

## 14-party, allies

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upholding the constitution, the election should rather be delayed for the sake of fairness and credibility.

Similar views have been expressed by civil society members and different socio-cultural organisations in the last few days. They have observed that the country still lacks an atmosphere congenial to a free and fair election.

Alongside the 14-party combine, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-led Jatiya Oikya Front, Islami Oikya Jote, Zaker Party, Islami Oikya Front and several other Islamic political parties have been demanding that the election be put back to March. They have already started preparing themselves for the polls, bearing in mind that those will for sure be delayed for some days.

EC Secretary Abdul Rashid Sarkar however maintains that there is little scope to hold the election on a date beyond the timeframe stipulated by the constitution.

The 14-party coalition and its allies will soon make a formal announcement from a common platform that they will not participate in the election according to the present timetable and ask the CG to put off the date until March.

The planned grand alliance led by AL will also formally ask President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed for complete reconstitution of the EC and appointment of a new CA on grounds that both the EC and the current head of the interim government have failed to hold election as per the constitutional provisions.

The AL Parliamentary Board that met formally after four years on Thursday observed that they will not take part in the election if it is to be held according to the current schedule.

After the meeting, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said it would be tough for them to participate in the election within the stipulated 90 days. Alleging that the CG has wasted 47 days, he called for a fresh schedule after correction and publication of the updated voter roll.

Besides, AL President and Central Working Committee have noted that an election debacle is inevitable if they go to polls under Iajuddin Ahmed-led CG.

They believe the CG has become a body loyal to BNP-Jamaat alliance following the appointments of four new advisers.

On this issue, LDP, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and National Awami Party (Nap) have already held meetings and decided that they will not participate in any election under Iajuddin.

"As long as Iajuddin holds the post of chief adviser, we will not participate in any election," LDP Joint Secretary Firoz M Hasan told The Daily Star last night.

According to the constitution, election is supposed to be held under a non-partisan and neutral CG and EC, but the present ones are anything but neutral, he added.

In parallel with agitation for reforms, the AL-led alliance has been gearing up for the elections. Its allies have also begun negotiating with Hasina over seat sharing.

The ALPB board sat last night to finalise the dates for distributing nomination forms and interviewing the aspirants.

The 14-party will hold a grand rally in the capital on December 18

## Printing press

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the processed data in CDs by December 25.

Earlier, an agreement was signed between the Election Commission and the printing press with November 30 as deadline to complete the printing job of the voter list. The deadline was extended at the request of the printing press.

## Hajj still uncertain

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government had not issued 'tasria', fitness certificate for the rented houses where the non-ballottee pilgrims are supposed to stay.

A vast number of non-ballottee pilgrims could not get visas from the Saudi embassy in Dhaka and enforced a strict tasria regulation for issuing visas.

The civil aviation ministry alleged that the private hajj agencies failed to get tasria because they had rented substandard houses in violation of rules.

Later, the tasria problem was managed after Information and Religious Affairs Adviser Mahbubul Alam, and erstwhile textile and jute affairs adviser Sultan Kamal had flown to Saudi Arabia to settle the issue with the authorities there in the first week of this month.

"The problems of tasria and visas for non-ballottee hajj pilgrims are over but all pilgrims will not be able to perform the hajj this year if foreign airlines do not agree to fly additional four thousand pilgrims," said Mohammed Ruhul Amin, a member of Haji Agencies' Association of Bangladesh (Haab).

He also said hajj performance of

8000 more prospective non-ballottee hajis will become uncertain if Biman fails to avail the 11 additional landing slots in Jeddah Airport.

Mamud Khan, general manager (flight operation) of Bangladesh Biman Corporation, said "We hope to carry 8,200 pilgrims in three additional days."

"Most hajj flights of Biman are operating without being fully booked while 20 flights have so far been cancelled for lack of passengers causing a loss of Tk 39 crore for the national airline," he said.

Biman initially planned 67 hajj flights for 32,000 hajis out of a total of 49,000 prospective pilgrims from Bangladesh up to December 22. But it has so far carried around 14,000 pilgrims to Jeddah and now has the capacity of carrying only 6,500 more hajj passengers by December 22.

Everyday, Biman flies some nine hundred pilgrims to Jeddah on two dedicated hajj flights, sources said.

Leaders of Haab urged the caretaker government to take more effective initiatives to persuade the foreign airlines to carry additional hajj passengers.

## 2 major alliance's tug-of-war over Ershad on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The tug-of-war between Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition and BNP-led four-party alliance over getting Ershad-led Jatiya Party (JP) into their folds is still on.

