

# Boycotting parties to blame if polls lose acceptibility: Khaleda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Blasting the Awami League-led combine for staying away from the January 22 election, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said the boycotting parties, not the participating ones, would be responsible if the election becomes 'less acceptable' due to the boycott.

Reiterating the position of the BNP-led four-party alliance, Khaleda said they would participate in the election, as there is a constitutional obligation to hold it within 90 days from power handover.

About the much-talked matter of seeking Supreme Court's reference for taking more time to hold the election with all the parties' participation, she said, "The Supreme Court can explain the constitution but it can not issue any direction against or beyond the constitution."

Expressing her doubt whether Awami League will accept the Supreme Court's interpretation on the constitutional obligation for holding election, she said, "We have trust in the Supreme Court. But do they [AL] have any faith in the Supreme Court?"

Khaleda Zia, who addressed a press conference at a hotel in the capital, did not reply to any question of the journalists. BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan replied to the reporters' queries on behalf of her after her written speech.

Mannan Bhuiyan later said the president can send reference to the Supreme Court on a matter that is controversial and obscure but there is no obscurity about holding the election within 90 days.

Many leaders, workers and

activists of the BNP-led four-party alliance and pro-BNP professionals including teachers, doctors, lawyers and columnists gathered at the press conference venue.

"We urged all to take part in January 22 election as it would strengthen the democratic process if all the parties join the election," Khaleda Zia said at the conference.

"Awami League is trying to make the BNP a victim of an odd situation through boycotting the election. Conspiracy is going on to shift the

blame on us for holding election with the participation of lesser number of political parties," she said.

"They could not give an acceptable reason for changing their mind abruptly...There can be only one reason -- disqualification of the Jatiya Party Chairman [Ershad] on legal grounds from contesting the election," Khaleda said.

The BNP chairperson said fake

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

Four-party alliance leader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia addressing newsmen at Hotel Sonargaon yesterday.

## LDP announces 10-day blockade from Jan 12

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) yesterday announced consecutive blockade across the country from January 12 to 22, demanding resignation of Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed and cancellation of the general election scheduled for January 22.

The party will hold grand rallies in Dhaka and two divisional cities on January 9, 10 and 11 to press for the demands.

LDP Secretary General Major (ret'd) Abdul Mannan announced the programmes after an emergency meeting of the party president at its Baridhara office.

He also said the LDP will discuss its decision to enforce consecutive blockade programme and propose it to the leaders of Awami League-led grand alliance.

"The blueprint of Iajuddin as prescribed by Khaleda-Nizami clique will not be allowed to be implemented through the January

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

## Non-stop siege for 10 days if demands not met: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said if the grand alliance's demand for fair election is not fulfilled by January 7-8 blockade, a non-stop siege for 10 days will be enforced to resist "vote thieves."

Addressing a meeting of Jatiya Sramik League at the AL's Dhanmondi office, she urged the police, Rab and BDR to resist the "vote thieves", otherwise, she said, "those who will cooperate with them will also be identified as thieves."

"We've tried our best to participate in the election but we cannot step into a trap of a stage-managed election and give it legitimacy," she said.

Hasina, also the leader of the grand alliance, said the blueprint for rigging election is in place. To participate in such election means acceptance of a rigged election,

she said.

Criticising the president, she said assuming office of the chief adviser by violating the constitution, he now refers to constitution for holding the election within 90 days.

She cautioned the chief adviser of bad consequences of arresting and torturing her party leaders and workers.

Sramik League president Abdul Matin Master was present at the meeting, which was also addressed by its General Secretary Roy Ramesh.

Earlier, Hasina while exchanging views with the members of Awami Swachhchasebak League asked the civil administration, army and law enforcers not to cooperate with those who intend to rig the election.

"Today people stand on one side

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

## EC prints ballot papers but can't say their exact numbers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday started printing ballot papers for the ninth parliamentary election without assessing the exact number of voters and the number of ballot papers.

"EC has sent the print order of ballot papers to three government press," EC Secretary Abdul Rashid Sarker told newsmen after a two-hour meeting of the EC.

The EC secretary however could not tell the number of ballot papers to be printed.

