

Ershad quits party post

Hands rein to Anisul Islam for reforms in JP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad yesterday quitted as the party chairman and appointed Presidium Member Anisul Islam Mahmud to deputise for him till the council elects a new chief.

A former military strongman who ran the country for about nine years, he also declared that he would not contest the apex post in the next council.

The announcement coming at a press conference at his Baridhara residence has the potential to mark a watershed in the country's politics, meaning an end to his eventful years at the helm of the JP.

Ershad, who has been serving as the JP chairman since 1986, said the rest of the party structure however would remain unchanged. He said he has decided to stand down as the chairman to pave the way for reforms in the party.

His decision is the result of pressure from within and outside the JP to pass the baton of leadership of the third largest party in the country, said a source close to him.

Ershad however denied having been through any pressure or intimidation. He said, "Lately, the political trends have changed and



HM Ershad

my initiative is the acknowledgement of the new current of thoughts."

He said he has taken the decision as his leadership has been called into question and some people believe his chairmanship might get in the way of reforms. He added that similarly the leadership of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina has been questioned.

Addressing the crowded press conference, the former president said he will be in the post till the next council elects the new chairman. But in the interim he won't exercise the



Anisul Islam Mahmud

power and his role will be relegated to merely a ceremonial one.

He said he will always keep in touch with the JP as one of its guardians.

Replying to a query, he said he might reconsider his decision in the event of the council volunteering to re-elect him as the chairman.

Political analysts believe that the pro-reform groups in the BNP and AL might get a huge mileage out of the latest developments in the JP.

Ershad's announcement that followed his wife and JP Presidium Member Rawshan Ershad's proclaiming herself as the party chief

will give an added impetus to the efforts within both the parties to dislodge Khaleda and Hasina.

Rawshan in her 13-point reform proposal called on Ershad to take the post of chief adviser to the party in the light of the reform initiatives.

"I am serving as party chairman for 22 long years and now it's time for a new leadership. I have nothing to expect and nothing to gain," he observed.

"If I continue as the chairman, the reform initiative might hamper. So I'm appointing Anisul Islam Mahmud to front the party," he added.

"The council will choose the new leadership," Ershad said. He however lauded the armed forces for "helping the present government to bring in peace and stability".

Ershad said Anisul will work independently to draw up a set of reform proposals and those will be placed before the party presidium after the ban on indoor politics is lifted.

Earlier, Anisul was appointed the chief of JP reforms committee.

REACTIONS IN RANGPUR
Our correspondent from Rangpur reports: Leaders and

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Falu sent to jail after 12 days on remand

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent former BNP lawmaker Mossaddak Ali Falu to jail custody on completion of his 12 days on remand, in four phases, in connection with two cases filed against him for misappropriating government relief materials.

Magistrate Delwara Begum passed the order after the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) produced Falu before her court on completion of his five-day remand in a case filed with Ashulia Police Station.

In yesterday's forwarding report, the investigation officer (IO) of the case Sheikh Abdus Salam said Falu gave important information regarding misappropriation of government relief materials. So, he needs to be kept in jail custody until the investigation is complete, the IO added.

The army-led joint forces seized government relief materials at Falu's factory in Savar on February 9. Ashulia police filed the case against Falu and several other unnamed officials and employees of the factory.

Falu, political secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia and owner of private satellite

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Nothing to take place beyond BNP constitution

Says Khaleda, will place her reform proposals at council

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday asserted that reforms within the party will not be implemented according to any individual's wish but through a democratically held party council where everyone will have their say.

"BNP is not an underground party, so nothing will be done here secretly...The reforms will not be

implemented according to anybody's whim," Khaleda told reporters during her visit to ailing BNP Treasurer Shah Alam at his Shyamoli residence.

Asked about the preparations of a section of her party leaders to hold party council amid the state of emergency, she said, "Everyone wants reform but it will have to be placed before the party council according to the party constitution

and everybody must accept the councillors' decision."

