

CA tells nation

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of voters' list with photos, the government will extend all-out cooperation to the Election Commission (EC) in holding the polls at the quickest," Fakhruddin said in his address to the nation over the state-owned radio and television.

The chief adviser also announced the end of the ban on indoor politics from today to facilitate political parties' dialogue with the EC preparatory to the next polls.

He hoped all parties would participate in the discussions with the Election Commission that will finalise its draft on reform in consultations with political parties.

"Our endeavour will continue to set up a solid foundation of democracy and good governance and create condition free from corruption and muscle power so our future journey along the path of building a progressive and democratic society is not impeded."

Fakhruddin said the objective of his government is not only to hold a fair election but also to build a sustainable democracy. "Our final goal is to make democracy sustainable forever as democracy is the best way for people's emancipation and progress."

He said a section of corrupt persons looted thousands of crores of money under their names or pseudonyms using power and influence.

"Although general people are to bear the burden of this, only a handful of people enjoyed its benefit. Therefore, the government has strengthened the Anti-Corruption Commission to take effective steps to stop corruption," he said.

The chief adviser said different persons returned Tk 820 crore earned through corruption and dishonesty to government exchequer following its coordinated efforts.

However, Fakhruddin made it clear that the National Anti-corruption Task Force would not publish any new list of suspected corrupt after this month.

He said different government agencies would carry on anti-corruption drives in accordance with rules and regulations.

"You must admit that it is not possible for the government alone to achieve final success in curbing corruption," said Fakhruddin, stressing the practice of moral values in all spheres and honest desire at personal, family, social and political levels to build a corruption-free society.

On recent student protest on the Dhaka University campus that led the government to impose curfew and shut down universities and colleges in divisional headquarters, the chief adviser lamented that it was an unfortunate incident.

He said the police filed cases against 36 suspects, including four teachers and 14 students of Dhaka University in this connection.

Fakhruddin assured that no other persons would be sued or harassed in connection with the campus incidents and final report would be given by pardoning others, including thousands of anonymous people against whom police filed FIR.

In his 24-minute speech the chief adviser listed his government's various measures to tackle national issues, including floods, price-hike, power deficit, trade and economy.

He said the present government assumed office for a limited period of time and is to take some harsh and corrective steps on short-term basis to put the nation on the right track.

"I would like to assure you that we are committed to performing the tasks vested in us properly until the holding of the election within the declared timeframe, December 2008," said the head of the caretaker government.

Turning to prices of essentials, he mentioned his government's various steps. The government action includes the process of importing 900,000 tonnes of food-grain during the current fiscal year under government initiative, which remains at the final stage.

Open Market Sale (OMS) of rice will begin today under which rice will be sold at Tk 19 a kg against the import cost of Tk 25, Fakhruddin said.

Besides, he added, private-sector import of rice and wheat has increased in last two months and opening of letter of credit (LC) to import food items has already increased following reduction in interest rate on bank loans for importing essential items.

On recent floods in the country, the chief adviser said one crore people of 39 districts and 256 upazilas were affected and property worth thousands of crores of taka was damaged. The government has taken a number of steps to tackle the floods and for relief and rehabilitation of the flood victims.

He said people of various classes and professions have come forward in aid of the flood-hit people and donated money to the Chief Adviser's Relief and Welfare Fund.

So far, nearly Tk 65 crore has come as donation of which Tk 52 crore has already been distributed in field levels as per demand and requirement of the flood-affected districts.

He said coordination committees at districts and upazila levels, comprising government, private and NGO sectors, are carrying out efforts to tackle the post-flood situation.

The members of the Armed Forces in aid of civil administration are playing an important role in relief and rehabilitation activities in every area."

Apart from food, clothes and cash assistance, he mentioned, CI sheets

and house-building grants are being distributed to the flood-affected people so they could start life anew.

Rehabilitation activities have been strengthened in many areas of the country shortly after the receding of floodwater as well as a massive programme has been taken giving highest priority to distribution of seeds, fertiliser and agricultural loans to the farmers.

"Our courageous and hardworking farmer community has already started cultivation with fresh zeal to make up for the losses. Cultivation process in many districts is at the stage of completion," Fakhruddin said.

Regarding fresh floods, he said the government is firmly determined to face the new situation by all possible means.

On power situation, he said generation of electricity had not increased in the past although the demand went high.

