

POLITICIANS URGED TO RISE ABOVE DIFFERENCES Political greed tears apart fabric of the nation Says UN Resident Coordinator

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

UN Resident Coordinator Renata Dessallien yesterday urged the president/ chief adviser and the election officials to ensure a level-playing field for all the political parties so that they can contest the forthcoming election fairly.

She also emphasised the need to minimise disenfranchisement and multiple voting by the same persons and to establish a climate of peace and security, free from intimidation and coercion, before, during and after the election.

The UN resident coordinator was speaking at a seminar entitled 'Inter-religious cooperation in peace making' at a city hotel.

Criticising the politicians, Dessallien said, "Political greed and power hungry politicians are tearing apart the fabric of the nation. Many different actors are seeking ways to remedy the situation, but so far the solution still eludes us."

Today politics in Bangladesh has overshadowed the precious national qualities -- unity, oneness and solidarity -- and divided not only the politicians, but also the adminis-

tration, schools and universities, professional organisations, the media and other civil society groups, she said.

She urged the political leadership to rise above their differences and to abandon inter-party hostility, political violence and coercion and behind-the-scene manipulation of the democratic process.

Diplomats, politicians and religious scholars attended the seminar jointly organised by the Embassy of Italy and the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW).

The speakers said that practising the true essence of all religions is one of the best ways to establish peace at this time when the country is going through political turmoil.

Ambassador Stefan Frowein, head of the Delegation of the European Commission, said a free and fair election is one which is rooted in respect for key rights such as the freedom of speech and assembly and the secret exercise of franchise.

"It is also one where political competition takes place on a reasonably level-playing field, meaning, amongst other things, that the

institutions and administration governing elections should be rigorously impartial and that candidates and parties should have equal access to state resources and to media coverage," he said.

Italian Ambassador Pietro Ballero said peaceful coexistence among different religious groups is not enough; there should be love within. People should find ways to demonstrate love towards each other, he added.

Presenting a keynote paper, Rizwana Yusuf, director of the Institute, said, "All religious communities, particularly their leaders, should make a collective effort to unite the entire world in our common shared values of peace, compassion, justice and harmony."

Ambassador of the Holy See Paul Tschang In-Num, first secretary of Pakistan High Commission Momina Bandey, former minister Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Head of Arabic department of Dhaka University Dr Abdul Mannan and Institute President Lt Gen (ret'd) M Nooruddin Khan also spoke.

DU student dies in Chandpur road accident

A Dhaka University (DU) student died in a road accident at Chandina, Chandpur on December 18, says a press release.

The victim, identified as ABM Golam Rahman, son of Abdul Aziz of Chandpur, was a second year student of Islamic Studies.

The accident occurred when the driver of Dhaka-bound Padma Express, which was carrying Golam Rahman, lost control and turned turtle in front of Gomta High School in Chandina, the release added.

Jute workers call blockade on Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pat, Suta-Bastrakal Sramik Karmachari Sangram Parishad, a platform of workers and employees working at country's jute and textile mills, would enforce a dawn-to-dusk blockade on Sunday and go for indefinite blockade from December 26 demanding payment of arrears, bonus and other dues before the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha.

They also announced to stage a sit-in in front of Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) office in the city on Sunday.

The decision came at a meeting of trade union leaders of jute and textile mills at Shaheed Asad auditorium in the city.

Their demands also include taking measures for continuation of jute mills production and budget allocation for buying jute for the mills.

Convener of the Parishad Abul Bashar chaired the meeting while Joint Convener Hafizur Rahman Bhuiyan, Shahidullah Chowdhury, Sardar Motahar Uddin, Lutfar Rahman, Shafiqul Ahmed and other leaders also spoke on the occasion.

Camp on breast cancer begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a view to raising awareness among women about breast cancer and hypertension, Bangladesh Mahila Samity is organising a month-long free medical camp that began at Dr Azmal Hospital Limited auditorium in the city yesterday.

Eminent nutritionist Prof Siddika Kabir, Actress Kabari Sarwar, Bangladesh Cancer Society General Secretary Dr Golam Mohiuddin Faruk and Executive Director of Dr Azmal Hospital and President of Mahila Parishad Selina Khalek spoke on the occasion.

The Samity is organising the one-month long camp under its 'Health Service Programme' where experts will conduct free check up from 10:00am to 2:00pm at Dr Azmal Hospital, Mirpur.

FFs hail Ershad's move to join 14-party

Twenty-four former district commanders of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad in a statement greeted Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday for joining AL-led 14-party combine.

