

Most parties

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"We expected that the chief adviser would say something concrete about the release of Sheikh Hasina which is a demand of the people and of all political parties," Zillur said.

He said the emergency was not lifted frustrating the nation 'even more'. He doubted the effectiveness of the countrywide withdrawal of the ban on 'indoor politics' since the relaxation is still quite conditional.

"We have been hearing about the parliamentary election by December for long now, there was nothing new regarding it in his address."

Zillur went on to say that the CA's address gave no direction regarding the country's prevailing crises including price spiral of essentials. "His speech also did not include anything about trials of war criminals and their participation in polls," the AL acting chief said adding, "There was nothing in his address except use of some words."

Rejecting the CA's address, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, de facto chief executive of pro-Khaledda faction of BNP also the chairperson appointed secretary general of the party, said the speech failed to reflect the desires of the people.

Regarding the CA's comment on forming a national charter, he said only an elected parliament may do it.

He condemned the conditional lifting of the ban on 'indoor politics', saying the move proves that the government is trying to implement its blueprint.

Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah of the BNP faction said the address brought no good news for political parties as the CA did not mention anything about the release of Khaledda Zia and lifting of the emergency.

Meanwhile, terming the CA's speech 'timely' and 'reflecting hope', Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, acting secretary general of Saifur loyalists in BNP, said the speech removed all public confusion about the upcoming election.

He, however, said they hoped that the CA would hint at lifting of the state of emergency. "The emergency should be lifted at least two weeks ahead of the election, so the election campaigns may be lively."

The leader of Saifur loyalists also said the CA talked about a qualitative change in politics, but initiatives of political parties is a must for implementing it, and the people hope that the parties will take necessary steps.

About the upcoming formal dialogues between the government and political parties, scheduled to begin on May 22, he said the dialogues are going to be very crucial for the country, and that is why they hope the parties will participate in it keeping partnership behind.

Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) Acting Chairman Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud in his reaction said "The speech failed to reflect the desires and expectations of the people."

"There was nothing new in the chief adviser's speech, it's a traditional one," the JP acting chairman said adding that the speech failed to dispel confusions about many things including the poll date and withdrawal of the emergency.

"There was nothing about economic matters, especially price hikes of essentials, in the speech," he added.

JP Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader said the CA's speech will end up creating more public confusions and disappointments.

Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed in his reaction said the

speech had no reflection of the government's good will regarding the upcoming dialogues and for holding a credible election.

"It is said that nothing has been said about the release of Hasina and Khaledda and about the false charges brought against the political leaders," added the Jamaat leader.

Expressing similar views, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said the CA did not speak about withdrawal of the state of emergency in a bid to continue the government's control over the upcoming election by holding it under the emergency. But no election will be successful if it is held under an emergency, Menon, a key leader in AL-led 14-party coalition said.

General Secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Mujahidul Islam Selim said there was nothing new in the CA's address to the nation. "The chief adviser's talk about a national charter is irrational and hints at a deep plot," he said.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu in his reaction said the chief adviser failed to build any effective public confidence through his speech.

Court to rule

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proof against her.

They also described to the media the observations that the former premier made while talking to them yesterday.

Hasina sought to alert her party colleagues to, what she said, a conspiracy against rule of law.

"Awami League has a long experience in mass movement. The senior leaders will work out how the movement should be steered home," Hasina said.

She then added, "I will take part in the election and win it if it's held freely and fairly."

The lawyers representing her took seven sittings to complete their arguments on the discharge petition that began on April 3. Before that, the prosecution presented their points.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station on September 2 last year.

The other accused are former Power Development Board (PDB) chairman Noor Uddin Mahmud Kamal, Managing Director of Summit Industries and Mercantile Corporation Private Ltd Aziz Khan, Director Farid Khan, United Group Chairman Hasan Mahmud Raja and Director Abul Kalam Azad.

The charge sheet submitted on January 10 included Bangabandhu Memorial Trust (BMT) Curator Siddique Rahman as one of the accused.

Charge sheet

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the First Information Report (FIR) filed on the evening of April 30, immediately after the incident.

