

Election preparation

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electoral roadmap, schedule for holding the stalled ninth parliamentary polls will be declared any time between October and November to hold the polls in December.

Satisfied by the progress of the preparation of the voter list with photographs, the CEC on several occasions were said the parliamentary polls likely to be held earlier than the timeframe announced in the electoral

roadmap.

Hope against past bitter experiences

The EC's experience of holding electoral reform talks with the political parties was rather disappointing because it got stuck in a court case for inviting one faction of BNP to the talk.

After it was reconstituted on February 4, the EC disclosed a set of proposals for

reforms in electoral laws and rules on April 5 with a timeframe to complete those by August through holding talks with political parties by July.

The CEC met the law adviser on April 4 and asked the government to lift the ban on indoor politics allowing it to hold electoral reform talks with the political parties. But the caretaker government did not respond to the EC's plan promptly.

After April 5, the EC met the chief adviser and discussed the electoral reform issues. On government assurance, the EC again announced a comprehensive plan for polls on July 16, including a deadline for completing the electoral reform talks and enactment of all legal amendments.

After consulting with the government, at the fag end of August it announced the schedules for holding talks with political parties from September 12, hoping that the ban on indoor politics two weeks before the talks begin.

The government relaxed the restrictions on indoor politics on September 10 only in Dhaka and the talks began. However, the EC could not complete the talks by the November deadline as controversy arose over inviting the BNP to the talks. The EC still does not know when it can sit with BNP as the issue is pending at the court.

The EC deadline for enacting all legal amendments by February has thus become uncertain. The commission itself is now saying it will be done in March.

Amid this situation, the EC is going to ask the government at any time to relax the state of emergency in five divisional headquarters for

holding the polls to the city corporations in the first quarter of this year.

Once the electoral reform is completed by March, the EC will ask the political parties intending to contest the next parliamentary polls to get registered with it by June. And for this, the government will have to allow political activities across the country so that the parties can hold councils to bring changes in their constitutions and select new committees to meet the registration criteria set by the EC.

Under the circumstances, nobody forecasts clearly about the future political situation, but the caretaker government firmly stated that the stalled parliamentary polls would be held according to the roadmap.

The caretaker government's recent decision to separate the EC Secretariat from the control of the prime minister's office, now the office of the chief adviser, has been lauded by all.

People want to see more positive steps from the caretaker regime, as they want to keep confidence in the regime's pledges for returning to a democratic rule in the country within the roadmap.

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SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



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Status of electoral law reform



গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশের
সংবিধান

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
আইন, বিচার ও সংসদ বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
[১৯৯৮ সালের ৩১শে ডিসেম্বর পর্যন্ত সংশোধিত]

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election to reserved seats.

The ninth dialogue was held with JP (Ershad) on November 1, 2007. The proposal for banning student fronts and expatriate units of the political parties was supported by it. They, however, opposed the 'no vote' option on the ballot paper and deposit of Tk. 5,00,000/- for each additional constituency and introduction of transparent ballot boxes.

The tenth dialogue was held with the Awami League on November 4, 2007. This party supported the condition of EC for party registration of having 33 percent women representation in party committees. They also supported the proposal of EC for disbanding student fronts, and opposed the proposal for replacement of the Representation of the People Order, 1972. They, however, suggested amendments to the existing Order wherever necessary. They also opposed the proposal for imposing a ban on running overseas party units and inclusion of 'no vote' option in the ballot paper. They further opposed the proposal for vesting the authority in EC for cancellation of party registration.

The eleventh dialogue was held with CPB on November 25, 2007. They supported the proposal for disbanding student front and 'no vote' option in the ballot paper. They, however, opposed the EC's proposal for not allowing a candidate to contest election in more than 3 constituencies.

The twelfth dialogue was held with the Workers' Party on November 27, 2007. The party supported most of the Commission's proposals for reform, but opposed the plan for holding election to local bodies before the parliamentary election.

The thirteenth dialogue was held with the Samyabadi Dal on November 29, 2007. They suggested that the political party which propagated communalism and used reli-

