

Govt, AL stick to guns as deadline ends today

REAZ AHMAD

The Awami League's (AL) one-month ultimatum to meet its 15-point demand expires today with the BNP-led ruling coalition remaining indifferent and the main opposition party's stand getting toughened.

AL policy planners are likely to meet on Friday to finalise fresh programmes to dislodge the government as the current phase of its agitation ends with the scheduled hartal on Thursday. The fresh programmes might be announced immediately after the meeting, a policy planner said yesterday.

The party is now having dialogues with like-minded opposition parties to forge greater unity of anti-government forces. The process will continue, party sources said.

AL President Sheikh Hasina gave the ultimatum to meet the 15-point demand from a January 10

rally in the capital. The demands include checking the downside in law and order and price hike of essentials.

Late last year, AL General Secretary Abdul Jallil had said there would be a changeover of power by April this year amidst a mass upsurge. Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the opposition, along with 57 party lawmakers has been boycotting parliament for eight months now.

Parliament also witnessed a stormy walkout by lawmakers belonging to second largest opposition party -- Jatiya Party (Ershad) -- on Sunday as the government on Friday barred party chief HM Ershad from going abroad on a private tour without showing any reason.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, AL Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury expressed utter disappointment that the government showed total indifference

to the demands placed before it by the main opposition party.

"The government's non-response is also a response and we'll react accordingly," he asserted.

AL sources pointed out the government ignored the ultimatum, pushing their party to go for the hartal on Thursday despite the business community's appeal to avert the shutdown.

Saber, also political secretary to Hasina, said AL would always welcome any idea of "alternatives to hartal" from the business community. He however said, "As they (business leaders) wrote to us calling for shunning hartal programme, I think they should also write to the prime minister seeking effective steps to check downside in law and order that is badly affecting the business environment."

JS extension plan on hold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is reconsidering its plan to add 150 more seats to the 300-seat Jatiya Sangsad in the wake of widespread criticism in and outside the ruling alliance, political sources said.

Top leaders of the ruling four-party alliance at a meeting on January 14 took the plan and said the constitution would be amended in the ongoing session to implement the decision.

"The scheme has been put on

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Integrated transport policy decided

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday decided to prepare an 'integrated transport policy', identifying the problems facing land, air, river and rail transports.

The cabinet made the decision at a meeting presided over by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia held at her office. Cabinet members and

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Nightmare in Noakhali

Six-year saga of rape, murder, loot haunts locals

MD NURUL AMIN,
from Noakhali

Bandits in the coastal forest areas of south-western Noakhali terrorised locals through a frenzy of rape, murder, loot and plunder of forest resources spanning over a period of nearly six years.

Names like Nababchora, Bashar Majhi, Shafi Batannia, Jahangir Majhi, Soleman Commander -- bandit chiefs who were once collaborators of dishonest forest officials in pilferage of precious forest resources -- would send a chill down the spine of ordinary villagers.

The gangs of robbers they led comprised primarily of petty criminals and extremely impoverished villagers who started off mainly as timber smugglers in collusion with corrupt forest officials but eventually came at loggerheads with the foresters over share of booty.

Gradually, they developed a strong network throughout the region by dividing their area of

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Villagers bay for blood of forest bandits in coastal areas of Noakhali during an anti-crime operation there in December last year.

PHOTO: STAR

J u s t - repaired roads ready for digging

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

After carrying out expensive repairs, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is now going to allow service providers to dig up about 13,643 square metres of the newly repaired road surface.

DCC officials said they had 'no option' but to permit digging of the newly repaired roads for the sake of 'development'.

The repairs were made in the last six months under the Dhaka Urban Transport Project using 'expensive' materials and were expected to last long, Nagar Bhaban sources said.

The decision to allow Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Co, Dhaka Wasa, Desa and several other service providers will hamper traffic movement on several major city roads, including Purana Paltan Road, Rajuk Road, Gulshan-Mahakali Link Road, Shaheed Tajuddin Road and some in Motijheel Commercial Area, DCC sources said.

In Motijheel, Titas Gas alone will excavate more than 7,800 square metres of road surface.

A DCC official said: "We have decided not to permit any digging from August to October." But, sources said, although the DCC was realising hefty caution money from service providers concerned for repairing dug-up roads, they were sure the digging would continue or ditches would be left waiting for compaction throughout the rainy season. Thousands of commuters will suffer due to this, they added.

DCC officials were particularly worried about the digging by Dhaka Wasa, which they said 'never' completed its work in time. Recently and for the first time, the city corporation has frozen the entire caution money deposited by Wasa for digging in the old city.

The DCC engineers will soon receive Tk 45 crore from its revenue budget to start repairing 570

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DIT Extension Road in Motijheel is one of the busy thoroughfares caught up in an endless cycle of road digging for installation of underground utility cables.

JP too kicks off JS boycott

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party (JP) began an indefinite boycott of parliament yesterday, a day after its lawmakers walked out of it in protest at a government bar on their party chief from flying abroad.

