



LGRD Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain and Information Adviser Mahfuj Alam handed over their resignation letters to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at Jamuna yesterday afternoon. Their resignation will be effective immediately after the announcement of the election schedule, CA's Press Secretary Shafiquel Alam said.

Finance adviser confined at Secretariat for over 5 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Employees of various ministries and departments staged a protest at the Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday, demanding a 20 percent allowance for Secretariat staff, during which they confined Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed.

According to witnesses, around 2:30pm, 150-200 non-cadre staff gathered in front of the office of Salehuddin. He was confined for about five and a half hours.

As the employees did not move even after being repeatedly told to do so, around 7:30pm, police personnel stationed at the Secretariat were called in. The police dispersed the protesters. Salehuddin left around 8:30pm.

Earlier, during the protest, some employees urged the government to issue a gazette by meeting their demand yesterday.

They noted that the schedule for the national election will be announced today and expressed concern that their demand might not be met afterwards.



Guerrillas blow up 85 targets in Chattogram

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points across the city in a single, coordinated wave. They had planned for a hundred. But, as Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, explosives chief and group commander, now 83, recalled, "Since freedom fighter Syed Emran was caught at the last minute, the 15 operations of his unit were unsuccessful."

The blasts plunged the Pakistani army into chaos. Freedom fighter Abul Kashem of Pahartali, now 80, said, "Only the group commanders knew about the coordinated operation for the sake of security. It took at least a week for the Pakistanis to move normally after the strikes."

During the war, at least 500 guerrillas carried out more than 400 operations here, the highest recorded in any single city.

recruits in their neighbourhoods.

By August, more than a hundred fighters from three Bangladesh Liberation Force groups entered the city. In September, four more BLF groups and at least 40 FF groups arrived, spreading the war across Chattogram.

Operations struck the Ice Factory, Kaibalyadham Petrol Train, Hotel Agrabad, American Express Bank, Lajaf Petrol Pump, and the Maykong Chinese Restaurant.

In October, the Pakistani regime declared East Pakistan "normal", prompting a UN observer team to visit and stay at Hotel Agrabad under tight guard. The fighters vowed to expose the lie.

After three days of reconnaissance, they chose the hotel transformer as their mark. On October 23, seven to

By September, funds ran low. Guerrillas decided to rob the American Express Bank in Agrabad. Under Engineer Harun's leadership, they hijacked a car; Harun waited outside while others stormed the bank at gunpoint.

They escaped with Tk 40,000, including Tk 19,000 in cash and the rest in foreign currency, which was handed to Moulvi Syed, said Fazul.

On November 1, they ambushed a central bank vehicle expected to carry Tk 2 lakh to the tax office. But a Pakistani soldier near New Market spotted them, triggering a gunfight.

Freedom fighter Rafiq Ahmad was martyred. Three fighters, including Fazul and Shafiqul Bashar, were shot. "The Pakistanis captured Bashar. We rescued him alive on December 16," said Fazul.

At least 20 guerrillas were captured

Schedule for twin votes this evening

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verdict that struck down the EC gazette reducing Bagerhat's seats from four to three and increasing Gazipur's from five to six. A bench headed by Chief Justice Rezaat Ahmed dismissed a leave-to-appeal petition challenging the ruling.

On November 10, the High Court had declared the delimitation of Bagerhat-1, Bagerhat-2, Bagerhat-3 and Gazipur-6 illegal and ordered restoration of the previous boundaries.

Earlier, Election Commissioner Anwarul Islam Sarkar told this newspaper the polls and referendum were expected between February 8 and 14.

Officials noted that elections are usually held the day before or after weekends. February 13 and 14 are weekends, and Ramadan is expected to begin on February 17 or 18, subject to the sighting of the moon.

The announcement of the schedule marks the formal start of the electoral process. Under the Representation of the People Order, 1972, the EC will issue the timetable through a gazette.

As per the code of conduct, campaigns may begin only three weeks (21 days) before polling. The preceding days will be used for finalising candidacies, nomination form submission, scrutiny, withdrawals, appeals, and allocation of symbols.

Once the schedule is announced, a public notification will follow, along with the appointment of returning officers (ROs) and assistant returning officers (AROs). They will handle all administrative tasks to ensure a fair vote.

Candidates have been instructed to remove posters, placards, banners, and billboards from public spaces within 48 hours of the announcement

of the schedule. The EC will also send a demi-official letter to the Cabinet Division, seeking assistance and requesting that field-level officers not be transferred until results are published.

With the schedule, the electoral code of conduct will come into force. Advisers and senior officials will be barred from using government facilities for campaigns. The government will also be not allowed to approve or inaugurate development projects that may influence voters.

WHAT'S NEW

Polling will continue from 7:30am to 4:30pm, an hour longer, as voters will cast both their votes and referendum ballots.

