

Fair polls not possible without correction of voter list

Hasina tells Gastright who meets acting CEC too

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The Awami League (AL) yesterday told visiting US Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs John Gastright that holding a free and fair election would be impossible unless the existing voter list is updated again and the Election Commission (EC) is reconstituted.

"We discussed current political atmosphere pertaining to the next

**REPORT ON FALU DU JCD men burn Prothom Alo copies**

**DU CORRESPONDENT**

The Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists yesterday burnt copies of leading Bangla daily Prothom Alo at Muhsin Hall of Dhaka University (DU) and also banned the daily at Salimullah Hall following a news report on former BNP lawmaker

# Freight charge hike to take costly toll

**RAFIQ HASAN**

Ship owners' unilateral raising of container freight by \$200 per TEUs (twenty equivalent units) from December 1 will adversely affect export-import trade, particularly making imported items including essentials costlier, business sources said.

They increased the fare by \$200 for each loaded TEUs of containers and \$50 for each empty container on the route connecting Chittagong port with Singapore, Malaysian and Sri Lankan ports. The enhanced rate has been effected without prior notice.

Earlier, the average freight was \$300-350 per TEUs on those routes but it would now go up to \$500.

"The sudden freight hike will directly affect overall business in the country and increase the prices of consumer items" said Mir Nasir Hossain, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

"It will also increase the prices of all industrial raw materials and lower our competitive edge in the global market," he added.

Asked about the apex business body's possible action in such a situation, he said, "We are working on it and we will have a meeting with the shipping adviser soon."

The issue also came up at an emergency meeting of the FBCCI yesterday, according to sources.

The business community protested the fare hike without prior notice. This "illogical" step would make imported items costlier and also cause losses to exporters.

"The negotiation on freight hike was done in Singapore among shipping companies and we only got the notice," said a shipping agent.

Maqsudur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association, said "Ship owners have increased freight without prior notice, and the fare hike will adversely affect export sector. We are worried as it will increase cost of products and losses of exporters will go up."

He mentioned that the export sector is already suffering a lot due to political agitation in the country over the last two months. And now the enhanced fare has been made effective from December 1 inform-

ing them about it only one day or two days earlier.

The freight per TEUs of containers bound for US would now go up to \$8,000 from \$5,600-5,700 earlier, he said. Ship owners increased the fare considering their losses due to the delay in discharging goods at the premier ports, he added.

Earlier in June this year, the Singapore-based ship owners' association Chittagong Feeder Trade Committee had imposed an additional congestion surcharge of \$150 per TEUs for Chittagong bound cargo.

The surcharge was withdrawn in August after consultation with the government and on assurance of improving the situation. But shipping agents say the port virtually remained inoperative for several weeks due to turbulent political situation in the country.

According to shipping agents, the owners were forced to increase freight as ships often had to wait for over 15 days before starting discharge of cargo. As a result, the turn around time of the ships went up abnormally, causing huge losses.

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# 12 Rab men sued for death of BCL man in 'crossfire'

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi**

Twelve Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel were sued at a local court in Rajshahi yesterday for murdering a Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader Ahsan Habib Babu in crossfire on Friday.

After hearing the petitioner and also the victim's father Afsar Ali Mollah, Magistrate Julia Moyeen of the third first class magistrate's court asked officer-in-charge of Durgapur police station to investigate the allegations.

Mollah, also social welfare secretary of District Awami League (AL), in his complaint accused Rab-5 Commanding Officer Lieutenant

# 13 firearms seized from Sundarbans

**UNB, Bagerhat**

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) recovered 13 firearms and ammunition from a den of pirates in the Sundarbans yesterday evening.

Jamal, second-in-command of notorious Sumon Bahini, was arrested earlier in the morning in Barisal. On his confessional statement, Rab members raided Sukuchi area in the Sundarbans at about 6:00pm and recovered the arms and ammunition, said Coastguard Commander Abu Taher Golam Mohammad.

A joint team of Rab and Coastguard clashed with the members of Sumon Bahini on the estuary of the Pashur River near Mongla Port on Friday night, leaving three—a coastguard, a Rab member and a pirate—dead.

Several gangs of pirates having dens in the Sundarbans are engaged in looting fishing trawlers in the Bay.

# Militant Galib made RU professor

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi**

Detained suspected militant kingpin and chief of Ahle Hadith Andolan, Bangladesh Asadullah Al Galib was made a permanent professor at the Department of Arabic in Rajshahi University (RU).

According to a RU notice signed by its registrar, four professors including Galib were appointed to vacant posts of permanent professors based on seniority.

The three others are: Abdul Aziz Khan, Abdul Haq and AKM Shamsul Alam.

A senior RU teacher said Galib's job confirmation was disclosed at an RU syndicate meeting on December 2.

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The BNP parliamentary board headed by party Chairperson Khaleda Zia starts interviewing nomination aspirants for the 2007 general election at Hawa Bhaban in Dhaka yesterday

# CONFERENCE ON POVERTY ENDS Stress on better data, tailored policies

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

A three-day conference on extreme poverty concluded yesterday with participants urging for greater emphasis on gathering better data and tailoring public policies, political structures and market mechanisms to work for the poorest.

The conference titled "What works for the poorest?" was organised by Brac in collaboration with the Brooks World Poverty Institute and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre at the University of

Manchester.

