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JS polls in 3rd week of Dec

CA says in his address to nation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed last night announced that the long-stalled ninth parliamentary election would be held in the third week of December.

Addressing the nation, he also said the government would either suspend or relax relevant provisions of the emergency power rules to create an environment congenial to electioneering.

Besides, it would open a formal dialogue with the political parties on May 22, and for that his office would start sending out invitations today.

In the 26-minute speech broadcast on radio and television, Fakhruddin declared withdrawal of the nationwide ban on indoor politics with effect from today. He said the decision has been taken to help the political parties gear up for the election.

"I hope this will dispel all questions and doubts over the general election," he said referring to the announcements in his address.

"The government is resolved to do everything necessary to make the election free, fair and meaningful," he said adding that the provisions of the emergency rules pertaining to election would be relaxed or suspended at an appropriate time.

"It is essential to formulate a national charter through consensus



among the government, political parties and representatives of people from all walks of life. A proper and sustainable election infrastructure will be put in place through this charter," Fakhruddin said.

He stressed the need for an agreement among the organisations to shun negative and destructive politics. "Hartal, blockade and violent demonstrations must come to an end once and for all. The nation does not want to see anarchy in the name of political activities in future."

A consensus should be reached before the election also on making parliament effective, observed the chief adviser, adding that a proposal to that end has already been discussed.

"It must be ensured that no-one would reject the election results and boycott parliament," he said expressing hope that the dialogue

- Suspension/relaxation of related provisions of EPR
- Dialogue with parties to begin May 22
- Indoor politics allowed countrywide
- A National Charter to be formulated
- Consensus before polls for making JS effective
- Flunky politics should end to ensure quality
- Hartal, blockade, violent demo should end

would attach due importance to the issue.

He was scathing about the culture of servility that enshrouds front organisations of the political parties.

He said a qualitative change in politics is a must. "We will have to understand these significant issues and work out solutions through the dialogue."

FULL TEXT OF ADDRESS ON PAGE 2

It is everyone's duty to make the dialogue successful, he continued. "There is no scope for failure. The entire nation is united in terms of aspirations and that's where lies our main strength."

Hoping that the political parties will join the talks with an open mind, he said: "I can assure that the government does not have any pre-fixed agenda (for the talks)."

In his speech, Fakhruddin also outlined steps and achievements of the military-backed government since taking over on January 12 last year.

He claimed his administration has already achieved considerable success in its measures to do away with the use of black money and muscle power, contain corruption and establish the rule of law—all to make the elections truly free and fair.

He said the election would be held any day in the third week of December and a specific date would be set up by the Election Commission (EC) later.

He said polls to local government bodies are crucial to strengthening those, and the EC has already announced it would hold election to some municipalities and city corporations before

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Govt asked to file regular leave to appeal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday asked the government to file a regular leave to appeal petition with it by May 15 against the High Court (HC) order staying operation of the Supreme Judicial Commission.

The commission was constituted recently for appointment of SC and HC judges.

Following a government petition seeking a stay on the HC order, Chamber Judge of the SC Justice MA Matin referred the matter for

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Emergency should go for holding credible polls

Says UK envoy

UNB, Dhaka

Outgoing British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury yesterday said the state of emergency should be lifted to the maximum possible extent for free, fair and credible elections in Bangladesh.

Talking to reporters after making a farewell call on Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Choudhury, he hoped that Bangladesh would incredibly have

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Politics freed further

Govt lets parties resume activities from today for polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government yesterday relaxed the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) once again, allowing political parties to resume their organisational activities, on a limited scale, all over the country from today.

According to a gazette notification issued by the home ministry yesterday, political parties from today may hold meetings of their forums to discuss only organisational affairs and preparations for the upcoming parliamentary election.

"No discussion can be held or decision can be taken on other issues," said a home ministry source quoting from the government notification.

Offices of all political parties at all levels are likely to start buzzing again with their leaders and workers after over a year's hiatus following a nationwide ban on 'indoor politics' slapped by the military backed caretaker government on March 8 of last year, almost two months into the declaration of the state of emergency on January 11.

The government however

allowed 'indoor politics' again, albeit only in the capital, from September 10 of last year with a set of conditions attached.