In the statement they said his decision to join 14-party's grand rally is a 'historic' incident in the present political situation.

Joining of Ershad would add a new dimension to the history of the nation, they said adding the largest alliance can bring economical emancipation of the country people through a free and fair election.

DESECRATION OF PORTRAIT Body to probe RU incident

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University (RU) authorities on Tuesday midnight formed a four-member probe committee to investigate the incident of defilement of the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Taposhy Rabeya hall.

RU Professor Rafiqul Islam Rumi was made convener of the committee while other members are ABM Shahjahan Ali, Prof Nazrul Islam and Aslam Hossain.

The probe committee will also investigate the rampage of the office of Vice Chancellor by some unruly Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists on Tuesday noon.

The committee was asked to submit the report within seven days, campus sources said.

The authorities also gave Monwara Begum compulsory leave from his service. Earlier, Monwara, a Jamaat loyalist senior house tutor at the Taposhy Rabeya hall, allegedly desecrated a picture of Sheikh Mujib, the sources said.

Meanwhile, BCL withdrew the indefinite strike on the campus, as the authorities assured them to meet all their demands, including punishment to Monwara Begum and JCD cadres.

They, however, threatened that they will call strike on the campus again, if their demands were not met.



Prof Muzafer Ahmad speaks at a press conference styled 'Attempt to Snatch Away Voters' Right to Know', organised by Shushashoner Janney Nagorik (Shujan), at Reporter's Unity Hall Room in the city yesterday. On his left is Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar while on his right is Syed Abul Maksud.

CA plunges nation into crisis Dr Kamal tells US Senator Richard Lugar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The forthcoming elections are of critical importance for the nation as it would determine whether democracy and the rule of law would prevail, enabling the secular forces to check the growth of extremism.

Dr Kamal Hossain, president of Gano Forum and a member of the AL-led grand alliance, said this during a meeting with Richard Lugar, chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at his office at Capitol Hill in the United States on Tuesday, says a press release.

Explaining the current political situation in Bangladesh, Dr Kamal said President/ Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed has plunged the country into deep crisis by tarnishing the image of the non-partisan caretaker government through appointing himself as the chief adviser and his various controversial activities have called into ques-

tion the neutrality of the caretaker government.

As a level-playing field with a neutral umpire does not exist in the country, all the political parties except the BNP-led alliance have collectively decided not to take part in the election, he said.

Also, the civil society firmly believes that it is no possible to hold a free and fair election under this caretaker government, he added.

The 14-party alliance, which is committed to democracy, would be willing to participate in the elections, provided that the caretaker government could demonstrate its good faith, neutrality and firmness in ensuring and maintaining a level-playing field, Dr Kamal said.

The eminent jurist expressed his alliance members' deep appreciation for the efforts made so far by the international community, particularly the United States, to help Bangladeshis hold a free, fair and

impartial election and keep the democratic process on track.

On behalf of his alliance partners, Dr Kamal expressed his hope that the United States would continue to remain proactively engaged at this critical juncture to ensure that democracy and freedom in Bangladesh are not thwarted.

Senator Lugar expressed the United States' commitment to promoting democracy and upholding freedom everywhere.

He assured Dr Kamal that he would discuss with the US government the prevailing situation in Bangladesh and the ways to assist the people of Bangladesh in strengthening democracy.

EkramulAmeen, political consultant and businessman from Indiana, Advocate Gazul Haq, Kalim Sharafi, Maj Gen (Ret'd) CR Dutta, journalist Kamal Lohani, artist Quayum Chowdhury, journalist Shahrier Kabir, Hena Das, writer Syed Shamsul Haq, Hasan Azizul Haque, Shyamoli Nasrin Chowdhury and Quazi Mukul.

9 accused in Barisal case acquitted

FROM PAGE 16

This is the first judgment of a case related with the August 17 series bomb blasts in Barisal.

The acquitted are: Ziaur Rahman Zia, director of Al Ikram Samaj Kalyan Sangstha, Golam Morshed Chowdhury Reza, Jalal Ahmed, Hafez Saiful Islam, Abu Yusuf Majumdar, Abu Solaiman Sujan, director - officials and staff of the organisation, and their 'associates' Md Maruf, Jasimuddin and Zahid Babu.

Zia, Yusuf and Babu have been absconding since the trial began. The six others, who are behind bars, were not released from jail as all of the nine are also accused in 11 other cases lodged in connection with the August 17 blasts.

Those cases are under trial in the First Additional District and Session Judge's Court in Barisal.

