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## BEFORE AND AFTER POLLING DAY Army given blanket power to arrest

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) in an unprecedented move yesterday agreed to allow the armed forces to arrest anyone from any place without a warrant during their engagement in election duties.

The Armed Forces Division (AFD) in a proposal earlier sought the power for the army, navy and the air force for seven days including the polling day to ensure a peaceful atmosphere and security of voters in light of the existing law and order situation.

Responding to the proposal, the EC finally asked the home ministry yesterday to issue a notification to allow the armed forces to have the authority as they had desired in addition to the power they already have to arrest any person within a radius of four hundred yards of a polling station on the polling day.

The EC in its letter to the home ministry however did not specify the time limit for allowing the armed forces to exercise the new power.

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## EWG won't monitor polls sans all-party participation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Working Group (EWG), an alliance of NGOs that monitors polls, will not undertake any national-level election monitoring initiative if all the major political parties do not participate in the upcoming election.

The decision was taken yesterday following the directives of its donors, said the group's Media and Communication Specialist Javed Ahsan. "There is no use monitoring a 'one-sided' election, which it is

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## Cops show zero tolerance as blockaders fight on

150 hurt in clashes; grand alliance lays siege to Bangabhaban today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Supporters of the Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance fought pitched battles with law enforcers in the capital and elsewhere leaving more than 150 injured yesterday on the second day of the three-day nationwide blockade that disrupted normal life.

The grand alliance will also lay siege to the Bangabhaban today

alongside its countryside blockade that ends today.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has already imposed a ban on squatting around the Bangabhaban to prevent a siege of the president's office.

Police in riot gear swooped on processions brought out by the alliance defying a ban in the capital's Lalbagh, Malibagh, Bangabandhu Avenue and Naya

Bazar and in Keraniganj on its outskirts without any provocation.

In retaliation, the blockaders pelted the police with brickbats that led to clashes and chases in which around 100 including policemen and journalists were injured.

Police were seen searching out people, both male and female, from wayside shops, buildings and

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## POLITICAL IMPASSE

## All doors shut on solution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government has seemingly run out of steam in its drive to break the current political deadlock as President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed stands firm on holding the next parliamentary election on January 22.

Iajuddin's tough posture happens to be in line with BNP leaders' desire for maintaining the constitutionally stipulated timeframe for

holding a parliamentary election within the 90-day tenure of a caretaker government.

Within a few hours of the interim government's move to find a solution to the electoral crisis on Sunday, Iajuddin at night made it clear that his government will not refer the matter to the Supreme Court for advice on whether it is possible to hold an election past the 90-day timeframe.

"The caretaker government now

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## Police admin remains politicised as before

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government's (CG) way of reshuffling the police administration overly shows that it has followed the footprints of the immediate past government, which massively politicised the department to harvest undue favour during the upcoming parliamentary elections.

The past BNP-led four-party coalition government first cut the training period of newly recruited police officers to ensure their presence in the field during the election and then arranged the whole police department in such a way that would be helpful during the election.

The steps taken so far by the CG show that the interim government of President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed wants to strengthen that design rather than

dismantle it.

Speaking very highly of the CG, immediate past prime minister Khaleda Zia on Friday defended its steps for making changes in the top posts of the police besides changing the SPs (superintendent of police) of all 64 districts and the OCs (officers-in-charge) of metropolitan and district areas.

An analysis of the so-called reshuffle, however, shows that many police officers, who had enjoyed favour during the five-year rule of the previous government, have been given promotion and postings that involve duty during the upcoming election.

On the other hand, those who were deprived of due promotion and postings during the previous government's rule have been neglected this time also.

These deprived police officers

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ  
Smoke engulfs a street at Chawkbazar in the capital yesterday as blockade activists hurl a cracker at police.

## Pressure on CA mounts to ensure all-party poll

Burns calls Iajuddin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States of America (US), United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) informed the caretaker government that a one-sided election will not be acceptable to the international community.

US Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns talked to Chief Adviser (CA) to the Caretaker Government (CG) Iajuddin Ahmed on January 6 over the telephone in light of a US government issued statement the day before.

The statement had urged the CG and the Election Commission to

take quick and immediate steps to ensure a congenial atmosphere so that all parliamentary parties can participate in the upcoming election. The US support will depend on whether such a congenial atmosphere is being created, added the statement.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia Butenis yesterday categorically said the US will not consider a one-sided election as credible. She also expressed her frustration at the current political crisis which she termed "a political problem, not necessarily a legal one".

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DBBL EXTENDS MEDI-CARE SERVICES TO RURAL PEOPLE

Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited has been extending free medi-care services to the rural people of the command area of its rural branches situated throughout the country.

Under the above program, the Bank will further extend providing Medi-care services to the rural people specially to the women and children of the command area of the bank's newly opened rural branches.

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