

100 hurt as hartal paralyses Rangpur over Ershad's fate

STAR REPORT

Fierce clashes between police and activists of Awami League-led grand alliance marked the dawn-to-dusk hartal called by the alliance in Rangpur and Lalmonirhat districts yesterday while the hartal in Kurigram, Gaibandha and Nilphamari districts passed off almost peacefully.

Half-day hartal was also observed at Sylhet-3 and Habiganj-3 constituencies.

At least 100 people including police, activists and leaders of the grand alliance and journalists were injured in a series of clashes at different places in Rangpur town during the hartal hours, reports our Rangpur correspondent.

The grand alliance called the hartal yesterday to protest the cancellation of nomination papers of Jatiya Party (JP) chief HM Ershad.

Police along with armed police from Jyurhat and BDR led by Magistrate Iqbal Hossain, Moniruzzaman and Israil brought

the situation under control after three hours.

Army men were deployed at the deputy commissioner's office. They, however, did not go into any action.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Khandker Atiar Rahman and other officials hurriedly left their offices in their jeeps as the mob turned violent after the police action, witnesses said.

The injured include former lawmaker and JP Joint Secretary Moshir Rahman Ranga, Rangpur Municipality Chairman and Vice President of JP's district unit Abdur Rouf Manik, former joint secretary of district AL Mosaddeque Hosen Bablu, former organising secretary Delwar Hosen Talukder and JP Secretary of the sadar upazila unit Mostafizur Rahman.

At least 30 activists and leaders of the grand alliance were admitted to the Rangpur Medical College Hospital and different private clinics.

During the three-hour long clashes that raged within two sq km of the Rangpur DC office, police fired a few blank shots, 300 rounds of rubber bullet, 150 rounds of tear gas shell and indiscriminately charged baton to disperse the agitating mob.

Officer-in-Charge of Kotwali Police Station Zahidul Islam said police chased the activists of the grand alliance when they threw bricks injuring thirty policemen.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 4



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Policemen thrash a Jatiya Party activist during the dawn-to-dusk hartal in Rangpur yesterday.

AL CANDIDATURE Grassroots resent tickets to allies

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

A section of mid- and grassroots-level leaders of Awami League (AL) are increasingly becoming frustrated over the party's preference for nominating candidates from its allies, who they fear have a lower chance of victory in safe AL seats.

Party insiders also observed a fear of losing even more seats because of the decision to nominate wealthier and influential candidates, who have hardly visited their constituencies in recent years, over those who enjoy grassroots support and are more likely to win.

The frustration spilled onto the streets across the nation yesterday as angry supporters of potential but

ignored AL aspirants burst into violence in Khulna, Barisal, Mymensingh, Kishoreganj and Jamalpur.

Meanwhile, the AL nominations board has initiated a process to change some 30-40 candidates in a last-minute reshuffle. The changes are to come following protracted negotiations with the nominees and continuing protests both in their constituencies and in front of Sudha Sadan in Dhaka as there are several AL candidates for each of at least 100 seats.

Some AL nominations have already been changed due to intense pressure from within the party and its alliance. AL President Sheikh Hasina herself initiated a

SEE PAGE 14 COL 7

BNP NOMINATION Aggrieved left-outs clash with rivals

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

More and more BNP activists staged protests in the last couple of days, sometimes locking in violent clashes with rivals within the party, in different parts of the country defying their party nominees as their leaders did not get the tickets to run for the upcoming election.

There have been reports of internal clashes and demonstrations against BNP nominations and filing of nomination papers against party candidates in a number of constituencies in Narshingdi, Chuadanga, Khulna, Kishoreganj, Mymensingh, Jhalokathi, Jessore, Chandpur, Kushtia and Manikganj.

The BNP leadership fears that more violent protests might follow

after the party announces the final list of candidates.

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan hoped all rebel leaders would withdraw their nomination papers and work together for the four-party alliance candidates in the election.

A group of leaders and supporters of Narshingdi 1 constituency demonstrated against their Secretary General Bhuiyan with brooms and burnt his effigy. Bhuiyan had been nominated by BNP for Narshingdi 1 and 2. The supporters of rebel leaders and Bhuiyan hurled bricks at each other and engaged in chase-counter chase with truncheons

SEE PAGE 14 COL 1

WAZIULLAH MURDER Brother files case against Tarique, Babar, cops

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Brother of Awami League (AL) leader Waziullah, who died on November 13 during the blockade programmes, yesterday filed a murder case against BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar and a few other policemen.