Family members of the acquitted demanded immediate release of the six in prison and judicial probe and punishment of the real culprits.

"The six accused are in the jail for

about 16 months and nothing was revealed to prove their connection with the August 17 blasts, even after interrogation for 168 hours under remand at Barisal Kotwali Police Station and Joint Interrogation Cell in Dhaka," they said.

Sub-inspector Mashur Rahman of Barisal Kotwali Police Station lodged a case against the aforesaid nine accused under sections 3 and 6 of Explosives Act for blasting bomb in front of the house of Shahjahan Commissioner at Natun Bazar area of the city at 11:15am on August 17, 2005, court sources said.

The law enforcement agencies interrogated the six arrestees for long 168 hours and after investigation by Sub-inspector MA Rob and Al Mamunul Islam, charge sheet was submitted against the nine accused on October 10, 2005.

The case was transferred to the Barisal Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal on June 11, 2006 and after examining 16 of the 18 witnesses, other evidences and arguments of

both sides, MA Matin, judge of the tribunal, handed down the verdict yesterday noon in the presence of the six arrested accused.

Claiming the charge sheeted as 'innocent' and 'victim of the police harassment', their family members appealed for the interference of the president and human rights activists on humanitarian ground.

"As the police has no intention to nab the real culprits, they implicated the same people in 12 cases of series bomb blasts at 18 places of the city that took place at the same time. They are harassing innocent poor people like us," they said.

Al Ikram Samaj Kalyan Sangstha employee Abu Solaiman Sujan, who is a born-blind, was forced to give a confessional statement under tremendous physical and mental torture and the 'so-called' statement was the only basis of the charge sheet, they said, adding that the matter can be proved in free and fair judicial and medical investigations.

Bar parties with less than 2.5pc votes

FROM PAGE 16

Election' at the Jatiya Press Club. Institute of Policy Development (IPD), a UK-based research and training institute, organised the programme where several suggestions for holding a free and fair election were presented by the participants.

"In India, political parties failing to get 2.5 percent of the total cast votes are not allowed to take part in the next election. Bangladesh can apply this condition for eliminating non-popular political parties from the polls," Rauf said.

The former CEC criticised the statements against election. "Statements like 'election will not be allowed to take place' or 'election will be resisted,' are against the practice of democracy," he said urging the political parties to stop making of such statement.

Election is needed to resolve the present political impasse, he said adding that if necessary, another poll could be held after one or two years.

He also accused the political parties of taking extortion to run their activities.

Rauf also said that nation will not sustain if the constitution is violated and practice of democracy will be barred if the election is not held in due time.

He also suggested re-modelling of the present democracy according to the national need and issuing identity cards for all citizens.

President and advisers to the caretaker government will have to be stricter for holding the next election, he added.

Eminent Journalist Sadek Khan said that the nation will plunge into a deep constitutional crisis if the

general election is not held.

"Poll day can only be deferred ignoring the three-month stipulated time of the caretaker government after announcing an emergency situation, which is unexpected to all," he said while addressing the meeting.

Researcher Dr Atiar Rahman feared that democracy cannot be kept working if political parties continue to make vital institutes, like caretaker government, election commission and supreme court, controversial through political statements and activities.

Among others, Dhaka University Professors M Rokanuzzaman and Rahul Amin, Barrister Tanvir Ahmed Al Amin and IPD Executive Director Nurullah Patwary also took part at the meeting.

5,000 more Rohingyas drafted in voter list

FROM PAGE 16

District Awami League (AL) General Secretary Shalauddin Ahamed alleged that over 5,000 voters loyal to his party were deleted from the voter list while 'correcting' it.

Zafar Alam, chairman of Chakoria Paurasabha, and Abdur Rahman Bodi, chairman of Teknaf Paurasabha, alleged that BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders influenced the Election Commission (EC) field staff to include a large number of Rohingyas in the voter list.

Teknaf upazila BNP President Mostaque Ahmed Chowdhury however said a small number Rohingyas might have been enrolled as voters but the number is not as big as claimed by the AL leaders.

Maheshkhali upazila AL President Anwar Pasha said some 2,000 supporters of his party were dropped from the updated voter list.

He also named a few Rohingyas enrolled in the voter list as Noor Mohammed (voter no 0347), Ali Ullah, (no 0348), Ziaur Rahman (no 0349), Nurul Amin (no 0350), Mohammed Taher (no 0351), Mohammed Idris (no 0352) and Shajeda Begum (no 0337). He has lodged a complaint with the local election officer but these voters are still on the list, he said.