The referendum ballot will be dropped into a pink box, and the national polls ballot into a black and white one.

More secret booths will be set up. Constituencies with only one candidate running will feature a "no vote" option.

For the first time, campaign posters are banned to protect the environment.

Expatriates have an online registration system for postal ballots, and by yesterday evening about 2,97,000 had registered. Their ballots will carry only party and independent symbols, not candidate names, and must reach returning officers before the close of voting.

PREPARATIONS

The EC has finalised plans for 42,761 polling centres and 2,44,739 booths for around 12.76 crore voters. All materials, including ballots, will reach centres the day before voting.

The EC has published the final voter list, completed delimitation of 300 constituencies, approved registration

of two new political parties with two more pending, and updated the electoral code.

Several lakh officials, including presiding officers, assistant presiding officers and polling officers, are being appointed, and their training is underway.

Meanwhile, the government has amended the Representation of the People Order and nearly completed major reshuffles in field administration and police. It has changed 50 deputy commissioners and police superintendents across 64 districts and officers in-charge in 577 of 639 police stations.

In national elections, deputy commissioners and the divisional commissioners of Dhaka and Chattogram usually serve as returning officers, while police maintain law and order.

In mid-October, 25 parties signed the July National Charter after three rounds of negotiations among 30 parties and the National Consensus Commission on constitutional reforms. The National Citizen Party and four others refrained from signing the charter.

On October 28, the commission submitted recommendations on the July charter implementation. But political divisions deepened, especially over the referendum.

On November 3, the government gave parties a week to reach consensus or else it would "act as necessary". When the deadline passed, on November 13, it announced that the national election and referendum would be held on the same day, and an upper house would be introduced through the proportional representation system.

Asif, Mahfuj quit advisory council

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continue to play an active role in democratic transition and development in the future as well.

"The interim government will always remember your contribution. I wish you a bright and prosperous future. The nation will never forget what you have given in such a short time."

Urging them to remain engaged in the welfare of the country through their work, Yunus further said, "The experience you have gained while serving in the government must certainly be put to use in your future lives."

Their resignations now leave the advisory council with no student leaders. Earlier, National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam resigned from the position of information adviser in the interim government.

Government sources said Asif and Mahfuj were told to resign from the interim government in September, which they refused.

Without mentioning names, BNP has been demanding the resignation of student advisers, saying their presence in the interim administration will create a conflict of interest as the

student-led NCP is also participating in the polls.

At a press briefing in the conference room of the Local Government Division earlier in the day, Asif reiterated that he will participate in the upcoming national election but did not clarify when he will resign from the council of advisers. He was one of the frontline coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, the platform that led the July uprising.

After the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government, he was appointed as a student representative in the advisory council of the interim government, formed on August 8 last year. Alongside his responsibilities as adviser to the local government ministry, he also served as youth and sports adviser.

Although hailing from Cumilla, Asif is likely to contest the election from Dhaka-10, where BNP and Jamaat have already nominated their candidates.

Meanwhile, NCP in its first-phase list of candidates for 125 constituencies announced yesterday did not nominate anyone for Dhaka 10.

In November, Asif became a voter

of Dhanmondi zone under Dhaka-10 constituency, which comprises Dhanmondi, New Market, Kalabagan and Hazaribagh areas, indicating that he is likely to contest from this seat.

He told reporters yesterday that he will inform the media later from which party he will contest the polls.

Adviser Mahfuj Alam was given the portfolio of the information ministry on February 26 to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Nahid, who stepped down to lead NCP.

A graduated from Dhaka University's law department, he was the coordinator of the liaison committee of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, and was appointed as a special assistant to the chief adviser with the status of secretary on August 28 last year. He was later made an adviser without portfolio on November 10.

Mahfuj, however, has yet to give any formal announcement on whether he will participate in the upcoming election.

BNP and Jamaat have nominated their candidates for Laxmipur-1, which is the constituency Mahfuj hails from. NCP did not field a candidate there yet.

Khaleda is 'responding to treatment'

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responding to treatment, he added.

Considering Khaleda's current health condition, it is not yet time to take her abroad for advanced treatment, he said.

"I urge everyone not to pay heed to any rumours regarding her condition," Dr Zahid said to reporters outside the hospital in Dhaka.

Khaleda, 80, was admitted to the hospital on November 23 on the advice of her medical board after being diagnosed with infections in her heart and lungs.

She is also suffering from pneumonia and has long been battling multiple complications, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and chronic issues affecting her kidneys, lungs, heart, and eyes. She has a permanent pacemaker and previously underwent stent placement.

Asked about her present condition, Dr Zahid said she was receiving the same treatment as before. "In medical terms, she can continue maintaining her treatment. The doctors are providing care, which she is receiving,

and she is responding to it."