The EC meeting discussed different issues relating to the upcoming election but the present political impasse and the poll boycott issue did not come up for discussion.

"We did not discuss the political situation," said the EC secretary who was present in the meeting.

The EC will not print ballot papers for the 17 constituencies from where candidates were elected unopposed, he said, adding that 1,000 postal ballots will be printed for each of the rest 283 constituencies.

Sources said the number of polling centres this year will be around 34,000, which is 4,100 higher than the number of centres in the previous parliamentary election.

Acting Chief Election Commissioner Justice Mahfuzur Rahman declined to make any

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

## Grand alliance demonstrates, vows to resist Jan 22 polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Countrywide demonstrations organised by the Awami League (AL)-led grand electoral alliance yesterday vowed to build all out resistance against holding the January 22 polls and asked President Iajuddin Ahmed to quit the office of the chief adviser to the caretaker government for holding a fair election.

The grand alliance organised the demonstrations to press home their demands for holding a free and fair election, which also include preparation of an accurate voter roll, reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC), changing the polls schedule and depoliticising the administrations.

The AL also held meetings with the presidents and general secretaries of the party committees of the districts adjacent to the capital and all of its front organisations to make the countrywide blockade programmes for January 7 and 8 a complete success.

AL President Sheikh Hasina also held meetings with two front organisations of the AL while leaders of the grand alliance held another meeting at AL-led 14-party coordinator Abdul Jalil's Gulshan residence last night.

Talking to The Daily Star AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader said they would enforce a non-stop blockade around the Bangabhaban if their demands for a free and fair

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

# Hundreds held ahead of two-day blockade

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have started mass arrest in the capital and elsewhere in the country ahead of the Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance's countrywide blockade slated for tomorrow and the day after.

AL leaders claimed that more than 1,000 party leaders and activists across the country were arrested yesterday. Many innocent day labourers, drivers, rickshawpullers and passers-by also fell victim to the wholesale arrest that began Thursday midnight.

The drive followed a meeting between the home Secretary and

the inspector general of police at the Bangabhaban.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) produced 594 people before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka yesterday. Usually a little over 100 arrestees are produced before the court a day.

Relatives of many victims alleged police released many others from the spot and police stations after taking bribe. Those who could not bribe them were implicated in different cases.

Meanwhile, several hundred AL loyalists laid a siege to Keraniganj Police Station yesterday protesting mass arrest of their leaders and

activists. The five-hour long demonstration ended at 2:00pm after police released eight of the arrestees.

DMP Commissioner ABM Bazlur Rahman said the drive is not linked to the blockade. "It is part of a continued process and we will step up it day by day until January 22 for holding a free and fair election."

He denied that AL or grand alliance leaders and activists are being arrested, saying only those who are criminals and can create trouble in holding a free and fair polls are being held.

He said if the situation

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



PHOTO: STAR

Awami League worker Joynal Ali's wife Zohura shows marks of bruise to newsmen yesterday. She was allegedly beaten by police during a raid on Sattala slum at Mahakhali on Thursday night.

# Cold spell kills 35 more as dense fog paralyses life

## Ferry services disrupted; mercury may start rising today

STAR REPORT

The cold wave sweeping most areas of the country claimed 35 lives in 24 hours till 6:00pm yesterday with the death toll rising to 76 in the last four days, most of them children and elderly people in the northern districts.

The first cold spell of this winter coupled with dense fog has paralysed normal life in a vast region including the capital. The situation would improve very slowly from today, met office said.

"The temperature will start rising within 24 hours, very slowly though," forecasting officer at the met office told The Daily Star last night. The lowest temperature -- 7.7 degree Celsius -- was recorded yesterday in Srimangal.

Thick fog disrupted ferry movement on Daulatdia-Paturia route for

nine hours till 9:00am yesterday, causing severe traffic congestion on both sides of the Padma river and sufferings to thousands of passengers. Hundreds of vehicles, including buses, trucks and private cars, remained stranded due to poor visibility.

Our correspondents reported that dense fog disrupted plying of vehicles and water vessels in different districts.

