

What's on today

Poetry recital: A poetry recital by young poet Russel Ashkei will be held. Venue: TSC road island. Time: 3 pm.

BPS prize distribution ceremony: The prize distribution ceremony of the Bangladesh Photographic Society's (BPS) annual photography competition '97 and '98 will be held. An exhibition of the entries will also be inaugurated. Venue: Bangladesh Shishu Academy Gallery. Time: 2.00 pm.

Weather

No change in temperature

Weather may remain dry over the country in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country during the period. Met office said.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 29 degree Celsius was recorded at Sandwip and the lowest of 11.2 degrees at Mysmingsh.

The sun sets in the capital today at 5:20 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:40 am.

Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius	Humidity percentage
Dhaka	25.5	13.0
Chittagong	27.7	17.0
Rajshahi	24.5	14.0
Khulna	27.0	13.6
Bahadur	26.3	13.2
Sylhet	27.0	13.6
Cox's Bazar	27.6	16.5

HERE and THERE

BMBA seminar

Bangladesh MBA Association (BMBA) organised a roundtable conference on "management of education in Bangladesh," at a local hotel on Sunday, says a press release.

Education Minister ASHK Sadique attended the conference as chief guest while Kazi Rakiuddin Ahmad, Secretary, Ministry of Education, and Prof Shamsul Haque, Vice Chancellor of Comilla University, were present as special guests.

The conference was presided over by S M Kamal, vice president of the association.

In the business session, Dr Shamsul Haque, Professor of North South University, and Bazul Rahman, Executive Editor of the Daily Sangbad, highlighted the deficiencies in the management of education in Bangladesh.

JU Film Society

SAVAR, Dec 28: A film session organised by Jahangirnagar University Film Society and Jahangirnagar University Students Film Society was held on the compound of Nabab Faizunnesa Hall of Jahangirnagar University on Sunday, reports UNB.

Two films — "Suchana" by Morshedul Islam and "Khondar" by Mirza Jafar Hossain — were screened in the film session.

Meanwhile, the two organisations have placed a six-point demand including renaming of JU Auditorium after Shaheed Zahir Raihan and allowing its use only by cultural bodies free of charge to the university authorities.



Agri-scientist dead

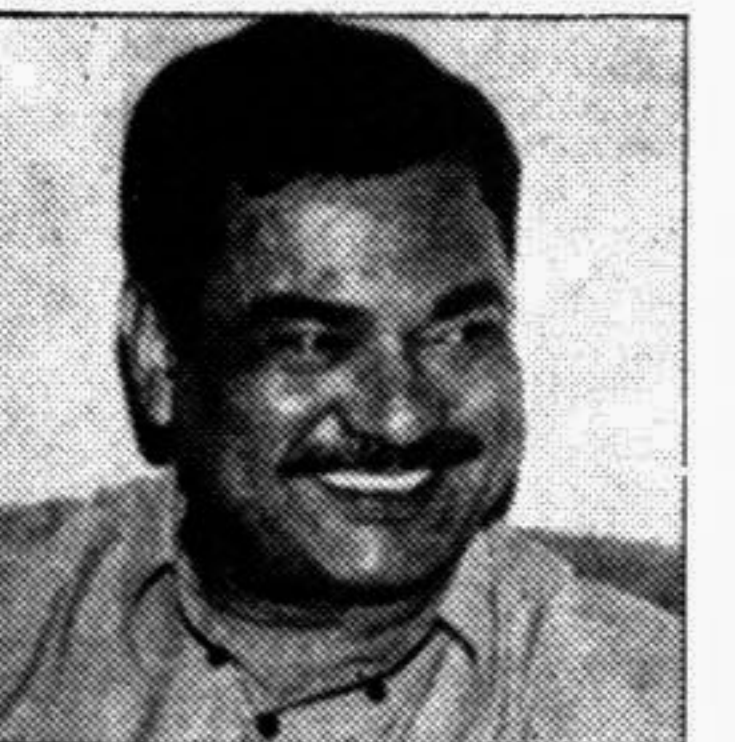
By Staff Correspondent
Dr Farhad Jameel, a renowned agriculture scientist, rhyme writer and Director (Research) of the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), died of cerebral hemorrhage at a hospital in Indonesia at 7:30 am on Sunday.

