

A three-minute neat job

STAR REPORT

The policemen and women looked bored. They had taken off their protective jackets and helmets. Many sitting on the road divider. After all, it was almost 12:30 in the noon and there was no sign of any trouble. A general air of relief and disappointment prevailed among the photojournalists.

Suddenly, a ripple of movement swept through the huge police gathering. There were rustles as the policemen slipped into their jackets and snapped on helmets. They were all alert, looking towards Russel Square.

Then the first line of processionists was visible, slowly moving towards Sangsad Bhaban. Placards and sticks dancing in the air. From the first floor, it looked a huge procession.

About 15 feet from the barbed wire barricade, the policemen looked nervous. They fidgeted with their batons and tear gas guns, but very quiet. They were standing in neat rows, as if ready to parade on Independence Day.

It took about five minutes for the processionists to reach the barricade. They were shouting and cursing. A few grabbed the steel frame of the barricade and tried to dislodge it without success. A thin man jumped on the barricade and

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Police barricades hassle commuters

WASIM BIN HABIB

Commuters in the capital yesterday experienced intolerable sufferings as police blocked major roads in the city and re-routed some of the vehicles to other roads during the 14-party opposition coalition's programme of laying siege to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Over 10,000 police, paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel encircled an area of several square kilometres around the PMO causing a long vehicular tailback on some of the roads.

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EU mission asks BNP leaders about electoral reform dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting members of the European Union (EU) Election Observation Exploratory Mission asked BNP leaders if a dialogue is possible between the ruling alliance and the opposition coalition on the issue of electoral reforms.

In reply to the query BNP leaders told the delegation that the ruling alliance is ready for a dialogue if the opposition proposes one.

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OPPOSITION'S PMO SIEGE PROGRAMME

Cops go wild on marchers

Scores including Nasim, Noor badly injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police brutally clubbed senior leaders, lawmakers and activists of Awami League-led 14-party opposition combine in Dhaka yesterday to foil their siege of Prime Minister's Office (PMO), injuring over 150 including former home minister Mohammad Nasim and Asaduzzaman Noor MP.

Besides their marauding action at Banglamotor, Dhanmondi and Agargaon, the tough-looking policemen mercilessly beat up opposition's female activists entering a house and a clinic at Dhanmondi 27 injuring at least 20.

The opposition activists failed to go near the PMO as some parts of the city, including the PMO, were literally besieged by law enforcers upon government instruction to jeopardise the opposition programme.

Police sources said Deputy Commissioner of Police Kohinor Miah ordered for the action at Dhanmondi.

The government had imposed a ban on all kinds of gathering and rallies in the adjoining areas of the PMO on Sunday to thwart the opposition programme. It

instructed the law enforcers for tough action against the 14-party demonstrators yesterday, if needed.

Over 10,000 police, paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) men encircled an area of several square kilometres around the PMO.

The opposition combine declared the siege programme to force the BNP-led four-party coalition to accept reforms in the caretaker government and Election Commission (EC).

Earlier on September 6 also, the police foiled the opposition's attempt to approach the vicinity of the EC Secretariat by firing teargas shells and charging batons indiscriminately, leaving over 100 opposition men, including opposition leader Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury, critically injured.

DHANMONDI
Riot police clubbed senior opposition leaders and workers brutally at Dhanmondi 27 intersection leaving at least 100, including Mohammad Nasim, SM Kamal and Ajoy Kar Khokon and a number of female activists, injured.

Nasim and other critically

injured opposition activists were admitted to Bangladesh Medical College Hospital (BMCH).

The police also beat up ATN Bangla cameraman Kabirul Islam Pintu and Tara Bangla reporter Soma Islam.

Ten policemen were also injured during the clashes.

Asked about the police action at Dhanmondi, Officer-in-Charge of New Market Police Station Saifur Rahman Babul told journalists, "You have no right to know why police beat up opposition leaders and journalists. I know nothing and I will not say anything in this regard."

CLASHERUPTS

Several thousand opposition demonstrators demanding immediate implementation of the electoral reforms started marching towards the PMO from Russel Square in Dhanmondi. But they were intercepted as the police put up barbed-wire barricades at the Dhanmondi 27 intersection.

"Do not try to break the police barricade. Please leave the place and observe your programme peacefully," police told the opposition men, reminding that there was a ban on processions and gather-

ings. As some demonstrators tried to break the barricades and hit the police with sticks, the law enforcers chased them. The opposition activists pelted brickbats at the police who then charged batons and dispersed the demonstrators.

TARGET NASIM
While police were chasing the opposition workers, Awami League (AL) leader Mohammad Nasim along with around 50 opposition activists were standing near the Dhanmondi 27 intersection.

Seeing opposition leaders and workers encircling Nasim, about 200 police indiscriminately charged baton on them. Nasim and others lay down on the street, but the police became more ferocious and beat them with sticks and kicked them.

