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## JS polls on Dec 18

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed last night declared that the much anticipated ninth parliamentary election will be held on December 18 this year, and the polls to upazila parishads will be held in two phases on December 24 and 28.

**CA also tells nation upazila elections to be held Dec 24, 28; emergency to be relaxed for electioneering**  
Full text of speech on page 5

Addressing the nation, the military backed caretaker government chief said the Election Commission (EC) will announce the detailed schedules for both polls at an appropriate time and the state of emergency will be relaxed for electioneering.

"No more there can be any doubt over the polls. I firmly believe we are moving towards holding the elections with participation of all political parties," the chief adviser said adding, "The two leaders of the two major political parties have already declared participation in the polls."

He said relevant rules and regulations of the state of emergency will be either relaxed or suspended to facilitate electioneering, so the elections can be held in a lively atmosphere with spontaneous participation of all.

All major political parties have been persistently demanding that the state of emergency be lifted before the national ballot.

"The government will not hesitate or step back from doing whatever is needed for holding free and fair elections. Our pledge and determination will be implemented in light of the national aspirations," the chief adviser said.

**Political parties hail speech with some reservations**  
**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Hailing the announcement of election dates, political parties last night said it will help dispel confusion and doubts over holding of the long-stalled parliamentary polls.

They however expressed mixed reaction over the chief adviser's observations about the state of emergency. While some welcomed his plans regarding withdrawal of emergency curbs, others criticised him for not being specific about the matter.

Besides, a few parties voiced concern about the dates for upazila and general elections being too close.

Talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence, AL acting president Zillur Rahman said it is a good speech to listen to. But it is more rhetorical than substantive.

"Awami League has long been demanding complete

## BNP, allies stand against electoral reforms

**Ask EC to hold JS polls as per previous laws**  
**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

BNP and its allies yesterday told the Election Commission (EC) they will not accept the new electoral provisions being implemented in the upcoming parliamentary polls.

Sitting with the EC separately, BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) also called for scrapping of constituency re-demarcation and immediate withdrawal of the state of emergency.

Yesterday's were the last in a series of electoral talks between the commission and political parties.

BNP and its alliance partners demanded that the new electoral laws and rules be scrapped or suspended till the national election is over.

They argued that it is not possible for them to abide by the recent

ordinance revising Representation of the People Order (RPO).

For time constraints, none of the major political parties would be able to meet the registration criteria that require amendments to their constitutions, they added.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda however



Electoral dialogue between the Election Commission (EC) and BNP being held at the EC Secretariat yesterday.

## CA's speech West offers guarded reaction

**UNB, Dhaka**  
The United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union made guarded response to Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed's speech, announcing the dates for parliamentary and upazila parishad elections.

"We are still analysing the Chief Adviser's remarks, but we are pleased to see that elections will be held before the end of this year according to roadmap. And we look forward to seeing free, fair and credible elections this year," a spokesperson for the US embassy here said.

A British High Commission spokesman said, "We welcome the confirmation of date for the parliamentary polls and the reassurance that this will provide to Bangladeshi people."



Police charge truncheons on garment workers at Malibagh Chowdhurypara in the capital yesterday. Left: The workers barricade Rampura Road, top, demanding cent percent of their basic pay as festival bonus.

## Minor tremor jolts Dhaka

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
A minor earthquake shook the capital and parts of the country yesterday evening causing panic among the people.

The Meteorological department said the tremor measuring 4.8 on the Richter scale struck at 5:16pm. Its epicentre was 76 kilometres off the eastern side of the capital, somewhere near Brahmanbaria area.

It lasted for about 23.12 seconds. Minor tremors jolted the city twice just before it. However, there were no reports of damage or injuries.

A correspondent from Madaripur reported that the quake's aftershocks were felt three times within five minutes across the district. The tremors caused

## Mayhem at Malibagh

**RMG workers ransack 40 vehicles over bonus hike**  
**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Chase and counter-chase continued for about two hours. The workers damaged at least 40 vehicles during the time, witnesses said.

Police said they lobbed eight tear-gas canisters to quell the violence.

A revolver of Sub-Inspector Habibur Rahman of Ramna Police Station went missing during the melee, said police.

The workers later forced into the factory, ransacking the interior.

Deploing the violence, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) president Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury Parvez said it is not mandatory for the employers to pay any bonus.

"It is their internal affairs if any factory owners give bonus to their employees," he told The Daily Star.

The agitating workers said the management, which gave them 25 percent festival bonus last year, agreed to pay them 100 percent this time after they declined yet another 25 percent offer.

They said they staged peaceful sit-in yesterday noon to realise their demand as the Eid drew nearer, and took to the street only after coming to know that the management went back on their promise.