According to a BRRI press release issued last night, Dr Jameel left the country on December 5 to participate in an IIRI organised workshop in Bali, Indonesia. He was hospitalised on December 8 after suffering a stroke.

He was buried at Martyred Intellectuals Graveyard in Mirpur yesterday.

Dr Jameel is survived by his wife Zerin Jameel, Assistant Teacher of Progoti High School, and only daughter Tanima, a college student.

Born in Khulna in 1944, Dr Jameel was one of the pioneer scientists who joined BRRI as scientific officer back in 1970. He has 39 publications and five Bangla books of rhymes to his credit.



Obituary

Kazi Md Rahmatullah, an Industrialist and Managing Director of Delta Group, died on December 25, says a press release.

His qukhani will be held at his residence, 14 Delta Dahila, 36 Kemal Ataturk Avenue, Banani, after Asr prayers today.

Relatives and admirers have been requested to attend the milad mahfil.

Jamdani saree exhibition

An exhibition of Jamdani craft designed by Mahmuda Begum began in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

State Minister for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir formally inaugurated the exhibition at Designer Den Art Craft and Fashion Gallery at Gulshan, a press release said.

UNESCO Special Envoy Bibi Russell was present at the inauguration as special guest.

The latest designed sarees of Mahmuda Begum are being displayed in the exhibition which will remain open till January 7.

BFAGA executive committee

A 10-member executive committee of Bangladesh Flying Academy and General Aviation Ltd (BFAGA) has been formed for two-year term (2000-2001), reports UNB.

The committee was formed at the 42nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the BFAGA held on the academy premises with its outgoing president Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman in the chair.

The office-bearers are President: Vice Presidents — Col (ret'd) Joyal Abedin and Capt Ashraf Hossain; and Members — Waresat Hossain Belal, Capt Giasuddin Ahmed, Capt Rafiqur Rahman, Capt Aslam Shahid, Abdus Sattar Mini, Capt Zahid Hossain and Eng Nasiruddin Ahmed.

Cooperatives Act Draft policy handed over to Zillur

The committee formed for suggesting amendments to the rules and regulations of the Cooperatives Act and update it with a view to strengthen the cooperative movement submitted a draft policy to LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman at his office yesterday, reports UNB.

Chairman of the committee Deputy Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Sabir Hossain Chowdhury formally handed over the draft policy.

The draft was formulated after reviewing the acts of different countries, field level experience, recommendations of workshop, and the draft policy to make the act easier and more democratic to suit the needs of the time.

The draft was prepared in Bengali for the benefit of the cooperative members and the policies were formulated with a view to strengthen the movement across the country to help alleviate poverty, ensure empowerment of the members freeing from government control.

Rural Development and Cooperatives Secretary Golam Rahman, Joint Secretary Dr Joyan Begum, member-secretary of the committee and Registrar, Cooperatives, SM Shamsul Alam and committee members were present.

Hasina

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Narrating the story of her phone call to the opposition leader on the morning of December 26, Sheikh Hasina said she had picked up her red telephone after knowing from newspaper reports that she (Begum Zia) was willing to sit for discussion with the government.

"But, there is no response from Begum Zia till today," the Prime Minister noted with regret.

Reiterating her willingness to resolve the political dispute through discussion Hasina said, "We want understanding, and we are sincere about it."

Muhurirchar

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take place in the absence of a demarcated boundary line, sources added.

The temporary boundary line will help reduce the number of border clashes, in the area sources said.

Permanent boundary can be drawn only after India ratified the Mujib-Indira agreement of 1974, sources said.

Khaleda blasts govt move to 'controversial' naming of halls

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has strongly protested and condemned government's attempt to impose 'controversial' names to name different halls and buildings of Shahjalal Science and Technology University, reports UNB.

