

Bhuiyan doubts

FROM PAGE 16 during a press conference at his residence yesterday.

"We don't know whom they're serving," he said doubting whether the opposition "...really wants the election or wants to create obstruction".

The opposition have failed to oust the government in the last four and a half years and will not be able to do so in the next four months either, he said.

The BNP policymaker commented that the opposition combine is not only "doing injustice to the people but also to their leaders and activists by holding such violent activities".

He blamed the 14-party opposition combine's "whimsical and violent programmes" for the death of a policeman and an Awami Swechhasebak League leader during Sunday's countrywide blockade.

"Sub-inspector Abul Bashar's killing was premeditated," claimed Bhuiyan. The opposition leaders delivered provocative speeches and their followers attacked the police. The police got into action only after they were attacked, he added.

Bhuiyan alleged that the opposition leaders are spreading false information to instigate their activists. "I'll resign tomorrow if they can prove that any BNP activist attacked their workers wearing police uniform."

On his proposal about a joint effort to ban hartal, Bhuiyan termed it as his personal proposition and said, "We can reach an understanding and submit a proposal during the caretaker government period as we'll be working on a common level then."

Talking on the deadlock dialogue, Mannan Bhuiyan questioned the opposition's intention about sitting together for a dialogue. "By imposing the condition of excluding Jamaat-e-Islami, they in fact want to see the BNP not sitting for dialogue."

Answering to a question if the government would agree to exclude Jamaat from dialogue to end the deadlock, he said, "Would the opposition break up in the 14-party unity if we gave any such condition? Jamaat is a partner of the four-party alliance and we're trying to shield this alliance."

The dialogue will take place if they withdraw this condition, he said. "We've said some of their proposals can be met, some can be improved while we can talk about the rest. But without agreeing to sit for dialogue, they're announcing violent programmes one after another."

On his recent speech in parliament about dropping one name from the proposed dialogue committee of the ruling alliance, he said, "I said that one may be dropped if two create problems. I may be present if it helps the talks."

Asked who may be dropped, he said they are yet to decide it.

On ways to resolve the prevailing political crisis, he said, "I don't see any crisis other than those created by the opposition."

Bhuiyan said that his government is keen to handover power to the caretaker government in about four months. "It's not such that we'll cling to power. Where is the crisis?"

Asking the opposition to withdraw today's hartal, Bhuiyan asked

Conjoined

FROM PAGE 16 "We last received such case in 2004 and managed to separate them, but one of them died straight away due to the toxic element from the other twin's body who also died later," he said.

Dr Kabirul also said that the condition of the newborns is unstable with one of them having breathing difficulties.

On the issue of their separation, he said that if their condition becomes stable within a few days, the doctors would decide whether they could be separated or not following x-rays and ultrasonography tests.

"The twins might also be internally joined, in which case one of them may have to be sacrificed to save the other's life," Dr Kabirul said.

On this type of rare birth, Assistant Registrar of Maternity Department Meher Afroz said that when the embryo is not properly divided or when the twins become linked at the cervix accidentally, they are born as conjoined.

She also mentioned that family history, delayed pregnancy and having birth control pills for long increase the risk of giving birth to such babies, adding that this mother has no such history.

The mother of the twins Salma told The Daily Star that she has two other daughters aged five and two.

Her husband Abu Sayeed is a cloth trader and lives at city's Gendaria.

Chief whip

FROM PAGE 16 "Left ventricle failure (LVF) has weakened the pumping action of chief whip's heart. Besides, he is also suffering from diabetics and kidney complications," Prof Majumdar said.

them to present their proposition in parliament.

On controversy over voter-listing, he commented, "Controversy has been created this year without any due reason. Although there were ways to include or exclude names of the voters, we've requested the Election Commission to go door-to-door for proper listing."

On another query, Bhuiyan said President Iajuddin Ahmed will resume office soon on recovery.

When road

FROM PAGE 16 Monsura is a reporter of our sister concern, the Prothom Alo. I rushed to her.

She told me that a few minutes back she suffered a dangerous road accident at the spot. She was going to the press club to cover a condolence meeting. But while her CNG run auto-rickshaw stopped at the nearby crossing, a pick-up van hit it from the back.

