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Kofi Annan asks caretaker govt to ensure level playing field

UNB, Dhaka

Outgoing UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has urged the Bangladesh caretaker government to ensure a level playing field, particularly through restoration of confidence in the Election Commission (EC).

In a statement on Friday, he also called on the army to continue to play a neutral role, thereby creating an environment for peaceful elections.

Renewing alarm about pre-election unrest in Bangladesh, he called for restraint and compromise among Bangladesh's major political players amid concern at the continuing violence and tensions ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for next month.

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V-Day celebrated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jubilation overshadowed political turmoil yesterday as the nation celebrated the 35th anniversary of victory in the nine-month Liberation War in 1971.

People from all walks of life paid their homage to the martyred war heroes who made supreme sacrifices for liberating the country from the Pakistan military rulers trampling the rights of the Bangalees, the majority in the then Pakistan.

As the countrymen renewed vow to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami activists clashed with Awami League (AL) men in Moulvibazar, Pabna, Chittagong, and Mymensingh, leaving at least 82 injured.

The day in 1971 marked the end of the bloody war as the Pakistan troops surrendered to the joint forces headed by Gen Jagjit Singh

Aurora at the then Ramna Racecourse, now known as Suhrawardy Udyan.

Aimed at a long-cherished autonomy, the Bangalees' victory in the War of Independence under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came at the expense of three million lives.

As the nation saluted the valiant sons of the soil early in the day, the president placed wreaths at national mausoleum at Savar. He stood in silence at the altar for a short while as buglers were playing the last post.

A smart contingent drawn from the military, navy and air force gave the president guard of honour there.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, Chief Justice Syed JR Muddassir Husain, advisers of the caretaker government, Dhaka City Mayor, judges, foreign diplomats and top civil and military officials were present.

Leaders of different political parties, socio-cultural organisations, rights organisation, professional bodies, educational institutions and a wide cross-section of people also placed wreaths at the altar of the mausoleum.

Elaborate programmes were chalked out to observe the day.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, AL President Sheikh Hasina and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, accompanied by senior party colleagues, separately laid wreaths at the mausoleum.

Coming after the president, they too stood in silence as a mark of respect for the martyrs.

Sheikh Hasina later placed wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum while Khaleda Zia at the mazar of former president Ziaur Rahman.

The day was heralded by a

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Thousands throng the National Memorial at Savar yesterday morning to pay homage to the Liberation War martyrs on the 35th Victory Day.

Military hardware show stampede kills one

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One person was killed and two others injured in an incident of stampede at the military hardware show at Tejgaon in the city yesterday.

The dead was identified as Montu Mia, 18, of East Kazipara of Kafur.

Montu went to the military hardware show at the National Parade Ground with his friend Masud, 20, at 8:00am, said Masud.

Police said the gate was not opened until 9:00am and hundreds of people had been waiting. Montu, Masud, 20, and Masud, 24, were stampeded as they along with many others tried to enter the parade ground.

Members of the armed forces rescued Montu in a critical condition and sent to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared him dead.

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Diplomats meet BNP top brass at Babar's house, talk polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Diplomats of three western countries had a meeting with BNP leaders at former state minister for home affairs Lutfozzaman Babar's residence in Gulshan last night.

According to sources, the three ambassadors talked about the Election Commission (EC) reconstitution and the upcoming election during the meeting.

The meeting started around 9:00pm and continued until a few minutes past midnight at Babar's

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'Informal' move initiated to revive package proposal

Iajuddin to request ECs to go on leave only when BNP, AL agree

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A few advisers to the caretaker government have re-initiated negotiations with the two major political alliances about recasting the Election Commission (EC) in line with the advisory council's package proposal.

Sources said President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed will request election commissioners SM Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury to go on leave-as per the package proposal-only when

the two alliances led by the BNP and Awami League (AL) agree.

"We are informally consulting with the leaders of BNP and Awami League for a consensus on resolving the ongoing political deadlock," Agriculture Adviser Shafulak Haque Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said it will take a couple of days to get a result from the negotiation.

Earlier on December 4, the president and all ten advisers signed in the proposals finalised in consultation with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia

and AL President Sheikh Hasina. The proposals include reconstitution of the EC by sending the two election commissioners on leave and appointing new commissioners.

