



**Democracy under Siege
In Bangladesh
Autocratic State Repression
Continues Unabated**

**116 Cavell street, London E1 2JA
www.citizenmovement.info
E:info@citizenmovement.info**

Democracy under Siege in Bangladesh

Autocratic State Repression Continues Unabated

Introduction

Democracy is about lasting and functional institutions of the state. People's choice is the root of democracy. When people's choice is confiscated, issue of democracy remains a far cry. Bangladesh has been experiencing such situation for quite a long time. It has reached the climax through the most controversial election conducted, one-sided, on January 5, 2014. The aftermath have been marked with shattered scenario of the state institutions, resulting a totalitarian and autocratic state led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The situation has been summarised by Human Rights activist Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan, saying " In Bangladesh, every person is in fear of his/her life. The ruling procedure in the Bangladesh could no way be said as democratic". (<http://www.bdchronicle.com/detail/news/32/13510>) The situation has been even grave after January 5, 2015; with series of repressive events like seizing the opposition leader inside her office, shooting on a senior opposition leader Mr. Riaz Rahman, extra-judicial killing of opposition activists, rampage of the police forces across the country, sabotages by ruling party men, threatening media and so on. These unfortunate happenings were heightened with the remarks of the chiefs of law enforcing ordering the forces to 'shoot at sight'.

Confinement of the Opposition leader

The police laid siege to Bangladesh Nationalist Party chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office for the third day on January 5, 2015, locking up the office, where she was confined by the law enforcers since January 3. Huge contingents of police and members of other law enforcing agencies laid siege to Khaleda's Gulshan office on Saturday night. At least 24 trucks laden with



sand and bricks, water cannon, armoured personnel carriers, prison vans and police pickups were posted in front the office and its adjacent roads on Monday. The deployment of police, including its female members, increased gradually. The police and other law enforcing agencies formed an 8-tier barricade in front of the office and adjacent area. The police allowed none to enter or come out of the office. A group of lawyers and a team of

journalist leaders were, however, allowed to meet Khaleda on Sunday. Some newsmen were allowed to enter the office on Sunday afternoon and many of them stayed overnight there.

Trucks laden with sands and bricks are seen parked near Bangladesh Nationalist Party chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office and its adjacent roads in the capital in a bid to restrict her movement ahead of a January 5 rally. Those trucks were parked there in between 12:00am to 1:00am on Monday.



The government action came apparently to foil the rally the BNP had planned for Monday marking the anniversary of the January 5, 2014 elections, boycotted by all opposition parties. The police were, however, yet to lift the siege. Thirteen trucks laden with sand and bricks, were placed near Khaleda's office. The gate also remained locked from outside by the police. As soon as the police heard the news that Khaleda would leave the office to join the rally the party planned for January 5, they locked the main gate from outside at around noon. Khaleda rode in her car at about 3:45pm in a bid to come out of the office only to be barred by the police.

The police splashed pepper spray injuring ten journalists and three BNP leaders and office staff when Khaleda's car reached the main gate. Later, Khaleda announced a non-stop blockade while talking to reporters getting down from the car in the office premises. Khaleda Zia's press wing official, Shamsuddin Didar, said at about 8:30pm that the BNP chief felt sick due to the pepper spray. She was undergoing treatment under private physician.

Earlier on December 28, 2013, Khaleda Zia was confined to her Gulshan house ahead of 'March for Democracy' programme for December 29, 2013. She had been confined to the house for 11 days.



Khaleda Zia (inside the car) is barred from leaving her office as the gate is locked from outside by police.

The police also locked the BNP central office at Nayapaltan on Saturday night removing all office staff after taking BNP joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi to a city hospital under police custody from the office, party leaders said. Khaleda on Sunday told BBC that the government had besieged her as well as the entire country. The prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, however, ruled out the allegation and termed it a drama. 'Khaleda Zia is not confined to her Gulshan office...Who has confined her? She can move to her house any time,' Hasina said while exchanging views with Bangladesh Chhatra League leaders at her official residence Ganabhaban on Sunday evening.

The state minister for home, Asaduzzaman Khan, said that enhanced security would remain in force for BNP chairperson Khaleda as long as there was a security threat on her life.

