

Grand alliance

FROM PAGE 1 Party (LDP), Zaker Party, a faction of Islami Oikya Jote and Islamic Front Bangladesh.

Asked whether the grand alliance will be responsible for any constitutional crisis arising from its election boycott, Hasina said, "A constitutional crisis can be avoided by holding of fair election following lajuddin's resignation... a constitutional crisis will be created if a farcical election is held by stealing votes."

Asked to comment about BNP and Jamaat's eagerness to participate in the January 22 election, Hasina said the people will resist the election as nobody except BNP-Jamaat-led alliance is in favour of a 'stage-managed' election.

JP Chairman HM Ershad, LDP President Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haque Inu also spoke at the briefing and inu also resist the January election at any cost.

Ershad said, "The January election will be resisted, a farcical election will not be allowed to be held."

Badruddoza Chowdhury said, "We can't accept an illegal election under an illegal caretaker government. It will be tantamount to a betrayal with the nation."

On behalf of the grand alliance, Hasina demanded immediate resignation of lajuddin Ahmed from the post of chief adviser (CA) and appointment of a new CA, reconstitution of the Election Commission in line with the package proposal prepared by the council of advisers, changes in the top levels of intelligence agencies, depoliticisation of the administration, a fresh election schedule following proper updating of the voter list, suspending Rapid Action Battalion's (Rab) activities till the election is over, and allowing Ershad and others to participate in the poll – whose nomination papers had been 'illegally cancelled'.

Hasina cited some flaws on the already once 'updated' voter list and said, "Our apprehension is that the Election Commission will provide to the presiding and polling officers the voter list that excludes the names of leaders, activists and supporters of the grand alliance, and of the people of minority communities."

Referring to the grand alliance announced countrywide 48-hour blockade on January 7 and 8, the AL chief warned if the demands are not met even after that, then the president's official residence, Bangabhaban, will be blockaded indefinitely.

She also called for holding rallies and processions across the country on Friday and urged the people to join the current movement 'once again to protect the people's voting right'.

"We will continue our movement to protect the people's right to vote. A free and fair election is required to save the country from the plague of corruption and violations of human rights," Hasina said adding, "We believe victory will be ours. A free and fair election will be held through formation of a new caretaker government."

Replying to the question, why in her view the BNP-led alliance wants to hold a one-sided election, the AL president said, "Because they want to rig the election. I urge the people to resist the vote-theieves."

Hasina asked the administration, and the armed forces and other law enforcers to stand by the people against the 'vote-theieves'.

"They will use the armed forces to hold a one-sided election. The intelligence agencies are already being used for election engineering

but the people will neither accept nor allow any rigged election. Nobody can stand against the people."

Explaining the alliance's earlier decision to participate in the poll, Hasina said, "We tried to participate in the poll for the greater interest of democracy... after filing nomination papers, we noticed that the chief adviser had started engineering the upcoming election following the dictates of BNP and Jamaat."

"We have been forced to take the decision of boycotting the January poll as there is no other way to protect the people's right to universal franchise," she said.

Accusing the Election Commission (EC) of not applying the electoral rules equally for all candidates, Hasina said, "As part of the election engineering, the Election Commission cancelled Ershad's nomination papers illegally."

The AL-led grand alliance that had announced a boycott of the upcoming election under the current schedule once before on December 18 from a grand rally, suddenly on December 26 filed nomination papers to contest the poll.

At the time, the grand alliance did not however formally announce whether it would remain in the race. It had repeatedly said it would announce its decision on January 3, the last date for withdrawing the nomination papers.

Following a series of hectic meetings among its components over the Eid holidays, the grand alliance finally yesterday decided to boycott the January 22 election.

From the news briefing, the grand alliance chief asked the alliance candidates to withdraw their nomination papers prompting a large number of senior leaders to rush to the EC for withdrawing their candidacies.

