

EC warns ROs of stern action for failure

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as failure of the commission."

He urged them to work in such a way so that no one can raise questions about the polls.

"We want an acceptable election." If the role of the ROs is called into question, that of the EC will also be questioned as they are representatives of the EC at the field level, he mentioned.

Addressing the ROs, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda said the upcoming election will be held under "a different set-up".

"In the past, elections were held in the country under presidents and caretaker governments. But this time, it is taking place under a government with parliament in place.

"You cannot compare this election with the 2014 polls as all parties did not take part in that," he said.

The last parliamentary election was held on January 5, 2014, amid controversy as the BNP, the main opposition in the previous parliament, and most other political parties boycotted the election terming it "farical and one-sided".

A total of 153 lawmakers were elected uncontested in the 10th parliament.

The CEC further said, "People want an election in a festive atmosphere. Keep in mind that such atmosphere is not hampered due to your activities."

Later in a closed-door session with the EC officials, the ROs asked what they should do if a convicted person submits nomination paper.

In reply, commissioner Rafiqul said the RO concerned can cancel the nomination papers of the convicted person if his or her sentence is not stayed by court, according to meeting sources.

The ROs then asked whether a minister would get protocol while taking part in electioneering.

In response, Rafiqul said the ministers would get security, not protocol, during campaigns.

Some of the ROs sought permission to hold meetings with parliamentary candidates ahead of the election.

The EC members then said the commission would send them instructions on it later, said the sources.

NO FURTHER DEFERRAL

Briefing the ROs, Huda said there is no scope for deferring the polls further.

He also asked them to prepare for conducting the polls on December 30.

The election date was shifted from December 23 on Monday. But Jatiya Oikyafront, an alliance of the BNP and several other parties, rejected the revised schedule, saying the polls should have been deferred by a month.

Yesterday, the CEC said the polls cannot be deferred further as a new parliament must be formed by January 29, and that they will need time to announce official results and publish gazette notifications.

Besides, a big number of law enforcers will be busy for Biswa Jtema to be held in Tongi on January 11, he said.

Talking to this newspaper, Rafiqul Islam, a central leader of the Gonoforum, said an Oikyafront delegation led by Dr Kamal Hossain will meet the CEC today to discuss the election schedule and other issues.

Earlier, he had handed over a letter to the CEC, seeking his appointment for today.

Meanwhile, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader told reporters

that the demand for further delaying the polls is "unrealistic and hilarious".

INSTRUCTIONS TO ROs

In a letter, the EC yesterday directed the ROs to take action against aspirants if they violate the electoral code of conduct by holding rallies or staging showdowns during submission of nomination forms.

A copy of the letter was also sent to the inspector general of police.

While collecting nomination forms, candidacy seekers of different political parties are staging showdowns or bringing out processions with vehicles and motorbikes. This is a violation of the electoral code of conduct, mentioned the letter.

The EC asked the ROs to take necessary action if such violation of the electoral code of conduct takes place during submission of nomination forms by the aspirants, said a joint secretary at the EC, quoting the letter.

The EC instructions came a day after the ruling AL ended sale of its nomination papers on Monday.

Locals in Dhanmondi area said show-downs and processions by AL nomination seekers and their supporters near the party president's Dhanmondi office led to traffic congestion in the area for three days till Monday.

Similarly, show-downs and processions by BNP activists also caused gridlock in the city's Nayapaltan area where BNP nomination aspirants gathered to collect nomination forms.

The sale of BNP nomination forms, which began on Monday, will continue till tomorrow.

Mega alliance in the making

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and Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) have expressed their interest to join forces.

Led by former president Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury, Juktafont was also formed last year with four parties. It is now an alliance of eight parties.

Formed in September this year, the IDA is a combine of 18 Islamic parties. Misbaur Rahman Chowdhury, chairman of a faction of Islami Oikya Jote, leads this alliance.

With them, the ruling alliance will be a combine of 129 parties, beating a three-decade old record.

However, most of the parties in the ruling alliance are not registered with the Election Commission, meaning they cannot contest the polls. Their leaders can run independently or with tickets from alliance partners who are registered.

Ahead of the fourth parliamentary election in 1988, the Combined Opposition Party was formed comprising around six dozen parties under the leadership of ASM Abdur Rab.

