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Dec 29 polls set high standards
 Says chief adviser
 UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said the December 29 parliamentary election set high standards for all future elections and signalled the beginning of a new process of democracy and good governance in Bangladesh.

Fakhruddin, whose interim regime had done the groundwork for two years under the state of emergency for fair polls, said his government carried out institutional reforms to lay the foundation of democracy.

He noted that since the assumption of office, his government has worked hard for holding a free, fair and credible election to transfer power peacefully to an elected government. And the government was "on the right track" and completed its task.

The head of the outgoing caretaker government made the remarks when a delegation of visiting Japanese election observer team, led by its leader Goji Sakamoto, made a

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Uphill task for Tigers
 SPORTS REPORTER

A 74-run sixth wicket partnership between captain Mohammad Ashraful and Shakib Al Hasan on the fourth day kept Bangladesh alive in the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Ashraful bade bye to a long lean patch to make an unbeaten 70 as the home side improved their batting in the second innings to finish the day on 254-5 while chasing an improbable target of 521. The Test resumed after a rest day due to national elections and visiting captain Mahela Jayawardene, who hammered 166, declared Sri Lanka's second innings on 405-6.

Ashraful also crossed the 2000-run mark yesterday during his eighth Test half-century that featured eleven boundaries while Shakib remained not out on 34.

Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes got off to a confident start with some scorching drives and cuts through the off side and down the ground but

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Women cruise to a historic high

SHAKHAWAT LITON and SHARIFUL ISLAM

Highest 18 women have won 22 parliamentary seats in Monday's battle of ballots, meaning the new parliament will have the highest number of at least 63 female lawmakers, including 45 to be elected to reserve seats, in the history of Bangladesh.

The fortunate female MPs-elects have defeated their male counterparts in the landmark ballots for the ninth parliament in most cases by

huge margins, giving the nation a hope for the long-desired empowerment of women.

This time 59 women candidates contested from 64 constituencies with Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina and her archrival BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in three seats each and Jatiya Party leader Rowshan Ershad in two.

Hasina and Khaleda have won in all the seats they contested from, but former first lady Rowshan Ershad has failed. Rowshan has suffered

defeat in both Mymensingh-4 and Gaibandha-5 constituencies of the AL, the leading component of the grand alliance of which JP is also a part.

The success of AL's women contestants is higher with 14 of its women leaders winning in 16 seats. From BNP only three leaders, including party chief Khaleda Zia, have won in five seats.

Announcing the election results this morning, Election Commission Secretary Humayun Kabir has lauded

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Graft, food price throw BNP out

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Corruption and price of essentials were the major deciding factors for voters going into the just concluded ninth parliamentary election.

The voters, who queued in front of different polling centres in the capital for hours, talked of the two issues while speaking to The Daily Star correspondents yesterday.

The Daily Star-Nielson Election Opinion Poll in November said the respondents want the next government to consider curbing prices of essentials as its prime task while 41 percent of them marked it as a top priority.

The survey said the other two issues that they consider very important are corruption (14 percent) and law and order (12 percent).

The survey also indicated that 37 percent of the voters would swing.

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Soul-searching in BNP for reasons

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After the rather humiliating defeat in Monday's parliamentary election, the leadership of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is now soul searching to find out the reasons behind it.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia convened an emergency meeting of party policy makers in her Gulshan office yesterday evening to assess the poll results and to discuss the party's next course of action.

Before the meeting started at 7:15pm, a group of angry leaders and activists waiting outside the office threateningly advanced towards Shimul Biswas, a personal aide to the chairperson, as he arrived there, prompting him to run for shelter into the office.

The incident took place as the meeting was going on inside the office, which was not

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Rab brings arrested JMB operatives and 28 improvised grenades before the media persons at Terry Bazar in Chittagong, where the explosives were recovered yesterday. Story on page 1.

POLL DEBACLE 'Fresh voters, price hike, corruption main factors'

REJAUL KARIM BYRON, ASHUTOSH SARKAR and REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Former advisers of caretaker government, renowned jurists, educationists and economists yesterday said fresh voters imbued with the spirit of the Liberation War rose above any temptation and played a decisive role in determining the winners in Monday's national election.

Price hike of essentials, unbridled corruption during the five-year rule of BNP-led four-party alliance and inclusion of Jamaat-e-Islami in the coalition are the other major factors behind its poll debacle, they said.

They urged the winners in the election to play a more responsible role and the losers to accept the poll results, and make efforts to regain their image.

