

No constitutional bar to holding local polls first

Says Dr Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent jurist and Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said there is no constitutional bar to holding the local government polls prior to the national elections.

"According to section 119 of the constitution, the Election Commission is free to hold the local government elections," Dr Kamal told journalists at a press briefing at his Bailey Road residence in the capital.

When asked about his party's participation in the local government polls, Dr Kamal said, "We shall make decision on the matter at the working committee meeting."

He criticised the government's returning the seized properties and documents to the persons arrested in connection with corruption.

Dr Kamal's remarks come at a time when police have returned Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina's properties and

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Country gets into election gears

Grassroots leaders overlook major parties' boycott mode, prepare for campaign

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country gets into election gears for the first time since emergency was declared last year although major political parties are still tuned to the boycott mode even after the Election Commission (EC) declared poll schedules for city corporations and municipalities on June 20.

The BNP-led four-party coalition has already threatened to resist the local government polls while the Awami League (AL) has demanded withdrawal of the announced schedule and holding of the parliamentary election first.

The grassroots level leaders of all major political parties, especially the AL and BNP, have, how-

ever, already started campaigns for the local government polls despite opposition from the high commands of the two major parties.

Talking to The Daily Star, many grassroots level leaders of the BNP said they would take part in the polls no matter what the party decides. Many AL leaders said the grassroots level leaders would take part in the local body election under a different banner if the party does not formally take part in it.

The BNP might come up with its formal stance tomorrow after consulting with Chairperson Khaleda Zia who would be brought to the special court tomorrow for standing trial in the Garco scam case.

The AL will also hold an emergency meeting of its Presidium today at acting party President Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence and a meeting of the party Central Working Committee on June 26 to decide on a formal stance on the local body polls.

AL Organising Secretary Abdul Mannan told The Daily Star that either the AL would have to take part in the election or boycott it—there is no position in the middle.

Meanwhile, the Jatiya Party (JP) has already said it would take part in the polls and asked party men to elect honest and potential candidates.

Addressing a meeting with the grassroots level leaders of Rajshahi

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Security to be upped during local govt polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police will beef up security steps ahead of the local elections scheduled for August 4.

"Holding the local body polls is a government decision and we'll stick to it and prepare ourselves accordingly," Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad told reporters yesterday after a meeting with LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal at the latter's office.

Asked to comment on the possibility of a confrontation following the four-party alliance's threat to resist the polls, he said, "We don't see any such possibility yet."

Expressing satisfaction over existing law and order in the country, the IGP said that police would take up a three-phase security plan for period before, during and after the elections.

Appropriate security measures will be put in place 15 to 20 days before the polls day and follow-up

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Polls to be free of black money, muscle power

Chief adviser assures ADB delegates

UNB, Dhaka

Reaffirming the caretaker government's commitment to hold general elections in December, Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said his administration is working to ensure that the elections are free from the influence of money, muscle and misuse of authority.

He said this when a six-member delegation of the board of directors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), led by Sebastian Paust, called on him at his office where they discussed political and socio-economic issues of the country.

As the delegation appreciated the government's ongoing dialogue with political parties, Fakhruddin said he and the Election Commission (EC) staked out many times that the parliamentary elections would be held in December as per the EC's

roadmap.

He said the interim government is working on two major issues—preparation of a photograph-attached voter list and keeping the next elections free from the influence of muscle, money and misuse of authority.

The chief adviser said the voter list is almost complete, adding that preparing such a voter list with photographs of about 80 million voters in a short time is a tough job.

The ADB delegation said they support the government's determination to keep the general elections free from the influence of muscle, money and misuse of authority.

Team leader Sebastian Paust said during their visits to a few areas of Bangladesh, they got a profound insight into the country.

He said people have a positive impression of the caretaker government and the leadership of the

chief adviser.

On the proposed Padma Bridge, the chief adviser said the project should be completed as soon as possible as the bridge is economically as feasible as the Jamuna Bridge.

He said the present government is a constitutional government and besides elections, it is also looking after economic issues.

Fakhruddin sought the contribution of the ADB and other development partners to infrastructure development like transport and energy.

He put emphasis on the support of development partners in mid- and long-term projects, especially on the coastal belts.

Referring to various positive indicators, he hoped that Bangladesh would become a mid-income country in next 15 years.

He briefed the ADB board of

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TORTURE OF TARIQUE Delwar seeks UN probe into 'HR violation'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khandaker Delwar Hossain, secretary general of pro-Khaleda faction of BNP yesterday urged the United Nations to investigate human rights violations in the country including alleged torture of Tarique Rahman, elder son of party chairperson Khaleda Zia.