But Iajuddin suddenly appeared opposed to sending Zakaria on leave. Coincidentally, the BNP-led four-party alliance also backedtracked from its stance and opposed the move.

Following the resignation of four advisers last Monday over differences of opinion with the president on implementing the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Latifur Rahman protests false campaign by Falu's media

Latifur Rahman, chairman and managing director of Transcom Group sent the following rejoinder to Amar Desh, ntv, Rtv in response to the false and malicious reports involving him and his business. We reproduce it in full:

"I have been surprised and shocked by a series of articles in the daily Amar Desh and news reports in the two TV channels namely ntv and Rtv. Mosaddek Ali Falu owns all these three media outlets, fully

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Tax exemption facilities misused to make profit

BB study finds welfare organisations encouraging graft

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

A number of welfare organisations in Bangladesh misuse tax-exemption facilities by operating profit-driven programmes that do not serve any socio-economic goal but encourage 'corruption-based activities', a Bangladesh Bank (BB) study found.

The study -- Tax expenditures in Bangladesh: An introductory analysis -- by the BB's Policy Analysis Unit also said the 'tax-holiday' provided to induce foreign direct investment (FDI) is widely misused and its opportunity cost is higher than its stated objectives.

In the financial year 2005 (FY05), Tk 9,345 crore of tax was

exempted, which was 31.3 percent of the total revenue earning and 2.5 percent of GDP, according to figures from the National Board of Revenue (NBR) cited in the study.

Tax exemptions in India and Pakistan make up 4.5 percent and 0.4 percent of their GDP, the study said.

"Income from a few welfare organisations operating with profit-driven motive" should be looked into because they enjoy exemptions on salaries of foreign technicians, it stressed.

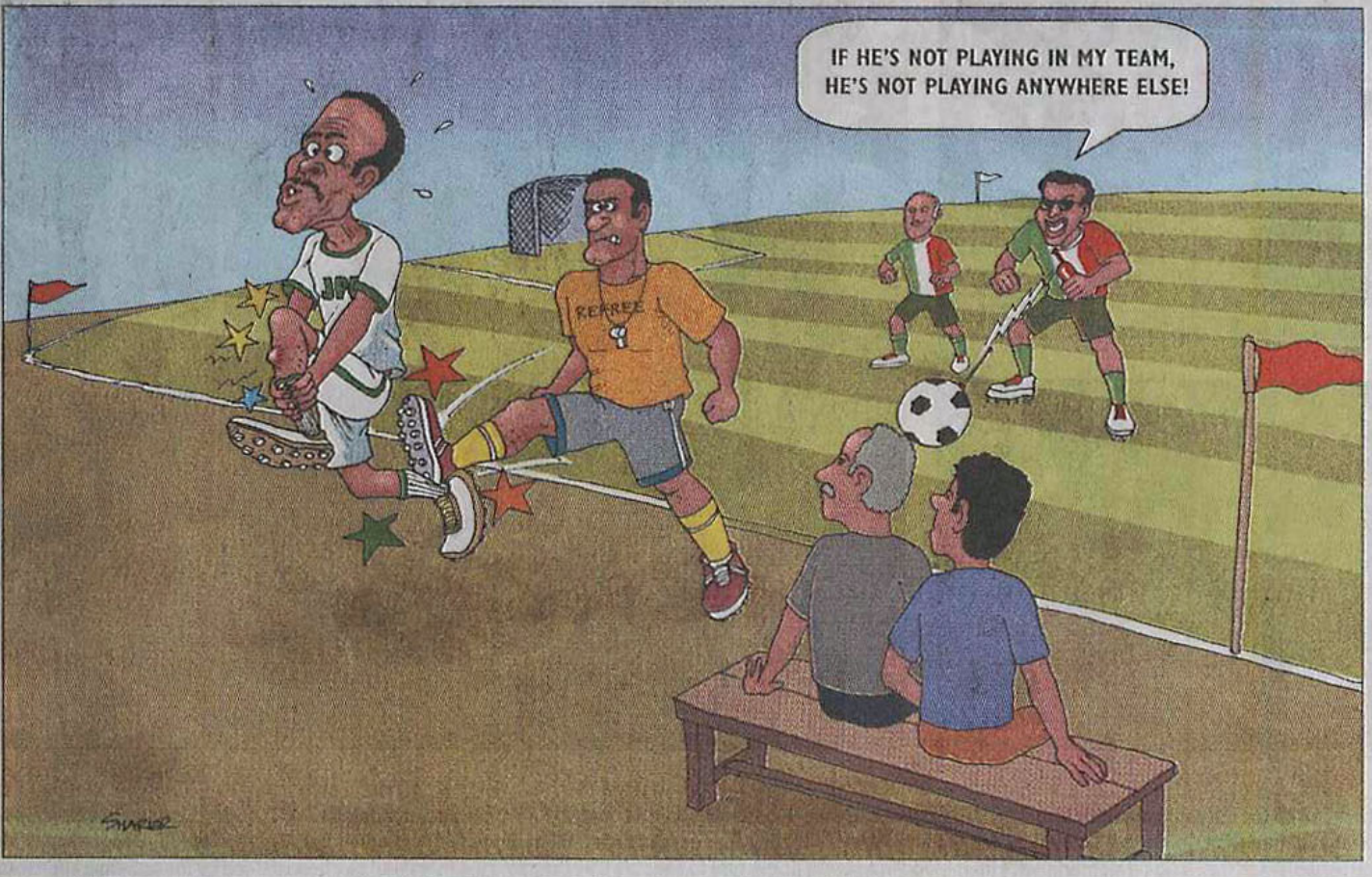
"A large number of foreign technicians are now working in Bangladesh, and many companies fraudulently use this measure," the report noted.