When contacted, M Hafizuddin Khan, former adviser of a caretaker government, said a number of factors were behind the four-party defeat in the election.

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3 killed in post-polls violence

STAR REPORT

At least three people were killed and 69 others injured in post-election violence in Chittagong, Pabna, Jessore, Noakhali and Dhaka yesterday.

Of the deceased, local Juba League leader Rahim Badsha, 26, of Bhatary village under Sitakunda upazilla of Chittagong district, was stabbed to death allegedly by the BNP men while BNP supporter Mohammad Shaheb Ali, 38, of Boailmari village

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Observers term polls free, fair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Republican Institute (IRI), a Washington-based election monitoring body, yesterday said the results of the ninth parliamentary elections held on Monday are an accurate reflection of the will of Bangladeshis voters.

"The election was free and fair. Political parties, candidates and citizens should accept the results and work together for a peaceful transition of power," IRI team leader Constance Berry Newman said at a news briefing at Radisson Hotel.

Observation missions from Japan and the EU Parliament also termed the polls free and fair.

The delegation was particularly impressed with the dedication of the millions of Bangladeshi voters who stood patiently in lines to exercise their civic rights and participate in the political process, Newman, a former assistant secretary of state, said in a written statement.

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News analysis

Trial in people's court

SHAHNOOR WAHID

It was a quick trial in people's court and the verdict was simple and clear with a message attached to it. It said it is the masses that hold the ultimate power in a republic. And it is they who break down the doors of Bastille again and again whenever tyrant rulers and their henchmen make feeble attempts to hide inside. History tells us that the despots have never been forgiven by the people.

The result of yesterday's election is a reflection of people's resentment and anger for what the 4-party alliance did during its 5-year tenure from 2001 to 2006. They have not forgotten the brutal repression of the cadres, and of a very partisan police force loyal to the rulers, on common people and activists of other political parties. They have not forgotten the baton charges on and mass arrests of people

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Public once again proves its might

ZAFAR SOBHAN

Once again, the Bangladeshi voters have demonstrated that it is best to never underestimate them. Once again they have delivered a verdict as clinical as it has been mature, and shown that when they are able to exercise their franchise without fear for their safety they are able to render decisive and critical judgments.

There is little question that had free and fair elections been held as originally scheduled on January 11, 2007 that the voters would have then dealt the BNP-led four-party alliance a severe rebuke at the polls.

The BNP-led alliance was rightly unpopular due to the fact that throughout the course of its five-year tenure it had ignored major problems such as rising prices and power generation, and had instead concentrated on centralising and misusing its authority for personal and political gain.

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Pakistan urges India to pull out troops

Delhi denies military escalation
 AFP, Islamabad/New Delhi

Pakistan yesterday called for negotiations with India and asked New Delhi to relocate its troops away from the border in a show of goodwill to defuse tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

The proposals from Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi came as both sides took steps to rekindle relations that had quickly deteriorated following the Mumbai attacks, which India blamed on militants based in Pakistan.

"Dialogue is in the interest of both the countries -- we should sit across the table and also use diplomatic channels" to resolve differences, Qureshi said in a policy statement broadcast live on local television.

The Pakistani minister proposed that India de-activate its

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Jets pound Hamas govt complex

Tel Aviv shuns truce call as troops with tanks mass along border
 AP, AFP, Gaza City

Israeli aircraft kept up a relentless string of attacks on Hamas-ruled Gaza yesterday, smashing a government complex, security installations and the home of a top militant commander as thousands of Israeli ground troops, backed by tanks and artillery, massed along the border and waited for a signal to attack.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told President Shimon Peres on Tuesday that the aerial phase of the operation is "the first of several" phases of attack that have been approved, an Olmert spokesman said.

Israel yesterday shunned world appeals for a truce, massed forces on the Gaza border and warned that its deadly assault on Hamas could last for weeks as jets pummelled Islamist targets for a fourth day.

Despite pleas by UN chief

Ban Ki-moon for a stop to the "unacceptable" violence that has sparked outrage in the Muslim world and protests in many countries, Israel waved aside calls for a truce.

"There is no reason that we would accept a ceasefire at this stage," Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer told AFP.

"If there is a ceasefire, that will allow Hamas to regain strength, recover from the shock and prepare an even stronger attack against Israel."

With tanks and troops massed on the Gaza border, the Israeli military said "ground forces are ready" to join what politicians have warned would be a prolonged offensive.

Warplanes launched their bruising aerial offensive on Saturday after the Islamic Hamas defied Israel's warnings that it would not stand for the rocket barrages on southern Israel that

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