Ashrafun Yusuf, a housewife and an eligible voter in Ukhiya, said none of her family members was included in the list although they had filled in the forms designated for this.

Members of some Hindu families in the locality, who were enrolled as voters in 2000, have been allegedly left out from the present list.

Pinto Dutta, 28, said he and four other family members -- his mother Aroti Bala, 50, brother Monitro Dhatta, 45, wife Minakghi, 25, and

sister-in-law Pipla, 38, -- were on the list of 2000 but this time their names have been deleted.

Moreover, the EC staffs did not visit many houses in six upazilas of the district for correcting the voter list till the last day yesterday, locals alleged.

Residents of Agriculture Office Road at the district town said the EC staff visited their houses but they did not register any new voters.

A number of eligible voters in Moheshkhali, Chakoria, Ramu, Teknaf and Ukhiya said no EC staff visited their houses.

Abdur Rahim, president of Ukhiya Press Club, said none of his family members has been registered as voters.

Helenaz Tahera, commissioner of Cox's Bazar Paurasabha, alleged that many of his relatives have not been enrolled in the 'corrected' voter list.

Misbahuddin Khan passes away



Misbahuddin Khan, former Awami League lawmaker and father of Prof Muntasar Maman, passed away due to a cardiac arrest on December 19 at United Hospital in the city at the age of 78, says a press release.

He was laid to rest at his family graveyard at Gulbarah at Kachua yesterday after four namaz-e-janjazas at different places at Kachua in Chandpur.

His first namaz-e-janjaza was held at Uttara Masque in the city.

Misbahuddin, former vice-chairman of Dock Workers' Management Board, joined Chittagong port in 1956 after completion of his education at Dhaka University.

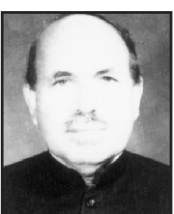
Misbahuddin was the brother of eminent educationist and litterateur Dr Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir, former state minister and AL leader Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir and Dhaka University Professor Dr HK ShamsulArefin.

Leaders of Ekatturer Ghatka Dalal Nirmul Committee (Forum for Secular Bangladesh), Muktiyudher Smriti Sangrakkhan Kendra and Moulabud O Sampradayeskota Birodhi Dakkhhin Asio Gonosamillon yesterday expressed deep shock at the death of Misbahuddin Khan.

In a joint statement, they said Misbahuddin was a great supporter of the anti-communism movement and the nation has lost a brilliant son at his death.

They also conveyed sympathy to members of the bereaved family. Signatories to the statement are Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Binodbihari Chowdhury, Justice K M Sobhan, Advocate Gazul Haq, Kalim Sharafi, Maj Gen (Ret'd) CR Dutta, journalist Kamal Lohani, artist Quayum Chowdhury, journalist Shahrier Kabir, Hena Das, writer Syed Shamsul Haq, Hasan Azizul Haque, Shyamoli Nasrin Chowdhury and Quazi Mukul.

Siddique Hossain



Siddique Hossain, a valiant freedom fighter and former lawmaker, passed away due to kidney diseases at a city hospital at the age of 70 yesterday.

Hossain was also a member of advisory committee of Awami League (AL).

He left behind his wife, three sons and a daughter to mourn his death.

His body will be buried at the family graveyard in Rangpur after his two sons arrive home from America.

AL President Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock at his death.

In a message, Hasina said with the death of Siddique Hossain, the country lost a brave leader, who was committed to democracy and against anti-liberation war and autocratic forces.

She also conveyed sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

Sudeep Sarker

BSS, Dhaka

Sudeep Sarker, a social worker and founder of Nabangkur Sangsad, passed away due to a cardiac arrest at a city clinic on December 18 at the age of 22.

He left behind his mother, two brothers and a sister to mourn his death. He was cremated at Postagola crematorium in the city.

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon President Prof Muzafer Ahmad and Country Director of the Hunger Project Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar expressed deep shock at his death.

They prayed for salvation of the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to members of the bereaved family.

Mominul Islam Suruj

BSS, Dhaka

Mominul Islam Suruj, a senior investigation officer of Bangladesh Jatiya Mahila Ainjibi Samity, passed away due to a cardiac arrest on Tuesday night.

Executive director of Mahila Ainjibi Samity Advocate Salma Ali expressed deep shock at his death.

She prayed for peace of the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to members of the bereaved family.

