

Cops attack blockaders with brute force

Maul senior grand alliance leaders unprovoked; pickets retaliate by throwing hand bombs; country remains paralysed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five top leaders of the Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance were injured as police assaulted them while using brute force to disperse alliance activists and leaders from around the Bangabhaban during a siege of it yesterday that triggered violent clashes between the law enforcers and the demonstrators.

Policemen in riot gear brutally assaulted the leaders at Noor Hossain Square and fired teargas shells inside the AL central office on Bangabandhu Avenue during the siege that was also marked by police-demonstrators pitched battles in Fakirerpool and Joykali temple area.

The leaders -- Tofail Ahmed, Rashed Khan Menon, Nurul Islam, Dilip Barua and Haji Mohammad Selim -- fell to the ground due to the police beating without any let up in two to three minutes.

A ferocious attack by AL activists using bricks and homemade



Police club grand alliance leaders including Awami League Presidium Member Tofail Ahmed and Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon near Zero Point in the capital during the alliance's Bangabhaban siege programme.

PHOTO: STAR

Adviser contradicts Bangabhaban spokesman's statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangabhaban last night issued a statement through a spokesman regarding meeting between the chief adviser and an adviser, which was contradicted by the latter.

Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath met President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday evening and discussed his upcoming official visit to Noakhali and recent transfer of the secretary of his ministry, fisheries and livestock.

But the Bangabhaban spokesman told the UNB that adviser Dhiraj Kumar called on the president as part of the CA's initiative since Thursday to discuss the emerging issues with the advisers.

They discussed issues relating to law and order situation, and stressed the need for upholding the constitution and democracy through holding the general election on January 22, the UNB reports, quoting the Bangabhaban spokesman.

They viewed that the next parliament to be formed through this election would play an important role in fulfilling the desires of the people and solve various problems, the spokesman said.

Contacted by The Daily Star last night, Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath said he met the president on his

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Advisers approach grand alliance with election deferment proposal

Alliance for postponing election, fulfilling their demands first

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid the donors' enormous pressures for all-party polls and after getting a green signal from BNP, a team of three advisers of the caretaker government yesterday approached the Awami League (AL)-led alliance with a new proposal deferring the next parliamentary polls by over a month.

The three advisers placed the proposal to the AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at a meeting yesterday afternoon.

The AL however asked the interim government to postpone the January 22 polls first and then take initiatives to meet the grand alliance's demands of creating a level playing field for all.

Sources said the three advisers -- Shafiqul Haque Chowdhury, Shobeb Ahmed and Azizul Haq, approached the AL general secretary at his Gulshan residence after getting a positive response for such a move from BNP high-ups.

The initiative by the advisers to the caretaker government

appeared to be a new effort to bring an end to the political impasse in the wake of a poll boycott decision by the AL-led grand alliance.

LDP leaders Abdul Mannan and Redwan Ahmed were also present at the meeting.

In the meeting, the AL general secretary expressed doubts over the outcome of the advisers' move saying deferring the poll date alone is not a solution to the problem unless all demands of the grand alliance, including correcting the

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EMINENT CITIZENS' OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT

Extend time for holding fair polls

Errorless voter list a must

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seventeen eminent citizens yesterday urged President Iajuddin Ahmed to extend the time for holding polls beyond the 90-day timeframe as one of the prerequisites to hold elections -- an error-free and valid voter list -- is yet to be prepared.

Since an errorless and valid voter list still requires time to prepare, the citizens think deferring of the poll-date will not violate the constitution, as the prerequisites of a credible election has not been fulfilled.

The eminent citizens yesterday made the appeal in an open letter to the president.

They said if the president failed to resolve the crisis, the nation would assume he has taken the position of chief adviser to the caretaker government intentionally and violated his constitutional obligation to hold a free and fair election.

"Being concerned over the prevailing national crisis, we, several citizens of Bangladesh, are writing this letter to you. We hope that you, being inspired by the trust

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CA told Burns of constitutional compulsion

Bangabhaban spokesman says

UNB, Dhaka

President/Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed has apprised US Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns of constitutional compulsion for holding general election within the stipulated 90 days and his caretaker government's steps to hold free, fair and peaceful polls on January 22.

A spokesman for Bangabhaban told the news agency yesterday that Burns made a phone call in the evening of January 5 and got apprised of the election situation.

"The way some newspapers reported today is not correct," the spokesman said, adding that the

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Create conditions for fair, transparent polls

US State Dept urges CG

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US Department of State yesterday urged the caretaker government to create conditions for free, fair and transparent elections where all political parties can be involved in Bangladesh's democratic and political life.

A US State Department spokesman said, "We have urged them [the caretaker government] to create those conditions where all political parties and everybody who wants to be involved in Bangladesh's political-democratic life can do so and feel as though that when they cast their vote that it is going to be a vote that's recorded in the way that it should be and that their voice will be heard, whether or not they will--their particular political candidate or political party wins is going to be up to those in the ballot box, but it needs to be free and fair. They need to have that opportunity."

Speaking at the daily press briefing in Washington yesterday, US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Under Secretary Nick Burns last week

spoke with the head of the caretaker government in Bangladesh to urge him to create those conditions that would allow for a free, fair and transparent election.

"I'm not sure to this point that we have seen them take those actions and we would encourage them to do so," McCormack added.