The leaders of the grand alliance asked the acting chief election commissioner (CEC) to postpone the electoral process to save the country from a probable disaster. Acting CEC Justice Mahfuzur Rahman however said the election will be held on January 22 as per the schedule.

Soon after the grand alliance' decision, eight political parties including Communist Party of Bangladesh announced that they will also boycott the election.

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad congratulated the AL chief for 'the brave decision'. "We will have to resist this farcically staged election. The leaders and activists of Jatiya Party will risk their lives in this struggle."

LDP President Badruddoza Chowdhury said, "The effort to legalise an illegal election by an illegal government will not be accepted. We as the grand alliance will not be a part of legitimising such an election. It will be a betrayal with the people if we participate in it."

The former president also said, "Taking part in the January election will be like committing suicide because of the chief adviser's conspiracy."

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said, "We cannot emphasise the constitutional provision of holding the election within the 90-day tenure of the caretaker government over the constitutional provision of having a proper voter list."

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu said "lajuddin's sole objective has been to conspire to bring Khaleda back to power by rigging the polls."

"Boycotting the polls and withdrawing our nominations is the only rational political and democratic option open to us for ensuring a correct voter list for the people," Inu said adding, "Our demands have been concentrated into one: remove lajuddin!"

Cold wave kills 17

FROM PAGE 16 upazila, died of respiratory complications, reports our correspondent.

At least 50 people with cold related diseases were also admitted to different health complexes in the district in the last two days, said control room of the district health department.

The civil surgeon's office sources said many of the health complexes do not have nebulisers - a life saving equipment used for the treatment of asthmatic symptoms.

UNB reports, at least 15 people died in cold wave in Panchagarh, Kurigram and Gaibandha since January 1.

The cold wave victims in Panchagarh are Moqbul Hossain, 60, of Baburamjoth, Rafiqul Islam, 55, of Daulatpara, Reazul Islam, 45, of Fakirpara, Budharu Mohammad, 62, of Dalalpara, Fazlul Haq, 50, of Dangirhat, Kofu Mia, 72, of Sardarpara, a newborn child of Rezaul Karim of Masjidpara and Asiruddin Kaku, 75, of Islambagh.

Victims in Kurigram are Abdul Jaill, 70, of Tantipara, five-day old infant of Jot Ghorah, Abdus Sabur Khan, 55, of Shaheber Alga and Hasan Ali, 60, of Kallamarji village.

In Gaibandha, three died in the cold wave. They are Mainul Haq, 72, Asma Bewa, 65, of Char

Kapasia and a minor Aminul Islam of Belka village.

In Rangpur, at least 29 people including 19 children affected by the cold wave were admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital. However, they are yet to get necessary treatment as most of the doctors were still on leave for the Eid holidays, reports our correspondent.

Bitter cold has confined almost all to their houses. People from the lower income group, especially the day labourers, are suffering the most as they can neither go out for work nor can they afford to buy warm clothes, our correspondents in Nilphamari and Rangpur report.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Nilphamari Khondokar Moklesur Rahman has sent an emergency fax message yesterday to Dhaka seeking ten thousand blankets immediately as the district relief office does not have sufficient warm clothes to distribute among the poor, our correspondent in Nilphamari reports.

DC of Rangpur Khandker Atiar Rahman told our Rangpur correspondent, "This is the first cold spell this season. We were not prepared for it. We are now observing the situation. If it deteriorates, we will seek warm clothes from the ministry concerned."

Factors leading

FROM PAGE 1 the 'politicised' administration had been non-cooperative towards its candidates with an increased zeal following submissions of their nomination papers on December 26.

Despite the CG's failure to implement the package proposal proposed by the council of advisers, the grand alliance had decided earlier to participate in the January poll 'with a belief that it would be able to break free the administration from the clutches of BNP influence'.

But following the cancellation of Ershad's all five nominations, the top leaders of the grand alliance including the AL president Sheikh Hasina began backtracking from their decision to participate sensing that 'the cancellations were a part of implementing BNP's blueprint for rigging the election, which will be almost impossible to dismantle under the current CA'.

