

Sagir murder accused killed in 'crossfire'

UNB, Dhaka

An accused in Juba Dal leader Sagir murder case was killed in an encounter between his cohorts and police in the city's Shyampur area early yesterday.

He was identified as Mazharul Islam alias Ripon, 35, son of Mansur Alam of Court-kachari road. Police said Ripon was wanted in 10 murder cases including that of Sagir.

Paltan police arrested Ripon at Ashulia Tuesday afternoon. According to his confession, they (police) took Ripon to Shyampur at about 2:30am to arrest his accomplices and seize hidden firearms.

When police along with Ripon reached Goshabari, his cohorts opened fire, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate.

Ripon received bullets during the "shootout" and died instantly, while his accomplices managed to flee.

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Thousands denounce 'fake' voter list

14-party demands scrapping of the roll

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several thousand demonstrators under the banner of the 14-party opposition line-up yesterday took to the streets in the capital and elsewhere in the country protesting what they termed the newly prepared 'fake voter list' and demanding immediate cancellation of it to ensure free and fair general elections.

In Netrokona, armed BNP men along with law enforcers attacked a procession of the Awami League (AL)-led opposition combine, leaving more than 50 injured, including 15 policemen and two journalists.

Those injured include District AL President Mohammad Samstujjoha, General Secretary Ashraf Ali Khan

Khasru and police officials Saidur Rahaman and Osman Ali.

Protesting the attack, the 14-party called a dawn-to-dusk hartal today in the district.

The opposition activists also caused damages to the office the superintendent of police.

On the other hand, ruling BNP activists went on a rampage at the district AL office and the house of district AL general secretary.

In the capital, a big 14-party procession started from Muktangan amid tight security measures and ended at the Central Shaheed Minar. The participants raised slogans against the 'fake' voter list and vowed to resist any election in the country without electoral reforms.

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BTTB union leader escapes gun attack

Protesting employees block road

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified criminals opened fire on the president of Bangladesh Telegajog Sramik Karmochari Union, a platform of the BTTB employees, at city's Moghbazar yesterday morning, triggering huge protest.

Md Firoz Mia, president of the union, however, escaped unhurt.

Hundreds of employees of the BTTB (Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board) took to the street protesting the attack and put barricades in front of Moghbazar BTTB office causing traffic congestion on Moghbazar-Malibagh road for two hours.

A vested quarter wanted to kill the president to halt their movement against privatisation of

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Locals stage demonstration at Dania on the city outskirts yesterday demanding permanent solution to power and water crises in the area.

PDB office besieged in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Several hundred people laid siege to the Satkhira Power Development Board (PDB) office, put up a two hour-long barricade on the Satkhira-Asasuni road in front of the PDB office and held a rally in the town yesterday demanding smooth supply of power.

At a rally jointly organised by Satkhira district Bar association and local people, the speakers said

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Teletalk's Tk 1,200 VAT illegal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday declared illegal the collection of additional Tk 1,200 as VAT by Teletalk Bangladesh Limited from its cellphone lottery winners last year.

The order came following a writ petition filed by six Teletalk lottery winners challenging the legality of a Teletalk notice imposing the levy

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Agami, an organisation of the students of Chittagong University, brings out a colourful procession in Chittagong yesterday as part of the Prothom Alo - The Daily Star Baishakhi festival to celebrate the Bangla New Year 1413.

WFP- The Daily Star ROUNDTABLE

More food produced, still half of households food insecure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh now produces much more food compared to two decades ago but still about half of the households are far from being food secure, Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf told a roundtable in the city yesterday.

"The country cannot afford to be complacent with the current state and trends in improvement of food and nutrition security. We have around 60 million food insecure population, the third largest in number after China and India," he said.

Political will is the key element in any programme for sustainable food security and elimination of hunger and malnutrition, he stressed speaking as chief guest at the roundtable held at CIRDP auditorium.

World Food Programme (WFP) and The Daily Star jointly organised the roundtable on 'What More Can We Do to Reduce Hunger and Malnutrition.' Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam moderated the roundtable.

The minister said sometimes 'targets are too ambitious' and raise expectations that are likely to lead to disappointment. So, national decision-makers in many contexts are in tension due to the gap between expectations and reality.

"The challenge of eradication of hunger is huge and urgent. And more innovative approaches, advocacy for the hungry poor and strategic partnerships are required to optimise resource mobilisation and maximise the use of limited resources," the minister observed.

In a presentation on 'Who and where are the hungry people,' WFP adviser John McHarris said the extreme poor are invisible even in their own community.

"Roughly 37 percent of the ultra poor are in the rural areas and 19 percent in urban areas," he said, adding that women are especially vulnerable due to poor access to education.

