



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 it 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 immedi-

ately. 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 Safiur 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 will not 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 Sadat 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.

"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

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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.

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 Mahbubul Alam told reporters last evening emerging from the council meeting held in Bangabhaban.

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

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 dangling 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 Mahbubul 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 Bijoynagar 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 restoration 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' while 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.

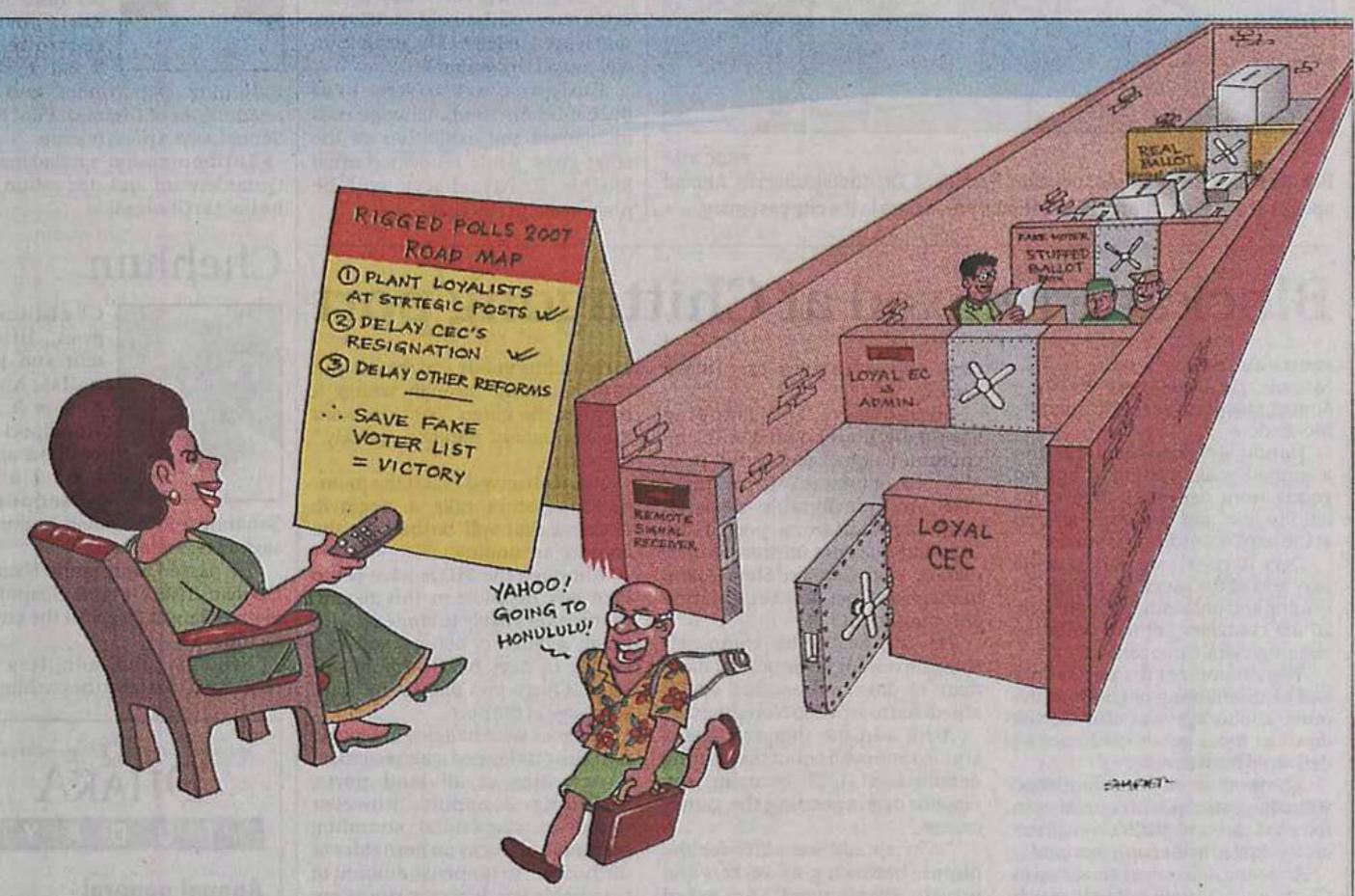
Amid festivity at the blockade points, the participants showed expressions of victory.

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

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

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

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

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 restructured," Col (retd) 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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No election commissioners acceptable as acting CEC

Says 14-party, demanding removal of 3 incumbent commissioners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League-led 14-party alliance will not accept any reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC) by keeping the three "controversial" election commissioners being made the acting CEC.

The AL-led alliance also demanded removal of the EC secretary, EC Additional Secretary M Zakaria, and 300 "politically appointed" upazila election officers.

The reactions came immediately after spreading of the news that CEC MA Aziz is going on a three-month leave, which, Quader

secretary, told The Daily Star last night.

Hesaid the 14-party alliance will not even accept any of the three "controversial" election commissioners being made the acting CEC.

The 14-party alliance held a meeting at the AL Dhammandi office before the news of CEC's going on leave spread.

At a press briefing after the meeting, the 14-party expressed its firm stance that the ongoing peaceful non-stop countrywide blockade programme will continue until the entire EC is reconstituted and

said, is a decision "taken as per directions from Hawa Bhaban".

"We will never accept such drama. SM Zakaria must quit his post," he added.

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 Jibilo League activists attacked Oli's residence and ransacked business establishments owned by two local BNP leaders -- Mozammel and Sattar Matabbar in Baufa town.

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

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