

Opposition declares

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leaders and workers to stage sit-ins wherever they might face obstructions.

In another development, leaders of the opposition line-up yesterday alleged that the police have been on an arrest spree in line with the ruling alliance's plot to foil the rally. They said the law enforcers have picked up over 5,000 of their workers and leaders in the last couple of days.

But State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday denied the allegation and said the police are performing only the routine tasks.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has slapped a ban on carrying weapons or other deadly objects in the city for today.

ALCWC MEETING

The AL Central Working Committee held an emergency meeting at its Dhanmondi office last night with party chief Sheikh Hasina in the chair. They unanimously decided to go for even more vigorous programmes, Obaidul Quader told The Daily Star.

The 14-party held a meeting at AL General Secretary Jalil's residence last night.

Both the meetings decided that the opposition supporters will hold indefinite sit-ins wherever the police will block their way.

The ALCWC and 14-party meet this morning again with Hasina in the chair to finalise the programmes to be declared at the grand rally.

OPPOSITION'S PREPARATIONS

Over the last one week, the opposition combine has had a series of meetings preparatory to the grand rally.

It expects to mass around 10 lakh people at Paltan and surrounding areas to turn the city into a human sea.

AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader told The Daily Star that if the government resorts to violence, they will come up with a fitting reply.

A group of leaders yesterday visited the Paltan ground to see the preparation.

The city unit 14-party yesterday held a meeting at the AL central office where the combine leaders warned the government that handing over power to the caretaker government before carrying out the reforms would do them no good.

AL President Member Amir Hossain Amu called on the coalition government to accept the reform proposals by yesterday. He said they will not tolerate anymore dilly-dallying with the proposals.

Abdur Razzak said the election under Justice KM Hasan and MA Aziz could never be free and fair as the two having allegiance to the BNP will work to bring the party back to power.

Presided over by Dhaka City 14-party Coordinator Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Rashid Khan Menon, Obaidul Quader, Hasanul Haque Inu, Abdul Mannan, Dilip Barua, Nurul Islam, Jahirul Islam, Pankaj Bhattacharya, and Syed Zafar Sazzad.

PREPARATIONS AT DISTRICT LEVEL

The district level leaders have also held a series of meetings in last couple of days.

"As we already know that the police will prevent us from entering Dhaka, we are planning different alternative measures so that our people could attend the rally tomorrow (today)," Gazi Qamrul Huda Selim, general secretary of Manikganj district AL, told The

Daily Star.

The leaders of Rajshahi and Khulna divisions and greater Mymensingh have been requested to leave their buses in Shahabg area, leaders of Dhaka, Khulna and Barisal divisions in Bangabazar and Tikatuli areas and Chittagong and Sylhet division leaders to keep their vehicles parked in Tikatuli area.

SECURITY PREPARATION

The DMP plans a four-layer security net around Paltan for today.

The security personnel will train binoculars to keep watch on the rally attendees from the rooftops. Metal detectors will be used to check people at the entry points.

Besides, there will be 26 closed-circuit TV cameras posted on and around the venue to monitor the movements of the opposition workers.

A police control room will be set up behind the podium to co-ordinate the security arrangements.

Members of different intelligence agencies and the Rab yesterday scanned the Paltan area with dogs.

The law enforcers have already taken position at different entryways to the capital and been watching over different Dhaka-bound buses. They will check both the buses and passengers till the beginning of the opposition's rally.

MASS ARREST

According to reports, the police have detained several thousand opposition activists in the last couple of days in the city and elsewhere in the country.

As part of the ongoing drive, they will continue raiding houses of the opposition leaders and workers, different hotels, bus terminals, railway stations and launch terminals in the capital.

Besides, they will set up road-blocks at different points, said police sources adding that patrols will be on along the highways.

A police official seeking anonymity told The Daily Star that around 2,000 people have been arrested in last few days.