In his complaint, Sattar, Waziullah's brother, said that he came to know from a reliable source that Babar sent a wireless message to deputy commissioner Kohinor on Tarique's orders asking him to take stringent action against the AL activists attending a procession near Saarc Fountain intersection at Karwan Bazar in the capital on that day.

According to the complainant, Waziullah, AL publicity secretary of unit 2 of the party under ward no 37, died after he was run over by a police van when policemen and members of the Armed Police

SEE PAGE 19 COL 6

Japan welcomes recent political developments in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government of Japan has welcomed the recent political development in Bangladesh where all major political parties expressed their willingness to participate in the upcoming general elections.

In a statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo on Tuesday, the Japanese government hopes that the forthcoming election will be held in a free and fair manner with the participation of all political parties.



PHOTO: STAR

People heading for their home outside Dhaka to spend Eid with their families cram into the top deck of a launch at Sadarghat in Dhaka although carrying passengers on the top deck is prohibited.

NOMINATION REJECTION Ershad files appeal with EC today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad will file appeal with the Election Commission (EC) today challenging the validity of the returning officers' (RO) decisions rejecting his nomination papers for five constituencies.

"We will file appeal with the Election Commission tomorrow. Our lawyers are preparing for the legal battle," JP Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hawlader told The Daily Star yesterday.

Nine candidates, whose nomination papers were rejected on different grounds, filed appeal with the EC yesterday, the first day of filing appeal against the RO's decision.

The ROs on Wednesday rejected 264 nomination papers due to loan defaults and other disqualifying factors.

As per the election laws, a candidate can appeal against rejection of his or her nomination papers within three days. On receiving the appeals, the EC will start disposing those from December 31.

The candidate can also move

SEE PAGE 19 COL 7

EVOLVING POLLS SITUATION

Grand alliance to decide today if it would contest

Hasina to talk to the press

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) led grand alliance will announce today its decision whether to participate in the next parliamentary elections under the circumstances when the caretaker government is allegedly using the administration and law enforcement agencies against the alliance.

AL President Sheikh Hasina will announce the alliance's crucial decision at a joint press conference in the presence of top alliance leaders, said AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at a press briefing at the Dhanmondi AL office yesterday.

"President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed with directions

from the BNP-Jamaat alliance is leading the current situation towards a direction that will force us to take any rigid stance," Jalil, also 14-party coordinator, said.

Sources said Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, Liberal Democratic Party President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, and other key leaders of the grand alliance will be present at Hasina's press briefing.

The AL top leaders yesterday discussed the latest political development with Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence. They will sit today morning to finalise the strategy to be declared.

Following declaration of Ershad's all five nomination papers

invalid, the top leaders of the AL-led grand alliance began backtracking from their decision to contest the January 22 polls.

Jalil said Ershad's nominations were cancelled without showing any proper grounds and following rules and regulations.

Sources said almost all top leaders of the alliance are sure that the caretaker government and the administration will work for the BNP-Jamaat alliance.

Talking to The Daily Star, many AL candidates alleged that the field level administration is not cooperating with them.

"We think the atmosphere is not congenial yet for a free and fair

SEE PAGE 19 COL 1

12 EU election observers arrive Sunday

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Twelve European Union long-term election observers (LTOs) will arrive in Dhaka on Sunday for the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place on January 22.

They will join the EU election observation mission's (EOM's) core team of ten election experts, who arrived in Bangladesh on December 17. The mission is being led by Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, a member of the European Parliament from Germany, said a press release.

After extensive briefing by the core team in Dhaka on January 1, a team of two observers will be deployed in Barisal, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions each on January 2. One team will remain in Dhaka.

Over the next few weeks, the

SEE PAGE 19 COL 5

Jamal, 2 others' nomination valid despite BB report on loan default

STAR REPORT

The Returning Officer's Office of Barisal did not disqualify the nomination papers of former BNP whip Shahidul Huq Jamal and two other candidates even though a Bangladesh Bank (BB) report listed them as loan defaulters, our Barisal correspondent reports.

In Gazipur, two AL leaders sent a letter to the chief election commissioner yesterday asking him to disqualify a four-party candidate on the grounds of him being a loan defaulter.

The Returning Officer's Office of Barisal cancelled 13 nomination

SEE PAGE 19 COL 7

HC orders not to harass Shamim Osman Supporters foil 'arrest attempt'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Supporters of Awami League (AL) leader and former lawmaker Shamim Osman foiled an alleged police attempt to arrest the leader at his Chashara home in Narayanganj early yesterday.

