

AL's yes to nearly all

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"We have some difference of opinions on some provisions in RPO but we fully agree other provisions," Ashraf added.

During the recent talks with EC, AL demanded cancellation of some of the newly framed criteria for registration, which imposed restrictions on parties having front organisations of professionals, and overseas units terming the criterion unconstitutional.

The AL also wants the national election to be held under the newly framed electoral law and rules in a bid to make the upcoming polls free and fair and ensure participation of honest and competent candidates.

"We think the electoral laws and rules reforms are very necessary to prevent goons and black money holders from contesting the upcoming elections again," Ashraf said, adding, "We want nomination to be given based on recommendation of the grassroots level and an election free from all influence of black money and muscle power."

The party's highest policymaking body sat at AL acting president Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence to review the chief adviser's speech. The meeting with Zillur in the chair formally welcomed the speech for announcing the national election date first.

Addressing the press conference, Ashraf said the AL-led grand alliance had forged movement to carry out necessary reforms in electoral laws and for that the January 22 "conspiratorial" election could not be held.

The 1/11 is the outcome of the Awami League-led grand alliance's movement and electoral reforms are the outcome of the 1/11; so we can not allow these reforms go ruin for a party."

The BNP and its alliance partners during its talks with EC on Saturday demanded that the new electoral laws and rules be scrapped or suspended till the national election is over.

The AL leader said those who [BNP] want the election to be held under the 2001 electoral rules do not want a free and fair election in the country. They want to arrange a farcical election again with collaboration. The BNP wants the goons and black money holders take part in the upcoming polls again, he added.

Saying that there is no lack of honest and competent candidates in AL, he said his party would nominate only honest, eligible and acceptable candidates for the parliamentary polls.

AL presidium members Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdul Razzak, Tofail Ahmed and Motia Chowdhury attended the meeting with Zillur in the chair.

The chief adviser has assured the nation by saying that his government's attempts were to hand over power to an elected government through holding a free, fair and credible election by December. We thank the chief adviser, the Election Commission and the council of advisers," Ashraf said hoping that the government and EC would concentrate their best efforts on presenting the nation with national elections acceptable to all.

He expressed the hope that voter list in each electoral area would be finalised ahead of announcement of election schedule. The AL thanked the government and EC for preparing a dependable voter list.

He also praised them for announcing upazila elections date after the national elections. He however said there are some practical and technical problems with holding upazila elections just five days after the national polls.

It would be very tough to handle administrative preparations and law and order, he said, adding it would not also be possible for the government to hold the local body election in a free and fair manner.

The AL spokesman said his party would discuss the matter with the government.

BNP says no to all

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They will continue to press the EC to hold the December 18 national election under the previous laws, added the sources.

The military-backed caretaker government had a number of additions to the RPO 1972 through an ordinance last month.

Of the latest provisions, the ones providing for no-vote option and mandatory registration on meeting conditions like severing ties with front organisations and overseas chapters appear to be the most contentious.

Meanwhile, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday reiterated that registration is a must for participation in the parliamentary polls.

Talking to reporters, he however said they are working to make the procedure easier.

"Registration is mandatory. But we are thinking about some alternatives."

Declining to elaborate on the plans, he said the EC will announce its next course of action today. It will also talk about registration and outcome of the dialogue with political parties.

The same day secretaries general of the four parties—BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) and Bangladesher Jatiya Party (BJP)—will meet at BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar

Ashraf demanded immediate withdrawal of the state of emergency before announcing the election schedule. He said holding of national election as well as casting of votes could not be held under emergency.

He also suggested that the government strictly implement the existing laws to ensure that all black-money holders, criminals and armed goons are barred effectively from the polls.

Asked about the news that EC should not be blamed in case the polls are hindered by BNP's non-cooperation, the AL leader condemned the way BNP and some other parties behaved with EC at the dialogue. He however expressed the hope that all the political parties including BNP would take part in the elections.

About holding party council to amend the AL constitution to get registered with EC, Ashraf said there is no need to hold the council since EC has agreed to accept the changes in the party constitution with approval from the central working committee.

Replying to a query, he said, "The decision about the grand alliance will be taken after Sheikh Hasina returns home. Awami League will take part in the election under the banner of grand alliance and under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina."

Unfit buses

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August 20 decided that buses 15 years or more old would not be given route permit in Dhaka and Chittagong. It had asked bus owners to withdraw the old buses from Dhaka and Chittagong and replace them with CNG-run 52-seater buses.