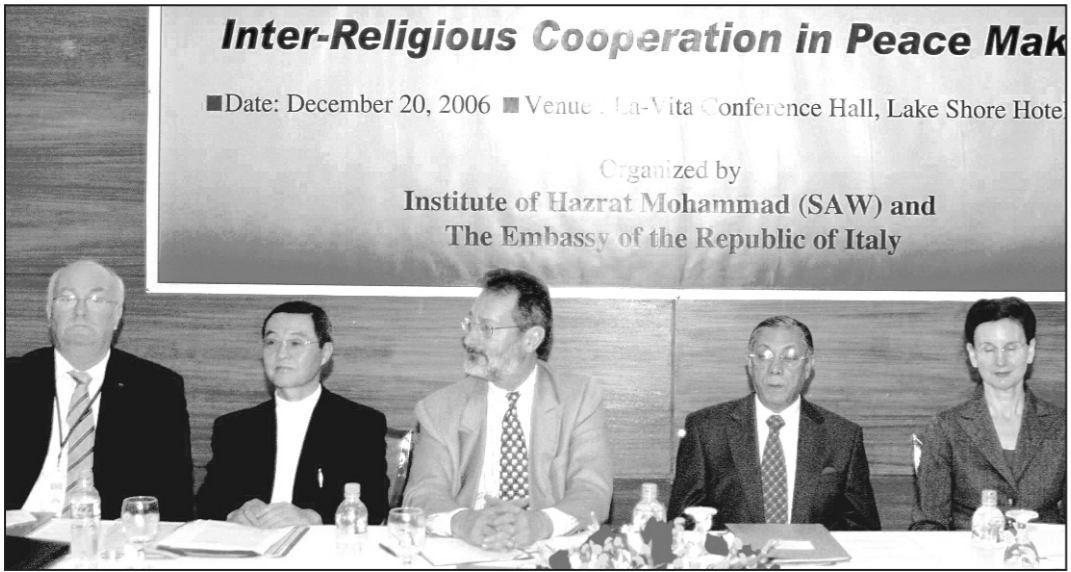
Death anniversary

CU CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 3rd death anniversary of Professor Mohammed Khaled, eminent journalist, one of the organisers of the Liberation War and former Editor of local daily Azadi.

He was also the governor of Chittagong and elected Member of Parliament in 1970 and 1973, said a press release.

Different organisations chalked out programmes, including Qurankhani, doa mahfil and discussion meeting to mark the day.



Participants at a seminar entitled 'Inter-religious cooperation in peace making' held at a city hotel yesterday. From left are Stefan Frowein, Paul Tschang In-Nim, Pietro Ballero, Lt Gen (ret'd) Nooruddin Khan and Renata Dessallien.

'Address issues of masculinities for a gender-neutral society'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday noted that it is imperative to address the issues of masculinities in order to form a gender-neutral society.

Although it might take time to eliminate the patriarchal societal system, it is possible to change the attitude towards women by chang-

Smuggled clothes worth Tk 4 cr seized, nine Indians held

UNB, Bagerhat

Coastguard members arrested nine alleged Indian smugglers and recovered clothes worth Tk 4 crore on Shibchar River near Sundarban area early yesterday.

Mongla Western Zone Coast Guard seized a trawler in the river near Nalian and recovered 192 bundles of clothes when those were being smuggled into Bangladesh from India.

Sensing their presence, another smuggler jumped into the river and fled the scene.

The arrested were handed over to the police. They were all from Uttar Chabbish Pargana of India, the sources said.

Non-govt teachers demand salary, bonus

National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE) in a statement yesterday urged the government to disburse the fund for the salary and festival bonus of non-government high school and college teachers and employees before December 24 so that they get the money before Eid-ul-Azha.

In a statement NFTE Chief Coordinator Principal Kazi Faruque said if the fund were not disbursed before the date, they would not get it before Eid-ul-Azha.

NFTE would launch agitation programmes if teachers and employees are denied of their current month's salary and festival bonus before Eid-ul-Azha, Faruque added.

WEATHER TODAY

Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may also occur over the river basins of the country during early morning, Met Office said in a forecast.

Highest temperature 32.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Chittagong and lowest 12.2 degree Celsius at Comilla.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:16pm today and rises at 6:37am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature		Humidity in celsius	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	28.9	16.4	73	68
Chittagong	32.0	16.6	83	75
Rajshahi	27.3	14.9	74	74
Khulna	29.0	16.2	87	72
Barisal	29.5	14.8	88	81
Sylhet	29.5	16.7	71	62
Cox's Bazar	31.0	19.0	73	76