

Another blockade

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constitution against the chief adviser. Since then the 14-party alliance along with a few other political parties has been demonstrating for his resignation.

Their other demands include reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC) through removal of the controversial election commissioners, rescheduling the polls after correction and publication of the updated voter list, depoliticisation of the administration, and cancellation of 300 "politically appointed" upazila election officers.

The leaders of 14-party alliance will sit today to finalise its strategy over settling the bottom line of its agitation.

"If the chief adviser takes decision after discussing with other advisers and takes necessary steps to create a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election after carrying out necessary reforms in the Election Commission, we will move back from our demand of his resignation," a 14-party leader said preferring anonymity.

Not only the election commissioners, all election officials, including the deputy commissioners, superintendents of police and upazila nirbahi officers, are loyal to the BNP-Jamaat alliance, he alleged.

"If the president takes action only to make the administration and the Election Commission neutral and correct the updated voter list, we will participate in the next election," said the leader, who is a close aide to Hasina.

Talking to The Daily Star, city 14-party Coordinator and city AL General Secretary Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya said they will put blockades at 32 strategic points in the capital. The alliance also plans to hold rallies and marches in the capital and other parts of the country.

The alliance leaders held a series of meetings with its city and district unit leaders in the last couple of days to make the blockade programme a success.

They also held a meeting yesterday with Gono Forum leaders with Mostafa Mohsin Mantu in the chair. AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader said at the meeting that they

will resist any "blueprint" election designed by the BNP-Jamaat alliance.

Different political parties, including Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) led Jatiya Oikya Front and some Islamic parties, will also be in the streets.

14-PARTY BRIEFING

Branding Iajuddin as the "main barrier" to holding a free and fair election, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said only the president could save the country from the conflicts, instability and uncertainty by resigning from the post of chief adviser.

He said the chief adviser has further politicised the administration instead of depoliticising it. "His every step is marked with intention to implement the blueprint of the BNP-Jamaat coalition and for this reason Dr Iajuddin has chosen the way to violate the constitution repeatedly," Jaill said. "He has ignored not only the demands of the people and 14-party, but also the opinion of the members of the advisory council."

Referring to Thursday's mayhem in the High Court, Jaill alleged that the president has even destroyed the highest constitutional institution only to protect his position as chief adviser.

"Those who want to steal people's votes knew that the court directives would go against them, and for this they misused the highest court," Jaill said.

Instead of reconstituting the EC, the chief adviser has made it more controversial by appointing two more "controversial" persons, one of whom even sought nomination from the BNP, he added.

Terming the chief justice's stay order on three writ petitions "unconstitutional", AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta told The Daily Star that they will reject the chief justice until he cancels the order.

Senior 14-party leaders Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Obaidul Quader, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Abdur Rahman, Pankaj Bhattacharya and Dilip Barua were present at the press briefing.

SL president's brother escapes suicide attack

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse's brother Gothabaya, who is also the island's defence secretary, narrowly escaped a suspected suicide bomb attack in the island's capital on Friday, officials said.

Hospital officials said 14 people were admitted with injuries after the blast, including one seriously.

But the President's office said Gothabaya was unhurt and had gone straight to see his brother after the attack.

"After the explosion, he directly came to the President's office and hugged him," said Sudath Silva, President Rajapakse's official photographer. "The blood on his clothes was that of his security guards."

"The President told him: 'They will never do it.'"

The secretary's driver had earlier said he had suffered slight injuries.

The attack comes just days after the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they were resuming their independence struggle in what analysts said opened a new chapter in the island's two-decade civil war.

"It looks like a suicide attack, either from a three wheeler or by a motorbike," said a police officer at the scene, refusing to give his name.

A Reuters witness saw a severed head in the back of a pickup truck at the scene of the blast and the wreckage of a three wheeler taxi — vehicles which have been used in previous bomb attacks blamed on the rebels.

A severed head found at the roadside after blasts is also often the sign of a suicide bombing.

The attack took place outside an upscale Indian restaurant in downtown Colombo, a few hundred meters from the Prime Minister's offices.

Sri Lanka's two-decade civil has killed more than 67,000 civilians, troops and rebel fighters since 1983, around 3,000 of those this year alone.

ETV

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neutral and investigative news.

The ETV got its permission for transmission on April 14, 2005, but the authorities could not go on-air due to some tangles with Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Board.

Hinting at a powerful quarter of the immediate past government, Salam said "an evil power" did not allow them to start transmission even after getting the permission.

