

14-party to lay siege to EC tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fourteen-party opposition alliance will lay siege to the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat in the city tomorrow demanding immediate resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two other "politically" appointed election commissioners.

A meeting at the Dhanmondi AL office finalised the preparations for the siege programme with Presidium Member Tofail Ahmed in the chair.

The leaders and activists of the 14-party combine will gather at Russell Square in Dhanmondi and in front of the weather office at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in processions to lay the siege around 11:00am tomorrow.

Addressing the meeting, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said the BNP-Jamaat alliance government has made the EC secretariat their "party office."

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WHO to create anti-bird flu taskforce

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organisation said yesterday that it will create a new taskforce to help tackle outbreaks of bird flu and contain a potential influenza pandemic among humans.

Dr. Keiji Fukuda, the coordinator of the UN agency's global influenza programme, told reporters that training of what is initially expected to be a hundred-strong pool of experts may begin as early as the summer.

"We need people from a wide variety of backgrounds," Fukuda said, including epidemiologists, laboratory specialists, plus experts in logistics, ethics and communications.

The planned role of the taskforce would include helping

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UNSC seeks united response to Iran

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council was set to discuss on Friday taking a united, firm but gradual response to Iran's nuclear defiance, amid expectations it will meet next week to endorse demands that Tehran halt uranium enrichment.

A day after UN atomic watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei sent his assessment report on the Iranian nuclear programme to the 15-member council, UN chief Kofi Annan said on Thursday that efforts must go on to resolve the crisis through talks.

"The issue has come here but the negotiations must continue," he said.

"I don't know what action or decision the council will take, but the efforts of the agency of Mr. ElBaradei and the other parties working with Iran must continue," Annan told reporters.

Washington, along with its European allies, suspects Iran is hiding a nuclear weapons programme and favours a tough line while Russia and China, which have close economic and energy ties with Tehran, are cool to sanctions.

Iran maintains its nuclear programme is solely for generating electricity.

Envoys of Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- the five veto-wielding, permanent members of the council

-- discussed the issue Wednesday and were to revisit it Friday ahead of a meeting by the full council next week.

The United States insisted Thursday that it wanted a diplomatic resolution of the crisis and would press for a "strong presidential statement" by the council.

"The first step in the Security Council will not be looking at sanctions, it will be looking at the possibility of a strong presidential statement laying out very clearly for the regime what it needs to do and calling on the regime to take certain steps," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said.

A presidential statement is not binding but requires unanimity of

council members. A resolution needs at least nine votes for adoption in the absence of a veto from any of the five permanent members.

The key challenge for the council will be to maintain unity, especially among members whose interests do not always coincide.

France's UN envoy Jean-Marc de La Sabliere said the council would also adopt a gradual response to encourage Iran to return to a moratorium on uranium enrichment.

"We will follow a gradual approach... because what we want is Iran to go back to (enrichment) suspension," he said.

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Draft coal policy violates constitution, anti-people

Economists, energy experts say

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Economists and energy experts at a dialogue yesterday said the draft coal policy violates the constitution as it seeks to award the coalfields to foreign investors on a royalty basis. They said the policy, which has been prepared without consulting the people, is basically export-biased and lacking in terms of national interests. As it has been drawn up without linking the National Energy Policy, it may lead to a serious energy crisis in near future, they added.

Held at the National Press Club, the dialogue on proposed coal policy was organised by Bangladesh Economic Association

(BEA) and Citizens Commission on Gas, Oil and Coal.

The draft policy prepared by the Infrastructure Investment Facilities Centre (IIFC) has never been discussed in parliament, whereas article 143 (1) of the constitution says all resources underlying any land or territorial waters vest in the people.

The application of royalty clause will jeopardise the 'ownership' of the property as per the constitutional provision, energy expert Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal said, presenting a paper on 'Proposed Coal Policy: An analysis'.

The already energy-deficient country depends heavily on natural gas, the reserve of which is set to be

used up by 2015. Therefore, coal development is a welcome relief. But the formula for exporting coal at the ratio of 1:2 during initial period and 1:1 thereafter appears to be export-biased, Nuruddin Kamal said.

Unless an acceptable demand forecast of coal is prepared, its optimum utilisation cannot be ensured to achieve a sustainable energy security in the country, he said adding that the energy hungry countries like USA or India do not think of exporting energy, but import.

