

Khaleda hails

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suspending clause 91(e) of the Representation of the People Order. The government has to remove all obstacles in the way to holding of a free and fair poll, she said.

It is the government's responsibility to create a congenial atmosphere for a free, fair and meaningful election, she said, adding that the four-party alliance will go to power if the poll is held in a free and fair manner.

"The election cannot be free, fair and neutral if it is held amidst emergency...The latest city corporation elections have proved this," she said. "The environment required will be created if the government makes an announcement regarding this matter without further delay."

In a televised speech Thursday, Khaleda declared that the BNP-led alliance would go to polls if the election is held on December 28.

The former premier said people want an elected government as soon as possible and they are eagerly waiting to cast their votes "as the country has moved 20 years backward in the last two years".

She said, "An elected government is essential to end the current situation."

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain and recently released former Barisal mayor Mujibur Rahman Sarwar also spoke at the programme.

Meanwhile, the BNP-led four-party alliance has started discussion to settle the seat-sharing issue as part of its preparation for the upcoming election, now scheduled for December 29.

Party insiders said Khaleda held a meeting at her Gulshan office last night with alliance leaders, including Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojahid, Assistant Secretary General Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chief Andaleeb Rahman Partho and Secretary General Shamim Al Mamun.

Before the meeting, she talked to a large number of party leaders from across the country who hope to get nominations.

Khandaker Delwar yesterday told reporters that BNP is ready with candidates for all 300 constituencies but they will share seats with three other parties of the alliance.

BNP Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed told The Daily Star that his party is yet to decide on selling nomination papers to party's aspirant candidates.

"I am ready to sell nomination papers but I am yet to get the chairperson's nod in this regard," he said.

Party sources said leaders of Bangladesh Jatiya Party and Islami Oikya Jote may have to take part in the election as BNP candidates since both the parties failed to get EC registration.

Led by Lt Col (ret'd) Mohammad Abdul Khaleque, 25 EX ARMY OFFICERS JOIN BNP

Twenty-five retired army officers yesterday joined BNP with the intention to contest the upcoming elections with BNP tickets.

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The report also points out that due to a sharp increase in the number of people entering job market, around 2.2 million new jobs need to be created each year over the next decade. This rate of job creation is twice that of the years between 2000 and 2005.

This is a challenge for Bangladesh but also an opportunity since the new income earners can contribute significantly to overall poverty reduction.

The report observes that the western part of the country lags behind the eastern part in poverty reduction, as the rivers Jamuna and Padma create natural boundaries that limit integration between economically unequal geographical regions.

Lead authors of the report Ambar Narayan and Hassan Zaman presented the report at yesterday's press conference.

They said infrastructure improvements, particularly the Padma Bridge, availability of power and gas and better connectivity to markets are necessary to spread growth to the lagging regions.

The officers met the BNP chairperson at her Gulshan office last night and expressed their loyalty to her leadership.

Brig Gen Nasiruddin Sarwar, Brig Gen Nasiruddin Ahmed, Lt Col AHM Ruhul Islam, Lt Col M Badiur Rahman, Col Mohammad Shahjahan Mia are among the people who joined BNP.

REFORMISTS LEADERS ASSAULTED
Rustam Ali Farazi, a former BNP lawmaker, was assaulted at BNP chairperson's Gulshan office last night.

Several BNP and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leaders assaulted him as he was about to leave the office. They termed Farazi collaborator of the present government and accused him of being loyal to expelled BNP leader Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

AL grappling

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since it has already announced its nominations in almost all 300 constituencies.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of senior AL leaders said they think the BNP-Jamaat alliance would benefit under the current circumstances.

The AL already notified this problem to the Election Commission (EC) saying that AL had nominated party candidates apprehending that the elections would be held on December 18.

"The election schedule has been changed three times due to the demands of a party. We are now facing problems with nominations as we finalised our party tickets apprehending that the national elections would be held on the date announced earlier," AL President Sheikh Hasina said yesterday.

