

Home boss denies

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However, many hoteliers told The Daily Star that they were indeed asked by the police not to receive any guest till today.

Meanwhile, after a five-day drama, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday gave permission for the BNP rally.

The main opposition party sought the permission in an application on March 6. Since then, the party has contacted the police authorities for a decision but the police were saying nothing.

Habibur Rahman, deputy commissioner of DMP, in a letter to BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday said the party could hold the programme at 2:00pm, but under 11 conditions.

Below is the translated version of the conditions:

1. Area of using of loud-speakers: Up to Fakirapool crossing in the east and up to Nightingale crossing in the west.
2. No loudspeaker can be used beyond those areas.
3. No projection can be set up beyond the areas mentioned in number 1.
4. If necessary, permission should be taken from the authorities concerned for the use of the rally venue.
5. No stage can be set up on the main road.
6. Except for a political speech, the stage cannot be used for any other purpose.
7. People can gather at the rally venue two hours before the scheduled time (2:00pm).
8. The rally must end by 5:30pm.
9. No gathering can be held before or after the approved time and traffic and public movement cannot be obstructed beyond the approved area.
10. During the rally, no activity should be undertaken that goes against the law and public interest.
11. The authorities, without having to show any reason, preserve the right to cancel the permission for the sake of public interest.

Six helicopters will hover over and around the rally venue, a reliable source in the DMP told The Daily Star.

Apart from police and Rab members, some 2,500 to 3,000 members of Border Guard Bangladesh will be on duty at various key city points today,

the source added. **POLICE ON ALERT**
The home minister said law enforcement agencies were put on alert in the capital and elsewhere in the country to prevent possible "anarchy" in the name of the rally.

"Law enforcers have been put on alert so that they [the opposition] cannot repeat incidents like the one on December 18 last year when the BNP carried out simultaneous bomb attacks at different city points and like the one on September 27 when the Jamaat men swooped on the police," she said.

Asked if she would resign over the killings of journalist couple Sagar and Runi and Saudi embassy official Khalaf Al-Ali, she said, "Nothing has happened that I will have to resign. I am carrying out my duties well."

"However, I won't wait for even a minute if the prime minister wants me to resign."

On the reported arrival of a Saudi investigation team to probe Khalaf's killing, she said she was not aware of the matter.

She also claimed progress on the Sagar-Runi killing case but declined to elaborate.

Held with food

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unit Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, a pro-BNP student body, was loading up a car with a huge quantity of puffed rice, flattened rice and molasses at the time of his arrest around 8:30 a.m., Mohammad Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Savar Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Police arrested him on suspicion of his possible involvement in subversive activities centring on the today's rally, the OC said.

However, the same policeman said he suspected that Firoj might have bought the food items to distribute them among participants of the rally.

A Dhaka court later sent Firoj to jail.

Savar police also arrested 13 BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and activists yesterday from Savar Bazar area for what they said was obstructing police from discharging their duties. They were also produced before a Dhaka court and sent to jail.

'Wrong day'

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The launches then made frantic efforts to find an alternate spot to anchor. There were over 10,000 passengers on board those boats, he said.

"I don't know about the other ones but our launch could finally anchor somewhere near Fatulla in Narayanganj. It anchored about 50 to 60 feet from land, and a fleet of dinghies helped us ashore in exchange for Tk 50 each," Jalal continued to describe his ordeal.

"At usual times this ride would have cost us no more than Tk 5," said this frequent traveller.

"After this I walked one kilometre or more before I got a rickshaw. When I reached English Road I saw law enforcers forbidding CNG-autorickshaws to travel to Sadarghat launch terminal."

Jalal's ordeal was, however, far from over. After nearly an hour's rickshaw ride, he reached Fulbaria bus terminal, where he found hundreds of launch passengers like him trickling in from different directions as their launches had also failed to anchor at Sadarghat.

There were only two buses at the terminal. Those who boarded these vehicles soon found themselves out of luck when some "unidentified" men arrived there and forced the drivers of the Gazipur and Mirpur-bound buses to cancel their trips, Jalal said.