Asked if there is any move by US Ambassador in Bangladesh Patricia Butenis to strike a deal between Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia so they come to the election process, McCormack said, "The short answer is, I don't have details of any meetings or any 'deal' that may be emerging."

"Our ambassador on the ground certainly is available to offer the good offices of that position to political parties--those involved in the political process--who want to see a good election transpire in a peaceful environment," he said, adding, "But ultimately, any of these decisions are going to...any accommodations that are made are going to have to be among the Bangladeshis themselves."

Grand alliance to announce fresh agitation today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL)-led grand alliance holds a grand rally at Paltan Maidan in the capital today to announce its next course of agitation programmes to press home its demands for a free and fair election.

Its demands also include the resignation of President Iajuddin Ahmed from the post of chief adviser to the caretaker government (CG).

AL President Sheikh Hasina is expected to announce fresh agitation programmes including non-stop blockade and hartals with an aim to resist the holding of January 22 elections which the grand alliance has boycotted.

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Officials to be on election duty worried over security

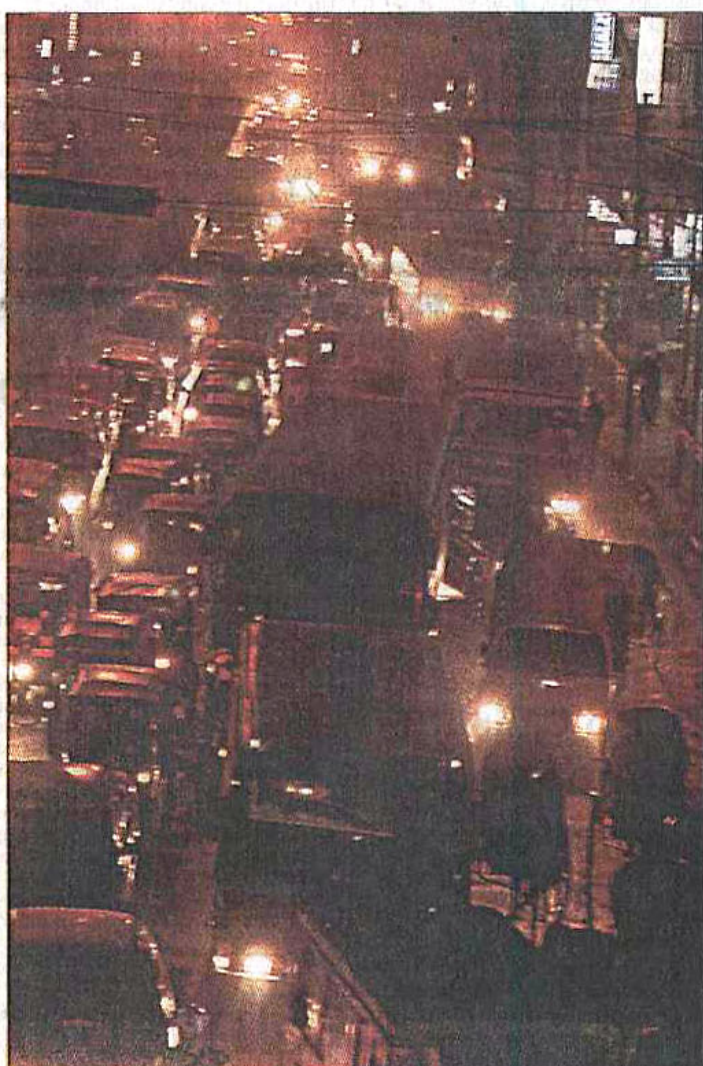
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sammilito Karmakarta Karmachari Oikya Parishad expressed concern over the security of government officials who are supposed to perform duty on the election day on January 22.

The leaders of the Parishad, an alliance of about eight lakh government, semi-government, autonomous and sector corporation officers and employees, noted that performing duty on the day amid the current political condition will be dangerous.

The Parishad comprising over 200 organisations at a press

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Gridlock at Moghbazar intersection in the capital yesterday evening as the city dwellers take their cars out to the streets on the last day of the grand alliance's 72-hour blockade.

PHOTO: STAR

CG to be responsible if violence occurs on polling day

Says acting CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government will have to take responsibility for any violence on the poll day of January 22, acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice Mahfuzur Rahman said yesterday.

He was briefing the newsmen at his office on different issues on the upcoming election.

Asked who to take the blame if any killing, bloodshed or hostility takes place on January 22 amid the grand alliance's decision to boycott and resist the polls, the acting CEC said, "The caretaker government is to take the responsibility. We will not be responsible." Election Commission (EC) is the agency to arrange the election, he added.

amount of money for holding the one-sided election, the acting CEC said, "Caretaker government could go to the Supreme Court for seeking time or any explanation of the constitution." The EC is not the authority to seek time from the Supreme Court or any interpretation of the constitution for deferring the election, he observed.

On the speculation to hold the poll after the stipulated 90 days as per the constitution, the CEC replied, "I would violate the constitution if I agree to hold the election after the 90-day period set in the constitution. The word in the constitution is 'shall' which means 'mandatory' (not directional). So the election will be held. Let's see what happens then."

Asked whether another general election would take place shortly after the January 22 polls, the CEC said, "If it (the election) is held again later on, it will be."

In reply to another question, the CEC said, the armed forces will be

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