

Communists leading in Russian polls

MOSCOW, Dec 18: Communists and nationalists were leading Monday in results from parliamentary elections, but moderate parties that back president Boris Yeltsin's democratic reforms were doing better than expected after a large voter turnout, report agencies.

The leader of the Russian Communist Party, Gennady Zyuganov, welcomed today his party's hefty win in parliamentary elections. "I am happy we got support in the Russian heartland — central Russia, the Volga, Kuzbas," he was quoted as saying by Interfax, as preliminary results showed his party had won 22 per cent, with 43.9 per cent of the vote counted. Zyuganov said he hoped the hard-left Agrarian Party, which was polling 3.5 per cent, and the Centrist Women of Russia, with 4.5 per cent, would manage to

Merrill meets Shamsul, Amu

By Staff Correspondent

US Ambassador in Bangladesh David N Merrill called on Information and Commerce Minister M Shamsul Islam and Awami League leader Amir Hossain Amu at their residences in the city yesterday, according to sources.

Merrill discussed with the two leaders the present political crisis and the bids to end it.

Details could not be known.

Rickshawpullers clash with police at Malibagh

By Staff Correspondent

A group of rickshawpullers locked into a clash with police near Malibagh crossing in the city yesterday afternoon.

Police lobbed at least five rounds of tear-gas shells to bring the situation under control. Chase and counter-chase between the rickshawpullers and the police created panic and halted the traffic movement for around 30 minutes, according to witnesses.

Police said that the trouble began when a plain-cloth police officer intervened to stop an altercation between a passenger and a rickshawpuller in the area at about 4:30 pm.

After hearing a rumour that police took a rickshawpuller inside the nearby CID office.

The rickshawpullers gathered in the crossing, chased the police on duty and started pelting stones on them.

Seventh SAF Games

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ence in utter dismay is the way the officials paraded. When the other participating teams followed the proceedings in a disciplined manner with chief-de-mission and his deputies following the flag-bearer, then our officials had crowded behind a bearded Atique for reasons best known to them.

Among the front runners an employee of the Ministry of Youth and Sports was seen along side the chief of the Bangladesh contingent, Abub Ahmed. Besides, Mohiuddin Ahmed, director (admin) of the National Sports Council (NSC), was surprisingly took steps to remain ahead of everyone.

However, that was not the end of an undisciplined Bangladesh team. As soon as our athletes settled in the middle they engaged in an unhealthy competition of preserving memories of the gale opening ceremony with a random clicking of flashes.

The enthusiasm was turned even worse when Indian celebrated athlete PT Usha was conducting the official oath, two of Bangladeshi players were seen taking photographs despite requests

PM opens Motijheel Digital Telephone Exchange today

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the 20,000-line Motijheel Digital Telephone Exchange today at 11 am, reports UNB.

Post and Telecommunications Minister Tariqul Islam, Secretary M Hafizuddin Khan and T&T Board Chairman MH Chowdhury will address the inaugural function.

The Motijheel Exchange in the capital is one of the 19 new exchanges being set up for 150,000 digital telephone lines across the country.

Some 12,000 analogue telephone lines have been converted to digital lines out of the 20,000 in the Motijheel digital exchange. Of the remaining 8,000 lines, only a few have been installed and the rest will be completed very soon.

Half-day hartal in Khulna today

KHULNA, Dec 18: Awami Jubo League has called a half-day hartal in Khulna city tomorrow from 6:00 am in protest against the killing of its leader Aminul Islam Babu yesterday.

Mizanur Rahman, district president of Jubo League at a press conference at the Khulna Press Club also declared a five-day agitation programme demanding immediate arrest and punishment of the killers.

WASA ordn

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effect a complete restructuring of the administration of the Dhaka WASA.

It will have a two-tier administrative system — one executive branch and one decision making — which will have autonomy in project designing and implementation, a highly placed official source said.

Instead of the present executive set up of one appointed chairman and three members, WASA will have one Managing Director (MD) and three Deputy MDs, who will be recruited on a contractual basis.

