

Govt, AL men stymie march to Dhaka

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rest of the country since Thursday evening by snapping all communication networks between Dhaka and other parts of the country.

To prevent opposition men from entering the capital, it deployed over a 12,000-strong force comprising police, Rab and BGB at all the entry points of the capital, including Gabtoli, Sayedabad, Jatrabari, Babubazar and Tongi.

Security forces allowed some people to enter Dhaka only after searching their bodies and belongings, triggering panic among the public.

"We have been here since early morning and checking everybody trying to enter the city," said a Rab officer at Gabtoli.

Law enforcers, many of whom were called in

from outside the capital, also took positions on almost all the city streets to stop opposition processions from going to the venue of the rally.

Stick-wielding activists of the ruling Awami League and its associated bodies also took to the streets in droves to resist the opposition march. They also brought out processions on many city streets, obstructing traffic.

In some areas, the AL men also blocked public movement. For instance, activists and leaders of Awami Juba League accompanied by law enforcers barricaded both sides of Babubazar Bridge and did not let anyone enter the capital.

Only those familiar with the ruling party men were allowed in, as law enforcers followed their instructions.

"I'm never with politics. Let me go," Jabbar Mia, a roadside fruit vendor, was seen pleading with AL activists in the afternoon.

At Nayapaltn, law enforcers cordoned off the BNP headquarters and put up barricades on all the roads leading to it. Even press vehicles were not allowed to cross the barricades until journalists showed the police their identity cards.

"You know why we are not allowing people to go there," said a police officer who took position with his force at Nayapaltn intersection by setting up a barbed-wire fence.

Khaleda Zia on December 24 announced the Dhaka march programme, after the 18-party alliance had enforced a series of blockades since November 26, demanding the cancellation of the polls schedule.

Over the past one month, the opposition enforced countrywide blockade of roads, rail and waterways for 22 days in phases. Violent clashes, arson blasts and killings happened almost daily, claiming at least 120 lives.

Between November 26 and December 24, only seven days were free from blockades -- four Fridays, two holidays for Martyred Intellectuals Day and Victory Day and December 15 when the Jamaat called a hartal to protest the execution of its leader Quader Mollah for war crimes.

Last year, Khaleda called a Dhaka march programme for March 12 to press home the demand for the restoration of the caretaker government system.

That time too, the government imposed heavy restrictions, and police and ruling party

activists blocked roads, rail and waterways to prevent opposition supporters from entering the capital.

But the rally still took place and was joined by tens of thousands of opposition men.

But this time the government took a tougher stance to foil the rally altogether.

Although the BNP could not bring out any procession, Jamaat-Shibir activists brought out one in Malibagh in the afternoon, resulting in a clash with police.

At one stage, police opened fire, killing Mansur Pradhania, 20.

He was a law student at City University in Banani, said his brother Manzur Samad.

Mansur, of Askona in the capital, was a leader of the airport thana unit of Chhatra Shibir.

Ruling party cadres go on the rampage

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to the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) building and torched a motorcycle.

The lawyers locked the gate of the building and started throwing brick chips at the AL activists from the rooftop. The AL men also hurled brick chips and stones in retaliation.

Earlier, around 11:15am, over 200 lawyers led by BNP Chairperson's Adviser Khandker Mahub Hossain brought out a procession from the court premises in support of "March for Democracy". BNP leaders Osman Faruk, Altaf Hossain, Lt Gen (ret) Mahubur Rahman and some outsiders participated in it.

As they attempted to pass through the main gate, police used water cannons and hurled two sound grenades. At one stage, they shut the gate with a chain.

However, the lawyers continued their demonstration, chanting slogans against the government, while police sprayed cold and coloured water on them in phases.

Talking to The Daily Star, Khandker Mahub Hossain said, "We were demonstrating peacefully. Police and Awami League activists attacked us without any provocation."

Contacted, Attorney General Mahubey Alam said, "The incident occurred as some BNP leaders, who are not lawyers, joined the demonstration."

