

Hasina declares

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to resist the January 22 polls.

"Holding of January 22 polls will have to be boycotted and resisted at any cost," Hasina said. The grand alliance as well as the people of the country will boycott the polls. So, no such election will be allowed to take place, she added.

"Even the international community, donor agencies and our friendly countries have already said this election will not be acceptable to them. So, none should get involved in the one-sided election just to become enemy of the people," she said, asking all including election-related officials, law enforcers and army personnel to keep off the polls process.

"The people will brand those getting involved in the one-sided election as their enemies and will build all out resistance against their activities," Hasina said amid repeated clappings from the rally that virtually turned into a human sea.

She also announced a country-wide demonstration for today to protest police atrocities on the grand alliance leaders and workers before and during the 72-hour non-stop countrywide blockade that ended at 6:00am on Tuesday.

The entire area around Paltan Maidan, including Paltan intersection, Noor Hossain Square, Bangabandhu Avenue and Gulistan Square, was crowded by workers and supporters of the grand alliance.

Explaining the alliance's election boycott stance, Hasina said, "We wanted to participate in the election. But there was no alternative but to boycott finally when we saw that the voter list was not updated, it contained serious flaws, 345 politically appointed election officials have not been made OSDs, a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election has not been created, and fake poll result sheets have been prepared."

She went on, "We have to go for election boycott only to protect the people's democratic right of voting ...We want an election participated by all the parties. But a free and fair election will not be held with Yes Uddin [Iajuddin Ahmed] as the chief adviser. He must quit the post, and a new chief adviser will have to be appointed."

"The Election Commission will have to be reconstituted, voter list must be updated, 345 politically appointed election officials will have to be made OSDs, transparent ballot boxes and voter ID cards must be arranged, and finally, a congenial atmosphere for free and fair polls

will have to be created."

Hasina asserted, "Only when all these are done, an election will take place. And no farcical election will be held before that." She instructed the alliance leaders and workers to continue movement until a fair poll is held in the country.

The AL president asked the law enforcers as well as the armed forces personnel not to be 'enemy of the people' by resorting to torture and attacks on the grand alliance leaders to save the 'looters' of the BNP-Jamaat coalition.

Referring to new facilities provided to the police force during the AL rule, Hasina asked the law enforcers why they swooped on its leaders and workers so brutally? "The consequences will not be good if you further torture them," Hasina warned. She asked the alliance leaders and workers to identify those involved in such torture.

Clarifying her parliament speech on April 12 in 2001 that election will have to be held within 90 days of caretaker government's (CG) tenure, Hasina said she delivered the speech as the then Election Commission (EC) worked independently, voter roll was updated properly and a congenial atmosphere for a fair poll was created for all-party participation.

The BNP is currently referring to that speech frequently.

On the BNP EC and CG's stance on holding the election within 90 days as per constitutional provisions, Hasina said the constitution is for the people, and it provides that a complete voter list is mandatory before announcing the election schedule. She asked how the election schedule was announced this time without reconstitution of the EC and preparation of voter roll. This was done in violation of the constitution, she alleged.

The AL president categorically blasted the CA for his 'failure' to create a congenial atmosphere for fair polls. Iajuddin took over as CA violating the constitution and is still violating it to bring the looters of BNP-Jamaat to back to power through vote theft.

The BNP-Jamaat is controlling the CA from Hawa Bhaban to return to power by any means as they know that people would force them give back the money they looted during their five-year rule, and bring them to trial for large scale corruption and misrule, Hasina said.

Avoiding poll duty

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officials) security, he further said.

The meeting held at the EC Secretariat and chaired by the EC secretary was told to ensure utility services on the poll day so that it can be held smoothly.

Sammiti Karmakarta Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKKOP) on Tuesday expressed concern over the security of government officials who are supposed to carry out election duties on the poll day of January 22.

Some of the SKKOP leaders even threatened to go for tougher actions like not cooperating in the election activities if the situation demands.

Asked about the acting CEC's comment on acceptance of the polls, Sarker said that there is no election law that specifies the percentage of casting votes that will give an election credibility or acceptability. "If five or ten percent of the total voters cast their votes in the election, it cannot be said that the election will not be acceptable." The EC secretary added.

On Tuesday, the acting CEC told the reporters that if 50 percent voters cast their votes in any election, the election is acceptable then.