In a statement yesterday, she expressed deep concern over the confronting situation arisen over naming of the halls and buildings of the university and called upon the government as well as authorities concerned to solve the problem showing respect to the wills and feelings of the local people.

Names of renowned personalities having outstanding contribution in the fields of history, culture, religion, literature and other fields are given preference in naming any important establishments," she said.

"Wills and feelings of local people are also given highest priority in this regard."

But the government defying the tradition and opinions of the local people has tried to name some buildings and halls of the University, alleged the opposition leader.

"The government itself has worsened the situation adopting the path of killing, arrest and repression," the BNP chief added.

She called for giving up the efforts to name the halls and buildings after the names of 'controversial' personalities for bringing back congenial academic atmosphere in the university.

AED to bring 700 hectares under potato cultivation in Chuadanga

CHUADANGA, Dec 28: The Agriculture Extension Department (AED) Chuadanga district has fixed up a target to bring 700 hectares under potato cultivation in all the four thanas of Chuadanga district during the current rabi crop cultivation season, reports BSS.

The four thanas of the district are — Chuadanga Sadar, Alamdanga, Damurhuda and Jibannagar.

According to an official source of the total land, 105 hectares will be brought under cultivation in Chuadanga Sadar, 285 hectares in Alamdanga, 215 hectares in Damurhuda and 95 hectares in Jibannagar.

The production target of potato in the district in the current season has been fixed at 8,400 tonnes.

Global workshop on environment begins today

A two-day global workshop of Environmental Journalists begins at CIRDP in the city today, reports BSS.

Organised by the Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB) in collaboration with Asia-Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists (AFEB), the workshop, entitled "Challenges of New Millennium: Reversing Environmental degradation and Role of the Media," will be participated by some 120 environmental journalists, experts and policy-planners from home and abroad. The workshop is being supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, Ministry of Environment and Forest and some other development agencies.

Minister for Environment and Forest Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury will inaugurate the workshop at 10 am. Environment Secretary Syed Marghubur Murshed, Resident Representative of UNDP Andre Klap, FEJB Chairman Quamrul Islam Chowdhury, AFEB Chairman Dharmar Wickramaratne, CEJA Secretary General Nina Ratulete and FEJB General Secretary Bakhtiar Rana will address the inaugural session.

Different global and national environmental issues like air pollution, land degradation, arsenic contamination and sustainable environment management will come up for discussion in three technical sessions of the workshop.

Daily Independent Editor Mahbubul Alam and Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam will be guests of honour at the first technical session.

Holiday Editor AZM Enayetullah Khan, Financial Express Chief Editor Reazuddin Ahmed and Banglar Bani Executive Editor Shaiful Aziz Mukul will be guests of honour in the concluding session.

955 km road construction project in CHT

KHAGRACHHARI, Dec 28: The government has taken up a project to construct 955 km roads in three hill districts to develop the communication network in the region, reports BSS.

According to Roads and Highways Department sources, the project work will start next month with the financial support from the donor countries. About Tk 600 crore has been estimated for the construction of 955 roads in Khagrachhari, Bandarban and Rangamati districts in five years.

Roads and Highways Department will implement the project.

After the implementation of the project, 25 thanas will have direct communication with the three hill district headquarters.

Pages from history

The liberation of Comilla

COMILLA, Dec 28: Comilla derives its name literally from 'Koh Milla' in Persian meaning 'meeting of peaks' — the Mainamati and the Lalmai Hill Range and the confluence of traits of Hindu-Buddhist-Muslim and that of the British rule. It was liberated on December 8, 1971 when the Pakistan occupation army deployed at various pockets including the old airport area withdrew and ran away helter skelter from the encirclement of the Bengal liberation fighters, reports BSS.

Senior Awami League leader and Chairman of the South-eastern council during the Liberation War late Zuhur Ahmed Chowdhury and First Administrator, Comilla, Advocate Ahmed Ali hoisted the national flag before thousands of joyous people and about a hundred freedom fighters gathered in front of the town hall.

