



Poll date depends on how much reforms parties want

Two advisers say voter ID cards would take a long time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new schedule for general elections depends on the extent and scope of reforms demanded by political parties to ensure free, fair and credible polls, two advisers to the caretaker government said yesterday.

It would take longer to hold the elections if political parties want voter ID cards but it could be held much sooner if only an update of the 2000 voter list is required, they told reporters.

Both the advisers -- MA Matin and Mainul Hosein -- cited updating of voter list, reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC), national ID cards, transparent ballot box, reform and depoliticisation of the administration as priorities for the CG.

They said there is no longer a time limit for holding elections as

the constitutional 90-day timeframe is not applicable now. So, it does not matter whether it would take three or six months to hold polls if necessary and reforms demanded are implemented.

But the two advisers did not see any need to prolong the state of emergency, and said they will work for polls without the influence of 'black money' and separation of the judiciary during their tenure.

"We will discuss with political parties their reform demands regarding the election. If they ask for national ID cards, it would take a long time. But, if they want only to update the 2000 voter list to be updated, an election could take place much sooner," said Matin, adviser for communications, shipping, civil aviation and tourism, and liberation war affairs.

"There are several major demands including introduction of voter identity cards, reconstitution of the Election Commission, preparation of voter list and depoliticisation of the administration as priorities for the CG.

Asked about the state of emergency, he said, "There is no need to prolong the emergency." He emphasised the need to protect fundamental rights.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Adviser Mainul Hosein told reporters at his office, "The constitution has already been violated in terms of the president taking oath as the chief adviser and the inability to hold elections within 90 days. What is done is done. So, we have to protect the constitution as much as we can and move towards holding an acceptable election."

Asked when they expect the polls to be held, Mainul said they could hold elections even within two months if they want, but the CG's main concern is to ensure legitimacy of the election by making it free, fair, neutral and credible.

"We want to hold an election free from the influence of black money. If dishonest people are elected representatives of the people, their wishes will not be fulfilled. So, we have discussed this

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Farmers collecting paddy seedlings from a seedbed near the flood protection embankment at Rayerbazar in the capital for transplantation as the IRRI season is going on.

BNP clique trying to change president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 25 people including police were injured when the law enforcers clashed with farmers who put up barricades on the Dhaka-Bogra Highway in Raiganj upazila of the district for hours yesterday demanding fertiliser.

Following the prolonged barricade and the clash, hundreds of vehicles got stranded on both sides of the spot on the highway, causing untold sufferings to the passengers.

Local sources said some 2,000 farmers from several neighbouring villages of the upazila went to the local fertiliser dealer Mozibor Rahman alias Meherchand's store at Shahebganj bazar in the morning, but the dealer failed to supply them with the required quantity, sparking off anger.

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BNP leaders are making moves to change the president, who holds the defence portfolio during the tenure of the caretaker government with the authority of transferring and promoting the armed forces personnel.

Losing confidence in President Iajuddin Ahmed, BNP is lobbying for a new face in the presidency believing that a change might help it in the upcoming election.

Iajuddin's last speech on Thursday night frustrated the BNP leaders and now they want someone 'more loyal' to them in the presidency, sources said.

The leaders who want to change the president believe that the speaker of the last parliament

might act more favourably to BNP if made the acting president following resignation of Iajuddin.

The BNP leaders already sent a message to the president expressing their desire. A senior official of Bangabhaban met Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, who is supposed to act as the president in absence of Iajuddin, sources said.

A BNP delegation led by Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, parliamentary affairs adviser to the immediate past prime minister, yesterday held a three-hour long meeting with the Speaker in his office in the parliament complex.

They left the speaker's office hurriedly without saying anything to the media about the meeting. Asked by The Daily Star, former whip Rezaul Bari Deena said, "The

meeting did not discuss what you think it discussed." He left the office without giving any scope for asking further questions.

Afterwards, the speaker met Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui at his office. According to the constitution, if the speaker assumes the office of the President, Akhtar will become the acting speaker.

Issues regarding the president's resignation dominated the discussions and there was a significant amount of pressure on President Iajuddin to resign, sources said.

Another section of BNP leaders do not support the move arguing that it would make it evident that BNP has plans to manipulate the upcoming election, sources said.

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However, Acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice Mahfuzur Rahman yesterday said, "Letters are yet to be sent and time and the date for dialogues have not been fixed."

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