

EC formation law for staying in power

Says BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday alleged that the government's attempt to "hurriedly" and "secretly" enact a law on the Election Commission formation was nothing but a blueprint to cling on to power illegally.

"The BNP thinks that the current parliament has no moral authority to make such a law since it is not legally elected by people," said party Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir while addressing a press conference at the BNP chief's Gulshan office.

In the prevailing political situation, no EC will be able to hold free and fair polls, unless the elections are held under a neutral caretaker government, he said.

"This truth has been established through the unilateral, voter-less elections of midnight vote robbery in 2014 and 2018."

Law Minister Anisul Haq on Sunday placed the draft of "Appointment of Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners Bill, 2022" in parliament. The bill is likely to be passed in the House tomorrow.

Countering Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen's allegation of appointing lobbyists by the BNP to harm the country, Fakhrul said they were only working to save the country from the grasp of "miscreants".

"I would like to say that whatever we do, we do to protect the country. This does not mean that we have hired lobbyists to save the country."

He said what the foreign minister said was a "complete lie".

Expressing solidarity with the demonstrators of Sylhet Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Fakhrul said, "Due to autocratic attitude of the university authorities and the government, the problem was not resolved, rather it became more complicated."

He also demanded immediate resignation of the university VC.



A thick blanket of fog covers the Buriganga in the capital's Badamtoli as vessels navigate the river around 7:00am yesterday. City residents are feeling the winter chill as the mercury dropped to 16.8 degrees Celsius.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Scale of education loss 'nearly insurmountable'

Unicef on impact of Covid school closure globally, calls for intensive support to help students recover

AGENCIES

School closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic have caused "nearly insurmountable" losses in education among children around the world, Unicef said.

More than 616 million students are still being affected by full or partial school closures, the UN children's agency said.

In many countries, in addition to depriving millions of children of the chance to acquire basic skills, these disruptions have affected students' mental health, put them at greater risk of abuse and prevented many from having access to "a regular source of nutrition," Unicef added.

"Quite simply, we are looking at a nearly insurmountable scale of loss to children's schooling," said Unicef Chief of Education Robert Jenkins in a statement on Monday, almost two years into the pandemic.

And "just re-opening schools is not enough," he added, calling for "intensive support to recover lost education."

Unicef reported that "learning losses to school closures have left up to 70 percent of 10-year-olds unable to read or understand a simple text, up from 53 percent pre-pandemic" in countries with low and middle income.

In Ethiopia, for example, children learned only "between 30 to 40 percent of the math they would have learned if it had been a normal school year" in primary school, the UN agency estimated.

Rich countries are far from being spared. In the United States, learning losses have been observed in several states, including Texas, California and Maryland, said Unicef.

School dropouts are also a problem: in South Africa, between 400,000 and 500,000 students "reportedly dropped out of school altogether between March 2020 and July 2021."

Finally, in addition to rising levels of anxiety and depression among children and young people linked to the pandemic, school closures also meant more than 370 million children around the world did not

get school meals, "losing what is for some children the only reliable source of food and daily nutrition."

The coronavirus has killed at least 5,602,767 people worldwide since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources yesterday.

Breaking a five-day trend of over three lakh daily Covid cases, India yesterday reported 2,55,874 new cases in the last 24 hours, which is more than 50,000 less than Monday's figure of 3.06 lakh cases.

Japan expanded regions subject to tighter coronavirus curbs to cover 70% of the country, as the government tried to counter a record wave of Covid-19 cases caused by the Omicron variant.

South Korea's daily new infections topped 8,000 for the first time yesterday, despite the extension of tough social distancing rules, reports Reuters.

Australia yesterday recorded one of its highest number of deaths in a day from Covid-19 as outbreak of Omicron tore through the country.

Five alumni held

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donated some money. We have no political motive, we just wanted to help the juniors as seniors."

Faiza Nodi, wife of Sakib, said, "Some juniors [students of the university] called and asked for support for the cause. He [Sakib] sent Tk 3,000."

On Monday afternoon, mobile banking accounts of protesters were frozen. They were using those accounts to raise money.

A spokesperson for the students said, "This shows how desperate the vice-chancellor is to demoralise the movement and this makes it clear why he should resign."

Ain O Salish Kendra, a rights organisation, in a statement yesterday condemned the detention of the five former students. "Such detention is a violation of constitutional and human rights and the government should stop the harassment and find a peaceful solution," it read.

On Monday evening, a voluntary medical team of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital withdrew their healthcare support to the students on hunger strike.

Two doctors, however, are still serving the students.

Nazmul Hasan, general secretary of the medical college unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League and a volunteer, said, "As many students were showing Covid symptoms and refusing to get tested, we had to withdraw..."

Last night, other protesting students requested the students on hunger strike to break their fast, but those on hunger strike refused.

The power connection to the vice-chancellor's residence, which was cut off on Sunday evening, was restored early yesterday.

A spokesperson for the protesters said, "We restored power considering that more than 30 families in the staff quarters nearby were also suffering..."

On January 13, a group of students began demonstrations alleging that their dormitory's provost, Zafrin Ahmed Liza, misbehaved with a student.

On January 16, police fired rubber bullets and hurled sound grenades on the agitating students, triggering a clash that left over 30 students injured.

The students that night started their demonstration demanding the resignation of VC Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed.

Russia adds Navalny to 'terrorists and extremists' list

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday added jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and a number of his allies to a list of "terrorists and extremists", as authorities further clamp down on the opposition.

Extent of graft remains the same

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In 2001 when the TI included Bangladesh in the annual CPI, Bangladesh was ranked the lowest with a 0.4 score. With incremental improvement, Bangladesh scored 2.7 in 2011. Since 2012, the score ranged between 2.5 to 2.8.

