

A break but full of hassle

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Sylhet-bound bus at Sayedabad bus terminal.

Many others there and elsewhere in the capital echoed his view, urging the politicians to stop this destructive politics.

"It is really painful that our exam, which was scheduled to start today, has been deferred again," said Rumana Sharmin, a student of State University of Bangladesh.

She added they could take classes only on Fridays during blockades.

Apparel exporters are bearing a heavy brunt of the continued blockades. "We are sending goods on Thursday night or on Friday to the Chittagong Port, but with the risk of the vehicles being attacked and damaged on the way," said Mir Mobassher Ali, a garment owner.

The government is giving security, but that is not enough, he added.

FBCCI President Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed said though businesses got a day's relief from the blockade yesterday, they could not make the best of the day due to long tailbacks on highways.

Small traders are in extremely bad shape. Consider the ordeal of Khokan Jamadar, a wholesale vegetable trader at Karwan Bazar. Like every year, he bought vegetables of 30 bighas of land from farmers in Chuadanga. But due to continued blockades, he could not bring a third of the vegetables.

"I brought a truck of cabbages from Chuadanga

today [yesterday] after a four-day gap," he said.

He has incurred a loss of Tk 1.60 lakh over the past two months, he said, adding that he could bring and sale some vegetables only on Fridays.

Abul Kalam, a fruit trader at Badamtali, said he was counting losses of Tk 2 to 2.5 lakh every month due to the blockades and hartals. Yesterday, he could supply 300 containers of orange to Khulna, after 10 days.

TAILBACK ON HIGHWAY

Thousands of passengers on Dhaka-Chittagong highway suffered badly for some 14 hours due to a 60km tailback on the Biswa Road in Comilla, reports our district correspondent.

The gridlock stretched from Padwer Bazar in Sadar upazila to Daudkandi Toll Plaza in Daudkandi upazila as a Dhaka bound goods-laden truck broke down at Cantonment area around 3:00am yesterday.

The ferry service at Mawa-Kerakandi remained suspended from 3:00am to 9:00am due to dense fog, stranding around 500 passenger buses on both sides of the terminal, reports our Munshiganj correspondent.

RAIL COMMUNICATIONS RESTORED

Four rail lines from Chittagong, Sylhet, Noakhali and Chandpur to Dhaka was restored yesterday noon, after an eight-hour suspension as miscreants removed fishplates and a security shuttle train derailed at Paghachang railway station.

EU won't send

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It also urged all sides to refrain from resorting to violence and encouraged all political leaders to respect the right of the people of Bangladesh to express their democratic choice.

Issued in Brussels last evening by spokesperson of Catherine Ashton, high representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and vice-president of the commission, the statement has been sent to the government, said sources in the EU Dhaka office.

Talking to reporters yesterday evening, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad said he was unaware of the EU's decision.

"It depends on them whether they will send election observers," he said.

He, however, said the country's law and order would improve after the deployment of the army from December 26.

Seven years ago, the EU first announced not to send observers for the January 22, 2007 parliamentary elections which were set to be held amid boycott and violent street agitations by Awami League and other opposition parties. The declaration came on January 6 that year.

Two days later, the Election Working Group (EWG), a network of 29 local organisations, followed suit.

Before this, on December 10, 2006, the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute had issued separate statements refusing to send election observers.

The history may now repeat itself. The EWG last Tuesday at a meeting with the CEC expressed concerns over the deteriorating political situation.

It said it might not be possible for the EWG to deploy observers to oversee the January 5 polls in a volatile political situation.

Last Thursday, several foreign diplomats stationed in Dhaka held a meeting at an ambassador's residence to discuss the present political situation. Some diplomats of those countries that sent election observers were sceptic about sending their observers, said meeting sources.

"We do not want to give any credibility to the January 5 election. So, we may refrain from sending election observers," a diplomatic source told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Credibility of the January 5 polls has already been questioned on many grounds including that as many as 154 candidates, more than half the total number of constituencies, have already won unopposed.

A pre-election assessment mission of the Commonwealth visited Bangladesh in the first week of December. But since, there has been no communications with the Election Commission (EC), said sources.

New govt

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According to the sources, Hasina said if the BNP did not respond to this call, the new government would continue to function.

She, however, did not say how long the new cabinet would be in office.

Hasina also instructed the 127 AL candidates who have been elected unopposed to donate Tk 10 lakh each to the party fund.

