign or go into leave as leaders of the demonstration -- spearheaded by Awami League-led 14-party alliance and joined later by Jatiya Oikya Front and Jatiya Party -- were delivering speeches from a bijoy mancha (victory stage) set up at Zero Point and 20 others podiums in the city.

A good number of general people who were seen at different blockade points yesterday expressed their frustration for continuation of the blockade. They, however, expressed hope for resto-

ration of normalcy from today amid speculation of the CEC's resignation by last night.

Train services were disrupted due to blockades at rail stations and on rail tracks in some parts of the country but launch services operated smoothly at many places.

Activities at the land ports were hampered.

THE CAPITAL. As on the previous two days, blockaders took position at around 22 different points in the city to block vehicular movement in the morning. They set up makeshift podiums on trucks and on streets at many places.

Cultural activists started with patriotic songs before political leaders joined them and started their speeches. They continued the songs, parodying popular folk

songs, criticising the CEC's 'shamelessness' whole daylong during intervals of the leaders' speeches to invigorate their fellow demonstrators.

The participants also staged mock dramas and read out satires at some places. They also burnt CEC's effigy.

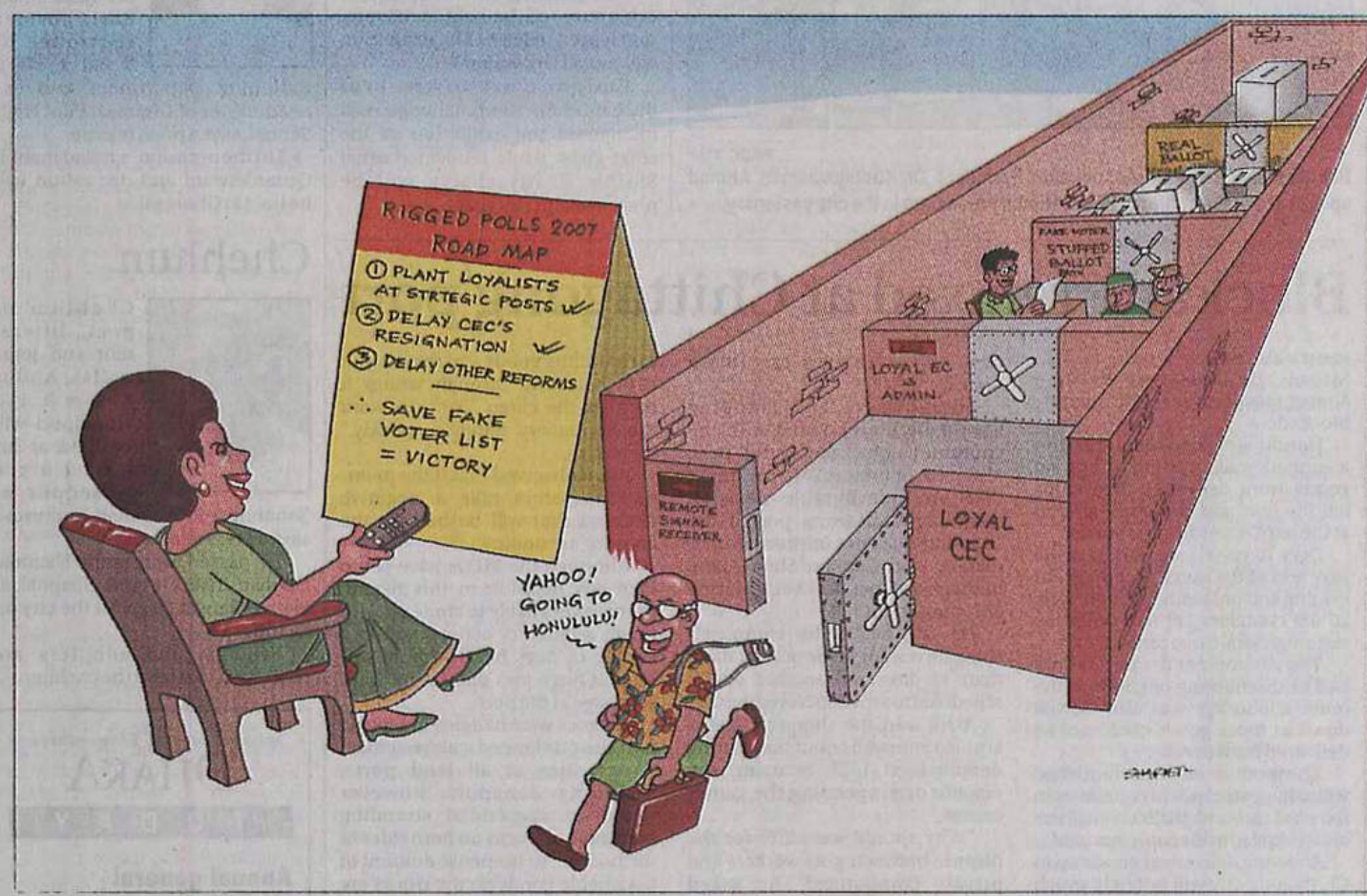
Amid festivity at the blockade points, the participants showed expressions of victory.