Dr Atiur Rahman, chairman of Unnayan Shamannay, in his presentation on causes of hunger and food insecurity, said continuous food price hike often due to bad politics, lack of competition due to syndication, absence of laws and institutions protecting consumers' rights mainly make the poor food insecure.

Hunger and famine constitute offence against and violation of human dignity, and the government has to create an enabling environment to ensure adequate

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Ex-communist named as new Italy president

AP, Rome

The Italian Parliament elected an 80-year-old former Communist to be president on Wednesday, paving the way for a government headed by centre-left leader Romano Prodi to be formed within days.

Giorgio Napolitano, a widely respected senator-for-life, was chosen during the fourth round of voting by some 1,000 electors, including lawmakers from the two houses of parliament and regional representatives.

He was proclaimed Italy's new president by the head of the lower Chamber of Deputies, Fausto Bertinotti, after winning 543 votes well above the minimum 505 necessary for victory. A long found of applause erupted in Parliament.

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Container congestion at Ctg port yet to ease

Customs says it's not responsible for delay

RAFIQ HASAN

Customs officials rejected the idea of customs clearance outside the port yard at the country's premier Chittagong seaport, saying that customs procedure is not responsible for creating delay in clearance of containers at the port.

Only increasing the efficiency of the port is the solution to the problem of recent severe container congestions as the responsibility of quick clearance of the containers goes to the port, not Customs, they said.

"We are not the custodian of export and import goods and customs procedures are not responsible for creating any congestion at the port," Dr Sarwar Hossain, member (Customs) of the National Board of Revenue said.

Customs formalities must be done at the landing and arriving goods, he said.

It is the port that arranges the landing places and gives the security of the goods, he said, adding that if the port creates landing facilities in other places only then the custom officials will go there and do their jobs.

Terming it illogical to say that stuffing containers inside the ports is responsible for long congestions, he said under the existing pre-shipment inspection (PSI) system, hardly ten per cent of imported goods now become subject to physical checking while the export items are checked only after getting allegations of containing contraband things.

He suggested that the port authorities put on auction the

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Thai court asks govt to set election date

AFP, Bangkok

A Thai court yesterday ordered the government and election authorities to set the date for a new general election, as outgoing prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra remained coy about whether he would run again.

The nation's top judges had been widely expected to set a date on Tuesday, one day after the Constitutional Court scrapped last month's controversial snap polls that left the country without a functioning parliament.

But when the court released its 54-page ruling that nullified the polls, the judges said the government and the Election Commission should choose a date.

"In order to ensure that the next election is free and fair in line with the spirit of the constitution, the court has asked the relevant authorities - the government and the Election Commission - to set the election date," court spokesman Paiboon Varahapaitoon told reporters.

The ruling offered little guidance on when the polls should be held, and Paiboon said the date depended on the readiness of the government and the commission to organise the elections.

Vasana Puemlarp, head of the Election Commission, said he had called a meeting for Monday with representatives of the major political parties, government and the court to consider a date.

The election commissioners

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Over 1,000 stranded Pakistanis on voter roll

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

More than 1,000 stranded Pakistanis in Bogra have been enrolled in the recently published draft voter list, some of them claiming to be Bangladeshi nationals by birth.

Contacted, district election officer admitted the allegation.

He, however, differed with the figure saying that only those, who showed nationality certificates, have been included in the draft list and many of them were in the previous list.

Mohammad Fakhruddin, secretary of Stranded Pakistani General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC) Bogra unit, said they have been

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Employees of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) block the road in front of the Moghbazar telephone exchange protesting attempt on the life of BTTB employees' union leader Md Firoz Mia.

Buddha Purnima today

AGENCIES, Dhaka

Buddha Purnima, the biggest religious festival of the Buddhist Community, will be celebrated in the country today, marking the advent, nirvana (enlightenment) and departure of Lord Gautam Buddha.

Lord Buddha was born at Kapila Bastu in Nepal in 563 BC, got nirvana at the age of 35 in Gaya in the Indian state of Bihar and departed from this world at the age of 80 (483BC).

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages on the occasion.

The day is a public holiday.

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GAIBANDHA BY-POLLS

4-party wins, JP alleges rigging

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Four-party alliance candidate Shameem Kaiser Lincoln of BNP won the Gaibandha-4 by-election held on Tuesday, according to unofficial results.

Lincoln secured 76,243 votes while his nearest rival Principal Abul Kalam Azad of Nagorik Parishad polled 50,663 votes.

Six candidates contested the by-polls. Jatiya Party candidate Lutfar Rahman Chowdhury secured 36,782 votes.

JP Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader has accused the ruling four-party alliance of rigging the election.

Speaking at a press briefing in Gaibandha on Tuesday, he said there were irregularities in the

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