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JULY 27 RALLIES

AL plans tight rein on the capital

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHANN

The Awami League will mobilise its activists across Dhaka city from early tomorrow in a bid to tighten its grip on the capital, fearing the BNP and its like-minded parties may bring the city to a standstill by sparking off untoward

- AL activists to take position at unit offices from tomorrow morning
- Police to monitor activities of BNP leaders
- Permission for BNP's rally venue after analysing intelligence report

incidents.

Alongside organising its "peace rally" to counter the BNP's grand rally, the party will put its leaders and activists on guard throughout the city, say party insiders.

Besides, the party will ensure a record gathering at the rally to be held at the south gate of the Baitul Mukarram national mosque to show its strength.

The rally will be organised by the Jubo League, Chhatra League and Swachhchhasebak League. The Dhaka city AL (north and south) leaders and activists will be at their respective unit offices, according to party sources.

The city unit leaders and activists will remain vigilant from tomorrow morning as ruling party leaders are in the dark about the BNP's plans centring its grand rally, sources said.

They, however, were also asked not to thwart BNP activists from joining the rally, but were told to stay alert in case the BNP tried to unleash chaos on the city streets.

Party sources say the AL leadership is apprehensive about the possibility of another Shapla Chattar incident.

On May 5, 2013, Hefajat-e-Islam supporters locked in deadly clashes with law enforcers and AL activists in Motijheel and adjacent areas, turning the capital city into a battlefield. They set fire to hundreds of shops, vehicles and police outposts and looted shops.

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A sewer carrying waste from the port city's EPZ area empties right into the sea. With such water pollution going on unabated, the biodiversity of the Bay is slowly being destroyed. The photo was taken in Chattogram's Patenga recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

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Girl 'takes own life' during police raid

Family alleges Pallabi police sought to detain her mother for refusing to give bribe; cops say they went there for anti-narcotics drive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A girl "took her own life" on Monday night after police tried to detain her mother from their Pallabi home in the capital for refusing to bribe them, family members have alleged.

Plainclothes policemen raided their home around 7:00pm. Soon after, rumors spread in the neighbourhood that a girl was strangled to death by cops during an "anti-narcotics drive".

Angry locals then besieged the police team and clashed sporadically with the law enforcers

for about four hours until midnight.

They also vandalised at least 10 vehicles, including two police motorbikes.

Younger sister of victim Baishakhi Akhter, 16, alleged that Baishakhi hanged herself in a room on the second floor of the four-storey building owned by their grandparents.

A police officer locked the room from the outside after she threatened to commit suicide if police detained her mother, alleged the sister.

Pallabi Police Station Sub-inspector Zahir

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ATTACK ON HERO ALOM Heads of 13 foreign missions summoned Govt irked by their joint statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The foreign ministry yesterday summoned the heads of 13 foreign missions over their joint statement condemning the attack on Hero Alom during the Dhaka 17 by election.

The heads of 13 missions in Dhaka will be informed today about the government's dissatisfaction, according to a report of Bangla daily Prothom Alo.

The 13 missions are the US, the UK, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the European Union.

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Illegally parked buses and trucks have been hampering regular vehicular movement on the capital's Kuril Bishwa Road right under the Kuril flyover. Despite road laws being violated by so many drivers and vehicle owners for long, the authorities concerned have done nothing to rectify the situation. The photo was taken yesterday.

EU worried over DSA, media environment

Its special envoy says they want to see free, fair polls in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The European Union has voiced concerns over the operation of the Digital Security Act and the environment for the civil society and the media in Bangladesh.

After discussions with Cabinet members, top government officials and the head of the human rights commission yesterday, Eamon Gilmore, EU special representative for human rights, also said they expect to see a fair and peaceful election held in a democratic atmosphere.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Gilmore, Law Minister Anisul Huq said a bill to amend the DSA is likely to be placed and passed in parliament in September.

Gilmore arrived in Dhaka on July 24 on a six-day visit upon Bangladesh's invitation.

After a meeting with Anisul, he told reporters, "As you all know, the European Union has been concerned about the operation of the Digital Security Act and the very large number of cases filed by individuals

against journalists and social media users."

He said Anisul also briefed him about the amendments to be made to the DSA. "We will examine those once they are made."

Gilmore further said the EU has already submitted to the authorities concerned their suggestions regarding the amendments based on their experience.

"There were also discussions on an anti-discrimination legislation, a data protection draft law, and labour rights issues."

Anisul said Gilmore's visit will strengthen Bangladesh-EU relations.

About the DSA amendments, he said, "All I can say now is that everyone will be happy about how the Digital Security Act will be amended," adding, "The labour right's situation, on the other hand, is good now."

Meanwhile, after meeting NHRC Chairman Kamal Uddin

Ahmed, Gilmore told reporters, "We discussed issues related to the country's environment for civil society organisations and the media – these are some areas of concern for us."

"We are looking forward to negotiations for a new cooperation agreement between the European Union and Bangladesh that will take place over the next couple of years."

"Human rights is very much at the heart of the relationship. The EU looks to Bangladesh to ensure high standards, including fair wages."

He added, "Bangladesh is one of the biggest beneficiaries of the trade preferences system."

Regarding private sector business investment, he said investors around the world want to ensure they are investing in an environment that respects human rights and is good for citizens, while consumers also

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Now S&P goes negative on Bangladesh economy

American credit rating agency stops short of downgrade

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Global rating agency Standard and Poor's yesterday downgraded Bangladesh's long-term rating outlook from stable to negative on the back of a continued decline in foreign exchange reserves despite an ongoing IMF programme and lower import bills.

"We revised the long-term rating outlook on Bangladesh to negative from stable to reflect the risk that its external liquidity position could deteriorate further over the next 12 months," said S&P Global Ratings.

The 'negative' outlook reflects sustained pressure on Bangladesh's external position, marked in particular by a continued decline in foreign exchange reserves.

"Bangladesh's external financial assets have fallen markedly over the past year, despite the introduction of a sweeping IMF reform and funding programme, alongside a substantially

WHY S&P WENT NEGATIVE ON BANGLADESH

- Sustained pressure on forex
- Forex declined despite IMF programme
- Forex situation could deteriorate further
- Economic growth slowing
- Modest per capita income
- Political landscape

lower current account deficit."

In January, Bangladesh entered into a 42-month loan programme with the International Monetary Fund to rebuild the country's diminished external buffers and to strengthen the management of its public finances.

In that time, Bangladesh's dollar

stockpile declined about 7.3 percent; on July 19, which is the latest available data from the central bank, gross official reserves stood at \$23.4 billion.

Earlier in May, Moody's downgraded Bangladesh's long-held credit rating on the same concerns over the country's external position after monitoring the situation for about six months. S&P, however, stopped short of downgrading the credit rating this time.

"We may lower the ratings on Bangladesh if net external debt or liquidity metrics worsen further," S&P said.

Should net external debt surpass 100 percent of current account receipts, or gross external financing needs exceed 100 percent of current account receipts plus usable reserves, on a sustained basis, S&P would be downgrading Bangladesh's 'BB-' long-term and 'B' short-term sovereign credit ratings.

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