The auto-rickshaw was bumped onto the foot path and was damaged severely hitting a tree on the footpath. A group of policemen, who were there, seized the auto-rickshaw and the attacking pick-up van. But they did not take any initiative to send the injured to the hospital.

The area was calm and quite and hardly any empty taxicab or auto-rickshaw was passing by. At first I was puzzled. I could not think of what to do. My important assignment was just a few minutes away.

Then I realised that first of all I should take her to a hospital for treatment, and decided to take her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) as I thought that a private hospital might not admit an accident injured fearing police case or any other kind of harassment.

I asked the policemen to hail a taxi cab or auto-rickshaw for us. But none of the transport sector 'service providers' was ready to let an injured person get on board. An auto-rickshaw was finally stopped and the driver was forced by the police to give us a ride. But little did we know how much more hassle was awaiting us.

As we were heading towards DMCH we found the roads closed. All the roads leading to the hospital were cordoned off by the police.

The law enforcers were rerouting every vehicle saying that there were processions on the roads, particularly in the university area. They would not even let an emergency patient pass by. I had to argue with police officers to get permissions to go through showing my journalist's identity card at several points.

But the police cordon in front of the Shaheed Minar turned out to be more difficult to work. They did not allow us even after I brandished my journalist's identity. So we took another detour towards the rear side of DMCH and managed to enter the hospital from Chan Khar Pool area.

The emergency ward of DMCH was as usual. Rush of severely injured patients amid leisurely strolling indifferent nurses and doctors. After we bought an emergency ticket, the duty doctor sent us to ward number 32.

The doctors there suggested X-rays of the injuries. But the emergency X-ray room was locked. By that time a reporter of the Prothom Alo, who covers crime related incidents, reached the hospital.

He looked for the X-ray machine operator. Monsura, meanwhile, was groaning in pain and was trying to call her husband on her mobile phone. We had to wait at least 15 minutes for the emergency X-ray man to oblige us with his kind presence.

In the meantime, Monsura's husband was facing the police cordons that we finagled our way through just a little while ago. He had to walk from Shahbagh crossing to DMCH. The doctors suggested few medicines and complete bed rest for at least a week for poor Monsura. We came out of DMCH at 6.30pm and I did not know what happened to my important assignment.

Debate in JS

FROM PAGE 1 involved in influencing the police to 'torture' MNH Bulu, a director of Boishakhi, a private television channel.

The statement prompted the main opposition lawmakers to make noisy protest. They asked the Speaker to expunge the minister's statement.

Amid demand from the opposition bench, Acting Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui handed the microphone to Shahjahan Khan of AL, who accused the Speaker of taking the minister's side and demanded expurgation of the remarks from the House proceedings.

But Health Minister Khondaker Mosharrif Hossain supported his cabinet colleague and said Mirza Abbas had not made any disputed or abusive comments. Mosharrif said the House cannot hold any discussion on a minister's personal clarification which was made under Article 274 of the Rules of Procedures.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid said he would not respond to the minister's [Abbas] statement that reflected 'bad taste'. "But, it's the responsibility of the opposition to expunge any such statements as they are being made against the leader of the opposition," he told the House.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar supported the deputy leader of the opposition and said the Chair should expunge all attacking and unparliamentary words of both sides. During the debate, Krishak Sramik Janata League lawmaker Abdul Kader Siddiqui sought floor. As the Speaker refused him, the lawmaker walked out of the House.

Little response across country

FROM PAGE 1 door is about to be changed, sources said.

"We are waiting for further directives from the election commission as we found that it will not be possible to update the voter list properly without door to door visits," a district election officer told The Daily Star yesterday.

But the EC remains rigid on its decision of not going from door to door and has been keeping mum about the prevailing situation since the beginning of the task amid at best a lukewarm response from the people.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz and two election commissioners -- Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria, however at a meeting yesterday discussed the progress of the task, sources said. But the CEC declined to talk to the media about the meeting.

Only a very few people collected forms for their inclusion on the voter list in the last three days, although over one crore people have become eligible to be registered as voters over the last five years.

Many election offices across the country could not distribute a single form for deletion of names of fake voters or of persons who died, although it has been estimated by various organisations that at least one crore fake voters' names exist on the list.

