



The BNP holds its rally in front of its central office in Nayapaltn marking the 'Democracy Killing Day' while the ruling Awami League holds two rallies near Bangabandhu Avenue, top right, and on Russell Square, bottom right, marking 'Victory of Democracy Day'. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN\RASHED SHUMON\PALASH KHAN

Grievances now forgotten

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around 2:10pm with recitation from the holy Qur'an. Many of them were carrying banners, placards and party flags, and chanting slogans.
By 1:30pm, both sides of the VIP Road from Fakirapool intersection to Nightingale crossing got almost filled with party men and supporters, forcing traffic police to divert traffic from the busy road.
Tight security measures were put in place in and around the venue with members of law enforcement agencies keeping a close watch.
Twenty-one CCTV cameras were installed around the stage set up in front of the BNP office.

Party leaders and activists seemed jubilant at the rally, the first at this venue in more than four years.
The BNP chief also looked cheerful while delivering her speech at the rally that ended peacefully.
"We all are very delighted today. I cordially thank you all for attending the rally in huge numbers following just a 24-hour notice," she said.
It was Khaleda's first rally in more than a year. She last attended a rally at Kanchpur in Narayanganj on December 13, 2014.
Twenty other BNP leaders, including five standing committee members, four vice chairmen of the party and Khaleda's two advisers spoke at yesterday's rally.

No leader of any component of the BNP-led 20-party alliance was seen there.
In her 75-minute speech, Khaleda called upon people from all walks of life to raise voice peacefully against the present government to end its "misrule and restore democracy".
Referring to the December 30 municipal polls, Khaleda said it has been proved once again that no fair and acceptable election is possible under this government and the current Election Commission.
The ruling party resorted to "vote rigging and irregularities" in the election to show people that it still has huge popularity, she alleged.
"If you want to prove popularity, hold

a fair election under a non-party administration," she said pointing to the government.
The BNP chief praised the government for allowing her party to hold the rally, and urged it to restore "all democratic rights of people", saying that otherwise, nobody can say when people will rise up and put up a strong resistance.
Khaleda demanded the release of her party's detained leaders and activists as well as other political prisoners, including Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna. She asked the government to withdraw "all false cases" against them.
She called upon law enforcers not to repress people or carry out the govern-

ment's unjustified orders, and gave assurance that none of them would lose job if her party returns to power.
The BNP chief demanded that the government bring down the charges of utility services, including that of electricity, gas and fuel.
Khaleda also urged it to meet the demands of agitating public university teachers and "restore their due dignity".
She alleged that the government is making new laws one after another to repress the opposition. "People won't accept the law which is not meant for their welfare."
The former prime minister said if her party comes to power, it would establish

good governance and promote officials on the basis of seniority, competence and merit.
"No more vandalism and torching... we want real development of the country. We will reopen all closed factories and mills, ensure a congenial atmosphere at educational institutions, and introduce free education for girls after class-XII if we return to power."
Pointing at the present government, she said, "Whatever initiatives you have taken to establish monarchy in the country will not do any good to you."
The BNP chief also accused the government of resorting to killing and forced disappearance for clinging to power.

For democracy, no need to kill people

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"You don't need to kill people and torch vehicles for democracy. Actually, you [Khaleda] wanted to destabilise the country," said the AL general secretary.
Urging the BNP to do peaceful politics, he said, "As we believe in democracy, there will be an election in the country. That election will be fair and peaceful, and not a single life will have to be lost."
Speaking there, Industries Minister

Amir Hossain Amu alleged that the BNP and its allies want to make Bangladesh "a failed state like Pakistan and Afghanistan".
"The BNP-Jamaat alliance is inviting other forces by promoting extremism and communalism," he added.
Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said all the BNP leaders now think their party is on the verge of collapse for the "wrong leadership" of Khaleda and her

son Tarique Rahman.
At Russell Square, veteran AL leader Suranjit Sengupta said Khaleda first needs to detach her party from Jamaat to return to peaceful politics in the country.
AL Presidium Member Matia Chowdhury, also agriculture minister, said the country would march forward under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, overcoming "all the conspiracies of the BNP-Jamaat alliance".

AL Presidium Member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, who chaired the rally, said there would be no dialogue with the BNP and its chief. "The Awami League will not hold any dialogue with terrorists, militants and plotters. Rather, they will be dealt with an iron hand."
Health Minister Mohammad Nasim said the January 5 election was a must for the continuation of democracy in the country.