BNP leader Ruhul Quddus Talukdar Dulu yesterday said they are trying to convince HM Ershad to join their alliance while AL said it is waiting for a decision from the former military dictator.

"Earlier, Jatiya Party was with four-party alliance, and we hope that the next election will be held with it our alliance again," Dulu told BBC Bangla Service yesterday.

Admitting that four-party alliance and JP had negotiations for nearly two and a half months regarding allocation of nominations for the upcoming election, Dulu said some distance was created between the parties centring formal announcement from Ershad about joining the alliance. He, however, expressed hope that the distance between them will soon be eliminated.

While asked about Ershad's recent comment on the possibility of his joining 14-party coalition, Dulu said, "He did not say that he had joined an alliance."

Meanwhile, AL leader Tofail Ahmed said the whole nation is waiting for Ershad's decision.

## Kamal's counsel

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informed the court that Advocate Ramizan Ali Sikder had inquired whether the court would sit the next day (Dec 7) and had not spoken about granting the application.

It said on Thursday (Dec 14), Barrister M Amir-Ul Islam, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, and Advocate Salahuddin Ahmad appeared before a division bench of the High Court Division, presided over by Justice M Abdul Wahab Miah.

It further said they sought permission to be allowed to move an application that day for Dr Kamal Hossain not to be harassed by arrest or otherwise on his return home in connection with the pending sedition case against him and other lawyers.

## Japan creates

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Previous attempts to create a defence ministry stalled over political sensitivities in light of Japan's past aggression and fears of upsetting neighbouring countries.

Despite its official pacifism, Japan has one of the world's biggest military budgets at 4.81 trillion yen (41.6 billion dollars) a year.

While public opinion is divided on how far to veer from Japan's half-century of pacifism, the bill to create the defence ministry had wide support, with only the small opposition Social Democratic and Communist parties opposed.

Japan has steadily been assuming a more visible military presence to counter its post-war image as solely an economic power.

In a groundbreaking move, Japan sent troops on a reconstruction mission to Iraq, the first time since 1945 that it had deployed to a country where fighting was underway.

The troops suffered no casualties and never fired their weapons, relying on Australian, British and Dutch forces to protect them.

It also sent close to 1,000 troops to Indonesia to assist with relief after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

Besides symbolism, the bill would also give the defence ministry more power in internal wrangling by letting it submit its own budget requests.

The bill changes the status of troops to list overseas activities as one of their missions. Until now, deployments abroad were considered "extraordinary", leading the government to seek parliament approval.

The bill also scraps the Defence Agency body that manages facilities after employees were arrested for alleged bid-rigging. Former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi's government cited the scandal to delay the creation of the defence ministry.

## Yunus

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cultures and towards a nuclear weapons-free and non-violent world.

The presence of Prof Yunus, winner of Nobel Peace Prize 2006, is being considered significant in view of the fact that poverty and peace are inseparable and he has given voice to the marginalised sections of society through his unique micro-finance network.

Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, who also heads the ruling alliance, and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will address the conference.

"The conference has generated global interest and this is reflected in the impressive response extended by world leaders and heads of major political parties," said Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and senior Congress leader Anand Sharma.

Satyagraha is the philosophy of non-violent resistance famously employed by Mahatma Gandhi and his son Arun and during his struggle in South Africa.

Special prayers will be offered at

## Hasina again demands

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in front of the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum.

The AL chief accused her political rival of hatching conspiracy to be the president of the country through a unilateral election. "She (Khaleda) does not want participation of any other party in the election as she wants to become the president and make her son the prime minister of the country," she said.

Hasina urged the people to remain alert so that President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed would not be able to "rig the election under the directive of his mentor Khaleda Zia."

"BNP-Jamaat alliance knows they will not be able to return to power through people's support. So, they are conspiring to implement their election engineering to capture the state power," she said. "If the BNP-Jamaat alliance returns to power, they will destroy the history of the Independence and achievements of the Liberation War."

Referring to the resignation of the four advisers to the caretaker government, the AL president said Iajuddin Ahmed has driven away the advisers as they had spoken the truth.

She bitterly criticised the immediate past BNP-Jamaat government for what she said was destroying the country's judiciary, alleging that the judiciary is being influenced with remote control by the BNP-Jamaat coalition.

## JU students

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capital in critical condition while others released after first aid.

Immediately after the accident, another Dhaka-bound university bus with students aboard reached the spot. The students got down from the bus and set two trucks ablaze. Their action infuriated the transport workers, leading to a clash between the two sides. At least 10 JU students were injured in the clash.

