



Rule soon to curtail political activities

Law adviser says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Adviser Mainul Hossain yesterday said political activities would be officially curtailed once the new rules of the emergency are outlined soon.

Explaining this, he said, "All sorts of fundamental human rights have not been curtailed at the moment, but provocative political activities have been banned and will continue to be prohibited. Some more fundamental rights may be curtailed."

Sources said the new rules could be implemented today.

Talking to newsmen at his office, Mainul also called upon the political parties to be patient as the caretaker government wants to hold a 'credible election', and

not just an election.

The adviser also said intelligence agencies are now hunting for the masterminds behind militant attacks. "They are trying to track down those who were, and still are, behind the militant activities."

He went on, "Investigation into the funding of militants has not finished yet. Intelligence agencies are stepping up the probe to detect the sources of militant funding."

Turning to elections, he said, "Politicians want a quick election. But we didn't create the problems (delaying polls), they created them."

"Our main priority is to hold the elections. But we are doing this not only for the political parties

but also for the people. So we cannot hold elections without doing these things (electoral reforms)," Mainul stressed.

"The elections would be held after whatever time is required to reconstitute the Election Commission and prepare voter list and ID card."

Mainul said, "We want an election free from the influence of black money. Peaceful and black-money-free elections must have to be held also in future."

"We don't want to stay for long. If we do so, politicians as well as the people would start getting scared," he added.

Asked about acting Chief Election Commissioner Mahfuzur Rahman's comments reacting to his request for resignation, Mainul

said, "I asked them to resign to protect their dignity, it is disappointing to see them feel offended...I am holding a very responsible position, I do not want to see people who hold respectable posts disrespected."

On the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the law adviser said, "They wanted to work independently but unfortunately they couldn't work that way."

"The problem here is not the law but (lack of) courage," said Mainul. "Work can be done within the purview of law if there is courage."

He said, "An initiative has been taken to revitalise the ACC but the ACC itself has to file the cases."

National ID not on govt's wish list now

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has backed down from its earlier wish to prepare national identity (ID) cards, finding it would not be feasible and in the interest of holding free and fair elections.

But a decision on preparing voters' ID cards will be announced within a week, Adviser Tapan Chowdhury told reporters yesterday, adding that preparing national ID cards would not be viable.

Tapan had earlier told the media that national ID cards would help free and fair staging of elections even if it means pushing back the polls by six to eight months.

Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed had tasked Tapan with examining the viability of preparing each type of ID cards.

Sources at the Ministry of Science and Technology said Tapan held several meetings with relevant experts in the past few days. He met with a number of experts at his office yesterday, including Brac University Vice Chancellor Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury.

Tapan later told reporters that the council of advisers will decide on preparation of voters' ID cards after considering the time and money required for its implementation.

Ex-energy adviser's hasty deals

4 exploration licences given to unknown firms in his brief tenure

SHARIER KHAN

When the country's future was looking bleak due to political turmoil, the then energy adviser retired major general Ruhul Alam Chowdhury was issuing four licences to unknown companies for exploration of mineral resources between late December and early this month.

The level of activity was a marked contrast to that in the previous five years when only three exploration licences were issued -- one to Asia Energy in 2002, one to Australian Titanium Resources in 2003 for Cox's Bazar beach sand and the other to Hosaf in 2003 for Khalashpur coal zone.

In addition, Chowdhury had formed a committee to review awarding mining licence to Hosaf group for development of Khalashpur coal zone in Rangpur. One of the top beneficiaries of

Khaleda Zia government for two terms, Hosaf is a key player in the disastrous Barapukuria coal mine project.

Chowdhury spearheaded issuance of four licences to three companies -- Bangladeshi KDS Group, Australian Premier Minerals and British Carbon Mining.

The KDS group was given licence on January 11 for heavy metal exploration in 3,500 hectares of land in Mithapukur of Rangpur. This company is a major garments exporter but it does not have any experience in mining.

On December 24 last, Premier Mineral was awarded two licences for exploration of heavy mineral beach sand in Cox's Bazar. One licence allows it to explore 3,986 hectares of land in the beach and the other 4,000 hectares in shoal or island areas in the bay.

At the same time, Carbon Mining was given licence to

explore heavy metal in 4,000 hectares of land in Chilmari area of Kurigram.

Such licences are issued for one year. But typically they get renewal every year unless the explorers violate any rules or contractual obligations.

Licences are transferable. Heavy minerals from beach sand are used in electronic industries.

There has been no in-depth study of heavy metals in Chilmari or Mithapukur. Previous studies by the Geological Survey of Bangladesh (GSB) in the sixties and early nineties in Mithapukur found copper, zinc and some other metals.

"It is true that we need to explore these minerals. But exploring these are quite expensive, needing professional expertise. None of the licensed companies

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1,500 shanties on railway land removed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway yesterday knocked down more than 1,500 shanties at two spots in the capital while the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) bulldozed several illegal structures at the diplomatic zone.