Amid boycotts by the AL, the BNP and several other opposition parties, the opposition combine contested the polls against the then ruling Jatiya Party and emerged as the main opposition in parliament. It secured 19 seats.

This time, the mega ruling alliance is set to take on the BNP-led 20-party alliance and the Jatiya Oikyafront, the newly formed alliance of BNP and several other parties -- Dr Kamal Hossain's Gonoforum, Mahmudur Rahman Manna-led Nagorik Oikya and ASM Abdur Rab-led JSD.

Apart from these, there is an alliance of eight left parties called Left Democratic Alliance.

'NO SUCH INSTANCE'

Forming electoral alliances is common around the world. But the main opposition party joining the ruling alliance is unheard of, experts said.

"As far as I know, there is no such instance in the contemporary history of parliamentary democracy across the globe," parliamentary affairs expert Prof Nizam Ahmed told The Daily Star on Monday.

"It seems the impossible has been made possible," said Prof Nizam, who teaches public administration at Chittagong University.

For the last five years, former military ruler HM Ershad's Jatiya Party has been playing the role of a "friendly" opposition in parliament.

Party Co-chair Raushan Ershad is still the leader of opposition in the current parliament and enjoys a minister's status. Her husband Ershad remains the special envoy to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also with the status of a minister. Moreover, the JP has three ministers in the current cabinet.

The JP took part in the 2008 election as a component in the AL-led grand alliance. The party quit the alliance before the 2014 election and emerged as the main opposition in parliament. The BNP and many other parties boy-

cotted that election as it was not held under a nonpartisan administration.

Things are different this time. After talks with the AL at the Gono Bhavan on November 5, the JP announced that it would contest the election with the AL-led alliance.

According to political analysts, the party made the announcement sensing that the BNP-led 20-party alliance and the newly floated Oikyafront may join the race.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said that JP's joining the ruling alliance is both unprecedented and embarrassing.

"Unprecedented because while it is a standard electoral practice for any two or more parties to forge an electoral coalition, it is rather extraordinary that they are doing so when one is an incumbent ruling party and the other an incumbent opposition in the government of the day," he told The Daily Star on Monday.

And it is embarrassing because it only reconfirms and reminds the people of the fact that those who were placed in the role of opposition was never sure of its role. It had one foot in the government and the other in the opposition, he noted.

"It will be ominous for the future of an accountable democracy in Bangladesh if the underlying idea is to institutionalise this concept of a ruling-cum-opposition party in parliament," he said.

SEAT SHARING: AN UPHILL TASK

The size of the ruling alliance, however, is also a cause for headache for the AL, which faces an uphill task of sharing seats among its partners.

More than 4,000 aspirants bought AL nomination forms -- an average of 13 leaders looking to contest from each of the 300 seats.

Among its partners, the JP has sought 100 seats, and Ershad expects that they would get at least 70, sources said.

However, a senior JP leader with close contact with the AL said the ruling party hinted it could offer up to 40 seats.

Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Jatiya Party (Manju), Samayabadi Dal and Tarikat Federation, who are old partners in the alliance, will also get some seats.

In all, the AL would not offer more than 70 seats to its partners, party sources said.

BNA chief Nazmul Huda gave a list of 25 of its aspirants to the AL.

"We will negotiate with the Awami League to get as many seats as we can," he told The Daily Star on Monday.

The Islamic Democratic Alliance has sought 10 seats, said its Co-chairman MA Awal.

The AL has yet to start discussion on sharing seats among its allies.

Meanwhile, Juktafont leaders yesterday held a meeting with the AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader and expressed their interest to join the grand alliance.

"We will sit again soon with the Awami League to finalise our joining and seat sharing," Juktafont leader Mahi B Chowdhury told reporters after the meeting at the AL president's Dhanmondi office.

Mahbubul Alam Hanif, joint general secretary of the AL, acknowledged that the issue of seat sharing might get a "bit complex" as a result of so many parties joining the grand alliance.

"But it is a positive thing that more and more political alliances are showing interest to take part in the polls under the banner of the grand alliance. It proves that everyone has support for the Awami League."

Muhith

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submitted my nomination paper to the party just as a dummy candidate."