Around 12:00 noon, pro-BNP journalists were demonstrating at the Jatiya Press Club, chanting anti-government slogans using a loud speaker.

At the time, a procession of around 250 to 300 activists led by AL Dhaka city General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya was passing through the adjacent road.

Hearing the slogans, they started hurling brick chips inside the press club. In retaliation, the pro-BNP journalists also threw brick chips at them. Maya left the spot immediately.

Later, talking to The Daily Star, Maya claimed he was at the party's Bangabandhu Avenue headquarters, not in the procession.

Around 12:45pm, the AL men again started hurling brick chips and banging on the gates of the press club.

Police stayed out of all this.

Later, pro-AL and pro-BNP journalists took positions separately on the club premises and chanted slogans. During this time, both the groups got engaged in scuffles and throwing brick chips at one another.

Mafizul Islam, treasurer of the pro-AL faction of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), was seriously hurt.

The situation calmed down around



Ruling party activists, with sticks and national flags in their hands, storm the Supreme Court premises yesterday and chase, top, pro-opposition lawyers who were demonstrating at the court. A number of them also beat up a pro-opposition woman lawyer at the apex court.

2:00pm.

The pro-BNP journalists claimed at least 40 members of their faction were injured, six critically. In protest, they will demonstrate across the country today and stage a rally at the press club around 11:00am.

The pro-AL faction of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) called for a rally at the same venue around the same time to protest the "chaos created inside the press club by brining in outsiders."

In the afternoon, at least seven opposition-leaning teachers of Dhaka University sustained wounds in an attack by activists of Muktiyoddha Projonmo League.

Around 80 to 90 teachers, obstructed by police on their way to the Nayapaltn BNP headquarters, were staging a sit-in at the intersection near Shikha Bhaban.

A group of 20 to 25 stick-wielding activists attacked the teachers, forcing them to retreat to Curzon Hall.

The teachers claimed the rowdies also assaulted their female colleagues. The attackers were chanting slogans like "attack razakars, kill them" and so on.

Prof Tajmeri Islam alleged that AL cadres had swooped on their peaceful procession brought out in support of the "March for Democracy", called to force the government to postpone the January 5 polls.

Protesting the attack, the pro-opposition teachers announced a rally for today at the base of Aparajeyo Bangla on the DU campus around 11:00am.

Pro-government activists also staged processions, rallies and cultural programmes at different strategic points including Jigatola,

Kalabagan, Dhanmondi, Hazaribagh, New Market, Ramna, Lalbagh, Sutrapur, Kotwali Thana area, Demra, Shyampur, Cantonment, Khilkhet, Uttara, Turag, Kafur, Mirpur, Pallabi, Khilgaon, Sabujbagh, Moghazara, Mohammadpur and Matsya Bhaban areas.

They pitched camps at several spots, including Gabtoli bus terminal and Mazar road.

In Gabtoli, members of the Sramik League, Jubo League and Chhatra League were stationed and were seen randomly stopping pedestrians and rickshaw passengers. Allowing any vehicles in the area was out of the question.

As people bound for the city crowded near Babu Bazar Bridge, the law enforcers repeatedly baton-charged them while the pro-AL activists pushed them away.

Only a handful of people vouched for by AL activists were allowed to cross the bridge.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN/SK ENAMUL HAQ/COURTESY

The army along with police and Rab personnel took positions at different points from Kanchpur Bridge to Jatrabari.

Many had to walk miles as the number of public transport was almost zero. Some auto rickshaws, rickshaws and rickshaw vans were seen plying the streets.

In some places, activists were seen checking auto-rickshaws. Even vehicles carrying journalists were not out of the vigil.

"Around 15 to 20 men carrying batons, some with iron rods in their hands, stopped my auto-rickshaw at Matsya Bhaban intersection, although a banner reading 'newspapers' was hung in front of it," one of our correspondents covering the events reported.

They, however, allowed him to go after knowing of his identity.

Kids triumph over all odds

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percentage points higher than that of the last year.