All these travellers had to find alternate modes of transport but there was hardly anything available. Some managed to hire the few rickshaws around while others started the long walk to their destinations.

Jalal's rickshaw ride had cost him Tk 150 thus far and he negotiated a further Tk 50 ride with the rickshaw-puller to take him up to Farmgate.

Jalal returned to Dhaka to join office after three days of leave.

He could not care less what day he chose to travel. But he now knows the price he paid for his right to travel as a free man in a free country.



Closed, nervy city braces for today

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The BNP and its allies have said their programme will succeed no matter how hard the "government tries to foil it".

The BNP standing committee last night met to discuss the agitation programmes that Khaleda Zia will announce at the rally, to be held before the party's Nayapaltn headquarters.

City dwellers, meanwhile, had an awful day yesterday as the government made commuting difficult.

Office-goers and students were the worst sufferers. Amid panic and an acute shortage of public transport, they got to their destinations after long, painful hours on the road.

In the morning, thousands of commuters waited long hours for buses and other modes of transport. While the strong ones elbowed their way into the few vehicles that were on the roads, many had to walk miles to reach their workplaces.

Aminul Islam, who works at a private bank, was one of those who bore the brunt of the ordeal. After waiting for over two hours at Azampur bus stand in Uttara, he quit trying to go to his Motijheel

office and went back home.

"Do you call it democracy?" an irate Aminul asked. "The government through its activities is causing panic among the public," he told The Daily Star.

Making the most of the situation, cabbies, rickshaw-pullers and drivers of CNG-run three-wheelers charged astronomically high fares.

Lutful Hasan, a private firm official, said he had a very important job to do at Motijheel. He had to shell out Tk 700 for a cab ride from Pallabi to Motijheel.

To make matters worse, in many places ruling Awami League men joined the law enforcers in trying to ensure that few buses were on the streets. Drivers and their assistants complained how they had been dragged out of their vehicles and beaten up by government supporters for being on the roads.

Some owners alleged that AL activists at Mirpur-11 even snatched money from the staff of their buses.

"Around 25 local Awami League men had our bus pull over at Mirpur-11 at 5:45pm. They started beating up the driver and his helper and took away around Tk 4,500 from them for operating the bus," one owner told The Daily Star in return for anony-

mymity.

Similar was the story in the case of at least a half-dozen other buses.

Traffic on the highways connecting the capital with the rest of the country was thin. Owners took their vehicles off the road, complying with informal government instructions and fearing vandalism and police harassment.

Things were not different on the waterways either.

A few buses which entered the city were searched thoroughly at different entry points.

Soon after sundown, shop owners pulled down the shutters in different parts of the capital, fearing an eruption of violence. Police remained active driving vendors away from pavements.

To avoid harassment and sudden raids, many city hoteliers have already stopped taking any boarders.

Although there was no official announcement or instructions for educational institutions, many schools and colleges opted to cancel classes.

MASS ARRESTS
Several thousand people were arrested across the country in the last three days including 2,849 on Thursday

and 3,616 on Friday.

Police headquarters sources said they detained several hundred on Saturday but could not give any figure for yesterday till filling this report at 1:45am.

Mass grave in Mexico yields 167 bodies

REUTERS, Mexico City

Authorities are investigating a mass grave in southern Mexico containing 167 bodies that may have been dumped there at least 50 years ago, a Mexican official said on Saturday.

The remains, found in a cave near the Guatemalan border, "disintegrated at the touch," said the official at the Chiapas state prosecutor's office.

Investigators are trying to determine the age and gender of the victims and the cause of death, the official said on condition of anonymity.

The advanced state of decomposition suggests they are at least 50 years old, he said, adding there were no obvious signs of violence.

Commuting

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Long-route bus services on most routes from Dhaka also remained suspended. Most local buses on different routes, including Motijheel-Mirpur, Gulistan-Uttara, Motijheel- Gabtoli, Gabtoli-Dhamrai and Savar-Nabinagar, did not hit the roads.

Only a few state-run Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) buses plied the city streets.

Taxis, CNG-run three wheelers also plied, but much less time than their usual hours. Rickshaws, taxi and CNG-auto-rickshaws charged almost double their normal fares.