Our correspondent from Khulna adds: Over 5,000 opposition supporters yesterday left Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira for Dhaka.

4 BCL men

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to murder case against the 12 leaders and activists mentioned above.

The accused are Soheli Rana Tipu, Saiful Islam, Alauddin Saikat, Tarek, Faisal, Ashraf, Abu Abbas Bhuiyan, Mizan, Nuruzzaman, Zico and Titu.

General Secretary of the Duja Imamul Haq Shamim filed the case on behalf of the association.

At least five journalists were wounded when a group of BCL activists backed by its president and general secretary attacked a press conference of their rival faction at the Modhu's Canteen of DU on Saturday.

Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) yesterday condemned the attack on reporters on the campus on Saturday.

In a press release, Duta leaders demanded the authorities to ensure security for the campus reporters.

Meanwhile, BCL exploded two crude bombs at Modhu's Canteen yesterday noon leaving a student injured that spread panic on the campus. Explosive experts recovered another unexploded bomb from the Modhu's.

After the explosion, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) instantly took part in a procession to protest the bombing.

Meanwhile, at least 10 leaders and activists were injured in a clash between the two factions of the BCL yesterday evening at party office.

BGMEA members

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workers, they offered to pay a package of Tk 2,000 including a two-hour overtime, he said.

Around 50 per cent of the factories will be out of the business within six months if the proposed wage structure is implemented, Huq said, adding that as the workers have their own rights, the owners also have the right to close their factories.

BGMEA Vice-president Lutfor Rahman Matin said those who have declared an unrealistic wage structure will be responsible for the factory closure and making the workers unemployed.

"Buyers come with a fixed CM (cutting and making) charge and ask whether we accept their offer. They tell us directly that they would shift their orders elsewhere if we are not ready to accept their price offer," said Khalilur Rahman, owner of KDS garments.

"Who will pay the salary of the workers -- the government or the Minimum Wage Board or the owners?" Rahman posed the question.

It is true that the owners made money when there was quota system and the price was good, said garment owner Muzaffar U Siddiqui.

But it is also true that they have invested their money in expansion of the industry, which has created more employment, he added.

Buyers rush to Bangladesh not

because they love this country but for cheaper prices of Bangladeshi apparel, he said.

Urging the government to fix only the minimum wage, he said the owners will negotiate with the workers for fixing salaries of other grades on the basis of their efficiency.

The owners are not bound to implement a three-tier pay scale for the workers, rather they would shut their factories if it is imposed unilaterally, said garment factory owner Shah Alam.

Arifur Huq, another factory owner, said he will need to pay Tk 72 lakh more if the proposed pay scale is implemented in the first year.

"I made a profit of Tk 70 lakh last year. Now who will pay the rest two lakh?" he said, adding, "It seems that joining a garment unit as an employee will become more profitable than running a factory."

Foreign buyers tend to come with a reduced CM, Sardar Liakat Hossain said, adding that it would be better for the owners to shut their factories as they do not know how to adjust with a situation that would force them to implement over 100 per cent wage hike.

Factory owner Bahauddin Md Yousuf said banks and insurance companies will also be forced to close their operations if the proposed pay scale is implemented.

WB loan

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Influenza (AHI) was told in Singapore yesterday.

The WB has devised a support programme for the developing countries to fight avian flu in animals and was preparing for a possible human flu pandemic through a global funding programme formerly known as the Global Programme for Avian Influenza (GRAI).

The bank's board of executive directors endorsed the programme in January this year in Beijing with a pledge of \$1.9 billion dollars.

Some 30 developing and least developed countries, including Bangladesh, remained in the pipeline for the credit likely to be disbursed within 6-12 months while the bank has already committed \$1.2 billion for 15 most-affected areas.

"This indicates a more rapid response than seen in the aftermath of recent major natural disasters, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami," a senior executive of the World Bank told the seminar at Suntec Singapore.

