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DAY 1 OF HARTAL

Dhaka roads see moderate traffic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Considerably less number vehicles were seen plying the Dhaka streets yesterday during the early part of the first day of 48-hour hartal called by BNP and its allies rejecting the polls' schedule.

The number of vehicles increased to some extent as the day progressed.

Rickshaws dominated the streets.

Brief traffic congestion was also seen at some major points in the capital.

The presence of law enforcement at different points in the city was higher than usual.

"Today [yesterday] was different from previous blockade days. I didn't have to wait long to find a bus," said Aminul Islam, who had to travel to Karwan Bazar from Kalyanpur for work.

"Still, there were some worries, as buses are being set on fire," he added.

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A few vehicles, mostly motorbikes and rickshaws, were seen on the capital's Airport Road around 11:30am yesterday, a route where long tailbacks are common during late morning. *Inset*, the Mirpur Road, however, was seen packed with buses and other vehicles around the same time.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS, PALASH KHAN

8.40 lakh BCL members for 42,000 polling centres

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Aiming to increase voter turnout and "resist" those who'll try to "destroy the festivity of polls," the Awami League-backed student organisation Bangladesh Chhatra League will form a 20-member team for each polling centre across the country.

Activities of those teams will start on December 18, when the official campaigning for the upcoming national election starts, said leaders of the organisation while talking to this newspaper yesterday.

According to the schedule, the next parliamentary polls will be held on January 7. There will be around 42,000 polling centres across the country.

When asked about the teams' task, Saddam Hussain, president of BCL, said the groups would participate in conducting campaigns in favour of AL candidates while adhering to the electoral code of conduct.

Additionally, the teams would work to bring voters to the polling centres and create a festive atmosphere.

"Those who attempt to obstruct the festive atmosphere



Polls to be held on Jan 7

Total polling centres
42,000

BCL to form 20-member
team for each centre

Total BCL members 50 lakh

Teams to be made before
November 26

To start electioneering
December 18

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

EC gets more time to scrutinise nomination forms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission will have more time to scrutinise nomination forms and dispose of appeals this time than in the previous national elections.

On November 15, the EC announced the schedule for the 12th general election. The polls will be held 53 days later on January 7.

According to the schedule, candidates must submit their nomination forms by November 30, giving them a 15-day window to submit their nomination papers.

In 2018, the gap between the schedule announcement and the last submission date was only nine days.

The returning officers will have four days to verify nomination papers until December 4.

Candidates, if their papers are rejected or any objections are raised, can appeal against the decisions between December 5-9 and the EC will have to announce their final decision by December 15.

In 2018, against the decision of ROs, the candidates got only three days to appeal and the EC took another three days to dispose of the appeals.

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Commonwealth asks about polls preparation

Meets CEC and 4 ECs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The pre-election assessment team of the Commonwealth yesterday inquired about the Election Commission's preparations for the upcoming national polls while holding a meeting with the EC yesterday.

A four-member delegation held the meeting with CEC Kazi Habibul Awal and four ECs at the commission office.

"We will submit a report in this regard to the Commonwealth secretary general with recommendations to decide on the next steps," Linford Andrews, adviser and head of the Electoral Support Governance and Peace Directorate of the Commonwealth told reporters after the meeting.

He said his team will be meeting a range of stakeholders before departing Dhaka on November 22.

EC spokesperson and secretary Jahangir Alam said the Commonwealth pre-election assessment team wanted to know about the rules and regulations of the election, how the voting is being held,

how voters cast their votes, and postal ballot system.

"They didn't inquire about the political situation," he added.

According to the EC official, the Commonwealth will decide on sending a full polls observer mission after findings of the pre-election team are communicated to its secretary-general.

The Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 56 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe, and the Pacific, expressed their interest to send the pre-election assessment mission to the CEC via email earlier in November.

It sent a two-member senior staff team to observe the 2018 and 2008 elections, as well as some previous ones.

Earlier, the EU sent a pre-election mission and decided not to send a full observer mission. The EU later said that they would send a four-member observer team to monitor the polls.

A US pre-election mission has visited Bangladesh but is yet to declare whether they will send a full mission or not.



No campaigning before Dec 18: EC

Directs aspiring candidates to remove campaign materials on their own

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has asked aspiring candidates for the 12th national parliamentary election to remove posters, banners, paintings, billboards, arches, pandals, lightings, and other campaign materials at their own cost.