Hasina alleged that a rival party of AL has been trying to buy party men, who failed to get AL tickets, with large amount of money.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said political parties that finalised their nominations are now facing problems due to the frequent changes in the poll schedule. He said he was sorry for this.

He hoped that all political parties would deal with the problem liberally and take part in the election in the greater interest of the country.

Meanwhile, AL Jatiya Party and two components of the 14-party combine held a meeting at Hasina's political office in Dhanmondi. Chaired by Hasina, the meeting discussed sharing election seats between alliance partners. They, however, failed to make any final decision in this regard.

AL spokesman Syed Ashraful Islam and Jatiya Party Presidium member Kazi Zafar Ahmed after the meeting said the alliance would give their formal reaction to the revised election schedule today.

Anwar Husain

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In an interview with The Daily Star.

The caretaker government will be leaving the education sector in total mess and it failed to manage disasters properly, he said, identifying the caretaker government's handling of the market as its worst performance.

"At the end of its tenure, the government may go out with a big whimper and without fulfilling people's expectations. It totally messed up everything."

To change the political culture, civil-society elements should start civic education at the bottom level to motivate common people not to vote for corrupt politicians. Top leaders of political parties should start fielding respectable candidates with no questionable background.

He, however, expressed frustration saying that the civil society in Bangladesh is fractured along political lines.

The administration and the politicians have only created a sort of bad political legacy for the people since the January 11, 2007 changeover, he said, adding, "I am not expecting any positive outcome from the election, if it is held at all."

He said it is the job of politicians to create a healthy political culture and it cannot be imposed from outside.

Asked whether he sees politicians' moving in this regard, he said, "I have come across some cosmetic attempts by a number of parties, especially the Awami League, but cosmetic attempts do not do away with the basic ills."

He said the initial aim of the anti-corruption drive was catching the corrupt people but later the drive was conducted with a political perspective. "That is why all arrestees have been freed just before the election. It is because the government needs an exit plan. It wants to have an election and a safe exit."

EC hears objections against poll observers

UNB, Dhaka

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday held hearing on objections against seven organisations before considering their enlistment as election observers.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda and commissioners M Sohel Hussain and Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain were present at the hearing.

The seven organisations of election observers are Bangladesh Center for Development Journalism and Communication (BCJDC), Democracywatch, BRAVE, Jagarani Chakra Foundation, Khan Foundation, Light House and Srijani Bangladesh.

A total of 319 organisations earlier applied to the EC for enlistment as election observers. The EC initially selected 138 organisations after scrutinising applications.

Objections have been raised against 25 applicants by different political parties questioning their neutrality.

The EC will hold another hearing today at 2:30 pm for 14 other organisations against whom objections have been raised.

Meanwhile, objections have been withdrawn against four organisations -- Noakhali Rural Development Society, Shariatpur Development Society, Coast Trust and ANFREL.

Khaleda's trial

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against Anwar and Shamsul Islam for two months.

Receiving the certificates, the court asked the lawyers to submit the certified copies of the stay orders.

Earlier, the HC stayed case proceedings of most of the accused including former premier Khaleda Zia and former ministers M Saifur Rahman, Matiur Rahman Nizami, Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojahid, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain and Altaf Hossain Choudhury.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case against Khaleda Zia and 15 others including ten former ministers from BNP and Jamaat on February 26 this year accusing them of causing a loss of Tk 159 crore to the state exchequer by awarding a contract to a Chinese company through abuse of power.

Former LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was present during the proceedings.

Meantime, the same court also adjourned the trial proceedings of Niko graft case against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and eight others till disposal of the HC's rule.

On October 27, the HC issued separate rules asking the government and the ACC to explain why the cases against Sheikh Hasina should not be quashed.

Govt asked

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Responding to a prayer moved by Hasina's counsel barrister Shafique Ahmed, an HC bench comprised of Justice Sheikh Rezwana Ali and Justice Md Rais Uddin extended the orders for the third time till January 7 next year.

