

Parliamentary elections, scheduled to take place on January 22, 2007, were postponed January 11 when President Iajuddin Ahmed resigned from his position as Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government, declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew. Polls were expected to elect 300 members to the 9th Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) for a five-year term. The five-year tenure of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led four party alliance ceased at midnight on October 27, 2006 and was marked by two days of intense violence between party activists from the four party alliance and the main opposition party, the Awami League (AL).

Caretaker Government

One of the first initiatives of the Caretaker Government following the resignation on January 11, 2007, of the former Chief Advisor and President Iajuddin Ahmed, and the indefinite postponement of parliamentary elections, was to begin the process of separating the judiciary from the executive. In his televised address to the nation, the Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government, Dr Fakruddin Ahmed, pledged to hold elections and transfer power to an elected government as early as possible, after reconstituting the Election Commission and preparing a flawless voters' list. However, he did not give a specific date for an election. He also said the Government would examine the possibility of introducing voter ID cards and transparent ballot boxes, which could further delay elections.

On Friday, January 26, President Iajuddin proclaimed the Emergency Powers Rules 2007, indefinitely extending the existing state of emergency. Under the rules, the Government banned political and trade union activities, politics by students, teachers and government employees and restricted anti-government news in print, television and the electronic media. There are also restrictions placed on processions, demonstrations, hartals, strikes and lockouts as well as severe penalties, including prison terms, for violations of these rules. Dr. Fakruddin also announced that the Anti-Corruption Commission would be re-activated. On February 8, the Anti-Corruption Commission Chairman, Justice Sultan Hossain Khan and Commissioner, Professor Maniruzzaman Miah resigned following requests to do so by the President. The remaining Commissioner, Maniruddin Ahmed resigned on February 10. The Attorney General, AJ Mohammed Ali also resigned and was replaced by Barrister Fida M. Kamal.

As part of the crackdown on corruption, numerous illegal structures throughout the country were demolished. A number of senior figures from both the BNP (12) and the Awami League (4) were detained with the authorities seeking and obtaining a detention order for 30 days for these individuals, who are now in various jails throughout the country. See page two for a list of the detained.

Election Commission

Controversial Chief Election Commissioner, Justice MA Aziz, who had been 'on leave' since November, resigned on January 21, the same day as the official cancellation of the Parliamentary Elections. Ten days later on January 31, the acting Chief Election Commissioner, Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and the remaining five Election Commissioners resigned from their positions. On February 11, the Election Commission Secretary, Abdur Rashid Sarkar was transferred with Humayun Kabir appointed Secretary to the Commission

The High Court suspended the conduct of all election-related activities, including the next parliamentary elections, for at least three months. The High Court also ordered the Election Commission to explain why the existing revised voter list should not be declared contrary to the order of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

On February 5, the former Water Resources Secretary, Dr. A.T.M. Shamsul Huda was appointed as Chief Election Commissioner and former Law Secretary, Mohammad Sohul Hossain was appointed as an Election Commissioner. On taking office, Dr. Huda pledged major electoral reform and vowed to

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restore public confidence in the Election Commissioner. On February 7, Dr. Huda announced that party registration with the Election Commission will be mandatory and imposed a ban on civil servants from contesting elections for up to three or four years after their retirement. He pledged to restore public confidence in the Election Commission and said he would hold dialogues with the political parties in due course. On February 13, retired Brigadier General Shakhwat Hossain was named an Election Commissioner.

Military

The Army Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Moeen said that the Army had no intention of assuming control of the central government and that the Armed Forces are not running the country. He also stated that under the new situation, politicians will be unable to ‘do politics’ and squander money.

NDI Activities:

Asia Programs Director Peter Manikas, Senior Program Manager Terry Hoverter, and Program Officer Daniel Harter, were in Dhaka from January 19 to 24 to assess the current political situation and to meet with various officials and the leaders of all the major political parties. They were joined on their assessment by NDI Bangladesh Country Director Owen Lippert and NDI Bangladesh Senior Program Manager, Deborah Healy.

NDI is currently revising its public opinion polling activities to reflect the current political situation. Pollsters from ACNielsen will return to the field with a modified questionnaire to take into account the changed political environment. This polling is being conducted in connection with the local media houses and with NDI technical assistance.

Detainees

Name	Affiliation	Former Position
Barrister Nazmul Huda	BNP	Communications Manager
Salauddin Quader Chowhury	BNP	Parliament Affairs Advisor to Khaleda Zia
Iqbal Hassan Mahmud	BNP	State Minister for Power
Amanullah Aman	BNP	State Minister for Labour and Manpower
Mir Nasir Uddin	BNP	State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism
Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu	BNP	Deputy Minister for Land
Mossadek Ali Falu	BNP	Political Advisor to Khaleda Zia
Naser Rahman	BNP	Member of Parliament
Wadud Bhuiyan	BNP	Member of Parliament, Chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board
Manjurul Ahsan Munshi	BNP	Member of Parliament
Ali Asgar Lobi	BNP	Member of Parliament, Chairman of Bangladesh Cricket Board
Salahudin Ahmed	BNP	State Minister for Communications
Tariqul Islam	BNP	Forest & Environmental Minister
Firoz Mia	Telephone Labourers Union (BNP)	Current Leader
Mohammad Nasim	AL	Minister for Home Affairs
Mohiuddin Alamgir	AL	State Minister for Planning
Salman F. Rahman	AL	Advisor for Development Affairs to Sheikh Hasina
A.N.H. Mostafa Kamal	AL	Member of Parliament
Pankaj Debnath	Awami Shechchashebok League (AL)	Current President and Secretary