They were -- CU BCL Science and Technology Deputy Secretary Jahidul Islam Jewel, Assistant Secretaries Razu and Sohel, and activists Idris, Ashrafur, Riyel, Aftabul, Tanjim and Rimon.

Investigation Officer (IO) of the case SI Delwar prepared the charge sheet exempting two -- Ashrafur and Razu -- of the charge, sources said.

The BCL brought out the procession on the campus protesting Islamic Chharta Shibir activists' alleged modification of their graffiti at the CU Railway Station and on the shuttle train.

Concern over

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"The senior journalists will wait for the Chief Adviser's (CA) address to the nation before taking any step," it said.

"The speakers alleged that a military intelligence agency is increasing pressure on newspapers day by day," BBC added.

Two news editors of TV channels said they have become fed-up with the increased pressure put on them in the last few weeks.

They said they were given instructions over the telephone about which news will be broadcast and which will not, BBC said adding that they are also given instructions about who will attend talk shows in the television channels.

The government is now forcing them to broadcast its publicity programme.

Nurul Kabir, editor of The New Age, told the BBC, "An intelligence agency of the armed forces has started giving instructions to editors of different newspapers and television channels regularly about which news will be published or broadcast and which will not."

"They cannot take any decision independently. We are informed that if they refuse to follow the instructions they will have to pay the price," he said.

Commenting on the problems he faces in presenting a newspaper review programme, Editor of the daily Manabzamin Matiu Rahman Chowdhury said, "Instructions are given about who can be invited to the newspaper review programme. Sometimes we are instructed that the invited guest should not be allowed to attend the programme only 30 minutes before the show starts. I have been experiencing such embarrassing situation every day," he said.

Alamgir Mahiuddin, the editor of the daily Naya Diganta, alleged that three journalists of the newspaper working outside the capital had been harassed during the state of emergency.

The editors reached a consensus that they would make a unanimous announcement of rejecting all the instructions given by the government intelligence agency.

But, they would wait for the CA's address to the nation before taking any decision on it.

"We want to listen to his (CA) speech first. We want to know whether the state of emergency will be relaxed or not. We shall look for solutions to the problems we are facing right now," said Ataul Samad, editor of the daily Amar Desh.

"We shall sit again tomorrow and make a decision after examining possible solutions to our problems," he added.

The BBC also reported that 'the time of the meeting will be announced later'.

CPB rally

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"I never heard the name of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) before," Sumon told CID personnel yesterday, the first day of his five-day remand.

They said Sumon has been trying to misguide them by hiding the truth.

On May 6, CID inspector Delwar Hossain, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, had shown Sumon arrested in the case and sought his remand saying that if Sumon is placed on remand, important information could be extracted from him.

Sumon has already given judicial statement to a magistrate in connection with the bomb attacks on Pabla Baishakh programmes at Ramna Batamul on April 14, 2001.

Earlier, Huji boss Mufti Hannan, his brother Mohibullah alias Mafizur Rahman, Huji leader Sharif Shahidul Alam alias Bipul and several leaders of the outfit were shown arrested in the CPB rally blast case.

Chevron

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work that could disturb the flora and fauna of the forest.

About the allegation of cracks in the houses alongside the areas where the survey was going on, he said he is aware of such an allegation. "But I should not comment before investigation," he said.

Some villagers, however, alleged that the cracks on their houses developed after the blasts.

Supreme judicial

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full bench hearing by the apex court, and fixed May 15 for the hearing.

He did not stay the HC order. The president promulgated an ordinance titled "Supreme Judicial Commission Ordinance 2008" in March this year for constituting the commission as part of government measures to do away with politicisation of appointment of SC and HC judges.

Advocate Idrisur Rahman, a SC lawyer, on April 28 filed a writ petition with the HC challenging validity of the ordinance. An HC bench comprising Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Farid Ahmed stayed for three months the functioning of the commission. It also issued a rule on the government and the SC registrar to explain within three weeks why the ordinance shall not be declared unconstitutional.

Attorney General Fida M Kamal appeared for the government yesterday while Dr Shahdeen Malik represented the writ petitioner.

Odhikar wants

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different intelligence agencies had called a number of the lawyers and enquired about several issues including reasons behind the delay in hearing of cases.

