

Indefinite strike

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their interviews for freshmen and many departments could not publish their first year admission test result.

The agitating employees at around 7:00am locked the RU main gate and laid siege to the administrative building. They also went to science, arts and commerce faculty buildings, central library, deans' offices and RU transport office and locked them down in presence of a large number of policemen.

They gathered at different spots on campus and asked teachers, officers, employees and students to leave the campus. The university opened yesterday after 15 days of Eid holidays.

Most of the scheduled classes and exams could not be held. They also chased away university officers and employees when they tried to open their department offices.

Mahmudur Rahman, a teacher of business faculty, strongly criticised university authorities and the police for not taking any action against the unruly employees.

Around noon, the employees held a rally in front of the administrative building in presence of the police.

They chanted slogans against pro-Awami League teachers, the RU acting vice-chancellor and University Grants Commission (UGC) chairman for not confirming their jobs. They said they will continue the strike until their jobs are confirmed.

Jahangir Hossain, assistant commissioner of police Mother Zone, told newsmen that the university authorities did not give them any direction on how to tackle the employees' agitation.

Denying the allegation that RU authorities were backing the agitating employees, Prof Mammul Keramat said he

informed higher authorities about their agitation.

The agitating workers were employed during the BNP-led four-party alliance regime amid widespread allegations that they were employed disregarding rules of employment.

Duta elections

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Akhtaruzzaman, Prof Momtaj Uddin Ahmed and Dr Zinat Huda Wahid of Blue Panel are vying for the posts of vice president, treasurer and joint secretary respectively.

White Panel nominees Dr Chowdhury Mahmud Hasan, Dr Jahangir Alam Chowdhury and Prof Muhammad Luther Rahman are also running for the respective posts.

Ten member candidates of Blue Panel are Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Prof RIM Aminur Rashid, Prof Kazi Shahidullah, Dr Zayed Ahmed, Prof Fakhrul Alam, Prof Mohammad Aminul Haq, Dr Noveena Farida, Dr Laila Noor, Prof Shahjahan Miah and Prof Mohammad Abdus Sattar.

Election of the association for the year 2008 could not be held due to a stay order by a Dhaka court.

Polling would be held from 10:00am to 2:00pm at Duta office without any break.

Prof Fazle Elahi of Social Science department will function as election commissioner.

Last election of the association was held on December 31, 2006.

Khaleda

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claimed that the Awami League is supporting the government activities.

"They [apparently the caretaker government] want to make the country a vassal state and a particular party assisted them to obtain power through the back door," Khaleda said in an election rally on Bashai Court premises.

She addressed at least 10 rallies yesterday and thousands of her supporters thronged the rallies in processions. Carrying the BNP electoral symbol, the enthusiastic men and women chanted slogans expressing their support for BNP candidates.

Many gathered on roadsides to have a glimpse of Khaleda on her way to the rallies.

Khaleda termed the December 29 elections very significant and urged people to vote for the BNP-led four-party alliance candidates. "The elections slated for December 29 is a momentous one for the people and the country."

The former premier said, "The country needs a government that can lead it forward and only BNP can ensure this and only the four-party alliance can bring prices of essentials within the reach of common people." She promised people three meals a day if voted to power.

"BNP is fundamentally different from other parties as it does not believe in the politics of terrorism, hartaal, chaotic atmosphere and arson," she claimed.

Khaleda said the BNP-led alliance will return to power with two-thirds majority as she sees a wave of public support in favour of sheaf of paddy, the election symbol of BNP.

"It is BNP that can protect and uphold Islamic values in Bangladesh," she said.

At the rallies she introduced to the people nominees of four-party alliance including Tanbir Ahmed Siddique for Gazipur-1, Lutfar Rahman Khan Azad for Tangail-3, Lutfar Rahman Matin for Tangail-4, Mahmudul Hasan for Tangail-5, advocate Ahmed Azam Khan for Tangail-8, Hasanuddin Sarker for Gazipur-2, Prof MA Mannan for Gazipur-3, Fakir Mahbub Anam Swapan for Tangail-11, Sultan Salauddin Tuku for Tangail-2, AKM Mosharraf Hossain for Mymensingh-4 and Mohammad Zahir Hossain for Tangail-5.

After the rally at Bhaluka, the BNP chief started for Dhaka at around 11.

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a free, fair and acceptable election on December 29.

He asked the government officials to perform their election duties with utmost neutrality and sincerity and not to bow to any pressure.

