

Blockade stops life

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THE COUNTRY
Activities at the Chittagong Port came to a total halt yesterday afternoon while all road communications to and from Chittagong also remained snapped.

Some loading and unloading of cargoes took place at the port jetties until around 3:30pm when workers loyal to the 14-party alliance forced others to stop all kind of operations inside the port.

Administrative activities, however, were quite normal at Bandar Bhaban although presence was less than usual.

Tension arose when Rab men tried to escort three truckloads of goods to Dhaka but ultimately retreated in the face of strong resistance from hundreds of 14-party activists at Olonkar intersection.

The 14-party activists laid blockade in front of the Bandar Bhaban, on connecting roads to the port, at jetty-3, Nimtola, Agrabad Barik Building crossing, Olonkar intersection at Pahartoli, Kalurghat and both ends of the Shah Amanat Bridge. They also damaged a few vehicles at City Gate and Barik Building crossing and set fire to some tyres.

The railway authorities cancelled the schedule of the Dhaka-bound Subarna Express although other trains left the Chittagong Railway Station with small number of passengers.

In Brahmanbaria, demonstrators pelted brickbats at a Bhaiarab-bound local train at the Poyertala outer signal of Brahmanbaria Railway Station, damaging several winduppanes and forcing the train to return to the station. All trains on the Dhaka-Chittagong, Dhaka-Sylhet and Dhaka-Noakhali routes remained halted at different points in and out of the station.

Train service from Sylhet remained suspended after Dhaka-bound Jayontika Express left the district at 7:30am.

Demonstrators damaged a truck and a private car at Jagannathganj and in Jamalpur town while some others damaged a pickup van at Majidee Bazar in Noakhali.

In Nilphamari, 14-party workers stopped four trains at two rail stations of the district in the morning. They stopped the Khulna Mail at Nilphamari Old Station at dawn while Khulna-bound Rupsha Express and Rocket Mail and Rajshahi-bound Barendra Express were detained by agitating railway workers at the Saidpur Station.

In Moulvibazar, the engine of Sylhet-bound Jalalabad Express that started from Chittagong Saturday night derailed near Longla Railway Station in Kulaura upazila at 10:00am as the 14-party men uprooted railway sleepers. No causality was reported.

The 14-party activists gathered at Kulaura junction station to put barricade, but resisted by the law enforcers, they attacked the station building and damaged door and window glasses.

In Sirajganj, 17 persons were injured at two places while a band of pickets vandalised two trucks at Nalka and a few compartments of a Dhaka-bound train at Ullapara. Activities at Hili and Biral land ports in Dinajpur and Banglabandha land port in Panchagarh came to a standstill while the blockade completely paralysed the entire Khulna city and all activities at the Mongla Port.

In Munshiganj, the BNP announced counter blockade programmes. Paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) was deployed to avert any untoward situation.

BNP threatens

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"I am requesting them to withdraw the programme and take preparation for election," he told reporters in reply to a question.

Bhuiyan alleged that the 14-party has announced the blockade programme to destroy the country's economy.

He said businessmen expressed apprehension over the present volatile condition of the country and informed him that the country loses about Tk 500 crore a day due to the ongoing blockade programme enforced by 14-party alliance.

After the meeting, the business leaders hoped the chief adviser would take initiative soon to resolve the crisis.

"We will meet the chief adviser and urge him to become proactive... we hope crisis will be resolved if he (president) takes initiative," Anisul Huq, former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), told newsmen at a press briefing after the meeting.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and

Industry (FBCCI) President Mir Nasir Hossain said, "We hope the president will take necessary action quickly according to the constitution and all the political parties should demonstrate tolerance."

"The whole country came to a standstill due to the blockade. However, we appreciate the matter that there was no violence today. We also thanked the BNP leaders for withdrawal of their programme," the FBCCI president said hoping that the ongoing political impasse will not longer.

International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh (ICC-B) President Mahbubur Rahman said, "Economy will be looser if the blockade programme continues." He said the country and democracy could not go forward under this political uncertainty.

About the initiative to be taken by the business leaders to resolve the present political crisis the BNP secretary general said, "We have no objection if they go to the president."

Business leaders AK Azad, MA Awal, Saidul Islam and MA Momen were also present at the meeting.

Goods pile

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In Chittagong, Awami League backed Bandar Sramik Union blockaded the road in front of the port by haphazardly parking over 100 trucks and covered vans last evening.

The trucks and covered vans, parked on the road stretching from Neemtala intersection of Port Connecting Road up to Salsgola intersection, caused suspension of vehicular movement to and from Chittagong airport as well, sources said.

