

Grand alliance

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election as the administration, Election Commission, police and Rab are working against the Awami League-led grand alliance, "AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader told The Daily Star.

At yesterday's press conference, Jalil alleged that leaders and activists of the AL-led grand alliance have been killed, arrested, tortured and harassed by the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police across the country ahead of the elections.

He also alleged that no action has been taken against the BNP-Jamaat cadres "who killed 26,000 people and resorted to a reign of terror across the country".

The AL high command had decided to participate in the election despite strong opposition from most party policymakers.

"Taking part in the election will be suicidal for us as it is clear that all electoral organs—from the caretaker government to the field level administration including the Election Commission and police—are working to favour the BNP-Jamaat alliance," a top AL policymaker said.

He also pointed out that the package proposal of the caretaker government has not been implemented fully yet.

Another AL leader, who earlier supported the party decision on taking part in the election, said yesterday, "After the latest development, most of us are now in favour of boycotting the election."

Sources in the alliance, however, said the top leaders are now in a dilemma over taking the crucial decision.

"The party high command has the faith that the party candidates will withdraw nomination papers if the party decides to boycott the election," the AL leader said.

"But, then we will have to mobilise people so that they also boycott the election and move to resist any conspiracy to hold a unilateral election to re-elect BNP and Jamaat," he added.

AL BRIEFING

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at a press briefing at the party's Dhanmondi office said the BNP-Jamaat coalition is worried to see mass awakening for the grand alliance after his alliance submitted nomination papers.

That is why the coalition has been trying to impede the process of creating a level playing field by using the President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed as their tool, explained Jalil.

Jalil accused Iajuddin of further politicising the administration to hold a blueprint election in favour of the BNP-Jamaat coalition.

He said the CA did not implement the package proposals even after he signed the proposals -- resulting in the resignation of four advisers.

"...afterwards, we decided to take part in the election. But after filing of the nominations, the chief adviser, being controlled by the BNP-Jamaat remote control, is taking the situation in their favour. As such, the nation believes that a free and fair election under his command is not possible."

"He (CA) is trying to deprive the people of their voting rights by pushing the elections into unfaithful uncertainty. Under these circumstances, our stance is clear -- we want a free and fair election. And for this, a congenial atmosphere will have to be created," Jalil added.

The AL second-in-command said if the president continues implementing the election engineering plot of BNP-Jamaat rather than

creating a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election, he must have to quit the office of the CA and appoint a non-partisan person as the CA.

People do not want an election where votes will be stolen. They want a free and fair election through which their judgement would be reflected, the AL leader said adding that they would forge tougher agitations for fair polls.

2 AL men hurt in bomb attacks in Chuadanga

UNB, Chuadanga

Two local Awami League (AL) leaders were injured in bomb attacks on Wednesday night.

Unknown assailants threw a bomb on Moinul Islam when he was sitting in a tea stall at Hardi Bazar in Alamdanga upazila, leaving him seriously injured.

Another bomb attack was made on Advocate Malek in front of his house in Chuadanga town.

Both of them were admitted to the Sadar Hospital.

Awami League at protest rally in the town yesterday accused BNP cadres of the bomb attacks and demanded immediate arrest and punishment to the culprits.

Head-banging snakes may predict China quakes

REUTERS, Beijing

China has come up with an earthquake prediction system which relies on the behaviour of snakes, state media said yesterday, two days after two quakes struck off neighbouring Taiwan.

The earthquake bureau in Nanning, capital of the Guangxi autonomous region in southern China, had developed its system using a combination of natural instinct and modern technology, the China Daily newspaper said.

Experts at the bureau monitor snakes at local snake farms via video cameras linked to a broadband Internet connection. The video feed runs 24 hours per day.

"Of all the creatures on Earth, snakes are perhaps the most sensitive to earthquakes," bureau director Jiang Weisong was quoted as saying.

Jiang said snakes, a popular restaurant dish in the south in the winter, could sense an earthquake from 120 km (70 miles) away, three to five days before it happens. They respond by behaving strangely.

"When an earthquake is about to occur, snakes will move out of their nests, even in the cold of winter," Jiang was quoted as saying.

"If the earthquake is a big one, the snakes will even smash into walls while trying to escape."

China is struck by frequent earthquakes, with most hitting remote rural areas.

Two people were killed and 42 injured on Tuesday when three buildings collapsed in earthquakes that shook southern Taiwan.

While a tsunami warning came to nothing, the quake damaged under-sea telecommunication cables, affecting users across Asia.

Politics rule

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bombed to death by the JMB.

