

Boycotting parties

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voters crept into the list during the rule of the AL.

"New voter list could not be prepared due to the case filed by Awami League and so the next election will be held on the basis of the current list which was prepared during the Awami League tenure," she said, adding that now it is the Election Commission's responsibility to update the voter roll and it is a continuous process although the Awami League boycotts the election by making it an excuse.

She termed the memorandum of understanding signed between the AL and Khelafat Majlis a cheating with the people as AL later said that it is nothing but a strategy to win the next election.

Having lost their way after the failed programmes with sticks and oars, Awami League

is looking for all possible ways to win the election through sacrificing their ideology and principles, she said.

Criticising the massive transfers by the caretaker government, she said, "Large-scale reshuffles and transfers in the administration have weakened the administration, leading to the rise in crimes."

"The Awami League's demands are endless," the former prime minister said, adding that the AL forced the interim government to meet almost all their demands and this interim government had to face more demands than any other.

Describing Ershad as an 'adversary of corruption', she said, "Awami League said they will fight against corruption but the Awami League president held a press conference with a convicted person [Ershad] beside her and asked the government to allow that per-

son to take part in the polls."

Accusing the AL of double standards, Khaleda Zia, said, "The Awami League claimed that they are an election-oriented party but they are boycotting the election. They said they believe in secularism but they signed a most controversial memorandum of understanding with a religion-based party."

"They [AL] alleged that government did not prepare a list of real criminals but the party nominated many real criminals as their candidate. They said they do not want to create suffering for people but they have called blockade again for January 7 and 8," she said.

Narrating the development works and successes achieved in last five years, she said they would lead the country to more development if they are voted to power again.

Later in reply to a question, BNP Secretary General Mannan Bhuiyan said preparation of a clean voter list and voter ID card will get priority if they are elected next time.

Many political parties will participate in the election but there is nothing to do if any political party wants to stay away, he said.

Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid and Qamaruzzaman, Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman Anwar Hossain Monju, BNP Chairman Nazir Rahman Manjur, BNP Standing Committee member M Saifur Rahman, Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, advocate Khandker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, Moudud Ahmed, Islami Oikya Jote (Amin) chairman Mufti Fazlul Haque Amin and Moulaan Ishaq were also present at the press conference.



PHOTO: STAR
People returning to Dhaka yesterday after spending the Eid holidays with their near and dear ones. The picture was taken from Kamalapur Railway Station.

Hundreds held

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demands, he might seek army help during the blockade.

Of the 594 arrestees produced before the court yesterday, 250 were shown arrested in regular cases, 14 under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code and the others under the DMP Act.

After hearing, the court sent the 250 to the central jail and fixed January 8 for their bail hearing and released 330 others on bail, court sources said.

Several hundred relatives of the mass arrest victims gathered around the CMM's Court yesterday to get them released on bail. Relatives of many of the arrestees were found crying as the breadwinners of their families were held.

When contacted, 18 of the 33 police stations in the capital said they arrested around 450 people till yesterday noon and forwarded them to the CMM's Court. Of them, 68 were arrested by Mohammadpur police, 35 by Pallabi police, 21 by Mirpur police, 38 by Tejgaon police, 25 by Gulshan police, 41 by Sutrapur police and 24 by Motijheel police.

The dream of making Bangladesh a secular, democratic and prosperous country for which the Liberation War was fought has been shattered due to the agreement of the parishad.

Some of the grand alliance leaders arrested in the capital included Information and Research Secretary of City AL Azizur Rahman Bachchu, Ward-91 AL unit President Mokbul Hossain and Ward-8 unit Publication Secretary Nazrul Islam and Ward-94 Jubo League unit Joint Convener Zakir Hossain.

Besides, police raided houses of a number of AL leaders and activists on Thursday night.

LDP announces

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22 election. People will resist the election," he said talking to the press after the meeting.

He said leaders and activists of LDP will not return home until Iajuddin resigns and the January 22 election is cancelled.

Mannan urged all leaders, activists and supporters of the LDP to make the January 7-8 blockade announced by the grand alliance a success.