The earlier relaxation of the emergency regime allowed political parties to hold meetings of their forums only to discuss organisational affairs, election preparations, and the Election Commission's (EC) electoral reform proposals, only within the capital.

After getting directives from the military backed caretaker government, the home ministry yesterday

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Most parties unhappy over CA's address

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of major political parties, with the lone exception of pro-Saifur faction in BNP, expressed their disappointments over the chief adviser's (CA) address to the nation, which they believe 'failed to reflect the hopes and aspirations of the nation'.

Pro-Khaleida faction of BNP and Awami League (AL) expressed unequivocal dissatisfaction as the address gave 'no indication of lifting the state of emergency' and

release of the two detained former premiers, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia.

"The address of the chief adviser has disappointed the whole nation," said AL Acting President Zillur Rahman to journalists in his instant reaction. AL presidium members Tofail Ahmed and Matia Chowdhury also expressed similar reactions.

AL will give its formal reaction today after a meeting of the party's central working committee.

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Politicos start opening offices countrywide with caution

STAR REPORT

Leaders and workers of political parties across the country started gathering at party offices with cautious enthusiasm yesterday as the news of nationwide lifting of the ban on indoor politics spread.

Some jubilant political leaders however were seen hugging each other and exchanging sweets.

Leaders of BNP and Awami

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Over 8,500 killed as quake rocks China

900 students trapped under rubble of their school; PM calls it a 'major disaster'

AFP, AP, Beijing

A massive earthquake rocked southwest China yesterday killing thousands of people and flattening schools and homes in a powerful tremor that was felt across a swathe of southeast Asia.

A total of 8,533 people have died in China's Sichuan province after a powerful earthquake struck there

on Monday, the official Xinhua news agency said, citing the local government.

The news agency gave the figure in a brief dispatch, shortly after citing national relief headquarters as saying more than 7,600 people had been confirmed killed in Sichuan.

The official Xinhua News Agency said 80 percent of the buildings had

collapsed in Beichuan county in Sichuan province after the 7.8-magnitude quake.

Casualties were also reported in other provinces close to Sichuan, Xinhua said.

A further 10,000 people were injured in the county, where officials said 80 percent of buildings had collapsed.

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GATCO CASE ACC likely to submit charge sheet today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is likely to submit the charge sheet in the graft case involving Gatco today by showing 12 persons including six former ministers, so far indicted in the case and not arrested yet, as fugitive.

The persons who have already been detained and are in jail in connection with other cases will also be shown arrested in connection with the case.

Out of the 24 accused in the case, 12 persons including prime accused former premier Khleda Zia and her younger son Arafat Rahman Koko are now in jail while the rest are not arrested yet.

The persons not arrested yet

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Concern over bid to dictate media

Editors, senior journo exchange experiences

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Editors of print and electronic media and senior journalists yesterday expressed concern over the increasing pressure on the media regarding freedom of expression under the state of emergency, reports BBC Bangla Service.

"The editors and senior journalists said it is tough to work independently under the state of emergency," said the BBC report broadcast at 7:30pm yesterday.

"The editors of different newspapers told a joint meeting that the situation has become intolerable and it must be resisted untidely," reported BBC without mentioning the meeting place.

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Chinese rescuers search for survivors at one of the two primary schools that toppled killing many schoolchildren yesterday after an earthquake measuring 7.8 rocked Sichuan province.

PHOTO: AFP

260MW RENTAL POWER

Govt to miss June deadline as inept bidders chosen

SHARIER KHAN

The caretaker government's bid to have 260 megawatt (MW) of rental power before June is missing the deadline due to selection of bidders who do not qualify for such fast-track projects.

On January 15, the Power Development Board (PDB) signed six rental power deals totalling 220MW with local Energy Prima, Venture Energy Resources and US company Alstom and on January 28, signed another deal for 40MW rental power with British Aggreko.

As per the agreements, six of these power projects are supposed

to start power generation from May 15 and the seventh from May 28. Now it appears that all of the first six power schemes are missing their deadline. The progress of the seventh power deal is also uncertain.

A shell company of Hosaf Group, Energy Prima, never had any experience in building any power stations including any rental power schemes, which are different from conventional ones. Energy Prima was awarded four out of six projects, even though it did not produce documents, as required, showing it had experience in at least 20MW rental power

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