"Had the election not been held, there would have been martial law in the country now" and neither the AL nor the BNP would be able to hold rallies, he said.
Mahbubul Alam Hanif, joint general secretary of the party, urged the BNP men to restructure their party by excluding Khaleda.
"Khaleda Zia is Pakistani by her soul. I want to urge my BNP friends to restructure the BNP immediately by keeping Khaleda

Zia out of it. Only then the people will treat the BNP as a true opposition party."
AL leaders Mosharaf Hossain, MA Aziz, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Sahara Khatun, Faruk Khan, Dipu Moni, Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Ahmad Hossain, Bahauddin Nasim, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and two mayors of Dhaka North and South city corporations, among others, spoke at the rallies.

Riyadh-Tehran crisis

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terms" the attacks which saw protesters firebomb the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in Iran's second-biggest city Mashhad.
VERY SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES
But the council made no mention of the event that set off the crisis -- Saudi Arabia's execution on Saturday of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a cleric and activist whose death sparked widespread protests among Shias.
Saudi Arabia cut off diplomatic ties with Tehran in protest at the attacks on Sunday and has severed air links with Iran.
Some of its allies among Sunni Arab states followed suit, with Bahrain and Sudan breaking off ties and the United Arab Emirates downgrading relations on Monday.
Kuwait said yesterday the embassy attacks "represent a flagrant breach of international agreements and norms and a grave violation of Iran's international commitments".
Rouhani has condemned the attacks and Tehran's mission to the UN vowed in a letter to the Security Council to "take necessary measures to prevent the occurrence of similar incidents in the future".
Iranian officials have brushed aside the dispute, with government spokesman Mohammad Bagher Nobakht saying yesterday it "will have no impact on Iran's national development".
"It is Saudi Arabia that will suffer," he said.
US Secretary of State John Kerry called his Iranian and Saudi counterparts on Monday to urge calm as European leaders raised concerns and Moscow offered to act as an intermediary.
UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon also spoke by phone with the Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers to urge them to "avoid any actions that could further exacerbate the situation," Ban's spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.
"A breakdown of relations between Riyadh and Tehran could have very serious consequences for the region," Dujarric said.

UN ENVOY HOLDS TALKS
The UN envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, rushed to Riyadh in a bid to defuse tensions and held talks with foreign diplomats there yesterday. De Mistura is also expected in Iran later this week and in Damascus on Saturday, according to UN sources.
The six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) of Sunni Arab states said it would meet in Riyadh Saturday for talks on the embassy attacks, a day before the Arab League is due to hold an emergency meeting.
Regional powerhouse Turkey also expressed alarm at the crisis yesterday, with Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu saying: "We expect all countries in the region to show common sense and take steps aimed at easing the tensions in the region."
He said Ankara was "ready to make any effort" to help resolve the crisis.
Iran and Saudi Arabia are on opposing ends of a range of crucial Middle East issues, including the war in Syria -- where Tehran backs President Bashar al-Assad's regime and Riyadh supports rebel forces -- and Yemen where a Saudi-led coalition is battling Shia insurgents.
Despite the fears, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United Nations, Abdallah al-Mouallimi, insisted the row would not have an impact on efforts to resolve regional conflicts.
"From our side, it should have no effect because we will continue to work very hard to support the peace efforts in Syria and Yemen," Mouallimi told reporters.
The spike in tensions comes after Iran last year secured a historic nuclear deal with world powers led by the United States, sparking major concern in long time US ally Riyadh.
Nimr, one of 47 men executed on Saturday, was a driving force behind 2011 anti-government protests in eastern Saudi Arabia.
He was arrested in 2012 after calling for two Saudi governorates to be separated from the kingdom. Riyadh's interior ministry at the time described him as an "instigator of sedition".

A mother's light

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therefore out of work almost all the time.
But the birth of Sohag about a year and a half later gave her some hope. But within two years, misfortune struck again: her husband died from illness. With no permanent income, raising the boy was an uphill task. Even so, Selina overcame this challenge with the help of her parents. As Sohag was growing up, Selina started to dream of better days.
Sohag, for his part, read his mother well. At 10, when he was in class four, he dropped out of school and began working, first as a helper of a mason and then as a waiter, to support his mother. For better pays, he changed his job several times. His last job was that of a truck helper. The mother and son were happy.
But on January 18 last year, Selina's world went dark again: Sohag came home dead.
Suspected pro-blockade pickets firebombed his truck in Bamrail area on Dhaka-Barisal highway around 6:30am. The driver managed to get out, but Sohag got trapped. Police later recovered his body.
"Before leaving for work, he took his shower with hot water. But my tall, nice boy came home charred and blackened. I touched his burnt face," said Selina, who hails from Shankarpasha village in Nagarkanda upazila of Faridpur.
"Before going out, he told me: 'I will come home in the morning, ma,'" she said, with tears streaming down her cheeks.
Sohag gave her Tk 20, as she said him goodbye. "I told him: *bazan*, be careful when you work."
Only two days earlier, Selina bought Sohag a green jacket, which he was wearing when he left home on the