'We have intelligence reports that they [BNP] might create situations on their own and so the police have enhanced her security,' he added.¹



Police throwing pepper spray aiming BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's car.

Journalists Attacked by Ruling Party Men at Press Club

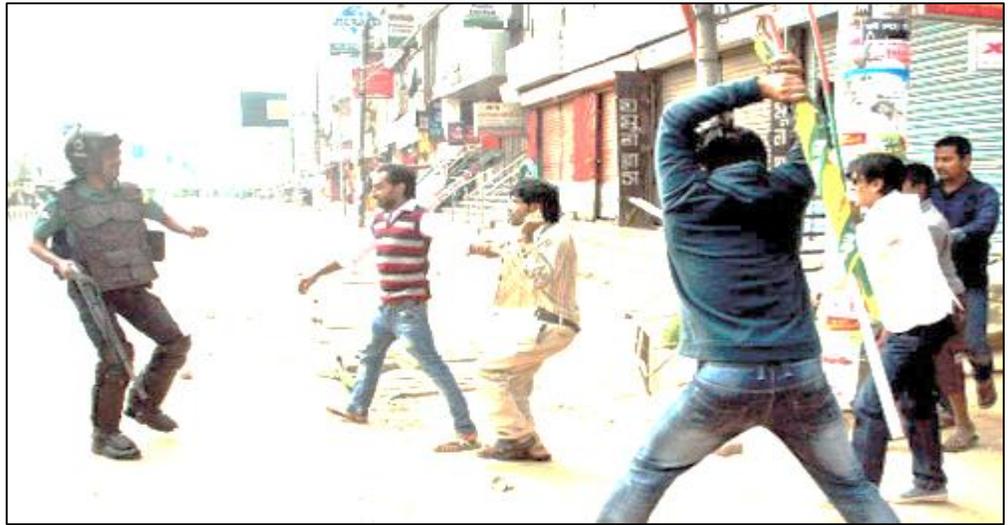
The Ruling party men stormed the National Press Club at around 4:00pm and attacked journalists and senior citizens, who are involved with professional bodies linked with the opposition. The activists forced their way into the press club premises immediately after BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir addressed a programme there. The Chhatra League men went berserk and vandalised Ibn Sina Hospital in the capital's Jigatola area in the evening after a crude bomb was hurled at their rally.



Ruling party goons entering the Press Club to attack BNP supporters.

4 Killed as Violence Grips Country

Violence raged across the country leaving at least four people dead at places on January 5, 2015 as Dhaka remained virtually cut off from the rest of the country for two days. Clashes broke out between activists of opposition parties and ruling party men along with law enforcers marking the first anniversary of the January 5, 2014 sham elections amid a ban on all opposition protest programmes, keeping Bangladesh Nationalist Party chairperson Khaleda Zia confined in her office. Khaleda Zia, having failed to come out of her office at Gulshan to join her alliance's planned rally in the city, on Monday announced a countrywide 'blockade' for an indefinite period. Local units of the BNP-led alliance called a dawn-to-dusk hartal for today in Rajshahi, Natore and Chapainawabganj in protest against killing of their three activists.



A policeman and ruling party men join hands to beat up an opposition activist at Kuril in Dhaka on Monday during opposition protest against January 5 election held last year.

JCD activists Rakib, 24 and Raihan Hossain Rana, 25, were shot dead by ruling party men at Tebaria in Natore town. BNP activist Majid Uddin, 45, was shot dead by police at Baneshwar Bazar under Putia upazila in Rajshahi while Jamaat-e-Islami activist Jamshed Ali, 26, was killed in police firing at Kansat in Chapainawabganj.

It looked as if a general strike was in force on Monday with the capital Dhaka virtually cut off from the rest of the country as almost all public transports and ferries to and from the city was thrown off the streets and waterways by the authorities keen on foiling the opposition's scheduled programme on Monday. The number of public transports operating in the city was negligible causing sufferings to thousands of office goers. Most of the shops in the city were closed.

The BNP office at Bongshal, Dhaka was set fire by the members of the ruling party.