Bangabandhu Avenue, Zero Point and Muktangan area was the heart of the blockade programmes and festivity streaming from it.

Police put up barricades at the entrance of Muktangan where the four-party alliance earlier announced to hold a rally yesterday.

The police barricade was later

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Australia keen to send 300 poll monitors

UNB, Dhaka

Australia is keen to send 300 observers to Bangladesh and assign 20 NGOs in coordination with Asia Foundation to monitor the upcoming general elections.

Australian High Commissioner in Dhaka Douglas Foskett expressed the desire of his government during a meeting with Housing and Public Works Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath at the ministry yesterday.

The Australian envoy thanked the adviser for taking effective steps to make the field level administration impartial for holding a free, fair and neutral election.

The adviser also thanked the Australian government for extending all-out cooperation to Bangladesh during post-liberation period.

Criminals beat up Star reporter Bilu

Attackers threaten him for reporting 'against BNP'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified criminals mercilessly beat up the senior correspondent of The Daily Star in Bogra, Hasibur Rahman Bilu, and damaged his motorcycle yesterday allegedly for "reporting against the BNP".

"Will you write again against the BNP?" said one of the attackers while beating Bilu.

Bilu has been undergoing treatment at Mohammadia Hospital in Bogra with severe pain in both his lower legs and on the back.

Journalists in Bogra staged a rally

at the Bogra Press Club at 2:30pm protesting the attack and demanding immediate arrest and punishment to the persons responsible for it.

Witnesses said six-seven youths with bamboo sticks in their hands swooped on Bilu when he came out of the IFIC Bank on the Station Road at 12:30pm.

They beat up Bilu for several minutes and left him lying on the road. The attackers also damaged Bilu's motorcycle before leaving.

No one dared to come in rescue of Bilu.

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Movement should go on until total reconstitution of EC, says Oli

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cg

Executive President of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Oli Ahmed yesterday said the ongoing movement of different political parties should be continued even after departure of the chief election commissioner (CEC).

"The current action programme should go on until the Election Commission (EC) is reconstituted and the field level administration set up by the BNP government, is reshuffled," Col (ret) Oli told a press conference at a city restaurant.

The former BNP leader said they would not take part in any election under the BNP-formed administration.

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Bhuiyan hails president's solution to crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan last night welcomed the solution given by the president in his address to the nation.

"We said earlier that the demand of 14-party is illogical and that the solutions should come within the framework of constitution. The solution given by the

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4-party to submit memo to EC today demanding poll schedule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led four-party alliance yesterday reiterated its demand for immediate announcement of the schedule for next election, and declared that it would continue its demonstrations across the country until the demand is met.

The alliance will submit a memo

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Khaleda again presses for announcement of polls schedule soon

Asks CG to create congenial atmosphere for election in time

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the caretaker government to immediately announce the election schedule and create a congenial atmosphere for holding the next parliamentary polls in due time.

"The constitutional process has to be protected," she said, and highlighted the significance of the coming polls for the nation.

The immediate past prime minister made the demand while exchanging views with the agriculturists at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

The BNP chief termed the upcoming general election very important for the country, explaining that country's progress, advancement, independence,

sovereignty and religious values would depend on this election.

She urged the agriculturists to work for victory of the BNP-led alliance in the next election.

Criticising Awami League's recent violent activities, the BNP chief said: "That party now wants to foil the election process by unleashing chaos and anarchy as its leaders know they will not be able to win the election if it takes place freely, fairly and neutrally."

She said the people won't remain secure at any places if the party comes to power.

Explaining her party's objective to make Bangladesh self-reliant and increase employment, she said the immediate past coalition government had succeeded in alleviating poverty and generating

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Iajuddin assures advisers of an 'acceptable' EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Adviser Akbar Ali Khan yesterday said that President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed has assured the council of advisers to appoint people acceptable to all to the Election Commission (EC).

"The president assured us that non-party people, who are acceptable to all, will be appointed to the EC once the present crisis centring the CEC ends," Akbar told reporters yesterday afternoon at his office.

"As per the constitution, this is absolutely the president's jurisdiction as to whom he will appoint as election commissioners," the adviser further noted.

"We want an end to the crisis and it doesn't matter whether the CEC is resigning or taking a long leave," he headed.

Asked about possible date for

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BNP men chop Jubo League man to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A Jubo League member was hacked to death yesterday by a gang armed activists of BNP in Baulfal upazila town.

Local sources said the gang of five armed thugs led by BNP's student wing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader Olulul Islam attacked the victim Ershad near Sultanabad culvert area at around 10:00am.

Ershad, a member of Jubo League Nazipur union unit, was returning home from the local market at that time.

Later, he was admitted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College hospital and he died there at about 2:00pm.

After receiving the news of Ershad's death, agitated Jubo League activists attacked Olulul's residence and ransacked business establishments owned by two local BNP leaders -- Mozammel and Sattar Matabbar in Baulfal town.

Additional police were deployed in the town to control the situation.

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