

Chronology of keeping off polls

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performing his constitutionally mandated responsibility as chief adviser to the caretaker government in the interest of the people.

The hope that flickered with KM Hasan's refusal to take office of the chief of the caretaker government seemed to have been dimmed as the BNP and Awami League (AL) failed to reach a consensus about who should head the caretaker government and President Iajuddin Ahmed offered himself as a possible head, a suggestion that the AL outright rejected.

AL President Sheikh Hasina at a press conference said President Iajuddin Ahmed should take immediate steps for a non-partisan person to take oath as the chief adviser to the caretaker government to put an immediate end to the countrywide violence.

BNP Chairperson and outgoing Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at a rally urged the opposition to accept whatever decision the president should take on caretaker chief and said her party will do the same.

October 29

President Iajuddin Ahmed assumed the office of chief adviser to the non-party caretaker government in addition to his presidential responsibilities as "major political parties failed to reach a consensus on an acceptable person for the post".

The President sought cooperation from all in holding the general election in a free and fair manner. "We are determined to hold a free and fair election to parliament rising above party and opinions," he said in his address to the nation over radio and television.

The AL-led 14-party alliance that vehemently opposed the president's proposal for assuming the post himself neither accepted nor rejected the new caretaker chief terming it a violation of the constitution. At an emergency meeting at Sudha Sadan, the alliance observed that Iajuddin's activities will decide whether they will contest the next polls or not.

October 30

The 14-party alliance leaders met President and Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed and demanded that he should perform 11 urgent tasks, including reconstitution of Election Commission (EC) and neutralisation of civil and police administration, within November 3, 2006 to prove his neutrality. The chief of the non-party interim government assured them that all possible steps would be initiated for holding a free and fair election.

October 31

Ten advisers to the caretaker government headed by Prof Iajuddin Ahmed were sworn in at Bangabhaban ending two days' speculations about the appointments. The advisers were Justice Fazlul Haque, former cabinet secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan, former foreign secretary CM Shafi Sami, immediate past army chief Lt Gen (retd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, former inspector general of police M Azizul Haque, former secretary Dhiraj Kumar Nath, human rights activist Advocate Sultana Kamal, Chairperson of Scholastica Pvt Ltd Yasmine Mursheed, Journalist Mahbubul Alam, and Prof Emeritus Sufia Rahman.

The 14-party in its reaction said they would observe activities of the advisers whether they play a role in creating environment for a free and fair election and then speak about them.

November 1

President and Chief Adviser Professor Iajuddin Ahmed allocated portfolios to the advisers of his caretaker government, keeping all the vital ministries under his stewardship. The portfolios that he held are the Chief Adviser's Office, Armed Forces Division, Cabinet Division, Election Commission Secretariat, NGO Affairs Bureau, Defence Ministry, Establishment Ministry, Bangladesh Public Service Commission, Ministries Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Education.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at a press briefing said AL's 14-party coalition's demand for restructuring the Election Commission (EC) is 'new' to him.

"There is no scope in the constitution to take any action against anyone in the EC."

Mannan Bhuiyan welcomed the newly appointed advisers to the caretaker government and said the interim government will hold a general election in three months' time and appointing the advisers was a step forward to that direction.

November 2

Two advisers - CM Shafi Shami and Sultana Kamal - on instruction from Chief Adviser to the caretaker government met AL President Sheikh Hasina conveying the message that they have initiated effective steps to reconstitute the EC. Following the meeting the AL softened its ultimatum ending on November 3 for tough action unless the caretaker government implements its 11-point demand including EC reconstitution.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at a press briefing said the CEC and the other commissioners are "neutral and non-partisan people." The country cannot concede to AL and its allies' "illogical demand" for removal of the commissioners, she said.

November 3

The 14-party alliance extended the November 3 deadline by a week and asked the president to appoint a non-partisan person as the caretaker government chief in addition to carrying out the previous 11-point task.

Otherwise, they would enforce indefinite blockade programmes across the country, AL President Sheikh Hasina warned at a huge

rally at Paltan Maidan.

Former law minister Moudud Ahmed moved against a High Court order and got the functions of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) stayed up to January 21 amid growing demands for investigation into corruption of ministers and officials of the immediate past government. The Supreme Court (SC) order means the ACC will not be able to function during almost the whole tenure of the caretaker government. However, the ACC was learnt to be preparing for applying to the court to modify the order so that it can function.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at a press briefing urged the president and chief adviser of the caretaker government to take action against two advisers who visited Sudha Sadan and met AL President Sheikh Hasina.

Advisers to the caretaker government said two of their colleagues met AL Chief Sheikh Hasina following a consensus decision and on instructions of President Iajuddin Ahmed and there is no room for controversy.

