

Khaleda Zia demands changes for Bangladesh elections

Bangladesh's former prime minister Khaleda Zia has demanded for change in national elections scheduled for December and warned that groups might boycott the polls if her party's demands to improve the elections are met within 48 hours.

The list of demands issued by the head of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), included: delaying the elections to Dec 28 from the currently-scheduled Dec 18; an additional delay in elections for local government spots; and a provision to allow for voting by Muslim pilgrims who might not be in Bangladesh in December.

Zia also called for an electoral rule to be scrapped that gives election officials powers to cancel a person's candidacy.

'My party and allies are ready to join the elections provided our four-point demands are met,' said Zia, saying that the government's preparation was inadequate to hold a credible election.

The government announced Saturday that preparations were complete for the Dec 18 elections and that the country was on track for a return to democracy.

Zia's deadline is 9 p.m. Wednesday, a day before the deadline falls for candidate's to file their intention to run in parliamentary elections.

Zia said the military-backed government needed to meet the BNP's demands to ensure a credible election with participation from all parties.

Since the military-backed government took over in January 2007, Zia has been detained on graft charges and subsequently released.

She said she has made previous requests for changes in the planned elections, but has been rebuffed each time by government officials.

Bangladesh's other major political alliance, Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, has already completed its preparation for the stalled parliamentary elections. They were originally scheduled for Jan 22, 2007, but were postponed after the military took control of Bangladesh in an effort to stop political violence.

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