In addition, there will be a board headed by a Chairman elected from amongst the seven members.

This board will be the decision-making organ of the agency while the executive branch will be responsible for project implementation.

The amendments were made in line with the World Bank's conditionalities for financing WASA projects, sources said.

The approval of the amendments was given at a cabinet meeting held in the cabinet room of the Prime Minister's office in the morning.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia presided over the meeting.

Ministers and State Ministers in charge of different ministries attended the meeting. Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and Secretaries concerned were present in the meeting.

EC directive

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and impartial manner.

The EC also directed the state-owned media to maintain a total neutrality in broadcasting news on the occasion of ensuing national elections.

The EC also asked the concerned media to follow the code of conduct properly for giving balanced opportunity to all the political parties going to the polls.

The decisions came at a meeting of Information Ministry, state-run media and Election Commission with Chief Election Commissioner Justice AKM Sadeque in the chair.

Radio and television will broadcast and telecast the news of opposition political parties in proportion to the number of seats obtained by them in last parliament, said the EC in a press release.

After the completion of final candidate list, the contesting parties will be allowed coverage on the media according to the number of their nominees in the electoral race, but only the parties putting up at least 30 candidates will get the opportunity.

IU students asked to vacate halls

KUSTHIA, Dec 18: Islamic University (IU) authorities asked the students to vacate their residential halls by 5 pm today, reports UNB.

The university was in vacation till December 31.

Campus sources said the IU Syndicate in an emergency meeting today took the decision in the wake of tense situation on the campus.

Not a single weapon

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meeting, they said. The government in a directive on December 10 asked the manufacturers, possessors and users to surrender the illegal arms by December 20 at the nearby police station.

So far, the response to the directive is very poor, according to reports received from a number of police stations.

Describing some of the aspects of the proposed drive, an official said, at the moment, the Home Ministry has received a comprehensive list of possessors, traders and manufacturers of illegal weapons from police and other law enforcement agencies.

The list covers almost all the districts of the country, he said.

The official, who talked on condition of anonymity said when the operation really takes off, para-military Bangladesh Rifles would be deployed to seal off the porous land border to check movement of weapons.

Bomb blasts rock Agrabad area in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 18: Sporadic bomb blasts rocked the Agrabad commercial area today.

According to witnesses, some cocktails were blasted in front of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry this evening while people were seen running for safety.

A vehicle of the chamber was partially damaged during the explosion at its premises, chamber sources added.

Earlier a series of cocktails were blasted near the Agrabad Commerce College by some unidentified youths, police said. They also allegedly attacked and damaged a vehicle of a contractor to stop him dropping the tender in a local office at noon, police added.

Later police patrol was intensified at the Agrabad commercial area to prevent any outbreak of violence.

Bank guard's rifle snatched

By Staff Correspondent

A group of about four unidentified youths snatched away the rifle of a security guard at a Janata Bank branch in the Khilgaon area in the city at around noon yesterday.

The guard received bullet injury in his hand when the gang fired a shot at about 11:30 am, according to sources. None was arrested in this connection.

Two of the gang members were seen near the cash counter where the gas bills are received, police sources said. On the other side, the two accomplices attacked the guard and snatched the rifle creating panic and fleeing the spot by firing gunshots, sources added.

A case has been filed with Tejgaon thana in this connection, sources said.

Ex-MP Mobarak Hossain dead

Former member of parliament Mobarak Hossain died early yesterday morning at the Holy Family Hospital, reports UNB.

He was taken to hospital on Sunday evening while he fell ill. He was 48.

Mobarak Hossain, an eminent student leader and freedom fighter, had been elected member of parliament twice — in 1973 and 1986 from Narayanganj-3 constituency.

DU teacher

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Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) last night, hospital sources said. His blood pressure and respiratory system were functioning normally. His right eye and a part of the brain matter were affected, attending doctor said.

Jatrabari bus fire

Police suspect involvement of influential groups

Star Report

Police suspects involvement of some influential groups in the December 4 bus fire at Jatrabari that left at least 12 people dead.