The agitating workers also took a good number of transport vehicles inside the port and stopped the jetties from operating.

The blockade was created when rumours of a move to keep the port operational by deploying army personnel was heard.

4 criminals

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hour-long gunfight. After the fight was over, the police break into the house and found the bodies of Saifur and Mizan.

Police also managed to arrest five criminals when they were trying to flee the scene. They are Abdul, 45, Zakerul, 22, Kamal, 36, Russell, 25 and Hafiz, 33.

Two pistols and 10 bullets were recovered from the spot. Hailing from Harbhanga village of Gangni in the adjacent Meherpur district, Saifur was convicted in an abduction case in 2004 by a Kushtia court. He was also accused in 10 cases including abduction, rape, robbery and murders.

So far, a total of 122 alleged criminals, highest across the country, have been killed in incidents of shootouts in Kushtia since June 2004.

Japan hopes for free, fair polls in Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

Japan yesterday hoped that the current political developments in Bangladesh would move in an orderly manner to ensure free and fair general election.

"We believe democracy is firmly in place in Bangladesh. We look forward to seeing orderly developments for free and fair elections," Japan's Deputy Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabukana told reporters at Zia International Airport before flying home.

Yabukana, who came here Saturday night from Laos on his way back to Tokyo, said Japan would send observers to join the international observation teams to monitor the coming elections in Bangladesh.

Termed Dhaka and Tokyo "natural partners", he said the new Japanese government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attaches importance to promoting relations with the Asian countries including Bangladesh.

He said Tokyo is committed to increasing its ODA (official development assistance) for infrastructure development in Bangladesh.

Asked about the funding of the Padma Bridge, the Japanese minister said his government is positive about the funding with the successful completion of the feasibility study.

He stressed the need for cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries for increasing trade and investment.

Earlier, the Japanese deputy minister had a bilateral meeting with Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin discussing ways of exploring better cooperation in different fields.

In reply to a question about the possibility of increasing the number of trainees from Bangladesh under the JITCO scheme, he would not commit an increase in the number but said the programme is running smoothly for enhancing human resource development.

Last year, 12 trainees from Bangladesh had gone to Japan for higher training in IT sector under a deal between Dhaka and Tokyo.

Japanese Ambassador Masayuki Inoue, Additional Foreign Secretary Toshihiko Hossain, DG for East Asia Shahidul Islam and DGP Zahirul Haque were present at the airport.

BGMEA

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industry might not supply orders on time due to political unrest.

President of BGMEA SM Fazlul Haque yesterday urged the President/Chief Adviser Prof Iajuddin Ahmed and political leaders to headway and break the deadlock for the sake of the garment industry as well as the national economy.

He said businessmen, especially those related to garment exports, had expected that political unrest would be over by yesterday, but they were disheartened with the beginning of 14-party's non-stop blockade.

Finance, Sports

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neutral administration, sources said.

While the last caretaker government terminated all alleged political appointments and made major reshuffles in the administration within a short period of taking over, the current one is yet to take any actions against the officials allegedly recruited under political considerations, although it has been over two weeks of its taking charge.

Aziz wants

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present Aziz-led Election Commission (EC).

In the wake of prevailing situation, the other election commissioners and officials at the EC Secretariat have become frustrated as the preparatory work is not going on smoothly.

Although the secretariat has been carrying out some routine work, it is not adequate to conduct the polls in early January, they said.

Aziz, who attended office yesterday morning amid the AL-led 14-party's blockade programme demanding his resignation, held a meeting with three other election commissioners.

Sources close to Aziz said he is still indifferent about the growing volatile political situation. He did not discuss the latest political situation at the EC meeting and other election commissioners also did not raise the issue, sources added.

Officials in the EC Secretariat also said Aziz remains silent if any one informs him of the deteriorating political situation.

In the afternoon, a delegation of International Republican Institute (IRI) met the EC and the election commissioners and discussed the preparatory work for holding the next parliamentary election.

IRI team leader John Anelli told reporters after the meeting that the EC has expressed his optimism for holding the next election peacefully and with the participation of all political parties.

The IRI team hoped that major political parties will be able to reach a consensus on resolving the prevailing political crisis.

A number of officials of the EC Secretariat also met the EC yesterday for official business.

14-party demands

FROM PAGE 1
Justice MA Aziz from the post of the CEC for his dishonesty."

He said they will continue enforcing the 'peaceful' countrywide blockade until the demands are met. "We will withdraw the blockade only when we will see the caretaker government taking effective initiatives to meet our demands for creating a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election," Jall added.