"You were elected uncontested and you didn't need to spend any money to win the election race. So, each of you should donate Tk 10 lakh to the party fund for the next parliamentary elections," an AL leader quoted the PM as saying.

She also said they would not get party ticket for future elections if they did not donate the amount, the AL leader added, requesting anonymity.

If these 127 candidates follow Hasina's instructions, the party fund would get Tk 12.7 crore. The party has already collected about Tk 7.4 crore from the sale of 2,959 nomination papers, each at Tk 25,000.

Hasina also discussed at the meeting this week's blockade and said the situation would improve soon. "People will resist the blockade in their own interest," Hasina was quoted by a senior party leader as saying.

The PM asked Communications Minister Obaidul Quader to see that BRTC buses run on the long routes during blockades to ease public sufferings. "The government has bought 1,000 buses. Run those during blockades. If the blockaders ransack and destroy those, I will buy another 1,000 buses."

Contacted, Obaidul Quader confirmed the PM's instructions about the BRTC buses and said those had already started operating on long routes. "It will continue during blockades, as serving the people is our main target."

Not meant to interfere

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foreign ministry in Islamabad. On December 16, Pakistan parliament had adopted a resolution expressing concern over the execution of convicted war criminal and Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah.

Following the resolution, Bangladesh's foreign ministry had summoned the Pakistan envoy in Dhaka to register its protest.

Regarding the difference between the position of the foreign office and the parliament, Tasnim Aslam said, "It must be noted that the parliament is a sovereign body. It is the supreme legislative body."

The parliamentarians represent the sentiments of the people and therefore, have the right to make every statement they deem appropriate, she added.

"Certainly the purpose was not to interfere but it reflected our desire to look towards a brighter future in the spirit of 1974 Tripartite Agreement between Pakistan, India and Bangladesh where it was agreed that we would let bygones be bygones and focus on a better future for peace and stability of the region," Aslam said.

To a query about the Pakistan envoy being summoned in Dhaka, she said, "We would not like to get into responding to everything that may have been said in the public demonstrations because we do not want our response to be construed as recriminations."

The spokesperson continued, "We call upon the brotherly and friendly country of Bangladesh to adopt the spirit of reconciliation and cordiality in keeping with the tripartite agreement of 1974. We wish the people of Bangladesh peace, stability and progress."

Since the execution of Quader Mollah on December 12, Pakistan has drawn huge criticism from the people of Bangladesh for its stand on the issue.

Mad rush to seaport

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to carry goods from Gazipur to Chittagong port a few days ago whereas the usual fare varies between Tk 18,000 and Tk 20,000.

He said in case of emergency export needs, he sends goods with police escorts.

Bakhtiar Uddin Ahmed, general manager of Narayanganj-based Fakir Apparels Ltd, said, "I send 25 to 30 covered vans [lorries] with 10 lakh pieces of garment every Friday as the day is usually blockade free. I am trying to make good use of Fridays."

Mentioning massive traffic jams at key intersections on the highway, he said, "On normal days, trucks charge Tk 15,000 from Narayanganj to Chittagong Port but now I am paying Tk 70,000."

But getting trucks to go to Chittagong with even higher fare has become difficult as nearly all exporters need trucks on the particular day of the week, he said.

The trucks and lorries that reach the port cannot return to the capital until another weekend resulting in a shortage of vehicles.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mohammad Mahbubur Rashid, managing director of

Hazi Edu Mia Transport Ltd, said now they charge Tk 60,000 to Tk 70,000 per truck even though the fare was between Tk 15,000 and Tk 18,000 just five months ago.

"There is little we can do... We cannot run the vehicles every day during the blockade," he said, adding, "Like exporters and importers we also have to wait for one day of the week to run our vehicles."

Din Mohammad, general secretary of Antah-Zilla Malamal Paribahan Sangstha and Truck and Covered Van Malik Samity, a platform of truck owners, said they were on the same boat as the importers and exporters and their income had gone down due to the political situation.

Shahidullah Azim, vice-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the garment makers' platform, said when police escort trucks and lorries at nights during the blockade, pickets burn many of them Sitakunda near Chittagong.

"As a result, the BGMEA and the highway police authorities decided to send goods during the day," Azim said, adding that the exporters would start doing this from today.

Army to guard one-sided polls

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resort to all means to foil the voting by enforcing agitation programmes.

