



1. Supporters of the Awami League-led grand alliance's 72-hour blockade torch a car at Moghbazar in the capital yesterday. 2. Tongi unit of AL brings out a procession on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in support of the blockade. 3. Arrested women supporters of the blockade chant slogans through a prison van's window as they are being taken to court. 4. A policeman shoots a rubber bullet towards the demonstrators at Adabar in the capital. 5. Blockade supporters obstruct railway tracks at Tongi. 6. Carton-load of teargas shells being taken to Adabar during a clash between police and blockade supporters. 7. Policemen kick and club a blockade supporter at Adabar.

Independent candidate held in Panchagarh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Panchagarh police on Saturday night arrested an independent candidate of the January 22 election and six others as part of the ongoing mass arrests launched targeting the grand alliance's countrywide blockade programme.

The candidate Md Samiul Alam is supposed to contest the next election from Panchagarh-1 constituency.

Though the officer in charge of Panchagarh sadar police station Md Fazlur Haque told The Daily Star that they detained Alam in connection with gambling, his family members alleged Alam was arrested as part of ongoing mass arrests.

The six other arrestees are Md Shawkat Ali, Md Nazrul Islam, Joyntal Abedeen, Md Khosru, Md Delwar Hossain and Mofazzal Haider.

Tension is prevailing as the news spread in the district, sources said.

THAKURGAON BORDER BDR, BSF trade shots

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Border Security Force (BSF) of India and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) exchanged bullets yesterday morning near Ratnai border of Baliadangi upazila in Thakurgaon.

BDR officials quoting villagers said BSF troops of 32 BSF battalion of Kishanganj fired at least eight bullets towards Bangladeshi territory without any provocation. The BDR retaliated firing at least four bullets at the Indian boarder guards.

However, no casualties were reported during the exchange of fire.

BDR officials of 20 Rifle Battalion in Thakurgaon under Dinajpur Sector said a letter has been sent to their counterpart protesting the shooting and the BSF's violation of international border security code.

Meanwhile, BSF troops of Haftiganj are yet to return the Bangladesh national they captured on Saturday near Kazipara of Tentulia upazila in Panchagarh.

Locals claim Saiful Islam, 35, of Sardarpara lost his way in dense fog early Saturday morning and went into Indian territory. A BSF patrol team allegedly picked him up in connection with trespassing.

Israel has drawn up plans for nuke strike on Iran

REUTERS, London

Israel has drawn up secret plans to destroy Iran's uranium enrichment facilities with tactical nuclear weapons, Britain's Sunday Times newspaper said.

Citing what it said were several Israeli military sources, the paper said two Israeli air force squadrons had been training to blow up an enrichment plant in Natanz using low-yield nuclear "bunker busters."

Two other sites, a heavy water plant at Arak and a uranium

BB to probe Falu's defaulter clean chit

Lawyers appointed to overturn HC stay order on declaring 32 other candidates as loan defaulters

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The investigation committee formed by the Bangladesh Bank to find out how the nominations of a number of loan defaulting electoral candidates including BNP ticket holder Mosaddek Ali Falu had been declared valid, will start its work some time this week.

The central bank's legal department also appointed four senior lawyers to initiate legal proceedings for overturning a last moment High Court stay order on the bank's Central Information Bureau's (CIB) identification of 32 candidates as loan defaulters including an Awami

League (AL) leader, Salman F Rahman.

Salman, however, withdrew his nomination paper as part of his party's decision to boycott the January 22 polls.

"We have seen that a number of candidates in the upcoming polls were declared fit by the retuning officers although they had defaulted on loan repayments to different banks," said a senior officer of the central bank. He said a four-member probe committee was formed last week with the central bank's Executive Director Khurshid-ul-Alam as the chief.

"The committee will detect the

lapses within the central bank that led to allowing such loan defaulters to participate in the polls," the official said preferring anonymity.

Amarshesh Publications Limited, of which Mosaddek Ali Falu is one of the major shareholders, took loans from Oriental Bank, a source in the bank said.

He said, "The loan was later transferred to five fictitious companies Elegant Traders, United Traders, Ahmed Brothers, Tarek Timber and Furnisher House, and KB International with guarantees from Falu and his brother Hasmat Ali."

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COMILLA BUS FIRE 29 unidentified bodies buried

Only 12 could be recognised

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

The unidentified bodies of 29 victims of Saturday's bus tragedy in Comilla were buried yesterday as the family members failed to identify the bodies of their loved ones.

The accident left 41 people dead after the bus crashed and caught fire near Suwagazi in Comilla on Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

The relatives of the victims could only identify 12 bodies as most of the victims were charred beyond recognition. The identified bodies were handed over to the families yesterday evening.

The identified victims are Nurul Islam, 30, his wife Ferdousi Shilpi, 21 and their two and a half-year-old son Sazzad of Gollai in Comilla, Shirin Akhter, 50, her daughter

Amena, 15, son Jashim, 12, of Palpara, Daudkandi, conductor of the bus Ilias, 26, of Feni,

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455 DU teachers ask Iajuddin to resign

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 455 Dhaka University teachers in a joint statement yesterday asked President Iajuddin Ahmed to resign from the chief adviser's post and appoint a neutral person as per the constitution to save the country from chaos and uncertainty.

The teachers also expressed their surprise at Saturday night's statement by the president, who expected 'a free, fair and neutral election will be held on January 22'. Iajuddin proved his irresponsibility by making such observation, they said.