The EC recently sent a letter to the local government division asking to take necessary measures in this regard.

As per the EC's decision, an order has been issued to the local government institutions, including city corporations and municipalities, to execute it.

EC deputy secretary Md Atiar Rahman wrote to the Local Government Division in this regard on November 16.

According to the election schedule, the EC will allocate symbols to the candidates on December 18 and till then, all kinds of campaigning is banned. After getting symbol

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Enact new road safety law as per UN strategy

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday demanded that the government enact a new road safety law, following the strategy devised by the United Nations to reduce road crashes.

They also emphasised proper implementation of the law and raising awareness among people to curb road crashes.

Bangladesh Orthopaedic Society and National Heart Foundation of Bangladesh organised the seminar at National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR).

Following an initiative of Road Safety Coalition of Bangladesh, they also arranged a procession to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, which was observed yesterday.

Speaking at the seminar, Prof Khandakar Abdul Awal Rizvi, secretary general of National Heart Foundation, said although road accident data varies, it is a fact that people are killed in road accidents.

But this is preventable, so there is a necessity to enact a road safety act like in developed countries, following the strategy devised by the UN.

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Escaped militants still traceless

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Exactly a year ago from today, two death row convict militants, Abu Siddiq Sohel and Moinul Hasan Shamim, escaped from a Dhaka court with help from their associates.

While being taken to prison, the convicts assaulted their police escort, untied themselves from shackles and fled on a motorcycle.

Police are yet to get any trace of the two. Sohel, an Ansar Al Islam member, and his associate Shamim were sentenced to death for the murder of publisher Faisal Arefin Dipon.

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit is presently investigating the militant snatching incident.

Md Asaduzzaman, chief of the CTTC unit, also the additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said, "The militants are hiding somewhere inside the country."

"We have raided some of their hideouts and managed to arrest several people directly involved in the snatching, including a main coordinator, also the wife of Sohel—Fatima Tasnim Shikha," he said.

One of the absconding militants — Shamim — was in a hideout in Savar, but

he managed to flee before a drive was conducted a couple of months back, Asaduzzaman told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Such operations are time-sensitive. But they will be arrested soon," he said.

According to investigators, the total number of arrests in the militant's escape case now stands at 20, and two of them gave confessional statements in court.

A high official of the CTTC unit, requesting anonymity said both militants — Sohel and Shamim — are hiding in two separate "Ansar House" or "Safe House".

There are three types of Safe Houses type A, B and C, and these two militants are staying in a type A house, the official told The Daily Star.

To stay in a type A house, the outfit is paying Tk 10,000 monthly to those providing shelters, while the militants themselves receive a payment of Tk 8,000 to Tk 10,000, said the officer.

In the last 12 months, the two have changed dozens of safe houses, which are located in Old Dhaka, Dhaka's outskirts, and North Bengal, said investigators.

Another CTTC unit official investigating the case said the two militants did not use any kind of device after being snatched.

They change shelters within a month or

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Fire service gets 15 female firefighters for the first time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the first time in the history of the fire service in Bangladesh, 15 female firefighters have joined the force.

According to the appointment letters, they officially joined the force on Saturday, located at Multipurpose Training Complex in Purbachal of Narayanganj, said Shahjahan Sikder, deputy

assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence Headquarters Media Cell.

After joining, they were transferred to Mirpur Training Complex.

Fire Service DG Brigadier General Main Uddin welcomed them at Mirpur Training Complex yesterday.

The fire official said the post of "Fireman" was recently changed

to "Firefighter" as per the order of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in order to eliminate gender discrimination.

On June 20, the recruitment circular for the post of fire fighters was published.

According to the notification, out of 2,707 applicants for the post of firefighter (female), these 15 women were finally selected for the post of firefighter, through

preliminary screening, physical fitness, medical test, and written and oral examinations. The newly recruited firefighters: Majeda Khatun, Papia Khatun, Pinky Roy, Maimuna Akhter, Rima Khatun, Meherunnecha Mim, Arjuman Akhter Rita, Mithu Akhtar, Jharna Rani Pal, Kakuli Khatun, Israt Jahan Iti, Nazmun Nahar, Yasmin Khatun, Rozina Akhtar and Priyanka Halder.