Credibility of this election has already been questioned on many grounds, particularly for 154 candidates to be elected uncontested. It means that the voters of more than half of 300 constituencies will have their representatives elected without casting a single vote.

All the prevailing signs suggest that international community might refrain from sending election observers to Bangladesh. In a clear manifestation of its stance against the polls, the European Union yesterday announced that it would not send observers to oversee the polls. Even the local observers might follow suit.

Against such a backdrop, the ensuing election looks all set to suffer from credibility crisis locally and internationally.

Army personnel, though, will start discharging their election duties from this week.

Like the Awami League-led government, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad himself was earlier against deployment of army in the polls. At a meeting with diplomats in October last year, he categorically said the EC had no plan to deploy army during the parliamentary election.

Sticking to its stance, the EC had refrained from suggesting that the government restore a provision in the RPO to give the armed forces sweeping authority to arrest anybody without warrant for violation of electoral laws within a radius of 400 yards of the

polling stations on the polling day.

Earlier last year, Rakib's predecessor ATM Shamsul Huda had suggested restoration of the provision in the RPO, which was scrapped by the AL-led government in February 2009. Before the 2001 parliamentary polls, the armed forces were given the authority by amending electoral laws.

On July 24 this year, AL General Secretary and LGRD Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam had asked the deputy commissioners (DC), who were appointed as returning officers by the EC, to prepare for holding the election in a free, fair and credible manner without the help of the army.

However, the prevailing political situation compelled the EC and the government to change their stance on army deployment. Now, like in the past, the role of the army might determine the atmosphere leading to the January 5 polls.

In every parliamentary election held since 1973, the army was deployed alongside other law enforcement agencies to ensure peaceful polls atmosphere. Its role has been lauded, particularly since the restoration of democracy in 1991.

But this time around, the prevailing situation reminds political analysts of the February 15, 1996 polls and the cancelled election of January 2007.

The army had cooperated with the then BNP government to hold the controversial February 15, 1996 election amid a boycott of polls and violent street agitations by the AL and other opposition parties.

However, the army did not play the same

Be young with Japanese plant

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experiments show it can prolong life by as much as a fifth.

"Okinawa has for decades enjoyed one of the longest life-expectancy rates in the world and I think the reason for this must lie in the ingredients of the traditional diet," said Tawada, a professor of agronomy at the University of the Ryukyus in Okinawa.

Tawada has been studying getto, part of the ginger family known variously as *Alpinia zerumbet*, pink porcelain lily or shell ginger, for the last 20 years and now believes his work is beginning to pay off.

In a recent experiment on worms, those fed on a daily diet of getto lived an average of 22.6 percent longer than the control group.

The plant, which has large green leaves, red berries and white flowers, has been a feature of Okinawan food for centuries and still grows in the wild.

And while the people of past centuries would not have known that it is rich in resveratrol—an anti-oxidant also found in grapes—they knew that it was good for

them, said Tawada.

"Traditionally, Okinawans have always felt that eating much -- a winter dish consisting of rice paste wrapped in a getto leaf -- would protect us from colds and give us strength," he said.

'TOO MUCH FAST FOOD'

But things are changing in Okinawa and the traditional diet, which was rich in locally-grown vegetables, fish and seaweed, is losing ground to the steakhouses and burger chains that crowd the streets of Naha, the island chain's capital city.

Those fast food joints originally sprouted to serve the 19,000 United States servicemen who are based on the island as part of a defence treaty between Washington and Tokyo, but are now popular among the locals -- even if the soldiers, sailors and airmen are not.

Women in Okinawa still live a very long time -- 87 years on average, one of the highest rates in Japan. But men have tumbled down the rankings and, at 79.4 years, are now 30th among the country's 47 prefectures, and below the national average.

Rejoinder, our reply

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misleading and unacceptable," read the rejoinder.

Hasan added that he inherited some assets after the death of his father in 2011. He has a loan of Tk 1.93 crore and his wife Tk 5.75 crore, which have already been shown in the latest tax returns.

He also raised question about how his wife's company having the value of Tk 9 lakh could make a profit of Tk 1.75 crore.

OUR REPLY

Our report mentioned that we just compared the two statements of the Awami League leaders, which were submitted to the Election Commission before the parliamentary polls in 2008 and 2014. We just published the volume of the minister and his wife's

wealth as mentioned in the wealth statement submitted to the EC by the minister.

