

JS polls on Dec 18

FROM PAGE 1
aspirations of the people about local government elections, upazila elections will be held immediately after the parliamentary election," the chief adviser asserted yesterday.

Analysing the sequence of the announced polling dates, political analysts said the long over due local government polls are also likely to be held before the tenure of the caretaker government ends.

In their instant reactions, senior leaders of the political parties lauded the chief adviser's latest announcement regarding the polls, and his government's and EC's change of heart regarding the sequence of holding the polls.

Fakhrudin Ahmed, who assumed the post of chief adviser on January 12, 2007, following the declaration of the state of emergency, said he had declared that his firm objective was to hand over power to an elected government through a free and fair election, for establishing democracy on a firm footing in the country.

Referring to the responsibilities of the caretaker government, the chief adviser said his government has been working to create a level playing field for the elections since its beginning.

He also said the government held talks with the parties twice. "We had talks with the chiefs of the two major political parties. Both leaders have already announced participation in the polls," said the chief adviser, who left Dhaka last night for New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly, after he had delivered the address to the nation.

The eighth parliament had been dissolved on October 27, 2006 and according to the constitution the ninth parliamentary election was supposed to be held within the next 90 days.

The ninth parliamentary poll had been originally scheduled for January 22 last year, but a grave political crisis involving massive level of street violence prompted the president to declare the state of emergency on January 11, 2007 suspending the scheduled national ballot.

The High Court (HC) on May 22 this year in a verdict said the EC had violated the constitution by not holding the general election within the stipulated 90 days since dissolution of the last parliament.

It, however, accepted the commission's decision to hold the long-stalled ninth parliamentary poll in December this year, considering it reasonable enough in the context of the changed reality.

Political parties hail

FROM PAGE 1
lifting of the state of emergency, but that demand has not been met."

He said they would continue to demand full withdrawal of the emergency rules.

About upazila polls, Zillur said the local government elections within five days of the parliamentary polls might lead to violence and anarchy across the country.

Al acting general secretary Syed Ashraful Islam however gave an appreciative reaction to Fakhrudin Ahmed's address.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, he said, "We are very happy with this announcement. We thank the chief adviser, Election Commission and the council of advisers."

He continued, "We also appreciate the chief adviser for talking about an election to be participated by the two major parties and their chiefs. Hopefully, there will be no obstacle to holding the national election in a free and fair manner."

Now that the poll date has been fixed, he said, Al will start taking all-out preparation for election from today.

The AL acting general secretary said they will come up with a formal reaction today after discussions at party forum.

According to him, all doubts and uncertainties have been removed and conspiracies over the election stopped.

About the state of emergency, Ashraf said it should not be a "big" problem for the political parties as the chief adviser has clarified the government's plans in this regard.

He said, "We are happy as the both the government and the Election Commission have met our logical demand for holding the national election first."

BNP Standing Committee member Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky said the chief adviser has realised their demand and accepted the reality.

"The government has accepted the politicians' logic. I think the chief adviser has realised the desires and expectations of the people," he told The Daily Star.

On lifting of the state of emergency, he said, "There are enough indications in the chief adviser's speech about lifting of the state of emergency before the election."

Welcoming the CA's speech, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad said it reflects good intention of the caretaker government towards

Govt probing

FROM PAGE 16

Amid growing uncertainties regarding the fate of the stalled parliamentary poll, Fakhrudin Ahmed on May 12 this year in an address to the nation declared that the general election will be held in the third week of December.

Earlier, on July 15 last year, the EC in its electoral roadmap had announced that the voter list with photographs will be completed by October this year and the parliamentary poll must be held by the year end.

The HC on May 22 in a verdict expressed its astonishment at the fact that the chief adviser, not the EC, had declared the tentative date for the national election while leaving it to the EC to fix the exact polling date.

The HC judges said in their observation that they had not found any provision in the country's constitution that empowers the chief adviser to make such an announcement.

Rab Additional Director General Col Gulzar Uddin Ahmed, who led the investigation into JMB's militant activities and massive terror attacks, told The Daily Star yesterday that many statements of Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh are similar to those of the JMB.

"We are yet to trace any terrorist activity by Hizb ut-Tahrir. Its activities are being watched," Gulzar said.

Boalia Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Ramzan Ali, who was tasked with investigating activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir after Thursday's arrest, said over phone, "I am investigating if the 10 arrested leaders and activists of Hizb ut-Tahrir are involved with militancy."

He said on September 9, Tahrir men distributed leaflets in front of the Baro Masjid in Rajshahi after Esha prayers. "The language of the leaflet was objectionable. Since Hizb ut-Tahrir's name was on the leaflets, we were looking for their activists," he added.