The Odhikar report says, "Despite repeated pronouncements, there are lingering doubts about the holding of general elections pursuant to the so-called roadmap." It said the EC has already missed a number of its self-set targets.

Odhikar said it is alarmed by the number of recent rulings of the Supreme Court Appellate Division which has serious implications for individual rights and principles of legality.

Criticising remarks of a few European heads of missions give the impression that the development partners could be satisfied even if mainstream political parties do not participate in the upcoming elections, Odhikar said. It said such remarks created apprehension among people that the election and handing over of power to a civilian government have become the primary concern of some of the development partners.

It called upon all development partners of Bangladesh to work for an election participated by all.

The human rights body was also very critical of the continued government attempt to interfere with the media and extra-judicial killings by law enforcement agencies. It also opposed the promulgation of another anti-terrorism act.

Between January 12, 2007 and May 11, 2008, 207 people were reportedly extra-judicially killed by law enforcement agencies, it said.

During the 16 months of emergency, freedom of expression, especially rights of the workers of jute mills and garment factories were ignored and they often received brutal response from the government, the report further added.

Odhikar strongly recommended the lifting of the emer-

gency and demanded the draft of the proposed Anti-terrorism Ordinance be revealed to public and all political prisoners be released.

It also asked the government to follow the due process of law in the trial of corruption suspects.

Rice prices

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This increase in price has impacted the retail markets where sellers are raising the price of rice by Tk. 50 per kg.

Retailers are saying that the price hike will continue for the next few days.

Wholesalers are however saying that the price of coarse rice has been more affected by the government procurement than the finer rice varieties.

Mohammad Nizamuddin, secretary general of Badamtoli-Babubazar Rice Wholesalers Association, while talking to The Daily Star confirmed the price hike across the country over the last two days.

He said that because farmers are only selling to the government at present, they are unable to meet the demand in the market, in price rise in the open market. The situation would improve within a few weeks, he added.

Wholesalers are however saying that because the government procurement is at a fixed price, farmers are holding back their stock to sell it at a better price in the open market, once the government procurement is over. That has caused the shortage in supply, they say.

Director General of the Food Directorate Pias Costa told The Daily Star that the rice procurement of the government started in mid-April and the food directorate's warehouses are already being stocked up for the past few days.

Meanwhile in the markets, price of Miniket has leapt to Tk 1,380 to Tk 1,390 from Tk 1,350 to Tk 1,360 per maund while IRR rose to Tk 1,100 to Tk 1,120 from Tk 1,070 to Tk 1,080 two days ago.

A maund of chapal is selling at Tk 1,160 to Tk 1,170, up from Tk 1,120 to Tk 1,130.

Over 8,500 killed

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The quake, with a magnitude of 7.8, struck close to densely-populated areas of Sichuan province including the capital Chengdu.

It swayed buildings in Beijing and Shanghai and was also felt in Hong Kong, Hanoi and Taipei, residents said, and even in the Thai capital Bangkok, 1,800 kilometres (1,200 miles) from the epicentre.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao called it a "major disaster" and urged calm.

"Facing disaster, the most important thing is calm, confidence, courage and strong leadership," Wen told China's CCTV television on a flight to the heart of the quake-hit zone.

"We will definitely overcome this major disaster."

Xinhua earlier reported up to 900 students were feared buried when a high school collapsed in Duijiangyan, northwest of Chengdu.

At least four children were confirmed dead there, Xinhua said, and a local official in the city said "rows of houses" had been demolished.

Another four children died and more than 100 were injured when two primary schools crumbled in the sprawling metropolis of Chongqing.

President Hu Jintao urged an "all-out" effort to rescue victims. Military troops were ordered to help with the disaster relief work.

It said its reporters in Juyuan township, about 60 miles from the epicentre, saw buried teenagers struggling to break loose from underneath the rubble of the three-story building "while others were crying out for help."

Two girls were quoted by Xinhua as saying they escaped because they had "run faster than others."

The international airport at Chengdu was closed and air traffic disrupted elsewhere.

An Olympic spokesman said none of the 31 venues for the Beijing Olympics in the capital and other host cities had been damaged.