The EC secretary did not make any comments on the acting CEC's observation that the caretaker government would have to take responsibility for any violence on the poll day.

Replying to a question, Sarker

CA seeks

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Advisers Mahbubul Alam, Shafique Huq Chowdhury, Ruhul Amin, Fazlul Haq, Azizul Haq and Yasmeen Murshed also held an informal meeting at the Secretariat yesterday and discussed latest political developments for about an hour. They, however, declined to disclose the meeting discussions.

Earlier in the morning Adviser Shafique told the journalists that they asked the AL general secretary to sit with BNP secretary general to resolve the crisis. "The AL general secretary is yet to respond to the request," Shafique said when asked about his Tuesday's meeting with the AL leader.

"If the political parties reach a consensus through discussions, the January 22 polls can be postponed," he said.

Reacting to the chief election commissioner's statement, Shafique said, "Only the Election Commission, not the caretaker government, has to take responsibility if any violence takes place on the poll day."

The EC is provided with all the tools for holding a peaceful election. The tools -- the armed forces, administration and law enforcement agencies -- will function in line with EC directives, he said.

HC rejects writ petition against takeover as acting CEC

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday rejected a public interest litigation (PIL) writ petition challenging the legitimacy of performing responsibilities as acting Chief Election

Commissioner (CEC) by Justice Mahfuzur Rahman.

Election Commissioner Justice Mahfuz took over as acting CEC on November 23, 2006 after Justice MA Aziz agreed to go on leave for three months under political pressure.

A division bench comprising Justice Mir Hasmat Ali and Justice M Fazlur Rahman passed the order.

Emerging from the court, aggrieved petitioner Mahbub Minhaj, a businessman, told reporters that he would move in the Supreme Court against the HC refusal, as there is no provision of acting CEC in the constitution.

Advocate Afsana Begum appeared for the petitioner.

Tax papers

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expenditures, and a photocopy of the last income tax return--if the candidate is a taxpayer.

Khaleda Zia, who is contesting from Barisal sadar constituency, and the 25 others did not submit their papers as of 8:00pm last night.

Khaleda is contesting the January 22 elections from five constituencies and her documents have been sent to one of those constituencies, said Asaduzzaman Khasru, city BNP general secretary and member secretary of the election conducting committee of Khaleda.

The papers were supposed to be sent by fax, he added, but he could not say why the documents did not reach the election office within the last time at 5:00pm.

The other candidates who did not submit their papers are former state minister for finance Shah Mohammad Abul Hossain, former lawmaker Zahir Uddin Swapan, Moazzem Hossain Alal, Mosharraf Hossain Mongu and Abul Hossain Khan.

Two rebel candidates from BNP Joyнал Abedin and Sharfuiddin Ahmed Shantu also did not submit their papers.

Independent candidate Porimalendu Halder of Ujjipur-Babuganj constituency, four-party alliance candidate Shahidul Huq Jamal, and two more candidates from Swarupkathi-Banaripara constituency submitted their papers.

Justice Faisal Mahmud Faizee of the single-member HC bench handed Ershad two years' imprisonment rejecting his appeal against the trial court's verdict.

Faizee in his verdict asked Ershad to surrender before the trial court without specifying any time or date.

Judge Jinnat Ara of the trial court sentenced Ershad to three years' imprisonment on July 6, 1995. The court also fined him Tk 10,000 and in default, he will have to serve four more months in jail.

The same year, Ershad filed an appeal with the HC against the lower court verdict.

HM Ershad, who assumed power through a bloodless coup in March 1982 and was deposed in December 1990. He was found guilty of misappropriating Tk 33 crore in a shady deal for purchasing 520 Japanese boats and 10 water-purifying machines for relief operation in 1989.

About 100 vehicles got stuck on Mawa side while 300-400 vehicles got stuck on both side of the river Padma. Three ferries-- Royapura, Dhaka and Shitalakhya-- were also caught up in the mid river.

Five flights were delayed by two hours at Zia International Airport due to dense fog.

10 RMG units

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The demonstrators then vandalised seven other garment factories. During the vandalism, other groups of the agitating workers set up barricades on the Tongi Diversion Road.

A large number of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) men rushed to the factories and tried to give the demonstrators assurance of finding Sayeed, the missing workers' leader.