Hasan claimed that formation of a limited company does not require any investment in cash, but he showed it as their moveable properties. And thus we added the value of the couple's share price to Hasan's wealth. The properties that the minister inherited were not mentioned in his affidavit submitted to the EC. So we had nothing to do in this regard.

The figures of the couple's loan amounts do not contradict any part of our report as we reported the same.

We stand by our report.

Upset by vicious politics

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approaches. But this time it has increased manifold. We were frightened whether any violence took place on the roads like last week," said Aysha Tarrannum, a mother whose daughter sat for the admission test.

She said the political turmoil had already hit hard her other child, who took the recently concluded primary terminal examinations. "Do the politicians ever care how we are going through due to their power-hungry game?" she asked.

Amid this situation, admission tests for different classes of the government schools in the capital were held yesterday. There are 29 government high schools in Dhaka and 14 of them offer education for class One. These schools usually remain on top of the limited-income parents' wish list.

Like previous years, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) has

divided the schools in three groups -- A, B, and C. The admission tests of the groups were supposed to be held on December 19, 20 and 21 in a row.

The DSHE has now rescheduled the C group's test. It would be held on December 27.

Children trying to get admitted to class Two to class Eight of the state-run high schools sat for a written test on Bangla, English and mathematics. Candidates for class Nine would be selected on the basis of their performance in the JSC and JDC exams, while the admission to class One was already held in a lottery system last week.

Contacted, Prof Fahima Khatun, director general of DSHE, said they were trying to manage everything amid the huge setback caused by the political programmes like blockades and hartals.

"Neither our teachers nor the students have got some relief this month," she said.

DG of Directorate of Primary Education Shyamal Kanti Ghosh said children usually visit relatives'

Hindus, AL men desert homes

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Sayedee in February.

The situation became worse after the tribunal, set up to deal with crimes against humanity committed during the country's Liberation War in 1971, had handed down capital punishment to another Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah and after his execution on December 12.

To handle the situation, law enforcement agencies have launched a joint drive in the district from Sunday to restore law and order. However, this has not proved to be enough to remove the security concern among the minority people.

Sathkira Superintendent of Police Chowdhury Manjurul Kabir is, however, hopeful that the situation would improve within a few days.

Meanwhile, Shyamol Kumar Ghosal of Agardari village under sadar upazila told The Daily Star, "I am not thinking of returning home as the situation there is still horrible."

He gave names of at least five Jamaat-Shibir men who had looted and burnt houses and business establishments of Hindus in Agardari union. He said some of the Hindu people had faced attacks twice.

One of the worst victims of the village is Shyamol's uncle Gopal Chandra Ghosal. His house came under attack immediately after the appeal verdict of war criminal Quader Mollah was delivered on November 26.

Around 60 masked men from nearby villages stormed his house and took away his TV, refrigerator and some furniture, and set those on fire. They also took two motorbikes of the family and set one of them alight and vandalised the other.

The attackers also wanted to slaughter Gopal and one of his grandsons but finally spared them after women of the house begged for mercy.

His nephew Shyamol, a lawyer by profession, said many Hindu families had sent their women and children to safe places while a few men stayed back to guard their houses.

Seeking anonymity, many Hindus of Agardari village told The Daily Star that their faith in religious harmony was shaken on the night of December 12, hours after Quader Mollah had been executed.

They said Jamaat-Shibir men had attacked many houses that night. They had also assaulted many Hindu people and vandalised their houses.

Subhash Chandra Ghosh, president of Zila Puja Celebration Committee and a former leader of Debhata Muktijuddho Command Council, is also among the worst victims of Jamaat atrocities.

In the morning after Mollah's execution, around 100 Jamaat-Shibir men set ablaze his two-storey building in Debishahar village. Three of the five brothers of the family used to live there with their wives and children.

The flames gutted everything on the ground floor and partially damaged the belongings on the first floor. Jamaat-Shibir men had also torched three motorcycles, snapped the water-supply line and looted 30 tolas of gold ornaments from the house, said his younger brother Sarat Chandra Ghosh.

He said, "My elder brother [Subhash] and I are now staying in Dhaka while 12 of our family members have taken shelter at our relatives' houses."