Chairing the concluding session, held at the Brac Centre Inn in Dhaka, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Chairman Rehman Sobhan said there is an urgent need to focus more on the broader socio-political processes that perpetuate poverty and limit development.

Sobhan warned if the underlying socio-political processes were not explored, it would not only be dangerous for the poorest but also would suggest that the current development discourses do not

have an adequate or a satisfactory understanding of poverty dynamics.

Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, member of the Planning Commission, dismissed the government initiatives to work for the poorest terming them "rubbish" and expressed his concerns over the state of data collection in Bangladesh.

Expressing his dismay at how researchers and academics have to work with poorly collected and

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Along trench is being dug in the middle of a road at Paribagh in the capital to install power cables, ignoring pedestrians' safety as the road is still open to public.

# PHONE BILL ARREARS Court asks 36 former MPs why action won't be taken against them

**COURT CORRESPONDENT**

A Dhaka court yesterday asked 36 former BNP, Awami League (AL) and Jatiya Party (JP) lawmakers to explain why actions should not be taken against them to realise telephone bills totalling Tk 83 lakh from them and fixed January 9 and 10 of 2007 for receiving their explanations.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rokan-Ud-Doula passed the order after an accounts officer (West) of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) filed 36

cases at different dates last month with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka against the former members of parliament.

Earlier on Monday, another court directed JP Chairman HM Ershad and 18 former BNP, AL and JP lawmakers to appear before it on December 27 in connection with criminal cases filed against them to realise pending telephone bills totalling Tk 66 lakh from them.

The ex-lawmakers sued are Dr Dewan Salahuddin and Neyamat

# Pakistan would give up claim to Kashmir if India allows autonomy Says Musharraf

**REUTERS, New Delhi**

Pakistan would give up its claim to Kashmir if India agreed to give the disputed Himalayan territory autonomy under the joint supervision of both countries, President Pervez Musharraf has said.

India did not respond directly to the proposal, which Musharraf has floated several times in the past, but said it could be discussed as part of a slow-moving peace process.

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Prayer Timing		
December 6		
	Azan	
Fajr	5-15	5-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-19	5-22
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

# BDR man killed in gunfight with smugglers

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar**

A Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) member was killed in a gunfight between the border guards and a gang of smugglers at Saint Martin's in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The dead was identified as Mohammad Jafor Ullah, 52, son of Mohammad Shaowkat of Rabibadiya village of Bogra.

The clash erupted when a BDR patrol team challenged a gang of smugglers, who were smuggling goods to Myanmar through Saint Martin's at around 3:00 am.

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# INDO-BANGLA TRADE Liberalisation, not FTA to yield benefits: WB

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Liberalisation of bilateral trade between Bangladesh and India will yield larger economic benefits for both the countries rather than signing a free trade agreement (FTA), said World Bank (WB).

The two neighbouring countries could also greatly benefit from cooperation in other areas, without implementing an FTA, the WB said

in its latest study titled "India-Bangladesh Trade, Trade Policies and Potential Free Trade Agreement".

According to the study, improvement of transport, storage and administrative infrastructures at the land borders, and greater harmonisation and cooperation in customs administration and banking relationship will yield substantial benefits.

As for potential economic bene-

fits to both the countries, there is no compelling case for Bangladesh and India to pursue a bilateral FTA, it added.

However, contradicting the same study said a bilateral FTA will provide substantial benefits to Bangladesh consumers by giving them access to cheaper exports from India.

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# Mild tremor in Chittagong

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg**

A mild earthquake, measuring 3.7 on the Richter scale, jolted the port city and its adjoining areas yesterday morning.

The quake shook the city at around 10.38.04am and lasted for 15 seconds.

However, there was no report of any casualty or damage to property.

The epicentre of the tremor was 129-km off the country's lone seismic observatory at Ambagan in the city, sources in the centre said.

It was the first in December and the 16th this year, they added.

# Coming polls will be most monitored, says Gastright

**UNB, Dhaka**

US Deputy Assistant Secretary John Gastright yesterday expressed his optimism that Bangladesh is going to have an election, overcoming the crisis, and it will be the most monitored polls ever in the country.

He discouraged army interven-

tion for a solution to the prevailing political crisis over the polls, saying that it will certainly negatively affect Dhaka-Washington military relations and Bangladesh's peacekeeping operations.

"I don't think army step is the right thing for Bangladesh. It will certainly negatively affect military

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# World failing to protect civilians, says UN

**AP, United Nations**

The global community has failed to live up to a pledge made last year to protect civilians caught in armed conflicts, the UN humanitarian chief said yesterday in his final briefing to the Security Council before leaving his post.

Jan Egeland cited Iraqi militias, Israel and Palestinian militants as some of the worst perpetrators of attacks against noncombatants.

"Nowhere in the world do more

# 44 slain in anti-Shia attacks in Iraq

**Shia leader asks Bush for more arms**

**AFP, Baghdad**

At least 44 people were killed in a wave of mainly anti-Shia attacks in Baghdad yesterday after a Shia leader asked US President George W Bush for more arms and authority to combat "terrorism".

The latest bombings came on the eve of the release of a US report on its options for the war-torn country, with Bush under growing

pressure at home to come up with an exit strategy.

The bipartisan Iraq Study Group, led by former secretary of state James Baker, is expected to call for a phased withdrawal of US forces without setting a timetable, as well as push for talks with Iran and Syria on controlling the violence.

On Monday, Abdel Aziz

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