LDP President Badruddoza Chowdhury chaired the meeting which was attended by party presidentium members Alamgir Kabir, Major General (retd) Anwarul Kabir, Talukdar, Mohammad Ali Zinnah, Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan, Dr Nurul Amin Bepari, Prof Jahanara Begum, Ali Kadar, Abdul Karim Abbassie and Mahi B Chowdhury.

Two held

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Islamic organisation, Hizbut Tohidin. But later they denied their involvement with any such organisation.

They however admitted that they were arrested from a mosque in Boda upazila in Panchagarh on December 22 last year with books and leaflets on Islamic revolution. They got released on bail on December 30.

"They are giving inconsistent information. We are interrogating them but it is yet to be confirmed if they are involved with any militant group," said the OC.

Akhtar also said the two will be showed arrested under section 54 of Criminal Procedure Code and the police will produce them before court today.

Communal deals

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giving Alems (religious law experts) the charge of issuing fatwa if the AL-led grand alliance wins the next general election.

The parishad leaders said it is a matter of shame that the party, which fought the Liberation War under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, signed an agreement that will weaken democracy and secularism as well as the thousand years' spirit of harmony and peaceful coexistence.

They said Ziaur Rahman approved communal politics although Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had banned it.

Khaleda Zia formed alliance with anti-Liberation Jamaat-e-Islami and governed the country for the last five years, they said.

"Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League signed the pact with Khaleda Zia aiming to come to power which is a disgrace to Awami League and the nation," said advocate Ashok Kumar Ghosh, general secretary of the parishad.

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EC prints ballot

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comment on the EC meeting.

The EC secretary yesterday held an unscheduled meeting with Home Secretary Abdul Karim, Principal Staff Officer of Army Maj Gen Jahangir Alam Chowdhury and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khoda Box Chowdhury to discuss how to tackle the law and order situation on the polling day.

"We discussed the role of army, police and ansar on the election day," the EC secretary said.

None of the three participants in the meeting talked to the press after the meeting.

Oil prices at lowest

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Shum, senior principal at Purvin and Gertz Inc in Singapore.

Crude prices have tumbled in the new year as unseasonably warm weather cuts demand for heating oil in the northeast United States, the world's biggest energy consumer.

"The market is also reacting to the bearish US inventory data showing a rise in distillates and oil reserves," Shum said after the latest US weekly report on stockpiles.

US stockpiles of distillates, which includes heating fuel, rose by two million barrels to 135.6 million barrels in the week ending December 29, compared with forecasts for a gain of 850,000 barrels.

Crude oil inventories dropped 1.3 million barrels to 319.7 million less than the anticipated 2.0-million-barrel decline.

Gasoline (petrol) reserves rose 5.6 million barrels to 209.5 million, almost four times market expectations for a rise of just 1.5 million barrels.

"The fact that distillates rose in the first week of January was significant and goes back to lack of winter fuel demand," Fimat analyst John Kilduff said.

The slump in prices has extended from the end of last year despite efforts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) to cut production and lift prices.

Shum said the market is testing Opec's resolve to cut production by an additional 500,000 barrels per

Democrats take control of US Congress

AFP, Washington

Democrats took control of the US Congress on Thursday, promising ambitious reform and tough new oversight of Republican President George W. Bush's policy in Iraq.

In his official capacity as president of the US Senate, Vice President Dick Cheney swore in 33 new and returning members of the 110th Senate in an official midday ceremony, as the lawmakers pledged "to well and faithfully discharge" their legislative duties.

In the House, top Democrat Nancy Pelosi, 66, became the first woman to take the job of speaker, making her next in line for the presidency after Cheney and the highest ranking woman ever.

She accepted the speaker's gavel and ended 12 years of Republican control of the lower house of Congress.

"In this House, we may belong to different parties, but we serve one country. We stand united in our pride and prayers for our men and women in the armed forces. They are working together to protect America, and we, in this House, must also work together to build a future worthy of their sacrifice," she said.

The oath-taking formalizes the sweeping new political order in Washington in the aftermath of November's historic legislative elections, and signals dramatic new political change as Congress's most conservative political caucuses cede power.

