

## Non-stop blockade

**FROM PAGE 1**  
"We will withdraw the blockades only when we see the caretaker government take effective initiatives to implement our demands to create a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election." Hasina said at a crowded press briefing at her Dhanmondi office last night.

On the caretaker government press note, she said a non-party caretaker government cannot take stand against the countrymen and a peaceful programme of any political party.

The BNP also urged the 14-party to withdraw its blockade programme, saying the AL will have to take the responsibilities for any untoward situation that foils the upcoming elections.

Rumours ran high in the capital yesterday that the chief election commissioner (CEC) has resigned. Hearing the rumour, journalists rushed to the residence of CEC MA Aziz but he did not allow them.

Meanwhile, US Assistant Secretary of State of the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Richard A Boucher arrived in Dhaka yesterday. He met both the AL and BNP chiefs, asking them to resolve the deadlock through a constitutional process.

Boucher, who was believed by politicians and general people to play a vital role in resolving the current political stalemate, is scheduled to meet President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed today and may request him to reconstitute the Election Commission (EC), sources said.

**14-PARTY MEETINGS**  
To make the blockade programme a success, the 14-party alliance held a series of meetings yesterday while its senior leaders visited different districts adjacent to the capital. Rallies were also held at different places across the country.

The central and Dhaka city committees of the alliance held separate preparatory meetings, accusing Iajuddin of conspiring to meet the political agenda of the immediate past BNP-led four-party alliance government.

## Blockade

**FROM PAGE 1**  
to use the armed forces against the people to save a 'corrupt and plunderer family'.

Earlier in the morning, at a meeting with the leaders of AL's youth front Jubo League on the occasion of its 34th founding anniversary, Hasina said the blockade programme will have to be observed peacefully for the sake of country's democracy, constitution and people's right to vote.

Pointing to the CA to the CG, Hasina said, "Whose directions is he implementing? It seems that he does not have any conscience. People are in doubt about whether he is implementing Hawa Bhaban's prescription after being super powerful with two posts."

Termining the CEC a liar, she said a free and fair election is never possible under his jurisdiction. The country and nation must be freed from all conspiracies of BNP-Jamaat coalition. She urged all to be united and launch a greater movement to resist all conspiracies for election rigging.

Jubo League Chairman Jahangir Kabir Nanak and General Secretary Mirza Azam among others were present at the meeting.

## Ctg port

**FROM PAGE 16**  
parliamentary election under a caretaker government.

This time around BNP-led four-party alliance, which recently relinquished state power, is not ready to allow the rival coalition to gain an upper hand at Chittagong port.

According to sources, BNP leaders asked its labour front to keep a continuous watch on the developments at the port.

Meanwhile, business leaders expressed deep concern over the volatile political situation in the country.

"The garment sector alone will suffer Tk 200 crore loss per day if Chittagong seaport is blockaded," said SM Fazlul Haque, president of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). The loss will be doubled considering the losses in other related industries like banks, insurance companies and the transportation sector.

The RMG sector which brings in 76 percent of the country's total export earnings, is the worst victim of such blockading of railways, roads and ports, he added.

BGMEA leaders observed that the existing political impasse should be resolved through discussions and dialogues for the sake of economic progress in the country.

## EC ambassador

**FROM PAGE 16**

to be done for a fair election, he said. "We all hope that the election will take place in time....I am very optimistic that the election will be held peacefully," he said.

He said the EU is going to send 150 election observers. Of them, a team of long-term observers comprising 60 members will come five or six weeks before the election while the rest will come a week before the election.

The long-term observers will look into the pre-election issues, while the other team will observe polling, he added.

While briefing newsmen after a meeting of the 14-party alliance at the AL Dhanmondi office, its Coordinator Abdul Jalil also accused the president of pushing the country towards confrontation by "taking stand against the countrymen".

Hasina on behalf of the alliance placed an 11-point charter of demands to President Iajuddin on October 30, urging him to prove his neutrality by meeting the demands by November 3. Following requests from all quarters, the 14-party alliance later extended the deadline up to November 11.

The AL-led alliance's demands include reconstitution of the EC, removal of the CEC and three other election commissioners, correction and revision of the updated voter list, cancellation of political appointments of 300 upazila election officers and all contractual appointments, and withdrawal of all officials loyal to BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami from both civil and police administration.

## 22 hot spots

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Terminal, Mirpur-10 roundabout, Pallabi-12 Bus Stop, Dhanmondi Russell Square, Azampur, Kuril level crossing, Mohakhali, Moghbazar, Jurain Rail Gate, Jatrabari intersection, Dayaganj Bus Stop, Sadarghat, Raisa Bazar intersection in Sutrapur, Babu Bazar Bridge under Kotwali, Kamalapur Railway Station, Motijheel Shapla Chattar, Shahjahanpur level crossing, Noor Hossain Square in Gulistan, Shahbag intersection, Labagh Kellah intersection, Nawabpur and North South Road.

Senior leaders of the alliance asked their workers to remain alert against any move to sabotage the programme.

"We will observe the programme peacefully and our leaders and workers have been instructed in that way. But, we apprehend that a vested quarter may try to create a volatile situation," City Unit Coordinator of 14-party Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya told newsmen following the preparatory meeting.

## Colossal hurricane

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Reuters adds: Michael Flasar, an astrophysicist involved in the mission at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, said the storm looks just like water swirling down the drain in a bath tub, only on a gigantic scale.

"We've never seen anything like this before," Flasar said in an interview. "It's a spectacular-looking storm."

Saturn, the second-biggest planet in the solar system with an equatorial diameter of 74,000 miles and the sixth from the sun, is about 746 million miles from Earth.

Its south pole storm is much bigger than Earth hurricanes. It has a well-developed eye ringed by towering clouds that soar 20-45 miles above those in the dark center, two to five times higher than clouds in our thunderstorms and hurricanes, NASA said.

A distinguishing feature of hurricanes on Earth are the eye-wall clouds that form when moist air flows inward across an ocean surface, rising vertically and releasing a heavy rain around a circular region of descending air that represents the eye. Scientists said it was unclear whether Saturn's storm was a water-driven system.

It differs from Earth hurricanes in part because it remains stuck at the pole rather than drifting as such storms do on this planet and because it did not form over a liquid water ocean, with Saturn being a gaseous planet, NASA said.

"It looks like a hurricane, but it doesn't behave like a hurricane," Andrew Ingersoll, a member of Cassini's imaging team at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, said in a statement. "Whatever it is, we're going to focus on the eye of this storm and find out why it's there."

Flasar said scientists have more work ahead to understand the Saturn storm.

"I'm hoping that as we puzzle over it, it will become even more exciting as we start to connect the dots in our brains. But right now, the wheels are a little creaky," Flasar said. "We're all arguing with each other about what it might or might not be."

## Iajuddin's comment

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Badruddoza claimed the chief adviser has created distance between himself and the advisers by saying that presidential form of government is prevailing in the country.

He also claimed that the president/chief adviser is doing his tasks like a doll in a puppet show.

"You were not like the way you are behaving now," he said adding, "Still there is time to prove yourself neutral and save the country form a serious situation."

Badruddoza, however, urged the chief adviser to act neutrally and take all necessary steps.

Advocate Akhter Hossain Majumder, assistant private secretary (APS) to the immediate past prime minister, was among hundreds of others who joined LDP yesterday.

## Ershad

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Ershad said, adding that they will also consider taking cooperation from any political alliance if needed.

At the meeting, the party presidium members were in favour of taking part in the election individually while most of the party members, who voiced against joining the BNP-led four-party alliance, criticised the activities of the alliance during the last five years, sources said.

Ershad's younger brother GM Quader, who is also a JP presidium member, was a conspicuous absentee at the meeting attended by party leaders.

## Non-govt teachers

**FROM PAGE 1**  
president/chief adviser and for not cancelling the contractual appointments.

The hunger strike will also be observed seeking withdrawal of the rule that educational institutions have to submit their incomes to the government and for allocation of Monthly Payment Order (MPO) for those who were deprived in the budget of fiscal year 2006-2007.

NFTE Chief Coordinator and Convenor Prof Quazi Faruque Ahmed alleged that NFTE is not being permitted to meet the president, who holds the education ministry, to solve their problems.

There seems to be no difference between the rule of the four-party alliance government and the caretaker government, he said.

He also pointed out that the president, upon taking the charge of caretaker government, failed to exhibit any noticeable progress in reforming and reconstituting the Election Commission.

"Constitutional experts have said the president has committed an impeachable offence by his recent comment regarding the form of the government," he added.

NFTE central leaders Mohammad Azizul Islam, Prof Asadul Haque, M Arzu, SMA Jalil and Bikis Zaman were present at the press briefing.

## AL fears

**FROM PAGE 1**  
at Sudha Sadan.

Party sources said the AL chief briefed him on her party's views on caretaker government and 11-point demand during the 50-minute meeting.

The US assistant secretary, who arrived here earlier in the day on a two-day visit, did not make any comment after the talks.

Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury briefed the reporters after the meeting.

"We briefed him about our stance and 11-point demand placed before the president after he took over the charge of the caretaker government," Saber said.

Replying to a question whether Boucher asked anything about the November 12 deadline or requested them to extend their time, Saber did not say anything.

"We've extended our deadline twice to help the president reduce gaps among the political parties and the Election Commission. But, now we are observing the reverse situation," he told the journalists.

Commenting on the November 12 ultimatum, the AL leader said that Boucher was informed that the 14-party combine does not want any confrontation, rather it wants peace.

Replying to another query, Saber said Boucher has also expressed his opinion on peaceful resolution of the crisis. "We also want the same," he added.

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Jafarullah, Salman F Rahman and Sheikh Helal were, among others, present at the meeting.

## BNP wants free

**FROM PAGE 1**  
general elections.

Briefing newsmen after an hour-long meeting, former foreign minister M Morshed Khan said Boucher told the BNP chairperson that US wants to see a peaceful and fair election in Bangladesh as per the constitution.

He also said fair and peaceful election with participation of all political parties will strengthen the existing democratic process in Bangladesh.

Khaleda informed the US assistant secretary of state that she has already gave directives to her party leaders and workers to maintain peace and discipline.

Replying a query from Boucher regarding the countrywide blockade of 14-party combine, the BNP chairperson said her party is concerned about security of the people. "But we will resist if they (14-party combine) attack the workers of BNP and four-party alliance," Moshed quoted Khaleda as saying.

"We will give priority to strengthening local government, eliminating corruption and completing their unfinished development activities if the four-party alliance returns to power," Khaleda told the US official.

Boucher praised BNP government's role in curbing terrorism and hoped that her stand against international terrorism would continue in future.

US Ambassador Patricia Butenis and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan were also present during the meeting.

## Sports body chiefs

**FROM PAGE 1**  
sports ministry has been in the process to prepare a list, but the unnecessary delay cast growing concern among the sports lovers who feel the current adviser to Youth and Sports, CM Shafi Sami, should immediately remove those 'hand picked' faces including the president of Bangladesh Cricket Board Ali Asghar.

Asghar is not only an influential BNP lawmaker but also the custodian of the famed 'Hawa Bhaban'. Besides, he has been in the centre of controversy ever since the board started its campaign to find a future TV sponsor of all the international home matches for the next five years. It may be mentioned that the board is now in the process of striking the biggest TV deal worth nearly Tk 400 crore (56.88 million dollars) but his presence evoked widespread criticism because of his previous shady affair with little known Aston Moore and the 'infamous' revised contract he signed with ESPN-Star Sports after being appointed by BNP at the hot seat of the most influential federation.

Awami League also demanded a similar move from the caretaker government as soon as possible.

"All the appointments at sports federations by the last government under political consideration have to be removed in resemblance to the neutral character of the caretaker government," told Awami League joint-secretary and former Youth and Sports Minister Obaidul Quader at a press briefing at the AL Chief's office yesterday.

"Last time, the caretaker government did it pretty quickly but now, it has been over two weeks and we have seen no action," he

said.

"We think the caretaker government should also bar the federations from holding elections until a government is in the seat. It should also not allow any new appointments, reshuffles or make any financial deals locally or internationally apart from running the games."

Quader particularly told that they are worried about BCB's Worldwide Marketing Agency Rights deal, which awaits the nod from the Ministry after an open tender was held on Thursday.

"We want the board to make public the clauses of the deal. The huge difference of the bid between two companies has raised questions about its transparency. It is also surprising to see why only two companies joined the bid although six had bought tender forms."

"With an ex-MP of BNP (Ali Asghar) at the helm of the board, we don't think it would be fair if he manages to sign the deal in the end. A neutral person should be the BCB chief when the deal is finalised. It is a matter of principle."

AL's Youth and Sports secretary Dewan Shafiqul Arefin Tutul also attended the briefing.

## 18 injured in AL-BNP clash in Khulna

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna**

A clash between activists of Awami League (AL) and BNP left at least 18 people injured last evening in Khalishpur Industrial Area.

According to police, the clash erupted at around 6:15pm when two processions of BNP and AL were passing each other and some BNP activists threw brickbats at the AL procession.

Police charged batons to bring the situation under control.

Khalishpur Thana unit BNP accused AL of the attack, while AL denied the allegation.

