

Focus shifts to Sunday

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office on Sunday.

It requested the DMP to provide security to Khaleda and other leaders who will gather at the party office, said Shamimur Rahman Shamim, assistant office secretary of the BNP.

Shamim was among the three-member BNP team that submitted the letter to the DMP commissioner's office in the morning.

On Tuesday, Khaleda, also leader of the opposition, announced Sunday's programme and urged people from every corner of the country to join the march to force the government to postpone the January 5 polls.

Government sources said the opposition leader would be barred from joining the programme on Sunday, just six days before the national election.

State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku told The Daily Star that the opposition programme was aimed at resisting the January 5 election.

"If the BNP wants to create anarchy through the programme, the law enforcement agencies will take all measures to tackle the situation," he said.

Sources said the government might soon go for a crackdown on leaders and activists of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami across the country to prevent them from joining Sunday's agitation.

If necessary, the government might halt traffic movement to and from the capital as it did before the BNP's march to Dhaka on March 12 last year.

Leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League would take positions at four gateways to the capital from Saturday to bar the opposition men from entering the capital, said AL sources.

In a joint statement yesterday evening, 14 AL lawmakers and two Jatiya Party leaders said many militants and criminals from different districts were taking shelter in the capital.

They urged the law enforcement agencies to immediately arrest all identified criminals, saying these anti-people elements were trying to create anarchy in the capital.

The leaders also called upon city residents to assist the law enforcers.

At a meeting at the party president's Dhanmondi office last night, top AL leaders asked lawmakers in the capital to remain alert and resist the opposition men if they try to create anarchy in the city.

They also directed the MPs to take to the streets to foil the BNP's move to thwart the January 5 polls, said sources.

The Dhaka city AL will hold a meeting at the party's central office today to decide its next course of action in the wake of the opposition programme.

The ruling party has asked its district-level leaders to remain alert and make sure that the opposition activists cannot create chaos in any district.

Conversely, the BNP has instructed its grass-

roots men to take part in Sunday's "March for Democracy" at any cost.

Apprehending that the government might try to foil the opposition's march to Dhaka, the party advised its grassroots leaders and activists to come to the capital two or three days ahead of the programme and stay with their relatives or friends here, said BNP insiders.

A number of the party's district leaders and activists told The Daily Star that many of them had already left for the capital in small groups as the government might suspend all communications between the capital and the rest of the country a day or two before the programme.

Party leaders and activists would be asked to stage sit-ins wherever they are prevented from marching towards the capital, said BNP insiders.

If the government resists Sunday's programme, the BNP might hold a small rally in front of its office and announce the next course of action, they said.

BNP high-ups said the party chief would announce tougher programmes, including non-cooperation with the government, till the election day.

The BNP-led combine will stage demonstrations all over the country today, protesting "attacks on its leaders and activists" in the last five spells of nationwide blockade.

Besides, the opposition will bring out processions in all cities, districts and upazilas across the

Admission in a shambles

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the tests at two universities at some distance from each other," said Mohammad Mohiuddin, an admission seeker who bought forms for four universities.

Dhaka University has already completed admission tests for five units in November, but the viva could not be finished due to the blockades.

Jagannath University held the admission tests, but could not start interviewing the successful students.

The Rajshahi University authorities had changed the date for its admission tests four times. The tests for different units will now be held on January 10-14.

Jahangirnagar University has postponed admission tests for the honours programmes indefinitely, the reasons for which were political unrest and teachers' movement. The tests were rescheduled for December 17-29.

Barisal University held the admission tests on the public holiday yesterday.

Admission tests in Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University in Dhaka were suspended twice. The authorities are yet to announce a fresh date.

Khulna University, Comilla University, Islamic University, Begum Rokeya

University and Sylhet Agricultural University had to postpone the exams due to "unavoidable reasons", as cited on their websites.

Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Pabna University of Science and Technology, and Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University could not hold the tests either.

Admission tests in Jessore Science and Technology University and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology are yet to be held together under a cluster system.

Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Khulna University of Engineering and Technology, Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology, Bangladesh Textile University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University and Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University have completed the tests. But the entire admission process is yet to be finished.

Delightfully different

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around Tk 38 lakh in the last five years.

This information surprised many when the two wealth statements he submitted to the Election Commission in 2008 and 2013 were compared.

Mostafizur, a lawmaker from the Dinajpur-5 constituency, and his wife had assets worth over Tk 2.08 crore in 2008. Now they own properties worth around Tk 1.69 crore.

The main reason behind the decrease in his assets is losing four flats in the capital.

He mentioned the four flats in the 2008 statement but he told The Daily Star recently that he gave away two flats to his two daughters and sold the other two.

However, the property of his wife Rezina Rahman has slightly gone up from Tk 44.4 lakh in 2008 to about Tk 48 lakh now, show the wealth statements.

According to the 2008 statement, the former state minister and his wife had movable properties worth about Tk 46 lakh, of which his wife owned about Tk 5.93 lakh. He had a bank loan of Tk 3 lakh.

In 2008, his own movable properties included cash Tk 20.92 lakh, bank deposit Tk 1.6 lakh, fixed deposit of Tk 3 lakh, a motor vehicle worth Tk 12.4 lakh, a motorcycle worth Tk 1.01 lakh, electronics goods worth Tk 45,000 and furniture worth Tk 60,000. His wife had cash Tk 2 lakh, fixed

deposit of Tk 3 lakh and ornaments worth Tk 93,000.

Mostafizur's own immovable properties were worth Tk 1.215 crore in 2008 that included arable land worth Tk 1.5 lakh and four apartments worth Tk 1.2 crore. His wife owned land and buildings worth Tk 37.1 lakh.

In 2013, he has shown his movable and immovable property as being worth about Tk 1.69 crore, of which he owns about Tk 1.11 crore, while his wife owns wealth worth Tk 45.77 lakh.

Mostafizur, who is popularly known as Fizar, has movable properties that include cash Tk 34.62 lakh, bank deposit of Tk 2.19 lakh, fixed deposit of Tk 30 lakh, a vehicle worth Tk 41.48 lakh, electronics goods worth Tk 45,000 and furniture worth Tk 60,000.

His wife has cash to the tune of Tk 7.59 lakh, bank deposit of Tk 20,000, gold ornaments worth Tk 45,000 and furniture worth Tk 43,000, according to the 2013 statement.

Also the Dinajpur district unit AL president, Mostafizur's annual income was Tk 2.15 lakh in 2008. It is now Tk 9.7 lakh after five years. His income increased as largely due to his salary as a state minister, Tk 5.74 lakh.

His wife's annual income has increased from Tk 1.4 lakh to Tk 2.51 lakh now.

Icy diplomacy

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political uncertainty, said a diplomat of the Korean embassy in Dhaka.

Similarly, Japan, a long-time friend and important stakeholder in Bangladesh, has suspended visits of any official or trade delegation due to the political confrontation and street violence.

Senior officials at the foreign ministry said they had many important pending issues with a good number of countries, but those are not being resolved as officials and government leaders of foreign countries were not at all eager to visit Bangladesh.

The officials are also uncertain about the upcoming events.

"There is no indication of any bilateral meeting by any country as most countries are totally confused about the future government, after the US, the EU and Commonwealth have refused to observe the January 5 controversial election," said a senior official at the foreign ministry.

Dozens of bilateral meetings with several important countries are pending, which is harming Bangladesh, the official told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

He said foreign diplomats based in Dhaka had been passing suffocating times for the past two months, as they could not move freely due to the political turbulence.

Many of them have even left Dhaka with their families on long vacation, as they thought the political stalemate would last long.

Instead of going to their offices, local UN officials and other missions have been working from home.

'Glitch' in EC website

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Even if they succeeded in getting through the links, it would take a long time to download the affidavits, often resulting in their annoyance and subsequent abandonment of the quest.

The website and the link titled "Candidate Disclosure", in particular, drew immense attention of people and media as it started giving comparative pictures of the wealth of MP-aspirants in 2008 and 2013.

The technical glitch of the EC website interestingly coincides with an Awami League delegation's recent request to the commission to stop disclosing the income and property statements of the candidates of the 10th parliamentary polls.

Embarrassed by the revelations that many AL leaders have amassed huge wealth in the last five years, the AL delegation led by former home minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir met the chief election commissioner on Sunday and made the plea.

Almost all the newspapers published stories on the shocking rise of their wealth in the past five years, triggering widespread public criticism.

Later on Tuesday, the EC issued a statement, saying it was legally bound to make the particulars public, and so, the commission could not stop disclosing the information.

However, people found it rather peculiar as only the link to affidavits' information

was not working while all the other links on the EC website were easily accessible.

Rafiqul Hoque, system manager of EC Secretariat, said, nothing was done from their end to bar people from checking the affidavits.

"If a lot of people try to access the webpage at the same time, it may become difficult to access it," he told The Daily Star.

"We are working on it," he added, but could not say how long it might take to solve the glitch.

Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz echoed the system engineer and said, "As far as we know, the website is running properly and people can easily access it without hassles."

However, IT expert Suman Ahmed Sabir, also the president of Bangladesh Computer Emergency Response Team, said, "It is very unusual that a link on a website, which had been active for many days, cannot be accessed all of a sudden without any reason."

The Supreme Court in a landmark verdict in 2007 asked the EC to collect eight-point information, including wealth statements of each candidate contesting in the parliamentary polls, and make those public.

The EC later incorporated a provision in the Representation of the People Order (RPO), the legal framework for conducting parliamentary polls, to ensure implementation of the apex court's order.

37 foreigners

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A tourist cannot extend his/her visa without sponsorship of a Bangladeshi citizen, said a former immigration official of the home ministry, who asked not to be named.

The Rab official also said the Chinese mission in Dhaka was yet to take any initiative for their arrested nationals.

A Taiwanese diplomat, who arrived in Dhaka on Tuesday from its New Delhi mission, officially approached the elite force for offering legal assistance to her compatriots.

Contacted, the diplomat refused to make any comment on the development from her government's side.

Meanwhile, the OC of Uttara Pashchim Police Station said they could not take the arrestees on remand due to shortage of special prison vans.

"Police would start quizzing them from Thursday (today)," he said, adding that the arrestees are currently in Dhaka Central Jail.

Fukushima operator readies new restructuring plan

AFP, Tokyo

Tokyo Electric Power yesterday submitted a fresh restructuring plan to a Japanese government-backed fund that envisages the creation of a special unit to dismantle the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant.

TEPCO president Naomi Hirose pledged thorough implementation of the plan, once approved by the government as expected next month.

The utility's board Tuesday approved a draft plan that would see the creation of a holding company with several sub-units dedicated to separate tasks, including one that would be solely responsible for decommissioning the battered reactors.

The plan, which includes a cost-cutting round of early retirements, assumes the giant utility will be allowed to restart some of its idled nuclear reactors.

Supporters say this is necessary to reduce the

inflated fuel bills caused by the switch back to fossil fuels in the aftermath of the disaster in March 2011.

"As the government takes a step forward (to help TEPCO), Tokyo Electric wished to demonstrate that we are taking three steps and four steps forward," Hirose told reporters of the plan, according to national broadcaster NHK.

TEPCO submitted the plan to the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, which gave its broad approval.

The utility and the fund will jointly submit the plan to the government next month for formal approval.

The government on Tuesday approved a budget for fiscal 2014 which includes measures to help TEPCO, such as earmarking 101.2 billion yen (\$1 billion) to pay for facilities to store radioactive waste.

Local media have separately said TEPCO was likely to receive fresh loans totalling 500

billion yen from 11 lending institutions, which have been pushing for reactor restarts to ensure the utility's sustainability.

The company cannot raise money on normal bond markets because of its perceived poor credit risk.

Observers say banks are already on the hook for huge sums and are willing to lend the company more to keep it afloat, in the hope they will get back their original money and more.

If TEPCO went under, it could deal a huge blow to the viability of some of its lenders, which would have knock-on effects in other parts of the economy. Its failure could also affect electricity production in the economically-vital Tokyo area.

TEPCO and Japan have yet to figure out the exact cost of compensating tens of thousands of people who had to flee their homes and livelihoods to avoid radiation.

Fakhrul among

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Secretary Generals Amanullah Aman and Barkatullah Bulu and Jamaat-e-Islami acting secretary general Shafiqur Rahman are among the accused top BNP and Jamaat leaders.

Sub-inspector of Ramna Model Police Station Nazmul Islam yesterday filed the case, mentioning the names of 18 opposition men, said Selim Mia, an inspector (investigation) of the police station.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that the top opposition leaders had been accused of "instigating and masterminding" the attack.

Ferdous Khalil, a traffic constable, was killed on the spot and Faizul Islam, a constable, and Bayzid, driver of the requisitioned bus, were injured as arsonists set fire to the vehicle at Bangla Motor around 11:20pm, hours after the opposition alliance's 83-hour blockade ended.

The injured have been undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the law enforcement agencies to hunt down the criminals involved in the arson attack, reported UNB.