Their street protests did not create any traffic jam as they made enough way for traffic movement, they claimed.

Things went wrong when the police swooped on the workers in consultation with the factory

## RTI given go-ahead

**SHAMIM ASHRAF**  
The council of advisers yesterday gave final approval to the much-awaited Right to Information (RTI) Ordinance 2008 aimed at ensuring people's right to information.

New posts will be created in most of the government offices and non-government organisations (NGOs). Officials holding those posts will provide people with the information they seek within 20 days of receipt of applications from them, says the ordinance.

But in cases of issues concerning a person's life and death, arrest and release from jail, the officials will have to provide primary information within 24 hours, it says.

The widely-debated law ensures people's right to information from organisations run with public money, and the NGOs using foreign funds. Information Secretary Jamil Osman, who placed the proposal before the council of advisers, told The Daily Star last night.

**Highlights**

- Public office, NGOs to give info
- pvt sector, six security and intelligence agencies kept out
- People to get info in 20 days
- Info in 24 hours for emergency
- Up to Tk 5,000 fine for delay
- Three-member information commission

The law covers government offices down to upazila level.  
"The rest of the local govern-

ment bodies, like union parishads, will be covered by the laws on different local bodies which have provisions for ensuring people's access to information," the information secretary said.

The RTI ordinance with 36 sections and a schedule of six security and intelligence agencies, which cannot be asked for information, has a list of about 20 instances of exemption from disclosure of information, an official said seeking anonymity.

The government said the new law will increase transparency and accountability, reduce corruption and establish good governance in government offices and NGOs.

Different rights and journalists forums have welcomed the government move terming final approval of the ordinance a 'historic step'.

The advisory council gave final nod to the RTI Ordinance 2008, 94 days after it approved the ordinance in principle, at a meeting

## Night time gridlock in Kalyanpur

**Inter-district buses violate govt ban, stop for passengers at will**  
**SHARIFUL ISLAM**

Inter-district buses are halting at counters in Kalyanpur and Shyamoli in the capital to pick up and drop passengers despite a government ban, adding to existing traffic congestion.

The authorities ahead of Ramadan decided that no inter-district bus will be allowed to enter the city, except those which go through the city to their destinations.

However, these buses, allowed to enter city after 8:00pm, have not been authorised to pick or drop passengers on the way.

Residents and commuters on



Inter-district buses pick up and drop passengers at Kalyanpur in the capital despite a ban on these vehicles entering the city. The photo shows these buses causing traffic jam after midnight.

## Dhaka condemns Pak blasts

**UNB, Dhaka**  
Dhaka strongly condemned the deadly bombing of a hotel in the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad, which left at least 40 people dead.

In an instant reaction from on board an Emirates flight for New York yesterday night, Foreign Adviser Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury said the perpetrators of the bomb attack would not be able to serve their purpose through such "heinous act".

Iftekhhar said the government and the people of Bangladesh express sympathy for the government and the people of Pakistan at this sad hour.

## 40 killed in Pakistan car blast at hotel

**New Pak president asks parliament to cut his powers**  
**AGENCIES, Islamabad**

At least 40 people were killed in a massive car bombing at the Marriott Hotel in the Pakistan capital Islamabad on Saturday in what appears to have been a suicide attack.

Many people were still trapped inside the burning building last night as rescue efforts continued, police said.

Flames were seen shooting out of the hotel, a key meeting place for foreigners and one of the most carefully guarded sites in the city, after the powerful blast, which was heard from quite far away.

Police officials said it appeared to be a car bombing but could not confirm it had been a suicide attack. Ambulances were racing to the scene, and it was not immediately known how many people were wounded.

Pakistani police warned Saturday the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad could collapse following the attack.

"So far 40 bodies have been

## Politics, poll process need some reforms thru' consensus

**Observes Dr Wahiduddin**  
**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Former adviser to a caretaker government Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud yesterday said some kind of reforms should be brought into the country's politics and electoral process through a consensus among the parties before the next parliamentary elections.

"It is not acceptable that no reforms measure would be taken when the election is getting closer. Some reforms in politics like transparency of political parties' fund management should be ensured," said Mahmud, also an eminent economist.

He said, "For a transition to sustainable democracy such reforms and consensus are needed."

He made the remarks while talking to reporters after attending a roundtable discussion at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday morning.

**CONGRATULATIONS**

Managing Director of Intraco Group Mohammad Riyadh Ali Has been appointed as Honorary Consul Of Republic of Korea in Chittagong. We, all the employees of Intraco Group & Hotel Agrabad congratulate him from the heart for his success.

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