"We have boycotted the elections as lajuddin-led caretaker government did not create a neutral environment, did not depoliticise the administration and did not make the Election Commission neutral even after we gave enough time," AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu told The Daily Star last night.

Since, President lajuddin Ahmed had assumed the office of the CA, AL-led 14-party coalition neither accepting nor rejecting him was trying to participate in the upcoming election even in the face of strong opposition from within the coalition.

According to the package proposal, Election Commissioners SM Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury would go on leaves of absence, three more election commissioners would be appointed, and an acting chief election commissioner would be made from the newly appointed commissioners.

The package also included promises of changing all 'politically appointed election officials including 300 upazila election officers', proper updating of the voter list, and depoliticisation of the administration.

Most of the promises remain unmet while lajuddin deployed the armed forces without consultation with the council of advisers leading to the resignations of four erstwhile key advisers to the CG.

Fuel crisis

FROM PAGE 16 provided huge loan to import fuel oil.

He said if there is no blockade or hartal, which disrupts shipment, there would be no crisis of gasoline this year.

Meanwhile, Petrol Pump Owners' Association President Nazmul Haque told UNB that pump operators started getting fuel supply from yesterday. But it would take at least one more day to have a normal situation in fuel supply, he said.

Haque blamed the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation's (BPC) mismanagement for the fuel crisis.

CPB, BSD

FROM PAGE 1 combine's conspiracy to win the elections through the caretaker government."

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) also announced its boycott decision and the party candidates withdrew their nomination papers yesterday in an effort to resist the 'one-sided farcical election', which is going to be held to implement the BNP-Jamaat's blueprint to remain in the power.

Chittagong Hill Tracts-based United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) also declared to boycott the election yesterday alleging the caretaker government has failed to implement UPDF's seven-point election related demands.

It alleged that the armed forces prevented the party activists from opening election offices in several areas.

Bangladesh Muslim League, Jatiya Samajibi Party, Prosperous Bangladesh Movement and Ganamukti Andolon also announced their poll boycott decisions.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1 DEC sources said a total of 43 out of 63 contestants yesterday withdrew their nomination papers.

However, Mamunur Rashid of Islami Shashantantra Andolan Bangladesh told reporters that Khaleda has been declared MP of Bogra-6 though he did not withdraw his nomination paper. He alleged that someone submitted his withdrawal paper using fake signature.

Later, Rashid was beaten for his complaint to the media, sources said.

Meanwhile, a total of 20 candidates, including five Jamaat and eight independent, will vie in five other constituencies in Bogra.

Others who elected MPs unopposed are former finance minister M Saifur Rahman from Sylhet-1, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Matiu Rahman Nizami from Pabna-1, Shariful Alam of BNP from Kishoreganj-7, Shahjahan Omar of BNP from Jhalakati-1 and Syed Emran Saleh Prince of

Advisers still hopeful

FROM PAGE 1 Following yesterday's grand alliance announcement, the advisers held several meetings to discuss their views and unsuccessfully sought an appointment with President and Chief Adviser (CA) lajuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban.

"This is a huge crisis.....we cannot give instant reactions but the council of advisers will sit to discuss ways to resolve it," Information Adviser Mahbubul Alam told reporters after a meeting with two of his colleagues. "The chief adviser will call a meeting of the council of advisers where we will certainly find a solution," he added.

Asked whether the crisis can be resolved within such a short space of time before January 22 and if the election will become an one-party election, Mahbub said, "We cannot possibly answer this question now, let's see what happens."

Regarding cancellation of former dictator and Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad's nomination papers, he said, "This is something for the Election Commission and the judiciary to decide, we cannot intervene in these decisions."

Termining the situation as a national crisis, Adviser Shoab Ahmed, however, expressed hope that there are still ways for a solution. "We need to work together to resolve the crisis. But the main role has to be played by the political parties, we can only assist in the process."