The days violence left over 200 people injured, some of them hit by bullets, in Dhaka, Chittagong, Pabna, Jessore, Moulvibazar, Narayanganj, Sunamganj, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Brahmanbaria and Khulna. The police clamped down on BNP and Jamaat activists to thwart their protest programmes marking 'Democracy Killing Day'. Law enforcers arrested 82 people in Jessore, 50 in Sylhet, 22 in Narayanganj, 33 in Bagerhat, 27 in Jhenaidah, 19 in Cox's Bazar, 21 in Noakhali, 39 in Chittagong, 10 in Comilla, 21 in Chandpur, 50 in Satkhira, 22 in Khulna, 29 in Lakshmipur, eight in Rangpur and many others elsewhere. Over 50 people were detained in the capital.

At least 50 each were injured in the capital, port city of Chittagong and Brahmanbaria in firing or baton charge, 15 each were injured in Natore, Pabna and Khagrachari, 25 in Sunamganj, 22, including three policemen, in Bhola, 10 in Moulvibazar, five each in Narayanganj and Dinajpur, four in Noakhali and 10 in Sirajganj. Awami League activists vandalised and torched offices of BNP

at places, including Rajshahi, Khulna, Gaibandha and Pirojpur.



An activist wearing the body paint that read 'let democracy be free' being arrested by police in Naya Paltan, Dhaka.

Activists of Awami League and its front organisations, however, ruled the roost in the city streets taking up positions

at all major points to foil the BNP's planned show of strength although Dhaka Metropolitan Police imposed a ban on political gatherings. The ruling party men were seen guarding the entry points to the capital and at many points in the city, carrying sticks.. Police were also seen along with the ruling party men at some place, including Gabtali, blocking the road. In the similar way, the ruling party men, backed by the law enforcers, had foiled the BNP-led alliance's 'march for democracy' to Dhaka programme on December 29 in 2013.

Police banned all protests, meetings and demonstrations in the capital from Sunday evening until further notice to prevent violence after the ruling party and opposition announced rival rallies. Law enforcers were also seen dispersing people trying to assemble at the roads leading to Naya Paltan.

Violence broke out in Natore when rival processions of JCD and Awami League came face to face in the town. Guns were fired allegedly by men in the ruling party procession triggering the clashes that left 17 people injured. The injured were taken to different hospitals and clinics. Of them, Rakib and Rana were declared dead by doctors at Sadar Hospital, said Sadar police officer-in-charge Faridul Islam.

In Rajshahi, a BNP activist was killed and at least 20 people were injured as protesters clashed with lawmen at Baneshwar Bazar under Puthia Upazila in Rajshahi. In the afternoon BNP men brought out a procession at Baneshwar Bazar but police dispersed them. Police opened fire after the angry BNP men hurled cocktails and stones at them that left one dead and at least 20 injured.

Lawyers brought out a procession on the HC premises at about 12:30pm. Police intercepted them as they came out and reached the shrine gate area. Altercations and scuffles followed leaving a lawyer, Jatin Sarker, injured, the lawyers claimed. The police constable, Mostafizur Rahman, came under attack when the lawyers were returning to the High Court. The lawyers then staged a sit-in at the entrance to the High Court after the police locked the gate.

In Chittagong, the protests organised by the Chittagong chapter of the BNP-led alliance, was



Policemen clash with activists of Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami at Kazir Deuri in Chittagong on Monday.

marred by violence that left over 50 people, including 7 policemen, injured, police and witnesses said. Among the injured, 3 people were admitted to Chittagong Medical College and Hospital with rubber bullet wounds while the rest were taken to some private clinics, police and party sources said. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse the agitators who attacked the cops with bamboo sticks and stones. Chittagong metropolitan police commissioner Abdul Jalil Mandal told New Age that over 100 activists of the BNP-led alliance were detained during the violence.²

BNP man killed in Rajshahi clash

One Bangladesh Nationalist Party activist was killed and at least 20 people were injured as BNP men were attacked by law enforcers at Baneshor Bazar in Puthia Upazila of Rajshahi on January 5, 2015.