The leaflet reads, "Our rulers have discarded the Quran and Sunnah... They have handed us over to our enemies. In this holy month of Ramadan, we have to take oath to dethrone our rulers and establish the rule of Khilafat."

Hizb ut-Tahrir also criticises sending of forces in United Nations Peace Keeping missions for protecting "enemies" instead of "turning them into the flagbearers of Islam."

Alaw enforcement agency source said Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh sought permission from an intelligence agency in Rajshahi on Wednesday for holding a press conference at Rajshahi City Press Club on Thursday but did not get the permission.

The police arrested the 10 Tahrir men when they attempted to hold the press conference without prior permission.

The police arrested the 10 Tahrir men when they attempted to hold the press conference without prior permission.

During the question-answer session, the adviser said, "By any measure, today's Bangladesh is different from what it was before 1/1."

Referring to recent political incidents in Bangladesh, Zillur said Bangladesh is not going back to the chaos that led to 1/1.

He also described the government's ongoing initiatives for dialogue with the political parties and hoped that a broader understanding could be reached so that the reform initiatives taken by the government could continue after the elections.

About lifting emergency before the elections, the adviser said the government is willing to relax the provisions of the emergency rules as much as possible in the interest of holding a free, fair and credible election.

Participating in the discussion, Sameer Sahgal of Boeing endorsed the fact that many positive changes have indeed taken place in Bangladesh during the last two years and requested fellow-Americans to visit Bangladesh to see for themselves the changes on the ground.

The programme was attended by State Department officials, academics and scholars, congressional staff members, members of the media and the business community.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the USA M Humayun Kabir and officials of Bangladesh Embassy in Washington were also present.

Earlier, the Adviser attended the Global Education Summit 2008 organised by the US Department of Education at Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington DC.

Subrata Bain

FROM PAGE 16

him a portion of Jhut (garment by-products) for the last one year causing him economic loss. "I had been taking all garment by-products of the factory for 10 years but the owner was supplying less for the year," he narrated.

More than 50 inter-district buses have counters in Kalyanpur.

He also said queues of vehicles particularly inter-district buses in front of filling stations in Kalyanpur also contribute to traffic congestion.

Though not authorised, many minibuses of the big transport companies also remain parked in lines on Mirpur Road to ferry passengers from counters to terminals.

Those buses are seen parked even more than half an hour at the same place blocking traffic movement.

Joint Commissioner (Traffic) Jasimuddin said they have recently decided that inter-district buses will collect and drop passengers at the terminals only.

He said buses can go through the city at night to reach their destination, but will not be allowed to collect or drop any passengers, let alone stopping at the counters.

Rajabazar roads

FROM PAGE 16

but overflowing sewage is overrunning the road making it unsuitable even for walking.

The sorry state of the road has been hampering the Juma prayers of the area's Muslims too.

A large number of them used to say their prayers on the road adjacent to the mosque, but they have been unable to do so for over six months due to the deteriorated condition of the road, said local residents.

Maruf Hossain, a resident of the area, said people are forced to walk on slippery dirty roads after a rain as rickshaw-pullers are reluctant to get on those roads due to their bad condition.

"Walking on these roads is very difficult as they become muddy and slippery after rain due to the digging," he said.

Anwaruzzaman, commissioner of no 40, said a large number of neighbourhood roads in East and West Rajabazar are in sorry state as Dhaka City Corporation has not been disbursing funds for their repair for the last three years.

"I get many complaints from the Muslims of the area everyday saying they returned home from the way to the mosque as their clothes got dirty from the sludge on the road," he said.

A large number of neighbourhood roads in East Rajabazar have also been in bad shape for the last three years.

The roads which had been in better conditions just three months ago are now almost unusable as they

were dug to lay down water pipes three months back, and were left without properly repaving the roads. Last time the roads were repaired was three years ago, said local residents.

Maruf Hossain, a resident of the area, said people are forced to walk on slippery dirty roads after a rain as rickshaw-pullers are reluctant to get on those roads due to their bad condition.

"Walking on these roads is very difficult as they become muddy and slippery after rain due to the digging," he said.

Anwaruzzaman, commissioner of no 40, said a large number of neighbourhood roads in East and West Rajabazar are in sorry state as Dhaka City Corporation has not been disbursing funds for their repair for the last three years.

"I get many complaints from the Muslims of the area everyday saying they returned home from the way to the mosque as their clothes got dirty from the sludge on the road," he said.

A large number of neighbourhood roads in East Rajabazar have also been in bad shape for the last three years.