November 4

CEC MA Aziz expressed his unwillingness to the council of advisers to resign if requested by the caretaker government (CG) for reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC), putting the CG in a difficult situation as regards holding a free and fair election. One adviser went to the residence of MA Aziz to know whether he will resign if the council requests him.

November 5

The 14-party alliance at a press conference urged opponent BNP-led four-party coalition not to pressurise the caretaker government but help it create a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election. AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil alleged that the four-party alliance placed its 10-point demand to the caretaker government as part of a conspiracy to foil the next election and urged BNP not to try to protect the "controversial" CEC and three other election commissioners.

November 6

The advisers at an unscheduled meeting in a state guesthouse without the chief adviser discussed the overall situation and agreed that the process of creating a congenial atmosphere for the next parliamentary election should be expedited.

In a dramatic turnaround from his earlier decision, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad at a meeting with his party leaders decided not to join the BNP-led four-party alliance following strong opposition from his party lawmakers.

November 7

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia blasted the council of advisers to the caretaker government for November 6 meeting without the chief adviser and accused them of conspiracy. "The meeting without the chief adviser was very much unconstitutional," she told a huge rally in front of the BNP central office.

November 9

President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed at a meeting with the secretaries reminded that the present form of government has become a "presidential form of government" and underscored his supreme authority over the state and government affairs, saying any unwarranted remarks about his personal officials are tantamount to interference in the affairs of the state.

November 10

The AL-led 14-party alliance leaders at a press briefing said President Iajuddin Ahmed opened up scopes for impeachment for "violating" his oath and making "unconstitutional" remark that the present government has become a presidential form of government.

The alliance also declared to enforce an indefinite countrywide blockade from November 11 if their demands are not met.

The BNP-led four-party alliance, on the other hand, announced that it would resist the AL-led coalition's programme by being on the streets.

November 11

A non-stop countrywide blockade enforced by the 14-party alliance began amid heightened tension as the extended deadline given to the president/chief adviser for implementing the alliance's 11-point task ended on November 10 without meeting major demands.

Terming the blockade programme "unlawful and unconstitutional", the non-party caretaker government directed the law enforcers to go tough during the blockade programme.

November 12

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at a press briefing said her party did not announce any programme for the next two days to avoid confrontation, saying BNP believes in peace and political consensus.

November 13

In a sudden unilateral move, keeping his advisers in the dark, President and Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed decided to deploy army across the country in aid of the civil administration to maintain law and order. The home secretary had sent the decision to the local administration in the afternoon. A late night handout by a joint secretary of the home ministry, however, said: "In fact, regarding the army deployment, the government has decided that the troops might be deployed after taking into consideration the situation. Since no such situation has arisen, the decision to deploy the army has not yet been taken."

The AL expressed its surprise at the decision to deploy the army and said no such situation has arisen in the country that necessitates army deployment in aid of the civil administration.

Otherwise, they would enforce indefinite blockade programmes across the country, AL President Sheikh Hasina warned at a huge

national asset army with a political motive and conspire to put them face-to-face with the people," AL General Secretary and coordinator of the 14-party alliance Abdul Jalil said in a press statement.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz told the reporters the election schedule will be declared by November 25, 2006.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan threatened to enforce counter programme if 14-party alliance continues the ongoing countrywide blockade.

President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed sent Advisers Mahbubul Alam, M Azizul Haque and Advocate Sultana Kamal to the poll chief in a last-ditch attempt to find a way to break the standoff. Through the delegation, the president had asked Aziz to make a swift decision in view of the gravity of the situation.

The advisers met the CEC to request from the CA to step down to resolve the crisis.

November 19

In the face of strong objection from the advisers to the caretaker government (CG), the home ministry's unilateral decision on deployment of army without following proper procedure was cancelled. Lured by the decision, the advisers observed that the decision and issuance of a circular to deploy army were gross mistakes, and the move was not taken in accordance with proper procedure.

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Advisers to the caretaker government said two of their colleagues met AL Chief Sheikh Hasina following a consensus decision and on instructions of President Iajuddin Ahmed and there is no room for controversy.

November 20

A full-day hectic meetings by the advisers yielded a 'light at the end of the tunnel' as the CEC Justice MA Aziz, with all probability, may either go on leave until the elections are over or resign in a couple of days.

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November 21

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan urged the CA not to take any step, which would violate the constitution. In a sudden visit to the CA, he expressed his dissatisfaction over the 'unnecessary transfer' of government officials.

November 22

CEC MA Aziz informed the president verbally that he would take a three-month leave of absence in response to the presidential initiative to resolve the political deadlock centring the popular demand for reconstitution of the EC. The CEC also set a condition that he will stay in the country under full security protection from the government.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at a press conference welcomed the CEC's decision to resign.

November 23

The 14-party alliance postponed its ongoing countrywide blockade and asked the chief adviser again to meet its demands, including reconstitution of the EC and removal of the CEC.

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