Adviser Azizul Haq told the reporters, "If all political parties are sincere, then we can escape this crisis within the next 23 days (days left for the caretaker government to hold elections)."

"We will also sit with constitutional experts to discuss how this crisis can be resolved," he said adding, "I am hopeful that all parties will participate in the polls."

Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath said, "We never thought that the Awami League would boycott the elections, but we will continue our efforts to hold an election partici-

Eid-ul-Azha

FROM PAGE 1 Eidgah in the morning.

Later, he hosted an Eid reception at Bangabhaban for the diplomats and elite.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia exchanged greetings of Eid-ul-Azha with diplomats and cross-sections of people on the LD hall premises of parliament.

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina also exchanged Eid greetings with diplomats, party leaders and workers and commoners at her Dhanmondi office.

Court courts

FROM PAGE 1 "President lajuddin without exhausting the mandatory provisions of article 58 C (3) (4) and (5) of the constitution has assumed the functions of Chief Adviser violating the oath of office which he took to protect and defend the constitution," the writ petition said.

On November 26, 11 leaders of the 14-party alliance, Jatiya Party (JP), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Zaker Party, a faction of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), and Islamic Front jointly filed three writ petitions with the HC against the president's assumption of the office of the CA, his way of exercising executive powers, and the Election Commission (EC) move to announce election schedule before finalising the voter list.

The court scheduled hearing of these four petitions on November 27. But on that day, a commotion took place at the court between counsels of the rival sides over the date of hearing of the petitions. In this situation, the court fixed November 29 for the hearing.

After the November 29 hearing, the HC fixed November 30 for passing its order.

But on November 30, in an unprecedented move the chief justice stayed the proceedings of the writ petitions, just minutes before an HC bench was supposed to issue a ruling.

When the HC sat on that day, Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali handed the stay order to the HC bench at 2:15pm. The bench read out that Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Hussain has stayed further proceedings of the writ petitions and left the courtroom.

Shocked by the order, lawyers and those present in the courtroom burst into anger and vandalised different sections of the SC and set fire to the vehicle of former state minister for law Shahjahan Omar.

Following this, a pro-BNP lawyer and the court authorities filed sedition cases against some pro-AL lawyers, and also Dr Kamal Hossain. But the sedition charges were dropped in the charge sheets of the cases.

The legal developments concerning Ershad over the last few months were conflicting. Back in August and September last, Ershad was discharged in five decade-old

pated by all parties."

They had thought that AL will contest the polls, as except a small part of the package proposal, all were implemented, he added.

Shafiqul Haque Chowdhury said that a solution is inevitable, as all parties want an election.

Components

FROM PAGE 1 when asked if BNP would participate in the upcoming election individually. However, a number of senior BNP leaders said the high command is most likely to approve individual participation of four-party alliance partners in the election, said the sources.

On the last day of nomination withdrawal yesterday, the BNP secretary general could not provide the list of the four-party alliance candidates either. "You will see the names in newspapers tomorrow or as early as possible." Although a few days back, he told the reporters that BNP would disclose names of their aspirants on the last day of nomination withdrawal.

According to the sources, the parties in the four-party alliance will not contest the election jointly to portray that many different political parties are taking part in the election process. The alliance also decided that Jamaat would file nominations for around 137 parliamentary seats.

BNP sources said if the AL-led alliance boycotts the election, BNP would contest more than 200 parliamentary seats individually while Jamaat could contest at least 50 seats. BJP, JP and a few other political parties would share rest of the seats in the next parliament if they agree to participate.

Ali Ahsan Mujahid, Secretary General of Jamaat told the reporters yesterday that around 150 Jamaat leaders filed nominations. He also said they would finalise their strategy to contest the election later.

Sources said BNP candidates filed nominations in every parliamentary seat. After the 14-party candidates filed nomination papers, the BNP secretary general asked rebel candidates to withdraw their nominations, but most Jamaat candidates did not withdraw their nomination papers defying directives of the party high-ups.

