

Grand alliance

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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 Iajuddin'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 vowed to 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 Iajuddin 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 nationwide 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, Bangladesh, 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."

Replies 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-thieves."

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

"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 diktats 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 announced 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.

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 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."

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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 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 Samajbadi Party, Prosperous Bangladesh Movement and Ganamukti Andolon also announced their poll boycott decisions.

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

However, Mamunur Rashid of Islami Shashantara 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 Matiur 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

Nilphamari reports.

Victims in Kurigram are Abdul Jalil, 70, of Tantipara, five-day-old infant of Jot Ghorwa, Abdus Sabur Khan, 55, of Shaheba Alga and Hasan Ali, 60, of Katlamari village.

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

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 and Jamaat.

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Advisers still hopeful

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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) Iajuddin 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."

Terming the situation as a national crisis, Adviser Shoaib 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

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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 Dhamondi office.

Court courts

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"President Iajuddin 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, 21 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 common 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 Mdussein Husain has stayed further proceedings of the writ petitions and left the courtroom.

On December 13, another graft case against Ershad related to questionable possession of Tk 1.99 crore plus other valuables came up after 14 years for hearing in the HC following a move by the AGO. The hearing of this case will take place on January 10.

On December 19, the SC stayed a HC verdict asking the EC to collect and make public some vital information including income and wealth statements of the candidates for general elections.

Pro-BNP lawyer Barrister Omar Sadat assisted Barrister Azmizul Hossain in moving for one Abu Safa who had filed an appeal in June last against the HC order. A one-member SC vacation bench stayed the HC verdict about 'disclosure', which will remain effective till disposal of the appeal.

Once again Moudud Ahmed, also a BNP candidate from Noakhali-5 constituency, was present during the hearing at the one-member vacation bench.

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Decision

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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