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RPO changes won't curtail EC powers

Says CEC amid concerns over limiting the authority to cancel polls at any stage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday claimed the latest amendment to the Representation of the People Order would not curtail the Election Commission's power to stop polls.

Rather, the commission's powers will increase, he added.

The CEC, however, did not clarify whether the amended law would allow the Election Commission (EC) to stop elections before the polling day.

The CEC held a press conference yesterday at the EC office after a gazette notification was issued on the amendment, which was passed by parliament on July 4, barely six months ahead of the national election.

Representation of the People Order, 1972 is the law that regulates national elections.

Through the latest amendment, the word "election" was replaced with "polling" at section 91a of the RPO. Election experts say that this will allow the EC to postpone an election amid irregularities or malpractices only on polling day.

Before the law was amended, the EC could postpone an election at any stage after announcement of the election schedule.

The CEC did not clarify whether the amended law would allow the Election Commission to stop elections before the polling day.

About this, the CEC said, "There is an attempt to make too much of it. The Election Commission may make mistakes, but it has not dug its own grave."

Replacement of the word election was a clerical correction, he added.

The amended RPO says the EC can suspend the results of only the polling centre at which irregularities are reported. After conducting an investigation, it can cancel the results of those centres and hold new polls there.

At yesterday's press conference, CEC Habibul said, "The word 'election' has come in place of 'polling'. We understood this our way... you can stick to your understanding."

Habibul then abruptly left the room.

CEC ON COMMISSION'S POWERS

About the allegations that the EC had curbed its own powers with the amendment, he said, "Such remarks are humiliating to the Election Commission.... The EC sought amendments to further consolidate and strengthen its position...."

Some of the amendments have, in fact, consolidated and increased the commission's powers, he added.

Asked whether the current EC would be able to postpone the by-polls to Dhaka-17 slated for July 17, Habibul said, "I will not answer this question."

Asked if the EC would be able to stop polls if there was no environment for a fair election, Habibul said, "It is

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Mukta Akhter, of the capital's Jatrabari area, breaks down in front of Mugda Medical College Hospital after her six-month-old son Mustafizur Rahman died of dengue fever yesterday morning. Just hours before, the infant was brought to the hospital as his health suddenly deteriorated.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Don't publish anything that hurts image of country

PM tells journo

BSS, DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the journalist community not to publish any such news or criticism in such a way that hampers the country's advancement and image.

She said she always welcomes constructive criticism from the media outlets so that the government can correct itself.

"Constructive news helps the government run the country," she said while

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DMP in overdrive over 25 cases

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and ZYMA ISLAM

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police Headquarters has taken an initiative to revive 25 criminal cases, filed against top BNP leaders, the proceedings of which were stayed by the High Court at different times in the past decade.

The cases were filed in 2013 and 2015, the years when there was widespread violence, including arson attacks on public buses, during anti-government protests that left scores of people dead.

The accused in the cases include BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, and other top leaders like Mirza Abbas, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed, Amanullah

Aman, Barkatullah Bulu, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Annie, Zainul Abidin Farroque, Salahuddin Ahmed and Habibun Nabi Khan Sohel.

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, currently in prison, is also an accused in one of these cases.

The DMP Headquarters also aims to reopen investigations into cases which have been halted for years.

In a letter sent on May 16, 2023, the DMP Headquarters directed all the deputy commissioners of police under the investigation officers of these cases to appeal to the HC to vacate the stay orders. The letter also told the DCs to urgently send a copy of the appeals to the DMP Headquarters.

The cases against the top BNP

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The cases against the top BNP leaders including Khaleda Zia and Mirza Fakhrul were filed mostly between 2013 and 2015 under the DMP area.

US under secy flies in today

Democracy, human rights to top agenda

PORIMOL PALMA

Uzra Zeya, the US under secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and



Uzra Zeya

Human Rights, arrives today on a four-day visit — at a delicate time when the ruling Awami League and opposition BNP are at loggerheads over the election-time government. BNP is adamant about reinstating the practice of caretaker government, which was abolished in 2011, to manage the transition from one elected government to another and hold the polls.

But the AL is insistent

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RUN-UP TO POLLS EU team talks with NHRC on rights situation

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The visiting EU election exploratory mission yesterday wanted to know from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) the possibilities of human rights violations during the next parliamentary elections.

"We said the overall situation is now better than before — that was evident in the recently held five elections as well as the local government elections," NHRC Chairman Kamal Uddin Ahmed told reporters after the meeting with the EU mission at his office.

There were some incidents in the elections but the NHRC has taken action and is investigating the cases. "We discussed these incidents with the EU delegation. We clearly said such incidents cannot be allowed as these are human rights violations."

Politicians do tend to deliver inflammatory speeches before the election, but there is nothing to be afraid of, he said, citing the cases of local government elections, which are often held without any major bloodshed.

"Everybody knows that bloodshed can be harmful to the respective parties. So, they are alert and we also realise that they don't go to that level, either way. So, I think the election environment as of now is good," Ahmed said.

After a few weeks, NHRC will start visiting various

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Rejoinder, our reply

State-run Essential Drug Company Limited has sent a rejoinder to our report headlined "Irregularities rife at state-run Essential Drugs Company, finds CAG audit" published on June 28.

The rejoinder, sent by the company's Managing Director Prof Dr Ehsanul Kabir, claimed the report was written without knowledge of the true facts, and there was mala fide intent.

He alleged while the report highlights certain irregularities, it fails to consider crucial factors and misrepresents the actions taken by the EDCL.

Prof Ehsanul explained his position regarding the seven-year delay in installing a drug production machine. He said that he joined the EDCL in mid-October 2014 and the machine to produce drugs was acquired in 2013.

He said the 60-year-old building was not suitable to install the machine. So, he launched measures to reconstruct

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Two young girls carry their fishing nets on their way to catch Horina prawns, a variety commonly found during high tide in the Rupsha. Many residents of Lobonchora Mathabhanga area near Khulna's Rupsha Bridge earn a living by catching prawns and selling them to the local markets. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Mugda hospital overwhelmed by dengue patients

2,080 being treated in different hospitals; 76 dead so far this year

MD ABBAS

The capital's Mugda Medical College Hospital has been struggling to cope with the steep rise in the number of dengue patients over the last few weeks.

The lone special dengue unit is currently accommodating 428 dengue patients at the 500-bed hospital, which is also treating 658 patients suffering from other diseases — putting tremendous pressure on the staffers.

As a result, many dengue patients were seen receiving treatment on the floors and corridors, as the hospital ran out of beds. On the other hand, the authorities have even been struggling to offer basic patients' needs because the number of dengue cases has already surpassed its capacity.

Abul Hossain, 64, a resident of Madartek area admitted six days ago, said, "When I was taken to the hospital, there was no bed available. I had to receive treatment on the floor."

"Throughout my five-day stay, I couldn't sleep well at nights and it'd be chaotic during the day. There was no fan at the spot I was lying on, nor any mosquito net...." he told The Daily Star.

Some 2,080 dengue patients are currently being treated at hospitals across the capital, while three more

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