

## EC rushes to set poll day Jan 21

Acting CEC, 2 ECs skip media as election schedule announced

### SHAKHAWAT LITON

In a surreptitious and hasty move threatening to pitch the country into further political turmoil, the Election Commission (EC) yesterday announced the schedule for the next parliamentary election, setting January 21 as the polling day.

The EC Secretariat issued a gazette notification to that effect at 10:00am, urging the electors to choose a member from each of the 300 constituencies to constitute the ninth parliament.

The announcement from the EC now headed by controversial acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice Mahfuzur Rahman followed a consultation with President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed late at night Sunday.

Most of the advisers to the caretaker government have expressed surprise over the announcement and said they were not informed about it.

The Awami League (AL) led 14-

party combine, Jatiya Party (Ershad), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and some other parties that have been calling for reconstitution of the EC and opposing unveiling of the polling schedule before correction of the voter list have outright rejected the timetable.

They have also declared that they will resist any attempt to hold election as per this schedule.

However, the BNP-led four-party alliance that has lately been pressing the caretaker government for an immediate announcement of the schedule welcomed the decision yesterday.

According to the official polls plan, December 10 is the last date for filing candidature while December 11 is the date for scrutiny of the candidatures by the ROs. Withdrawal of candidature will close on December 19.

Neither the acting CEC nor any of the two election commissioners--SM Zakaria and Mahmud Hasan Mansur-- talked to the media about

the schedule.

In the past, the CECs themselves would unveil the schedule either at a press conference or in an address to the nation.

But this time, the EC at a meeting in the morning authorised EC

Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar to brief the media. Accordingly, he held a press briefing at the conference room of the EC Secretariat at 2:00pm.

"The president and chief adviser was informed last night [Sunday

night] about the election schedule announcement," Rashid Sarkar said.

Asked if there is any scope for rescheduling the polls in view of

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### POLLS SCHEDULE

Polling date: January 21, 2007

Last date for candidacy withdrawal: December 19, 2006

Submission date of nomination papers: December 10, 2006

Date to scrutinise nomination papers: December 11, 2006

Election Commissioner Abdur Rashid speaks to the media at the EC Secretariat yesterday after announcing the election schedule. PHOTO: STAR

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## Man with political goal made one of 2 ECs

EC crisis deepens as 14-party rejects new appointments

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The president yesterday appointed two new election commissioners -- one of them aspired to be a candidate of the four-party alliance from Habiganj-2 (Ajmirganj-Banichang) constituency while the other has no illustrious background.

New Election Commissioner Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury is a former inspector general of police (IGP) and secretary and was an aspirant BNP candidate.

The other new Election Commissioner Saiful Alam served in the lower judiciary as a judge for a long time and later served as a director general in the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Following the two new election commissioners' appointment by President Iajuddin Ahmed in the morning, the chief justice administered their oath at the Supreme Court at 4:30pm.

With their inclusion, the number of

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A press clipping shows the picture of newly appointed Election Commissioner Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury in a pre-election report.

## Eminent citizens surprised

Crucial issues not addressed before fixing polls schedule, they say

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Advisers to the former caretaker governments, retired bureaucrats, academicians, jurists and eminent citizens of the country yesterday expressed their surprise at the announcement of election schedule without addressing a number of critical issues for holding a free, fair and credible election.

Before announcing the schedule, the Election Commission (EC) should have discussed the matter with major political parties. But the announcement came following pressure from a certain political group. As a result, the rival parties rejected the schedule outright, they observed.



Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, after the announcement of the schedule, they said to make the election acceptable to all the EC should have waited for a few more days. A major political alliance has already rejected the election schedule and if the elections are held, it is unlikely to be acceptable to all, they pointed out. They also feared more violence and agitation on the

streets.

Terming the declaration of election schedule "unsolicited", former cabinet secretary Mujibul Haque said, "It is not a very good sign and if the EC waited for a few more days and declared the schedule that would have been a refined act."

He said the EC could have waited a few more days as a writ

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## EC's time constraint claim belies reality

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In defence of the hurriedly announced election schedule, the Election Commission (EC) came up with the excuse of constraint of time, but it allocated more time for different stages of the electoral process compared to the length of time that had been allocated for the same stages during previous elections.

The EC kept a highest 55 days gap between the day of announcement of the election schedule and the day of polling while the gap had been 42 days in 2001 election and 45 days in 1996 election.

A day after the filing of a writ petition with the High Court by political parties of the long agitating coalition led by Awami League challeng-

ing the validity of the updated voter list, prepared without publishing its draft, and seeking an injunction against announcement of the schedule, the EC suddenly announced the election schedule yesterday at 10:00am when the writ was scheduled to be heard.