As of Thursday, Holocaust survivor Tom Lantos, 78, who voted for the Iraq war but now is calling for dialogue with Syria and Iran, will head the House International Relations Committee.

In the Senate, another fierce White House opponent, Harry Reid, 67, will be the new majority leader, while Joseph Biden, 63, who hopes to run for the White House in 2008, will head the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Reid vowed at a press conference Thursday that a "new day" had dawned in Washington, and he pledged to work cooperatively with Republicans.

"Our efforts are going to be to work in a bipartisan basis, in an open fashion, to solve the problems of the American people," he said after a meeting with his Republican counterpart, Mitch McConnell.

McConnell, now in the minority party, agreed that it was high time to "get past the level of partisanship that we've witnessed in recent years and develop stronger personal relationships, as well as work across party aisles."

As part of the nationwide demonstrations, the 14-party alliance held rallies in Rajshahi, Rangpur, Barisal, Khulna, Chittagong, Sylhet and other districts.

14-PARTY BRIEFING
At a briefing at AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue, the 14-party alliance termed BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's press conference speech as "false, misleading and self-contradictory".

Through the speech of Khaleda, Iajuddin's musk has been unveiled and it is apparent that he [Iajuddin] follows Khaleda's directions, Abdul Jali said at the briefing.

OTHER PARTIES' DEMONSTRATIONS

A number of political parties including Jatiya Party (Ershad), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Zaker Party, Bangladesh Shamajtantrik Dal (BSD) also staged simultaneous demonstrations in the capital as well as other parts in the country to resist the January 22 polls with demands of resignation of President Iajuddin from the office of the chief adviser.

Power deals

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even if implemented without any favouritism or corruption will always be costlier."

A senior official said, "Small power plants -- government-owned or private -- have always been costly. In the past, the Awami League government had implemented the 110 MW oil-fired barge-mounted Khulna power plant. Since it is oil fired, the average power price for this plant in 2005-06 swung up to Tk 8.49 per unit because oil price is globally very high. Besides, in 2004-05, it sold power for Tk 5.92 per unit as oil price was lower."

Similarly, the average power tariff of the NEPC barge-mounted 90 MW plant and Westmont 90 MW barge-mounted plant hovered around Tk 3.80 and Tk 3.68 per unit in 2005-06, though these are gas-fired. The official explains, "These deals were made in terms of dollars, and have become costly because of high rate of dollars."

The country's power load shedding has exceeded 2,200 MW and next year this might reach 2,500 MW as the BNP-led alliance government miserably failed to pursue adequate power schemes. Despite a serious crisis situation, the alliance government last year initiated more than 40 small power projects as 'rewards' to various BNP men.

Ultimately that bid fell off due to serious pressure from the World Bank and the government resorted to a smaller scale scheme.

Bush had little to say his Iraq speech next week when he spoke to reporters after a meeting Thursday with Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The president held a nearly two-hour video conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki during which he said he made clear Washington expects "a full investigation" over the controversy sur-

rounding Saddam's execution.

"I wish, obviously, that the proceedings had gone in a more dignified way," Bush told reporters. "But nevertheless, he was given justice; the thousands of people he killed were not."

White House officials said they were unsure whether Bush would consult Maliki again before he unveils his eagerly awaited proposals for waging the war in Iraq in a speech expected as early as Wednesday.

US sanctions

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lasting, overall and appropriate solution to the Iranian nuclear issue," Hu was quoted as saying.

"China's policy is consistent. We wish to preserve the international non-proliferation system and preserve peace and stability in the Middle East," Hu said according to the television report.

The report did not detail what

Larijani, who has been meeting with Chinese leaders in Beijing this week, told Hu regarding the Islamic republic's nuclear programme.

China, which has major energy interests in Iran, supports Tehran's right to a programme.

China last month voted in favour of the UN resolution, but Beijing sought to water down the measure and has said it prefers negotiations instead of sanctions.

The sanctions take aim at Iranian efforts to enrich uranium, which the United States and others fear could be used to make a nuclear weapon.

Iran insists its atomic programme is entirely peaceful and it has every right to the full nuclear fuel cycle.