

Awami League to contest Bangladesh civic elections

The Awami League and its allies have decided to contest the Aug 4 civic elections in Bangladesh, ending its poll boycott, a media report said Saturday.

Despite reservations by some, the Awami League's central working committee Thursday took a 'unanimous' decision to go for the civic polls, its acting head Mohammed Zillur Rahman was quoted as saying by the New Age newspaper.

Since a majority of the parties have fallen in line with the caretaker government's election timetable, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of jailed former prime minister Khaleda Zia, which has vowed to 'resist' the polls, is also likely to contest.

All of them want the timetable for parliamentary elections, as of now scheduled for the third week of December, to be advanced and the national emergency lifted.

However, the government Thursday said it would announce the schedule for the general elections only by October-end.

Political analysts said the government had succeeded in driving a wedge among the political parties through a carrot-and-stick policy.

The government's sop of a temporary lifting of curbs and allowing a poll campaign has made politicians reconsider their election boycott. Now, they are gradually gravitating towards joining the political dialogue ahead of the December polls.

Earlier this month, the military-backed government of Chief Advisor Fakhruddin Ahmed facilitated the temporary release and the visit to the US for medical treatment of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

But it is yet to decide on the release of Zia's two ailing and jailed sons, Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko, who are facing graft charges.

Bangladesh slid into being ruled by a non-representative government after general elections were called off amid political turmoil in January last year.

The caretaker government has promised to hold elections after warnings from the US, Britain, the European Union and others that the country's political instability would drive away investors.

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