

JS polls on Dec 18

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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.

Fakhruddin 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.

Amid growing uncertainties regarding the fate of the stalled parliamentary poll, Fakhruddin 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.

Yesterday before addressing the nation over the state-owned radio and television, the chief adviser met the EC in his office.

The meeting examined the laws of the land to see whether the chief adviser is allowed to announce the dates for the polls, and found that there is no legal bar on him doing so, meeting sources said.

Last week, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda however said the chief adviser would not announce the dates for the polls, rather he himself would announce the dates on Monday in line with the law.

Even moments before leaving the EC Secretariat premises for the Chief Adviser's Office yesterday afternoon, the poll chief told reporters that he would announce the dates for the polls in a day or two.

Minor tremor jolts

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waves in rivers, canals and ponds of the district.

Panicking residents of the area rushed outside to the open field when the tremor struck, the correspondent added.

A correspondent from Chandpur reported that the earthquake was felt twice in the area.

Earlier a moderate earthquake shook the capital and parts of the country in the early hours of July 27 causing panic among the people.

At least 20 people were hurt in the panic and confusion as people rushed for safety following the tremor.

Govt probing

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the shrine two days before the attack, which made investigators suspect that the attack was carried out by Hizb ut-Tahrir. And since then the outfit has been alleged to have militant links at home and abroad, said a law enforcement official involved in the probe into the attack.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad yesterday told the media that Hizb ut-Tahrir's activities in Rajshahi are suspicious and that they are investigating the outfit's objectives and activities. He said they are cautious not to let similar incidents take place elsewhere.

The leaflets distributed in Rajshahi contain objectionable statements against the state and the government. We are investigating the line of their activities," the IGP said.

Another law enforcement agency source said Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh was on the list of suspected militant organisations prepared by intelligence agencies, including Police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), when JMB started militant activities openly.

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 flag bearers of Islam."

A law 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.

Referring to recent political incidents in Bangladesh, Zillur said Bangladesh is not going back to the chaos that led to 1/11.

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.

Several dozens of buses of Hanif, Al-Hamara, Modern, National Travels, Nabil, Shyamoli, Agomony and Sohag Paribahan were seen collecting passengers in front of counters in Kalyanpur.

"It often takes me 30 to 40 minutes to pass half a kilometre road between Shyamoli and Kalyanpur at night by my office car due to severe traffic gridlock thanks to parking of these buses," said Abul Kashem, who works as an executive at a private firm in Mohakhali.

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) Jasmuddin said they have recently decided that inter-district buses would 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 areas 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.

Mohammad Ismail, khadem of West Rajabazar Mosque, said about 200 to 300 Muslims of the area do not get the chance to say their Juma prayers with at the mosque anymore, while many who attempt every Friday have to return home without saying their prayers.

"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," the khadem 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

Adviser Zillur

FROM PAGE 16
at the Heritage Foundation in Washington DC on Friday, according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

"...As recourse to political transition, the government has intensified the process of involving the people from all walks of life in the decision-making process and thereby is trying to ensure good governance and accountability in public administration," the adviser said.

He, however, acknowledged that the government had to adjust their strategies with a view to facilitating the process of bridging the goals of political parties and the aspirations of the common people of Bangladesh.

The adviser informed the audience about the economic potentials of Bangladesh, as the country has been maintaining a healthy growth rate of over 6 percent and narrated the reform initiatives taken by the government to exploit these economic opportunities.

During the question-answer session, the adviser said, "By any measure, today's Bangladesh is different from what it was before 1/11."

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were due to lay down water pipelines three months back, and were left without properly repaving those. 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 ward 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.

He however said the road in front of West Rajabazar Mosque is scheduled to be repaired soon as tenders for its repair are scheduled to be invited this month.

Ranada Pharmacy Road is also scheduled to be repaired soon.

The problem of overflowing sewers is also scheduled to be solved soon as just before the start of the road repair work, WASA is scheduled to fix the sewer next month, the ward commissioner added.

Repair of the roads in East Rajabazar, which were dug to set up waterlines, is also scheduled to start soon as the work order has already been issued and the work is scheduled to be completed before the Eid-ul-Fitr, he added.

Meanwhile, the residents of West Rajabazar, East Rajabazar and Indira Road can only hope that the list of schedules that promises a little respite in their otherwise hectic lives will be kept, as the Eid is practically knocking on the door.

Hasina

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government to explain why the initiation and continuation of the case filed by Noor Ali should not be declared illegal.

Noor Ali, managing director of Unique Group of Companies, filed the case with Gulshan Police Station on June 13, 2007 against Hasina and her two relatives on charge of extorting Tk 5 crore for doing a mediation between the Power Development Board (PDB) and his firm to finalise a power plant deal back in 1997.

West offers

FROM PAGE 1
A spokesman for the European Commission in his instant reaction said they welcome the chief adviser's speech. "But we will observe the next steps concerning the elections."

European Commission (EC) External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero will meet Foreign Adviser Iftakhar Ahmed Chowdhury in New York on September 22 and discuss the latest developments on the ground ahead of the election.

The rebels have been fighting for an independent state in the north and east since 1983, following decades of marginalisation of ethnic Tamils by governments dominated by the Sinhalese majority. More than 70,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

Lankan battles

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underreporting their own.

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Dr Wahiduddin

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Mahmud said if realistic reforms are not made the country's politics could take another turn.

About the much-talked-about dialogue between Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, he said all problems in the country's politics would not be solved only by a dialogue between the two top leaders and without coming to an understanding after finding the real problems.

"The country's politics has entered a vicious circle and some kind of accord among the two big parties, regarding bringing qualitative changes in politics, has to be achieved to solve the problems," said Mahmud.