The HC bench also adjourned the hearing on its earlier rules for the same period. The court had issued the rules on July 7 asking the ACC and the government to explain why the proceedings against Hasina should not be quashed.

As the rules were fixed for hearing yesterday, Shafique Ahmed told the court that there was no urgency of hearing the matters at this moment.

Barrister Shafique also told The Daily Star that the HC earlier stayed the proceedings of the cases till disposal of the rules. His client is now on bail in other cases filed against her, he said.

On July 7, the HC stayed for two months the proceedings of Niko and barge-mounted power plant corruption cases.

On October 5, a vacation bench of the HC comprising Justice Mohammad Anwarul Haque and Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury upon separate petitions directed the government not to harass or arrest Hasina at home or abroad until October 20 in the two cases.

The HC then extended its orders again and the time of the orders expired yesterday.

JS elections

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December 3-4 and upazila on December 17-19.

The end date for withdrawing candidature from the parliamentary race is December 11 and from upazila election is December 31.

Termining the schedules a 'reasonable solution' to the stalemate, CEC Huda said there is no room for doubt or uncertainty over voting.

"We'll do whatever it takes to hold free and fair elections," he added.

The commission however did not meet the call from BNP and allies for scrapping of the provision that authorises it to cancel candidatures.

Citing the long and detailed procedure prescribed to revoke candidature, the polls chief said there is enough safeguard against abuse of the authority.

He observed that the EC should retain the power to resist electoral offences like snatching ballot papers and occupying polling stations.

The crisis over the ninth parliamentary polls arose when the BNP-led four-party alliance laid down a number of conditions for their participation.

An official of the EC Secretariat last night said Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed called the CEC and expressed satisfaction with the announcement. He also thanked the election commissioners for hammering out a 'resolution of the stand-off'.

Before making the announcement, the EC sat separately with BNP and AL leaders again to make sure

they agree on the election days, he added.

Earlier in the morning, the commissioners met the CA and discussed their plans, sources in the EC said.

In the fresh schedules, the EC has pretty much accepted the political parties' demand for the upazila election to be delayed for a month.

The EC sources said the commission had to press the administration hard for deferral of the local polls for over three weeks, and lifting of the state of emergency after December 11, the deadline for withdrawing nominations in the general election.

The EC changed twice the dates in its original schedules for filing, scrutiny and withdrawal of nominations. The polling days were left unchanged on both occasions.

Still, its efforts towards all-party polls continued to falter with BNP sticking to their demands.

On November 17, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia issued a 48-hour ultimatum to the caretaker government to meet its four-point demand.

She demanded that the state of emergency be lifted, some 'objectionable' clauses in the Representation of the People Order done away with, upazila election deferred for a month, and the national polls be rescheduled so the hajis can cast their votes.

Things began to change for the better after the former prime minister announced Thursday that they would join the election provided it is held on December 28.

Emergency

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withdrawal of emergency.

According to the new schedule for parliamentary election, the last date for withdrawing candidature is December 11.

In line with EC's proposal and CA's assurance, the emergency state will be lifted on December 12, about two years after enforcement of the emergency rules.

Meanwhile, Home Adviser MA Matin after a law and order meeting at the Secretariat yesterday said the country's law and order would not deteriorate even if emergency is lifted.

"We expect that the situation will remain normal after lifting of emergency," he told reporters after the meeting, dismissing any deterioration of law and order.

For the first time, a specific date was announced for lifting the state of emergency. In the wake of political parties' growing demands, the caretaker administration has recently announced that emergency would be lifted on a reasonable time before polls.

Earlier, some advisers to the caretaker government even announced that the parliamentary election would be held under the emergency state. They argued that emergency was required to ensure voters' safety during polls.

The polls to four city corporations and nine municipalities were held on August 4 under full state of emergency and fairness of the polls prompted the government and even EC to hold the ninth parliamentary election.

Khoka

FROM PAGE 1
Farah Mahub for hearing.

The court asked him to move the petition for hearing later. The lawyers concerned said the hearing of the petition might be held today.