"Exemption of income from poultry, fisheries, livestock, horticulture, etc. requires further consideration as there has been widespread misuse of this provision.

"It seems that these provisions do not serve any socio-economic goal; rather they violate the principle of equity and encourage corruption-based activities," the study said.

Stating that tax holiday is provided to promote investment and attract FDI, the study observes, "The tax holiday facility has been misused widely and the opportunity cost of the incentive has been high compared to the objective for which it has been introduced."

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ERSHAD'S CONVICTION JP calls hartal in 5 northern dists today

STAR REPORT

Jatiya Party (JP) enforces a dawn-to-dusk hartal in five districts of greater Rangpur today protesting the High Court verdict on Thursday that sentenced JP Chairman HM Ershad to two years' imprisonment in the Japanese boat purchase case.

Announcing the programme on Friday, JP Presidium Member Moshir Rahman Ranga said that the verdict was 'damning to bar Ershad from contesting the next parliamentary election.'

Party leaders from the five districts -- Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Nilphamari and Rangpur -- were consulted before declaring the programme, our correspondent from Lalmonirhat reports. Awami League (AL) has extended its support to the hartal in the five districts, sources said.

The local units of JP organised processions and rallies in the district towns and the upazilas of the five districts yesterday to drum up

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Thousands in Kamrangirchar left off voter roll

RASHIDUL HASAN

"Please register my name on the voter list," Sekandar Ali (65), a resident of ward no 5 in Kamrangirchar in the capital requested The Daily Star correspondent mistaking him for a field level Election Commission (EC) official.

Like Sekandar, thousands of prospective voters who live mostly in slums of Kamrangirchar were not registered as voters yet on the ninth day of stipulated 11-day schedule for correcting the much controversial voter list already updated once.

About 10 thousand prospective voters of the ward now feel that they have little hope of seeing their

names on the voter list as the field level officials left their houses without registering them as voters.

Many residents of the area, who are eligible to be voters, alleged that the field level EC officials did not visit their houses. They alleged that the officials only visited the houses of either BNP or Jaamat leaders or of their relatives and supporters.

While this correspondent visited ward no 5 and 4 of the city in Kamrangirchar yesterday, many residents alleged that the visiting EC officials were usually guided and instructed by local people identified as leaders of BNP or its front organisations, and stayed away from the houses or slums occupied by Awami League sup-

porters. Achia, wife of the owner of a small road side café at Boro Gram under ward no 5, claimed that many people including her and her husband were not registered as voters because the enumerators had not visited their slum although they went to the adjacent slum.