He said if the agreement is not ensured then it cannot be guaranteed that another 1/11 would not happen.

Consensus could be achieved about electoral code of conduct, not nominating any corrupt person, stance of the opposition party in the next parliament and whether the caretaker government system would continue in the country, Mahmud said.

He said, "It seems that the country has an environment for election and elections will be held in the country but the consensus should be achieved before the elections."

About the government's anti-corruption drive and other initiatives for reforms Mahmud said, "Now it seems those initiatives were a bit too optimistic... such changes could not be brought within such a short time."

He urged political parties, the Election Commission and the caretaker government to come to a consensus regarding these issues.

He said there is no alternative to holding parliamentary polls for a smooth transition to democracy.

Reformists

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Party insiders said Chairperson Khaleda Zia herself finalised the names of the delegation members following discussion with senior leaders including Secretary General Khandaker Delwar 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 Gani, Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky and M Shamsul Islam, vice-presidents MK Anwar and Sarwari Rahman, Joint Secretary General Nazul Islam Khan, Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed, BNP Chairperson's Adviser Brig Gen (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah and Mushfiqur Rahman and former lawmaker Abdul Mannan were in the delegation.

"The chairperson made the right decision considering the reality," a senior leader of the party told The Daily Star, adding that the inclusion or exclusion of names in the delegation will not hamper the party's unity.

Two reformist leaders M Saifur Rahman and Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahabubur Rahman attended the standing committee meeting held at the party office on September 13.

"Everyone can work for the party from their own position," Khaleda Zia told reporters after the meeting and urged the party leaders and workers to prepare for the upcoming election.

Reformist leader Maj (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin had talked to Khaleda over telephone after her release while Dhaka Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, who in early 2007 said the party chief's power should be reduced, met with Khaleda Friday night.

JMB threat

FROM PAGE 16
assistant commissioner of RMP Detective Branch (DB), told reporters that they have beefed up security at police stations and other installations in the city.

The fax said JMB has enough explosives to bomb the police stations.

Addressed to Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), superintendent of police, DB and National Security Intelligence, the fax did not carry any signature.

It said the outfit has targeted police stations since the law enforcers are "creating obstacles to its operation".

Earlier on September 7, another fax purportedly sent by JMB threatened to bomb the residences and offices of caretaker government's advisers and police officials.

RMG workers

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authorities, they alleged adding that they damaged the vehicles in protest.

Meantime, workers of Root Apparels Ltd, shut down in past August, blockaded the road in front of the factory at Uttarkhan in Uttara yesterday, demanding salary and overtime arrears.

They removed the roadblocks an hour later when the factory management agreed to pay them off.

Bush offers

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"And that over time, we're going to get a lot of the money back."

He added that "the government needed to send a clear signal that we understood the instability can ripple throughout and affect the working people and the average family and we weren't going to let that happen."

Money took them

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ICL sacrificing their national careers," Ashraf said.

"For example, I was in constant touch with our former national captain Habibul Bashar. We were thinking about giving him a chance in the coming home series. So I had talks with him every other day on how he was training and preparing."

"You are supposed to trust everyone you work with. But I admit that I never realised what he was really thinking of. Moreover, we were very close in the negotiation of pumping more of our players to play in the Indian Premier League. But we might have been a bit late with that effort," said Ashraf adding that almost similar things happened in case of the others joining the ICL.

The focuses of the roundtable, however, were on infrastructure and planning, management, umpires, pitches and grounds, leadership, attitude and domestic cricket. The lively five-hour discussion was also attended by former BCB general secretary Mahbubul Anam, former national captains Roquibul Hassan, Aminul Islam, Naimur Rahman, chief selector Rafiqul Alam, current BCB officials Shafiqur Rahman, Shakil Kasem, Salim Shahed, coach Jalil Ahmed Chowdhury, international umpire Nadir Shah, CDDM secretary Mostafa Kabir and young organiser Syed Ali Asaf.

The Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam rounded off the discussion with a vote of thanks to everyone and invited the audience to use the newspaper as a platform for the betterment of country's sports and cricket in particular since it is a now a national obsession.

RTI given go-ahead

FROM PAGE 1
chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin 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 Munaim, 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 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 Jatoya 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, delivered his first address to parliament.

In his first speech to MPs since he replaced Pervez Musharraf in August, he vowed instead to "root out terrorism and extremism wherever and whenever they may rear their ugly heads".

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.

The bomb was so powerful that it blew out windows in buildings about one kilometre (a half-mile) away. An AFP photographer saw at least 20 mutilated bodies amid the carnage at the scene.

Witnesses spoke of a smaller blast followed by a much larger one.

A US State Department official using a section of white pipe as a walking stick led three colleagues through the rubble from the charred building, one of them bleeding heavily from a wound on the side of his head.

One of the four, who identified himself only as Tony, said they had begun moving toward the rear of the Chinese restaurant after the first blast when the second one threw them against the back wall.

"Then we saw a big truck coming through the gates," he said. "After that it was just smoke and darkness."

Ambulances rushed to the area, picking their way through the charred carcasses of vehicles that had been in the street outside. Windows in buildings hundreds of yards away were shattered.

In recent months, Pakistan has voiced growing disquiet over US raids targeting militants in its territory, launched from neighbouring Afghanistan.

A BBC report said that the centre of the blast was at the front of the building close to the area where security checks are carried out.

About two-thirds of the 290-room hotel went on fire following the blast, and the wounded and dead are still being brought out, on stretchers or wrapped in sheets hours after the attack.

Emergency services had been unable to reach the upper floors of the hotel, where more people were feared to be trapped, the BBC report added.