Considering the people's lukewarm response and difficulties the officers are facing to start the task in rural areas, the district and upazila election officers already started questioning the fate of the voter listing.

"People can't be interested in being registered as voters following the current procedure, but I have nothing to do but to carry out the order of the Election Commission," Nurul Hasan Bhuiyan, Khagrachhari district election officer, told The Daily Star correspondent.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday,

Cops kill

FROM PAGE 1 dress, asked them not to enter. Mukhles started kicking Nayan Banu and kept beating her with the rifle butt. At one stage she fell down dead and the policemen fled away when the neighbours rushed in.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy at 11:00am yesterday.

Hundreds of aggrieved people from neighbouring villages thronged Nayan Banu's house and demanded exemplary punishment of the killer policemen.

Salauddin Nagri, TNO of Savar, pacified the demonstrating people by assuring them of justice.

Mukhles has been suspended and further action will be taken on receipt of the autopsy report, said Akhtaruzzaman, officer in charge of Savar Police Station.

"We had not locked horns with police. Being suspicious about the identity of police in civil dress, Nayan Banu refused to let the ASI enter the house. But they swooped on us and killed her on the spot," said Montaj Begum, 55, who was also injured in the police beating. No case was filed with Savar Police Station regarding the incident as of filing of the report at 6:00pm.

Dawn-to-dusk

FROM PAGE 1 untoward incidents.

Meanwhile, several hundred opposition men yesterday paraded the city streets to grieve the death of Golam Mustafa Milon.

The mourning procession, which was brought after a gayebana janaza for Milon on Bangabandhu Avenue before Johar prayers, ended at the central Shaheed Minar.

Amid tight security, hundreds of opposition activists joined the procession. They were wearing black badges and waving black flags.

In a brief speech before the procession, AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu said, "The ruling alliance has started killing the opposition men to thwart the 'oust-government movement'. And we just can't afford to sit idle in this situation."

Reminding the BNP and its allies of the 'anti-government movement and the outcome in 1996', Amu demanded that the alliance government implement the electoral reforms proposed by the opposition combine.

Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Rashed Khan Menon, Obaidul Quader, Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Dilip Barua, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Nurul Islam and Mukul Bose, among others, took part in the procession.

Meanwhile, AL and its front organisations have alleged that their leaders and workers could not participate in Milon's janaza as the police took away the body from Dhaka Medical College Morgue in the early hours yesterday and sent it to the slain opposition activist's village home at Mathbaria in Barisal for burial.

"The police hijacked Milon's body late at night as the government is trying to evade responsibilities for the killing. They did not even inform his [Milon's] wife and children about it," Pankaj Deb Nath, general secretary of Awami Swechhasebak League, said yesterday.

After the gayebana janaza in front of AL's central office, a group of AL leaders accompanied Milon's wife and children to Mathbaria.

day, Netrakona district election officer said the percentage of enrolment on the voter list will be very low if the current method is continued.

Dulal Alam, Khagrachhari Sadar upazila secondary education officer who is recruited as an ARO told our Khagrachhari correspondent that it is impossible to enrol eligible people following the system initiated by the EC.

"I could not enlist some people as voters even after visiting their residences 18 times. So is it wise for us to expect that they will physically come to our offices to get enlisted as voters?" ARO Deen Mohammad Khan, also a teacher of Kakoli High School at Dhanmondi in the capital, told reporters referring to his experience.

The Netrakona district election officer admitted that the task of updating the voter list has not even begun yet in all the 107 offices of the assistant registration officers (ARO). Our Netrakona correspondent yesterday visited 16 offices of the AROs and found all the offices shut.

"I am in doubt whether the Election Commission wants to implement the programme for updating the voter list or just wants to pass a few more months," a district election officer told The Daily Star yesterday referring to the EC's rigid attitude for updating the voter list without door to door visits.

Talking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, the district election officer said the EC decided to use the offices of representatives to different local government bodies. But it did not write to the LGRD and cooperatives ministry asking it to issue a circular directing the local government bodies to cooperate with the voter listing task.