US, UK, EC

FROM PAGE 1 reversal of their previous commitment to participate; we urge them to reconsider," the spokesman told UNB.

He said the US continues to believe that participation of all major parties is a necessary element for free, fair and credible elections.

"As election day approaches, we urge all parties to continue to act peacefully, to avoid violence, and to refrain from activities designed to disrupt elections," he said.

The British High Commission also expressed disappointment at the decision to boycott the elections by Awami League-led alliance but expressed hope that a way could be found for participation of all parties in the polls.

"We are disappointed by the decision to boycott the election," a spokesperson for the High Commission said.

The spokesperson said, "We have encouraged full participation all along and we will continue to do so."

"We are however concerned by the prospect of violence and therefore hope a way forward can be found that will allow participation of all political parties in the election," she said.

The European Commission said the election boycott decision by Awami League and its allies signifies that the efforts to reach agreement among relevant stakeholders on key issues pertaining to holding the parliamentary elections have not borne any fruit.

This will carry serious implications on a peaceful and acceptable democratic process in the country, a spokeswoman for the EC said.

"The European Commission trusts that the deeply troubling ramifications of this decision to withdraw from contesting the elections will prompt all stakeholders involved in the election to strive for a solution which would put Bangladesh back on the path towards peaceful democratic elections with participation by all parties," she said.

Decision

FROM PAGE 16 percent for a user, who consumes over 100 units.

But the government on Monday announced the decision to stall the price hike.

A power division source said the decision might affect the negotiation between the government and an Asian Development Bank mission this month on realisation of US\$500 million soft loans for the power sector.

According to the source, the donors gave pressure to the government to lift electricity charge as the power division was incurring Tk 600 crore losses due to higher electricity consumption. There was a fear that the loss amount may cross Tk 1000 crore, the source also added.

Power Secretary ANH Akhtar Hossain admitted the fact while talking to The Daily Star last night.

However, he said the government neither stalled the price hike nor cancelled it. "In the present political environment, price hike could emerge as a political issue. So the decision was taken as per the advice of the chief adviser."

CEC says

FROM PAGE 1 withdrawal letters to him, instead of the returning officers, the acting CEC said, "Law will take it own course."

Asked if the election would be acceptable to the international community if it takes place without the participation of major political parties, he replied, "Let's see what the international community says."

Meanwhile, the EC has already allocated election symbols to the political parties. It is now preparing to send the election materials and other related thing to different districts and upazilas.

JAMAAT DELEGATION The Jamaat delegation urged the acting CEC to hold the election as scheduled.

"We have asked him to hold the election as per schedule" said Maqbul Ahmed.

The delegation declined to say whether Jamaat would participate in the election under the party banner or as four-party alliance component if the grand alliance does not contest the polls.

It also did not disclose the number of aspirants who submitted nomination papers under the banner of Jamaat.

The Jamaat delegation claimed that the present voter list is free of fault.

CPB-WITHDRAWAL Thirty-two aspirants from the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) have withdrawn their nomination papers as the party has decided not to participate in the election.

The dead were identified as advocate Tafsirul Ahmed Lenin Bosunia, 32, president of Nilphamari pourashava unit of Juboleague, Milan Rahman, 28, of Sapmaria village, Babul Hossain, 35 and Abdul Malek, 38, of Gopalpara village under Gobindaganj upazila in Gaibandha.

BSS adds from Sherpur: Fuad Chowdhury, son of former whip of Jatiya Sangsad Zayed Ali Chowdhury, was killed while Zayed's another son Fahad Chowdhury and sister-in-law Kokila Chowdhury were critically injured as the car carrying

the wreckage and some survivors had been found on a jungle-covered mountain near Polewali in the west turned out to be false after rescue teams combed the area.

Aircraft accidents are not uncommon in Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation stretching over 5,000 kilometres, but the unusual circumstances in this case have stunned the country.