The present government has taken short, mid and long-term planning to meet the growing demand for electricity.

The average power production was 2,800 MW in last January whereas now 3,600 MW electricity is being produced daily, he said.

An additional 200 MW electricity would be generated in December this year following the government's steps and it hopes that more 370 MW power will be generated by next June, the head of the caretaker government mentioned.

Lauding the Bangladesh Armed Forces as professional, Fakhruddin said they have made commendable contributions at different times during the need of the nation, including in improving law and order situation, relief and disaster management, various development activities and in the UN peacekeeping missions abroad.

Presently, he noted, the armed forces are providing significant assistance to the present government in curbing serious crimes, terrorism and corruption as well as in relief and rehabilitation operation for flood victims.

The chief adviser had a word on hawker business, the means of earning of the hawkers, which was hampered during eviction drives. He said the affected hawkers have been rehabilitated in various places of the capital by giving opportunity to run their small business. Presently, the hawkers of Dhaka city are getting scope for running their trade in new places besides the previously fixed areas.

As business picks up during Ramadan and there is a buying binge before the holy Eid festival, he said the government would take necessary steps so that people can go shopping in a happy mood during the upcoming month of fasting and religious festival.

The government will try to ensure supply of uninterrupted electricity to shopping malls and shopping stores as well as strengthen the security system.

About jute mills, the CA said the government has taken a work plan to reduce the losses the state-owned jute mills have incurred since independence due to inefficiencies.

"Attention has been given so that government-owned 18 jute mills can be operated properly. For the first time, the government disbursed funds for purchasing raw jute in July during jute season," he said.

Fakhruddin also stated that the process of paying arrears of workers of the four closed jute mills has been started soon after closure of those mills and the workers won't have to wait for long, as in the past, to receive their benefits.

He said his government has taken decision in principle to operate the closed jute mills by private sector on the basis of short-term lease. Under such arrangements two mills in Chittagong already are in operation.

Barisal robber

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Habul's confessional statement, taking him along with them around 2:30am to recover hidden firearms.

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ANH Akhter

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director of the ACC and also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka, showing 31 people as prosecution witnesses.

The IO prayed for issuance of arrest warrant against Nazneen. She has been absconding since the case was filed against the couple.

In the charge sheet, the IO mentioned that the charges brought against the two were primarily proved and they should be brought under trial.

On May 31, ACC Assistant Director Mahbulul Alam lodged the case against Akhter and his wife with Uttara Police Station for concealing information of wealth worth over Tk 2.23 crore in the statement submitted to the ACC earlier.

Akhter was arrested on February 4 on the ACC premises when he went there to submit his wealth statement. His name was on the first government list of 50 corruption suspects.

Koko

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Dr Manzoor said Koko was given inhaler since he has been suffering from bronchitis.

He said they are yet to get the pathological test reports. The board will meet after getting the reports.

"So at this stage, it is not possible to say what diseases inflicted him," he added.

Khaleda denies

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Azam and Sanaullah Miah, the other lawyer for Khaleda, met the detained BNP chief at the sub-jail yesterday.

Azam entered the sub-jail at 3.30pm and came out at 5:00pm while Sanaullah stepped in at 5:00pm and emerged after about an hour.

Khaleda said Hannan Shah and Khandaker Delwar Hossain are the coordinator and the secretary general of BNP and urged her party colleagues to work as per the guidance of the two leaders.

"Hannan Shah and Khandaker Delwar Hossain-led party is the mainstream BNP," Khaleda said as quoted by her lawyer.

Azam said Khaleda's physical condition is good.

2 JMB men

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Comilla -- were teachers at Sengram Dakhi Madrasa in Sylhet's Jaipur upazila. They have already been given 10-year jail terms in another blast-related case on July 10. Both of them are now in jail.

The court reached the judgment after examining the statements of 24 prosecution witnesses.

A total of 10 cases were filed following a series of blasts that rocked the city on August 17 two years back.

Fisheries sector

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sustainable fish resource management is urgently required to improve the conditions of the fishermen, he said regretting that implementation of the suggestions never saw the light of day.

The present government, as part of its ongoing reform initiatives, is seriously considering implementing the suggestions made in the strategy paper and bringing changes in the leasing process, Dutta added.

He also said to completely reform the fisheries sector, suggestions made on strategy studies titled Aquaculture Extension Strategy, Inland Capture Fisheries Strategy, Marine Sector Strategy and Shrimp Strategy will be implemented gradually.