The DMP and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials launched the drives against the old vehicles as per the decision of the DMTC. The BRTA also stopped renewing route permits of old buses in Dhaka and Chittagong.

DMP Commissioner Naim Ahmed yesterday said they held back the drives considering the Eid rush. He said the drives would resume after Eid-ul-Fitr vacation.

BRTA Chairman Sunit Kanti Bose said the measures of the BRTA would continue regardless of DMP's decision to stop the drive. He said the BRTA was not informed about the DMP decision.

The DMTC decided not to renew route permits of old buses after being asked by the communications ministry to do so. The traffic department of the DMP was also asked to carry out drives against the old vehicles.

City traffic chief DMP Joint Commissioner Jasim Uddin told The Daily Star, "We announced a reward... If a traffic sergeant catches an old vehicle, he will be rewarded Tk 1,000."

"We carried out the drives against the old vehicles on September 18 and 19 and picked up 28 buses and minibuses," the joint commissioner said, adding, "Soon after the drives were launched, the owners stopped running their vehicles. We saw hundreds of city dwellers in trouble. Considering public suffering, we decided to hold back the drives during Ramadan."

When asked, the joint commissioner said they have no accurate number of old buses and minibuses. He, however, advised contacting the BRTA.

Talking to The Daily Star, BRTA Chairman Sunit said, "Around 15-20 percent of the total buses plying the city streets are older than 15 years."

He said the old buses would be given route permits outside the capital and Chittagong.

Sources said a large number of city buses are unfit but many of those are running with fitness certificates from BRTA by bribing a section of corrupt officials. Most of these vehicles are in appalling condition. A number of them lack tail lights, headlights, indicator lights and most of them bear marks of accidents but the police say that these have fitness certificates from BRTA.

Hossain's residence to discuss their strategies with regard to the amended RPO, particularly the registration rules.

According to the EC announcement, October 15 is the closing date for submitting registration applications.

BNP standing committee member Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiqi yesterday told The Daily Star, "It is utterly illogical to expect the parties to hold councils under the state of emergency and bring changes to their constitutions to fulfil the registration criteria."

BNP's Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan said, "We have already told the Election Commission that it's not possible for us to meet the conditions at such short notice."

As per the electoral laws of 1982, registration can be done after the election, he added.

Meanwhile, a number of BNP leaders said the party's opposition to almost every decision of the EC baffles them.

They told The Daily Star they are worried that wholesale disagreement might hinder the efforts to restore democracy.

"We shouldn't do anything that might prolong the non-elected regime," said a former lawmaker.

Some others believe BNP would rather be the gainer if it can make the EC concede its demands.

Govt asks

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a fixed amount of Zakat from their respective areas.

The information was given at a press briefing at the secretariat yesterday afternoon.

"We did not send letters to well-to-do people earlier. This is the first time we have taken an initiative like this. The government would not have to launch any poverty alleviation programs had people offered Zakat to the government fund," said Director General (DG) of the Islamic Foundation Mohammad Fazlur Rahman.

The government has also taken initiative to broadcast programs on television to encourage people to offer Zakat and let them know about the significance of it.

He also informed that Tk 6.09 crore has been spent from the Zakat fund so far, under which 5.43 lakh poor people have already been benefited.

Mufti Mohammad Nuruddin, acting khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, was also present at the press briefing.

The projects financed by Zakat fund include a children hospital in Tongi, sewing training program, student scholarship, widow rehabilitation, poverty alleviation program, financial assistance, and relief material distribution.

The government Zakat board is consisted of 13 members.

2 companies

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Lu, Sun Care and Yashili brands of China for the time being.

Officials from the Customs, BSTI, Atomic Energy Commission, health directorate and health and commerce ministries attended the meeting, presided over by Commerce Secretary Ferroz Ahmed.

6 govt officials

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wealth voluntarily.

The ACC, however, did not send the name of former BNP state minister Maj (retd) Kamrul Islam, as the summary report of the investigation was not yet ready. Kamrul applied to the ACC on August 18 for making voluntary disclosure before Tac.

The six persons faced Tac yesterday from Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) and Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa).

Meanwhile, the ACC has already stopped the enquiry into the wealth statement submitted by Kamrul Islam as the commission is preparing to send his name to Tac.

Kamrul submitted his wealth statement worth over Tk 7 crore after ACC had served him with notice in November asking him to submit wealth statement.

