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Rallies, demos bring Dhaka to a standstill

People suffer as AL, BNP hold events, workers block roads

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commuters, especially children, elderly persons and patients, suffered in gridlocks amid intense heat as political programmes caused massive traffic congestion in the capital and its exit points yesterday.

While Dhaka city north Awami League's "Peace and Development Conference" at Gabtoli was scheduled to start at 3:00pm, processions from different wards of DNCC began as early as 12:00pm, blocking the entire bus terminal.

Around 4:00pm, a long queue of stranded vehicles heading towards Dhaka reached as far as Hemayetpur. Inside the city, vehicles on Mirpur road and several others stood still till 4:30pm.

Similarly, BNP staged a demonstration in front of its Naya Paltan office, demanding unconditional release of Khaleda Zia and her proper treatment abroad.

Their rallies and gatherings blocked roads in Motijheel, Gulistan and Secretariat areas. Hundreds of vehicles were seen standing still for hours in these completely gridlocked roads.

Besides, a fire at SA Paribahan office in Kakrail and demonstration of RMG workers at Shyamoli, blocking the Mirpur Road, further intensified the crisis.

Sharmin Islam, who was out shopping with her child, said, "I waited in an autorickshaw for more than an hour. Then, I left it and walked for an hour and took another CNG. After moving slowly for a couple of minutes, I was again stuck in a huge tailback."

"All vehicles were so crammed on the road that I could not even move out from the CNG. My son has already become very sick."

DU student Rubayet Islam said, "It will take at least three hours to reach my home. Tomorrow is my exam and when I reach home, I'll be too tired to prepare for it. Why should we suffer for political interest of few people?"



Rallies of Awami League and BNP brought the capital to a standstill yesterday, leaving scores of vehicles stranded on roads. Meanwhile, demonstrations by RMG workers added to the misery of commuters.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN, RASHED SHUMON, COLLECTED



Polls will be held on time: Quader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

The upcoming national election will certainly be held next January under any circumstances, said Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday.

"The quarterfinal will be played in November, the semifinal in December and the voting will be held in January," he said.

Quader was speaking as the chief guest at a "peace and development rally" organised by Dhaka north city unit AL at the capital's Gabtoli.

"Games will be played against vote rigging; games will be played across the country; games will be played in Chattogram, Barishal, Rajshahi and Sylhet. A red card will be shown, if anyone commits a foul," he said.

He also warned that uranium will be poured on the heads of BNP leaders, if they try to shut down the Rooppur power plant.

"The prices of daily essentials have increased. But did anyone die from starvation? Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will not let anyone die out of hunger," said Quader.

Pointing at BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul, Quader said BNP threatened to immobilise Dhaka. But the people of the city would not allow that. They would rather immobilise BNP.

Several AL central leaders also spoke at the event.

There will be consequences

Fakhrul on govt not letting BNP chief seek treatment abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If something happens to Khaleda Zia due to lack of proper treatment abroad, there will be dire consequences, warned BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday.

"We would like to make it clear that if there is any threat to the life of our leader Begum Khaleda Zia, the people of this country will never forgive this despicable looter government," Fakhrul said.

Speaking at a rally, the BNP leader alleged that the government pushed the BNP chief near death by deliberately keeping her confined to an uninhabitable room while she was in prison.

As part of the party's countryside programme, BNP's Dhaka south and north city units arranged the rally in

front of its Nayapaltan central office, demanding that the government allow Khaleda to go abroad for advanced treatment.

The party will also observe a token hunger strike across the country, including Dhaka, on October 14 to mount pressure on the government to let Khaleda go abroad.

Earlier in the day, the medical board formed at Evercare Hospital for Khaleda's treatment recommended to urgently send her to a multidisciplinary facility abroad, as there are now no treatment options available for her in Bangladesh.

The board also said the 78-year-old former prime minister's life is at risk because of a lack of proper treatment to stop water accretion in her stomach and chest, internal bleeding and infections caused by her liver cirrhosis problem.

Maternity leave now for 120 days

Cabinet nods draft labour law

UNB, Dhaka

The Cabinet yesterday in principle approved the draft of Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act, 2023, increasing the maternity leave to 120 days from 112 days (16 weeks).

The approval came from the Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office in the city.

"Now a female worker can avail 16 weeks as maternity leave — eight weeks before the birth of a baby and eight weeks after the birth. But the leave has been made 120 days in the draft law," said Cabinet Secretary Md Mahub Hossain while briefing reporters at the Bangladesh Secretariat after the meeting.

A woman can enjoy the leave at her convenient time before or after the delivery of the baby, he said. Besides, the condition for formation of a trade union was eased in the proposed law.

The Cabinet also approved in principle the draft of Payra-Kuakata Development Authority Act, 2023 to make development in a planned way there.

'BRI lacks accountability'

Speakers tell event on China's investment initiative

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

China's funding and capital investments under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) lack accountability, said Ali Riaz, political scientist and distinguished professor at Illinois State University, at a seminar yesterday.

He was speaking at a panel discussion on the regional effects of China's BRI at a session called "The Dragon's Domain: BRI after a Decade" at the Bay of Bengal Conversation seminar organised by the Centre for Governance Studies in Dhaka.

Riaz said the investment China is making is destructive in nature, and there is no accountability in its policies.

"The countries who received aid under the BRI have infrastructural development at the core of their development. The massive amount of corruption we have seen in many of these cases has led to crony capitalism," said Riaz.

Meanwhile, Smruti S Pattanaik, research fellow at Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis in India, argued that the larger share of blame lies with the countries taking the financing and not figuring out how to pay it back.

She said the agreements are not transparent, and people remain unaware of the interest rates, so there is a debate about this debt trap.

The massive amount of corruption we have seen in many of these cases has led to crony capitalism.
ALI RIAZ
Political scientist

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FRAMING WOMAN WITH YABA

File criminal case against DNC official

Directs court

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday directed the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) to file a criminal case against its official for framing a woman in a false yaba recovery case.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mosharraf Hossain issued the order asking Ahsanur Rahman, an additional director of DNC, also the case's investigation officer, to file the case within seven days against Sheikh Md Sajjad Hossain.

Sajjad framed one Swapna Akhter, a resident of Khilkhet, in the case.

The magistrate relieved Swapna from the charges and said CID will investigate the case.

According to the prosecution, it was alleged that Sajjad along with seven others went to the house of Swapna around 8:00pm on February 16 last year and seized 1,000 yaba tablets.

Following the seizure, Sajjad filed a case against Swapna with Khilkhet Police Station.

Later, Ahsanur Rahman, an additional director of the DNC, was assigned to investigate the matter. After getting charge of investigation, Ahsanur interrogated all the raiding forces and witnesses. They told him that they knew nothing about the matter.

The IO also found that the recovery of yaba tablets was false and fabricated and it was just to frame Swapna with an intent to harass her.

ARSON CASE

15 BNP, JP men get 4yrs in jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced 15 leaders and activists of BNP-led 20-party and Jatiya Party, including BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser Habibur Rahman Habib to four years' imprisonment in a case filed over torching vehicles and preventing police from discharging their duties in Bhatara on January 4 in 2015.

BNP Vice Chairman Mohammad Shahjahan, Assistant Secretary of BNP Central Executive Committee Shamimur Rahman Shamim, and former Jatiya Party lawmaker Ahsan Habib Linkon are among the convicts.

According to the case statement, a group of BNP leaders and activists vandalised vehicles and prevented cops from discharging duties during a political programme.



Even though the rail gate has descended, vehicles continue to ply through this crossing. Such reckless activities persist even after numerous accidents occurring at rail crossings. The photo was taken near Khilgaon Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

No chance of sanctions ahead of national polls

Says Shahriar Alam

UNB, Dhaka

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam yesterday reiterated that there is no possibility of any punitive measures by any country against Bangladesh before next election.

"Not at all," he told reporters when his attention was drawn about media reports on possibilities of economic sanctions on Bangladesh.

He urged the media to judge things based on merit and facts, discussing with officials of the relevant countries, as a vested group might capitalise on such fear.

He talked to reporters at State Guest House Padma after his meeting with Swedish State Secretary for International Development Cooperation Diana Janse.