

Emergency in 8 US states: 20 killed Worst blizzards in 70 yrs



US President Bill Clinton (R) and First Lady Hillary Clinton went through the snow on Sunday on their way to church in Washington, DC. Washington and the East Coast of the US are being hit by the first major snow storm of the season, with accumulation expected to be between 15 and 24 inches. — AFP/UNB photo

NEW YORK, Jan 8: One of the worst blizzards to hit the eastern United States in 70 years left at least 20 people dead, piling up knee deep snow that shut down airports and halted trucks and shoppers, reports AP.

Thousands of travellers were stranded at airports, bus terminals and highway rest stops. USAir said it cancelled about 1,100 flights serving airports from Washington north to Boston.

The storm closed the major airports for Washington; Baltimore; Philadelphia; Newark, New Jersey; and New York City, which also affected hundreds of connecting flights elsewhere.

Thousands of other people were without heat and light.

States of emergency were declared in all or parts of eight states, and hundreds of members of the National Guard were sent out to help.

In Philadelphia, where a record 26 inches was on the ground by nightfall, cab driver Sam Winder said he had to give up after six runs to the Philadelphia airport.

Most state offices and schools were closed today throughout the region. The United Nations also was closed today, and New York City cancelled classes for the first time since 1978.

At least 20 deaths were blamed on the storm, including five in Kentucky and five in Virginia. All of those were traffic deaths except for a 79-year-old Bridgewater, Va. man who had a heart attack while shovelling snow.

Solution is imminent, Opposition tells CEC

Star Report

Chief Election Commissioner Justice AKM Sadeque said last night that the mainstream opposition had requested him to "postpone" the elections.

"A solution to the political crisis is imminent, they assured me while requesting for postponement of the elections," Justice Sadeque told The Daily Star quoting from the written and verbal requests made to him by the Opposition over the last two days.

"I have postponed the elections for seven days following their request, but I cannot postpone it sine die," he added.

The Election Commission scheduled the elections for the third time yesterday fixing February 15 as the polls date.

About the mandatory provision of holding elections within 90 days of dissolution of the Jatiya Sangsad, the CEC said, "in my personal opinion it is mandatory and not a directive."

Constitutional experts may be consulted for better explanation of this provision, he added. The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court may give its opinion in this connection if an explanation is sought, he observed.

Shifting of polls date Yet another farce, says Opposition

Star Report

Opposition leaders yesterday described the shifting of the date for general elections as continuation of a farce but, privately, many of them termed it a breather to help reach an amicable solution to the persisting political crisis.

Meanwhile, the major opposition parties yesterday revised their hartal programme for today in what appeared to be a sequel to the Election Commission's announcement shifting the election date.

The 48-hour hartal was earlier scheduled to continue till 6 am Wednesday but it will now end this evening.

The EC also said it has shifted the date with the hope of a negotiated settlement of the present crisis.

A source involved in the BNP-Opposition negotiation indicated that the crucial seven days would allow the rivals to sort out the remaining bargaining points.

Some of the leaders contacted by The Daily Star yesterday indicated that some of the issues now being negotiated by both the BNP and the Opposition were: how the vacuum will be filled up in

case the Prime Minister decides to resign; whether the Opposition will sign a written accord with the BNP to end the crisis; the possibility of holding parliamentary elections beyond the constitutional limit of 90 days; the possibility of the Opposition's joining the BNP in seeking advice from the Supreme Court on holding of the elections after the 90-day time limit; and, whether the PM's resignation meant automatic switching of the executive power to the President.

Talking to The Daily Star, some of the opposition leaders said that they were ready to sit for talks only after the PM resigned.

BNP leaders, however, said that they were ready to talk, but with Begum Zia very much as the Prime Minister, sources in the ruling party said.

"BNP is suffering from indecision," Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday said while giving her immediate reaction to the press on the shifting of polls date.

The Midnight File

Israel's secret service chief resigns

JERUSALEM, Jan 8: The head of Israel's Shin Bet secret service, under fire over the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, quit today. Prime Minister Shimon Peres' office said. Peres accepted the resignation, his spokesman Yarden Vatikay said, reports Reuters.

JKIF founder shot dead in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Jan 8: Indian security forces today shot dead a top Kashmiri Muslim separatist leader whose group claimed responsibility for a bombing in the Indian capital last week, police said here, reports AFP.

Sajjad Kinoo, the founder of the Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Front (JKIF), was shot dead by members of the crack special task force during a raid on his hide-out on the outskirts of Srinagar, the state summer capital, police said.

"We raided the place in the afternoon after receiving a tip-off," an official said.

The JKIF had claimed responsibility for Wednesday's bombing in Sadar Bazar, New Delhi's bustling commercial district, in which seven people were killed and 35 injured.

The attack came less than two months after another blast claimed by the JKIF in Conaught place, New Delhi's fashionable downtown business district which left 22 people injured.

The JKIF was formed by Kinoo about six months ago, shortly after his escape from prison on charges linked to the 1990 abduction and murder of Mushir ul-Haq, the Vice Chancellor, Kashmir University.