The HC ordered the EC earlier this year to update the voter list as per the 2000 roll. Though the court asked for execution of the ruling urgently, the order did not reach the EC in the next few weeks. It usually takes about 15 days for a court order to reach its destination, if not intervened by the AGO.

The Appellate Division last week rejected an appeal of Ershad against the December 14 verdict by High Court in which he was asked to surrender to the lower court for corruption in purchase of the Japanese boat.

The legal developments involving Ershad took the reverse course in the last few months when he was dilly-dallying the decision to join the alliance led by the BNP.

Ershad was acquitted in five decade-old graft cases in August and September amid outcry from all and sundry. At that time, the BNP-led alliance was in power and Ershad was all set to join the 4-party coalition.

But as soon as Ershad decided to join the Awami League-led 14-party alliance, the flow of legal system suddenly started to go against him. On December 14, the high court upheld a decade-old lower court verdict in which the former dictator was convicted.

The EC came into play after Ershad submitted his nomination papers in five constituencies. The Returning Officers (ROs) were supposed to scrutinise his nomination Wednesday. And they had no reason to reject Ershad's nomination unless they had a specific court

HC orders

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The supporters encircled Shamim's home, Heeramahal, and barricaded all roads leading to the leader's home to prevent his arrest.

They had set up barricades on roads in Chashara, Fatulla and Siddhirganj areas in Narayanganj town since Tuesday night following an announcement from a local mosque that law enforcers were trying to arrest Shamim.

Talking to journalists, Shamim said the attempts to arrest him were part of a conspiracy against him but it failed in the face of public protest.

However, Officer-in-charge of Narayanganj Police Station Moin Uddin denied police went to arrest Shamim.

He said, "Police went to the area at night to ask the demonstrators to dismantle the road barricades."

Ending a five-year self-exile, Shamim returned to Narayanganj and submitted his nomination papers on Tuesday. But his return was overshadowed by reports of police attempting to arrest him.

Meanwhile, Narayanganj BNP condemned Shamim Osman and his cadres' activities.

In a statement, district BNP Office Secretary Zannatul Ferdous said Shamim's cadres humiliated the freedom fighters by vandalising a Liberation War memorial -- Bijoy Stamba -- in Chashara as BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan had inaugurated it.

Shooting

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at Aziz Cooperative Super Market at Shahbagh from Shyampur.

Three youths riding a motorbike stopped by the microbus when it was caught in a traffic jam near Dhupkhola playground in Sutrapur and "...two of them started shooting at the vehicle indiscriminately at around 10:30am," the duty officer of Sutrapur Police Station said quoting witnesses. Window glasses of the vehicle were shattered in the shooting.

The criminals fled the scene moments later firing blank shots. Police suspect dispute over financial transactions or business rivalries may be the cause of the attack.

Police could not arrest anyone till filing of this report at 8:00pm.

Neither Nazma nor Gulshan police could say how Safia suffered the wounds. However, sources at Dhaka Medical College morgue said stab injuries were found in her throat.

Meanwhile, Jatrabari police recovered the body of an unidentified man from Matuail Canal yesterday.

On information, police rushed to the scene and found the body with his hands and legs tied with electric wire.

Police said the criminals strangled him and then dumped the body into the canal. They could not arrest any of the criminals as of 7:00pm yesterday.

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100 hurt as hartal

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Eyewitnesses, on the other hand, said the clash erupted at about 11:00am when police from the District Collector Building lobbed tear gas shells on a big procession of the grand alliance that was heading towards the DC office.

As police entered the houses of New Engineer Para, Kerani Para, and Kotkipara chasing the activists of the grand alliance, the law enforcers got locked into clashes with the locals.

At one stage police entered the Rangpur office of The Daily Pratham Alo at the court square. When The Daily Pratham Alo staff correspondent Anifur Haque Ruju, and photographer Litu Anam tried to resist them, police beat them up.

From early in the morning the activists of the grand alliance started picketing at different points of Rangpur town.

Agitating people dismantled railway line at Lalbagh under sadar upazila and Shyampur under Badarganj upazila.

Picketers kept halted Teesta Intercity Express at Badarganj station and two local trains at Rangpur station.

There was little vehicular movement while banks, commercial centres, educational institutions and government and non-government offices remained closed in Rangpur town and seven upazilas during the hartal hours.

At a rally at the Jahaj Company intersection in the afternoon, the grand alliance leaders urged the returning officers of five districts concerned to accept the nomination papers of Ershad.

LALMONIRHAT
At least 12 people were injured in a clash between JP and BNP workers at 11:30am yesterday in Mazar area and Khuniya Gachh under Lalmonirhat sadar upazila, reports our Lalmonirhat correspondent.