"Corruption has become part of our life. As a result, the benefits of development are not reaching to the disadvantaged people."

About 2-3 percent of the country's GDP is lost due to corruption, Iftekharuzzaman said.

At least 89 percent of those who are forced to bribe for public services say they have no access to public service without bribes.

Bangladesh has

good laws and political commitment but a section of those responsible for combatting corruption are involved in corruption, Iftekharuzzaman said.

"Thus, the country's institutions have been weakened. There is a need for a paradigm shift in the political culture, one that is free from treating political and public positions as the licence to personal gains. We need to move towards putting the public interest first in government policies and practices."

He also suggested legal provisions to manage conflict of interest transparently, depoliticising institutions of accountability and establishing professional integrity and impartiality

of the Anti Corruption Commission, public service, administration and law-enforcement agencies.

TI has identified "corruption, human rights and democracy" as the theme of CPI last year. It observed that corruption contributes to an unsafe climate for human rights and defenders of human rights.

It also says restricting freedom of expression, association and assembly is a popular tactic to protect and promote corruption and weaken the scope of societal checks on corruption.

"Given the state of violation of human rights in Bangladesh, the deficits of rule of law in general and the abuse of the Digital Security Act in particular,

whether or not we are in the same trajectory is anyone's guess. We have seen that a section of people has used their political and administrative power for corruption," he added.

In 2021, Sudan got the lowest score of 11. The worst performers in CPI include Syria, Somalia, Venezuela, Yemen, North Korea, Afghanistan, Libya, Equatorial Guinea, Turkmenistan, DR Congo and Burundi, all of which got scores ranging from 13 to 19.

The highest scorers (88-76) are Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, UK and Hong Kong. No country has scored 100.

7 Bangladeshis

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"Three people died during the crossing, another four [who were] suffering severe hypothermia died after they were intercepted by the coast guard and were being transferred to the island," AFP quoted mayor Toto Martello as saying.

The seven dead were Bangladeshi, according to Italian media reports.

"The shocking thing is there continues to be a deafening silence from the Italian government and Europe, even in the face of deaths," Martello said.

After undergoing

coronavirus tests, the survivors were split between the health centre and the heavily overcrowded reception centre on the tiny island, which lies closer to Africa than Italy.

The centre, which can hold 250 migrants, currently houses over 600 people.

Just over 100 were to be transferred yesterday to a quarantine ship moored off Cala Pisana, one of the island's tourist spots.

While some 34,000 migrants arrived in Italy in 2020, that figure almost doubled to 64,500 people in 2021.

Indifference of people

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reported the highest 16,230 cases in one day. Yesterday, the DGHS also reported the second-highest positivity rate, 32.40 percent, after conducting 49,492 tests in 24 hours ending at 8:00am.

The highest positivity rate, 32.55 percent, was recorded on July 24 last year when the Delta variant was ravaging the country.

Yesterday, 18 Covid patients were reported to have died in the 24 hours.

The week-on-week analysis, ending yesterday, shows that the case detection increased by around 142 percent this week. A total of 83,203 cases were reported this week while 34,405 cases were reported in the previous week.

The latest surge in cases is fuelled by the Omicron variant of the virus that was first detected in the country on December 9. From early this month, the daily case

detection started jumping with higher positivity rates.

On January 1, the positivity rate was 2.43 percent.

Maleque said, "Around 85 percent of the Omicron infected patients are unvaccinated. Around three crore of the targeted population, mostly people in the transport and construction sectors and shop employees, have not been vaccinated yet."

The minister also said 25 percent beds at the dedicated Covid hospitals were now occupied.

The number was around 5 percent early this month. Asked about the isolation period for Omicron infected patients, he said the ministry was working on reducing the isolation period to five-seven days. "Besides, there will be an updated treatment protocol in place soon."

"Everyone has to wear masks ...," the minister said.

Cleanse force of corrupt members

President tells police

UNB, Dhaka

President Abdul Hamid on Tuesday asked the police force to launch a cleansing campaign to get rid of its corrupt members and improve its service to the society.

He made the call virtually from the Bangabhaban while exchanging views with senior police officials on the occasion of Police Week 2022.

"If necessary, strict action should be taken against the corrupt members of the force through cleansing campaign," he said.

4 Rangamati UP chairmen arrested in murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Four newly elected union parishad chairmen were arrested in a murder case yesterday soon after taking the oath of office at the Rangamati deputy commissioner's office.

Elected in the recent fourth phase of UP elections, all were accused in the case filed over the 2018 murder of Naniarchar upazila parishad chairman Shaktimaan Chakma, said Mir Muddasser Hossain, Rangamati superintendent of police.

Man killed after train hits rickshaw van in Joypurhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

The driver of a rickshaw van died after a train hit his vehicle at a level crossing in Akkelpur of Joypurhat yesterday.

Anto Mia, 50, died on the spot when a Titumir Intercity Train hit his rickshaw van near Tilakpur Railway Station around 9:45am, Akkelpur Police Station OC Saidur Rahman said, quoting witnesses.

The level crossing was unmanned and has no gates, the OC added.

Evaly can appoint audit firm of its choice: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday allowed e-commerce platform Evaly to appoint any well-reputed firm of its choice to carry out an audit of the company.

The company bench of Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar passed the order after hearing an application submitted on behalf of Evaly's board of directors seeking necessary directives.

The same bench earlier asked Evaly board of directors to appoint audit firm KPMG. The board later filed an application seeking a modification as the firm wanted Tk 86 lakh, which it deemed too high.

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