Similarly, the EC did not seek cooperation from the Cabinet Division that controls the government's field-level administration. But during the EC's previous attempt to prepare a fresh voter list, which the Supreme Court later declared

Massive promotions

FROM PAGE 16 people on 'political consideration'.

All of the deputies have been made officer on special duty (OSD) and posted to the Ministry of Establishment until fresh postings.

According to official sources, 95 out of 153 elevated belong to 1982 special Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) batch, nine belong to former secretariat cadre of 1982 batch, eight 1982 BCS regular batch and three BCS 1981 batch.

Of the total 153, 113 belong to BCS (Administration Cadre) while the remaining were drawn from different other cadres, like Postal, Food, Telecom, Information, Audit and Accounts, Commerce, Customs and Excise, Health, Agriculture, Public Works, Statistics, Railway, Economic, Taxation, Fisheries and Roads and Highways cadres of BCS.

Sources said around 50 eligible officials belonging to 1982 BCS special batch were deprived of promotion. Similarly, seven from the 1981 batch, 12 of BCS 1982 regular batch and 10 others were dropped from 1982 (former secretariat cadre) batch.

ADDITIONAL SECRETARIES PROMOTED The government yesterday promoted five additional secretaries to full-fledged secretaries in the administration, according to an official notification.

The new secretaries are: Secretary in-charge [additional secretary] of the Ministry of

illegal, the Cabinet Division had issued a circular ordering the field level administration to provide the EC officials with assistance following the commission's request, sources added.

"Many government officials at district and upazila levels have been recruited as ARO. But they are showing no interest in the task," a district election officer said.

Meanwhile, publicity for updating the voter list has yet to begin in many areas. "We will start publicity soon and start to sit in our offices to distribute the forms for updating the voter list," Humayun Kabir, fishery officer of Atpara upazila in Netrakona also an ARO, told our correspondent.

Sources in Narail, Habiganj and Tangail district election administrations said they could not start the task due to lack of adequate preparation, manpower and cooperation from union parishes.

"Several assistant registration officers went to the offices of the union parishes, but they found that the offices were closed. Even, where we started distributing the forms, we did not get any feedback from the people," an ARO said.

After visiting different areas of Barisal City Corporation (BCC) and its adjacent areas, our Barisal correspondent reports that people are not interested in collecting the voter registration forms by going to the offices of ward commissioners and union parishes.

Besides, the field level EC officials were not found in the offices from where they are supposed to distribute the forms. Ward commissioners of BCC said it will not be possible to prepare a flawless voter list without door to door visits.

HC halts further

FROM PAGE 16 Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Khan Mohammad Ibrahim Hossain, Additional Secretary of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Aminul Islam Bhuiyan, Executive Director [additional secretary] of Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge Authority Abdul Hey Hawlader, Chairman of Tariff Commission [additional secretary] Sirajul Islam and Additional Secretary of Economic Relations Division of Ministry of Finance and Planning Shaikh AK Motahar Hossain.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday gave one-year contractual service to Additional Inspector General of Police [Special Branch] Farrukh Ahmed Chowdhury cancelling his Leave Preparatory to Retirement.

FROM PAGE 16 officer of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and the officer-in-charge of Lalbagh Police Station.

The rule was issued upon a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), seeking a court order to stop construction of the road through the graveyard reportedly by the local MP-owned construction firm. Advocates Sandzill Murshid and Asaduzzaman Siddique moved the writ petition on behalf of the HRPB while Deputy Attorney general Jamal Akhter Bulbul stood for the defendants.

Rules bent, yet voters

FROM PAGE 1 whether anybody submitted the required documents or not with the applications for being listed as voter," ARO Harun-Ul-Rashid said.

He received six applications without these documents in the last two days for registration as voters. Only 17 forms for inclusion of names in the voter list were distributed from his office till yesterday, Harun told reporters.

"Though we are receiving applications without required documents, the response is very poor," said Sajjad Hossain, who was working at the office of the commissioner of DCC Ward-49 at Dhanmondi yesterday in the absence of ARO for the ward Jamal Uddin.

Sajjad, who introduced him as a student and did not have any appointment to do the job, said 24 forms for inclusion of names as voter were distributed till yesterday.