Seriously injured JP workers Azizur Rahman, 36, Nur Jamal, 40, and BNP workers Khalil, 32, Gamad, 42, and Jobed Ali, 26, were admitted to the hospital.

Hartal supporters vandalised three motorcycles on Dak Bangla road in the town, at Chaparhat under Kailigen upazila and at Barokhata under Hatibandha upazila.

Vehicular movement in the district remained completely

stopped during the hartal.

JP activists stopped an intercity train at Bamondanga railway station in the morning. They also stopped five trains at Lalmonirhat railway station, one at Bawra station and one at Kaunia station.

KURIGRAM
The hartal called by the grand alliance was observed peacefully in the nine upazilas of the district, reports our Kurigram correspondent.

With stoppage of public transport and closure of most of the shops and commercial organisations, life came to a standstill.

GAIBANDHA
AL-led alliance activists paraded the main road of the town and held a protest procession during the hartal yesterday, our Gaibandha correspondent reports.

The hartal was also observed in Nilphamari district.

SYLHET
Pickets yesterday damaged 14 vehicles at Dakshin Surma during the half-day hartal that was called to raise protest against the cancellation of the nomination paper filed by the JP chief HM Ershad for Sylhet-3 constituency (Dakshin Surma and Fenchuganj), reports our staff correspondent from Sylhet.

The vehicles include, bus, truck, CNG run auto rickshaw and private car. No inter district or upazila linked bus departed or came to the central bus terminal during the hartal hours.

However, the half-day hartal passed off almost peacefully at Habiganj-3 constituency (Habiganj Sadar and Lakhai).

500 passengers will be added to almost every train to meet the increased demand of the passengers, said the Bangladesh Railway sources.

Besides, a special train with a capacity of 500 passengers will also ply between Dhaka and Dewanganj, the sources added.

SAYEDABAD
ANM Mujibullah Naser, general secretary of Sayedabad Terminal Bus Owners' Association, told The Daily Star that they have decided to ply extra city-service buses on different routes considering the need of the homebound passengers.

"We also decided to deploy 100 volunteers at different spots from Sayedabad to Jatrabari to reduce traffic jam," Naser added.

Defending the exorbitant fares, he said they are bound to do so to overcome losses as the buses return empty from the other side of the routes.

Hartal

FROM PAGE 1
reinstatement of retrenched workers and employees and allocation of fund for purchasing raw Jute.

Khulna District Auto-rickshaw Sramik Union has also expressed its solidarity with the movement of Jute mill workers and employees.

Advisory council

FROM PAGE 20
The power ministry placed the proposal for transforming the BPDB into a holding company as part of reform of the problem-ridden power sector.

The meeting decided to form a high-level committee to identify the problems with the non-profitable jute mills in the public sector and make recommendation for bailing those out.

Advisers to the caretaker government attended the meeting. Cabinet Secretary Ali Imam Majumder and other secretaries concerned were present.

Brother files case

FROM PAGE 1
Battalion started to club the demonstrators mercilessly on orders from Kohinor.

Following the incident, a sub-inspector of Ramna police station filed a criminal case accusing an unknown truck driver the same day.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullal Bahui recorded the complainant's statement, took the complaint into cognisance and directed the officer-in-charge of Ramna police to merge the complaint with previous case filed by the police and investigate the matter jointly.

The other accused in the yesterday's case are deputy commissioners (DCs) of police Kohinor Miah and Aurangzeb Mahubb, additional deputy commissioners (ADCs) Ishrail and Abul Khair and assistant commissioners (ACs) Taherul Chowhan and Gaus Uddin and more than 100 unknown policemen.

Iraqi civilians

FROM PAGE 20
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Two soldiers died and another was wounded southwest of Baghdad on Wednesday during a security patrol on a well-travelled route, the military said.

Another soldier was killed and two more were wounded in an eastern section of Baghdad on Wednesday, said a separate statement.

With 99 American troops dead so far this month, December is the second-deadliest month of 2006 for US military personnel. A total of 105 troops died in October.

"This has been a difficult month for coalition forces," Maj Gen William Caldwell, a spokesman for US forces in Iraq, said Wednesday.

"And the month is not over yet," Caldwell said. "Our deepest condolences to those families and friends who've lost someone near and dear to them."

At least 2,986 members of the US military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. The figure includes seven military civilians. At least 2,391 died as a result of hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

Iraqi forces backed by US troops captured an al-Qaeda in Iraq terror cell leader south of Baghdad, the US military said. The suspect, who was detained Tuesday, is believed responsible for kidnapping two American soldiers from a checkpoint in June, the military said. The soldiers were later found tortured and murdered.

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