He thanked the law enforcers, leaders and activists of the coalition, and the people of all walks of life for observing the blockade peacefully.

The president has completely failed to take any initiative to prove his neutrality since he assumed the post of the CA of the non-party CG "violating the constitution", Jall said adding that the president-cum-CA is not taking any step to create a level playing field for holding a free and fair election, rather he is issuing threats against them.

Branding Iajuddin and Aziz as BNP partisans, the AL leader said a free and fair election will never be possible under their leadership. There is no alternative but to resign for the CA and the CEC if a free and fair election is to be held, Jall said urging Aziz to follow the two former CECs - Justice Sultan Hossain Khan and Justice MASadek - who resigned in the face of criticisms as questions had arisen over his neutrality in 1991 and 1996 respectively.

He said Aziz violated directives of the High Court and Supreme Court by publishing a draft voter list and

included '1.40 crore fake voters' on the list. Saying that a credible election is not possible with a fake voter roll, the 14-party leader added that there is still time to bring corrections to the voter list.

Jall demanded immediate cancellation of all contractual appointments to government posts through a single notice, and a drastic change both in civil and police administrations for creating a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election.

He said those who got influential posts during the immediate past government will have to be replaced by those who were made officers on special duties (OSD) to keep at bay the influence of the former on the next election, and to ensure neutrality in the administration. He also demanded immediate cancellation of the last minute appointment orders in 30 municipalities by the immediate past government.

He urged the law enforcers to act neutrally for safeguarding the hard-earned democracy. If they fail to act neutrally, the present situation will head towards a confrontational situation, Jall said.

Among others, senior 14-party leaders Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Obaidul Quader, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Abdul Mannan, Abdur Rahman, Bimal Biswas, Pankaj Bhattacharya, Nurul Islam and Dilip Barua were present at the briefing.

Non-govt teachers

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After a month-long strike of the non-government teachers and employees demanding salary hike, the then education minister M Osman Farruk on August 6 announced raising their salary to 100 per cent from the existing 90 per cent but tagged it with the condition of submitting the tuition fees to the government coffers.

Later, in the face of teachers' agitation, Osman Farruk decided in principle to withdraw the condition. But the October 31 circular did not drop the condition.

According to the circular, non-government teachers will get 100 per cent basic salary from the national exchequer. Half of the increased salary will be given from July 2006 from the budget of 2006-07 fiscal year (FY) and the rest half will be given as 'outstanding bill' from the budget of 2007-08 FY.

But the educational institutions will have to deposit the tuition fees to the government exchequer and a policy for this will have to be prepared within the next three months, the circular said.

Termed the condition a farce, leaders of different teachers' organisations vowed not to deposit a single penny to the public exchequer and declared fresh agitations.

"We demand amendment to the circular and issuance of a new one within seven days," said Quazi Faruque Ahmed, chief coordinator and convener of National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE), a platform of 11 organisations of teachers and employees.

They have already submitted a 13-point education reform proposal to the caretaker government and urged forming an enquiry committee against Osman Farruk for 'cheating' with the teachers, he said.

NFTE has also held rallies, brought out processions in the capital on November 8 and submitted a five-point education reform proposal to the President and Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed on November 9. NFTE may declare tough agitation programmes like strike from November 27.

The October 31 circular had been prepared by Dr Osman Farruk and issued after the expiry of BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government on October 29, said Prof Mazharul Hannan, a leader of Shikkhak Karmachari Oikya fote.

This was done to relieve the former education minister of the blame of double-dealing with the teachers, he added.

Prof MA Awal Siddique, convener of Bangladesh Shikkhak Karmachari Oikya Parishad, said they have already submitted an eight-point education reform proposal to the caretaker government protesting the circular that imposed an 'unacceptable' condition.

"The amount of tuition fees will be a lot more higher than the government's salary increase offer and so teachers can not accept the government's condition," he said.

Over five lakh teachers and employees are on the payrolls of more than 26,000 non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas in the country.

CG, EC must respect

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Boucher, who came to Dhaka Saturday to assess the pre-election ground situation, said the Election Commission must be aware of its important job to make the elections free and impartial, free from any outside influence.

The US minister said he discussed with the chief adviser how to make the process in the run-up peaceful for a free and fair general election. Boucher, here as part of his four-nation South Asian tour, was expected to leave Dhaka Sunday evening on conclusion of his shuttle mission through Bangladesh's squabbling political camps.

BSS added: President Iajuddin sought US cooperation for holding the upcoming elections as visiting called on him at Bangabhaban.

"The president and chief adviser expected US cooperation for his interim non-party government in holding the election as a friendly country," a presidential spokesman told BSS.