Coal export can be accommodated only after meeting the

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2 extortionists held in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested two extortionists near the Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday.

Ramna police said the two--Abul Basar and Sajib--had been demanding Tk 20,000 to Abdul Hannan, deputy assistant officer of Agricultural Extension Department (AED), over telephone for the last few days.

The extortionists, claiming themselves as accomplices of 'Kala' Jahangir, also threatened

Hannan with death if he failed to oblige, police quoted Hannan as saying.

Being afraid, Hannan agreed to give them Tk 10,000 on Shahbagh foot-over bridge at about 12:30pm yesterday. The extortionists said they would wait on the bridge with bottled mineral water in hands.

After paying the amount, Hannan guessed that he might have been bluffed in the name of 'Kala' Jahangir. Then he started following the extortionists up to the press club and at one stage, he sought help from the on-duty policemen.

Police arrested the extortionists with the money. Hannan filed a case with Ramna Police Station under the Speedy Trial Act.

Wife of slain Zia curses Bangla Bhai

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

"There was no rule of law in the country then. Otherwise, my husband would not have been killed by Bangla Bhai's men in the presence of police," Farsia Bakul, wife of slain Ziaul Haque Zia, lamented.

"The murderers left the scene brandishing firearms near Chhatardighi police camp in Naogaon but the law enforcers did not even make a move against them," she said.

Militants of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) lynched Zia, 30, an NGO worker and activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League, in broad daylight at Chhatardighi Bazar in Raninagar upazila on November 13, 2004.

Twenty armed JMJB cadres led by Sariyatullah alias Simar, Samad Babu Bablu and Mostafijur Rahman Khaza abducted Zia from his Abadpukur house that afternoon. They beat dead by hanging him upside down in a tree, branding him as an outlaw.

Several people of the village who witnessed the killing said Bangla Bhai oversaw the operation. Earlier, Zia's father Jasim Uddin denied giving the JMJB men Eid toll after they claimed five-eighths of zakat and fitra [religious donations].

Sub-inspector Masud, camp in-charge, was later served with a show-cause notice for 'his neglect

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Prayer Timing

March 11

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-05	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-12	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation



Garment Workers Federation forms a human chain at Muktangan in the capital yesterday demanding compulsory group insurance for workers at every garment factory.

PHOTO: STAR

KTS burn victims worry about future

Many still being treated at hospitals, clinics

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The fire has extinguished at the KTS Garment Factory in Chittagong for quite some time now, but many injured garment workers are still groaning with pain at different medical hospitals and clinics.

More than 60 people have died so far and scores of others were injured in the fire that gutted the KTS Composite Textile Mill on February 23.

Five such burn victims--four females and a male--have been languishing at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH). As they undergo unbearable physical sufferings,

their concerns always seem to be shifting to something beyond their physical pain.

Dr Samanta Lal Sen, plastic surgeon at the DMCH, said 40-60 percent part of these victims' bodies was burnt. Their conditions are serious "especially because all of them got inhalation burn, which is extremely difficult to cure completely," he said.

Factory labourer Abdus Salam, 45, used to send half his salary of Tk 3,000 a month for his wife, two daughters and a son in village. The family now faces an uncertain future as the lone bread-earner was severely burnt in the accident.

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2 students 'tortured' by Rab in Khulna for 'keeping arms'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) allegedly tortured an SSC candidate, a Dakhl candidate and an HSC candidate at the Rab headquarters in Khalishpur under the city on Wednesday night for 'keeping and smuggling arms'.

The three torture victims were identified as Sumon, a student of St Xaviers High School, Rumi, a student of Khulna Alia Madrasa, and Masum Imam, an HSC candidate from Khulna Shahid Suhrawardy College -- all residents of Basupara in Sonadanga of Khulna City.

Sumon and Rumi sat for the examinations with severe injuries on Thursday.

Some Rab members entered their house scaling the boundary wall on Wednesday midnight, Shumon's father freedom fighter Mostafa Shaikh said, adding that they searched all the rooms of the house before taking Shumon to Rab headquarters.

"When I wanted to know what the

offence of my son was, a Rab man threatened me," Mostafa said.