The head of the caretaker government gave the directives during an opinion exchange meeting with the government officials of Barisal division at the local Circuit House in the afternoon as part of preparatory steps ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

This was the fourth of such meeting after the first one in Khulna divisional headquarters on December 1 followed by Rangpur and Sylhet.

Home Adviser Major Gen (retd) MA Matin, Cabinet Secretary Abdul Aziz, Home Secretary Abdul Karim, DCs, SPs, UNOs, metropolitan police commissioner, DIG of police, Barisal region, senior officials of BDR, Ansar and intelligence agencies and election-related officials of the division were present.

Barisal Divisional Commissioner Mezbau Alam made welcome address and conducted the meeting.

The CA asked for heightening intelligence vigilance so that the absconding terrorists cannot enter the country to create chaos (ahead of the polls).

He said the main objective of the present caretaker government is to hold two elections--parliament and upazila parishad elections--in a free, fair and credible manner.

The CA thanked the whole administration, the Election Commission and all concerned for carrying out relentless work to achieve the goal. The good ending of the journey of this government will take place through holding the election peacefully and keeping post-election situation peaceful, he said.

He forewarned that a little deviation or negligence could smash the achievements of the caretaker government. "And in this case the nation would not forgive us," he told the officials.

He suggested forming a high-level committee to address the impacts of the global financial crisis, saying that export income and remittance are likely to be affected by the countryward.

He gave a package of guidelines and decisions dividing those in three phases--before, during and after the polls.

'Dour' Salahuddin

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is now divided into two camps, but some party men said they are working against party nominee Salahuddin and did not even attend Chairperson Khaleda Zia's rally for him on Friday.

On May 5, 2006, thousands of residents of Sharif Akhra in Demra chased Salahuddin as an extreme outburst of anger and resentment at the existing acute crisis of water and electricity. Salahuddin ran away in the face of people's demonstration and later came to be mockingly called "Dour" (cynical) Salauddin.

The former lawmaker has served in jail for about two years over many charges including money laundering, arms cases and other criminal offences after the January 11 changeover.

Babla, who was the area's lawmaker during HM Ershad's regime, also faces allegations of criminal activities while supporters of Mollah, who is now behind bars facing many charges, is campaigning on his behalf with election symbol boat.

Dhaka-5 constituency presently consists of Demra, a part of Jatrabari and a part of Shyampur.

In the 2001 election, Salahuddin defeated AL's Mollah securing 1,51,244 votes, which is 52.05 percent of the total votes cast while Mollah got 1,23,020 votes (42.34 percent) and Babla got 15,133 votes (5.20 percent).

The total votes in the seat this time is 3,61,823.

Hasina

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country's southwestern part.

Hasina pledged to bring down the price of essentials, increase power generation, make education up to degree level free, set up more schools and colleges, give job to one of each family and ease traffic congestion in the capital.

Terming the AL-led grand alliance the "delivers" and the BNP-led coalition "looters", the former premier alleged that the BNP-led coalition government looted crores of taka during its tenure and siphoned off the money abroad.

"Now decide who you are going to elect," said the AL president urging the people to vote for boat.

Earlier, Hasina went to the Square Hospital to see her ailing husband Dr M Wazed Miah, who has been receiving treatment since December 10.

The AL chief will address several election rallies in Tangail and Mymensingh today.

Be graceful losers

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Bangladesh has a bright future provided the political parties are honest, prudent and have the attitude to learn from the past.

"It is necessary to look at what happened to the politics in Bangladesh since '91. The political parties should clearly admit to their faults and talk about what lessons they learned. If they fail to do so, the potential will not be materialised," he said.

Prof Riaz said the political parties pledged what they will do if they go to power, but did not pledge what they will do if they are in the opposition. "They should declare how they will treat the opposition if they are in the ruling seat," he added.

Emphasising on the need for an effective parliament, legal expert Dr M Zahir said arrangements should be there that members of parliament (MPs) will lose their jobs if they remain absent from the parliament for 90 consecutive days.

He said the article 70 of the constitution should be amended to ensure that all members of the parliament may speak freely. "Otherwise, the parliament becomes a dictatorship of the majority," he asserted.

He said the main objective of the present caretaker government is to hold two elections--parliament and upazila parishad elections--in a free, fair and credible manner.

The CA thanked the whole administration, the Election Commission and all concerned for carrying out relentless work to achieve the goal.

The good ending of the journey of this government will take place through holding the election peacefully and keeping post-election situation peaceful, he said.