"The previous night freedom fighters and the allied forces had jointly launched an attack on the Pakistan's 22 Baluch regiment at the outskirts of the town and they were forced to retreat because of the three-pronged attack. Many of the fallen Pakistan occupation army had surrendered to the Mukti Bahini and Mitra Bahini (allied forces)."

11 Gurkha Regiment of the allied force led by RK Majumder and Major Alauddin of the liberation army entered Comilla from across Tripura of India where the freedom fighters had got sanctuary and substantial assistance.

Some of the freedom fighters led by Lt. Dedarul Alam had entered Comilla through the Bibir Bazar checkpoint and crossed the Gumbi river where they attacked the Pakistani forces with artillery and mortar shelling.

Freedom fighters Nizamuddin, Azad, Sirazul, Munir, Zahirul Haque Dudu, Shafiulla, Aolad Hossain, Quayum, Basirul Islam, Mohammad Shahidullah and Kader Mia, eleven valiant sons of the soil were killed on the south-eastern side of Comilla district at Bettara under Chowdagram Police Station on the Dhaka-Comilla Feni-Chittagong highways.

All the martyrs were students of Dhaka University. They belonged to the Students Union, student's wing of the then Communist party and had undergone a three-month training in guerrilla warfare in India.

The bodies of the martyrs could not be buried instantly but following the liberation of Comilla their remains were collected and formally buried in Bettara village and a "Shaheed Minar" was later raised there.

The day is celebrated with fanfare each year. On the occasion, rallies are brought out, discussions take place and cultural programmes are arranged as to pay tribute to those brave sons of the soil who laid down their lives to give us the independence that we enjoy today.



A minor girl named Irtiza, aged 3, was abducted by some terrorists brandishing arms at the time of iftar from a residence at Khilgaon in the city on Monday holding the inmates hostage. Police later rescued the girl. — Star photo

Chawkbazar digital phone exchange opens

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government adopted a National Telecom Policy for its rapid growth, reports UNB.

"We have adopted a telecom policy and are implementing it for reaching the service to the people," she said this while inaugurating a 10,000-line Chawkbazar Digital Telephone Exchange in the old city yesterday morning.

The exchange is the first of Greater Dhaka Telecommunication Network Expansion Project that is being implemented with financial help of the World Bank was also nearing completion.

The Prime Minister opened the new exchange at the business hub of the city by talking to President Shahabuddin Ahmed over telephone from the function.

Under the project the telephone system in greater Dhaka will be expanded to 1,38,500 digital lines through setting up of 8 new exchanges and 13 sub-exchanges, which will solve the telephone problem of the capital and adjoining areas.

The Prime Minister said the government has approved a Telecom Bill, which will be placed in Parliament.

Besides, she said a Telecom Regulatory Commission with financial help of the World Bank was also nearing completion.

Cellular mobile telephones have been made easily available to the people by creating an environment of competition. "We have also made the computers a thing available to the people by waiving tax and duties."

Telecom service is a source of revenue of the exchequer. This also help accelerate development process, she added.

She said still miles to go to make telecom a universal service for the people of the country. At present the person-telephone ratio is 200:1.

The fifth Five-Year Plan envisaged one phone for each 125 people of the country and a long-term target was set to provide one phone for each 100 people by 2005, she said.

Speaker

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legations that Treasury Bench members used unparliamentary language, Sengupta added.

The Speaker sent his first letter to the Leader of the Opposition on December 20. The letter was replied by the Opposition Chief Whip on December 26 on behalf of Khaleda Zia.

In the letter, the Opposition put forward five fresh pre-conditions and demanded implementation of the four-point accord signed with the ruling party long ago for a dialogue.

No opposition leader was available last night for comment on the Speaker's second letter.

'Bureaucracy often hinders govt's political agenda'

Prime Minister's Political Adviser Dr SA Malek yesterday emphasised the need for administrative accountability as a pre-condition to improving the quality of democracy and observed that bureaucracy often hindered the government's political agenda, reports BSS.

"Though not always deliberately, bureaucracy sometime obstructs the implementation of the elected government's programmes as there appears a lacking in mutual respect," he told a meeting of Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) with politicians.