In presence of the law enforcers, the railway workers tore down some 1,000 shanties from both sides of the railway tracks stretching from the Film Development Corporation (FDC) to Mohakhali bus terminal.

Another team of the railway authorities pulled down at least 500 shanties at Jurain. The same team also removed different temporary shops and other structures in front of the Gendaria Railway Station.

"The drive will continue for three months and by then we hope to recover all lands except where there are some cases filed," said Md Delwar Hossain, chief estate officer of Bangladesh Railway. More than one kilometre area has been cleaned up at Gendaria, he added.

The railway department also conducted eviction drives at Barokha in Sylhet, Ashuganj in

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PHOTO STAR

An elderly woman and her grandchildren with all their belongings sit near the rail tracks at Karwan Bazar in the capital yesterday after Rapid Action Battalion personnel demolished all shanties on both sides along the rail lines.

Attorney general resigns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali stepped down from the country's highest law officer's post yesterday in the wake of increasing demand for his resignation.

"I have resigned and sent my resignation letter to the president," Mohammad Ali confirmed when The Daily Star contacted him over telephone yesterday afternoon.

He, however, declined to disclose the reasons for his resignation.

When journalists tried to meet Mohammad Ali at his office immediately after his resignation to verify the news and its reasons, they were told that he would meet them in the evening.

But Mohammad Ali did not meet the reporters and sent an advocate instead around 5:00pm, who told newsmen that the attorney general resigned on personal ground.

Son of Bangladesh's first attorney general MH Khandakar, Mohammad Ali was appointed in the post on April 30, 2005 after the then attorney general, AF Hassan Arif, resigned. Mohammad Ali was appointed additional attorney

general on October 23, 2001.

The Awami League and its allies in the grand alliance and a section of lawyers demanded Mohammad Ali's resignation from the post of attorney general, alleging his bias towards the BNP-led four-party coalition.

The Attorney General's Office went into overdrive, speeding up or slowing down a few court orders for the Election Commission (EC) to capitalise on its dubious moves that suited the purpose of the BNP-led alliance.

Of late, judgment copies have either been delivered overnight from the court or delayed by weeks apparently to upset the execution process. Observers credit the erratic pace of the Attorney General's Office to its office bearers, most of who are directly involved with the BNP and Jamaat politics.

The Japanese boat purchase graft case against HM Ershad and the Supreme Court stay order freeing election candidates from the obligation of disclosing personal details to the EC are the two most recent controversial instances of this.

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3 outlaws killed in 'crossfire'

STAR REPORT

Two Janajuddha leaders were killed in "crossfire" in two separate incidents in Jhenidah and Kushtia yesterday while another extremist was killed in a similar incident in Madaripur Tuesday night.

Our Jhenidah correspondent reported that a cadre of outlawed Janajuddha, a faction of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-ML), was killed in an encounter with the members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday.

On tip-off, a team of Rab-6 arrested Janajuddha activist Jan-e-Alam Jana, 30, in his village at Batiadanga under Jhenidah Sadar the previous night.

Following his confessional statement, the Rab members took Jana to Narayanpur Hatathpara around 8:30pm yesterday to recover hidden firearms and arrest his accomplices, sources said.

Sensing Rab's presence, Jana's cohorts opened fire forcing the elite force to retaliate.

Rab claimed that Jana received bullets during the shootout while his cohorts managed to flee.

The law enforcers recovered a light gun and two rounds of bullets from the spot.

Jana was an accused in several cases including two for murder.

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Hawa Bhaban man Tinku arrested

Hunt on to catch Tarique's friend Mamun, Dipjol

STAR REPORT

The joint forces arrested former Jatiya Chhatra League president Jahangir Sattar Tinku, who is also close to Hawa Bhaban, and his business partner Abdur Razzak from their residences in the capital yesterday.

The law enforcers also arrested a Dhaka City Corporation (DCC)

ward commissioner from his Mohammadpur residence in Dhaka.

They recovered 29 firearms, 18 other weapons, 497 rounds of ammunition and 60 bombs during yesterday's countrywide drive.

Meanwhile, police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested around 2,200 people on various charges in the 24 hours preceding

10:00pm yesterday.

A police news release said about 2,043 persons were arrested on different charges in the 24 hours preceding 6:00am yesterday, 23 of whom were convicted fugitives, 1,054 had arrest warrants against them and 935 of whom were arrested on other charges.

The army held 174 people

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Innings begins for women

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

The status of women's sports in Bangladesh will reach a new level on Saturday when the first national tournament for women cricketers gets underway at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The first competitive meet will allow women cricket aspirants from throughout the country to show their skills and will help the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to form the country's first national women's

cricket team.

Women's cricket is a popular sport in several countries, with an increasingly high profile being given to women's teams. Pakistan's women cricketers are currently battling it out with their South African counterparts in five match one-day international series in South Africa.