On November 17, the EC took the decision that since the city corporation mayors hold office of profit they would not be eligible for contesting the general elections.

The mayors can be candidates in the parliamentary polls if they resign from their positions before filing of nominations, according to the decision.

The DCC mayor filed the writ petition with the HC seeking stay on the EC's bar.

Elected on April 25, 2002, mayor Khoka stated in the petition that the EC's decision was "an arbitrary one and not in conformity with the existing laws."

The petitioner said the EC took the decision to deny mayors of the city corporations from exercising their constitutional rights to contest the parliamentary polls.

Mayor Khoka, who was a member of parliament for three terms, claimed that he was not holding the office of profit as his status is that of a cabinet minister, which was notified by a gazette on October 14, 2002.

MILK TEST

Govt to seek instructions from SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will seek instructions from the Supreme Court (SC) to be sure if the apex court directed the health ministry to test all the powdered milk brands or only the eight brands in question in a European country.

"We shall seek instructions from the SC in a day or two on its order as it did not mention the number of samples," health ministry Additional Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told The Daily Star in the evening.

He said upon receipt of the certified copy of the SC, they understood that only the eight brands -- Yashili-1, Yashili-2, Sweet Baby-2, Diploma, Dano, Red Cow, Anlene and Nido Fortified -- should be tested in a European laboratory.

But Advocate Manzil Murshid, counsel of the original petition, said as the SC upheld the HC order, all the other brands of powdered milk available at the local markets should also be tested in a European country.

Meanwhile, the health ministry has written to the WHO requesting it to select a laboratory in a European country for testing of the powdered milk brands.

On November 10, the HC directed the government to submit test reports of the eight brands in question in 21 days and the test reports of all the other brands as soon as possible.

But the SC in its ruling on November 17 said it upholds the HC order with modification that the samples also have to be tested in a laboratory in Europe through World Health Organization (WHO) following a petition with the SC filed by counsels of Red Cow and Nido Fortified seeking a stay on the HC order.

EX-COUNCILLOR MURDER

Khagrachhari district council chief suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

The government has suspended Khagrachhari Hill District Council (KHDC) Chairman Monindra Lal Tripura temporarily following his alleged involvement in the murder of former KHDC councillor Anupam Tripura.

KHDC Chief Executive Officer Sayed Mohammad Abul Hashim said a letter signed by Senior Assistant Secretary of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) affairs ministry Begum Nazma Khanom was faxed to them, reading that Monindra's suspension would be effective from October 31, the day he was arrested in connection with Anupam's murder.

"But it was not made clear for how many days the suspension order would remain in force," he said.

When contacted, Monindra, who was released from Dhaka Central Jail on bail on November 19, alleged that Additional IGP Naba Bikrom Kishore Tripura and his relative Bidhan Tripura have manipulated the administration into making such a decision.

He said he would go to court for justice.

Tejgaon police along with members of Detective Branch of police arrested Monindra on October 31 this year in the capital's Raja Bazar for his alleged involvement in Anupam's murder.

Zardari

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a tit-for-tat action at that time, refused to commit to no-first use saying India has superiority in conventional weapons.

India, which is a votary of retaining a credible minimum nuclear deterrent, had also announced a moratorium on conducting further nuclear tests but Pakistan did not reciprocate the Indian action.

Replying to a range of questions, Zardari said he was hopeful of resolving the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan.

He said, "There is a little bit of Indian in every Pakistani and a little bit of Pakistani in every Indian and I speak today as a Pakistani, as much as the little Indian in me."

Zardari said his government did not interfere in the internal affairs of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

He favoured doing away with cumbersome curbs on movement of people across the divided Kashmir and was looking into the possibility of enhancing trade between the two areas.

End of a family

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"Shirin and Ashraf got married on November 18 last year... Perhaps they had dreamt of having a happy family woven with love and care," he added.

"Will you just keep on writing, sister? Would you not do anything for us? What was our fault? Why have we to suffer in such a way?" These were her last words to this correspondent.

