

January 8, 2007

Blockaders fight with law enforcers on first day

Hundreds of rubber bullets, tear gas shells fired in Adabor in capital, cops beat up activists elsewhere; communication breaks down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 200 persons were injured as blockaders fought pitched battles with law enforcers in the capital and elsewhere yesterday on the first day of the three-day countrywide blockade called by Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance.

The blockade cut off the capital from the rest of the country.

Military vehicles mounted with automatic weapons patrolled the streets of the capital yesterday. The army and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members were seen guarding different strategic points in the city.

Several hundred army personnel were drawn together in Adabor after the area witnessed the worst clash of the day between grand alliance activists and police leaving around 50 injured.

Besides, clashes and chases took place between the blockaders and police at Maghbazar, Russel

Square, Matshya Bhaban crossing, Zero point, Tanti Bazar, Lalbagh, and Badda.

Police arrested 106 activists of

the grand alliance in the city.

Pickets set fire to a private car and two buses, and damaged dozens of vehicles at different

places in the city. Presence of motorised vehicles including buses was

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Supporters of the Awami League-led alliance, left, throw brickbats at police at Adabar in the capital during the blockade that began yesterday. Policemen, right, chase the blockade supporters in the same area.



PHOTO: STAR

Civil admin reshuffle makes little sense

Key posts still held by past govt beneficiaries

ZAYADUL AHSAN with SHAMIM ASHRAF

A close look at the civil administrative reshuffle done by the caretaker government (CG) reveals that although a lot of changes have been made as claimed by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in her latest speech, in essence they mean very little in neutralising the bureaucracy.

The Daily Star took up the list of changes made in the civil administration during October 30-November 30 after the caretaker government took over and found that the reshuffle was basically a "musical chair" game where the top people who matter most for the

election have only gone from one important post to another.

The cumulative result remains the same—they still hold posts that were gravely politicised by the previous four-party coalition government and can pull strings in any election.

As the demand of depoliticisation for the sake of a free and fair parliamentary election grows, the immediate past prime minister attempted to defend the caretaker government saying it brought changes to the posts of 46 secretaries and acting secretaries, 72 additional secretaries, 50 joint secretaries and 87 deputy secretaries.

The officials who enjoyed favour during the five-year rule of the

BNP-led four-party coalition government have not been removed from their offices, rather been transferred to other areas with the same rank and, in many cases, to higher offices in ministries involved with the election process, and as deputy commissioners (DCs) and upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) who play the most significant roles in the election process.

DCs: Only districts change Khaleda Zia said 87 officers of deputy secretary rank were transferred but she did not mention that 64 of them are DCs whose transfers made no difference in terms of affecting the election process.

Transfers of the rest and the 72

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WRONG POLICY PDB faces Tk 1,100cr loss this fiscal year

SHARIEF KHAN

Because of government's wrong policy, annual loss of the Power Development Board (PDB) will shoot up to around Tk 1,100 crore in the current fiscal year (2006-07), competent sources in the power ministry said.

This amount of loss is so massive that even if the PDB's systems loss came down to zero from the present level of 22 percent, it would not reach a break-even point.

The PDB incurred about Tk 400 crore loss a year from the late nineties to fiscal 2002-03. The trend continued, and the annual loss exceeded Tk 879 crore in 2005-06.

The loss this fiscal year would have remained close to Tk 800 crore had the government increased power tariff by five per-

EC to spend Tk 200cr for Jan 22 polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over Tk 200 crore will be spent to hold the upcoming ninth parliamentary elections and the lion's share of it would be spent on maintaining law and order, Election Commission (EC) Secretariat sources said.

Meanwhile, the EC yesterday declared the total number of voters for the ninth parliamentary elections.

The EC sources said Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) have sought Tk 53 crore so far while the armed forces and the police have sought Tk 17 crore and 70 crore. The Ministry for Home Affairs gave this primary estimate to the EC secretariat for maintaining law and order during pre- and post-election periods.

The caretaker government has already given Tk 100 crore to the EC and the bulk of it was spent on buying electoral materials and to prepare the voter list.

"We've Tk 100 crore but we need more money," EC Secretary Abdul Rashid Sarkar told newsmen during a briefing at his office yesterday.

"The amount includes the expenses for printing the voter

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ELECTION DUTY

Armed forces now desire more power

They want authority to arrest anyone from anywhere; home asks agencies to take preemptive legal actions against anti-election elements

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The armed forces expressed their desire to have the authority to arrest anyone from any place on the polling day without a warrant in addition to the power they already have to arrest any person within a radius of four hundred yards of a polling station.