Kinoo had vowed to stage attacks outside Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority province, where a bloody separatist campaign has claimed more than 12,000 lives since 1989.

Salam Talukdar hails shifting of polls date

BNP secretary general and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Barrister Abdus Salam Talukdar last night hailed the shifting of the date of the coming Jatiya Sangsad elections to February 15 from February 7 by the Election Commission, reports BSS.

Giving his reaction to the newsmen at his Baily Road official residence, Salam Talukdar said rescheduling of the date of elections at the request of the major opposition parties had provided an opportunity to reach a consensus so that all political parties can participate in the elections.

Barrister Talukdar said that from the BNP side, they were trying their best to contact the opposition leaders from reaching an understanding to bring them in the elections. He expressed his optimism about a peaceful settlement of the current political problem.

SAARC

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agreement "lose their meanings if the special measures envisaged in the agreement are subjected to delays or hedged in technicalities."

Bhutanese Minister for Trade and Industry favoured review of the "existing high levels of tariff, non-tariff and para-tariff barriers, quantitative restrictions and discriminatory practices wherever these exist."

Commerce Minister of Pakistan Ahmed Mukhtar said there is need for special care regarding the interests of relatively smaller economies. He said all participating states must be net beneficiaries to make the economic grouping successful.

Cargo with 24

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later. When contacted Director General of Shipping Abdul Malek said, "We have been asking the governments of Taiwan, China and Japan through fax and telex to send information about the vessel Al-Kashem since December 20 but we did not get any positive response yet."

The government is trying to collect information through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If the ship is located, the government will rescue the crew, he said.

He said the Japan Maritime Safety Agency had searched through the Japan coastal area but could not trace the missing ship. The DG said as per official record, there were only four Bangladeshis crew in the ship. "Rest of the people were recruited without government approval," he said.

But the family sources of the crew claimed that there were 24 crew. Relevant sources fear that the ship might have sunk because during November-January the China Sea and the Japan Sea usually remain very rough and stormy. Temperature there during this period also remain very low, near zero degree Celsius.

Relatives of the crew said that Bengal Marine Lines in Khulna, the local agent of the Singapore-based company, could not provide them any satisfactory information regarding the ship.

Ahsanul Huq Chowdhury, a relative of another crew, Shajahan, said that Shajahan's wife was informed by one Capt Quadri from Singapore over telephone on December 18 that the ship Al-Kashem was missing. Mr Quadri is a staff of Seafire Shipping in Singapore.

The relatives of the crew have demanded of the government to form an inquiry committee to investigate the matter. According to the family sources of Capt Rabiul Islam, the names and addresses of the missing Bangladesh crew are: (1) Capt. Rabiul Islam Chowdhury (45), designation Master, son of late Abul Kashem Chowdhury, Ward No. 57, Road No. 5, Sona Danga

Tamil Tigers plan to kill Kumaratunga

COLOMBO, Jan 8: Security for President Chandrika Kumaratunga has been tightened further following intelligence reports of an assassination plan by Tamil rebels, news reports said Sunday, reports AP.

Additional security measures were put into force after the military intelligence received reports that four rebels had left France with aircraft parts that could be assembled into a plane, Colombo's Sunday Leader newspaper said.

The four Tamils in France had been employed in an aircraft manufacturing company, the newspaper said without naming the company or the rebels.

The paper quoted unidentified security sources. There was no independent confirmation of the threat.

Powerful long-range weapons have been positioned around the presidential palace and radars capable of detecting missiles and aircraft mounted on rooftops around her home and office, Sunday Times newspaper said.

The military fears that rebels possess ultra-light aircraft because government soldiers found aluminum structures of planes during the military's recent offensive

that led to the capture of the guerrilla's stronghold of Jaffna city.

Tamil rebels have assassinated their political foes both in Sri Lanka and overseas, news reports said Sunday, reports AP.



Victims include President Ranasinghe Premadasa, Gamilini Dissanayake, a presidential candidate and former Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

US embassy resumes services

With the enactment of the continuing resolution, passed by both houses of Congress and signed by the US President, in the American Embassy in Dhaka has resumed its normal services to the public, reports UNB.

All furloughed American personnel have returned to work. The visa section will resume its operation in two steps, said a press release.

Today, applications for only three kinds of visas will be accepted; (1) student visas for those who must travel to the US for term beginning in January (2) immigration visas, and (3) DV-96 visas.

Tomorrow, the visa section will accept all visa applications. All other services at the chancery in Baridhara resumed yesterday.

The US Information Service, the USIS Library, the Student Counseling Centre, the Commercial Library and the Foreign Agriculture Service — all in Motijheel — will reopen tomorrow.

Ctg BNP leader files nomination as independent candidate

CHITTAGONG, Jan 8: A BNP leader, who failed to procure a party ticket for the next parliamentary elections, submitted his nomination paper as an independent candidate for Chittagong-12 constituency today, reports UNB.