Asked about the reason, the veteran politician said, "Because I am not contesting [the next elections]."

Replying to the query if he was sure about the decision to retire, he said, "Absolutely certain. It will be known in a day or two."

On the PM's opinion about it, he said, "Well, whatever I am doing, it has the approval of the prime minister."

Pointing to his experience of holding important positions in the public service since 1963, he said few persons have such vast experience, but he should retire now. Other politicians should also understand that there is a time to stop.

Mentioning politicians senior to him like former presidents HM Ershad and AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, the finance minister said they want to take a last chance (in politics).

He added, "It is their wish. I don't have such a wish."

Muhith, who has been at the helm of the finance ministry for the last 10 years, on several occasions in the last one year said he would retire from politics but changed his mind.

Asked how he would evaluate his terms, he said, "I tell you, you see the performance of the government is outstanding. I am, of course, a party to it."

When the reporters asked if he had any failure in the banking sector, Muhith said, "I have said many times that there is problem in the banking sector. I will leave a roadmap for the banking sector for the next government."

He further said he would prepare the roadmap this month.

Replying to another query about Jatiya Oikyafront and its participation in the election, the minister said it is a political success.

Its impact would be on many spheres including economic development, he said, adding, the country is in a good political situation now as all parties are contesting the polls.

He said being elected uncontested is something that saddens, not pleases, adding, "Uncontested election is not really a pleasure... it's a kind of sorrow."

media reported yesterday.

Erdogan told reporters on his plane returning from a weekend visit to France that he discussed the Saudi journalist's killing with the US, French and German leaders there.

"The recordings are really appalling. Indeed when the Saudi intelligence officer listened to the recordings he was so shocked he said: 'This one must have taken heroin, only someone who takes heroin would do this'," he added.

Khashoggi - a Saudi writer, US resident and Washington Post columnist - entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2 to obtain documentation certifying he divorced his ex-wife so he could remarry. He never came out.

The whereabouts of Khashoggi's body are still unknown.

Scientists

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cylinder locked in a vault in France. For more than a century, it has been the one true kilogram upon which all others were based.

No longer.

Gathering in Versailles, west of Paris, governments are expected on Friday to approve plans to instead use a scientific formulation to define the exact mass of a kilo. The change is expected to have practical applications in industries and sciences that require ultra-precise measurements of mass.

And it will mean redundancy for the so-called Grand K, the kilo that has towered above them all since 1889.

Made of a corrosion-resistant alloy of 90 percent platinum and 10 percent iridium, the international prototype kilo has rarely seen the light of day. Yet its role has been crucial, as the foundation for the globally accepted system for measuring mass upon which things like international trade depend.

Three different keys, kept in separate locations, are required to unlock the vault where the Grand K and six official copies -- collectively known as "the heir and the spares" -- are entombed together under glass bell-jars at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, in Sevres on the western outskirts of Paris.

Founded by 17 nations in 1875 and known by its French initials, the BIPM is the guardian of the seven main units humanity uses to measure its world: the meter for length, the kilogram for mass, the second for time, the ampere for electric current, the kelvin for temperature, the mole for the amount of a substance and the candela for luminous intensity.

Of the seven, the kilo is the last still based on a physical artefact, the Grand K. The meter, for example, used to be a meter-long metal bar but is now defined as the length that light travels in a vacuum in 1/299,792,458th of a second.

5 from same

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villagers had collected nomination forms for the post of Solimganj union parishad chairman.

Brahmanbaria AL General Secretary Al-Mamun Sarker said any one in the party could run for the lawmaker post and it was their democratic right.

"Party high-ups will scrutinise their popularity. No opportunists will get a chance here," he said.

Sri Lanka

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Wickremesinghe on October 26 and replaced him with former strongman president Mahinda Rajapakse.

The 225-member parliament could meet as early as today to decide which of the duelling pair it backs.

Amid mounting international concern, Wickremesinghe has refused to accept his sacking and has remained in his official residence while Rajapakse has sought to build a parallel administration.

Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) is the largest single party in the assembly. He told reporters that he expected the legislature to meet today, as was scheduled before Sirisena dissolved the body to prevent a majority test.