When his attention was drawn to the writ petition, Secretary to the EC Abdur Rashid Sarkar said the EC will abide by the court's verdict if there is any for the commission.

As the acting chief election commissioner (CEC) and the EC secretary had repeatedly claimed on several occasions that the election schedule would be declared within

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## Advisers kept in the dark

They were not aware of polls schedule, 2 new ECs

### STAR REPORT

Advisers to the caretaker government (CG) fired a broadside at President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday over his apparent retreat from a promise to consult them before the appointment two more election commissioners and announcement of the schedule for next general elections by the Election Commission (EC).

"We were not aware of the announcement of election schedule," Information Adviser and spokesman for the council of advisers Mahbubul Alam told reporters emerging from a weekly meeting of the council at the CA's office.

The advisers expressed their utter displeasure at the two decisions at the meeting that saw hurling

of heated words at the chief adviser (CA) for keeping them (advisers) in the dark about the two vital decisions, sources said.

The meeting stretched to over four hours with the CA trying to downplay seriousness of the two decisions in the face of a barrage of questions from the advisers.

The advisers later told reporters at the Secretariat that appointment of the two new election commissioners and announcement of election schedule were not discussed at the council meeting.

Meeting sources said the CA insisted on discussing the prices of essentials and agricultural production throughout the meeting, and at no point informed the advisers about the appointment of election commissioners and announcement

of election schedule.

At one stage, an adviser asked the CA why other important issues were not being discussed while another wanted to know why they were not informed about polls schedule announcement.

The CA then hesitantly informed the advisers that it is a matter for the Election Commission, meeting sources said.

The advisers asked why Iajuddin appointed two election commissioners of his own accord while he had earlier promised to consult them before deciding on the appointments.

The CA continued to sidestep these questions. At one point, all but one adviser expressed their

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The Awami League-led 14-party activists sit on the Gulshan Square in the capital yesterday as part of their programme to stage a sit-in around the Bangabhaban demanding resignation of the chief adviser to the caretaker government.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Body to probe civil servants' secret meet

'Janatar Mancha' too to be investigated

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-member probe body was formed yesterday to investigate Friday night's meeting between former energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman and serving bureaucrats, as well as bureaucrats' involvement in the 1996 'Janatar Mancha' and another meeting between a political party and bureaucrats in 2001.

The council of advisers, who set up the probe committee, has also

directed the committee to list the name of all bureaucrats who have frequented the BNP chairperson's office, Hawa Bhaban and the Awami League president's residence, Sudha Sadan, and other political party offices.

The committee headed by Agriculture Secretary M Abdul Aziz also have Secretary to the Youth and Sport Ministry M Aminul Islam

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## Advisers move to reopen Ctg container terminal

Mayor to be asked to call off agitation

### RAFIQ HASAN

The council of advisers of caretaker government yesterday discussed the issue of deadlock at the Chittagong Container Terminal (CCT) and did not find any valid reason to cancel the agreement with the private company to operate the gantry cranes.

The council decided to send the chairman of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) as an envoy of the

government to request the Chittagong city mayor to withdraw his agitation programme and reopen the terminal that has been sitting idle for over two weeks, according to sources.

Shipping Adviser Azizul Haque said after the meeting that he does not find any reason for cancelling the agreement as demanded by the mayor. "The foreign operators engaged by the private company handled 40 to 45 TEU (Twenty

Equivalent Unit) of containers per hour against only 10 to 11 by the port operators," he said while talking to The Daily Star after the meeting.

The government thinks that speedier handling of containers with the gantry cranes is definitely better for the economy and the country in general, the shipping adviser said.

"The chairman of Chittagong

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## WRIT PETITIONS ON CA, EC Lawyers wrangle at court over hearing

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An awkward commotion took place in High Court (HC) yesterday between the opposing counsels over fixing the date of hearing for three writ petitions filed against the president taking over the chief adviser post, his unilateral decisions and the Election Commission's move to declare election schedule.

When the AG was appealing the bench to fix the date again, one of the counsels for the petitioners opposed the move that lead to an argument between the two.

Counsel for the petitioner Barrister Tanvir Amir locked in heated arguments with Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali in the

the Attorney General (AG). Although the bench, half an hour back, had fixed today for the hearing when the AG pleaded for it the first time.

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## GM Quader to float new party

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different political parties rejected the election schedule declared by the Election Commission (EC) yesterday.

Through press conferences and separate statements, the political parties described the EC's move as farcical and said a fair election is impossible under the present circumstances.

At a press conference at party

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