An 11-member delegation of the demonstrators, Rab, police and officials representing the Padma factory searched the entire seven-storey building but failed to find any body.

Padma DGM (admin) Nuruzzaman Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "We have nothing to do with Sayeed going missing. He had a fight with outsiders outside the building as a sequel to his personal rivalry with them on Monday." He also dismissed the allegation that the owner of the factory had Sayeed removed or killed.

He said the factory would be reopened soon.

Police and Rab were deployed in front of Padma.

PROBE BODY
The BGMEA yesterday formed a 12-member probe committee to investigate the employees' unrest and vandalism at Padma Poly Cotton Knit Fabrics Ltd at Tejjagon industrial area.

The committee led by BGMEA Vice-president Harunur Rashid was asked to submit the investigation report by 5:00pm today, according to sources.

The committee was formed after Padma factory workers gathered in front of the BGMEA head office in Karwan Bazar in the capital yesterday afternoon following the vandalism.

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BGMEA places

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and formally placed the set of recommendations, according to a press release.

The BGMEA president told the president that the apparel sector was the worst victim of the ongoing volatile political situation in the country. Besides, for the last six months, the industry have been facing a series of setbacks including labour unrest, vandalism and arson.

As a result, orders have been dropped drastically and new orders are not being received by a satisfactory level either.

The seven point recommendations include, shifting the schedule of term loan for at least six months without interest so that no factory faces loan default cases, disbursement of loan in easy term for payment of at least three months' salaries and allowances to the workers, increasing the time limit for payments against back to back letter of credit by at least 60 days, instructing the banks to increase the cash limit and payment option for gas and electricity bills in long term instalments for at least one year.

The BGMEA also requested not to disconnect any gas or electricity connection at garment factories for overdue bills and keep the Chittagong port operational at all times.

The president Iajuddin Ahmed assured the BGMEA leaders of considering their recommendations

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Ershad's petition

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court on July 6, 1995.

As per provision of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), Ershad had served out his sentence and the question of surrendering of the accused does not arise. So, the order of January 4 issued by the trial court about Ershad's surrender to his bail to serve out the sentence within January 17 should be withdrawn, the lawyer said.

After the hearing, the trial court kept the petition with the case file and fixed January 17 for hearing on the issue.

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Golden goose

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US\$ 4.92 billion against US\$2 billion in 2001 while about 4 lakh people left the country for joining jobs overseas last year, which was less than 2 lakh in 2001, according to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET).

The money sent by the Bangladeshis abroad was US\$4.25 billion in 2005 and the number of overseas manpower employment that year was only around 2.52 lakh.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) hired 1,30,204 people, the highest number, while The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) employed 1,09,513 people, the second highest number of contract or temporary workers from Bangladesh last year.

The UAE and KSA hired 61,978 and 80,425 workers in 2005 from Bangladesh.

The other countries that follow the KSA and UAE are Kuwait hiring 35,775 workers, Bahrain 16,355, Oman 8,082, Qatar 7,691 and Malaysia 20,469 workers from Bangladesh last year.

During the period of the caretaker government, the number of people who left the country for joining jobs abroad marked a sharp rise as it was about 46,474 in November and 49,012 in December last year.

The Middle East countries, especially the KSA and UAE, are hiring more workers from abroad, including Bangladesh, for development activities that got boosted due to almost doubling of oil price in the international market, manpower businesses and government officials said.

Strictness of the administration, especially during the caretaker government, also contributed to the increase of the number of people migrated last year.

"Strictness in checking at the airport contributed to the lessening of illegal or undocumented migration," an official of the Ministry of

and asking the advisors concerned to take necessary measures.

The president also assured the BGMEA leaders that the law and order of the country would be strictly maintained and Chittagong port would be operational at all times.

The first vice president of BGMEA Moinuddin Ahmed, second vice president Lutfar Rahman and two other top leaders of the organisation were also in the delegation.

Legal steps

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Hossain moved Safa's petition at the one-member SC vacation bench of Joyнал Abedin. The court issued the stay order without hearing any submission by the three petitioners who had obtained the original ruling.

Moudud Ahmed, former law minister of the immediate past BNP-led four-party coalition government, was present in the court at that time.

The stay order was seen as a legal victory of criminals and black money owners in the election race.

