

President sworn

FROM PAGE 1

In his instant reaction, President Iajuddin Ahmed said, "Pray for me so that I can work for the country." He hoped that the current political crisis will be resolved soon.

Asked when the ten other advisers of his caretaker government will be appointed, the president told reporters, "You will be informed later."

Soon after taking over the new office, he asked the chief election commissioner to take necessary measures to hold the next general elections in a free and fair manner.

He also issued orders for the civil administration and law enforcement agencies to protect public life and property from violence.

The AL-led 14-party alliance did not attend Iajuddin's oath-taking ceremony. Sheikh Hasina however received the invitation just five minutes before 8:00pm. Political parties, except the BNP-led alliance partners and Jatiya Party (Ershad), were also not seen at the ceremony.

Reserved seats for the former caretaker government advisers were also seen empty. Former chief adviser to caretaker government Justice Habibur Rahman, however, attended the function, but he declined to make any comment.

BNP Chairperson and immediate past prime minister Khaleda Zia also declined to make any instant comment over transferring power to a caretaker government. "We will keep meeting each other from now," she told the reporters.

UNB, however, reported that Khaleda expressed her satisfaction over the power handover. "I am very happy about transferring the power democratically and peacefully," UNB quoted Khaleda.

The immediate past PM made a courtesy call on the president soon after he was sworn in as the chief adviser to the caretaker government.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil also made a courtesy call on the newly sworn-in caretaker government chief and discussed holding of a free and fair election.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan also declined to make any comment.

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad said the president had no alternative but to assume the office himself. He said his party will participate in the next parliamentary elections, no matter which political party contests or not.

Replying to a question, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Muzahid said it does not matter whether any political party accepts the president's assumption of the post of chief adviser.

U.S. Ambassador Patricia DiBuenis, who attended the oath-taking ceremony along with other diplomats, declined to make any comment.

Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Moin U Ahmed in his instant reaction told reporters at Bangabhaban that they are happy.

DAYLONG TALKS

The president assumed the office of the chief adviser to the caretaker government last night following daylong talks with the four major political parties, BNP, AL, Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatiya Party, to resolve the ongoing stalemate.

After the talks, the Bangabhaban spokesman told the media yesterday afternoon that the president would give his decision as "other options for appointing the caretaker government chief from retired judges of the Supreme Court had been exhausted".

In the talks however, BNP, Jamaat and Jatiya Party informed the president that they have objection to Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury as the chief adviser, and Bangabhaban claimed that Justice Hamidul Haque had declined to assume the post of the chief adviser.

Justice Hamidul Haque yesterday

noon however told reporters that he had not declined to assume the office of the chief adviser.

The JP delegation after holding talks with the president told reporters that the president informed them that Justice Mahmudul Amin had agreed to accept the post if it would be offered to him, but BNP and Jamaat had reservation about him.

On receiving the letter from former chief justice KM Hasan declining the job offer on Friday night, the president held a meeting with BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil on Saturday afternoon and he offered himself as the chief adviser.

AL-led 14-party coalition rejected the president's proposal outright. The president then again sat with BNP, AL, Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatiya Party yesterday.

AL in the talks submitted a written statement to the president opposing his intention of assuming the office of the interim government chief and urged him to follow the constitution while the other three political parties apparently gave consent to the president's proposal.

Finally, the president last night assumed the office of the chief adviser to the caretaker government that is supposed to provide all out cooperation to the Election Commission to hold the next parliamentary election scheduled for next January.

SCENE AT DARBAR HALL

On receiving the invitation to attend the chief adviser's oath-taking ceremony at 8:00pm, many expressed their astonishment and were confused who is going to assume the post of the caretaker government chief, while many other invitees rushed to Bangabhaban to attend the ceremony.

The invitation letters sent to important persons did not carry any name of the probable chief of the caretaker government. Even while entering Bangabhaban many had no clue as to who was going to take the oath.

President Iajuddin Ahmed entered Darbar Hall at 8:00pm and took his seat. The oath-taking ceremony began in absence of most of the political parties and many seats in the hall were vacant.

Ending all speculations, the cabinet secretary announced that the president was going to assume the office of the chief adviser and the chief justice would administer the oath.

The chief justice completed administering the oath within three minutes and the dignitaries present at the ceremony welcomed the new chief adviser with applause.

Darbar Hall was however not filled with invited dignitaries, as many of the invited guests did not attend. Even the seats reserved for the family members of the president and the prime minister remained vacant.

Khaleda Zia who entered Bangabhaban as the prime minister last night left the president's residence as the immediate past

OCT. 3 0.2006

The Daily Star