afternoon of January 17.
"When he put on the jacket for the first time [that day], he asked his aunt to take a look at him and tell him if he looked like a groom," Selina told these correspondents at her father's house at Shankarpasha last month.
"Sohag was my dreams, my hopes. Everything."
When Sohag was about 13, Selina's parents married her off for a second time so that she has somebody to look after her. She has a five-year-old son with him. The man, Osman Bepary, does not see in one eye.
After Sohag's death, the government gave Selina Tk 5 lakh in compensation. She deposited the money with a bank and draws the monthly interest for her expense. She also gets Tk 5,000 a month from the local administration.
But what about justice?
Selina said she heard a case was filed over the killing of her son but police were yet to contact her.
Now involved with an organisation working with disabled people, she demands justice.
"They [the perpetrators] should be tried and given exemplary punishment," she said, flying into a rage over violent politics.
Politicians do politics and are doing just fine. "But I lost my son amid all this. Like me, many mothers lost their children. My son went out of home for work. He was not in politics; he knew nothing about politics."
After some moments' pause, she posed some serious questions: "They [politicians] say people are everything to them. But for whom do they do politics if they kill people? With whom would they wage movement? Whom do they love then?"

COST OF BLOCKADE 2015

HUMAN LIVES
January 5-April 5

Dead: **95** (78 were common people having no political link)

Total killed in arson attacks: **64**

Injured: More than **1500**

ECONOMY
Approximately Tk **17,150** crore loss (World Bank Report)

Vehicles torched and vandalised: More than **700**

EDUCATION
Academic calendar shattered for first three months

All SSC tests rescheduled; pass rate dropped

50 gold bars seized at Dhaka airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Customs officials yesterday detained a man and seized 50 gold bars weighing six kilogrammes worth around Tk 3 crore at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital.
The arrestee, Jasim Uddin, 40, landed at the airport from Chittagong around 6:50pm boarding an international flight of Regent Airways that was flying from Bangkok.
On suspicion, the officials stopped Jasim at the domestic terminal moments before his departure from the airport and found the gold in his shoes, said Shahiduzzaman Sarkar, assistant commissioner of customs.
Jasim claimed a man had given him the gold in the aircraft, said the customs official, adding that the gold might have been smuggled into the country from Bangkok.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam has meanwhile prayed to the SC to uphold the death penalty of Nizami, saying the Jamaat chief had instigated war crimes, including killing of intellectuals, through delivering speeches and writing articles on newspapers.
The Tribunal-1 on October 29, 2014 awarded Nizami the capital punishment on four charges of war crimes, including the killing of the intellectuals.
The SC may also fix today a date for hearing the appeal of another war crimes convict Mir Quasem Ali.
The apex court was scheduled yesterday to fix the date but did not do it as a conducting lawyer for Quasem Ali was not present before it.
The court yesterday asked Quasem Ali's advocate-on-record Zainul Abedin Tuhin to take steps so that a conducting lawyer remains present at the court today.
Quasem, a member of Jamaat-e-Islami central executive council, filed the appeal with the SC challenging the verdict delivered by the International Crimes Tribunal-2 on November 2, 2014.
The tribunal sentenced Quasem to death after finding him guilty on 10 charges of abducting, confining and torturing people during the War.

Verdict today

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Division headed by the chief justice fixed today's date after hearing Nizami's appeal for 11 days.
Both the state and the defence expressed the hope that the judgement would come in their favour.
Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said he hoped the SC would uphold the International Crimes Tribunal-1 verdict that sentenced Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami to death for committing crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.
On the other side, Khandker Mahbub Hossain, principal counsel for Nizami, has recently told this correspondent that he expects acquittal of his client.
"I have placed arguments on behalf of my client before the court. Now, the court will decide about acquittal of my client," he said.
On the last and 11th day of the hearing, Mahbub Hossain urged the SC to acquit his client of all the charges brought against him.
He also prayed to the court to commute the death sentence of the 75-year-old to life term even if the apex court found him guilty of committing wartime offences.

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