Russia closes cases against Greenpeace activists: Group

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday dropped all but one of the cases against 30 crew members of a Greenpeace protest ship, marking the "final chapter" in a three-month criminal probe, the environmental group said.

The cases were dismissed under a Kremlin-backed amnesty that specifically mentioned the charge of hooliganism levelled against the environmental campaigners.

The detention of the group sparked global protests and tainted Russia's image ahead of February's Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

Twenty-five foreigners were summoned to the Investigative Committee yesterday to receive confirmation that the hooliganism probes launched after their September protest against oil drilling in the Barents Sea had been dropped, Greenpeace said.

Only Italian activist Cristian d'Alessandro failed to receive the relevant paperwork. Greenpeace said the delay was due to the absence of a translator and the Italian was invited to return on Thursday.

Anthony Perrett of Britain was the first Greenpeace member to have his case dis-

missed on Tuesday.

The four Russian crew members also benefited from the amnesty.

"The final chapter in the legal ordeal of the Arctic 30 began today," Greenpeace said in a statement.

The next step will see the foreigners receive exit visas to leave Russia "in the coming days," Greenpeace said.

Five people come from countries that have a no-visa regime with Russia. But "they also need the migration service sticker to leave," said spokesman Ben Stewart.

The group said it also expected Russian investigators to release all the equipment seized during the raid of the Arctic Sunrise, as well as the ship itself, which is still impounded at Russia's Arctic Circle port of Murmansk.

Arctic Sunrise was boarded by Russian border guards and towed to Murmansk in September after several activists attempted to scale the Prirazlomnaya oil rig belonging to Russian energy giant Gazprom to protest Arctic drilling.

The crew then spent several weeks detained in the local jail before being transferred to Saint Petersburg and released on bail.

Originally facing a charge of piracy, they were later left with only the less severe hooliganism accusation.

Greenpeace argues that the group's detention was illegal as the ship was in international waters. Russia however said it was in the right and needed to protect its platform, while President Vladimir Putin slammed the group for merely seeking publicity.

An international maritime court in Germany in November told Russia to release the activists and the ship in response to a formal complaint lodged by the Netherlands, under whose flag the ship sailed.

But Russia boycotted the German court hearings and ignored the ruling.

The ship's US captain Peter Willcox yesterday said he was "pleased and relieved the charges have been dropped".

But some activists said the amnesty document merely lifted the investigation and punishment while still recognising their peaceful protest as a crime.

In a further upset to the group, Gazprom last week announced that it had started oil production at the platform, formally launching its first offshore production in the Arctic.

Khaleda threatens govt

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actual wealth amassed through unfair means.

"Even minister Dilip Barua [now the PM's adviser] has amassed vast wealth ...," she said.

Khaleda demanded that the government arrange a free, fair and inclusive election under a non-party caretaker government system through an understanding with the opposition and postpone the January-5

parliamentary polls.

She reiterated that the government and its agents were involved in setting fire to passenger vehicles and killing and attacking minorities during their movement so that it could blame the opposition. "This trend is nothing new ... they file cases against opposition leaders and activists for these subversive activities."

Ex-BNP MP Bakul held

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BNP sources alleged that law enforcers also picked up BNP MP Shammi Akhter, BNP leader Aminul Islam, and Tabid Awal Mintoo, son of BNP chief's adviser Abdul Awal Mintoo, at Khaleda's Gulshan office last night.

The Daily Star could not confirm their detention by law enforcers.

Meanwhile, detectives released BNP standing committee member RA Ghani last night after detaining him when he was going into Khaleda's office.

The 82-year-old leader was dropped off near his Dhanmondi home, his relative Rabbir Ahmed Shuvo told The Daily Star.

Rab personnel and police took position around Khaleda's residence yesterday morning, a day after Khaleda announced the programme "march for democracy" towards Dhaka.

In a press conference, Khaleda had

called upon people from all walks of life to march towards the capital carrying the national flag and gather at the party headquarters in Nayapalton to resist the government's move to hold a "one-sided and farcical" election on January 5.

Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies have detained dozens of opposition leaders and activists from different parts of the city.

Kalabagan police detained at least 64 opposition activists raiding several messes and houses at the city's Hatirpool area early yesterday, locals said.

Mohammad Iqbal, officer-in-charge of Kalabagan Police Station, said they were detained on specific allegations of torching and vandalising vehicles during hartals and blockades.

Gulshan police said they detained seven people yesterday.