Many were seen waiting at Gabtoli, Sayedabad and Jatrabari bus terminals to go to their hometowns. Failing to get a bus, many returned home. Some even walked to Kamalapur Railway Station from Sayedabad and Jatrabari terminals to board trains to their separate destinations.

Rahim Mia along with his daughter and a grandson was seen waiting at Shabbagh intersection for a bus to go to his Pallabi residence.

"We have been waiting here for an hour to board a bus. Unfortunately, we could not get on any," he told The Daily Star, expressing grave anxiety.

"I came to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University to see my ailing wife. Now I am wondering how to return home as I do not have enough money to hire a taxi or a CNG-run auto-rickshaw," Rahim, clad in a lungi, added.

At Mirpur-12, Nazrul Islam, an official of a private company, expressed his helplessness thus: "What should I do now? I have to go to my Gulshan office within an hour to attend an important meeting."

"I have been waiting here for over an hour for a bus. The taxis and CNG-run auto rickshaws either are charging high fares or refusing to go," he added.

Sujana Rahman, a student at a private university at Banani, said she had failed to get into any bus or other transport to go to her university. "Now I am walking back home," she added.

Even patients, who had to go to hospitals, also faced sufferings.

"I waited for half an hour to hire a taxicab to take my colleague to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) after he had suffered burn injuries while working at our welding workshop at Badda," said a staff of the workshop at the DMCH yesterday.

"I later hired an ambulance at Tk 1,200 to take my colleague to the hospital," he added.

In Azampur, Uttara, around 50-60 people were seen waiting for a bus around 2:30pm. As soon as a bus approached, all of them started elbowing each other to get into the bus.

"Is this a way of doing politics? The politicians are making our lives hell by their anti-people programme, turning us into hostages," said one of the commuters, venting his anger.

Meanwhile, leaders of the 14-party grand alliance offered their apologies to the nation over the sufferings of the latter.

2 judges

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Ruhul Kuddus Kajol, a Supreme Court lawyer, filed the petition yesterday as public interest litigation, seeking HC directives upon the government to ensure that people can move freely in the capital.

The petitioner also sought a court ruling on the authorities concerned to release the people detained in the city in last few days. He placed before the HC bench some newspaper reports on mass arrests in Dhaka ahead of the BNP rally.

During the hearing on the petition, Attorney General Mahubey Alam opposed the writ petition, saying the government was looking into whether any subversive activities would take place centring the grand rally.

Possibility of such activities cannot be ruled out as the war crimes trial is going on, he said, adding that filing of the petition the day before the programme was intentional.

Petitioner's lawyer Khandker Mahub Hossain told the court that law enforcers had been reportedly arresting innocent people without following the legal procedure, which was a violation of their fundamental rights.



BGB troops are on patrol at Shahbagh in the capital around 11:00pm yesterday. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police says more than 2,500 BGB members alongside police and Rab men remain positioned at the key city points today as the opposition launches its much-talked-about March to Dhaka programme.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Pakistani ploy didn't work

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idea of discrediting Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his party through alleging that Indians had infiltrated his circle. The regime announced the arrest of several Indian citizens in Dhaka, the ostensible purpose of which was to let the country know that a conspiracy was at work in the movement for Bangladesh. Predictably, the ploy failed to sway the feelings of Bangalees about the gathering movement for national self-expression.

Throughout Bangladesh, increasing numbers of people in various fields of life were coming out in support of the movement. One of the leading voices in the struggle for an assertion of Bangalee rights was the poet Sufia Kamal. She and other women in various other sectors spontaneously came forth to declare their support for the movement. Across the province, the urge for independence came with the thought that the Awami

League and the regime would engage in talks on a resolution of the crisis sooner rather than later. At Dhaka University, students took part in military-style drills, which was a symbolic way of demonstrating the many miles the nation had traversed in the preceding eleven days in a radicalisation of its political beliefs.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, despite all the pressure he was under, went on providing focused leadership to the nation. He and his senior colleagues in the party met every day and over long stretches of time assessing the situation and directing the course of events. At one point, a foreign correspondent, one of the many overseas newsmen then based in Dhaka, asked him if he planned to take Bangladesh to freedom any time in the near future. Bangabandhu's response was cryptic. "Independence? No, not yet," said he. Once more it was clear that the

Bengali leader was not willing to rule out the options before him.