Adri Mamoto, whose parents were on board the flight, said he had travelled from Manado to Makassar only to be told there was no news after all.

"After all that effort, we decided to just go back home to Manado and wait for more news from Adam Air, what else can we do?" he told ElShintaradio.

Mila, sister of air hostess Nining Iryani, said the reports had disturbed her family.

"This is a question of life," she told the Warta Kota daily. "Do not fool around when disseminating information. Our whole family has had no peace since we heard of the crash."

"Don't they know how badly it has affected families?" questioned Wenny, the sister of another air hostess, Dina Oktarina.

The latest search was concentrated on the sea off Pambuang near Majene, 40 kilometres west of Polewali, which is some 20 kilometres north of Makassar, as well as areas inland.

Navy ships had late Monday started searching around Pambuang after locals reported seeing something floating in the sea that looked like a jet, MetroTV said.

That search was abandoned after reports the wreckage had been located near Polewali, but navy ships

Bush says Congress must limit spending

AP, Washington

President Bush said yesterday he'll submit a proposal to balance the budget in five years and exhorted Congress to "end the dead of night process" of quietly tucking expensive pet projects into spending bills.

"This budget will restrain spending while setting priorities," Bush in a statement he delivered in the Rose Garden after meeting with his Cabinet at the White House.

"It will address the most urgent needs of our nation, in particular the need to protect ourselves from radicals and terrorists, the need to win the war on terror, the need to maintain a strong national defense, and the need to keep this economy growing by making tax relief permanent," Bush said in the budget proposal that he will soon send to Capitol Hill.

Bush, faced with working with an opposition Congress for the first time of his presidency, welcomed new members of Congress and said he's anxious to work with them on the nation's priorities during the remaining two years of his presidency.

"It's time to set aside politics and focus on the future," he said.

"Congress has changed," Bush added. "Our obligations to the country have changed."

But, the president, in a newspaper opinion piece published Wednesday in the Wall Street Journal, also served notice to lawmakers:

"If the Congress chooses to pass bills that are simply political statements, they will have chosen stalemate," Bush wrote. "If a different approach is taken, the next two years can be fruitful ones for our nation. We can show the American people that Republicans and Democrats can

come together to find ways to help make America a more secure, prosperous and hopeful society."

Sen. Charles Schumer (news, bio, voting record), D-N.Y., said Democrats ran in the midterms election on a message of compromise, and want to work with Bush.

"We hope that when the president says compromise, it means more than 'do it my way,' which is what he's meant in the past," Schumer said.

He said fiscal restraint is one area where the executive and legislative branches of government can work together.

"Over the past few years, pro-growth economic policies have generated higher revenues," Bush said. "Together with spending restraint, these policies allowed us to meet our goal of cutting the budget deficit in half three years ahead of schedule."

The president's critics argue that the White House is using sleight of hand when boasting about the deficit.

Bush can rightly state that he has fulfilled his 2004 campaign pledge to cut the deficit in half by the time he leaves office. In fact, he can say he has done it three years early. But in making that claim, the president is using the administration's original forecast of what the 2004 deficit was expected to be not what it actually turned out to be.

Back when Bush made his promise, the administration was predicting that the 2004 deficit would be \$521 billion. That prediction turned out to be off by \$100 billion. To achieve the feat of slicing the actual 2004 deficit number in half, the federal deficit Bush was highlighting would have to have dropped to \$206 billion, not \$247.7 billion.

19 killed

FROM PAGE 16 On Monday, two persons were killed and 20 others injured in two road accidents in Dinajpur district.

Two Thakurgaon-bound night coaches from Dhaka that were in a mad rush collided, leaving Masudur Rahman, 35, driver of one of the coaches, dead on the spot and 20 passengers injured, police said.

Motorcycle rider Gopal Chandra, 40, of village Katabari under Phulbari upazila, who was seriously injured when his bike hit a roadside tree at