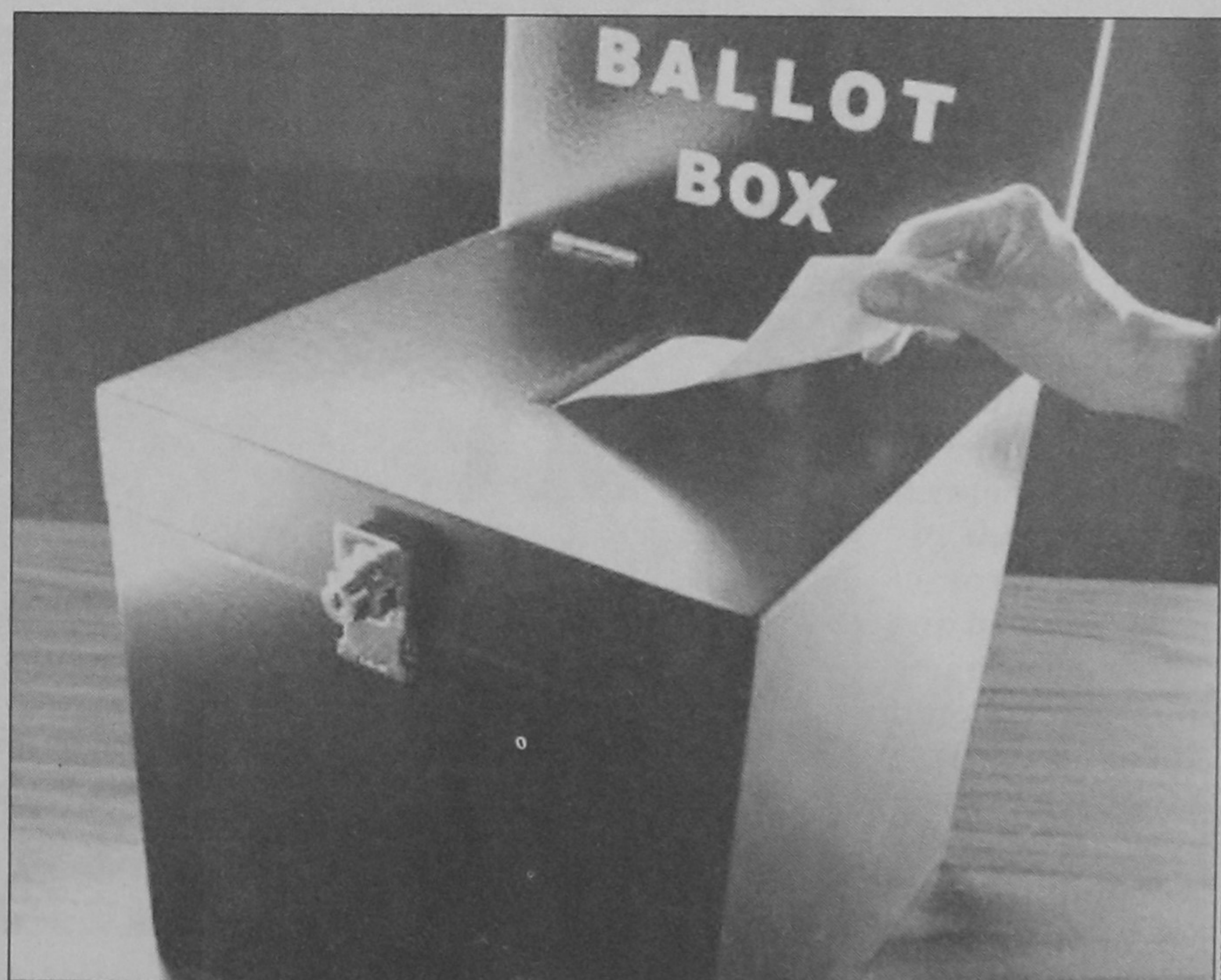


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gion in politics should not be registered.

The fourteenth dialogue was held with Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh on December 2, 2007. They demanded, amongst others, the introduction of the transparent ballot boxes and reduction of number of polling stations.

The fifteenth dialogue was held with the Liberal Democratic Party on December 11, 2007. They demanded cancellation of the existing system of allocation of symbols, limiting the time of polls campaign, ban on participation in the election of anti-liberation forces, registration and bachelor degree for contesting election to Parliament.

The Commission has not been

able to hold a dialogue as yet with the representatives of the BNP due to the injunction obtained from the court by the BNP faction led by Khandaker Delwar. Because of this, the electoral reform proposal is stuck. Even after the completion of the dialogue with BNP, it seems, the Commission may have to hold a bigger dialogue with the leaders of all important political parties to reconcile the differences which of course will be a difficult task.

Even after arriving at consensus with the political parties on some major issues, the Commission will have to send the draft of the law containing proposals for the reform to the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs for vetting.

Thereafter, it has to be sent to the Council of Advisors of the Caretaker Government for clearance as a matter of practice and lastly to the President for enactment of a law in the form of Ordinance. It will thus be seen that the Commission is still to travel a long way for getting the law enacted on the basis of proposals for the reform of the electoral law.

Burhanuddin Ahmed is the Executive Director of FEMA and held the post of the Deputy Secretary (Elections) in the Election Commission from 1979 to 1992. The contents of this article represent his personal views and have no bearing whatsoever with his present official position.