Aug 21 attack

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charge framing against 22 people including Harkatul Jihad (Hujj) chief Mufti Abdul Hannan and detained former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu.

The cases were filed after 23 people had been killed and 200 others injured in grenade attacks on an AL rally in the city's Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004. AL President Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped the attack.

Of the accused, Pintu, Mufti Hannan and his brother Mohibullah alias Mafizur Rahman alias Ovi along with 10 others are now in jail custody. They were produced before the court yesterday.

Another accused Shahadat Ullah Jewel, who was earlier granted bail by the High Court, was also present in the court yesterday.

Pintu's brothers Maulana Tajuddin and Maulana Liton, Anisul Mursalin, Mahibul Muttakin, Iqbal, Maulana Abu Bakar alias Selim Howlader, Jahangir Alam Badar and Khalilur Rahman have been absconding since the cases were filed.

Of the arrestees, Hannan, Bipul, Ovi, Abu Sayeed, Bulbul, Arif Hossain, Jahangir and Sabuj gave statements admitting to their involvement in the incident.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Assistant Superintendent Fazul Kabir, also the investigation officer (IO) of the cases, submitted the charge-sheets to the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court on June 11 this year, showing 412 people as prosecution witnesses.

RPO of contention

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• The EC is empowered to cancel candidature for violation of electoral laws and code of conduct.

• Parties with no parliamentary seats won since independence and with less than five percent votes secured in constituencies concerned will be disqualified for registration.

• Parties are required to give nominations on the basis of recommendations made by local level party committees in every constituency.

• Political parties must incorporate provisions in their constitutions to get elected members in all their committees.

• Political parties must incorporate provisions in their constitutions to get 33 percent women leaders in all majorities by 2012.

All major political parties will have to amend their constitutions to fulfil the criteria laid down for registration.

al-Qaeda blamed

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The official said investigators believe up to 600 kilos (1,300 pounds) of explosives were packed into the truck, which exploded in a giant fireball at the security gate and tore an enormous crater in the ground.

The blast ignited gas cylinders in the kitchen, setting off a blaze that swept through the 300-room hotel. A security official said some victims leapt to their deaths rather than be burnt alive on the upper floors.

Pieces of human flesh were still scattered outside the hotel on Sunday morning. The intense heat inside kept rescuers, who were wearing masks and chemical protection suits, from getting inside most of the destroyed building.

A senior security official said at least 53 people were dead. The government put the confirmed toll at 53 Sunday, and it was not known how many people might still be unaccounted for.

Bodies pulled from the debris were burnt beyond recognition. The hotel was popular with politicians, foreigners and the Pakistani elite.

The bombing is a serious challenge to new President Asif Ali Zardari, who faces a desperate battle against al-Qaeda and Taliban militants whose campaign of violence has killed 1,300 people in Pakistan this year.

"We will rid the country of this cancer," Zardari, who took office less than two weeks ago, said in a message to the nation after the attack. "I appeal to all democratic forces to come and save Pakistan."

"We will not be deterred by these cowards, Pakistanis are brave and fearless people, they are not afraid of death," he said.

"I promise you that such actions by these cowards will not lower our resolve," he said.

But analysts say the ability to carry out such a massive bombing at one of the most secure sites in the capital, not far from parliament and the prime minister's residence, is an unmistakable sign of the militants' reach.

Zardari's predecessor Pervez Musharraf turned Pakistan into a close ally of the United States after the September 11 attacks in 2001, and the government has waged a

Boro output

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food assistance needs of the country to be 1.76 million tonnes, of which 35,000 tonnes are for vulnerable households affected by Cyclone Sidr. To meet this need, 500,000 tonnes will be imported and 1.26 million tonnes purchased locally.

Producer prices of rice have increased for Boro season. Wet paddy price in 2008 is Tk 18-20 per kg compared to Tk 10-12 last year, milled rice prices vary from Tk 30-40 compared to Tk 15-16 per kg last year.

"But due to sharecropping arrangements and lack of working capital which forces forward sales, many farmers did not get the full benefit of these price increases," the FAO-WFP report observes.

Prior to the 2007-08 shocks, an estimated about 7.58 crore individuals in Bangladesh were below the food consumption threshold of 2122 kilocalories per person a day. Within this group, an estimated 3.96 crore people fell below the more severe poverty line food consumption threshold of 1805 kilocalories per person per day.