Poor people in the northern region of the country have been the worst sufferers in the chilling cold. Unable to buy warm clothes, these people struggle to ward off cold bite at night by wrapping themselves with gunny and plastic bags, torn kantha, mosquito nets and such other things.

Moreover, hundreds of people in the affected districts have been suffering from different cold-related

diseases like asthma, cold, diarrhoea and dysentery, the correspondents reported.

The district authorities kept on sending messages to the Ministry of Relief and Disaster Management seeking warm clothes and blanket.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports: Cold wave has claimed six more lives in the district in the last 24 hours. The victims included six-day-old twin babies of Shalu Mia in the town and four elderly people.

Our staff correspondent in Bogra reports that five people died due to cold in Kurigram, including a two-year-old baby in the last 24 hours. And five others died in Pabna and one in Lalmonirhat due to cold-related diseases.

Our Rajshahi correspondent reports: Thick fog enveloped the city and other areas of the district

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

## Farmers block highway for fertiliser

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Several thousand farmers of Birganj took to the streets to protest fertiliser crisis and blocked the Rangpur-Dinajpur highway for two hours.

The farmers lined up in front of a fertiliser shop at Kabirajhat in the morning but the dealer failed to provide them with fertiliser, sparking instant protest by the farmers.

Later, hundreds of farmers from nearby villages brought out a procession demanding fertiliser and put barricade on the highway at around 11:00am. At least 300 vehicles remained stranded for about two hours during the demonstrations.

On information, Birganj upazila nirbahi officer and upazila agriculture officer along with police force rushed to the spot and requested the protesters to withdraw the barricade.

The farmers lifted their barricade at around 1:00pm after the officials assured them of smooth supply of fertiliser from Saturday.

## 50 injured in BNP-grand alliance clash in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

At least 50 activists of BNP and the Awami League-led grand alliance were injured in a series of clashes at Keranihat in Rangpur-3 constituency yesterday afternoon.

The dais of BNP candidate Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel's first election meeting was ransacked allegedly by supporters of the grand alliance during the clashes.

The BNP and the grand alliance leaders blamed each other for the clashes.

Mostafizar Rahman, Jatiya Party's sadar upazila unit president, alleged that the clash erupted as the grand alliance activists from a rally at Keranihat Government Primary School attacked a procession of the grand alliance, which was passing through Rangpur-Badarganj road.

At least 30 grand alliance activists were injured in the attack, he alleged.

On the other hand, BNP's sadar upazila unit president Hasan Ali alleged that the clash erupted as the grand alliance activists from their procession attacked the BNP election meeting at the school ground, leaving at least 20 injured.

Police rushed to the spot half-an-hour later and brought the situation under control.

Among the injured, BNP activists Shamsul Bashar, Sajju, Tota, Lavlu, Majibor, and grand alliance activists Alamgir, Milon, Sohel, Raju, Manik, Pavel and Motin were admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

In the evening, the grand alliance brought out a protest procession in Rangpur town and held a rally at Payera Square.

Local leaders of Awami League and Jatiya Party including Moazzem Hossain Lavlu, Rafiqul Islam Dulal, Abdur Rouf Manik, Faqruzzaman Jahangir and Moshir Rahman Ranga spoke in the rally.

## Five dead in Lanka bus blast

AFP, Colombo

Suspected Tamil Tiger rebels set off a powerful explosion on a bus, killing at least five people and wounding 50 others near Sri Lankan capital Colombo, defence ministry said Friday.

A bomb ripped through the passenger bus driving between Nittambuwa and Girulla during the evening rush hour on the main Colombo-Kandy highway.

The bus immediately caught fire, eye witnesses said.

"The bus was full of passengers at the time of the blast. It has still not been possible to identify the cause of the blast or the number of casualties", military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarsinghe said.

"This is the work of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)", Samarsinghe added.

The bus attack came hours after the Tigers accused government forces of penetrating into their area of control in the north triggering a mine.

## PDB RENTAL PLAN FOR 15 YEARS

# 6 out of 7 power deals set to go to pro-BNP men

SHARIER KHAN

The Power Development Board (PDB) plans to sign by the middle of this month seven small power rental deals for 15 years which were pushed by the immediate past BNP-led alliance government risking a 15-year projected financial loss of about Tk 2,000 crore.

