



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 Fakirpool 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 three minutes.

A ferocious attack by AL activists using brickbats 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.

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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

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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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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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.

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.

Asked whether the upcoming election would be acceptable amidst the grand alliance's boycott, he replied, "If 50 percent voters cast their votes in any election, it is accepted then. Let's see if the election gets that muchvote."

Asked about spending a huge

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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Advisers approach grand alliance with election deferment proposal

Alliance for postponing election, fulfilling their demands first

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

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, Shoaib 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.

ALP leaders Abdul Mannan and Md. 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.

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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ARMY DEPLOYMENT FOR ELECTION DUTY TODAY

Legal experts question its blanket power

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The armed forces start election duties today with unprecedented authority to arrest anyone at any place without a warrant until January 29, but legal experts questioned the decision to give them the power without amending election laws.

A home ministry circular said the armed forces, which will act as mobile and strike forces, may also be deployed at polling stations if necessary, sources said.

The Election Commission (EC) for the first time allowed the army

navy and air force to exercise the power of blanket arrest in addition to the authority they already have--arresting anyone without a warrant within the 400-yard radius of a polling station on the polling day.

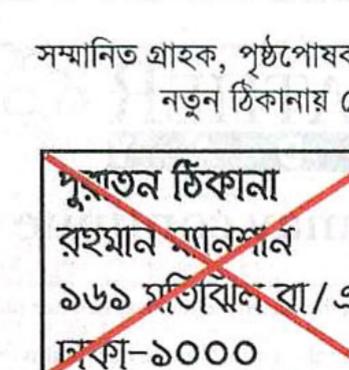
The armed forces have been given the power to do everything required to maintain law and order for holding the election," Acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice Mahfuzur Rahman yesterday told reporters.

Asked why the armed forces have been given the power of blanket arrest so early this time while they were given the authority only

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