Mohammad Kabir Chowdhury, who was the BNP candidate for the constituency in the last election, went to the Chittagong Deputy Commissioner's office accompanied by cheering supporters and filed the nomination paper.

Witnesses said a few thousand people — leaders and workers of the BNP, Jubo Dal, Chhatra Dal and Samik Dal — were chanting slogans in favour of Chowdhury during the submission of his nomination paper.

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) president Sarwar Jamal Nizam, a newcomer to BNP, got the party nomination for the constituency (Chittagong-12) comprising Anwara thana and West Patiya.

The Daily Star was assaulted and his camera was snatched by some members of the law enforcing agencies while he was discharging his professional duties at Farmgate at noon. Later, his camera was returned but the film was taken away.

Bangladesh Photo Journalists' Association (BPJA) in a statement last night condemned the incident and demanded proper action against those responsible.

Inter-district bus service remained suspended while a few launches left the city's Sadarghat terminal in the morning.

Train communication in Dhaka-Chittagong route was more or less normal, but was badly disrupted in Dhaka-Northern region and Dhaka-Sylhet routes.

Two domestic flights of Bangladesh Biman were cancelled while the international flights operated normally, according to Biman sources.

Our Narayanganj Correspondent adds: Hartal was observed here more or less peacefully. Seven nomination papers were submitted at various offices of the EC in the district yesterday. A total of 16 nomination papers were submitted so far, according to the EC sources.

Our Staff Correspondent in Chittagong reports: Business activities at the commercial hubs of Agrabad and Khatunganj were badly affected due to the hartal. Cargo handling and delivery of goods at the port were also seriously hampered.

According to reports received from our correspondents, the first 18 hours of the hartal passed off peacefully in Khulna, Rajshahi, Pabna, Mymensingh and in some other districts.



Three party leaders pose for photo session following the agreement made to nominate International Trade Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto (R) to replace the outgoing Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama (C) at the national diet in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP/UNB photo

Taka devalued

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The economists, however, say unless the government can pursue more "effective" demand management policies, further devaluation of taka would perhaps be necessary to restore the trade balance.

Although financial analysts do not see the decline in foreign exchange reserves and devaluation of taka as a sign of macro-economic weakness, they say the current import boom is not particularly investment intensive as evident from the composition of import commodities during the last part of the previous fiscal year and the first quarter of the current year.

The key issue concerning the exchange rate management, say economists, is to maintain the rate at an appropriate level at any time and to ensure its "full" flexibility over time so that, it always remains at an appropriate level.

"A practical, safe, workable and desirable strategy would be to avoid, as far as possible, overvaluation of the domestic currency in terms of foreign currencies of significance to the Bangladesh trade," says a report prepared by consultants for the Asian Development Bank in October 1995.

'Masari no longer a Saudi'

RIYADH, Jan 8: Saudi Arabia's defence minister says dissident Mohammed al-Masari is no longer considered a Saudi, suggesting that he might be stripped of his nationality, reports AP.

"I cannot speak about a Saudi citizen," Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz told reporters late Sunday. "But Saudi citizenship is negated if a person slanders his country, religion and beliefs."

The minister's remarks were in reply to a question on last week's decision by the British government to deny al-Masari political asylum.

Ex-JP MP, Khulna JCD president arrested

Khulna, Jan 8: Six persons including Khulna District JCD President Wahiduzzaman Chanchal, 35, and a former Jatiya Party MP Alhaj Abul Hossain, 52, were picked up by security personnel from their residences in the small hours of this morning and were handed over to police.

According to police, the JCD leader was arrested after he was accused in Shibir leader Abul Kashem Pathan murder case.

Police brought charge of terrorism against five others including the former MP.



Mohammad Ali, BNP nominee for a Narayanganj constituency, going towards the Fatulla TNO office in a procession and submitting his nomination papers (inset) yesterday. — Star photo

First day of hartal

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coincided with the last dates for submission of nomination papers and scrutiny, as scheduled earlier. Twelve nomination papers were filed yesterday with five offices of the Election Commission in Dhaka district, according to sources at the office of the Deputy Commissioner, who is also a returning officer.

A total of 74 candidates submitted their nomination papers for 13 constituencies of Dhaka district till yesterday, the sources added.

Opposition leaders and workers took to the streets as the hartal began, organised rallies and brought out processions that raised anti-government slogans.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and police personnel in riot gear were deployed at all strategic points in the city.

Police rounded up nine people from various parts of the city during the hartal hours yesterday.

In the capital, a large number of rickshaws came out on the streets from early morning while other modes of transport stayed off the roads. Private business houses, banks and educational institutions remained closed. Attendance in government offices was thin.

A clash between the pro-hartal and anti-hartal activists took place near Dhania College at Demra at around 10:30 am.

The clash left at least four persons stabbed, according to witnesses.

In some incidents of bomb explosions, two persons were injured at Dhania and one each at Motijheel and at Keraniganj near the city.

A Staff Photographer of

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Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA.