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Top court blocks government decree curbing police power

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Govt delinks Dhaka

DMP won't allow rally in capital; Khaleda asks all to defy barriers for tomorrow's march

STAR REPORT

By yesterday evening, most districts were cut off from the capital as pro-Awami League transport associations stopped operating buses and launches, apparently to foil tomorrow's Dhaka march called by the BNP-led opposition alliance.

A number of bus and launch owners said they did not operate as law enforcers "advised" them to remain grounded on security concerns.

Moreover, transport associations in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Khulna divisions have called a two-day strike beginning this morning, protesting the recent vandalism and arson attacks on buses by the opposition men and demanding the arrests of the attackers. The shutdown will end tomorrow evening.

"Busses are leaving Dhaka but they are not returning to the capital as the drivers and helpers fear for their security," Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, told The Daily Star last night.

All Dhaka-bound passenger vessels already stopped operating from Barisal, Bhola, Chandpur, Jhalakathi, Pirojpur and Patuakhali yesterday evening. As of 9:00pm, passengers of four launches were waiting for their

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Just when the vessels were about to sail for Dhaka, law enforcers stop them at Barisal Launch Terminal yesterday evening, get the passengers off and close the terminal, *inset*. With buses from the city to the capital already kept out of service, thousands of passengers got stranded.

PHOTO: ARIFUR RAHMAN

At least 360 picked up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police and joint forces yesterday picked up at least 360 people including opposition activists across the country.

Of them, 167 were rounded up by joint forces in drives at several locations in the capital's Mirpur from 12:00am till 6:00am. At least 19 of them are opposition men with alleged links to subversive activities and they were held in Pallabi, Bhashantek, Rupnagar, Shah Ali and Mirpur, police said.

Meanwhile, the detectives have arrested at least seven BNP leaders and activists including two lawmakers either in front of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan residence or her office in the last three days.

With the seven, the

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AL'S POLLS CHARTER TODAY

Law against errant MPs

Party to pledge 10pc growth rate, 24,000MW electricity, deep seaport, two major bridges, employment for all youths

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

voted to power again, the Awami League will enact laws to ensure accountability of the MPs for their activities in and outside parliament.

The ruling party is likely to come up with the promise in its election manifesto for the 10th parliamentary polls

at a time when the party is visibly embarrassed at the sharp rise in the wealth of some party lawmakers and former ministers in last five years.

AL President Sheikh Hasina, also the prime minister, will unveil the manifesto at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre at 3.00pm today.

The manifesto titled "Bangladesh moving forward" will highlight the government's successes in different sectors and detail the party's election pledges, party sources said.

Although most of the major parties are not contesting the January 5 polls, the AL will pledge to make the 10th

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Exercise your voting rights

Says PM in Gopalganj

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged people to exercise their voting rights in the January 5 national election and resist those who would try to foil the polls.

"Inshallah, the election will surely be held in Bangladesh. Casting vote is the rights of people, and I urge all to cast their votes spontaneously," she said.

Hasina made the remarks while addressing a party workers' meeting at Shilpakala Academy in Kotalipara of Gopalganj as part of her electioneering in two districts, reports UNB.

The premier sought votes for "boat", the election symbol of Awami League, to re-elect her party and give them scope to complete the unfinished tasks and continue the development works.

At least 154 candidates in the elections scheduled for January 5 have already won unopposed as the BNP-led opposition alliance and former Awami League ally Jatiya Party refrained from taking part.

With "contest" in just 146 constituencies, several foreign organisations and countries refused to send election observers for the polls citing security concerns, and the fact it was not an all-inclusive election.

The opposition, demanding restoration of the caretaker government system, has been enforcing long hartals and blockades which have turned violent.

Hasina yesterday came down heavily on the opposition for indiscriminately felling trees across the country and killing people in the name of blockade.

"It seems that the opposition is out there to deforest the country," Hasina, also the chief of AL, told her audience.

Turning to the war crimes trial, she alleged that the BNP-Jamaat-Shibir

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It's local

Locally assembled
Honda bike on sale

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Japanese auto giant Honda has begun selling locally assembled motorcycles in Bangladesh.



The sale came a year after Honda partnered with state-run Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) to forge a joint venture, Bangladesh Honda Private Ltd (BHL), to cater to the demand of the booming local market.

A total of six models, including the locally produced Honda CD80, went on sale yesterday with the opening two authorised dealerships in Tangail and Jamalpur, the company said in a statement.

The BHL began the local production of

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Corrigendum

In the commentary "Please do not hold Jan 5 elections" published in The Daily Star yesterday, it should read Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah in place of Khairul Bashar and Abdul Wahab Miah. We regret the error.



A policeman picks up a banner of Hizb-ut Tahrir that urges army officers to remove the Awami League and BNP and establish *Khilafat* led by the banned organisation. Hizb-ut yesterday tried to bring out a flash procession at Segunbagicha but law enforcers drove them away firing shots at them. Story on page 5.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BIBIYANA RESERVE

Gas recovery to rise dramatically

SHARIER KHAN

The recoverable gas from the country's largest gas field Bibiyana is likely to increase significantly.

A high official of Petrobangla said this on the basis of primary indications from ongoing drilling of several wells at Bibiyana by Chevron as part of its half a billion dollar project to increase gas production from late next year.

If the present indications are confirmed through further analysis and drilling, the recoverable reserve may go

up by another trillion cubic feet. "By June next, the American oil giant would be able to confirm the increase," said the official.

Petrobangla had earlier certified the field to have 7.4 trillion cubic feet (tcf) gas in place, of which 4.2 tcf is proven and recoverable. This is bigger than the last assessed figure of the country's oldest producing field Titas (the reserve of which is currently being reassessed).

The additional reserve in the Bibiyana field comes as comfort for

gas-starved Bangladesh that did not have much luck with any major gas discovery in the last one decade.

The field is currently producing 800 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) gas, slightly over one third of the country's needs, and set to gradually increase production by another 300 mmcf gas.

It would also increase production of condensate, a liquid fuel by-product of the gas, by 4,000 barrels a day which is worth \$175 million per year. Such a

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