Earlier around 5:00pm, Khaleda went to an ophthalmologist for check-up at a clinic at Banani but law enforcers prevented her from talking to the media.

Police scuffled with journalists and prevented television camera crew taking shots.

From the clinic Khaleda went to

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Date for announcing polls in 15 days

Pilot voter listing project ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said a complete roadmap for holding the next parliamentary election with a specific timeframe for preparing a voter list with photographs and a date for announcing

the election schedule will be made publicly by July 15.

"The election will be held in 2008. But we have yet to announce anything specific. We will announce a complete roadmap charting the path to the ninth parliamentary polls," the CEC said

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Ex-Jamaat MP Taher sued again

UNB, Comilla

Two more cases have been filed against detained former Jamaat lawmaker Abdullah Mohammd Taher and his brother on charges of misappropriating public funds allocated against different projects.

Of the cases, one was filed by Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mir Khairul Alam, while the other by

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PHOTO: STAR

Fishermen at Nondipara in the capital fix their fishing nets as recent downpours have left the low-lying areas of the city under waist-deep water.

Razzak comes up with his own reform plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League's (AL) reformist Presidium Member Abdur Razzak yesterday announced a set of reform proposals including a provision for barring the party president and the general secretary from holding the posts for more than two terms in a row.

Another Presidium Member Motia Chowdhury however downplayed the importance of the proposal announced by Razzak, saying what Razzak had announced cannot be considered as a reform proposal, rather it is a political essay elaborating the political thoughts of a party member.

Motia also termed the proposal as 'imposed' and said AL leaders and activists will not accept any reform imposed on them from above. "This is an attempt to reform by diktats," she said.

Razzak's proposal came following a number of informal reform proposals from other senior AL

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Over 400 RMG units yet to fix minimum wage as deadline ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 400 garment units are yet to fix minimum monthly wage for their workers though the time limit for it ended yesterday, a survey of the garment manufacturers and exporters association has found.

The government last year fixed the minimum wage at Tk 1662.50 during a tripartite deal involving the government, the owners and the workers.

After the agreement, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in May this year identified 1,197 out of 4,600 garment factories, which were not paying the minimum wages.

The BGMEA then revisited the factories last month and found 757 out of the 1,197 factories fixed minimum wages for the workers as per the deal.

Among the rest units, 419 units did not comply with the agreement and the other 21 factories were closed down last month, the study

found.

"The units will implement the new pay scale from this month," hoped BGMEA President Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury Parvez.

He said the BGMEA would start monitoring this week whether the units introduce the new pay scale.

"We will issue show cause notices against the factories which will not implement the minimum wages by this time," said the BGMEA president.

Parvez also urged the factory owners to implement the wage board immediately as he said there is no alternative of introducing the new wages.

Different workers' unions, however, expressed their discontent yesterday, as all the garment units did not implement the new pay scale.

They also urged the government to take action against the factory owners who are yet to implement the minimum wages.

Budget has measures to contain price hike, scopes for job creation

Says finance adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Refuting criticisms of the budget for fiscal year 2007-08, Finance and Planning Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam yesterday said the budget has measures to keep prices of essentials at a tolerable level and create scope for employment.

The government has taken measures like tax exemption on importing food items, allocation of Tk 350 crore for agriculture research and alternative marketing to prevent price hike, the finance adviser said at a post-budget press conference at the National Economic Council.

As part of the government's steps, Bangladesh Rifles is working and the government is planning to introduce more mechanism to keep the prices of essentials at a tolerable level, he said.

Responding to suggestions from different stakeholders tariff

structure has been changed in some cases, he said.

He said despite slight reduction of the profit by the local producers, they will not be losers as a whole and the new tariff structure will not discourage the investors.

Replying to a query about the increase of salary of government officials, the adviser said lack of moral values rather than insolvency leads one to become corrupt.

Admitting huge gap between the salaries in private and government sectors, he said the government will consider formulating permanent pay commission in future.

When journalists asked him about low response to the NBR's offer to whiten undisclosed money, the adviser said it will be wrong to think that one will fall into a trap by paying tax.

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