Narrating the December 13 arson attack by Jamaat-Shibir activists on his house in Kulia village, Debhata upazila parishad chairman and district Awami League leader Golam Mostafa said his 80-year-old mother had implored the attackers not to set the house on fire as Mostafa had done nothing to harm them.

In reply, the attackers told her that they were carrying out the directives of their high-ups.

The activists also vandalised and set on flames the house of Debhata upazila AL president Mujibur Rahman that night.

A large number of ruling party men are living away from their houses fearing attacks on their families. At least 10 AL leaders and activists were killed in the last 30 days.

No less than 70 houses and business establishments of the Hindu community and AL men came under Jamaat-Shibir attacks during this time.

Feroz Ahmed, organising secretary of the district unit AL, said several hundred leaders and activists of the party were hiding fearing attacks.

(Our Sathkira correspondent contributed to the

BNP leader

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deceased stabbed an Awami League leader in Tangail town yesterday morning.

Rafiqul Islam Faruque, 52, was the chairman of Dainna union and the vice-president of Tangail upazila BNP.

Tangail district BNP has called a hartal in the upazila from 6:00am to 2:00pm today, said organising secretary of the district unit Farhad Iqbal.

A group of criminals shot Faruque point-blank in the head around 6:30am near his home at Battala Bazar, said Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Tangail Model Police Station, quoting witnesses.

They stabbed the chairman several times,

the OC added.

Locals took him to Tangail General Hospital where doctors declared Faruque dead.

As the news of Faruque's death spread, his supporters stabbed Tara Miah, president of Dainna ward unit Awami League, suspecting his involvement in the killing.

Tara was admitted to Tangail General Hospital.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhruul Islam Alamgir yesterday condemned and protested the killing of the BNP leader. He claimed that the government wanted to establish a reign of terror and as part of this plan, it killed Faruque, who had been elected chairman three times.



Engineering Office

Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet

Invitation for Re-Tender (OTM)

Sealed tenders are hereby invited as per PPA-2006 & PPR-2008 for the dermentioned work as per terms and conditions stated below:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ministry/Division 2. Agency 3. Procuring entity name & district 4. Invitation for 5. Invitation reference No. & date 6. Procurement method 7. Budget and source of funds 8. Tender Package No 9. Tender package name 10. Tender publication date 11. Tender last selling date & time 12. Tender closing date & time 13. Tender opening date & time 14. Name and address of the office(s) selling tender document 15. Name and address of the office(s) receiving & opening tender document 16. Eligibility of tenderer: Tenderer must meet the following qualifying and other eligibility criteria stated in the tender documents:- (a) Reputed construction firms who have minimum 10 (ten) years of general experience in building construction and also have experience in successful completion of at least 1 (one) number of similar works of Tk. 20.00 (twenty) lac in a single work order in last 5 (five) years. (b) Experience certificate should have to be issued by the officer not below the rank of Executive Engineer of concerned department. (c) Liquid assets/Credit facility/FDR not less than Tk 12 (twelve) lac. (d) Current year trade license. (e) VAT registration certificate and up-to-date income tax clearance certificate. (f) Original money receipt of purchasing schedule from the bank. (g) All others as stated in the tender documents. (h) Experiences must be supported by the attested photocopy of work orders and completion certificates bearing work order No. & date. The tenderer with a consistent history of litigation or a number of arbitration awards against it and or debarred tenderers by this university or any other department/organization shall not be eligible to tender. 	<p>Ministry of Education. Shahjalal University of Science & Technology (SUST), Sylhet. University Engineer, Engineering Office, SUST, Sylhet. Construction of 10 Nos Low Cost Houses, SUST. Engg/36/12/25/2012-2013, Date-17/12/2013 Open Tendering Method (OTM-PW2) Own Fund. 01 (one). Construction of 10 Nos Low Cost Houses, SUST. Within 05 (five) days. Date-07/01/2014 Time-Up to 12:00 noon. Date-08/01/2014 Time-Up to 12:00 noon. Date-08/01/2014 Time-12:10pm. Sonali Bank Ltd, SUST Branch, Sylhet. (A/C No 36000034) Office of the University Engineer, SUST, Sylhet.</p>
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<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Brief description of works and related services 19. Price of tender document 	<p>Tinshed semi-pucca building, Tube wells, sanitary, electrical etc works.</p>
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<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 20. Amount of tender security 	<p>Tk. 1000.00 (one thousand) only on cash payment (non-refund</p>
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