Iran tells West to drop 'bullying' tone

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday that the West should drop its "bullying" stance against his country and insisted that sanctions imposed over its nuclear programme were having no more than a "psychological" effect.

"As God is my witness, the Iranian nation will not give a damn for (your) bombs, warships and planes," he said in a televised speech in the city of Karaj west of Tehran.

"They say all (options) are on the table. Well, let them rot there. You yourself will rot," he hailed, in characteristically fiery language.

BNP thrives on govt blunders

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At the rally, the BNP chief is very likely to announce the addition of new parties into the BNP-led four-party alliance.

Aiming to mount pressure on the government, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is also expected to declare fresh agitation programmes and issue an ultimatum to force the government into meeting the party's demand for a restoration of the caretaker government system.

Khaleda Zia last night held separate meetings with members of the BNP standing committee and leaders of the alliance and like-minded parties to finalise the party's fresh agitation programmes.

Party leaders said a huge number of volunteers and dedicated BNP activists would be at the entrances to the capital to welcome party men to the rally, which the BNP touts as "cholo cholo Dhaka cholo" (let's go to Dhaka).

They said the volunteers and activists would also tackle any untoward incidents and resist obstructions.

Police, however, did not give permission to the party to set up any temporary "welcome centres", which are usually set up ahead of large rallies.

The party even sent a letter to the home ministry seeking adequate security measures for the chairperson and the rally at Nayapaltn.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday evening finally gave the BNP the nod to hold the rally. It had kept the matter hanging for the last two days.

Fakirerpool and Nightingale intersection between 2:00pm and 5:00pm. It asked people wishing to join the rally not to arrive at the venue more than two hours ahead.

"Police have given us the permission. The rally will start at 2:00pm on Monday. We are now starting our work to prepare the stage," BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

At noon, while addressing a press briefing, Fakhru said the government had declared war on the people by cutting the capital off from other parts of the country. He claimed that communication between Dhaka and the rest of the country through waterways, railway and roads had snapped.

"Our leaders and activists have arrived in the city defying all obstructions," said the BNP leader, claiming that police had already arrested over 5,500 of our party activists across the country.

He also alleged that the ruling Awami League cadres assisted by police were harassing their activists on their way to the capital. Over 3,000 have been injured, he claimed.

Khaleda during a rally on January 9 Chittagong declared the "cholo cholo Dhaka cholo" programme as part of her party's anti-government movement.

Earlier, she had led road marches towards Chapainawabganj, Khulna, Sylhet and Chittagong and addressed public meetings at Lalmonirhat, Feni, Mymensingh and Bogra in the last few months to drum up public support in favour of her demand for a restoration of the caretaker

government system.

BNP'S PREPARATION
The party's central office was yesterday very busy and packed with party men who arrived in the city to attend the rally. The BNP issued identity cards to 450 top members taking part in the rally.

Several thousand BNP activists thronged the party central office in Nayapaltn around 6:00pm yesterday and chanted slogans against government obstructions for the rally.

As per party decision, the BNP's own security members, volunteers and special teams comprised of 1,300 people will ensure the safety of the supporters and activists of the BNP. At least 36 medical teams will provide treatment to the activists, if required.

Khaleda's address will also be shown on 12 large screens around the rally venue. Her speech will also be streamed live on www.bnplive.com.

NEW ALLIANCE
Khaleda Zia last night had a meeting with leaders of parties which were to join the BNP-led alliance.

The total number of the parties in the alliance will be 16 or more, party sources have claimed.

Currently, the four-party alliance comprises the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) and Khelafat Majlish.

The new parties likely to join the alliance are the Liberal Democratic Party, Kalyan Party, JAGPA, National People's Party, National Awami Party, Labour Party, Islamic Party, National Democratic Party and Muslim League.

Representatives of a few other parties, including

Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, may express their solidarity with the rally.