About 140 women will be in action for ten participating teams in the inter-district tournament with Dhaka, Narayanganj, Khulna, Rajshahi,

Jahangirnagar University, Chittagong, Rangamati, Bhola, Bogra and Ansars taking part in the two-week long meet.

"The question of whether the women cricketers will play well or not is not relevant now. The main thing is at last Bangladeshi women are going to play cricket nationally and we are ready to extend our helping hands if needed," said Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar while welcoming the women cricketers.

"Women's cricket is not

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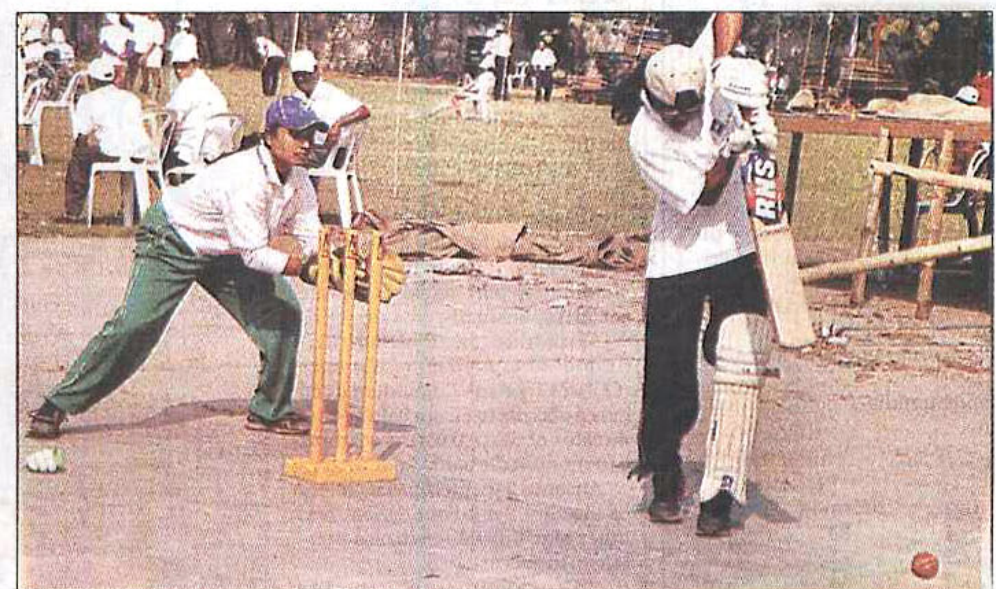


PHOTO STAR

Women cricketers practise at Dhanmondi Sports Complex in the capital yesterday ahead of the country's first cricket tournament for women beginning Saturday at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Iajuddin's photo removed from govt offices

UNB, Dhaka

The portraits of President Iajuddin Ahmed are being removed from government offices after the Cabinet Division yesterday cancelled its previous memo issued on November 2, 2006.

The memo of the Cabinet Division issued on November 2, 2006 on preserving and displaying the portrait of the president, who acted as the chief adviser to the non-party caretaker government, in the offices of the president, chief adviser and Speaker and all government, semi-government, autonomous organisations, government educational institutions and all Bangladesh missions abroad has been cancelled," said the order.

EU envoys for CG's early commitment to poll schedule

UNB, Dhaka

Members of a delegation of the European Union yesterday said an early public commitment by the caretaker government to a timetable for holding the stalled parliamentary elections is highly desirable, as the EU wants fair polls as early as possible.

They said the election in Bangladesh can be held as soon as the voter list is well updated and polling officials are sufficiently

considered by the people.

The remarks were made by the delegation during a meeting with Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury at his office.

The members of the delegation included the ambassadors of Germany, the UK, France, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, the European Union and the charge d'affaires of Denmark.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, EU current Presidency

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Another illegal VoIP firm busted

Tk 25cr equipment seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) seized Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) equipment worth around Tk 25 crore busting an unscrupulous phone service business at Azimpur in the capital yesterday.

With yesterday's recovery, the Rab has busted eight unauthorised VoIP business centres -- seven in the capital and one in the port city of Chittagong -- since December 26. The total seized items would be worth several hundred crore taka, Rab officials said.

Illegal VoIP operators use the equipment to generate or terminate overseas calls by first turning voice calls into data, routing it over the internet and then turning the data into voice again.

The method, also known as

internet telephony, bypasses BTB (Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board), the sole carrier for overseas calls in Bangladesh and thus gets away without paying a huge revenue.

Yesterday's raid was made on a tip-off that some people are operating VoIP equipment to illegally divert calls abroad by call origination and termination using BTB phones and mobile SIM (subscriber identity module) cards at Sheikh Shaheb Bazar in Azimpur.

A team of Rab intelligence raided the house minutes past midnight yesterday and found huge VoIP equipment in five rooms on the ground floor and third floor of the four-storeyed building.

The seized equipment include 37 GSM fixed terminals, 55 fixed

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