The number of GPA-5 achievers tripled this time. A total of 1,52,997 examinees secured GPA-5, the highest grade point average, which was 44,158 last year.

The results of all education boards simultaneously published at 2:00 pm yesterday showing a significant improvement in other indicators.

The number of total examinees and number of schools with cent percent pass rate rose remarkably while the number of failed pupil and schools with zero pass rate came down.

Education board officials and teachers attributed the incorporation of an optional subject, popularly known as fourth subject, in this examination for first time as the major reason behind the success.

Besides, the students' better performance in English and Mathematics as compared to last year and their awareness of the exams also contributed to the overall success rate, they said.

A total of 13,89,313 students -- 6,57,741 boys

and 7,31,572 girls -- under eight general education boards came out successful in the JSC exam. The number of failed students came down to 1,59,387.

And 461 out of 475 JSC students, who sat for the test in six overseas centres, came out successful. Of them, 198 obtained GPA-5.

The pass rate in Junior Dakhil Certificate (JDC) examinations is 91.11 percent, said Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, while formally announcing the results at a press conference at his ministry around 1:00 pm.

The combined pass rate of JSC and JDC in eight general boards and one madrasa board also beat previous records with 89.94 percent students coming out successful.

The exams were scheduled to begin on November 4 but the authorities had to reschedule the exams for November 7 due to the 18-party opposition alliance's shutdown.

As the frequent changes in exam schedules resulted in a significant fall in the HSC results, the education minister had appealed to keep JSC and

JDC exams beyond the purview of hartal.

But his call was ignored. A total of 17 test dates of JSC and JDC examinations had been changed due to the agitation. The tests ended on November 22.

Yesterday, the minister said, "They [students] were uncertain about their tests and their studies were badly hampered by the frequent changes in the exam schedule caused by hartals. It was a huge psychological stress on them."

Asked how it was that the results had turned out better despite all obstacles, he said, the introduction of the optional subject had made it possible.

The additional marks of the students, who obtained more than 40 marks in the optional subject, were added, resulting in the rise in the pass rate and GPA-5 achievers, he explained.

"Besides, we used our experience of HSC and took steps accordingly," he said.

Dhaka Education Board Chairman Taslima Begum also gave the optional subject the full credit.

"The examinees of SSC and HSC have long been getting this facility. We have introduced the subject in JSC for the first time, which significantly contributed to better results," she told The Daily Star.

Agricultural Studies, Home Economics, Sanskrit, Pali and Arabic are the optional subjects, and students have the option to choose one from any of these.

In 2012, the pass rate in English under Rajshahi Board was 88.62 percent which leapt to 94.38 percent this year. Similarly, the pass rate in Mathematics in the board jumped to 96.49 percent from last year's 92 percent.

All other boards almost have exactly the same situation, board officials said.

The students who took this year's JSC were the first batch of primary terminal examination, they also said.

Despite a panicky situation in the city due to the opposition's "March for Democracy" programme yesterday, the schools wore a festive look following the publication of the results.

Before the announcement of the results, the education minister handed over a copy of the results to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

As in previous years, the highest 96.60 percent examinees passed from Barisal Board. Chittagong Board is at the bottom among the eight boards with 86.13 percent pass rate while Dhaka Board goes down to seventh position with 87.93 percent pass rate.

In Dhaka board, Viqarunnisa Noon School topped the list of 20 best institutions. Ideal School and College, Motijheel and Rajuk Uttara Model High School and College ranked second and third based on five academic standards.

NUMBER HIGHER RESULT POORER

Although the number of girl examinees was higher by around 1 lakh than boys in all boards, they failed to outnumber the boys in the pass rate.

Except Dhaka and Barisal, the pass rate of boys is higher in all other boards. The success rates of boys and girls are 90 and 89.44 percent respectively. However, girls did well in terms of obtaining GPA-5.

PM likely to address nation on Friday

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them at Gono Bhaban last night.

The AL chief will also visit Pirganj Thursday for the election campaign as she is contesting from Rangpur-6 constituency.