Asked about ETV's share owned by Gias Al Mamun, managing director of Channel 1 and a friend of BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, Salam said, "If he had the share, we would not have to wait for one and half years for starting transmission.

"Gias Al Mamun was one of the most powerful persons in the country during the past government's tenure. Why have we waited such a long time if he was with us?" Salam said.

On former managing director of ETV Simon Dring's joining the channel, he said, "Time will tell that."

Salam thanked the media for supporting the ETV in its fight to get permission to resume operation.

ETV Director (programme) Atiqul Haq Chowdhury described the day as their "victory day", saying, "We lost our paradise, but we have regained it."

Arges grenade

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and ammunition abandoned.

The Rab personnel handed over the recovered arms and ammunition to Nalitabai police Thursday morning, sources said.

A General Diary (GD) was filed with the police station concerned.

50 hurt

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Abu Baker, Shahjahan, Kalam, Kader, Amir Ali, Mohammad Ali, Mizan and Mansur Ali.

Police and locals said the activists of both parties clashed at Comilla Tila, Amtali, and Sabujbagh in Sadar upazila yesterday morning to take control of the areas.

On Thursday night, the activists of the rival parties clashed at Dewan Bazar, Ramsira and Tabalchhari in Matrianga upazila for the same purpose.

District BNP Secretary Mostafizur Rahman Millat blamed the Awami League activists for the attacks. He demanded immediate arrest of the AL men involved.

On the other hand, District Awami League General Secretary Zahedul Alam alleged that BNP cadres attacked his party men and damaged their houses. He claimed that at least 25 AL men were injured in the attacks.

The AL leader demanded exemplary punishment to the BNP activists responsible for the attacks.

No-one was arrested in connection with the incidents as of 6:00pm yesterday.

AIDS day

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The theme of the World AIDS Day this year was "accountability".

Prior to the discussion, over 50 organisations including CARE, Ashar Alo, Durjoy Narisangha, Padokkhep, BILLS, Association for Social Development, Human Resources Development Programme, and Save the Children-USA brought out a colourful procession from the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban with the slogan, "Stop AIDS. Keep promise".

"With high prevalence in the neighbouring countries, frequent migration of people, lack of awareness of HIV infection, existence of commercial sex workers and injectible-drug users, tendency of low condom use, and lack of voluntary blood donors, HIV/AIDS might become endemic," Matiu said.

In his paper he noted the major breakthroughs in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention: establishment of 98 blood centres to screen five lethal diseases—HIV, hepatitis-B and -C, syphilis and malaria, approval of Safe Blood Transfusion Law 2002, increase of relative and voluntary blood donors, and declining number of paid donors from 70 percent to 15 percent.

The challenges for Bangladesh right now are ensuring food and nutrition security for the AIDS patients and more coverage under the AIDS prevention programme, he said.

Wahida Banu, chairperson of STI/AIDS Network of Bangladesh,

also stressed the need for immediate coverage of places, which are still out of the programme.

The NGOs dealing with the issue often lack efficiency and institutional capacity, she said, urging every one concerned to maintain the standard by initiating a sustainable approach with more government and donor fund.

Dr Duangvadee Sungkhobol, Bangladesh representative of World Health Organisation, insisted on strengthening vigilance for the ongoing programme.

Taufiqur Rahman, team leader of South and West Asia Cluster of the global fund, assured the organisations concerned of smooth funding to their projects.

Md Abdus Selim, programme manager of NASP, Kelland Stevenson, country director of Save the Children-USA, Dr AZM Zahid Hossain, secretary general of BMA, Md Abdul Mannan, director general of DGFP, Md Monirul Islam, additional secretary and focal point-HIV/AIDS of health and family welfare ministry, AKM Zafar Ullah Khan, health and family welfare secretary, Dr Syeda Badrun Nahar, ADG of DGHS and line director of NASP and SBTP, also spoke at the discussion.

Later, a cultural programme was held at the conference hall in the evening.

Bar to boycott

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premises tomorrow to protest Thursday's vandalism sparked off by the C.J's stay order.

Different quarters continued voicing protest against the C.J's move yesterday too.

The president killed the highest constitutional organisation to retain his post by using the chief justice,

said Abdul Jalil, Awami League general secretary and coordinator of the 14-party combine.

On the other hand, BNP steering committee member advocate Khandakar Mahabubuddin Ahmed at a rally yesterday demanded punishment to the people involved in Thursday's vandalism at the Supreme Court.