"They are earthquake proof to a high degree and no damage was done," said Sun Weide, deputy director of the Olympic media and communications office.

The civil affairs ministry, cited by Xinhua before the estimate toll from Beichuan County, said that as at 6:00 pm (1000 GMT), 107 people were confirmed dead and 34 injured in Sichuan and neighbouring Gansu and Yunnan provinces.

The quake struck 93 kilometres from Chengdu, a city of more than 12 million people, and some 260 kilometres from Chongqing and its 30 million.

The State Seismological Bureau located its epicentre in Wenchuan County, a mountainous region home to the Wolong Nature Reserve, China's leading research and breeding base for endangered giant pandas.

Xinhua quoted an official saying the landmark Three Gorges Dam in Sichuan province had not been affected.

However, buildings shook in Beijing and Shanghai, residents

BRTC boss

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Dhaka Auto-tempo, Auto-rickshaw and Auto-truck Owners' Samik Oikya Parishad, Haji Mohammad Fazlul Haq, convener of Auto-tempo Owners' Samik Oikya Parishad and Utpal Kanti Saha, deputy general manager of BRTC.

Of them, Taimur and Mokles are now in jail. Fazlul Haq is out on bail while Utpal is on the run.

On August 19 last year, Hanif Khokon, general secretary of Dhaka Auto-rickshaw Samik Union, filed the case with Paltan Police Station against Huda, Taimur and eight others in connection with misappropriation of Tk 1 crore by allotting 200 CNG-run auto-rickshaws illegally to 33 persons.

Emergency

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a good election by the end of this year.

Asked about some EU diplomats' comments that elections could be credible through major parties' participation, Choudhury said if there is a good voter list, if the field is level, if there is no influence of money and muscle, or any interference, everybody should participate in the polls.

However, he said, "If field is ready and if referee is ready, it is up to the players to play the match."

In reply to a question, the envoy said he is leaving Bangladesh with huge optimism and a song in his heart.

Describing the Bangladesh-Britain bilateral relations as special, Choudhury said the bilateral relations between the two countries reached a new height and it would be further deepened in the future.

Bangladesh and Britain will also work together in the international arena, including the UN and other world bodies, as he said both the countries share same values.

Reciprocating the British envoy's optimism, the foreign adviser said Bangladesh and Britain enjoy a "strategic relationship, which will further deepen and widen".

HC rule

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constituencies after completing more than 70 percent of voter list preparation, and that is why the gazette notification issued by the EC on April 29 for delimitation of 133 parliamentary constituencies is unconstitutional and illegal, he argued.

He alleged that in the name of delimitation of constituencies, the EC is killing time before holding the next parliamentary elections.

Advocate Nurul Islam argued that there is no necessity of delimitation of constituencies now due to time constraints.

Moving for the government, Additional Attorney General Salauddin Ahmed countered their arguments saying that no case can be filed with court against demarcation of constituencies until objections in this regard are disposed of.

"As per the gazette notification, anybody can submit objections to the EC against demarcation of constituencies, and no one can move to court against demarcations until the objections are disposed of," he said.

He also argued that the EC is not killing time by redrawing constituencies.

Abdul Mannan on Sunday filed the writ petition as a public interest litigation (PIL) challenging legality of the gazette notification issued by the EC on redrawing 133 parliamentary constituencies.

Advocate Nurul Islam yesterday filed the writ petition on the same ground.

4 drown

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capsized in Ghorautra river in Nikli upazila. The news agency quoting ASP Asaduzzaman said 25 passengers swam ashore while the rest remained missing.

Power plant case

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comprising Justice Md Iman Ali and Justice Emdadul Haque fixed May 20 for hearing on the rule.

The government, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Special Court-1 on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises trying the case are respondents in the rule.

Hasina's counsel Barrister Rafique-ul Huq yesterday submitted before the HC that as per Section 6(A) of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 1958, trial proceedings of any criminal case have to be completed within 60 days after a court takes it (case) into cognisance. But in this the special court did not do so.

"The Special Court took this case into cognisance for trial on January 13 this year, and the period of 60 days has already passed. That is why trial proceedings of this case have become functus officio (infructuous), and no court now has jurisdiction to try the case," he said.

