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Free, fair election particular duty

52

was the demand of all the countrymen, the Acting President said adding that he responded to the call to establish democracy for greater interest of the nation and the country.

Mr Justice Shahabuddin said the struggle by students, teachers, lawyers, artists, journalists, doctors, engineers, workers, employees and people from all walks of life over the past eight years for establishment of democratic rule through constitutional process has been successful.

The Acting President said Bangladesh is a modern democratic state and the people are the source of all powers. Election is the base of the democratic system but the election becomes meaningless if it fails to reflect the hopes and aspirations of the people. He said the people's demand for the last eight years was for free and fair polls so that their representatives could take part in the running of the state.

The Acting President said he would take some immediate steps to ensure free and fair election. Firstly, peace and discipline will have to be established. He appealed to the political parties, students, workers, employees and people of all classes for their cooperation in this regard.

The Acting President said, since there was no parliament and cabinet in the country at the moment, an advisory council would be formed to assist him in discharging his responsibilities, the members of the advisory council would be non-partisan and neutral and they would not be eligible for contesting next election or any by-election within one year.

Mr Justice Ahmed said it is necessary to show respect to all parties and opinions. Every citizen has equal rights. He said democracy can be permanent if it

Contd. on page 8 col. 4



Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed addressing the nation over Radio and Television on Friday.

Free, fair election

Contd. from page 1

is based on tolerance, cooperation and fellow-feeling. He called for friendly ties sinking differences and shaking off hatred. He said the Armed Forces, BDR, Police, Ansar and all the law enforcing agencies have responsible role to play in establishing constitutional rule.

The Acting President stressed the need for a good election machinery to hold fair polls on time. He said the Election Commission may be reorganised if the political parties want. He said it is the duty of the citizens to cooperate with the employees engaged in the election work. He said measures will be taken to award stern punishment to those committing crime in election. He said the election law may be amended, if necessary, to reduce election expenditure.

Turning to the economic

scenario the Acting President said the economy is on the verge of a serious crisis. As one of the poorest countries, Bangladesh is dependent on foreign aid. He drew attention of all concerned to keep their eyes open so that economic activities are not obstructed, he hoped that the donor countries and agencies would continue to help Bangladesh.

The Acting President said the foreign policy of Bangladesh is based on the principle "friendship to all, malice to none." He said this policy will continue. He pledged

to maintain good neighbourly relations with neighbouring countries; friendship with countries, and to play an active role in the United Nations, aligned Movements of Islamic countries, the Commonwealth, Bangladesh, South Asian Regional Cooperation for increased development of the South Asian region.

Recalling the role played by the students in the democratic movement in the country the Acting President said the nation would remember ever the struggle and sacrifice of the students. He said students have set a fine example of unity in the democratic movement. He urged the students to go back to their respective institutions and maintain academic atmosphere. He requested the teachers to take special measures to complete academic programme that had been disturbed within schools.

Mr Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed made a clarion call to the countrymen to work shoulder to shoulder and participate in the unprecedented peace democratic struggle. He expressed his confidence in the democratic values of the people of the country.

The Acting President paid tribute to those killed in the democratic movement and expressed his sympathy for the peace of their souls.