The two countries have "very good" bilateral ties and Bangladesh values the United States as an important development partner, the president said.

Huji leader

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Court, Dhaka with a prayer for another seven days' remand.

In the forwarding report of the case, investigation officer (IO) of the case CID Inspector Abdul Baten said Hannan and two others gave important information about the killings. The information gathered from them was being verified. Therefore, they need to be questioned further to find out clues to the killings and whereabouts of their accomplices, the IO added.

After hearing both sides, Metropolitan Magistrate Nani Gopal Biswas placed Hannan, Mazif and Mizan on a five-day remand. Earlier on September 10 and 16, Hannan, Mazif and Mizan were shown arrested in the Ramna Batumul blast case and a court placed them on a 13-day remand.

On September 19 and 21, Hannan and Mazif were shown arrested in connection with the bomb blasts on the rally of Communist Party of Bangladesh at Palton on January 20, 2001, and was placed on 14 days' remand in two phases.

Moreover, Hannan was remanded for 120 days in connection with the cases filed with different police stations in the city for bomb blasts across the country on August 17 last year.

CA's office today

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one of the demands of the Awami League-led 14-party combine.

According to a Bangabhaban spokesman, the chief adviser would preside over a meeting of the Council of Advisers at the CA office at 11:00am today.

Waterlogging

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suffering from the problem of waterlogging for several years.

Now dredging is going on in the area under the supervision of 55th Division of the Army, which has resulted in receding of four feet water, the adviser said.

The dwelling houses in the area are fast getting rid of waterlogging, he said.

Agriculture Secretary M Abdul Aziz, Water Resources Secretary Syed Mohammad Jobaer and Director General of Water Development Board Sharif Rafiqul Islam attended the meeting.

Technical glitches

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would identify a number of people in the ministry, private entrepreneurs and political groups who were allegedly involved with corruption at the power division.

"We want to identify the people, groups and organisations who were allegedly involved in corruption in procurement, supply and generation of power," he said.

He said Prof Muzaffer Ahmed, trustee member of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), met him and gave him a TIB book on corruption to help identify the corrupt people.

"We also will examine the questions which were usually raised in the parliamentary standing committee meetings earlier," Mashhud added.

He said he has no intention to leave without any work done and publishing the names of the corrupt people is half of the job done.

Saudi prince

FROM PAGE 16
government not a major or policy level decision," he noted.

Talking about finalisation of the sale and purchase documents, the commission chairman expressed hope that the documents will be ready for signing within November 15.

Gaza ONSLAUGHT

US vetoes UN draft resolution to condemn Israel

AFP, United Nations
The United States Saturday vetoed an Arab-sponsored draft resolution in the UN Security Council that would have condemned Israel's deadly attack in the Gaza Strip, calling the text "unbalanced" and "biased."

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a statement the United States was "compelled to vote against" the draft resolution because "we do not believe (it) was designed to contribute to the cause of peace."

"The resolution would have used the tragic incident in Beit Hanoun to advance a one-sided political agenda," she said, referring to what

Israel called an accidental shelling on November 8 that killed 19 Palestinian civilians, mostly women and children, in the Gaza town of Beit Hanun.

"The resolution included inflammatory and unnecessary language that would aggravate the situation in Gaza ... (and) failed to include any reference to terrorism or to condemn Hamas for its threats to broaden the attacks against Israel and the United States," Rice added.

As one of the council's five permanent members along with Britain, China, France and Russia, the United States has veto power which it has now used 82 times, often to shield Israel from censure.

Decision to deploy army

FROM PAGE 1
mention even for once the decision to deploy army during two and half hours of his meeting with the advisers.

Just when everyone was preparing to sign off, he said he wants to invite the home secretary to hear about the latest situation regarding the 14-party blockade.

Shortly afterwards, the home secretary appeared and began his narration.

He said the blockade was mostly peaceful. Then as if it was an ad-lib he said the Chittagong port has become inoperative and this may necessitate the military deployment.

The suggestion greatly annoyed the advisers who said the implications of any such decision might be very grave both nationally and internationally. They said it would amount to inviting the army unnecessarily and as such this should be reviewed.

The secretary however did not tell them that the decision to that effect has already been made and communicated to the local administration.

At this point, the president ended the meeting abruptly.

The advisers left the Bangabhaban under the impression that the army deployment was still a plan. But while on their way home, many of them became dumbfounded to know over telephone from journalists and family members that the decision has already been circulated.