"Rice and other food commodity prices have been rising since early 2007, but rose more rapidly between late 2007 and the first four months of 2008. Prices have decreased somewhat since their peak in April 2008, but still remain at relatively high levels," the report observes.

MK Alamgir

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evading Tax worth Tk 85 lakh on its purchase. CASE AGAINST ALAMGIR: NBR Additional Assistant Tax Commissioner AKM Shahadat Hossain filed the case with the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court against Dr Alamgir for committing the offences.

After the hearing, Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque recorded the statement of the complainant, took the charges into cognisance and fixed September 24 for next hearing of the case.

The court also asked the jail authorities to produce the accused before it on the scheduled date.

In his order, the judge said the charges brought against the accused were primarily found to be true and the charges were taken into cognisance for trial.

In his complaint, the plaintiff mentioned that Dr Alamgir had concealed information about his wealth worth Tk 2,12,58,602 from the NBR department and evaded Tk 5,344,671 in income tax from 2002 to 2007.

Dr Alamgir, accused in a number of cases, was arrested on February 4 last year.

CASE AGAINST OBAIDUL: ACC Deputy Director Abdu Karim submitted the charge sheet to the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in the case filed against Obaidul and Saidul for irregularities in importing a car and evading tax on its purchase.

Karim, the investigation officer (IO) of the case, showed 23 people as prosecution witnesses.

He appealed to the court for issuing arrest warrant against Obaidul Karim and the order to attach his properties. Earlier, Saidul Haque was granted bail by the High Court.

In the charge sheet, the IO mentioned that the charges brought against the two were primarily proved and they should be brought under trial.

The commission filed the case with Tegrapur Police Station against Obaidul Karim and Saidul Haque on August 9 last year for committing the offences.

Barisal serial blasts

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serial bomb blasts at 12 places in Barisal city on August 17, 2005.

Assistant sub-inspector Anwar Hossain of Barisal Kotwali Police Station filed the 7th case for blasting bombs at a place between Bottala police checkpoint and a city mosque on August 17, 2005.

Sub-inspector Matiar Rahman submitted the charge sheet against 14 people on December 25, 2005.

With this judgment, the trial proceedings of eight out of the 12 cases have been completed.

Only in one case seven people were sentenced to life imprisonment by the same court on July 30, 2008.

Advocate Kazi Munir Hussein, special prosecutor-in-charge of the tribunal, said the accused in such cases get acquitted due to flaws in investigation.

Hizbut-Tahrir men

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Hizb ut-Tahrir Coordinator and Dhaka University teacher Syed Golam Mowla and Ahmed Jamal Iqbal, teacher of South East University and a senior member of the Islamist group, were arrested along with eight others on September 18 in Rajshahi.

However, police did not lodge any case against them, as of filing of this report last night, as they reportedly did not receive the go-ahead from government high-ups.

Officials of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) said they are yet to get any signal from the government high-ups about bringing sedition charge against the arrestees.

They said the arrestees were engaged in anti-state activities and provoking people against the country and the government through leaflets which called for toppling the government and establishing Khelafat in the country.

They said they are investigating whether there is a link between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the JMB threat made on Saturday.

Ramjan Ali, officer-in-charge of Boalia Police Station, told The Daily Star, "The investigation is on. We will submit remand prayers against the arrestees when the investigation demands."

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Naim Ahmed yesterday said even though Hizb ut-Tahrir threatened the government and gave a 48-hour ultimatum, they are yet to see any activity in this connection.

During a press conference held at Rajarbagh Police Lines Auditorium, the DMP Commissioner said, "We are seriously observing their activities."

On Thursday, Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders in a meeting at the city's Engineers Institute demanded immediate release of the 10 leaders.

Hasina

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The government on July 16 last year put the case under the emergency power rules (EPR), and a magistrate's court on July 29 the same year ordered that Hasina be shown arrested in the case.

Following a writ petition on August 7 last year, the HC granted bail to Hasina in this case, and asked the government to explain why bringing the case under the EPR should not be declared illegal.

Later, the Supreme Court upon a petition filed by the government stayed the HC order till disposal of the rule.

Sajeda's son

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hiding information about his wealth.

Since he is absconding, the sentence will come into effect the day he surrenders or is arrested.

ACC Assistant Director Khairul Huda filed the case with Ramna Police Station against Shahdad and his wife Shahnaz Khan on February 19 this year for accumulating wealth worth Tk 1.24 crore beyond their known sources of income and concealing information about assets worth Tk 95.38 lakh.