The roads which had been in better conditions just three months ago are now almost unusable as they

Reformists

FROM PAGE 1

Party insiders said Chairperson Khaleda Zia herself finalised the names of the delegation members following discussion with senior leaders including Secretary General Khandaker Dewa Hossain.

A number of leaders expressed surprise not to see Goyeshwar in the delegation even though he recently criticised the BNP secretary general on different issues.

Party standing committee member RA Ganji Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky and M Shamsul Islam, vice-presidents MR Anwar and Sarwari Rahman, Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan, Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed, BNP Chairperson's Adviser Brig Gen (retd) ASM Hannan Shah and Mushfiqur Rahman and former member Abdul Mannan were in the delegation.

"Walking on these roads is very difficult as they become muddy and slippery after rain due to the digging," he said.

Anwaruzzaman, commissioner of no 40, said a large number of neighbourhood roads in East and West Rajabazar are in sorry state as Dhaka City Corporation has not been disbursing funds for their repair for the last three years.

"I get many complaints from the Muslims of the area everyday saying they returned home from the way to the mosque as their clothes got dirty from the sludge on the road," he said.

A large number of neighbourhood roads in East Rajabazar have also been in bad shape for the last three years.

The roads which had been in better conditions just three months ago are now almost unusable as they

RTI given go-ahead

FROM PAGE 1

chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed.

Details of the ordinance were not available immediately. It will come into effect after the president signs it.

Under the new law, people will have to pay fees for filing application seeking information. But people living below poverty line will be able to apply in white sheets of paper without paying any fees.

A three-member Information Commission headed by a chief information commissioner will be formed to properly enforce the law and deal with complaints from the information seekers.

"One of the two commissioners will be a woman," Syed Fahim Munain, press secretary to the chief adviser, told reporters after the council meeting.

The Information Commission, apart from financial liberty, has been entrusted with the authority to punish or fine officials who will fail to provide primary information on life and death, arrest and release of a person from prison within 24 hours, he said.

The president will appoint the chief information commissioner and information commissioners on the basis of suggestions from a five-member selection committee.

The chief justice will nominate a judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court to head the selection committee. The Speaker will nominate two parliament members -- one each from the treasury and opposition benches -- while the government will nominate one from among eminent citizens.

The cabinet secretary will be the other member of the selection committee.

If any assigned official does not provide information to an information-seeker as per the law, he will have to pay Tk 50 for a day's delay and

a total fine not exceeding Tk 5,000, according to a provision of the ordinance.

The ordinance will not cover National Security Intelligence, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, Military Intelligence Directorate, Special Security Force, Criminal Investigation Department of Police and Central Intelligence Cell of the National Board of Revenue.

This provision will not apply if the information concerns corruption and human rights violation.

Welcoming the government move, Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, which has been working for several years for enactment of the law, said, "It is historic. If there is anything that needs to be changed, it can be done later."

Congratulating the government on its approval of the ordinance, Shawkat Mahmud, president of the Lativa Press Club, also termed it a historic move.

The information secretary said 99 percent of the NGOs will be covered by the law. "We've tried to ensure maximum disclosure of information. If there is any lapse in the ordinance, there is always a scope to address that," he said.

Describing implementation of the law as a crucial job, he said the main tasks include forming the information commission, creating information bank and information dissemination system at offices and training up the staff.

Against the backdrop of a long-standing demand, the caretaker government took the initiative to formulate an RTI law as part of its institutional reforms. After an eight-member government-formed body prepared a primary draft in February, opinions from different stakeholders were sought before the information ministry submitted it to the cabinet on June 18.

40 killed in Pakistan

FROM PAGE 1

faces a tough challenge in reining in a wave of Islamist militant violence, he told the Associated Press news agency.

There are reports that the explosion brought down the ceiling of the banquet hall, where some 300 people were sharing a meal to break the fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

The Marriott is the most prestigious hotel in the capital, and is located near government buildings and diplomatic missions.

Security there is tight, with guests and vehicles subject to checks.

It is popular with foreign visitors to Pakistan or members of the expat community, and has previously been the target of militants.

Pakistan has faced a wave of bombings and other attacks for more than a year. Tribal areas along the Afghan border are believed to be a new stronghold for Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants.

Zardari called for an end to the president's powers to dissolve the assembly and dismiss the government.

He was speaking in Islamabad, just several hundred metres to the east of the Marriott.

The United States was looking into whether any US nationals were hurt, a State Department spokeswoman said Saturday.

Pakistan has been a key ally of the US in its "war on terror", but relations have become strained over tactics.

The attacker came in a big vehicle and rammed it into the outer gate of the Marriott Hotel," an eyewitness said.