"I will go to parliament tomorrow and we will show we are the legitimate government of Sri Lanka,"

Wickremesinghe said at the Temple Trees residence that has become the opposition headquarters.

Wickremesinghe called the court ruling a "a victory for the people and a victory for decent politics in this country."

Parliamentary officials said Speaker Karu Jayasuriya called a meeting of political party leaders this morning ahead of a formal meeting of legislators who could vote between Wickremesinghe and Rajapakse.

There was no immediate comment from Sirisena or Rajapakse after the Supreme Court's unanimous decision.

The UNP led petitions against the dissolution of parliament and the three-judge bench, headed by the Chief Justice Nalin Perera, gave the landmark decision to a packed court guarded by hundreds of heavily armed police and commandos.

The court said it would give a final verdict on the petition on December 7, after three more days of hearings.

The judges ordered the independent Elections Commission to halt preparations for the January 5 vote, which Sirisena had announced on Friday.

TIGHT SECURITY
Security at the courtroom had been beefed up ahead of the hearing as authorities feared clashes between rival supporters.

However, there was no trouble and supporters of Sirisena melted away when it was known that parliament had been restored.

The United States, European Union and other nations have raised concerns over the crisis in the strategically important island nation of 21 million people.

Only China has recognised the appointment of Rajapakse, who during his decade as president until 2015 relied heavily on Beijing for diplomatic and financial support.

As president from 2005 until 2015, Rajapakse ended Sri Lanka's four-decade civil war in 2009 by crushing the Tamil Tigers.

But 40,000 ethnic Tamils were allegedly massacred in the process.

During his time in office from 2001 until 2004, Wickremesinghe is credited with pulling Sri Lanka out of its first ever recession, in part with reforms that have endeared him to the West.

34 South Asian luminaries

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own, for the values of truth, justice and social equality he promotes."

Other distinguished persons who joined this appeal include singer and songwriter Moushumi Bhowmik (Kolkata), political scientist Jayadeva Uyangoda (Colombo), poet and critic Sankha Ghosh (Kolkata), historian and writer Ramchandra Guha (Bangalore), photographer Raghu Rai (Delhi), artist Salima Hashmi (Lahore) photographer Dayanita Singh (Delhi), Manjushree Thapa and Kanak Mani Dixit (Kathmandu).

"It is clear to us that the case of Shahidul Alam is being used as a means to suppress criticism by others in civil society. His arrest and continued detention appear to be manifestation of an intolerant political atmosphere, an attempt to threaten and silence the voice of Bangladeshi citizens," the letter reads.

"With the country preparing for general elections, this is a time when there should be more space for debate and discussion, not less," it adds.

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) also denounced the continued detention of Shahidul and called on the government to free him immediately, according to a press release.

Rights defenders and photographers in Bangladesh made a similar call.

"We have recently seen that convicts of murder get presidential clemency. But, Shahidul, who was sent to jail for pointing out the real scenario of the country, has yet to get bail. It's unfortunate," said Prof Anu Muhammad.

He said this at a rally organised to mark the 100th day of Shahidul's arrest.

A group of photographers organised the rally in front of the National Museum at Shabbagh where participants protested the arrest of Shahidul

by covering their mouths with red cloths.

Shahidul was picked up by plain-clothes men from his home in the capital's Dhanmondi on August 5.

Police filed a case against him and produced him before a Dhaka court the next day. He was subsequently placed on a seven-day remand.

In the court, Shahidul said he was tortured in custody which the police denied.

On completion of his remand, Shahidul was refused bail and sent to jail on August 13.

Describing how Shahidul was picked up by law enforcers, Anu Muhammad said, "The noted photographer has been kept behind bars in an extrajudicial manner."

By picking up Shahidul, the government wanted to create panic so that other people dare not speak, he observed.

Rights activist Hameeda Hossain questioned the role of the judges dealing with Shahidul's case.

"My question to the judges is why they cannot grant bail to Shahidul since the allegations against him have not been proved yet," she said.

"No matter how much pressure the government creates, we will not give in. We will continue our protests until Shahidul is free," said Khushi Kabir, another rights defender.

Munem Wasif, photographer and teacher of Pathshala South Asian Media Institute, said Shahidul was sent to jail for expressing his opinion.