Two cases were filed with Shahbagh Police Station on Thursday afternoon for vandalising the offices of attorney general and chief justice, and creating disturbance in court proceedings.

Abdul Quddus, administrative officer of Attorney General (AG) AJ Mohammad Ali, and Mohammad Nurul Islam, court officer of the Supreme Court, filed the cases.

In the first information report (FIR), Quddus said a group of "unruly" lawyers and some outsiders attacked the new office building of the AG and Solicitor at about 2:45pm, vandalised its furniture and took important documents from there.

They also burnt a vehicle parked in front of the building.

Nurul Islam in his FIR said the lawyers made "indecent" and "abusive" remarks about the chief justice and other judges, vandalised his office and furniture, tore the flag in front of the SC, and created disturbance during the hearing at court No 14.

The SCBA has also called a general meeting at its office at 11:00am today to discuss Thursday's unprecedented incident at the court, said its General Secretary Amin Uddin.

"We will go to the court on Sunday morning and do our regular work, but won't appear before the

court of chief justice until he resigns," he told The Daily Star last evening.

On the other hand, Joydul Abedin, a leader of Jatiyatobadi Ainjibi Forum and law secretary of BNP, said they would hold a protest rally at 1:15pm tomorrow on the Supreme Court premises.

At a BNP rally held yesterday in front of the party office at Naya Paltan, Abedin asked the chief adviser to issue contempt rule against the unruly lawyers.

400 die

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Durian, one notch below a category 5 "super typhoon," caused havoc across the central and northern Philippines, affecting nearly 22,000 people, grounding planes and halting sea travel.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said farmers had suffered around 500 million pesos (\$10 million) in losses after Durian swept through growing regions for coconuts, rice and hemp. Crop damage from previous typhoons cut third-quarter economic growth.

On the island of Marinduque, trees were uprooted, lamp posts wrenched out and roofs swept from most homes.

"It's the worst in our history. Almost all houses were damaged by the typhoon in the province," Congressman Edmund Reyes said on local radio.

Australia's Lafayette Mining Ltd halted operations at its copper and zinc mine in the central Philippines after the typhoon damaged staff housing and power lines but the company said it hoped to reopen in two weeks.

Durian skirted Manila, where offices and schools were closed for a national holiday.

Illegal logging and mining raises the risk of mudslides during the Philippine typhoon season. In the worst disaster in recent years, more than 5,000 people died on the central island of Leyte in 1991 in floods triggered by a typhoon.

6 faulty firms

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devaluation of dollar etc.

In addition to dredging, this project includes river bank protection and construction of a marine drive.

The CPA floated tender for the dredging project in March. By that time, it had already inflated the project cost to Tk 125 crore without prior approval of the Ecnecon ground of additional construction work.

A week before the bid was opened, the CPA abruptly amended technical specification for the project to drive away four of the six pre-selected bidders from the bid. Only two participants --China Harbour and MJ Hojgaard of Denmark -- remained.

China Harbour gave two financial offers, the first one asking for a cost of Tk 252 crore and the alternative one Tk 215 crore. Hojgaard made an offer of Tk 422 crore. Insiders allege that Hojgaard was an arranged partner to make the tender look competitive. The CPA picked China Harbour's Tk 252 crore offer.

China Harbour's performance in Bangladesh itself is in question. It was awarded the Tk 331 crore New Mooring Container Terminal Project two years ago.

The project was scheduled to be completed by December last year but till date the company is delayed.

Yunus

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People become frustrated, as they see always negative news about the country, he said. He asked the journalists especially the younger section to take interest about the positive side of the society.

Yunus also criticised a section of newspapers, saying, "There is also a trend in the newspaper industry to divert the news from one direction to another."

Appreciating the technological advancement in local media, he suggested improvement in contents as well. If the standard of content goes up people's confidence in media will increase, he said.

He said some newspapers published item saying that he gave a formula for all party government instead of a coalition government. "This makes the people confused and embarrassed."

The anniversary function was also addressed by Reazuddin Ahmed president of Jatiya press club. He described Yunus as a pride of whole southeast asia.

He also called upon the Nobel laureate to participate in the struggle of journalists to establish the right to know.

Reazuddin Ahmed said the nation can see the light of hope in the speech of Dr. Yunus. "You show the path of overcoming the existing crisis and motivate the people through your good words."

Yunus was also given the honorary membership of the Jatiya Press Club. The name and fame of the Jatiya Press Club would spread through out the world by giving membership to Yunus, Reazuddin Ahmed said.

The 52nd birth anniversary of the press club was observed in a festive mood through a cultural function last night.

Jubo Dal man

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Mashiur Rahman.

Witnesses said a gang of eight men ambushed Hadu near his Adarsha Para home in the town. They hurled two bombs at him moments after he got down from a rickshaw around 8:15pm. They then opened fire against the unruly lawyers.

Locals took him to a clinic, which Hadu himself owns, and he was later taken to the district hospital where hundreds of his party men and followers gathered.

Sources said Hadu died in the hospital but police did not disclose the matter to the people gathered there to keep the situation under control.

One Rajib Hasan, claiming himself to be the regional leader of PBCP Janajuddha, over telephone said he was responsible for the killing, reported our Kushtia correspondent.

He said they killed him for his involvement with criminal activities in the locality. Police said Hadu was once accused in at least four murder cases during the Awami League regime.

Int'l trade fair

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President and Chief Adviser of the caretaker government Iajuddin Ahmed will inaugurate the month-long trade fair on Sher-e-Bangla Nagar DITF ground.

A total of 418 companies including 53 foreign firms from seven countries will display their products at the 12th version of the annual extravaganza.

Malaysia is the 'large-scale' participant while other foreign participants are firms from India, Iran, Pakistan, Singapore, Thailand, and the USA.

Twenty-two countries took part in the DITF in 2002. The next year, the number went down to 20, followed by 16 in 2004 and only 10 last year.

Besides, the number of foreign buyers this year would be the lowest since 2002 and this might affect their main target that is to reach Bangladeshi products to the foreign buyers, Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) officials said.

The EPB officials said so far buyers from only two countries, Malaysia and Nepal, have expressed their interest to attend the fair.

Last year four trade associations from China, Pakistan and Myanmar sent their representatives to visit the DITF.

The DITF was launched in 1995 and its main objective was to attract the foreign buyers to promote exportable goods produced in Bangladesh. After a few successful events the number of foreign participants started to decline.

The organisers said they had to change the fair schedule due to 'unavoidable circumstances.'

"We have sent invitation to more than 50 countries through Bangladesh's foreign missions abroad. Still we are negotiating with many countries to send buyers. We hope the number will increase," said a high official of the EPB.

There will be 10 premier pavilions, 35 premier stalls, 46 pavilions, 240 general stalls and 10 restaurants, he added.

Tickets will be available at the entrance at Tk 10 for adults and Tk 5 for infants.

The fair to be concluded on January 2 will remain open to visitors from 10:00am to 9:00pm on weekdays and from 10:00am to 10:00pm on holidays.

Khaleda, Hasina

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made in the past is to think that when one party wins majority seats in the parliament the other party disappears or become devoid public support. It is this mistake, repeated over and over, that made both the BNP and the AL to ignore each other when either of them came to power. This mutual ignoring lies at the root of most of our present political problems. Even in 2001, when BNP and its allies got two third majority seats in the parliament, the AL had gotten 41 per cent of popular votes. BNP totally ignored this fact.

This is not really the time to recount how the BNP or the AL has repeatedly gone wrong. This is the time to spell out how they can finally get it right. Therefore our ardent appeal to both the leaders is that please do not continue to live in the world as if the other does not exist.

Khaleda Zia is wrong when she says election should go ahead without regard to which party comes to the elections (meaning the AL) and which party does not. An election without the AL will not be a credible one and it will neither be acceptable to the nation nor to the international community.

Sheikh Hasina is wrong when she says that she will impose indefinite blockade till her demands are met. A blockade harms the very people she hopes to represent, and an indefinite blockade makes it infinitely worse.

Therefore the first thing we urge both the leaders to remember during their talks with the President/CA that they cannot ignore the other. We understand that both leaders have their points of view, they have a huge list of complaints against the other, and that they have made many unkind remarks about each other. We also understand that over the years they have become personally bitter about each other. We also understand that all their political problems, including personal issues, cannot be solved in today's meeting. We understand all that.

However, they must also understand that howsoever they may feel about each other, how ever far apart their views might be and whatever their political differences may be, in the final analysis they are LEADERS OF THE PEOPLE and they MUST LISTEN to what the PEOPLE WANT. And the plain truth is people are SICK and TIRED of the political bickering of these two leaders. They are tired of the attempts to manipulate the election; they are tired of the corruption and the presence of criminals among the lawmakers and political workers. They are also tired of the blockades, hartals and disruption of normal life. Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina can stop all this and they must stop all this-if they have any feelings for the people they claim to speak for.