He suggested that the bureaucracy should discard what he termed its confrontational attitude as there is no scope to undermine the elected representatives of people.

PARC chairman ATM Shamsul Haque chaired the meeting. Leaders of different political parties including the BNP and senior government officials attended the meeting.

Dr Malek described the current stage of democratic process in Bangladesh as a transition period when a balance was needed between the elected and appointed officials.

The PARC chairman said the commission has suggested 28 interim recommendations on the proposed administrative reforms to the cabinet and several of those have already been implemented by the government.

Security tightened

20 arrested from ZIA

Special security force nabbed 20 suspects from the Zia International Airport as security was tightened in the airport yesterday, reports UNB.

Officials said the security reinforcement was done in view of traffic rush ahead of Eid and millennium festivals so that the swindlers cannot fleece the passengers.

As part of the new measures, the special security force of ZIA picked up 20 people in a pre-dawn swoop and sent them to a magistrate court.

Witnesses and airport sources said the suspects were caught from the restricted area of the airport while they were trying to create disturbance to passengers.

The chief security of ZIA, captain (ret'd) Ekram Hossain, said a special security measure had been taken and now the environment of ZIA was "fully satisfactory."

Allegations are in plenty that miscreants disturb air passengers at night and even sometimes rob them trespassing into the prohibited area.

The special force was raised comprising Ansar and civil aviation personnel.

9 new ministers

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AL sources hinted that Amu and Jalil are likely to get important portfolios. Except the two, all the newly appointed ministers are members of parliament.

Meanwhile, the induction of fresh faces has triggered widespread speculation among the ruling party rank and file about distribution of portfolios, the sources added.

The official announcement did not however give any reason for the sudden expansion. The present 45-member Council of Ministers comprises 22 cabinet ministers, 21 state ministers and two deputy ministers.

The Constitution permits induction of one-tenth ministers from the technocrat quota. The expanded Cabinet has eaten up the entire quota for technocrat ministers.

An AL source explained that the prime minister had to go for such a massive expansion of the Cabinet by 25 per cent to accommodate the two technocrat ministers — Amu and Jalil.

Dr Alauddin staged a comeback after an Election Commission ruling in early October declared his parliamentary seat in Rajshahi and that of Hasibur Rahman Swapan from Sirajganj vacant for floor-crossing.

Alauddin and Swapan, elected on BNP tickets in the 1996 general elections, joined Hasina's so-called government of consensus in February 1998 as state minister and deputy minister, respectively. They were expelled immediately from the party.

However, in December 8 by-polls to the vacant seats Alauddin was re-elected although Swapan lost, both running this time on AL tickets. Alauddin, the veteran Awami League who quit his party to contest the 1996 elections on BNP ticket, is the only minister inducted in the Cabinet for the second time.

With the addition of nine new ministers, the Cabinet now has four technocrat ministers — Finance Minister SAMS Kibria and State Minister for Planning Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir being the two others.

The FM's move for expanding the Cabinet comes at a time when the major opposition parties are trying to intensify their campaign to unseat the government. On Sunday, Hasina also spoke about an early election.

In his instant reaction, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, MP said last night, "It appears to be Awami League's last attempt to cling to power before stepping down in the face of intensified agitation."

The move also aims to quell growing intra-party feuds in the ruling party... but not such a thing in work," he told a group of reporters at the Opposition leader's Minto Road official residence.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed administered the oath to the new ministers at Bangabhaban in presence of the prime minister and her senior Cabinet colleagues.

Talks with hijackers

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hardening of the stance of the hijackers, who were originally reported to have sought freedom for jailed Muslim cleric Masood Azhar.

It coincided with increased concern among the Taliban, and UN and Indian officials over conditions inside the Indian Airlines aircraft, which was without ventilation for much of a hot day after an engine failed.

The BBC, quoting Taliban soldiers guarding the plane, said there was a "rancid" smell inside the aircraft and that the passengers were still blindfolded after a five-day drama that began in Nepal when the plane was commandeered on Friday.

