



PHOTO: STAR

BNP Vice-chairman Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury being taken to a Dhaka court yesterday in a case filed in connection with the violence in the capital's Bakshibazar area on December 24. He was arrested Thursday night at his Banani home.

## Shamsher Mobin

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Detectives picked up Mobin from his Banani home Thursday night.

Meanwhile, Police yesterday removed the lock from the gate of the BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office and slightly relaxed the security measures.

A few number of police personnel were deployed there late last night and visitors were allowed to go inside the office where Khaleda Zia had been "confined to" since the night of January 4.

The BNP has been claiming that Khaleda had been kept under house arrest but police said she was free to go home.

Rozi Ferdous, acting president of Women Journalists Forum who met the BNP chief around 6:30pm, told journalists that Khaleda was sick and that she was using nebulisers and inhalers for respiratory problems.

She said Khaleda's respiratory problems were caused by the pepper spray which the police used in front of the office on January 5.

### BLOCKADE TO CONTINUE

The ongoing countrywide blockade enforced by the BNP would continue until the removal of the Awami League-led government, BNP Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed said yesterday.

"The removal of the government is now only a matter of time ... The government would be forced to step down," he said while talking to reporters at a house in Gulshan.

He also asked party activists to take to the streets to make the blockade a success.

Condemning the arrest of Mobin, Rizvi demanded his immediate release.

Police early yesterday went to the house of Mirza Abbas in Shahjahanpur but the BNP leader was not home.

## Bomb hurled

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Banani Police Station.

The criminals came in a bike and fled immediately after the bomb explosion which also broke windowpanes of a vehicle parked inside the house, he added.

"The mother, sister and brother-in-law of the minister were in the house and they are safe," added the SI.

The minister lives in his another house in the capital.

The injured Ansar member is being treated at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

## Islamic University

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were not feeling secure due to the ongoing countrywide blockade enforced by the BNP-led alliance, he added.

The authorities asked resident students to vacate the halls by 10:00am today, said Amanur Rahman, deputy registrar of the university.

According to sources, the IU authorities had information that activists of the Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student front of Jamaat-e-Islami, were hatching a plot to destabilise the campus. They brought in a huge number of outsiders for this purpose.

Shibir cadres, who were involved in different subversive activities across the country, had taken shelter at the university dormitories, said a high-ranking official of Kushtia police, seeking anonymity.

Earlier yesterday, shibir men of the IU unit brought out a procession in front of the university main gate in support of the ongoing blockade. Later, police intervened, triggering a clash. The Shibir men then blocked the Kushtia-Khulna highway for an hour.

The university resumed its academic activities on January 8 after remaining closed for 38 days following the death of a student near the main entrance of the university and subsequent violence on the campus.

## Fall of Rajapakse

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new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"People want a new political culture. I don't want anyone taking the law into their own hands," said Wickremesinghe, the head of the opposition United National Party (UNP), at an earlier press conference.

Sirisena, a former health minister who united a fractured opposition to pull off an unlikely victory, thanked Rajapakse for a "fair election that allowed me to be the president".

He was elected with a 51.28-percent share of the vote to the former leader's 47.58 percent.

It was a remarkable reverse for a leader who had appeared certain of victory when he called snap polls in November.

Thilanga Sumathipala, a lawmaker with Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, said the outgoing president had a "very emotional" meeting with ministers as he bowed out yesterday.

US Secretary of State John Kerry welcomed Rajapakse's early concession and said he looked forward to working with the new leader.

Sirisena has promised sweeping reforms of the presidency and said he will transfer many of its executive powers to parliament.

He was elected on a tide of resentment against Rajapakse, who wrote the constitution after his re-election in 2010 to remove the two-term limit on the presidency and give himself more powers over public servants and judges.

During the campaign, Sirisena said that he had warned Rajapakse to change his ways or risk new unrest in the country.

"He was leading the country down a dangerous road to destruction," he had said, promising a "constitutional revolution" if elected.

Rajapakse enjoyed huge support among majority Sinhalese voters after overseeing the end of a separatist war by ethnic Tamil rebels in 2009.

But critics say he failed to bring about reconciliation in the years that followed his crushing victory over the Tamil Tiger guerrillas.

He is also accused of undermining the independence of the judiciary and has packed the government with relatives, sparking resentment even within his own party.