Meantime, a letters by the cabinet

Late night

FROM PAGE 1
decision to deploy the army has not yet been taken. It is now expected that the TV channels will broadcast the news again after correcting the errors. The Bangla version of the press note follows:

লক্ষ্য করা যাচ্ছে যে, বিভিন্ন টেলিভিশন চ্যানেলে পরিবেশিত সংবাদে বলা হচ্ছে সরকার দেশে আইন-শৃঙ্খলা রক্ষার্থে সেনা বাহিনী নিয়োগ করার সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ করেছে। একতরফে সেনা বাহিনী নিয়োগ করার বিষয়ে 'পরিষ্কৃতি' বিবেচনায় নিয়োগ করা হতে পারে বলে সরকার সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ করেছে। তখন পরিষ্কৃতি উক্ত না হওয়ায় এখনও সেনা বাহিনী নিয়োগ করার কোন সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ করা হয়নি।

Suicide bombers

FROM PAGE 16
To help stem bloodshed that has already left more than 125 dead this week, Maliki called for a "comprehensive cabinet reshuffle," a statement from his office said.

In a closed parliamentary session on Sunday, Maliki explained the current situation to lawmakers and the "security challenges and efforts made by the government to go ahead with the national reconciliation process."

Iraq is frequently beset by rumours of cabinet reshuffles, and the prime minister has said in the past that one or two ministers might be changed. But Sunday was the first time he had spoken of "comprehensive" change.

In the face of the persistent violence, the country's political process appears to be increasingly fragile, with Sunni lawmakers on Wednesday threatening to leave the political process until their demands were addressed.

On Saturday, Maliki urged all political groups to help usher in "peace and not to arouse passions," and attacked the Sunni Arab parliamentary bloc for issuing threats.

"I strongly condemn statements about taking up weapons or abandoning the political process," Maliki said.

"Our request to those who are doing this is to fulfil their responsibilities, and we demand that they take a clear look at the situation as the pain they suffer is the same as what all Iraqis suffer."

The Sunni National Concord Front threatened to abandon the political process and take up arms if the Shia-led government contin-

net division directed

the divisional and deputy commissioners to get prepared to facilitate matters for the military forces.

The letter signed by Home Secretary SM Jahurul Islam reads, "The government has decided to deploy military forces to aid the law enforcement agencies in maintaining the law and order."

It continues, "To ensure functions of the deployed army, a sufficient number of magistrates are requested to be kept ready to discharge their duties whenever needed."

Director of Inter-services Public Relations (ISPR) of the defence ministry Lt Col Anisur Rahman Chowdhury told The Daily Star last night that the army has yet to receive any orders for deployment.

On receiving the letters, the district administrations and field level officials have started vacating the circuit houses, rest houses and other government dormitories for the army men. They have been taking other preparations as well, report our district correspondents.

In his address to the armed forces on November 8, President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed admitted that the forces had been kept on the alert for some time for untoward incidents in the country.

Situation

FROM PAGE 1
at two minutes past zero hours.

Jall mentioned that Adviser to the caretaker government Mahbubul Alam has also said there no discussion on the matter at the meeting of the council of advisers last night.

Termed the armed forces as a symbol of independence and sovereignty, he said "the army and the armed forces are our pride and a national asset".

"The army can be deployed in aid of the civil administration. We also want peace and discipline in the country," Jall said, hoping that no-one would use the army with a political motive.

"They (the armed forces) will, this time too, play the laudable role which they had played earlier to uphold the country's sovereignty and democracy," he hoped.

to ignore its calls

to ignore its calls to dismantle militias.

"If they do not respond to this request, we may abandon the political process and have no other choice but to take up arms," Salim Abdullah, spokesman for the bloc which holds 44 seats in the 275-member parliament, told AFP Wednesday.

Sunday's suicide attacks came just hours after two bombings killed another four civilians in central Baghdad and wounded 10.

A similar twin attack in central Baghdad's Babil al-Sharji area left five dead and seven wounded.

South of the capital in Radwaniyah, a roadside bomb destroyed a civilian car killing three people, while a car bomb near a school in Yusifiyah killed three and wounded 15.

Another car bomb killed one civilian and wounded five in east Baghdad's Karrada district, while another in the Mulmalif area on the capital's southern outskirts killed one and wounded six.

In south Baghdad, a municipal official and his driver were killed in an ambush, police said.

The surge in violence and the Republicans' defeat in last week's US congressional elections have prompted a rethink from President George W. Bush's administration on its strategy in Iraq.

In his weekly radio address on Saturday, Bush reaffirmed his commitment to fighting terrorism in Iraq but also made clear that he was open to ideas from the Democrats as well as from a group of independent experts with whom he is scheduled to meet on Monday.