To help countries prepare projects for financing, the World Bank's task teams would provide analytic and advisory assistance. The GPAI allows for the use of up to \$500 million in IBRD loans or IDA credits or grants for new projects with or without additional financing.

The seminar was told that limited grant resources were also available from the bank-administered trust funds for financing AHI projects.

The newly established multi-donor trust fund, the AHI facility, has an initial endowment of \$75 million from a number of donors, including the European Commission.

Countries could access funding from the bank to strengthen their veterinary and health services to deal with avian flu outbreaks among animals, minimise the threat posed to people, and prepare for and respond to any potential human flu pandemic.

Another bullet-hit

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Saturday morning fearing tougher action by the law enforcers.

Only a few female members were guarding their homes at Bahadurpur, Moishapur, Purba Daliarpar, Ganguar Noakt, Chhonbari and Zaltapur villages.

A curfew-like situation has been created by BDR who started going door-to-door in search of villagers involved in the attack on BDR on Saturday morning.

The BDR recovered the missing walkie-talkie and 27 rounds of ammunition from a place near Bahadurpur yesterday.

However, the BDR has not yet filed any case against the villagers for the attack.

JCD leader

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Meanwhile, a Jubo Dal leader was killed in 'crossfire' during a shootout between his accomplices and police at Mirersarai upazila in Chittagong, our staff correspondent in Chittagong reports.

The victim was identified as Ershad Ullah, 35. The Jubo Dal cadre was also accused in as many as 10 criminal cases including murder and robbery cases.

Police sources said Mirersarai police arrested Ershad Ullah on Friday noon at Sandhurchar area at Ichhakhal of the upazila.

Following his confessional statement to the police, a team of Mirersarai police went to Sandhurchar area along with Ershad to recover hidden firearms. As they reached the scene, a number of Ershad's accomplices opened fire on the team in a bid to snatch him from police custody, police claimed. Police said they were had to retaliate in self-defence.

"During the shootout, Ershad received bullets and he died on the way to a local health complex, sources said.

They said Ershad was the second-in-command of notorious Alauddin Bahini and he had several criminal cases filed against him.

EC to stop

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authorities to initiate steps to stop the campaign by the aspirant candidates, the secretary said.

While the announcement of the polls schedule is yet to be made, many aspirant candidates in the capital and elsewhere have launched election campaign through posters, billboards and wall writings.

As per the rules of the code of conduct formulated by the EC, no candidate is allowed to launch campaign through billboards, wall writings and colour posters after the election schedule is declared.

But as the EC has no jurisdiction to stop the ongoing election campaign by the aspirant candidates scheduled for January, the EC in a recent meeting decided to sit with the police administration and the DCC to stop the unauthorised campaign.

The city corporation ordinance has empowered the corporation authorities to stop such campaigns to keep the city clean.

The water resources ministry secretaries of the two countries will lead their teams to visit the Feni riverbank and riverbank preservation work in Chittagong and Khagrachhari today, according to Bangladesh water resources ministry.

The two ministers, meantime, will visit some places including the Feni river tomorrow to have a firsthand view of the ground situation along the cross-border rivers that often causes skirmishes between border forces of the two countries.

They will attend a press conference in Dhaka on Wednesday for official disclosure of the meeting outcome.

Outraged by outage

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least three phases.

Chittagong city witnessed 230 MW of load-shedding yesterday. The Razan unit-2 tripped on Saturday leaving the port city with a staggering 300 MW of load-shedding, reports our staff correspondent in Chittagong. The Razan unit-2 resumed operation yesterday morning but the power situation did not improve much.

The picture is bleaker in the rural areas. According to our district correspondents, rural power consumers hardly get a few hours of electric supply a day.

PDB sources said as of yesterday, a number of power plant units including the Meghnaghat 450 MW, Sikaiba 28 MW, Ghorashal 40 MW and 210 MW, Ashuganj fifth 150 MW, Haripur 100 MW, Shahjibazar 70 MW, Khulna 60 MW, Bheramara 20 MW, Baghabari 71 MW, Tongi 80 MW, Barapukuria 250 MW, and Baghabari 90 MW remained shutdown. A number of them have been shutdown for routine maintenance while the others have serious technical problems.