Eyewitnesses said attack on the AL procession was carried out first from the BNP procession without provocation.

Chowdhury, chairman of the Muktijoddha Sangsad Central Command Council, said they are not in favour of any political party, but they agree with the demands of the 14-party combine and will be in the streets in line with the combine.

Abdul Ahad, who presided over the roundtable, said democracy that the nation achieved is now threatened. "This time we shall move to perpetuate democracy," he said.

Big Gen (ret) Giasuddin A Chowdhury, Col (ret) AKM Rakibul Islam, Maj Gen (ret) Syed Rafiqul Islam, Lt Col (ret) Saifur Rashid and Prof Nim Chandra Bhowmik also spoke at the roundtable moderated by Muktijoddha Sangsad Secretary General Mohammad Salauddin.

He urged all the freedom fighters and pro-liberation forces to be united to uphold the spirit of independence through movement.

Major (ret) Akbar said it will be a bad news for the army if they are deployed to resist the demonstration in the streets.

There will be a worldwide reaction if the army is deployed, he said, adding that the UN will stop appointing them in the peace missions, he said, adding, "Ultimately, the army will be affected--this should be explained to the high officials of the army."

Nazmul Hasan, a leader of Muktijoddha Sangsad Central Command Council, said the country will be in deep crisis if the army's role is debated following their deployment.

Maj Gen (ret) Helal Morshed Bir Bikram said the country's army is democratic minded but there is possibility of their being influenced when they move to remote areas and when the civil and police administration lose neutrality.

"The army, if deployed during the polls, should be provided with unbiased information and the politically appointed officials should be transferred," he said.

The army personnel are deployed to assist the police, Maj Gen (ret) KM Shafiqul Islam said, adding, "They are to execute the orders of the magistrate. But during the last general elections, the army was given the 'magistracy power', which became a matter of concern to people."

Arrest of people by the army is against democracy, he said.

Principal Abdul Ahad

## Military

**FROM PAGE 1**  
favour any particular political party.

There are a lot of issues to be settled by the caretaker government that needs more time to set up the groundwork for a free, fair, peaceful and credible election, he noted.

When asked about his meetings with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina, he said both the leaders want free and fair elections and it would be better for them to reach a consensus on the issues respecting the constitutional process.

Asked how the election could be credible without participation of AL that seeks resignation of the CEC, the visiting US official said he hopes all political parties would participate in the polls and the EC should make sure that the people trust its decisions.

Boucher said both the political parties have a lot of experience in politics and they could easily settle many of the controversies.

He said the US would send observers to monitor the upcoming general election.

Termining the Dhaka-Washington relations excellent, he said his country would continue cooperating with Bangladesh, no matter what party gets elected to power in future.

He said despite Republican debacle in the midterm elections, the US government would carry on its efforts to strengthen democracy, healthcare and economic progress.

## BGMEA

**FROM PAGE 1**  
programme enforced by the 14-party from today, BGMEA President SM Fazlul Haque in a statement last night said that since the peak season in garments industry already began with the manufacturing of the winter wears, the shutdown of port will squeeze orders and reduce export in next season.

As a result, the \$8 billion worth of garments industry may reach the brink of destruction, Haque said.

He noted that the garments sector alone suffers a loss of Tk 200 crore for per day closure of the Chittagong port. This becomes double considering the losses in other related industries like bank, insurance and transport due to such blockade programmes, he pointed out.

The BGMEA chief said the garments sector, which shares 76 percent of the country's total export earning and employs 22 lakh workers, is the worst victim of any kind of political agitation programmes.

In the greater interest of trade, commerce and economy, the existing political impasse should be resolved through discussion and dialogues, he added.

Chowdhury, chairman of the Muktijoddha Sangsad Central Command Council, said they are not in favour of any political party, but they agree with the demands of the 14-party combine and will be in the streets in line with the combine.

Abdul Ahad, who presided over the roundtable, said democracy that the nation achieved is now threatened. "This time we shall move to perpetuate democracy," he said.

Big Gen (ret) Giasuddin A Chowdhury, Col (ret) AKM Rakibul Islam, Maj Gen (ret) Syed Rafiqul Islam, Lt Col (ret) Saifur Rashid and Prof Nim Chandra Bhowmik also spoke at the roundtable moderated by Muktijoddha Sangsad Secretary General Mohammad Salauddin.

He urged all the freedom fighters and pro-liberation forces to be united to uphold the spirit of independence through movement.