Rajapakse fell out with the West over allegations his troops killed 40,000 Tamil civilians at the end of the civil war, and refused to cooperate with a UN-mandated investigation.

He cultivated close links with China, which has invested heavily in Sri Lanka, seeking to counter rival regional power India's influence.

Beijing yesterday downplayed suggestions the new leadership could impact its projects in Sri Lanka.

## Violence may hurt

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Political tensions erupted with the BNP enforcing a countrywide daylong hartal, protesting the government's "foiling" of its Gazipur rally on December 27. On January 6, the BNP chief called a countrywide blockade for an indefinite period to protest the government's not allowing her party and allies to hold rallies in the capital and elsewhere.

The nonstop blockade not only continues on the weekly holidays but coincides with the second largest congregation of the Muslims near the capital city.

The recent clashes follow a period of political violence leading up to the January 2014 election in which more than 300 people were reportedly killed. The repeat of violence thus far in 2015 shows that tensions remain high, and may further damage foreign investor perception regarding the country's stability, Fitch said.

It said economic activity could directly be affected in the short term if the violence and blockades continue.

The opposition has promised to address international concerns over war crimes and normalise relations with Western nations and India, whose Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Sirisena.

Sirisena's decision to run triggered a slew of defections and became a rallying point for disaffection with Rajapakse and his powerful family.

His vision for the country ties in closely with the free-market policies of the centre-right UNP which provided him with the political base to contest the election.

But analysts say he faces a challenge to unite the rainbow coalition of parties from right-wingers to Marxists that helped him secure victory.

The vote passed off largely peacefully, although there were some reports of intimidation in Tamil areas.

The president had come under international pressure, with Washington urging him to ensure peaceful and credible polls.

The election came days before a visit to the island by Pope Francis which some Catholic leaders had said should be cancelled in the event of violence.

Election monitors said large numbers of people had voted in the Tamil-dominated former war zones of the north and east, which are heavily militarised.

Tamils are Sri Lanka's largest minority, accounting for 13 percent of the population and helped bring down Rajapakse by supporting his rival.

"We voted to get our dignity back," said a Tamil journalist who asked not to be named.

"We may have good roads and a new railway line, but what we want is to live in peace."

## Mali Prime Minister Moussa Mara resigns: presidency

AFP, Bamako

Mali named a new prime minister on Thursday with Modibo Keita taking over after Moussa Mara resigned under pressure from the president of the strife-torn west African nation.

Modibo Keita, who has been leading peace negotiations with rebel groups, was appointed by President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, according to a presidential decree.

Mara leaves the job after just eight months.

A source close to him told AFP that "he wanted to carry on, but it's not him who decides".

"The president wanted to change the prime minister, so the premier (Mara) issued his resignation to the president."

Protracted protests could also negatively affect domestic demand, consumer confidence, credit growth, and by extension, fiscal revenues, while also fuelling inflation.

"The deeper structural risk to Bangladesh from the ongoing polarisation and repeated outbreaks of violence are the potential impact this could have on long-term foreign investment decision-making", the rating agency said, adding that it would be difficult to gauge in the short term the extent to which a continuation of violence would affect foreign investor confidence in Bangladesh as a production centre.

The rating agency also said RMG is a principal element in Bangladesh's development strategy and make up 81 percent of exports, equivalent to 15 percent of the GDP.

In August last year, Fitch for the first time did rating for Bangladesh and assigned the country long-term credit rating of BB- and short-term rating of B and a country ceiling of BB-.

## Bangabandhu's

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to Bangabandhu when he arrived there from New Delhi on a British Airways flight at 1:41pm.

Upon his return, he termed his homecoming "a journey from darkness to light".

Pakistan army had arrested the architect of the country's independence from his Dhanmondi residence on March 25, 1971 -- the night the occupation forces unleashed one of history's most heinous genocide campaigns on an unarmed Bengali people who were caught unawares. Later he was sent to a jail in then West Pakistan.

Bangabandhu had become the undisputed leader of then Pakistan through a landslide victory of his party Awami League in the 1970 general elections.

The Pakistani junta freed Bangabandhu after Bangladesh had earned independence through a nine-month war.

Awami League (AL) and different organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes marking the day. The programmes include hoisting of the national and party flags at all AL offices across the country, milad mehfil and discussions.

The party will hold a rally at the historic Suhrawardi Udyan on January 12 to commemorate the day.