With a sardonic smile Achia said, "Don't you know why they did not register us as voters?"

A rather large number of local residents besieged this correspondent and urged him to register their names as voters, since they mistook him for an enumerator from the EC.

After finding out his real identity some of the residents started

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CPJ concerned at attacks on journalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) sent a letter to President Iajuddin Ahmed on Friday asking him to do everything in his power to ensure that threats and assaults against journalists are investigated and the criminals are punished.

The CPJ said journalists told them threats and attacks on media are on the rise in the run-up to the elections. They said it has been on the rise since the interim government took power in late October.

"We urge you to do everything in your power as leader of the interim government to ensure that assaults on the press are adequately investigated and punished, and that journalists are free to report on the election campaign without fear of retribution," the letter read.

The letter signed by Joel Simon, executive director to the CPJ, was also put on the CPJ website.

Bangladesh's vibrant press corps has been a constant target of attacks in recent years, the letter said giving an instance of the

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Show of alliance strength

Khadea, Hasina to give poll guidelines from city rallies

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

BNP-led four-party alliance and Awami League (AL) led 14-party coalition are set to show off their strengths as both the alliances will hold grand rallies in downtown Dhaka.

AL-led 14-party will hold the rally tomorrow and four-party will hold its on the following day.

Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, chiefs of the two alliances, will give their activists guidelines regarding the next election scheduled to be held on January 23.

The AL-led coalition will announce three conditions as prerequisites for its participation in the election -- rescheduling of the election after correction and publication of the updated voter list, implementation of the package proposal offered to the alliances by the advisers to the caretaker government (CG), and purging the field level administration of 'partisan' officials, according to coalition insiders.

But the BNP-led alliance will announce a single condition for its

participation in the election - holding of the election within the stipulated 90 days of the CG's tenure.

Sources in both the alliances told The Daily Star that the announcements are likely to come from two expanded common platforms.

Sources within 14-party said their leaders including AL President Sheikh Hasina, Dr Kamal Hossain, Rashed Khan Menon and Hasanul Haque Inu, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and its Executive President Col (ret) Oli Ahmed, Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) leaders Ruhul Amin Hawlader and GM Quader, JP-Manju Secretary General Sheikh Shadidul Islam, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) Chairman Misbaur Rahman Chowdhury and its another leader Mufti Izharul Islam Chowdhury, Zaker Party Chairman Pirjada Faisal Amir, and Khelaphat Majlish Chairman Azizul Haque are likely to be present at the common rally of the coalition and its allies.

JP Chairman HM Ershad was

also supposed to be there but following the High Court verdict, sentencing him to two years in jail, the possibility of his presence is relatively slim, the sources said.

A senior AL leader told The Daily Star that they are keeping close contact with all the leaders of like-minded political parties in an effort to gather them on a common platform which is likely to make a common announcement. From that common platform, which the coalition is unofficially calling 'the grand electoral alliance', the leaders might urge President Iajuddin Ahmed to step down from the post of chief adviser 'for the interest of holding a fair election in the country.'

On the other hand, four-party alliance leaders including BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Jamaat-e-Islami Amir Matiu Rahman Nizami, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) Chairman Nazir Rahman Manzur, IOJ (Amini) Chairman Mufti Fazul Haque Amini, and JP-Ershad leader Begum Raushan Ershad are likely to be present at the BNP-led rally.

At least six top leaders of JP-Ershad are likely to be present at the four-party-led rally, the alliance sources said.

Senior leaders of 14-party will draw up a list of programmes tonight to follow their rally and Hasina will approve the draft of it tomorrow morning before the rally with a view to keeping the programmes 'a secret till the formal announcement', sources close to the AL president said.

With a view to turning the capital into a 'human sea' by mobilising about two lakh people in its rally, 14-party began massive preparations. Dhaka city AL will hold an extended meeting in the AL central office on Bangabandhu Avenue today. 14-party will also hold a meeting today and senior leaders of the coalition will instruct leaders of different districts adjacent to the capital about their tasks.

Meanwhile, the police and other law enforcement agencies have been asked to stay alert until the two rallies end, according to police sources.

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200th Branch of Uttara Bank Ltd. now at Raipur under Laxmipur district

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