"Six persons submitted those forms. And one person submitted a copy of his SSC certificate with the application," he told reporters. "I know the others, so I did not ask them to submit the required documents."

But Saidur Rahman, a resident of the locality, said those sitting in the ward commissioner's office are loyalists of the ward commissioner and a local BNP leader.

Sajjad however claimed he is not involved with any political party. ARO Najim Uddin, also Dhanmondi thana election officer, was not present at the office of the commissioner of Ward-48 at about 1:00 pm. And an outsider named Tusher, who is lobbying for a job at Dhanmondi thana election office, was present there.

"A total of 24 forms for inclusion of names were distributed since Saturday. Two forms were submitted, one with a receipt of house rent and the other with no such document," he said.

The register maintained at the office showed that a person named Mohsin Sarkar of Moneshwar Road took nine forms on Saturday for

25 lakh

FROM PAGE 16 for 30 years. The coal is located at varying depths of between 120 metres and 300 metres.

AEC is working in Bangladesh from 1998 under an agreement with the government. It submitted a scheme of coalmine development last year following a two-year study.

If the government approves the plan within this year, AEC can start production of 1.5 million tonnes of coal in fiscal 2007-08, six million tonnes in 2008-09, nine million tonnes in 2009-10 and finally 15 million tonnes from 2011-12. It will employ 1,200 to 1,500 people and deploy trucks that can carry up to 350 tonnes of coal each. Digging machines to be deployed there will pick up 50 tonnes of coal each, according to sources.

Opposing the AEC mining plan, many local energy experts say the six-percent royalty under the coal development policy should be immediately revised as it undermines the high value of coal in the present context of high price of petroleum.

Environmentalists decried granting of the dense forestland for coal mining purposes. It would set a bad example and others would also demand green areas for various purposes on the plea of community welfare.

SC stays DNA

FROM PAGE 16 On June 18, the High Court issued the order for DNA test abroad following a public interest litigation (PIL) writ filed by Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) seeking custody of the seven infants, airing doubt about parenthood of the children and apprehending a racket for trafficking them out.

The HC had also given a four-month deadline to comply with its order for the ex-DIG, Anisur Rahman, the disputed father, to submit the DNA test report.

Dr M Zahir, the counsel for Alena Khan, submitted before the chamber court that apprehension is not ruled out that if the seven infants along with her, the disputed mother, left Singapore for DNA test, they might not return home.

Besides, during the hearing of the writ petition, the information about the refusal to have the DNA test at Dhaka Medical College despite a magistrate's court orders was not mentioned," the counsel said.

Big four

FROM PAGE 1 trying to instill confidence in his flagging team, suddenly had the boot on the other foot as he tried to bring his players back down to earth after their stunning 1-0 win over Brazil in the quarter-final.

The French go up against England's conquerors Portugal in Munich on Wednesday knowing that they have a strong winning record against them in major tournaments.

"We've already beaten Portugal but I'm not into statistics, that's history, this is 2006, the reality is on Wednesday night," Domenech warned from the French training base outside Hanover.

"The danger for us now is to think we've done it by beating Brazil, we've got to get the players back to where they were before that win."

Domenech has the advantage of an almost injury-free squad, but he has six players on one yellow card. A further yellow against Portugal would rule any of them out of an eventual final in Berlin on July 9.

Portugal, based at nearby Marienfeld, have exceeded all expectations by reaching the last four, the only country without a previous World Cup win to do so.

Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari was in the same position four years ago in Japan but on that occasion he was coaching Brazil ahead of their semi-final against Turkey.

The Brazilian has now extended his record number of wins to 12 and he will once again have available his first-choice midfielders Deco and Costinha after their one-game suspensions for red cards in the battle against the Netherlands.

Scolari says that he has succeeded in welding a new 'warrior spirit' on to the traditional ball skills of the Portuguese players and that for them the sky is now the limit.

Inflation rate

FROM PAGE 16 potato 94 percent, garlic 30 percent and onion 30 percent over this period.

Besides, prices of other essentials including fish and meat have also gone up by 11 to 33 percent.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data, the national inflation rate was 7.95 percent in November last year and it came down to 5.72 percent in February this year.

