

CJ's unprecedented

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other parts of the capital, especially at a mass rally of the Awami League-led 14-party alliance, its allies and a few other political parties during their sit-in programme around Bangabhaban.

Law enforcers beefed up security in and around the Supreme Court as aggrieved lawyers geared up for street protest.

The stay came at a time when most political parties except those of the BNP-led four-party alliance were increasing agitation demanding the president's resignation as chief adviser. They blamed President Iajuddin for repeatedly violating oath by "implementing the four-party alliance's agenda".

Eleven leaders of the 14-party alliance, Jatiya Party, Liberal Democratic Party, Zaker Party and Islamic Front filed three petitions with the HC on Sunday, challenging the legality of the president's taking over as the chief adviser, his "unilateral" decisions, and the Election Commission's move to declare election elections.

Hearings of the writ petitions were held for two days by an HC division bench comprising justices M Awlad Ali and Mainul Islam Chowdhury.

As the bench began its proceedings at 10:55am yesterday, Attorney General Mohammad Ali appealed to hear the petitions at a larger bench.

Petitioners' counsel Dr Kamal Hossain told journalists that the AG had told the court that the "small bench" does not have the jurisdiction to judge any action of the president, no matter what he does.

Dr Kamal opposed the appeal, saying the question of hearing the matter at a larger bench does not arise before issuance of any ruling and formally admitting the matter before the court. The matter is still in a premature stage, he argued, adding that there is no instance of forming a larger bench at such stage.

Echoing Dr Kamal's contentions, another counsel for the petitioners, Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud, told the court that it might be a "plot" to frustrate the writ petitions. "Earlier, the attorney general had made attempts time and again to defer the hearing," he said.

Mohammad Ali, however, said there are previous instances of larger benches.

Dr Kamal challenged the attorney general, who sought time until 2:00pm to present examples.

The court asked the attorney general to produce the examples when it resumes at 2:00pm, saying it would dispose off his application and deliver its ruling then, Dr Kamal told reporters.

When the court resumed at 2:15pm, Mohammad Ali rushed in with three applications for staying the proceedings of the writ petitions and submitted them before the presiding judge. He did not serve any copy of the applications to the petitioners' counsels, the petitioners' lawyers told reporters later at a press briefing.

The court offered the petitioners' lawyers a look at the attorney general's applications, but they said they could not look at them since the applications had not been served on them.

After examining the applications, the chief justice announced the stay order on further proceedings of the

Top business leaders

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programme from Sunday.

They also requested the CA to create an environment so that the political parties do not go for such programmes in future that disrupt smooth running of the business activities.

The president of top six business chambers and associations placed the demands to the President and CA Iajuddin Ahmed when they met him at Bangabhaban.

Mahbubur Rahman, president of International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh (ICC), Fazlul Hoque, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), SM Fazlul Haque, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), MA Awal, president of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), MA Momen, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and AK Azad, president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industry (BCI) were in the delegation.

"We are the lifeblood of the economy, I feel your problem," the CA said adding that he had already taken some steps to solve the political crisis referring to his initiative where his advisers met with the chiefs of both the political parties on Wednesday.

He said the electoral process has been obstructed by the attack on the HC, adding if the 14-party alliance did not like the verdict of the court they could lodge an appeal.

In the backdrop of such a volatile situation, Mannan Bhuiyan feared that the upcoming election could be foiled, if the 14-party alliance continues its anarchic activities.

He also insisted that there was "no scope to shift the election date as the election schedules have already been declared. However, some other timetable could be changed".

The secretary general admitted that the election would remain incomplete if any major political party boycotts it, but "the constitution should not wait for anyone".

BNP ally, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, also termed the ransacking of the court premises unexpected and sad. In a statement signed by Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Matiur Rahman Nizami and Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid the party said, "We are concerned that the 14-party alliance is creating controversies over the constitutional institutions one after another."

They had also asked the CA to ask the political parties to keep the economic activities out of purview of any political programmes, he said.

BKMEA President Fazlul Hoque

Mumbai blasts

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court, the police charges claim that Pakistan's intelligence agency and outlawed pro-Pakistan militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba were behind the blasts, which also injured more than 800 people. "Our investigations reveal the role of Pakistan-backed terrorism, which we aim to prove before the court," KP Raghuvanshi, head of the police anti-terrorism squad in Mumbai, told AFP.

He said that of the 28 accused, 13 have been arrested by the anti-terror squad and most of the suspects had links to Pakistan, including the alleged main conspirator Azam Cheema whom they said is a Pakistani national.

The petitioners' lawyers attempted to stop them, but pro-BNP lawyers escorted them hurriedly to their cars and left the court premises.

At 2:30pm, the angry lawyers rushed to the chamber and office of Chief Justice Mdusdar Hussain to ask him how such an order, "which had no precedence", could be passed.

Finding that the chief justice had already left the court premises, they vandalised his chamber and office.

They also rushed to the office of the attorney general but police prevented them. They broke the windowpanes of the offices of the attorney general and the SC registrar.

The aggrieved lawyers chanted slogans against the chief justice and attorney general.

At the judges' lounge of the Appellate Division they asked the other judges present there to go out and vandalised it.

Finding a flag in the car of Shahjahan Omar used on the SC premises, a few protesters vandalised and set fire to it at 2:45pm.

Police arrived on the SC premises 20 minutes later and chased the marauding crowd and took control of the situation. Fire fighters also reached there at 3:12pm and doused the fire.

The agitators also beat up the cameramen of private satellite television channels ntv and Balashakti and snatched the video cassette from Channel 1 cameraman.