The hijackers in Kandahar a short while back gave up negotiating team the following three demands in addition to Mohammed Masood Azhar's release: Release of 35 others, return of the coffin of terrorist Sajad Hashmi, payments by India of \$20 million. Singh said after a cabinet meeting in New Delhi, Afghanistan was arrested in February 1994 along with Azhar and was killed when what India called Pakistani mercenaries tried in vain to free him from a jail near Jamnau earlier this year.

"We will send an appropriate response through our negotiating team in Kandahar. In the meanwhile, let the country and the international community reflect on these demands," said Singh.

Indian officials continued to talk to the hijackers as night fell and the passengers, mostly Indians, braced for a fifth cramped night inside the Airbus from which they have not been allowed to set foot since it was seized last Friday.

Singh said the hijackers rejected an appeal to free children and mothers. "They have not acceded to our demand."

"The condition of the passengers continues to deteriorate with every hour," said one Indian diplomat in a party of 57 officials who arrived in Kandahar on Monday.

PM wooing north?

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fact that they had failed to be voted to parliament.

In the parliamentary form of government, shuffling and reshuffling of the cabinet comes on the basis of the efficiency and performance of the ministers. In the process, capable and competent people replace those failing to deliver the goods.

But in the present case, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expanded her cabinet, rather than shuffling it, which clearly indicates "that she is quite happy about the performances of her cabinet colleagues. In the past, she dropped a couple of members, inducted a new face into the cabinet and re-distributed certain portfolios among her cabinet colleagues."

Removal of frustrations of certain senior party leaders, winning the heart of the people of the country's northern region, and through these steps further consolidation of the party with the aim of taking on a united opposition, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, were the reasons behind the present expansion of the cabinet — some influential ruling party insiders tended to believe.

The most important reason behind the expansion was, perhaps, to remove frustrations of the two senior AL leaders, who, although did not get elected to the parliament, made substantial contribution to take the party to power in 1996, a prelude member of the party told The Daily Star last night.

"Removal of the sense of frustration was very important, specially when the party once again needs to effectively combat its political rivals united in the form of BNP-led four-party opposition alliance," said a prelude member of the party.

"Sheikh Selim's induction into the cabinet hints that the feuds in the Sheikh family is over. A five time elected MP, Selim deserved to be a minister long ago."

However, with the induction of Amu and Jalil, the number of non-MP members rose to four, including finance minister SAMS Kibria and state minister for planning Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir. It, therefore, appeared to be a constitutional obligation.

DMCH

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Another staff of the hospital said, "The constructions are not taking place without the authorities' knowledge. Babar Hossain gave permission (to build the shops) when he was acting director. In fact, Hossain had invited top officials of Dhaka City Corporation and Bangladesh Medical Association to inaugurate some of the shops built next to the outdoor patient department."

Dr Babar Hossain however denied the allegations. "I have never given permission for construction of the shops. In fact, I have ordered their immediate demolition."

When it was pointed out there are allegations that political discussions take place during work hours in his office, the deputy director said, "I am a follower of Bangabandhu and I am seeking Awami League ticket in next parliamentary election from Munshiganj. I have been doing politics since I was a student of this medical college and I am proud to continue politics here in the same building."

Dr Hossain also allegedly threatened to have some employees transferred, using his close relations with health minister Salahuddin Yusuf.

He denied the allegations as "baseless".

"We have two passengers on the plane with cancer and with the engine shut down we need to know how they are," he said.

An engine which was kept running for 72 hours to ensure stable air temperature during Kandahar's chilly nights and baking days was repaired by an Indian mechanic who was allowed on board.

At the same time a tall hijacker in checked trousers, red shirt and a black mask and sunglasses stood briefly at a rear door which was opened to allow in some fresh air.

But Indian officials said the captives had been allowed to change clothes and were being regularly fed. The three toilet cubicles were being cleaned, they said.

Taliban Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil Mutawakil told a news conference that the negotiations made little progress. "The talks are in medium condition, no progress has been made so far."