The home ministry meanwhile instructed intelligence agencies to strengthen their surveillance on persons involved with 'ill-attempts' to resist the election, and asked other law enforcing agencies to take preemptive legal actions against those who might create trouble on the polling day set for January 22 amid a boycott by Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance and some other allied political parties, sources said.

The principal staff officer (PSO) of AFD at a law and order meeting with the Election Commission (EC) on December 27 expressed the

enforcement agency including the army, navy and the air force shall have the power to arrest any person without a warrant for maintenance of peace, law and order in a polling station or within a radius of four hundred yards of a polling station on the polling day.

The power given to the armed forces, through a controversial ordinance in 2001, also allows the armed forces to take actions against any activity that goes against the electoral code of conduct.

Now the Armed Forces Division (AFD) desires an additional authority of exercising this power all over the constituencies which will have the polls on January 22, sources said.

The principal staff officer (PSO) of AFD at a law and order meeting with the Election Commission (EC) on December 27 expressed the

desire, sources said.

But interestingly, the EC Secretariat in its minutes of the meeting did not include the speech of the PSO expressing the desire to have the additional power.

In a recent letter to the EC, AFD reminded the commission of the PSO's desire and asked to include it in the meeting's minutes, sources said.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday EC Secretary Abdul Rashid Sarkar confirmed the martial desire.

Meanwhile, AFD is scheduled to hold a meeting chaired by the PSO today to chalk out a plan for the deployment of troops for election duties. It already asked the EC Secretariat to send a joint secretary level official to attend the meeting, sources said.

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CG moves again to bring all parties to polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government (CG) yesterday initiated a fresh move to bring all the parties to the parliamentary elections, if possible by holding the polls beyond the constitutional 90-day timeframe provided the major political alliances agree.

After a green-signal from President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed for talks with the rival political alliances, advisers Mahbubul Alam, Shueb Ahmed and Shafiqul Haque Chowdhury yesterday met BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

The three advisers are waiting to meet Awami League (AL) General Secretary and 14-party coordinator Abdul Jalil, sources said.

Before the meeting with the BNP

secretary general, Agriculture Adviser Shafiqul Haque Chowdhury yesterday told reporters in his office that they would ask the president to seek advice from the Supreme Court if both the political camps agree on holding the elections beyond the constitutional 90-day time limit.

He said the chief adviser had asked the advisers to approach the two camps to broach a possible agreement to break the current political impasse.

After the meeting with Mannan Bhuiyan at his residence, both the sides remained tight-lipped about the meeting agenda and termed it a 'courtesy call'.

Sources in the BNP said the BNP-led 4-party alliance stuck to their decision to participate in the

January 22 polls, saying that there is no reason to shift it violating the constitution. After the meeting with advisers, Mannan Bhuiyan told a press conference that they are fully concentrating on contesting the January 22 election.

If there is any demand from any quarter, the next government, which will be formed through the January 22 election, will consider it, the BNP leaders said.

On Saturday night, Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed issued a statement, which reaffirmed that the parliamentary elections would be held on schedule due to constitutional obligation. "At this stage of the election process, according to the constitution, there is no scope

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Polls under Iajuddin won't be allowed

Reiterates grand alliance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance yesterday reiterated that it would not allow holding of any polls under President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed.

"The chief adviser wants to hold a stage-managed election on January 22. But the countrymen will not allow it. We will resist holding the election on the day at any cost," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said at a press briefing at his Gulshan residence.

Prior to the briefing, the grand alliance leaders held a meeting there with AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu in the chair to review the latest political developments.

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Huge grenade-making materials, explosives seized from JMB dens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday busted several militant hideouts in Narayanganj and recovered huge amount of explosives and locally made iron cases to be used for making grenades.

The elite anti-crime force also arrested six militants of banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), who possessed the bomb-making materials.

The recovered items include 31 packs (500gram each) of power gel, one detonator, 80 iron-made shells of improvised grenades and a book on jihad.

The arrestees are Moazzem Miah, 21, from Tekpara Barabari under Araihaazar upazila, Abdul Al Naim, 24, and Taiyabur Rahman, 20,

both from Hirilal Majhipara under Rugganj upazila, Mofijul Islam, 20, and Masum Billah, 24, both from Konabari under Sonargaon upazila, and Mohammad Mahbub, 22, from Farazi Kanda under Bandar upazila.

Rab said the clue to yesterday's drive came after the arrest of Abdul Rahman Alal alias Fahad and Saiful Islam alias Russell, whom police nabbed with huge amount of arms, ammunition and detonators from a bus at Ramna Bypass in Tangail on December 29.