Alamgir Kabir, superintendent of Rajshahi district police, said BNP men brought out a procession at Baneshor Bazar while police barricaded them. Agitated demonstrators hurled cocktails, brickbats towards police and in response police fired bullets, leaving one dead on the spot, witnesses said. The detail of the victim could not be known immediately. Meanwhile, BNP Rajshahi district unite called a day-long strike on Tuesday in a press release, pretesting the killing of fellow party activist.³

'Use lethal weapons'

In the following events and continued protests, the country witnessed a total standstill. In the wake of the events, the law enforcing paramilitary forces declared an unprecedented step of 'using lethal weapons'. The chief of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) said "it (the forces) would use weapons in self-defence and when necessary to contain violence and arson attack on transports during the blockade or hartal. 'I have not ordered [its use] yet...but, all the weapons used by the BGB are lethal. In self-defence the personnel will use weapons,' BGB director general Major General Aziz Ahmed told a press briefing at the Peelkhana headquarters on January 16, 2015. The threat of using ammunitions on civilians marks the government's attitude suppressing the movement of opposition.

Attack on Riaz Rahman

Unidentified miscreants have opened fire on Reaz Rahman, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser in front of Pink City Shopping Mall in the city's Gulshan area on Tuesday evening, January 13, 2015. Nurul Alam, Gulshan Zone assistant police commissioner, confirmed the news to the national daily Dhaka Tribune. He said: "Some miscreants set his private car afire and opened fire on him. The BNP member received four bullets in his legs and waist. The criminals fired four

² <http://newagebd.net/83574/4-killed-as-violence-grips-country>

³ <http://newagebd.net/83306/bnp-man-killed-in-rajshahi-clash>

rounds of bullets on him and left the spot immediately. Later, he was rushed to United Hospital." BNP chief Khaleda Zia condemned the gun attack and demanded immediate arrest of the attackers.

People fleeing fearing massive rampage of police and armed forces



On January 17, 2015; police and other armed forces carried massive raids across different parts of the country. The photo was taken from Shibganj Upazilla of Chapainawabgonj district just before the sunset, where women and children are seen fleeing for safe shelter far away where there could be less raids. The chronic torture and repression carried by the forces created such panic that people were forced to leave their belongings for life. Reports were found of vandalizing homes of the opposition supporters. At least 35 houses were vandalized only in one three villages.

Extrajudicial killing spree

Despite reports from rights group of 'forced disappearances', government paid no heed. On January 20, 2015; reports were published that at least three opposition leader and activists have been reportedly killed extra-judicially in five days.



In khilgaon in capital Dhaka, the General Secretary of Chattradal, Student wing of BNP; Nuruzzaman Joni was shot dead by police and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). Detective Branch of Police (DB) arrested Joni from central jail gate area in the afternoon. Later, he was taken to the Balur Math area in the dawn, according to police, for an arm rescue operation, while the 'terrorists' fired on the police and Joni was shot dead.

Sabotage by the ruling party

Arson attacks on public transports have been the ugliest aspect of the ongoing blockade and hartal. According to the fire service officials, over 250 vehicles were torched across the country in the last few days. Government is accusing the pro-blockaders for these bombing. In the name of preventing these sporadic incidents of violence, the law enforcing agencies are arresting activists of opposition forces indiscriminately without having any substantial proofs against them. But in reality, there are reported cases where the ruling party activists have been caught up red-handed in Magura central bus terminal area while attempting to hurl petrol bomb on moving transports in Dhaka-Khulna Highways. One of them is the secretary of religious affairs of the student wing of the ruling party, Sajjad Molla (24) and two others are Limon (22) and Rana (19), also the activists of BCL. BCL general secretary of Magura district confirmed the news which have been covered in most of the leading newspapers. Also there are news where 4 Jubo league activists have burnt themselves in Feni in accidental explosion while preparing petrol bombs. They are Saiful Islam (32), Ripon (35), Shah Alam (28), Jamal (25).

Many of the arson attacks have taken place in escorted convoy of trucks. Hence it is very logical to ask whether it is possible for the pro-blockaders to penetrate this strict security cordon or not. As the evidences suggest otherwise, hence it is more likely that they are actually acts of sabotage by the ruling party to make people lose sympathy for the cause of opposition forces.

With kind regards,