The couple was moving to Chittagong to start a fresh life but the bus carrying them was rammed by an acid-laden truck in Comilla. Ten passengers died on the spot while others were brought to DMCH burn unit with severe injuries.

Even though 17 days have passed, the government is yet to arrest the culprits who were transporting acid in such an unsafe way.

Deputy Commissioner of Comilla Manjurur Rahman told The Daily Star that the report of the investigation committee, formed after the accident, was sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs Friday. The committee in the report concluded that the truck was carrying the acid without taking proper safety measures.

"Nasir Chemical Industry of Shiddhirganj in Narayanganj was transporting the barrels of acid and we are trying to arrest the criminals," said Officer-in-charge of Burichang Police Station Anwar Hossain. He said a case was filed with Comilla Police Station on November 12 and they have added an account of Acid Control Act violation in the case.

Due to lack of implementation of law and absence of monitoring mechanism, every year a significant number of people including women and children suffer acid burns and die tragic deaths. Even though two laws have been enacted in 2002 to control acid and acid crime, acid violence and acid-sonar is still rampant.

About the control on the army, Home Secretary Abdul Karim told the media that a statutory order was being readied with instructions as to under whom the army will move and perform duty.

He said control rooms would be set up at the home ministry and at district level four days before the election.

Karim said there would be 35,500 polling centres across the country. Asked about the number of vulnerable centres, he said their exact number would be determined later.

He said each polling station would have a 13-member security team while a risk centre would have a 19-member team.

The home secretary said the drive to retrieve illegal arms and arrest listed criminals would be intensified to keep the election free from terrorism and black money.

He also said police would arrest real criminals rather than going for mass arrest.

Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad, Rapid Action Battalion Director General Hasan Mahmud Khandakar, BDR Director General Major General Shakil Ahmed, and officials of the home ministry and the EC were present at the meeting chaired by Adviser Matin.

Maj Mannan

FROM PAGE 1
Assistant Returning Officer and Ramgati Upazila Nirbahi Officer Ahsanur Rahman Hasib refused to accept Mannan's bid for the constituency.

Section-8 (Ga) of the electoral code of conduct. The section says that a candidate cannot use choppers or any other mode of air transport in the election campaign.

Mannan went to Ramgati Upazila Sadar in a helicopter from Dhaka around 1:00pm yesterday to submit his nomination papers.

Mannan had argued that the Election Commission is yet to announce him a candidate. He said the helicopter was not used in the election campaign and therefore the electoral code of conduct was not violated.

He said he would take legal measures if his nomination papers are not accepted.

Mannan around 4:00pm went to Noakhali in a people carrier and submitted his nomination papers for Noakhali-4 constituency.

Hasina sees

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emergency in the country. "I have never seen in my life that after declaration of the election date, it is rescheduled again. It has caused us troubles," Hasina said, adding that the election date is being rescheduled following the demand of a party.

The former premier was exchanging views with a delegation of Dhaka University teachers at her Dhanmondi office in the capital.

She said the elections must be held and all have to remain alert so that none could foil the polls.

Hasina said the people's problems cannot be solved without an elected government.

Apart from holding a free, fair and neutral election, the polls results have to be perfect so that the candidates who will get people's votes are elected.

She said her party has already submitted nomination and the rival parties are now buying some leaders of the AL-led alliance who failed to get the alliance's ticket.

3-tier security

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law enforcement agencies would be deployed a few days ahead of the polls as per the desire of the Election Commission.

He said four to five platoons of troops would be deployed in each district along with other forces as mobile strike forces around polling centres on the polling day.

He dismissed the possibility of any threat on former premiers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, who are now getting security under the Special Security Force, and said there would be special security arrangement for VIPs during the election.

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RMG stores

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stored at the warehouses were gutted in the fire, said staffs of the two garment factories.

On information, 17 fire fighting units from seven fire stations in the city rushed to the spot and had been trying to extinguish the blaze as of 6:30pm yesterday.

Fire fighters said they were struggling to extinguish the blaze as the area does not have any water body where they could get water to douse the flame.