"Everyone knows the human rights situation in the country. Tarique Rahman is now fighting death as his spinal cord has been damaged. But the government is not investigating the matter," he said urging the UN to initiate an investigation for collecting information.

"We are expecting the United Nation's interference in this regard," he said while addressing a discussion meeting organised by Shocheton Jubo Forum in a hotel in the capital with Muhiuddin Khan in the chair.

Accusing the government of hatching conspiracies for prolonging its stay in power, Delwar said

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No discrimination against Khaleda Says adviser on her treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader yesterday ruled out any discrimination towards detained BNP chief Khaleda Zia and said she has been given every offer of treatment at home or abroad.

The case of Khaleda's elder son Tarique Rahman is also under consideration on humanitarian grounds, the adviser said. He however did not comment on the release of the former premier's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko.

"No, we're not making any discrimination towards her at all. She is a former prime minister and chief of a big political party," the adviser said promptly when newsmen pointed out delay in

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Labourers risk their lives while working to install Wasa's sewerage pipes near the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital yesterday. The contractors hardly take any safety measures for them.

ENERGY PRICE INCREASE IMF to discuss govt's hike plan

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

A mission of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) visiting the country next month will discuss with the government whether the pay hike in public service adds to private sector wage pressures and impacts on inflation.

It will also discuss how much increase the government plans in energy and fertiliser prices and electricity tariffs in efforts to reach break-even levels, and measures to perk up revenues.

Scheduled to reach Dhaka on July 2 and stay till July 15, the mission has lately sought the caretaker government's responses to a number of questions to make an overall economic review, said finance ministry sources.

It has wanted written answers to some of the queries while leaving some for discussions during its visit.

In the questionnaire sent to the ministry, the Bretton Woods institution asks, "What is envisaged for public pay and employment? How are the recent changes in wage policy related to the next Pay Commission that will start in 2009?"

The government has already declared 20 percent dearness allowance for the public servants and teachers of the non-government high schools and colleges under MPO (monthly pay order), and proposed formation of a Pay Commission in the budget for fiscal year 2008-09.

A finance ministry official said the government is trying to cushion the effects of unabated price hike of essentials by increasing wages since the possibility for any let-up in the price spiral is little.

"It wants the private sector too to follow suit," he said, adding that

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Non-govt teachers too get 20pc DA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 20 percent dearness allowance declared for the public servants will be applicable to the teachers of non-government high schools, colleges and madrasahs under MPO (monthly pay order) as well, Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam said yesterday.

Earlier this month, when the announcement of dearness allowance for government officials and employees came in the budget for fiscal year 2008-09, there was no mention of teachers.

"The allowance for teachers under MPO system has not been clear in the budget speech," Mirza Aziz told reporters at the planning ministry after meeting leaders of

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Matin sees no major anti-graft drive before polls

UNB, Dhaka

Home Affairs Adviser MA Matin yesterday said there would be no major anti-corruption drive before general elections slated for December.

"We've no plan for big anti-corruption drive now," he told reporters when asked whether the government plans to go for major anti-corruption drive before the polls.

Matin, chairman of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) on Serious Crime and Corruption, made the remarks after attending a meeting of the NCC at the Armed Forces Division in Dhaka cantonment.

He said out of 222 corruption cases dealt with by the NCC, 76 cases have been prioritised considering the importance of the offence

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CITY POLLS CANDIDATES Personal details to be on EC website

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The new election rules promulgated by the Election Commission (EC) ensure public access to information about candidates in the August 4 polls to four city corporations and nine municipalities.

Applicants seeking candidacy must submit affidavits of personal information to returning officers (RO) during filing of the applications including details of their wealth, sources of income, backgrounds, and records of criminal cases if any existed in the past, officials in the EC Secretariat said adding that voters will have access to those information.

The EC will post the personal information of the selected candidates on its website for public viewing after July 13, the deadline for withdrawing candidacies, senior officials in the EC Secretariat said.

All contesting candidates will

have to submit their election expenditure reports to the ROs within 30 days of the polling day.

The ROs will preserve all documents pertaining to the polls in their offices or in any other appropriate place, and the documents will be accessible to public for a year in exchange for a certain amount of fees. People will also be able to obtain copies of the poll expenditure reports submitted by the candidates.

The EC officials said the new system will help voters in making informed decisions about who they will vote into their local government offices.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda on Friday, while announcing the election schedule for the four city corporations and nine municipalities, said the new election rules will encourage honest and competent people to contest in the polls.

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The Editor

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