"How the January 22 elections can be free, fair and neutral as most of the political parties have already boycotted it?" the statement observed.

It said the president is performing his duties under instructions from the leaders of the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance since taking charge as chief adviser 'unconstitutionally.'

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Port negligence makes Karnaphuli channel dangerous

RAFIQ HASAN

The Karnaphuli channel for the country's premier seaport Chittagong has become dangerous for anchoring ships that often run aground and get stuck due to inefficiency of the pilots and negligence of the port authorities.

Four major incidents of collision and grounding of ocean going ships in the channel took place last month. The ships that were grounded had narrowly escaped major disasters, sources said.

The rate of such incidents recently increased mainly due to communication gap between harbour and hydrological departments of Chittagong Port Authority

(CPA), the sources said, adding that the former often does not follow the hydrological department's suggestion regarding the draft for the channel.

It is alleged that often ships of longer draft or wrongly declared draft are permitted in exchange of handsome amounts of bribe, which is a major cause of such accidents.

"Lack of regular monitoring of the situation and periodic survey of the channel are the main causes of such incidents," said Sayeed Hossain Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Ocean Going Ship Owners Association (BOGSOA).

Mainly foreign flag carriers face such accidents while bringing in

high-draft ships through bribing the port officials, he said.

The BOGSOA president demanded special allocation for maintaining draft of the channel through regular dredging and formation of a special supervision team to monitor the situation from time to time.

Two ships got grounded on December 31 at the estuary of the River Karnaphuli. The port officials said the ships got stuck in thick fog as the pilots failed to trace the track.

The same day, the OEL Freedom, a Singapore registered ship navigated by pilot Badiuzzaman, landed on shore

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Cold related diseases spread in capital

Children the worst victims

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

As a cold wave sweeps through the country, viral, bacterial and respiratory diseases have broken out in the capital affecting mostly the children.

Though normally the city hospitals lack patients during the Eid holidays, little children with asthma, bronchiolitis, bronchitis, pneumonia and diarrhoeal diseases were found thronging the hospitals accompanied by their guardians.

The city drugstores also saw an increase in sale of medicines for treating cold in the last couple of days.

A total of 44 infants came to the emergency outpatient department of Dhaka Shishu Hospital till noon on Friday. Mostly under two years, they had been suffering from fever, cough, bronchiolitis and pneumonia, the medical officer of the hospital told The Daily Star. Thirteen of

them got admitted, as their condition was serious.

A total of 107 children were admitted to the hospital between Wednesday and Friday, of which most are affected with different respiratory tract infections.

Zannatul, an eight-month-old girl, who has been laid up with pneumonia, was found struggling with an oxygen mask at the emergency outpatient department while waiting for admission.

Coming from city's Mirpur, the baby girl lost her mother at birth and had been looked after by her grand mother. "She has suffered from cold since she was born. Due to the past few days' extreme cold, her condition worsened," an aunt of the infant said.

Since the infants are in a process of growing up and their body resistance power is not mature

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2 NBR officials, 19 others sued for Tk 3cr tax evasion

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has filed four separate graft cases against two additional commissioners of National Board of Revenue (NBR) and 19 others for evasion of about Tk 3.36 crore revenue.

Assistant Director Muhammad Mahbubul Alam filed the cases with Motijheel police station on December 28 and 29, an ACC press

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Prayer Timing			
January 8			
	Azan	Jamaat	
Fajr	5-30	6-05	
Zohr	12-45	1-15	
Asr	4-00	4-15	
Maghrib	5-30	5-35	
Esha	7-00	7-30	
Source: Islamic Foundation			



An Indian animal lover feeds migratory seagulls off the Arabian Sea coast in Mumbai as the number of migratory bird species fell sharply due to water shortages.

PHOTO: AFP

Troops raid rebel hideouts after Assam massacre

REUTERS, AFP, Guwahati

Hundreds of soldiers and policemen raided insurgent hideouts in jungles of restive state of Assam yesterday after separatist rebels killed at least 57 people in two days of coordinated strikes.

Police blamed the attacks on the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), which has been fighting for the independence of Assamese people in an almost three-decade-long insurgency that has killed thousands.

Curfew was slapped across the state late Saturday, and was expected to be reviewed by security officials later Sunday. Federal troops have the authority to shoot anyone defying the order.

"We are going all out against the

Ulfa," Tarun Gogoi, Assam's chief minister, told Reuters.

"Massive combing operations have started and additional troops are being rushed to the affected areas."

"The central government would send adequate reinforcement of paramilitary forces immediately to tackle the situation and ensure security of common people in Assam," India's junior home minister Sriprakash Jaiswal said.

The wave of violence started late on Friday with the gunning down of 48 labourers and traders. An explosion on Saturday killed seven people, including four policemen.

On Sunday, suspected rebels shot dead two supporters of the state's ruling Congress party after calling them out of their homes.

Security was tightened in areas adjoining the violence-hit eastern districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Golaghat and Sivasagar to prevent a spill-over of violence.

Most of the victims were migrant labourers from Bihar, who have been attacked in the past by rebels to gain the union government's attention, security official said.

Last week the Ulfa had warned non-Assamese businessmen and labourers of dire consequences if they continued to live in Assam, accusing New Delhi of flooding the state with outsiders to reduce the indigenous Assamese population to a minority.

"The Ulfa's only motive behind the killings was to create panic," Gogoi said.

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