## Recharge

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charge. But given how quick the batteries are to recharge, doing so a couple of times a day shouldn't be a problem, the company says.

Previous versions were impressive but big. But the new ones will add no extra bulk to the phones, the company claims.

StoreDot's batteries were shown to visitors to CES on a Samsung smartphone, which sat in a small dock.

It was created by using re-building battery technology from the bottom up, Doron Myersdorf, the company's CEO, told the BBC. The reactions that happen in the battery are entirely different from those in normal ones, and include specially synthesised organic molecules.

Phone makers from around the world are already looking to buy or license the technology, according to the BBC.

As companies clamour to announce more new features in their phone, battery life has tended to get left behind. But many phone customers say that the main thing they want is larger battery lives.

## 4 Qaeda

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"The Crime Investigation Department (CID) of the police raided a house in Qayyumabad neighbourhood in the eastern part of Karachi where the suspects were plotting a terrorist attack," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Umar Khatab, a senior policeman in the CID, confirmed the killings. "Sajjad came from Bangladesh to Pakistan in 2009 and lived in Waziristan where he swore allegiance to Asim Umar, the Pakistan chief of AQIS," Khatab told AFP.

He said the police recovered ammunition, weapons and a suicide jacket from the house after the shoot-out.

It was not immediately possible to confirm the details of the event with independent witnesses from the neighbourhood.

Rights activists say suspected militants who are captured are often killed in staged encounters by security forces.

Meanwhile, three paramilitary soldiers were killed and four others injured in the southwestern province of Baluchistan in an attack by unidentified gunmen.

The incident occurred around 70 kilometres north of port of Gwadar.

"Three paramilitary soldiers were killed when their vehicle was fired at in Sunster Zahiran area of Baluchistan near the Iran border," local administration official Balach Gichki told AFP, adding that four other soldiers were wounded in the incident.

Abdul Hameed Abro, another senior administration official, confirmed the incident.

Pakistan has upped the ante against the Taliban and al-Qaeda linked militants after a December 16 attack on a military-run school in the northwestern city of Peshawar.

The country's deadliest terror attack killed 150 people, 134 of whom were schoolchildren.

Pakistani officials have said they plan to hang 500 convicts in coming weeks, drawing protest from international human rights campaigners.

Last week, Pakistan parliamentarians approved a law for the establishment of a military court to speed up justice in terror-related cases.

# US trains Iraqis for house-to-house battle against IS

AFP, Taji Base

A team of camouflage-clad Iraqi soldiers lines up near the door of a one-storey house north of Baghdad with rifles ready, preparing to enter and search it.

For now, there are no militants inside, and American and Iraqi instructors are on hand to tell them how to position themselves, where to look when they enter and how to hold their Kalashnikov assault rifles.

But these are skills the soldiers, who are some two weeks into a six-week training programme at the massive Taji base complex, may soon need to employ against foes who shoot back.

The Islamic State (IS) jihadist group led a sweeping militant offensive last June that overran large areas north and west of Baghdad, and multiple Iraqi divisions collapsed during the assault.

A US-led coalition is carrying out air strikes against IS, and is also providing training aimed at rebuilding the Iraqi forces and readying them to fight.

The aim is to eventually train 5,000 federal soldiers and Kurdish fighters at five sites every six to eight weeks -- a tight timeline, especially for newly recruited troops.

There are four Iraqi battalions, of roughly 400 soldiers each, being instructed in infantry skills at Taji by a combination of US and Iraqi trainers.

Around 80 more are receiving tank training.

Most are recent recruits who volunteered after the IS-led offensive began, knowing that they would likely see combat.

Before this course, they received just a few months of basic training.

Now they are being trained for the house-to-house fighting that will be necessary to recapture the cities, towns and villages that IS holds.

The recruits will have to make split-second distinctions between militants and civilians if they are to avoid casualties among residents whose support will be vital in the long run if IS is to be defeated.

Knowing how to approach, enter and clear a building are key skills that they will need.

The exercise begins with small teams of Iraqis rushing across open ground, going prone to avoid simulated enemy fire, then moving to take cover behind makeshift obstacles, including wooden doors.

The training programme is still in its infancy and some improvisation is necessary.

## Probe recent killings

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expression and peaceful assembly," he added.