Following their information, a team from Rab Intelligence Wing and Rab-11 in the early hours yesterday conducted several raids in the district and made the recovery after arresting the six.

Earlier on December 30, Rab

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AL should wait for next govt to see their demands fulfilled

Says Bhuiyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said the election must be held on January 22 and if the Awami League (AL) led grand alliance has any demands unfulfilled, the next government will fulfil them.

At a press briefing at Hawa Bhaban Bhuiyan brushed aside the AL-led grand alliance's demand for rescheduling the poll date.

He said his party will prepare a correct voter list and take initiative for voters' identity cards if they can go to power. The BNP may even consider the other demands of the AL-led grand alliance, he added.

Earlier, President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed in a

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HC asks govt not to harass Dr Kamal until Jan 10

UNB, Dhaka

The vacation bench of the High Court yesterday ordered the government not to arrest or harass noted jurist Dr Kamal Hossain, charged with involvement in vandalism at the Supreme Court, until the reopening of courts on January 10.

The directive came when Dr Kamal, one of the accused in the November 30 Supreme Court vandalism case, sought ad-interim anticipatory bail after surrendering before the HC bench.

The single-member bench of Justice Mir Hasmat Ali conducted the court proceedings at his residence instead of his High Court

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PHOTO: STAR

Army personnel on high alert at Kalabagan in the capital during the Awami League-led grand alliance's blockade yesterday.

17 more die of cold

STAR REPORT

At least 17 more died due to the cold wave in three districts raising the nationwide death toll to 118.

The victims died of respiratory and cold related diseases, our correspondents from different districts report.

Children and the elderly are the primary victims of the bone chilling cold spell. People of all ages from the lower income group have been going through immense sufferings during the cold wave as they can neither go out for work nor can they afford to buy warm clothes. These less privileged group of the population are struggling to ward off the bitter cold by wrapping themselves with gunnysacks, torn kantha (quilt) or any such items they can afford.

Different hospitals and clinics have been experiencing an influx of patients with cold related diseases, our correspondents report.

The meteorological office said that mercury gradually rose in almost all areas during the last 24 hours. Sources at the met office said the situation in the northern region and elsewhere would continue to improve in next 24 hours.

The met office however told The Daily Star that dense fog will persist over the river basins during nights.

The lowest temperature, 8.8 degrees Celsius, was recorded in Rajshahi while the highest being 26.5 degrees in Cox's Bazar.

The lowest temperature in the capital yesterday was 12 degrees Celsius, 18.9 degrees was the highest.

The sun was not visible in most places in the northern region until around 9:00am yesterday.

Meanwhile, the capital experienced another chilly day while the sun stayed behind the fog till noon.

Nippy weather coupled with political blockade programme confined most of the city dwellers to their homes yesterday.

The food and disaster management ministry has urged, welfare organisations, social workers and the affluent to come forward and help the cold affected people in different parts of the country.

The ministry said in a handout that it has already distributed five metric tons of warm clothes and 1,12,500 blankets to the cold affected people throughout different districts and upazilas. However, according to reports, there are 19,00,000 extreme poor and homeless people in the country that had been affected by the cold wave.

Our Patuakhali correspondent reports, the cold wave has claimed four lives in the district in the last 36

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Butenis, Anwar meet Khaleda

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador Patricia Butenis and UK High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury had a meeting with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at Hawa Bhaban yesterday evening.

After the nearly 45-minute meeting, none of them talked to the press, but sources said they might have discussed creating ground for holding elections with all-party participation.

The two top diplomats had a similar joint meeting with Awami League President Sheikh Hasina Saturday night.

Former Foreign Minister Morshed Khan told reporters that most of the time the envoys had one-to-one parley with the BNP chairperson.

He said the election matter and present situation came up during the meeting, and the BNP leadership apprised them of its stand.

To another question he said the envoys wanted to know what was happening and what next.

Outlaws among 6 murdered in 3 dists

STAR REPORT

Criminals murdered six people on Saturday night -- two in Daulatpur upazila of Kushtia, three in Laksam of Comilla and one in Kolaroa of Satkhira.

Our correspondent from Kushtia reports, activists of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-ML) Janajuddho faction slaughtered two members of BNP and its ally Jamaat-e-Islami at Sadipur village under Daulatpur upazila on Saturday night.

Soon after the murder, Janajuddho claimed responsibility for the killings.

The dead were identified as Afaz Uddin, 40, a BNP activist, and Abu Daud, 38, a Jamaat activist, both from Bahirmadi village of the same upazila.

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PHOTO: STAR

The six JMB militants arrested with grenade-making materials in Narayanganj yesterday. The photo was taken from Rab headquarters in Dhaka.