The decision to stay out of parliament proceedings, taken at a JP's parliamentary party (JPPP) meeting coincided with the main opposition Awami League's boycott of the eighth parliament since June last year.

At the Sangsad Bhaban meeting, the second largest opposition party decided not to return to parliament until it gets protection from the House and the remarks by

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda and Prime Minister's Parliamentary Affairs Advisor Salauddin Quader Chowdhury against the former president are erased from the House's proceedings.

The party also took a resolution criticising the government for stopping its chairman at Zia International Airport from visiting Sri Lanka and the Maldives on Friday.

"A party presidium meeting will decide how long we will continue our boycott," senior JP lawmaker Tim Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury told reporters.

REMARKS

Rabbi, presiding over the JPPP

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Asian nuke rivals' no to NPT

AFF, Munich

India and Pakistan pledged to work to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction but reiterated that neither would sign up to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT).

"There is no hope ... that India will sign the NPT, but India is prepared to join the international community to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction," said Brajesh Mishra, India's national security advisor.

Mishra also said that India needed more nuclear power plants to produce extra electricity in the coming years, possibly as much as 200,000 megawatts in the long-term.

Speaking with Mishra at the close of a security conference here, Pakistani Foreign Minister Mian

Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri said that his country would do its utmost to limit the spread of nuclear weapons.

"We will fulfil the non-proliferation requirements there is no question about that," he said. "It is not something that is in our interest that proliferation takes place."

Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in May 1998 in a tit-for-tat response to similar detonations by India.

Pakistan has been embroiled in a scandal involving a top scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan, known as the father of the nuclear bomb there.

He confessed to passing nuclear secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea and publicly begged the nation's forgiveness. Khan has since been pardoned.

8 die, 48 injured in road crashes

STAR REPORT

Eight people died and 48 others were injured, eight critically, in road accidents in Dhaka, Pirojpur and Rangpur in the last 48 hours till 9:30 last night.

Three people were killed and eight others critically injured in Dhaka when three three-wheelers and five rickshaws fell from Postogola Bridge to the slope near the bridge after a truck pushed them last night.

Two of the victims died on the spot. None of the dead aged between 20 and 22 or the injured could be identified immediately.

Fire Brigade and police officials said the incident took place at around 8:45pm when the unidentified speeding truck pushed the vehicles.

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Kamal speaks of agitation to free nation of misery

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gano Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain has said agitation programmes will be announced from a national convention in the capital on March 14 to force the government to curb corruption and violence, and govern the country in accordance with the constitution.

"Commonmen from across the country will converge at the convention to be held at Paltan Maidan. Non-political people including civil society representatives, leaders of professional bodies and women's

organisations will join to free the nation from the miserable situation it is in now," he said at a press conference yesterday.

Former president Badruddoza Chowdhury will also join the convention, he mentioned.

Dr Kamal has initiated a move titled Oikya Prokosta for building greater unity of secular, progressive and democratic political parties.

Relying to a query he said, "The convention aims to form a national platform to find ways to protect and uphold the constitution. We want a

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B Chy lunches with EU heads of missions

UNB, Dhaka

Former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday had luncheon with heads of missions of the EU countries at the Gulshan residence of Head of the EC Delegation Ambassador Esko Kentrochynsky.

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Prayer Timings

February 10		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-40	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-55	6-00
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Blue kerosene fails to clear diesel devil

Petroleum dealers suggest bringing prices at par

STAR REPORT

Petroleum dealers yesterday reiterated their demand for uniform rates of diesel and kerosene to curb adulteration in diesel, saying that government initiatives to check adulteration by dyeing kerosene blue have so far proved futile.

The dealers suggested reducing

the price of diesel so that the price differential between kerosene and diesel is reduced to zero, thereby becoming a disincentive for adulteration.

The current per litre market price of kerosene is Tk 17 and diesel Tk 20, according to Syed Sajjadul Karim Kabul, secretary-general of

Cabinet okays proposals against land grabbing

BSS, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday approved the recommendations made by a secretariat-level committee to safeguard public and private lands from the grip of grabbers.

The approval came at a regular cabinet meeting held at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The secretariat-level committee recently suggested the government

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NWD facility for all digital phones

Thousands more get reduced int'l rate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The state-run Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) opened the nation-wide dialing (NWD) facility to all its private digital telephone subscribers yesterday, enabling them to avail the reduced international call rates as well as long distance call facilities within the country.

With the NWD facility installed, BTTB's digital phone subscribers will be able to make overseas calls

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Local coalition leaders demand ouster of 2 cops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Local leaders of ruling four-party alliance at Monirampur in Khulna on Saturday gave home ministry a month's deadline to remove two 'corrupt' police officials of local police station.

Threatening to launch a greater agitation programmes, the leaders at a rally at Monirampur upazila parishad auditorium asked the ministry to suspend Officer-in-Charge Jalal Uddin and Sub-inspector Abdur Razzak of

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