

## 4-party

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the parliamentary election first and asked the government to create an atmosphere conducive to free and fair polls by lifting the state of emergency and releasing all political leaders behind bars.

The meeting held at the Bardhima residence of Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) Chairman Andaleeb Rahman Partha was presided over by Delwar and attended by senior leaders of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, BJP and Islami Oikya Jote.

Asked about the decision on local elections, the BJP chairman told The Daily Star last night that lifting emergency is a must for any election to go ahead.

"Why worry about participation of the political parties if the polls are non-political?" he questioned.

Queried what would be their final decision when the closing date (July 3) for submitting nominations is approaching fast, the BNP secretary general said, "We will consider contesting the polls only if our demands are met, and the time has not run out."

Asked about the party leaders preparing for the local polls, he said, "It would be solely their responsibility if they choose to run for the polls while the party would decide on its own whether to participate or not."

Criticising Awami League (AL) for its decision to participate in the polls, Delwar said, "It shows that the present government came to power with the connivance of Awami League."

He said AL says it's joining the elections to restore democracy, but people know how it had destroyed

democracy after independence and also became party to a rigged election in 1986.

"Some countries and quarters who are the brains behind this government want it to stay longer in power, and they have chosen Awami League and some other parties to implement their plans," he observed.

Addressing AL, he said, "Refrain from participating in the elections for temporary gains and at the expense of independence and sovereignty of the country."

Calling on the authorities to send BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's detained sons Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko abroad for treatment, he said, "What they [government] are bargaining for anyway? BNP won't trade the interests of people for anything."

Delwar also demanded release of all political leaders and mentioned the names of Khaleda Zia, Motiur Rahman Nizami, Khandaq Moharrar Hossain, Moudud Ahmed, Tarique Rahman and MKA Anwar.

Moments afterwards, he said, "You [journalists] might ask me if I'm demanding release of corruptors. No, we don't want that. And neither do we accept politically motivated trials under the emergency powers rules."

The BNP secretary general said they would accept a judgment only if the case is tried by an independent court and the highest court upholds that decision.

The four-party alliance demanded cancellation of the polls schedule immediately after their announcement June 20.

## Cabinet okays

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The government made a few adjustments to the proposed budget taking into consideration the reactions and recommendations made by different chambers, trade bodies, economists and individuals.

In the approved budget, the limit of tax-free income of an individual has been increased to Tk 1,65,000 from Tk 15,000.

For taxpayers who are female or aged over 70 years or disabled, the tax-free income limit has been raised to Tk 1,80,000 from the proposed Tk 16,000.

"Inclusion of the disabled in this group is in part their social recognition," said an official at National Board of Revenue (NBR).

However, people from different quarters had been urging the government to increase the ceiling of tax-free income to Tk 2,00,000 since day-to-day expenses of the middle class have increased significantly following inflation and spiralling prices of essentials.

The same day Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko was exempted from appearing before the court in person in the Gato corruption case.

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