

Parliamentary elections

Ershad announces three steps to hold fair

By A Staff Reporter

The Election Commission on Sunday announced that the election to the 300 seats of Parliament would be held on April 26 next in pursuance of the declaration of President Hussain Muhammad Ershad that the polls would take place in the last week of April.

The President in his address to the nation over Radio and Television said that all steps would be taken to ensure a free and fair election and announced measures, to be effective on the day of filing of nomination papers, if the Opposition participated in the polls.

The measures are: if any member of the cabinet becomes a candidate he will then resign all posts and offices of zonal

Martial Law Administrator and tiers under them will be abolished, and Martial Law Courts will be closed down. The date of filing nomination papers has been fixed for March 22.

The President said the decision was taken in fulfilment of his pledge to the nation that he was determined to take the country back on the path of democracy and appealed to all to participate in the election.

"We are confident that all of us will extend our total co-operation to take the country to the path of democracy for establishing a democratic system on a solid foundation for our posterity" he said.

He said the functioning of democracy stumbled time and again in the hands of anarchists

and forces of indiscipline due to weaknesses in the very foundation of political organisations and economy, the President said pointing to difficult path the nation had to traverse.

The President dismissed the allegations that the polls were not free under Martial Law and pointed out that at least three elections were held in this country under ML in which major opposition parties had participated.

The President also noted that the Opposition parties who joined him in political dialogue never demanded withdrawal of Martial Law totally, either verbally or in writing since it would create a legal vacuum. The Opposition knew it very well that total with-

drawal of ML was not desirable till the election was held.

Recalling his impressions which he gathered during his hectic visits to the nook and corner of the country and talks with wide sections of the people, the President said that all expressed themselves in favour of the election as there was no alternative to it for transition to democracy.

Those who want democracy without election are in fact trying to push the country to the path of indiscipline and chaos which the people would never accept.

The President spoke in brief on the efforts of his Government for establishing democracy through elections and said despite accommodation of the

Election schedule

Elections to the Parliament will be held throughout the country on April 26 next says a Press release of the Election Commission, reports BSS.

In a Gazette notification, issued on Sunday the Election Commission has called upon the electors to elect a member from each of the 300 constituencies of the Parliament. The Commission has also announced detailed schedule of the elections in the same Gazette Notification as follows:

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| A. Filing of nomination papers with the returning officers | : 22nd March, 1986. (Saturday) |
| B. Scrutiny of nomination papers filed | : 23rd March, 1986. (Sunday) |
| C. Last date of withdrawal of candidature | : 1st April, 1986. (Tuesday) |
| D. Polling date | : 26th April, 1986. (Saturday) |

The Chief Election Commissioner, Mr Justice Chowdhury A. T. M. Masud has assured a free, fair and impartial election and sought the co-operation of all for holding the elections in a peaceful atmosphere.

It may be mentioned here that the Election Commission, in a Gazette notification, issued on September 20, 1984, has published the final list of all the 300 constituencies of the seats of the Parliament. The Election Commission is also taking other measures for holding the elections as per above mentioned schedule.

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polls

demands of the Opposition political parties, they kept themselves away from participation in the polls under the false pretext that elections will not be fair unless Martial Law is withdrawn totally.

BSS adds: President Ershad said Martial Law was promulgated under unavoidable circumstances "This Martial Law is exceptional" he observed.

Expressing his respect to the Constitution of the country, he said while promulgating Martial Law his Government did not abrogate the Constitution, but suspended it because "we did not want to push the country toward a constitutional vacuum."

In this context, the President

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and demands with a view to creating an atmosphere for holding free and fair elections.

In spite of that the two opposition alliances had taken decision not to take part in elections which had really surprised the countrymen. The elections was postponed again. You are sure to remember as to how and why the elections had to be postponed at that time and why we had to go for re-imposing the paraphernalia of military rule which had been withdrawn earlier.

They said that the reasons of their boycotting the elections then was that without the complete withdrawal of Martial Law the elections would not be free and fair. But they knew it very well that if Martial Law is withdrawn there will be a legal vacuum in the country. On this realisation of the reality, one of the component parties of an alliance had participated in the elections in 1970, 1975 and 1979 under Martial Law. Another main component of the other alliance did participate in the election under Martial Law while it was in power. Moreover, there was no mention of the point of withdrawal of Martial Law in their verbal discussions and the charter of demands they had submitted during the dialogue.

I have travelled from one corner of the country to the other. I have visited villages after villages and also mills, factories and farms. I have talked with the people from all quarters. I have talked to peasant and workers, to students and the youth, women and professionals.

They want social peace and economic progress. They have said one of the main aims of our great independence struggle is a democratic state system. They want elections. They have agreed with me that there is no alternative to elections for transition to democracy. Those who talk of transition to democracy by avoiding participation in the polls, in fact, want to push the country in a state of chaos. It is my belief, the countrymen, and the democratic loving political parties and organisation will not allow our dear motherland to fall prey to such a state of chaos and anarchy.

Four years of Martial Law is going to be completed. It is no longer desirable that Martial Law to continue for whatsoever reason. I have already said election will be held by the first half of the current year. We have decided to hold the Jatiya Sangsad election in the last week of April this year by honouring the will of the people and our commitment. The Election Commission will announce the election date and schedule.

The Opposition parties had demanded holding of Jatiya Sangsad elections first. Giving

position parties should participate in the polls with honour, this time too we have decided to hold the Jatiya Sangsad election first.

We had taken certain significant steps last time so that the opposition could contest the election with confidence. Their main conditions were fulfilled. This time too we are ready to take similar steps. I hope

all opposition parties will participate in the coming polls. It is my belief and confidence that all concerned will extend total cooperation to my sincerity and endeavour to take the country to a democratic path so that we collectively could establish a solid base for a democratic system for the future generation. Since the independence till today the path of democratic system was never smooth and easy.

Democratic efforts have time and again been hindered by indiscipline and anarchism that stemmed from lack of democratic political organisation and strong economic foundation. I have told it before and I assure again, all steps would be taken to ensure that polls are held in a free and fair atmosphere.

I declare that if the Opposition parties join the election the following measures would be taken from the date of filing nomination under the polls schedule of the Election Commission:

- 1) Any member of the cabinet who will want to contest the polls will have to resign.
- 2) All Zonal Martial Law Administrators and their subordinates and offices will be abolished.
- 3) All Martial Law courts will be abolished.

My dear countrymen, Party is above any individual and the country is above the party. I will expect we will forget all contradictions and malice and rise above all difference of opinion and will not fail to show respect to the country, to the nation and to the people and their democratic values and above all to the spirit and aspirations country towards a prosperous future and to mobilise the ten crore people towards that goal. Today we need national unity, consensus and national unity.

I want to call upon all political parties and the people, let us come forward to prove before the world through peaceful transition to democracy through the elections, that we are firm in our resolve and unshakable in our national unity.

Khuda Hafez
Bangladesh Zindabad