Meanwhile, five eminent citizens of the country--Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, Dr Badiul Alam Majumder, Syed Abul Maqsum, Prof Tofael Ahmed and Sharmin Murshid-- filed another application, requesting the court to take legal steps against Safa for lying before the court.

They also sought the court's permission to become a party of the case.

GOLD SMUGGLING CASE

The hearing on argument of the gold smuggling case against Ershad is likely to be held today.

Judge Mohammad Amirul Islam of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka will hear the argument from the prosecution and defence.

ANOTHER GRAFT CASE

UNB reports, A HC Division Bench yesterday deferred by a week the hearing of the appeal filed by Ershad to overturn the lower court verdict that jailed him for three years in a corruption case.

The bench comprising Justice Sharif Uddin Chaklader and Justice Sheikh Abdul Awal issued the order following a petition moved by his counsel Barrister Rafique-ul-Haq.

Almost fifteen years ago, the Special Court for Dhaka Division found Ershad guilty of keeping Tk 2 crore in cash, 11 sets of precious jewellery and other valuables in his residence illegally.

The government also filed an appeal against the trial court verdict to extend the period of his jail term.

6 killed

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during the "shootout" and died instantly, while his cohorts managed to flee.

He was wanted in 12 cases, including three, for murder, the sources added. The law enforcers recovered a revolver and some bullets from the spot.

SC gives

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satisfactorily explain why it is delaying the implementation, the court would issue contempt rule against all concerned government officials, including the attorney general, the court said.

On January 26, 2002, the court had cleared the draft amendments of four rules regarding the separation. The court yesterday said that these four amended rules must be published in gazette notification within a week.

"The court had given a light which the government has turned off," the court said.

The four rules are: Judicial Service Commission Rule, 2002, Bangladesh Judicial Service Pay Commission Rule, 2002, Bangladesh Judicial Service (Service Constitution, Composition, Recruitment, Suspension, Dismissal and Removal) Rules 2002 and Bangladesh Judicial Service (Posting, Promotion, Leave, Control, Discipline and other Service Condition) Rules 2001.

When the attorney general was submitting his statements before the full bench of the Appellate Division headed by JR Mudassar Hossain, former law minister Moudud Ahmed was seen prompting him with various points, said barrister Amir-ul Islam, the counsel of the judiciary separation case, who was present at the court.

Amir was assisted by barrister Shamsul Hasan and Moniruzzaman Asad.

NDI, IRI

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Election Observation Mission for the upcoming general elections in Bangladesh may not proceed as expected if the political stakeholders fail to resolve the ongoing crisis.

"A failure of the current electoral process would be a major setback for democracy in Bangladesh and for the international credibility of the country," the EU stated in a release of the local EU presidency.

Bimstec

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wants to skip the summit, as it thinks that an elected government should take part in this type of summit where heads of government have to attend, the commerce ministry official observed. Besides, the government is at present busy with resolving the political problems over the next general election, he added.

The member states of Bimstec are -- Nepal, India, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

In 1994, Thailand first developed the idea of establishing a bloc to explore economic cooperation on a sub-regional basis involving neighbouring countries of south and southeast Asia surrounding the Bay of Bengal. In 1997, BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation) was launched in Bangkok.

At the ministerial meeting held in February 2004, Bhutan and Nepal were welcomed as new members and subsequently the group was renamed "Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation."

Unlike Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), the association was formed to promote economic cooperation in the region. According to Bimstec second ministerial, member countries identified six areas of cooperation namely trade and investment, technology, transport and communication, fisheries, energy and tourism.

The group also works for establishing a free-trade area in the region step-by-step.

Rab busts

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around 4:00am yesterday raided a house at Nur Chala area of Badda in the capital where they arrested the other two.

Meanwhile, our Tangail correspondent reports that Shoyeb is a charge-sheeted accused in two cases filed with Kalihati and Tangail police stations in connection with the August 17, 2004 serial bomb blasts in Tangail.

Shoyeb, who is also involved with Ahle Hadith Andolan, had coordinated the blasts in the capital on August 17, intelligence sources said. He recruited a number of JMB activists from his village Bolla and its adjacent areas and they had their militant training at his house, the sources added.

Rab claimed the series of recoveries they had been able to make during the last few days follows the arrest of Abdul Rahman Alal alias Fahad and Saiful Islam alias Russell. Police captured them with huge amount of arms, ammunition and detonators at a bus on Ramna Bypass in Tangail on December 29.