"Sumon was returned to me at 3:00am on Thursday with multiple injuries to several parts of his body. His legs were swollen. Again on Thursday afternoon Rab took Sumon to Khalishpur headquarters. He was set free at 7:30pm," he added.

Madrasa student Rumi also got similar treatment from the elite force, sources said.

The two boys are suffering severe pain and still to recover from the mental shock due to the torture.

They have been threatened with dire consequences for talking to media men, Mostafa Shaikh said.

Rab men tortured HSC candidate Masum Imam until he fainted at the Khulna Rab headquarters on Wednesday midnight, his mother Monowara Begum said, adding that Rab men gave Masum electric shock on false allegation of keeping illegal arms.

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INCREDIBLE LIST Barisal EC asks 32 enumerators to show case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The district election office of Barisal has issued show cause notice on 32 registrars employed in the registration of voters.

The office took the step due to the incredible increase of voters in the new voter list in some areas of the district.

Majibur Rahman, Barisal district election officer, said Barisal district had about 14 lakh 50 thousand voters according to the previous lists and this number is likely to increase by about 15 percent.

Sources in the district election office said the number of voters have increased in all the upazilas and also in Barisal city. The increased number of voters in the district is almost uniform in the upazilas but at 32 areas the increase is simply incredible.

There were 3781 voters in ward No 21 of Barisal City Corporation (BCC) but according to the new voter list it now stands at 6829. In ward No 25 the increase is about 48 percent, in ward No 22 it is 45.97 percent, in ward No 5 it is 41.83 percent, in ward No 29 it is 43 percent and in ward No 28 it is 41.45 percent.

In Jagua union under Sadar upazila the increase of voters is about 42.71 percent.

This unusual increase has aroused suspicion of foul play in the minds of the authorities.

Bomb attack in Khulna hurts 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two people were seriously injured in a bomb attack in front of Shohag Paribahan office at Daulatpur in the city last night.

The injured are Delwar Hossain, 32, and Belal, 29. They are undergoing treatment at Khulna Medical College and Hospital (KMCH).

There was no electricity in the area during the attack.

Police and locals caught two suspects, Mirza Tarafdar and Mizanur Rahman, from the spot.

Transport service on the Khulna-Jessore highway came to a halt, as Rab and police cordoned off the entire area.



PHOTO: STAR

Toxic wastes from a dyeing factory are dumped into a canal at Bhasan beside the Bishwa Road in Gazipur, posing a death threat to the plantations nearby.

Pak mine blast kills 28

AFP, Quetta

A vehicle carrying a wedding party hit a landmine in Pakistan's restive southwestern province of Baluchistan yesterday, killing 28 people, mostly women and children, officials said.

Seven people were also wounded in the blast, which ripped through a trailer being pulled by a tractor on a remote mountain trail near the town of Rakhni, around 300km east of Quetta, a provincial spokesman said.

Officials blamed the attack on "terrorist" tribal militants who are waging an insurgency to win more autonomy and a greater share in the gas-rich region's vast natural resources.

US to hand over Abu Ghraib prison to Iraq

AP, Baghdad

The US military said Thursday it would begin moving thousands of prisoners out of Abu Ghraib prison to a new lockup near Baghdad's airport within three months and hand the notorious facility over to Iraqi authorities as soon as possible.

Abu Ghraib has become perhaps the most infamous prison in the world, known as the site where US soldiers abused some Iraqi detainees and, earlier, for its torture chambers during Saddam Hussein's rule. The sprawling facility on the

western outskirts of Baghdad will be turned over to Iraqi authorities once the prisoner transfer to Camp Cropper and other US military prisons in the country is finished. The process will take several months, said Lt. Col. Barry Johnson, a US military spokesman in Baghdad.

Abu Ghraib currently houses 4,537 out of the 14,589 detainees held by the US military in the country. Iraqi authorities also hold prisoners at Abu Ghraib, though it is not known how many.

The US government initially spoke of tearing down Abu Ghraib after it

became a symbol of the scandal. Widely publicized photographs of prisoner abuse by American military guards and interrogators led to intense global criticism of the US war in Iraq and helped fuel the Sunni Arab insurgency.

But Abu Ghraib was kept in service after the Iraqi government objected. Planning for the new facility at Camp Cropper began in 2004, Johnson said.

Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the US wants to turn Abu Ghraib over to the Iraqis as fast as possible.