In rural areas, the inflation was 7.70 percent compared to 7.53 percent in April. For food items, the rate was 8.46 percent in May and 7.87 percent in April and for non-food items, it was 6.35 percent in May and 6.93 percent in April.

In May, the inflation rate in urban areas was 7.41 percent against 7.27 percent in April. For food items, it was 9.94 percent in May and 9.23 percent in April and for non-food items, it was 4.67 percent in May and 5.14 percent in April.

Truce monitors asked

FROM PAGE 16 had censured the Sri Lankan government in a statement in May for the lack of progress in the Norwegian-backed peace initiative but decided to outlaw the Tigers as a "terrorist organisation".

"This makes the Tamil people look at the (EU) monitors with a suspicious eye," he said. "A member from a country that has participated in a ban of the LTTE cannot be defined as a neutral person."

The Tiger demand for the EU monitors to quit comes amid spiralling violence on the embattled island, where more than 825 people have been killed since December.

On Monday at least seven people were killed and dozens wounded Monday in three Claymore mine attacks carried out by Tamil Tiger rebels in Sri Lanka's northern and eastern regions, the defence ministry said.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) used a remote-controlled device to detonate a bomb hidden inside a three-wheel taxi parked near a checkpoint at the entrance to the town of Trincomalee, the ministry said.

It said six people, including four constables, a soldier and a civilian were killed. Local residents said dozens of passengers in a nearby bus were also wounded, but only 14 people were kept in the hospital for treatment.

A local police official said two nearby shops were also destroyed by the blast.

Another soldier was killed and two more wounded in another Claymore mine attack in the Jaffna peninsula, a ministry spokesman said adding that four constables escaped with injuries in a similar attack in Batticaloa.

Even as the attacks marked a surge in violence, a senior Indian diplomat visited Colombo and held talks with President Mahinda Rajapakse on the current security situation, a spokesman for his office said.

Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran discussed the state of the stalled peace process with Rajapakse amid concerns in New Delhi over fears that their southern neighbour could slip back to full-scale hostilities, diplomats said.

The February 2002 truce brokered by Norway is now in tatters and attempts to arrange a face-to-face meeting in Oslo between the two sides failed in early June.

Talks held among the five Nordic nations providing staff for the SLMM last week ended after five hours without any announcement of a breakthrough over the truce monitoring crisis.

Mission leader Sweden had asked for more time to evaluate the country's role in the mission, diplomatic sources in Oslo said.

Diplomats in Colombo told AFP that Norway was likely to try strike a compromise on the LTTE demand rather than pull out altogether, saying there was too much pressure from the international community to

Gaza groups set

FROM PAGE 16 threatened to retaliate by resuming attacks inside Israel, predicting the region would sink in a "sea of blood" if the offensive continued.

"The Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades warn the Zionist enemy: if its operations continue, we will hit the occupation targets we were previously reluctant to strike," said a statement.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan also expressed concern that the Israeli onslaught could undermine the possibilities for a lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict.

"I remain very concerned about the need to preserve Palestinian institutions and infrastructure -- they will be the basis for an eventual two-state solution and that's in the interest of both Israel and the Palestinians," he said.

Olmert's government has rejected outright the demands of the three militant groups holding Shalit, which have called for the release of 1,00 Palestinians held in Israeli jails as well as women and children prisoners.

It has also threatened to strike at Hamas leaders, including those based in Damascus, raising fears of a regional escalation of the worst crisis in the Middle East since Hamas came to power and Olmert took the helm in Israel.

"My government has instructed the IDF (army) and the security establishment to do everything in order to bring Gilad back home... and when I say everything, I mean everything," Olmert told Sunday's cabinet meeting.

The Israeli army on Sunday said it had shot dead three more militants in the southern Gaza Strip after approaching an army unit near the territory's disused airport. It was not immediately clear to which faction they belonged.

Israel last week hit the Hamas-run interior ministry in Gaza, detained scores of Hamas members in the occupied West Bank including eight ministers and more than 20 lawmakers, and revoked the Jerusalem residency of four others.

With the threat of a fullscale Israeli ground offensive looming, already impoverished residents of Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas on the planet with a population of 1.4 million, are grappling with shortages of food, fuel and electricity.