A medical board led by cardiologist Prof Shahabuddin Talukder, with specialists from Bangladesh, the UK, the US, China, and Australia, continues to oversee her treatment.

Dr Zubaida Rahman, wife of Khaleda's son and acting BNP chairman Tarique Rahman, arrived in Dhaka on December 5. BNP leaders said Zubaida has been spending most of the day by Khaleda's side, coordinating her care.

'TIME HASN'T COME

YET FOR ABROAD'

Dr Zahid said Khaleda's treatment was being conducted in consultation with doctors at home and abroad, and they remained hopeful that her care would be ensured properly.

"Later, if necessary, she may be taken abroad at any time. But at this stage, this is where things stand," he said. "We had discussed it earlier, but what Allah has planned for her is beyond anyone's control."

Although the party earlier announced twice that she would be taken abroad, both attempts fell through.

The medical board decided last

Friday that she could be moved overseas, but technical issues with the air ambulance and her health condition prevented the transfer, Dr Zahid said.

He stressed that the board was consistently working to ensure the best possible care. Efforts were also underway, both locally and abroad, to secure any additional treatment she might require, based on medical recommendations.

Acknowledging the anxiety among Khaleda's supporters, he said doctors must respect the patient's rights and privacy. "We must remember that she is a patient and has her own ethical rights and privileges. As a doctor, I cannot disclose everything openly; medical science does not permit it."

"Under no circumstances, we allow emotions or feelings to lead to excessive sharing or confusion among the people," he said, urging the public not to fall for misinformation or rumours regarding her condition.

He also urged the people to pray for her recovery. Special prayers were offered across the country for the former prime minister's swift healing.



PHOTO: AHMAD ISTIAK

Site of Operation Ice Factory

In April, this correspondent spoke with at least 20 freedom fighters in Chattogram. Their memories echo the written record – Jamal Uddin's "Muktijuddhe Chattogram Shahor", Mahfuzur Rahman's "Banglaer Jatiyatabadi Sangram Muktijuddhe Chattogram", and the sector-wise chronicles.

Together, they sketch a city quietly preparing for war after Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's March 7 speech. Secret training under Awami League leader Moulvi Syed Ahmed began almost immediately. After March 25, Bangalee soldiers of the Bengal Regiment and EPR resisted but had to withdraw. As Pakistani and Bihari forces seized control and carried out massacres, the city emptied.

In early April, students and youths slipped into India for training. Many hesitated, until Moulvi Syed printed a leaflet calling them to arms. The response swept across neighbourhoods, and training began beside Noor Mohammad's house in Chhotopool, Agrabad.

Meanwhile, lightly trained Ansar men and guerrillas launched small strikes. After taking oath on May 7, fighters established their main base at Sabujbagh in Panwalapara.

Among the earliest major missions was Operation Chawkbazar. On May 18, Jahangir Group fighters spotted four Pakistani soldiers in a jeep and hurled a grenade in Kapasgola, destroying the vehicle and killing the soldiers.

Through May and June, their task was to spread dread. Dost Mohammad, now 72, said, "We arranged shelters for the trained guerrillas who came from India in various houses in the city." By June, fighters were slipping back inside Chattogram.

Freedom fighter Fazul Haque Bhuiyan, now 75, said his group returned on June 16 after training in India.

"We had instructions that no Dalal or Razakar would be allowed in the city so that the remaining guerrillas could also enter the city," said Nuruddin Chowdhury, now 70. Those fighters trained new

eight fighters led by Mahfuzur Rahman stormed the site. Shafiq Munshi, now 70, recalled, "We kept two freedom fighters on guard outside and first held the security guards and the Razakars hostage by pointing revolvers at their chests."

"Freedom fighters Faiz and Garibullah burned their hands while trying to install high-explosives in the transformer... Within a short time, the transformer exploded, causing power outages and panic in the area." The blast carried the truth to the observers.

A week later came Kaibalyadham, the city's most devastating ambush, killing 20 Pakistani soldiers. For three days, fighters tracked an army train moving between Battali Kattali and Mirsarai. On a bustling market day at Colonel Hat, the city emptied.



Raisul Haque Bahar's group slipped into the crowd disguised as foot pilgrims, explosives hidden in their bags.

Imtiyar Uddin Pasha, now 73, said, "As planned, we planted explosives in the evening and hid. When the first two coaches crossed, Bahar Bhai pulled the wire with the T&T cord. A terrible explosion occurred immediately. All the Pakistani soldiers on the train were killed."

WEAPONS, FUNDS, TORTURE

Arms flowed from India along many routes, including Banshbaria via Mirsarai, then travelled by sea through Katuli, said freedom fighter Shafiqul Alam, now 73.

Sometimes, the delivery required disguise. Mohammad Hossain, now 84, remembered one fighter who posed as a corpse in an ambulance to smuggle weapons.