Meantime, briefing reporters at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre on the sidelines of lawyers' meeting with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, former law minister Moudud Ahmed said the CJ has stayed the hearing on writ petitions under PSCs.

The memo said "reality on the streets of Baghda suggests Maliki is either ignorant of what is going on, misrepresenting his intentions, or his capabilities are not yet sufficient to turn his good intentions into action."

Yet at a joint press conference in Anman, Bush praised Maliki as the "right guy" for the job, and said US forces would stay in Iraq "to get the job done."

Maliki in turn said the two agreed "on the need to speed up the transfer of security responsibilities to the Iraqi forces."

The White House said the memo had nothing to do with Maliki's failure to appear at a planned three-way meeting Wednesday also including Bush and King Abdullah II, with spokesman Tony Snow describing it as "jointly decided."

Khaleda blames

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on the lawyers. The attackers must be brought to justice," she said.

She criticised Awami League for creating chaos and anarchy in the country, saying that it wants to foil the upcoming election as its leaders know they cannot be victorious.

She called upon the lawyers to resist those who are creating chaos. "Parliamentary democracy, rule of law and the rights of people will be destroyed if AL comes to power again," she said while addressing a peace exchange meeting with the Jatiyatabadi Aijibhi Forum (organisation of pro-BNP lawyers) held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

The former prime minister alleged that the allies of AL in the 14-party alliance are preventing the party from going for polls.

AL has no respect for democracy and constitution and it is trying to destroy those, she complained.

People are worried to see the activities of Awami League that harmed the garment and pharmaceutical sectors and they were not secure during its rule," she said.

"They (AL) wanted to establish family dynasty but people did not accept," she said and urged her political opponent to come to the way of peace and welfare.

Urging her party men to make preparation for election and to work together for party candidates, she said, "A few more parties showed promise one".

Bhuiyan made his comments while addressing a press conference at the city office of BNP. During his speech, he also called upon the 14-party alliance to stop vandalism and participate in the upcoming election.

"Please join the democratic process and follow the path of law," he urged.

He said the electoral process has been obstructed by the attack on the HC, adding if the 14-party alliance did not like the verdict of the court they could lodge an appeal.

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Petrobangla

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seniority due to blatant politicisation of Petrobangla by the immediate past government.

While Mukhtadir has taken over as director, Production Sharing Contract (PSC), and Mokbul as acting director (Mining), the post of director (Operation) will be vacant from tomorrow as the existing official is leaving Petrobangla on December 1. Director (Operation) Rahman Moshid is set to join the Asian Development Bank.

Meanwhile, the vital post of director (Finance) remains vacant, while director (Planning) Rais Uddin Siddiqui is due to retire in March. The current chairman is also likely to be replaced verysoon, sources said.

There are five director's posts in Petrobangla that oversees nine oil and gas affiliates and annually contributes over Tk 2,700 crore to the national exchequer and monitor activities of foreign oil companies under PSCs.

Lack of new recruitment for seven years, a wave of retirements, exodus of talented officers and the severe politicisation have created a manpower vacuum in Petrobangla at its top and mid levels, sources said.

At this point, the caretaker government should consider transferring and promoting competent and

appropriate officials from outside Petrobangla to fill in vital posts," said a high official.

"The government should not just fill in higher posts by promoting less competent officials from Petrobangla affiliates. Frankly, there are not many competent officials left to lead Petrobangla," he added.

"For instance, the post of director finance should be filled with someone with chartered accountancy background or similar discipline instead of promoting an official who has little command over finances," he pointed out.

Petrobangla is now dealing with a number of challenges: handling the country's two troubled mines, oil companies which are now supplying around 28 per cent of the country's total gas requirement and set to increase that to 50 per cent next year and also holding the third round block bidding for oil and gas exploration within next October.

There are about 450 people in Petrobangla now while the posts of directors have remained vacant in turns, for more than two years. The alliance government had held up promotions of many senior persons and controversially made top-level appointments on contract. The caretaker government cancelled one of them.

EC now waits

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to act to that end.

The UN Secretary General's special envoy Caren Jennings who met the acting chief election commissioner (CEC) and other election commissioners yesterday morning enquired how a political consensus could be reached on the official poll plan.

In reply, acting CEC Justice Mahfuzur Rahman told the envoy, "President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed has already made a move to have a political consensus over the issue. We wish all the political parties take part in the election."

Asked if the EC will suspend the operation of the schedule until the outcome of president's initiative, the acting CEC replied in the negative.

EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar met the president late at night Sunday and the following morning the EC announced the schedule.

The Awami League-led 14-party alliance, Liberal Democratic Party-led Jatiya Oikya Front, and a few other political parties rejected the schedule outright while the BNP led 4-party alliance welcomed it.

Later, when the reporters asked him whether such measures [for consensus] could have been taken before declaring the schedule, he said, "None took such steps then and now we cannot initiate any."

Justice Mahfuz talked to the media yesterday for the first time since the announcement of schedule.

He told the reporters that during the meeting, the United Nations special envoy has expressed concern about the upcoming election.

The acting CEC chief declined to make any comment when asked if the EC too is worried about the way things have panned out since the declaration of election schedule. Then when queried whether the EC has had any meeting to review the prevailing situation, he said, "It is an internal matter. So, no comment."

He also did not answer whether the election minus any major political alliance will be acceptable or not.

He however said they might rearrange different dates like the ones for filing nomination and with-

drawing candidature if the political parties arrive at a consensus over the issue. "But because of time constraints there is no scope to change the polling day," he added.

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