Following information from Fahad, Rab on December 30 recovered bomb-making materials from Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj. Rab, on January 7, busted several JMB hideouts in Narayanganj and recovered 80 improvised iron casings for making grenades, 31 packs (each weighing 500gm) of powerful and one detonator. They arrested six alleged JMB men in the process.

New US air strikes hit Somalia

Qaeda leader feared killed

AGENCIES, Mogadishu

US forces hunting al-Qaeda suspects hit four sites in air strikes in southern Somalia yesterday, a Somali government source said, as international criticism mounted over Washington's military intervention.

A senior al-Qaeda suspect wanted for bombing American embassies in East Africa was killed, a Somali official said, a report that if true would mean the end of an eight-year hunt for a top target of Washington's war on terror.

There was no immediate confirmation from the US. In Washington, a US intelligence official said the US killed five to 10 people in an attack on an al-Qaeda target in southern Somalia but did not say who was killed. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the operation's sensitivity, said a small number of others present, perhaps four or five, were wounded.

The report came as US forces apparently launched a third day of airstrikes in southern Somalia. Witnesses said an AC-130 gunship attacked a suspected al-Qaeda training camp. At least four separate strikes were reported Wednesday around Ras Kamboni, on the Somali coast and a few miles from the Kenyan border.

Also yesterday, Somalia's Deputy Prime Minister said American troops were needed on the ground to root extremists from his troubled country, and he expected the troops soon. It was the first indication that the US military may expand its campaign.

Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, who allegedly planned the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa, was killed in a US airstrike early Monday morning local time, according to an American intelligence report passed on to the Somali authorities.

"I have received a report from the American side chronicling the targets and list of damage," Abdurizak Hassan, the Somali president's chief of staff, told The Associated Press. "One of the items they were claiming was that Fazul Abdullah Mohammed is dead."

If confirmed Mohammed's death would be a major victory for the US in its hunt for the 1998 embassy bombers. The strike was part of the first US offensive in the African country since 18 American soldiers were killed there in 1993.

The campaign is aimed at capturing al-Qaeda members thought to be fleeing Somalia since the Islamic militia that sheltered them began losing ground to Somali government soldiers backed by Ethiopian troops last month.

The Somali troops and their Ethiopian allies have driven the Islamist movement that had dominated the country for six months out of the capital and toward the Kenyan border.

Hassan said local intelligence reports indicated Abdurrahman Janaqow, one of the Islamists' deputy leaders, had also been killed.

Fazul, 32, joined al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and trained there with Osama bin Laden, according to the transcript of an FBI interrogation of a known associate. He had a \$5 million bounty on his head for allegedly planning the 1998 attacks

Bush to send 20,000

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we're going to fix the strategy." Bush will say that the infusion of additional American forces will depend on Iraq taking specific steps to curb sectarian violence and make other moves to deal with political and economic problems. The first batch of new U.S. troops is expected to be in Iraq within three weeks.

Bartlett also said that Bush will "make very clear that America's commitment is not open-ended, that benchmarks have to be met, that milestones have to be reached both on the security side but just as importantly on the political side and the economic side. It will be unequivocal in President Bush's speech tonight that the Iraqis have to step up."

In his speech, Bush was to acknowledge that mistakes have been made, Bartlett said.

"The president will say very clearly tonight that there were mistakes with the earlier operations, that it did not have enough Iraqi troops or U.S. troops, that the rules of engagement the terms in which our troops would actually conduct these operations were flawed," Bartlett said.

After nearly four years of fighting, \$400 billion and thousands of American and Iraqi lives lost, the White House calls the president's prime-time address from the White House library just the start of a debate over Iraq's many problems.

The address one of the most pivotal of Bush's presidency is the centerpiece of an aggressive public relations campaign that also will include detailed briefings for lawmakers and reporters, trips abroad by Cabinet members and a series of appearances by Bush starting with a

on the US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which killed 225 people.

He is also suspected of planning the car bombing of a beach resort in Kenya and the near simultaneous attempt to shoot down an Israeli airliner in 2002. Ten Kenyans and three Israelis were killed in the blast at the hotel, 12 miles north of Mombasa. The missiles missed the airliner.

Somalia's Deputy Prime Minister Hussein Aidede said US special forces are needed on the ground as government forces backed by Ethiopia are