"What will we do with independence when people cannot express their opinions freely after so many years of independence?" he asked.

Many notable personalities, including Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and 11 other Nobel prizewinners, have also called for his immediate release.

Draft Brexit deal agreed

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percent margin for leaving the EU, surged to \$1.3036.

Brexit will pitch the world's fifth largest economy into the unknown and many fear it will help to divide the West as it grapples with both the unconventional presidency of Donald Trump and growing assertiveness from Russia and China.

Supporters of Brexit say that while the divorce might bring some short-term instability, in the longer term it will allow the United Kingdom to thrive and also enable deeper EU integration without such a powerful reluctant member.

The EU and Britain need an agreement to keep trade flowing between the world's biggest trading bloc and the United Kingdom, home to the biggest international financial centre.

But May has struggled to untangle nearly 46 years of EU membership without damaging commerce or upsetting lawmakers who will ultimately decide the fate of the divorce deal.

By seeking to leave the EU while preserving the closest possible ties, May's compromise plan has upset Brexiters, pro-Europeans, Scottish nationalists, the Northern Irish party that props up her government, and some of her own ministers.

News of the deal prompted eurosceptic opponents to promise to scuttle it in parliament, where, ever since losing a snap 2017 election, May has had to rely on the support of 10 Northern Irish lawmakers for her majority.

It looks like she will have a mountain to climb.

"The trick will be for Theresa May, can she satisfy everyone? It is going to be a very, very hard sell, I would have thought, but let's wait and see the actual detail," Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) deputy leader Nigel Dodds said.

Trump, top aides sued

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that Acosta's credential suspension could set a precedent for future attacks on other outlets.

"If left unchallenged, the actions of the White House would create a dangerous chilling effect for any journalist who covers our elected officials."

The White House had suspended Acosta's hard pass after he sparred at a news conference with the president, who demanded that the reporter yield the microphone and called him a "rude, terrible person" when he did not immediately comply.

Acosta pushed back with more questions and a White House intern tried to take the microphone from the CNN journalist -- an incident the Trump administration characterised as misconduct against the woman.

Hours later White House press secretary Sarah Sanders announced Acosta's hard pass had been suspended, a rare if not unprecedented move that she justified by claiming the reporter was inappropriately "placing his hands" on the intern.

Sanders then tweeted a video that she said backed up her narrative of the incident -- but analysts said the footage was sped up to make it appear that Acosta struck the intern.

The press secretary yesterday dismissed the CNN legal complaint as "grandstanding," vowing that the White House would "vigorously defend against this lawsuit."

She alleged that Acosta "physically

refused to surrender a White House microphone to an intern," softening the earlier misconduct accusation and then casting blame on the journalist for his persistent questioning.

"The First Amendment is not served when a single reporter, of more than 150 present, attempts to monopolize the floor," the press secretary said in a statement. "If there is no check on this type of behavior it impedes the ability of the President, the White House staff, and members of the media to conduct business."

CNN lawyer Ted Bontross said the White House's suspension of the press pass made "clear it was based on the content of the reporting."

In addition to requesting the return of the journalist's pass, the network is seeking "a declaration that the revocation of Acosta's press was unconstitutional," according to the filing.

The White House Correspondents' Association welcomed CNN's lawsuit, saying "revoking access to the White House complex amounted to disproportionate reaction to the events."

"The President of the United States should not be in the business of arbitrarily picking the men and women who cover him," WHCA president Olivier Knox said in a statement.

Trump is no stranger to fights with the press: the president regularly labels unfavorable coverage as "fake news" and has threatened to ban certain media organizations from his events.

Tell your boss

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linking bin Salman to the murder, it said.

Maher Abdulaziz Mutreb, one of 15 Saudis sent to Istanbul to target Khashoggi, made the phone call and spoke in Arabic, sources told The Times. Mutreb is a security officer who frequently travels with the crown prince.

Turkish intelligence officers told US officials they believe the call was made to one of bin Salman's close aides.

"The deed was done," Mutreb told the aide, though the paper noted exact translations into English may differ.

'PRETTY INCRIMINATING'

Turkish officials have said the audio recording does not conclusively implicate bin Salman, but analysts say it's an important clue.

"A phone call like that is about as close to a smoking gun as you are going