Of the seven deals involving 260 megawatt (MW) power generation, two with Ornate and GBB for Fenchuganj and Bogra power plants have already been signed. And five are now undergoing negotiations and fine-tuning.

Except for one deal with the Summit Group on a 20 MW skid-mount plant in Kumargaon, all the six other deals are set to go to people involved with the BNP.

These seven deals concern

Shahjibazar 80 MW Tk 2.63 per kilowatt hour (per unit) power rental by United Group, Fenchuganj 50 MW (Tk 2.83 per unit) by Ornate, Kumargaon 20 MW (Tk 2.79 per unit) by Summit Group, Bogra 20 MW (Tk 3.16 per unit) by GBB and Feni 20 MW (Tk 2.73). Sikalbahra 50 MW (Tk 2.64) and Barabkundu 20 MW (Tk 2.86 per unit) by Hosaf.

Industry insiders say the deal with Summit was offered to create one kind of 'balance' as six of the deals are being backed by influential BNP men, including a former minister.

Back in March, on scrutiny of some of the small power rental offers, the PDB made a financial interpretation of the deals. One such deal was for 80 MW Shahjibazar scheme that initially offered a price of Tk 3.30 per unit to

the PDB which it (PDB) would sell to the Rural Electrification Board (REB) at Tk 1.9, incurring a net annual loss of Tk 96 crore.

But Shahjibazar deal ultimately came down to Tk 2.63 per unit. Now, the projected loss from this plant has come down to Tk 50 crore.

When all the seven deals will be made effective, the PDB will incur a loss of about Tk 120 crore to 150 crore annually. In other words, the PDB in the next 15 years will incur a total loss of between Tk 1,800 crore and Tk 2,200 crore in the present price structure.

"On the brighter side, payment for the new small power schemes will be done in Bangladeshi taka. Plus, the PDB will have flexibility about buying their power as there will be lesser compulsion for buy-

ing certain percentage of power," noted a PDB source. "Besides, these companies are expected to start power generation from June-July next."

"On the negative side, the rental deals for these projects are being signed for a 15-year term as an emergency measure. How can a 15-year deal be an emergency? This is a wrong policy focus that will not have any positive impact on reducing power crisis in the country," he pointed out.

"If the PDB must sign a 15-year deal, that should be done with large plants ensuring stability and quality," said the source. "Our experience shows that a large private power plant can supply power at a much cheaper rate. S m a l l e r p l a n t s ,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## Scrap communal deals, minority leaders urge political parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Minority leaders yesterday demanded that the political parties cancel all communal pacts including the five-point deal between the Awami League (AL) and Khelafat Majlish to safeguard the spirit of the Liberation War that is to establish a secular, democratic state upholding harmony and peaceful coexistence.

Criticising the AL for signing a deal with Khelafat Majlish, they said it is a misfortune for the nation that the party that speaks of building a progressive and secular nation signed such a contract with the anti-Liberation evil forces.

Minority people under the banner of Bangladesh Minority Sangram Parishad yesterday held a rally at Muktangan in the capital and brought out a procession protesting the December 23 AL-Khelafat Majlish deal that pledged

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

## Act swiftly, impartially to create conditions for all-party polls

### US urges CG, EC

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United States has urged the caretaker government and the Election Commission of Bangladesh to act "swiftly and impartially" to create conditions under which all parties can participate in the parliamentary elections.

"Our own support and observation missions will depend on whether such conditions are created," a statement issued by the US Embassy in Dhaka said yesterday.

The statement urged the Awami League and its alliance partners to reconsider their decision to boycott the January 22 general election.

"The voters of Bangladesh deserve a choice. We regret that the Awami League and its alliance

partners intend to boycott the election. We urge them to reconsider and to offer the voters a chance to choose," it said.

The US statement said: "Elections need to take place in an open, peaceful atmosphere with the participation of all political parties so that the voters can have confidence in the outcome [of the election]."

"The process as it is unfolding certainly shows many imperfections. We urge the caretaker government and the Election Commission to act swiftly and impartially to create conditions under which all parties can participate," it added.

The United States also called

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5