Fourteen-party alliance leaders Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Latif Siddique, Obaidul Quader, Syed Ashrafur Islam, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haq Inu and Jahangir Kabir Nanak met Hasina yesterday. She discussed the latest political situation with them.

Party sources said the AL chief asked the alliance leaders to remain on the streets to resist any move to foil the national polls.

She also directed them not to bring out any stick-wielding procession, rather bring out processions with 'boat', meeting sources told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the ruling AL yesterday described the BNP's "March for Democracy" as "a drama and a damp squib", claiming people did not respond to the opposition leader's call for joining the programme.

"Neither the BNP men nor the general people have responded to the programme. Whenever Khaleda Zia announces a

programme, people reject it outright," AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said at a press briefing at the party chief's political office in Dhanmondi.

Ashraf, also LGRD and cooperatives minister, claimed Khaleda herself did not want to join the "March for Democracy".

"She woke up at 3:00pm while the programme was scheduled for 10:00am. It proves she did not really want to attend the march," he observed.

"In the name of the programme, you [people] saw what a drama Khaleda Zia has staged. She suddenly came out of her residence in the afternoon and from the way she dressed up, it seemed as if she was going to attend a party, not a movement," he said.

The AL leader claimed that no major incidents took place yesterday, except for a few isolated ones.

He also said neither the government nor the AL tried to obstruct the programme.

"The AL never tried to obstruct the opposition men. It was the duty of the party and of the government to protect the lives and properties of the people," Ashraf said.

Asked about the attack on lawyers on the High Court premises yesterday, he claimed there were no lawyers except some members of Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal and Chhatra Shibir black coats on the HC premises.

They created chaos under the leadership of BNP leaders Lt Gen (ret) Mahubur Rahman, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Osman Faruk, who were not lawyers either, he alleged.

He also said Khaleda Zia had the democratic right to announce a programme but people would expect her to observe it peacefully.

On police presence in front of Khaleda's Gulshan residence, the minister said security had been beefed up in front of her residence following repeated requests the BNP chief, through her party leaders, made to the government.

Ashraf also condemned Khaleda Zia for rebuking an on-duty police officer in front of her Gulshan residence.

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader, Dipu Moni, Jahangir Kabir Nanak and Ahmed Hossain were also present at the press briefing.

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and the South Asia bureau chief of the weekly, asking them to explain why contempt of court proceedings should not be taken against them for "interfering in ongoing trial, violating privacy of a judge and having link in the hacking".

The show-cause notice was issued after a person, claiming to have been from the London-based weekly, had called Justice Md Nizamul Huq, former chairman of the ICT-1, and said The Economist had possessed hacked Skype conversation between him and Ahmed Ziauddin, a legal expert on international crimes.

Terming it a serious breach of privacy, the show-cause notice said the persons involved in disturbing the processes of the tribunal "have links to the hacking".

The tribunal yesterday made five observations on the background upon which the notice was issued.

According to its observations, no journalists will have the rights to communicate with any judge directly or over the phone for gathering information.

The journalists will have to collect information about a case pending with the tribunal from its lawyers concerned.

If journalists want administrative information, they will have to contact the registrar as he is the designated person for it.

Any information obtained 'illegally' should not be published, the court said.

The tribunal also asked journalists to refrain from "scandalising" the court.

Issuing the show-cause notice on December 6, the tribunal said the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973 was a new law. To understand the law, it was necessary for the judges to look into the process and orders of different tribunals and consult experts, the court added.

Justice Nizamul Huq said he had the privilege of consulting expatriate Bangladeshis, including Dr Ahmed.

On December 5, a person introducing himself from The Economist made a call to Justice Nizamul Huq claiming to have possessed the conversation between him and Dr Ziauddin.

The caller also asked the chairman a number of questions on the conversation, which was not allowed under the law, the show-cause notice said.

The Skype controversy, which led to the resignation of Justice Nizamul Huq on December 11, began after Bangla national daily Amar Desh published a "transcript of Skype conversation".