Major (ret) Akbar said it will be a bad news for the army if they are deployed to resist the demonstration in the streets.

There will be a worldwide reaction if the army is deployed, he said, adding that the UN will stop appointing them in the peace missions, he said, adding, "Ultimately, the army will be affected--this should be explained to the high officials of the army."

Nazmul Hasan, a leader of Muktijoddha Sangsad Central Command Council, said the country will be in deep crisis if the army's role is debated following their deployment.

Maj Gen (ret) Helal Morshed Bir Bikram said the country's army is democratic minded but there is possibility of their being influenced when they move to remote areas and when the civil and police administration lose neutrality.

"The army, if deployed during the polls, should be provided with unbiased information and the politically appointed officials should be transferred," he said.

The army personnel are deployed to assist the police, Maj Gen (ret) KM Shafiqul Islam said, adding, "They are to execute the orders of the magistrate. But during the last general elections, the army was given the 'magistracy power', which became a matter of concern to people."

Arrest of people by the army is against democracy, he said.

Principal Abdul Ahad

## Abbas sets conditions

**FROM PAGE 16**  
impotent against Israel and embroiled in factional unrest today, more than ever Palestinians miss the patriarch who symbolised their dreams.

Even Arafat's most fervent critics miss the man remembered as a survivor who excelled in the art of triumphing in the face of adversity, thanks to a natural political instinct.

Palestinian newspapers plastered Arafat's photos on their front pages, with the Al-Quds daily proclaiming "How much we miss you Abu Ammar", Arafat's nom de guerre.

Abbas, his moderate and uncharismatic successor as Palestinian Authority president, has repeatedly advocated but failed to achieve a return to negotiations with Israel.

He now finds himself locked in a power struggle with Hamas, which won unexpectedly won parliamentary elections in January.

The Islamists' rise to power weakened Abbas and led to a series of events that plunged the already suffering Palestinian territories into a deeper political and financial crisis.

The West, which brands Hamas as a terror group, cut off the aid that once kept Palestinian coffers afloat, and subsequent efforts to end the boycott by forming a Fatah-Hamas unity government have not borne fruit.

Arafat was criticised in later years for his authoritarian rule, but no one has been able to fill his gargantuan shoes. The Palestinian state he promised until his dying day is still a dream, and Gaza and the West Bank are in the throes of anarchy. However, Abbas added to growing political optimism Saturday by saying a unity govern-

ment with Hamas was likely by month's end. That would hopefully not only lead to an end to the punishing boycott, but also help reinvigorate a stalled peace process.

"I say to our people that we have realised great progress on the road toward forming a national unity government that can break the siege and open the way for a political solution that will end the occupation forever," Abbas said.

"I expect, God willing, that this government will see the light of day before the end of the month."

Abbas and other speakers also touched on suspicions that continue to surround Arafat's death in a Paris hospital. Conspiracy theories that Arafat was poisoned still abound despite doctors finding no trace of toxins.

Abbas said an investigation into Arafat's death was continuing.

"I repeat here my call for all those doctors involved in the matter to fully cooperate with (investigators) so that our people and the whole world can know the truth of what happened to Abu Ammar," he said.

Nazrul was also given unusual facilities, which his post did not justify. His contract was however cancelled last week.

The posts of director finance, planning and production sharing contract (PSC) of Petrobangla are now vacant though it is a vital revenue earner for the government, fetching over Tk 2,700 crore a year for the public exchequer.

Though Petrobangla still has a number of competent senior officials, the coalition government that politicised and divided different public entities since 2001, refrained from giving regular promotions and postings. It filled up vital positions on the basis of lobbying and potential candidates' political affiliation, sources said.

In the last five years, a good number of competent officials and experts retired from Petrobangla, there had been no new recruitment from 1999. Besides, many officials left the organisation due to deterioration of working condition amid severe politicisation.

## 5 killed

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Hospital (MMCH) later.

The bodies are kept in the MMCH morgue for autopsy.

In another accident, 15 people were injured when a passenger bus tumbled into a roadside ditch at Ukbari of Trishal upazila. Two critically injured were sent to MMCH.

Omar al-Baghdadi: I have put 12,000 al-Qaeda fighters at the disposal of the Islamic state of Iraq," Muhajir said, pledging allegiance to the state's emir.

The al-Qaeda chief appealed to major Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups, notably the Army of Ansar al-Sunna, the Islamic Army of Iraq and the Mujahadeen's Army, to endorse the self-styled state and pledge allegiance to its emir.