Emphasising on improving the lives of the common people, economist Dr Atiur Rahman said corruption eats up a major share of the resources the poor are entitled to, therefore curbing corruption and reforming the administration is very important.

He suggested forming a high-level committee to address the impacts of the global financial crisis, saying that export income and remittance are likely to be affected by the countryward.

The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam, who is also the publisher of both newspapers, also spoke.

Polls symbol

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aspirants for Chandpur-1 and Comilla-10 constituencies to contest the election as independent candidates.

The RO of Comilla-10 constituency allocated BNP's electoral symbol 'sheaf of paddy' to Abdul Gafur Bhuiyan following a court order.

He also allocated 'deer' symbol to Mobashwer Alam Bhuiyan, who earlier got the BNP's electoral symbol, as an independent candidate.

RO Manzur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday over telephone that he allocated the symbol to Mobashwer as per the EC directive.

"Initially, I did not allocate any symbol to Mobashwer Alam Bhuiyan. But later I did so after receiving the commission's directive," he said.

Meanwhile, JP leaders and activists think that their candidate has more chances to be elected as he is the official candidate of the grand alliance. They, however, want the confusion among party activists removed and AL candidate Mollah to be withdrawn.

The RO in Chandpur-1 constituency did not allocate any symbol to Mir Mohammad Iqbal Hossain, who earlier got AL's electoral symbol 'boat'.

The RO on Friday amended the candidate's list and allocated 'boat' symbol to Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, who got back candidacy following a court order.

As per the electoral laws, an individual seeking to be an independent candidate must submit signatures of one percent voters in his constituency with the application for candidacy.

Talking to The Daily Star over the telephone yesterday, RO AKM Shahidur Rahman said he did not allocate electoral symbol to Iqbal as the electoral laws do not permit him to do so.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain, however, said they are bound to follow the court orders.

"We shall implement the court orders even if it is against the Representation of the People Order," Sakhawat told reporters at his office yesterday.

Asked whether multiple candidates of a party will contest the election from a single constituency, the election commissioner said the parties will have to decide on it.

"If a party fails to do so, both of its nominees will contest the election," he said.

Meanwhile, Mobashwer Alam Bhuiyan, whose electoral symbol 'sheaf of paddy' was scrapped, filed a complaint with the EC yesterday claiming that the RO did not act in line with the court order.

The Appellate Division gave orders to accept Abdul Gafur Bhuiyan's nomination. But it did not give any directives to allocate 'sheaf of paddy' to him as electoral symbol, said Mobashwer's counsel and eminent jurist M Zahir in a written prayer to the EC.

Documents show that the RO cancelled Gafur Bhuiyan's nomination during scrutiny as he filed nomination paper as both a BNP and an independent candidate. The EC also rejected Gafur's appeal against the RO's decision.

Talking to reporters at the EC Secretariat yesterday, Mobashwer said he would go to the court to challenge the RO's decision of allocating 'sheaf of paddy' symbol to Gafur Bhuiyan if the EC does not take any action in this regard.

Shakhawat

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This happens because the administration has not been made neutral, he said adding that the Election Commission (EC) requested the government to transfer officials in April so that the Commission could observe them.

Asked if they had already

notified the information and apprised Hasina of it, the DG of SSF said, "I briefed the two leaders [Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina] about our threat assessment times."

He however would not elaborate on the issue.

Sources said names of Huji and JMB were categorically mentioned to Hasina as sources of threats. While Huji had made attempts on her life before, JMB poses danger to everyone and everything standing up for secularism and progressive ideals.

Khaleda too has been alerted to dangers from Huji and JMB. She faces threats from the Islamist outfits as her government banned the groups following a series of nationwide blasts and killings in 2005.

The leaders are now campaigning across the country for the December 29 general election.

At the end of September, AL

expressed fear of militant attacks in the run-up to the polls.

"We have information in this regard," AL acting general secretary Syed Ashraful Islam told reporters after a meeting with British envoy Duncan Norman who too spoke of similar fears.

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He said he is convinced

that the EC is working sin-

cerely to have everything in order. It faces huge workload as it is taking preparations for both national and upazila elections.

Lamsdroff hailed lifting of

the state of emergency and said deployment of army to help ensure a congenial atmosphere for polls is a constructive effort that does not contradict international norms.

"It is the responsibility of all

sides to accept election result.

The losing side has to accept it as in the next election they can be the winning side," he observed.

Replies to another question

over violation of election code of conduct by candidates, he urged all concerned to substantiate such violations and to share the information with the EU mission.