Therefore the need of the moment is to compromise. Each of them will have to move away from their entrenched positions. Each of them will have to understand that the points of view of the other side have some merit and that neither of them enjoys either the monopoly of truth or of virtues. They both have made mistakes, severe mistakes at that, for which we the people have been paying dearly.

Nepal's new anthem

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aspirations without praising any individual and institution" -- including the increasingly isolated King Gyanendra.

"We are Nepali the only garland with hundreds of flowers. Extended, being sovereign, from Mechi to Mahakali," the first two lines of the song were quoted as reading.

"We have submitted the song to the government. Now the government will make a final decision on the national anthem," Joshi explained. "The tune for the song will be composed later after the government approves the anthem."

Nepal's current national anthem lauds the monarchy with the lines: "May glory crown you, courageous Sovereign ... His Majesty the King, our glorious ruler, may he live for many years to come."

But the king, revered by many as a Hindu deity, has lost some of his popularity in recent years and stands on shaky ground following a landmark peace deal between the fiercely-republican Maoist rebels and the current coalition government.

The accord, signed last week, brings an end to the Maoists' 10-year-old "People's War" and will allow them to enter parliament and government.

It also stipulates elections for a body that will rewrite the constitution -- and decide whether the king can stay or go.

King Gyanendra was forced to give up his dictatorial powers after massive protests in April. A month later, parliament called for a new national anthem.

Meanwhile, Nepal's government and Maoist rebels missed a deadline Friday for forming an interim government but said the seven-month-old peace process was on track.

The two sides must complete the drafting of a temporary constitution before the rebels can join the government.

"Intensive discussions are being held with the Maoists to finalize the interim constitution. The Maoists will join the government only after the constitution is formulated," said Pradeep

CA invites

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could be brought to the declared election schedule," Alam said, but declined to provide any detail of the specific recommendations, saying, "It would not be right to say this in advance because of the confusion it might create."

"We have requested the EC to consider changing and adjusting the election schedule so that it can be accepted by all," Mahbubul Alam said.

The information adviser however did not make any direct comment on the scheduled blockade called by 14-party coalition. "Let's wait and see," he said, "Let's hope for the best."

This initiative followed the president's move on Wednesday night to send his adviser Mokhlesur Rahman as an emissary to both Hasina and Khaleda to invite them to a dialogue in an effort to end the ongoing political crisis.

AL-ed 14-party coalition is scheduled to impose a countrywide blockade from tomorrow. Three similar blockades had been earlier imposed by the coalition in the past month bringing the entire country to a grinding halt.

14-party threatened the blockade last Monday protesting the announcement of the election schedule by the EC, and demanding rescheduling of the upcoming

election and removal of 'controversial' election commissioners.

The coalition also gave an ultimatum to the president and CA on Thursday to resign from the post of the CA by today and to appoint a non-partisan individual to the post in his place, otherwise he is to face resumption of an indefinite country-wide blockade.

Pressure had been mounting on the caretaker government chief in the past week after a number of his advisers spoke out against the appointments of two new election commissioners by him without consulting the council of advisers.

The demands of 14-party also include functioning of the CG in accordance with collective decisions of the advisory council, cancellation of 300 "politically appointed" upazila election officers, temporary suspension of those officials found to be involved in the surreptitious gathering at Uttara in the capital and an impartial investigation of the incident.

United States Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, and Craig Jenness, visiting special envoy from United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, also stressed in the past week that the two major political parties need to put aside their differences and sit in a dialogue.

BNP top brass

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started distributing the nomination forms and announced the dates for taking interview of the nomination seekers. The party will finalise its candidates through interviews within December 15, sources said.

Following Thursday's incident at the Supreme Court, "hard-line" BNP leaders are trying to keep pressure on the president and chief adviser to take punitive action against those who create "anarchy and chaos" in the name of political programme.

They are also trying to convince the party high-ups that they could face the 14-party in the street.

Strongly criticising the vandalism at Supreme Court on Thursday, Khandaker Mosharraf said Awami League does not want election and so it is trying to destroy all the institutions including the caretaker government, Election Commission and judiciary.

"If the election is not held in time, the country will face constitutional crisis. It can even