The name of Shahnaz was dropped from the charge sheet as charges brought against her were not proved.

JAHMILUR: Judge Amar Kumar Roy of the Special Court-2, on the same premises, awarded Jahmilur Rahman eight years' imprisonment for amassing wealth illegally and hiding information in his wealth statement submitted to the ACC.

He was also fined Tk 1 lakh, in default of which he would be in prison for another three months.

The former Sonali Bank boss was handed down five years' imprisonment for accumulating wealth beyond his known sources of income and three years' for hiding information about his wealth.

As he is on the run, the sentence will come into effect when he surrenders or is arrested.

His wife Shamima Begum was also accused in the case for aiding and abetting him in the illegal earning. But the High Court quashed corruption proceedings against her.

ACC Assistant Director SM Manjur Ahmed filed the case against them on March 27 this year with Ramna Police Station for amassing wealth worth over Tk 1.18 crore beyond their known sources of income.

DCC

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He claims he had all the roads in Lalmitia repaired before his arrest in February 2007, but those roads have been damaged as land developers keep construction materials on the roads.

Chief Engineer of DCC Col Ashfaqul Islam said they did not give ward-based allocation in the last fiscal year according to the financial planning.

"Earlier, DCC used to do the repair on credit and make the payment in the next fiscal year. But since last year we have stopped this practice but had to pay the arrears of Tk 56 crore of the earlier years," he said.

Ashfaqul said after paying off the arrears they could spend only Tk 7 crore to repair roads last fiscal year.

"We have already started the process of repairing roads and it will start in full swing in October. We have already collected a list of the most damaged roads, taken video footage of those and made initiatives to repair the roads based on priority," he said.

The DCC requires over Tk 1,000 crore to repair all the damaged roads in the city. But as the city corporation does not have that much fund, they would do the repair on priority basis gradually, he added.

Waterlogging. To avert this problem, DCC is setting up drains, he said, adding they have also taken initiative to use cement concrete (CC) instead of bitumen during repair on the waterlogged roads.

"We are also emphasising maintaining quality during repairing so that the roads do not get damaged within a short time," he said.

According to the budget of the current fiscal year, DCC allocates Tk 170.4 crore for development and maintenance of roads, traffic infrastructure, footpaths, footbridge or underpass, bus-truck terminals, central reservation and electrification in the roads.

The amount was Tk 163.5 crore in the 2007-2008 fiscal year.

US hopes

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ensure conditions conducive to free, fair and credible elections.

"We share the hope of the people of Bangladesh that conditions in the country will allow the total repeal of the state of emergency at a special prior to the elections," a spokesman for the US Embassy in Dhaka said in a full-dress reaction to the chief adviser's address to the nation.

"We look forward to seeing free, fair and credible elections this December," the spokesman said, adding, "We believe that local government elections are an important part of a democratic Bangladesh. The timing of these elections is a matter for the government of Bangladesh and its people to decide."

The spokesman said the US believes that the government, political parties, civil society and the media have important roles to play in ensuring free, fair and credible elections for the people of Bangladesh. Compromise is an integral part of a healthy democracy.

Meanwhile, the European Commission (EC) has also welcomed the chief adviser's indications about holding of the parliamentary and upazila elections and the creation of favourable conditions for the successful holding of the polls.

"The European Commission encourages all stakeholders to work in a constructive spirit towards those elections," said the delegation of the EC to Bangladesh yesterday in an official reaction to the chief adviser's Saturday evening speech to the nation.

The EC delegation said the EC confirms that the Commissioner for External Relations Dr Ferrero-Waldner will decide in the near future on the redeployment of EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) based on the prevailing political and electoral situation.

Policy dialogue

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"We should think of decentralisation of administration from the central," he observed.

There are other problems with the running of the committees, other than the funds, experts pointed out. For example, while the UPs have been laden with the task of birth registration across the country, their manpower has not been increased to accommodate this extra load of work.

Giasuddin Ahmed, a UP standing committee member, said committee members are often not well educated and therefore public offices bear a negative attitude towards them.

Expressing frustration over the fact that democracy is not exercised and that the central government does not pay much attention towards the local government, Democracy Watch Executive Director Talya Rehman said, "It is sad that we cry for democracy when it is absent, but neglect it when we have it."

Professor Zehna Rahman Khan, UP Chairman advocate Afzal Hoss