Six persons, arrested from the Syedabad bus terminal area in this connection, are now on police remand for interrogation. The statements of the six persons recorded by the police bring into light involvement of some influential groups in the incident, said a police official yesterday.

The arrested persons may be produced before the court today or tomorrow, the source said.

Police, however, could not arrest the driver of the bus Shamsu Miah who is absconding since the incident.

According to the police, Shamsu Miah was brought to the city from his village home at Chakhal, under Noakhali district a couple of days before the incident and was kept under protection of an influential group.

Police is yet to receive the report of the forensic department.

The Noakhali-bound bus (Dhaka-Ja-1468) Green Star caught fire at about 11:30 pm on December 4, soon after it had left the terminal with 31 passengers.

Gun recovered from outside BAU hall

MYMENSINGH, Dec 18:

The security branch of the Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) today recovered a single barrel gun from outside the boundary wall of Shahjalal Hall, reports UNB.

The gun, recovered after the Saturday's clash on the campus, killed three students and 50 injured.

The university has been closed till December 31 following the Saturday's incident.

The university officials said the work for first year admission test is going on smoothly and all foreign students of the university are well.

Shibir calls half-day hartal tomorrow

The Islami Chhatra Shibir

yesterday turned down the press reports that its activists had played an offensive role in the clashes on the Bangladesh Agricultural University campus on Saturday that left four students dead, reports UNB.

Addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club, Shibir president Muhammad Rafiqul Islam Khan claimed that the four students killed in the incident belonged to his organisation.

He also announced a series of programmes to protest the killings on the BAU campus.

The programmes include a half-day hartal in the divisional towns, including Mymensingh, on Wednesday and a siege on the Prime Minister's Secretariat on Saturday.

He blamed the activists of the Jatiyatibadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the students' wing of ruling BNP, for the killings and demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the 'culprits'.

Scotland Yard opens file on Al-Badr chief

LONDON, Dec 18: Scotland Yard is investigating war crimes allegations against a prominent Bangladesh-born Muslim, according to a report published Sunday, reports AP.

The observer newspaper said that Scotland Yard's War Crimes Unit had opened a file on Chowdhury Moueen Uddin, who heads the Islamic Forum Europe.

Witnesses have said that Moueen Uddin headed Al Badar, a pro-Pakistan group that flourished during Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971.

Al Badar preferred Pakistan's Islamist policies to Bangladesh nationalism. Survivors claim the group was behind mass killing and rape.

Moueen Uddin emigrated to Britain in the mid-1970s.

The charges against Moueen Uddin and two other prominent Muslims surfaced earlier this year. Moueen Uddin, who led European support for the 1989 Iranian death sentence against author Salman Rushdie, has denied the charges.

Britain's war crimes legislation allows prosecution of crimes committed in foreign lands.

A Scotland Yard spokesman would not comment on the report.

PM firm not to resign

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should she resign if there was no negotiated settlement.

Other sources in the BNP said the party had toughened its stand on the PM's resignation issue.

In case of the Opposition's continued rejection of any move to end the crisis before the PM steps down, the sources added, the ruling party would follow the Constitution as regards the PM's resignation and holding of the elections.

Meanwhile, the process of behind-the-scenes negotiation between the government and the opposition parties had slowed down as the negotiators of both the sides feel they've got more time to bargain for their respective positions — the BNP seeking to settle all issues relating to the polls before the PM resigns and the Opposition demanding the PM's immediate resignation.

Asked on the issue, BNP Secretary General and LGRD minister Abdus Salam Talukdar told some reporters at his Bailey Road official residence last night that the process was still on.

The Opposition leaders seemed discouraged after AL Chief Sheikh Hasina spoke against the personal level contacts, he added.

"We'll continue our efforts to resolve the crisis through dialogue despite their refusal to comply with our request", he said.

On the PM's resignation, the BNP Secretary General said, "Even if the Prime Minister desires, she cannot resign unless a negotiation (about her successor) takes place. She is under oath to uphold the Constitution. She can't create any constitutional vacuum... If she resigns, there will be no government and the country can't be run without a government".

