

HC rejects Ershad's appeal, hands him 2yrs behind bars

Defence claims of no hearing on appeal, sees political link

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To the utter surprise of many, the High Court (HC) handed two years imprisonment to former dictator HM Ershad yesterday, rejecting his appeal against the trial court's verdict in a corruption case of purchasing Japanese boats.

The verdict has now given rise to the question if Ershad, who is also the president of the Jatiya Party (JP), will be able to take part in the upcoming parliamentary election.

After over 11 years of appealing against the trial court judgment that awarded Ershad a three-year term in the jail, the attorney general's office moved in the court for holding hearing of the appeal. Tuesday was fixed for the hearing at the court of Justice Faisal Mahmud Faizee.

Ershad's lawyers said they did not get the chance to hold hearing of their client's appeal against the lower court verdict. "The way the verdict came is unprecedented," Advocate Shaikh Sirajul Islam told The Daily Star.

They said they are aggrieved by the verdict like their client Ershad. It is a "politically motivated" case and Ershad has been deprived of justice, they said, adding that they will challenge the HC judgment at the Appellate Division.

When the court sat on Tuesday, Ershad's counsel made a verbal submission for deferring the date of hearing, seeking time for collecting some necessary documents.

The court fixed the next day for the hearing.

When it resumed on Wednesday, Ershad's lawyers filed a written prayer for time extension, saying the paper-book lacked most essential papers and documents and exhibits necessary for the disposal of the case. They also mentioned that Ershad's senior counsel Barrister Azmalul Hossain will leave for Hajj. They appealed for deferring the case by two weeks after the Supreme Court vacation ends on January 9.

The court fixed yesterday--the last working day before the vacation--for hearing the time prayer.

The court rejected the time petition at 11:25am yesterday. When it was preparing for passing its order at 2:45pm, Ershad's lawyer sought half an hour's time for getting an Appellate Division order



Nation pays homage to martyred intellectuals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation observed the Martyred Intellectuals Day yesterday paying rich tribute to those illustrious sons of the soil who were brutally killed at the fag end of the Liberation War.

With defeat looming large, the Pakistani occupation army aided by their local collaborators -- Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams -- abducted frontline intellectuals and professionals on December 14, 1971 and killed them to cripple the nation intellectually.

The killers dragged renowned academics, teachers, litterateurs, doctors, engineers, journalists and other eminent personalities blindfolded out of their houses and killed them before dumping the



President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed places a floral wreath at the Martyred Intellectuals' Mausoleum in Mirpur yesterday.

Advisers slow down to end EC standoff

Plan not to take any move before Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There might not be any move before Sunday to recast the Election Commission (EC) in line with the package proposals drawn up by the council of advisers to the caretaker government 10 days ago.

By this time the advisers might be trying informally to negotiate a consensus among the political parties on reconstituting the commission by sending two commissioners on leave, said sources.

President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed at a meeting on Wednesday asked the advisers to initiate steps to break the deadlock stemming from his strong opposition to the idea of sending Election Commissioner SM Zakaria on leave.

The advisory council did not meet yesterday. They did not even discuss among themselves how to go about negotiations with the parties. They however have plans to take steps to that end on December 17, just four days before

AL won't go to polls under this schedule

Observes party's parliamentary board

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League Parliamentary Board (ALPB) yesterday observed that the party will not take part in any election according to the current schedule.

"We want to participate in the election. For us, it is the only accepted way to form and change a government and there is no alternative to it. But it'll be tough for us to go to the election if it is to be held according to the present timetable," said AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil.

He was speaking at a press briefing at the party's Dhanmondi office following an ALPB meeting at Sudha Sadan with AL President Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

"We will not participate in the election without implementation of the package proposals and rescheduling of the polls," an ALPB member told the Daily Star last night.

He however added that they are gearing up for the polls in case they should decide at the eleventh hour in favour of participation.

Jalil said 47 days have already been wasted. Asking Chief Adviser and President Iajuddin Ahmed to "give back those 47 days", he said otherwise it will not be possible for the AL to take part in the election.

An accurate voter roll is a prerequisite for a free and fair election, he said calling for a fresh schedule after correction and publication of the updated voter roll.

The ALPB, formed at the national council of the party in 2002, met yesterday to discuss preparations for the upcoming election.

At the meeting, the AL president formally handed over to the parliamentary board the field level surveys that the party had carried out over the last five years. She also handed it recommendations of the grassroots level leaders and asked all the members to take those into consideration before selecting

VOTER LIST CORRECTION Time extended by 3 days

EU to send 150 observers in phases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday extended the time for the ongoing field level work of correcting the updated voter list by three days--up to December 18, but was yet to re-fix the poll date.

The EC also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the European Union (EU) for the latter's sending around 150 observers in three phases to Bangladesh for the upcoming national election.

EC men yet to visit scores of houses

STAR REPORT

Correction of the updated voter list enters its eighth day today but a large number of houses in different areas of the capital and elsewhere in the country have not yet been visited by the Election Commission (EC) field level staff engaged in the task.

Around 10 thousand people residing in eight inaccessible Teesta chars in Dimla and Jaldhaka upazilas of Nilphamari are still not

Guest birds chirp at JU lakes

JU CORRESPONDENT

With the arrival of winter, migratory birds of different species thronged Jahangirnagar University (JU) campus making it eloquent with the chirping of the birds.

Even though the number of birds this year seems lesser than the previous year due to the delayed advent of winter, more than six thousand birds, six foreign species alongside local breeds, have already taken shelter here. This year the birds arrived in the last week of October, a month later than in the previous year.

Drying up of lakes, disturbance and interference from humans, unplanned cultivation of Nepiar grass in the shallow lakes and lack of



Migratory birds flock around a lake on the Jahangirnagar University campus. Fewer birds are seen this year due to the declining condition of their habitat.

EC moves to ensure salary for MA Aziz

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) Secretariat has finally issued a circular to enable Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz to get his pay during leave.

The CEC's three-month leave will now be considered as 'advance leave', which will be adjusted after his resuming of the office, the EC circular issued on Wednesday said.

The office of the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) refused to pay the CEC his last month's salary saying that he was not entitled to enjoy the 'three month paid leave'. As laid out in the financial rules, Aziz has been the CEC for one

EARLY ARMY DEPLOYMENT Home, not EC, to bear expenses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry will have to bear the cost of the armed forces working to maintain law and order before the national election due to hurried deployment of the troops.

Usually, the Election Commission (EC) pays for the army to work during the election period. But this time it will not have to finance the job, as it did not ask for the services of the military, said sources.

If the troops, who rolled out on December 9, remain posted on the

EC APPOINTMENT Wahiduddin points at good intentions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent economist and adviser of two previous caretaker governments Wahiduddin Mahmud yesterday said election commissioners cannot be appointed merely by abiding constitutional provisions or presidential powers, as judgement of 'good intentions and dignity' is also required for it.

"The appropriateness of appointing election commissioners is not merely a matter of abiding by constitutional provisions or the prerogative of the president," Mahmud said at the launching ceremony for the "State of

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