Two people were reportedly killed on Wednesday during clashes between police and BNP supporters in Noakhali and at least six people had been killed in protests since Monday, the report mentioned.

In another statement with the same date, Washington-based Human Rights Watch said the Bangladesh government should immediately stop its "excessive force" and lift "restrictions on the media".

"The government's indiscriminate use of force, arbitrary arrests and censorship will only inflame an already tense situation," said HRW Asia Director Brad Adams.

"Authorities have an obligation to protect the public, but need to do it in a way that doesn't throw human rights and the rule of law out the window," he added.

The HRW report claimed that hundreds of opposition activists, including those of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, had been rounded up and arrested across the country in recent days.

"The government crackdown has come in response to opposition protests on the anniversary of controversial national polls in January 2014, which the BNP boycotted and from which Jamaat was excluded."

According to the rights organisation, Khaleda Zia, the leader of the BNP, has been "effectively detained" on her office premises in Dhaka since January 3, 2015.

Although the government claims she is not under arrest, a heavy security

presence is in place, the gates are locked, and she has been denied exit, said the report.

"Information Minister Hasanul Huq announced that the government was preparing murder charges against Zia [Khaleda] for an arson attack. A corruption trial against Zia [Khaleda] began this week which she has been unable to attend due to the security cordon around her."

The report also said BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir was arrested on January 6 from near the Jatiya Press Club for allegedly organising a protest the previous day that led to the death of four people and dozens of injuries.

It alleged that the authorities also targeted media perceived to be sympathetic to the opposition.

Abdus Salam, chairman of Ekushey TV (ETV), was arrested and detained on January 7, allegedly on charges of broadcasting pornography.

His arrest came a day after ETV's broadcast of an anti-government speech by Tarique Rahman, a senior member of the BNP.

"The arrest of the owner and closure of a TV station is not acceptable from a government that claims to be democratic," said Adams.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury yesterday lambasted the two rights organisations over the reports.

"They talk in favour of the killers but they are not concerned about those who are killed. This is an old habit of theirs. The government is doing what is necessary as per the law and will continue to do so," she said, reports BBC Bangla.

## Charlie Hebdo

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shop. Amid thick fog, a helicopter landed on the building's roof, signalling the end of the assault. A government source said the brothers had emerged from the building and opened fire on police before they were killed.

Minutes later police broke the second siege at a Jewish supermarket in eastern Paris. A police union source said four hostages had died there along with a gunman, believed to have had links to the same Islamist group as the Kouachi brothers, who was holding them.

President Francois Hollande said France "faced down" Islamists behind the deaths of 17 people in three days "but has not finished with the threats".

In a televised speech delivered shortly after commandos killed the three gunmen responsible, Hollande said that "even if France knows it faced down" the attackers and had "courageous" security personnel, the danger had not passed.

"I call for vigilance, unity and a mobilisation," he said.

President Barack Obama rallied to the support of France on Friday after the bloody end to hostage sieges in Paris, vowing to offer all assistance to combat the threat of militant Islamists, adds Obama.

"I want the the people of France to know that the United States stands with you today, stands with you tomorrow," Obama said at a speaking engagement in Tennessee, describing France as America's "oldest ally." **HOSTAGES RUSHED OUT**  
News footage of the Hyper Cacher

kosher supermarket in the Vincennes district showed dozens of heavily armed police officers massed outside of two entrances. The assault began with gunfire and a loud explosion at the door, after which hostages were rushed out.

Reuters photographs taken from long distance showed a man holding an infant and looking distressed being herded into an ambulance by police. Others were carried in on stretchers.

French authorities have mobilized a force of nearly 90,000 since Wednesday's attack on Charlie Hebdo, a weekly that has long courted controversy by mocking Islam and other religions.

The Kouachi brothers were prime suspects in this attack when hooded gunmen shot dead 12 people including some of France's top satirical cartoonists along with two police officers.

Security sources said the French-born brothers of Algerian origin had been under surveillance and had been placed on European and U.S. "no-fly" lists.

The violence raised questions about surveillance of radicals, far-right politics, religion and censorship in a land struggling to integrate part of its five million-strong Muslim community, the largest inn the European Union.

Charlie Hebdo had long courted controversy with satirical attacks on Islam as well as other religions and political leaders. A witness said one of the gunmen in Wednesday's attack was heard to shout: "We have killed Charlie Hebdo! We have avenged the Prophet!"