The Awami League chief on Sunday filed the writ petition challenging legality of trial proceedings of the case filed by the ACC. Barrister Fazeel Noor Taposh filed the case on behalf of her

Politicos start

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League (AL) started chalking out political programmes demanding release of two former premiers and their party chiefs, Khaledda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, and were waiting for instructions from their central leaderships.

Presence of BNP and Jamaat leaders and activists were, however, thin at some local party offices.

Due to many frontline BNP leaders being in jail or in hiding to evade arrest, some BNP leaders who are still free said they will observe the situation for sometime and then announce their next course of action.

"We will now be able to sit with our leaders and activists for planning organisational activities. It will help us increase organisational strength," said Chittagong city AL leader MA Mannan.

Former law secretary of Chittagong city unit of AL Advocate Ibrahim Hossain Babul said they will clear the party office today and hold a Milad Mahfil after the asr prayer on Wednesday to formally open the office on Thursday.

All four members including the convener of BNP Chittagong city unit are currently abroad.

Our staff correspondent from Rajshahi reported that AL workers there started gathering at the city office in Kumarpura around 6:00pm while BNP, Jatiya Party (JP) and Jamaat refrained from any activity.

There is no BNP office in Rajshahi now as the ones the party had earlier were evacuated for being illegally set up.

Rajshahi City BNP President Mosaddik Hossain said they will rent an office soon after observing the situation for a few days and they will submit a memorandum to the authorities and go on a hunger strike on Friday demanding release of their chief Khaledda Zia.

Jatiya Party and Jamaat offices there were seen closed yesterday evening.

Our staff correspondent reported from Sylhet that political leaders and activists were getting prepared last night to chalk out political programmes within a day or two following instructions from their central leaders.

Sylhet District AL President ANM Shafigue told The Daily Star, "We will sit with different front organisations and upazila committees within a day or two to discuss the overall situation and decide on the ways and means for raising demands including immediate release of Sheikh Hasina."

Sylhet City BNP General Secretary Nasim Hossain said they will sit with their ward committees and front organisations immediately to chalk out the next course of action and will submit a memorandum to the authorities for immediate release of the party chief Khaledda Zia.

Our staff correspondent reported from Bogra that party offices of AL, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Jatiya

Bangladesh Navy

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attendance by the Chinese technical team and ship staff," said an ISPR release.

This is the first instance BNS Osman, commissioned on May 4, 1989 as the only missile frigate, fired long-range ship-to-ship C-802 missile, which is capable of destroying any target within 120 kilometres.

Chief of the Naval Staff Vice-Admiral Sarwar Jahan Nizam expressed his heartfelt thanks to the government of China as well as all Chinese delegation members on behalf of the Bangladesh government.

Principal Staff Officer Lt Gen Masududdin Chowdhury said the upgradation programme is "part of the government policy".

Commodore Commanding of BN Flotilla Commodore HR Bhuiyan, Commodore Superintendent Dockyard Commodore Jasim Uddin Bhuiyan, and Chinese Defense Attache senior Colonel Ju Dewu, among others, were present.

Politics freed further

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issued a fresh notification cancelling the earlier one, and allowing 'indoor politics' all over the country from today, the ministry sources said.

According to yesterday's notification, which relaxes the provisions of EPR further, a maximum of 200 leaders and workers of political parties or of any other legitimate organisation, or the same number of individuals may meet at a time indoors, by informing proper authorities 48 hours in advance.

For any meeting of over 200 people, permission will have to be taken from metropolitan police commissioners in metropolitan areas, and from other proper authorities outside the metropolitan areas, 72 hours in advance.

The earlier notification of September 9 last year had allowed only a maximum of 50 leaders or workers of only political parties to meet at a time, while the right had not been extended to any other organisation.

According to the latest relaxation, a political party or an organisation, auditoriums, hotels, restaurants, conference centres, in residences of organisation members,

Samajtantrik Dal were seen open at 8:45pm yesterday.

There was however nobody present in the district office of BNP A supporter of BNP said such absence of party leaders and workers might be attributable to the fact that BNP District President Rezaul Karim Badsha and General Secretary Saiful Islam are currently evading the hands of law.