"For instance, the Meghnaghat 450 MW plant has gone for a 15-day maintenance shutdown and it will resume production later this month. On the other hand, the Ashuganj 150 MW and the Haripur 100 MW plants have technical problems. We don't know when they would resume operation," said an official.

Mindless expansion of power distribution

"The government failed to install any new power project in the last five years except for the 80 MW Tongi power plant which remains shutdown most of the times due to its sub-standard quality. In contrast the government in the last five years has doubled the number of

power consumers -- mostly in the rural areas," quips a PDB official.

Increasing the number of power consumers has given hundreds of crores of taka worth of business to a number of ruling party men who are involved in construction of power poles. At the same time, it helped the parliamentarians show off to their constituencies that they have 'brought power' to their areas.

Last week the Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Cenec) approved different power distribution projects worth Tk 2000 crore -- but none related to power generation. One of these projects specifically target at increasing power consumers by another 10 lakh.

The country currently has about 85 lakh power connections covering around five crore consumers. Five years ago, this number was around 50 lakh connections. In 2002, the country generated 3100 MW power and stayed even with the demand of 3100 MW. Now in 2006, the country generates 3300 MW of power even though its number of consumers has nearly doubled.

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Sircar

FROM PAGE 1
Shahid also criticised the prime minister for her contradictory speeches on the proposed dialogue with the opposition. "The prime minister at a public meeting in Moulybazar said the election will be held as per constitution, but earlier in Brahmanbaria she spoke of a one-to-one dialogue on reforms proposal. What does she actually want?"

Ruling BNP lawmakers protested Shahid's remark. A few of them, including Manjur Quader, Rustam Ali Parazi and Shahawaj Hossain Bakr, stood up and tried to draw the Speaker's attention for floor.

AL lawmakers KM Jahangir Hossain, Rahmat Ali, Mahbubur Rahman and Delwar Hossain also tried to speak.

But Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar did not allow anyone to speak and jumped to other businesses of the day.

Most senior parliamentarians both from BNP and AL, however, were absent from the House at that moment.

Mufti Hannan

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same case and were being interrogated during remand.

Ten people died and several others were injured on April 16, 2001 when bombs went off on the crowd gathered to celebrate the Bengali New Year near the Batamul inside Ramna Park.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) yesterday produced Mofiz, also a member of Huji and an arrestee in a murder case filed with Gopalganj Police Station, before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka and submitted a petition for showing him arrested in the Ramna Batamul blast case.

The CID submitted another petition for placing him on a 10-day remand for interrogation in connection with the blasts.

In the forwarding report placed before the court, CID Inspector Abu Hena Mohammad Yusuf, the investigation officer (IO) of the case, said Mofiz might be involved in the blasts and he needs to be interrogated intensively to dig out clues about the blasts and whereabouts of the perpetrators.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Shamsul Alam granted the petition for showing Mofiz arrested in the case and approved a five-day remand.

The police have so far arrested 12 people in connection with the Ramna Batamul blasts but all of them were granted bail from the High Court.

On June 14, 2001, one of the arrestees, Moulana Akbar Hussain gave a confessional statement to a metropolitan magistrate and disclosed names of Mufti Hannan and others involved in the blasts.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar, however, yesterday denied that any mass arrest is going on, terming the arrests a "routine drive" of the police.

Our correspondent from Khulna adds: Police arrested 61 people in Khulna in the last 24 hours. Two of the arrestees are leaders of Rupsha upazila unit of the AL while 39 others are AL activists.

Our Chittagong correspondent adds: Eighty people were arrested in the city until 6:00am yesterday, mostly under the Chittagong Metropolitan Police Ordinance.

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