On information, fire fighters rushed to the spot and extinguished the fire. Traffic on the Dhaka-Aricha highway remained halted from 9:30am to 11:00am.

Police seized the bus and the truck. But no case was filed with Savar Police Station as of 5:00pm yesterday.

## Bhuiyan criticises

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have no shortage of sympathy for Ershad.

Bhuiyan was addressing a discussion meeting organised by the BNP at Ramna Batamul in the capital to mark the National Victory Day.

"Ershad changed his mind several times in the last two months, so it's not final, this is not the end," he said on the issue of Ershad joining the 14-party alliance, adding that the 14-party leaders should not be too happy about Ershad's current intentions to join 14-party.

On the alleged political influence in the verdict against Ershad, Bhuiyan said, "How could BNP influence the High Court when we did not influence the court even when we were in power?"

Urging the AL-led 14-party to participate in the elections, Bhuiyan said, "Trust the people and participate in the elections as the people will decide who will rule the country."

"There is no alternative to elections, if we all want to save democracy," he added.

The BNP secretary general urged the leaders and activists of his party to continue their fight against people who are trying to destroy the image of the country.

He said a few people termed

## Ban promises to restore trust in UN, work to resolve conflicts

AFP, London

South Korea's Ban Ki-moon, due to take over as the next UN secretary general in the new year, promised on Thursday to devote most of his attention to solving the immediate problem of regional conflicts around the world, in an interview with the BBC.

Speaking on the same day he was sworn in as Kofi Annan's successor at a General Assembly ceremony, Ban reiterated comments he made at the ceremony, promising to be a "harmoniser" and a "bridge-builder".

Asked which issue he would devote the most attention to after assuming his duties on January 1, Ban told the broadcaster: "Most immediately, we have many regional conflicts, including situation in Middle East, Lebanon, situation and crisis in Darfur."

"If we look at middle, long-term affairs, we must take urgent action to address this climate change issue otherwise our future generations will suffer from this issue," he continued.

The former South Korean foreign minister also said it was a priority of his to restore trust in the organisation, which he said had been "criticised for its inefficiency, ineffectiveness" and was plagued by "widespread mistrust".

"As Secretary General, I will try to be a harmoniser and bridge-builder to reduce the gap," in trust among member states, and between member states and the UN Secretariat, he said.

He also encouraged the United States to continue to play an active role within the UN, because he described its participation in UN activities as "essential".

"I hope that the United States will continue to participate actively," Ban told the broadcaster.

"At the same time, the United States can find the United Nations as a good forum where we can work together to enhance ... the objective goals of human right protection, peace and security, and development."

Ban will become the UN's eighth secretary general and the first Asian UN chief since U Thant of Burma led the organisation from 1961 to 1971. He will lead a staff of over 15,000, drawn from more than 170 nations.

## Bombs

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In his confessional statement, Bachchu told the police that he carried out the attack on instructions of Asif, who, he said, had business rivalry with Raju.

Raju Alim denied knowing any one named Asif. He told The Daily Star that he sometimes used his microbus for professional purpose.

When contacted, the Channel i authorities said the incident has no connection with the private TV channel.

Police recovered one pistol and five bullets from Bachchu.

Altaf Hussain, driver of the microbus, filed a case with Ramna Police Station.

## US wants

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charge of South Asian affairs at the State Department.

"Perhaps it is the moment to watch and see what they decide. We are watching very closely to see what they decide."

The interim government said Thursday it was making a last-ditch attempt to meet opposition demands for electoral reforms and ensure the polls can go ahead.

But President Iajuddin said he would not bow to mounting pressure to resign.

He told US Ambassador in Dhaka Patricia Butenis that his quitting was "unrealistic and impractical" and "will not happen," his adviser Mukhlesur Rahman Chowdhury said Wednesday.

Boucher said he had talked to the president and "I think he is trying to manage the situation as best he can."

"He is certainly trying to do this in a way that meets the needs of his constitutional responsibilities well as the needs of the current situation."

Asked to comment on some of the president's "controversial" decisions and calls for his resignation, Boucher said, "if he resigns, what next?"

The US official then said "the best thing" is for all parties to cooperate and ensure that the elections were held in a fair, non-violent and credible manner.

The country, long plagued by poverty, corruption, natural disasters and political feuding, has been in turmoil since the BNP's five-year mandate expired in October.

The South Asian nation is also no stranger to coups -- although government officials have dismissed the possibility of yet another one.

Hanifa was finally allowed to cross after