The fisheries and livestock ministry recently requested land ministry to relax monetary requirements so that a larger number of fishermen can successfully take part in the leasing process of the water bodies.

For the same reason, the ministry also requested the National Board of Revenue to exempt all tax and VAT (Value Added Tax) accrued on the value of a lease.

Furthermore, following the Inland Capture Fisheries Strategy, the government is likely to lease out the water bodies to community-based fishery management organisations or cooperatives comprising fishermen only.

For better sustainability, the government also has plans to spend the funds collected from the lease on protection and maintenance of the water bodies.

During 2006-07 fiscal year, around 24.41 lakh tonnes of fish were produced in the country while around 23.29 lakh tonnes of fish were produced during the previous 2005-06 fiscal.

The land ministry each year leases out around 30 lakh hectares of water bodies to the highest bidders through open tenders, enriching the exchequer with around Tk 15 crore.

Habul lost all the fingers of his left hand in 1996 in a blast while making bombs.

Indoor politics relaxed

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The present EC, led by ATM Shamsul Huda, was reconstituted on February 4, and soon after it started preparing a draft proposal for massive electoral reforms, which was disclosed to the people on April 5 with an announcement that the commission would finalise the proposal following consultations with the political parties.

The poll chief at a meeting with the law adviser on April 4 first asked the meetings at its central office, hotels, restaurants, auditoriums, and residences of its members, but it will have to inform the Dhaka Metropolitan Police in advance about the meetings.

Following the notification, offices of the political parties, which had been locked since the imposition of the ban on indoor politics on March 8, may be reopened.

The political parties however may hold the meetings only in the capital as the ban on indoor politics remains in the rest of the country, the sources added.

According to the notification, which was issued amending a provision of the Emergency Power Rules, a maximum of 50 leaders may meet at a time.

"If the number of attendees at a meeting is to exceed 50, the party will have to take prior permission from the home ministry," a source in the ministry told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

The official said a political party may also hold its council to bring reforms to itself with prior permission from the home ministry.

According to the Emergency Power Rules, those who will violate the restrictions will be punished with prison terms of two years to five years and fines.

Indoor politics was allowed even after the declaration of the state of emergency on January 11, but the government on March 8 imposed a total ban on politics including indoor politics on March 8 saying the political parties had been abusing the limited political freedom.

CA's address hailed

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Brig Gen (retd) ASM Hannan Shah, a pro-Khaleda leader in the BNP, said they welcome the decision if it is unconditional. He thanked Fakhruddin for forgiving the students and those who were involved in the recent unrest at Dhaka University.

"As the ban on indoor politics has been withdrawn, I am asking my party leaders and workers across the country to reopen [party] offices to hold meetings," Hannan Shah told The Daily Star adding that he has already discussed the issue with Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain.

AL Organising Secretary Mahmudur Rahman Manna said the government has taken the right decision by allowing politics to take its own course. "I welcome the decision. We will sit soon and talk about the overall situation," the AL leader told The Daily Star.

Welcoming the chief adviser's speech, Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon said they hope the announcement would be implemented fully and there would be no further condition attached to it.

Menon, a key leader of the AL-led 14-party coalition, said they would sit at party forum to discuss the proposed electoral reforms. "We will also meet as the 11-party coalition and 14-party coalition over the matter," he added.

JP acting chairman Anisul Islam Mahmud said the chief adviser's decision would help the EC have fruitful talks with the political parties. "Lifting of the ban would create a friendly environment and help prepare a flawless voter list," he noted.

He told The Daily Star that they would meet to discuss different matters.

Rain-fed rivers

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all major rivers of the Brahmaputra-Jamuna basin have witnessed sharp rise while a rising trend was observed in all the rivers of the Ganges-Padma and Meghna basins.

Meanwhile, India Meteorological Department forecasts that isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely in next 24 hours over Indian states of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim.

The fisheries and livestock ministry recently requested land ministry to relax monetary requirements so that a larger number of fishermen can successfully take part in the leasing process of the water bodies.

For the same reason, the ministry also requested the National Board of Revenue to exempt all tax and VAT (Value Added Tax) accrued on the value of a lease.

BSF said, over 1.5 lakh people of 160 char villages of Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Rangpur, Jamalpur, Bogra, Sirajganj and Pabna were marooned again due to the worsening flood situation.