Another group of police charged batons mercilessly on the opposition's female activists a few yards off the spot, injuring 10.

The dispersed demonstrators took shelter in different by-lanes and fought pitched battles with the policemen who fired around 50 teargas shells.

The police charged batons

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PHOTO: STAR

Police onslaught on Awami League activists who were trying to protect party lawmaker Mohammad Nasim from the law enforcers' wrath by lying down on him on Dhanmondi Road-27 in the capital during the opposition's Prime Minister's Office siege programme yesterday.

Phase-wise RMG wage increase proposed

Tk 1,604 minimum salary in first year, Tk 2117 in last year; workers, owners disagree

MONJUR MAHMUD

The National Wage Board at its 24th meeting yesterday failed to reach a consensus on minimum wages for garment workers despite a hectic seven-hour long negotiation.

Failing to reach a consensus the board sent to the government, for its consideration, a three-tier proposal to be implemented in three years with Tk 1,604 as gross minimum salary in the first year.

The board proposed Tk 1,604 as gross minimum wage for entry-level garment workers for the first

year up to June 30, 2007. Minimum gross salary would be Tk 1,890 in the second year during July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008 and it would be Tk 2,117.50 in the third year starting from July 1, 2008.

Annusul Haq, representative of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) on the board did not agree to the proposal, and Nazma Akhtar, representative of workers on the board did not sign the proposal, saying it did not match the expectation of the workers.

However, Board Chairman Anwarul Haque, independent member on the board Iqbal Ahmed, and permanent representative of the workers on the board Zafarul Hasan signed the proposal. Permanent member of the employers on the board Kazi Saifuddin Ahmed was absent in yesterday's marathon meeting held at the board office in Dhaka.

"We could not reach a consensus but a majority of the members decided to send a proposal to the government for its consideration,"

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Govt crackdown brings Proshika to grinding halt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nationwide activities of Proshika, one of the country's largest non-government organisations (NGO), were at a standstill for the third consecutive day yesterday as most of its staff continued to refrain from attending offices fearing arrests and harassment.

The activities of the leading NGO came to a halt following the government's sudden crackdown on over 200 offices of the organisation, which had started on Saturday midnight and led to arrests of some 137 Proshika staff.

The crackdown was launched allegedly in suspicion of the

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Chaos in JS over attacks on MPs, law and order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Yesterday's session in the parliament saw a pandemonium as lawmakers of the ruling BNP and main opposition Awami League (AL) embarked on an unscheduled mud slinging, following which AL walked out of the House protesting the speaker's 'favouritism' towards the ruling party.

Leader of the Opposition also AL President Sheikh Hasina and some other lawmakers on points of order requested the speaker to adjourn the parliament session and to visit AL lawmakers who were undergoing treatment in hospitals following severe police beatings during the opposition coalition's

programme of laying siege to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) yesterday. They also demanded arrest and punishment of those who beat the lawmakers.

The AL lawmakers in the House gathered near the podium of the speaker while shouting at Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddique who was presiding over the session and attempted to start another proceeding without replying to the opposition lawmakers' demands.

At this time Sheikh Hasina took the floor and said, "Let's adjourn the parliament and go see the injured lawmakers." She also said those who are involved in the inhumane torture of the AL

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Dhaka set to sign energy cooperation deal with Bangkok

Thai energy minister arrives tomorrow

SHARIER KHAN

Thai energy minister Viset Chooipiban will arrive in Dhaka tomorrow to participate in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries on energy sector cooperation and manpower training in the sector, sources said.

The government had earlier been preparing itself to sign an offshore joint venture exploration deal between Thai government oil and gas agency PTTEP and Petrobangla on the basis of an unsolicited negotiation.

But due to political and other

reasons, including that the deal would violate the country's energy policy, the government finally decided to sign a cooperation MoU.

Thailand had proposed that the PTTEP be awarded contracts for offshore blocks 18-A, 19-A and 19-B where it will give Petrobangla 30 percent stake without any investment till any discovery is made. After discovery of oil or gas, Petrobangla will have to invest for development of the oil or gas field. The PTTEP is open to increasing Petrobangla's stake and will pay it a signature bonus.

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POLYTHENE BAG USE Cops asked to take legal action

BSS, Sangsad Bhaban

Police officers of the rank of sub-inspector and above have been empowered to take legal action against use of polythene shopping bags in the metropolitan areas and elsewhere.

The order was given to enforce the ban on polythene bags at field level successfully in absence of adequate manpower. Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam told parliament yesterday.

Replying to a question from BNP lawmaker Major (retired) Manjur Quader (Sirajganj-6), the minister admitted that it is partially correct that polythene bags are still being produced in some factories in Dhaka.

But he said that a programme

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