The BNP leader brushed aside a press report which said his party had made a new proposal to the Opposition that the PM would resign 45 days before the polls.

Dhaka puts forward 8 proposals

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expansion of intra-regional trade, reports BSS. Bangladesh foreign minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman made this commitment while addressing the 16th session of SAARC council of ministers at the Vigyan Bhawan here.

Rahman said as "we step into the second decade of the SAARC, we are committed to boldly facing the challenges awaiting us, to grasping the opportunities that are presented to us and to building a better future for the peoples of South Asia by intensifying regional cooperation with visionary zeal".

The Foreign Minister in his speech made an eight-point proposal for the consideration of the member nations. His proposals include sharing of vitally important water resources 'in our region where four countries share common waterways.

Let us look at this issue of sharing such common resources from long term perspective, thereby changing one of the poorest regions in the world to come to one of the most prosperous.

Referring to the operationalisation of SAPTA agreement, he said it has to ensure that the least developed states obtain the benefits they expect from this agreement.

The other proposals made by Rahman include gradual abolition of visas between the member countries to strengthen people to people contacts and interaction at all levels across the entire spectrum of South Asian society, promotion of study tours for students at different levels, development of SAARC speakers and parliamentarians association into a non-legislative South Asian parliament.

The Midnight File

Syria accepts 9-pt proposal for talks with Israel

JERUSALEM, Dec 18: Prime Minister Shimon Peres said today that Syria has agreed to a nine-point programme for negotiations which could produce a final peace agreement before Israeli elections in October. Speaking to a closed-door session of his Labor Party group in parliament, Peres said the negotiating principles had been accepted by Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad as the basis for talks to begin next week, according to deputies who attended the meeting. He said a tenth point proposed a summit meeting with Assad, but was not accepted by the Syrian leader, reports AFP.

Second COMDECA

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camp for development with participation of all in society and it is a special gathering or jamboree where scouts or rovers participate in social development activities along with the local people.

This enhances the efficiency and partnership of the scouts in practical work and, side by side, this raises the awareness of the villagers about social uplift.

Australia, Indonesia, Japan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Maldives, the Philippines, Switzerland, Korea and Thailand have sent their scouts to the COMDECA. The USA and UK have also sent their delegations to the meet.

The Bangladesh Scouts organised community development camp for the first time at Bahadurabad in Gazipur district in 1992 and has arranged the second such jamboree in light of its experiences and successes.

The prime minister said, "Scouting makes the children and youths self-reliant and inspires them to dedicate themselves to the service of society."

Begum Zia cited the projects taken up by the Bangladesh Scouts. Among those, the Bangladesh-Australia Child Health Project, Bangladesh-Korea Joint Social Development Project and the Diarrhoea Prevention Port Project now under implementation in Khulna division in cooperation with UNICEF deserve special mention, she said.

Maintenance of public health, diarrhoea prevention port, elimination of malnutrition of mother and child, afforestation, preservation of environment, repair of roads and construction of cyclone shelters, demonstration of fuel-saving stove and solar stoves etc will make COMDECA attractive and educative, she said.

"Besides, our scouts are imparting training on rearing of poultry and livestock, tailoring, typewriting and computer use. These activities are very beneficial to the country and the common man," she said.

She also mentioned that the Bangladesh Scout is firmly committed to building the youth community as a disciplined, well-organised, self-reliant, self-respecting.

Intra-SAARC

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view but differed on the manner in which this could be done with Dhaka even suggesting creation of a 'SAARC' conciliation group to ease tensions and to resolve disputes among member nations.

While Nepal was silent on the issue, Bhutan and Sri Lanka felt that misunderstanding and suspicion among the SAARC countries cast a long shadow on its activities.

The Bhutanese foreign minister, Lyonpo Dawa Tswering, said the "popular domestic politics of neighbour-bashing" was not conducive to regional cooperation.

Creation of a South Asian Development Fund (SADF), and establishment of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) by the end of the second decade of SAARC and setting up of a South Asian Economic Conference were among the specific suggestions made at the commemorative meeting to give a new direction to SAARC.

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