The supporters of Shamim brought out a victory procession in the town yesterday afternoon following a High Court order to the administration telling it not to arrest Shamim without an arrest warrant and to stop harassing him. Shamim had filed a petition earlier in this regard with the High Court.

Tension ran high in the area around 1:00am yesterday as over one thousand supporters of Shamim started chanting slogans after the police arrived in Chashara area.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 3

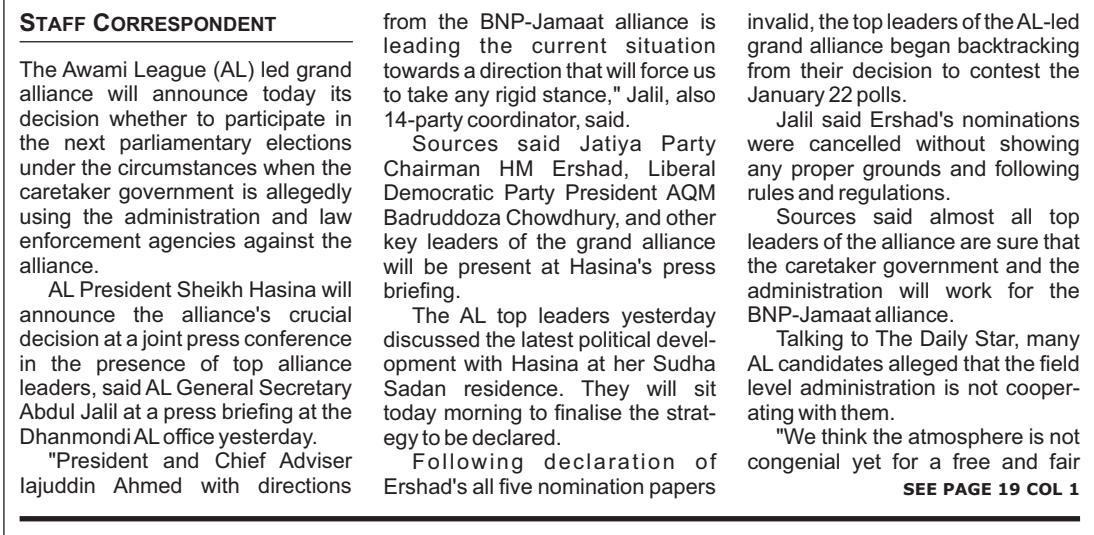


PHOTO: STAR

Barrels of oil used in transformers as coolants are kept on the yard inside the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority office at Kataban in the capital.

News analysis Politics rule attorney general's office

STAR REPORT

The Attorney General's Office (AGO) goes into overdrive, speeding up or slowing down some court orders for the Election Commission (EC) to capitalise on the dubious moves that curiously suit the purpose of the BNP-led alliance.

Of late, judgement copies are either being sent overnight from the court or being delayed by weeks apparently to upset the execution process. Observers credit the erratic pace of the AGO to its office bearers, most of whom are directly involved with the BNP and Jamaat politics.

The Japanese boat purchase graft case against HM Ershad and the stay order by Supreme Court freeing the election candidate from the obligation to disclose personal

details to the EC are the two most recent controversial instances.

The AGO was also found all too hyperactive on November 30 when it put three writ petitions to rest that challenged Professor Iajuddin to become the caretaker government chief. "I haven't seen such an active role of the AG office in my whole legal stint," remarked a very senior lawyer after that unprecedented incident.

In contrast, the court order rejecting the appeal of top seven JMB leaders against their death sentence (upheld by the HC) could not find its way to the jail authorities even one month into the ruling.

Curiously, the AGO runs out of gas in such an important case filed after two judges in Jhalakathi were

SEE PAGE 19 COL 1

Hartal observed in Khulna-Jessore industrial area

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A daylong hartal was observed in Khulna and Jessore industrial areas yesterday in response to a call by a Jatiya Party election candidate to woo jute mill workers.

Abdul Gaffar Biswas, convener of Regional Transport Owners and Workers Association who filed nomination paper from Khulna-3 (Khalishpur-Daulatpur) constituency as a JP candidate, gave the call on Wednesday night, expressing solidarity with the ongoing agitation of over 20,000 workers and employees of eight state-owned jute mills in Khulna and Jessore industrial areas.

He also threatened hartal in entire southwestern region if eight-point demand of the workers and employees of the state-owned jute mills was not met.

The demands include payment of all arrears including Eid bonus, reopening of all closed Jute mills,

SEE PAGE 19 COL 6