

Khaleda tells Greek FM

BNP, allies to win next polls with a big margin

Leaders of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia said BNP and its allies would win with big margins the next general elections if held in a free and fair atmosphere, reports UNB.

She told this to visiting Greek Foreign Minister George A Papandreu when he, along with his nine-member delegation, met with Khaleda Zia at 29 Minto Road yesterday evening.

Bilateral, political and economic issues came up for discussion in the meeting that lasted about an hour.

The BNP chairperson expressed her desire that an adequate number of international observers from the European Union, of which Greece is a member, would come here to assess the pre-election political situation as well as monitor the polls.

Replying to a question from the FM, the opposition leader apprised him why they were boycotting parliament. Still, she said, a congenial environment did not return to parliament.

"It is the responsibility of the government to improve the atmosphere of parliament," she was quoted as telling Papandreu.

Responding to the envoy, Khaleda Zia, who is leading a four-party alliance movement, focused on the present political situation as well as "misrule" of the Awami League government.

Her advisor M M Rezaul Karim briefed newsmen on the outcome of the meeting.

Welcoming the Greek Foreign Minister the opposition leader hoped that present limited bilateral relations between the two countries would be expanded in the days ahead.

She requested him to establish relation of the world-famous Greek shipping and tourism sectors with Bangladesh with the hopes that it would benefit the

Pakistan pulls back troops from Kashmir border

ISLAMABAD, Dec 20: Pakistan today announced a partial troop withdrawal along the tense unofficial border in divided Kashmir following India's extension of its ceasefire with Muslim militants, reports AFP.

The military's public relations department also called on India to reduce its troop presence in its part of the Himalayan state.

"Pakistan has unilaterally taken another bold initiative to withdraw part of its forces deployed along the Line of Control (the unofficial border)," the military said in a statement.

The move back has already commenced and the troops have started moving towards cantonments (barracks).

Mirza Golam Hafiz dead

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The namaz-e-janaza for the late leader was held in the afternoon at the Dhamondid Eidgah Maidan and again at South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. He was later buried in Banani graveyard.

His gulkhawani will be held at his Dhamondid residence after Asr prayers tomorrow.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina condoled the death of Mirza Golam Hafiz yesterday.

In a message she said Hafiz actively took part in the 1952 Language Movement and 1954 movement and was jailed twice.

She said he was dedicated to social welfare activities and was a popular personality. He was a respectable politician to all.

The prime minister expressed her deep sympathy to the members of the bereaved family and prayed for the peace of the departed soul.

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia, Deputy Leader of the Opposition P A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury, BNP general secretary Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Opposition Chief Whip Khondaker Delwar Hossain expressed their deep shock at the death of Mirza Golam Hafiz.

Recalling his long political career, the BNP chairperson said: "We lost a patriotic politician and a brilliant leader. We'll never forget his contributions to BNP."

Khaleda prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed her sympathies to the bereaved family.

Khaleda went to South Plaza of JS Bhaban to have a last glimpse of the late leader and placed wreath and party flag on the coffin of Mirza Hafiz.

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury, ministers, whips, MPs, politicians, his party colleagues, officials and employees of the Jatiya Sangsad and his admirers from different walks of life took part in the janaza at the South Plaza.

The Speaker also placed wreaths on the coffin.

Life sketch of Mirza Golam Hafiz

An eminent lawyer, veteran politician, seasoned parliamentarian, architect of newly-formed Panchagarh district and Speaker of the second Parliament Mirza

Death of Mirza Golam Hafiz condoled

Individuals and leaders of various political parties have expressed deep shock at the death of former Speaker Mirza Golam Hafiz, reports UNB.

Those who condoled the death of Hafiz included Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Abdul Matin Khasru, Jamaat ameer Maulana Matur Rahman Nizami, president of Panchagarh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Delwar Hossain.

Dhaka City BNP acting president Salauddin Ahmed and general secretary Abdus Salam and Jatiyabadi Krishak Dal president Mahbubul Alam Tara and general secretary Sham-suzzaman Duda also condoled the death.

In separate condolence messages yesterday, they prayed for salvation of the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

PM hosts Iftar for govt officials, elite

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked government officials and elite to join her in the struggle for changing socioeconomic condition of the deprived masses, reports UNB.

"Continue your service to the people and help us so that we can ensure economic emancipation of the poor," she said while hosting an iftar party at Ganobhaban in the evening.

Ministers, MPs, judges, vice-chancellors of different universities, academics, diplomats, business community leaders, high civil and military officials and friends and relatives of the prime minister attended the party on the lawn of Ganobhaban.

Nearly three thousand invitees joined the iftar with the Prime Minister under a huge canopy erected over the western lawn.

She said five distressed women in each ward would be given Tk 100 each so that they could feed their children on Eid day.

Besides, the government issued 45,000 special VGF cards for providing ration to poor people across the country, including the flood-affected districts, on the occasion. Winter clothes and relief were also distributed among them.

Earlier, Hasina went round the iftar party exchanging greetings with the guests.

3 policemen shot by terrorists in Chittagong

CHITTAGONG, Dec 20: Three policemen suffered bullet wounds as terrorists fired on them in a daring attack on an outpost 14 km west of Saktania thana headquarters this (Wednesday) evening, reports UNB.

The injured policemen were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital "in critical condition."

Police said a gang of 30-40 terrorists attacked the camp in Katapahar area all of a sudden. They snatched three firearms from the three policemen, shooting them down.

A police officer blamed Islami Chhatra Shibir cadres for the attack. Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat, denied.

Police could not yet make any arrests or recover any of the looted arms.

Greece

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Chowdhury, Foreign Secretary Shafi Sami, Director General of Europe Desk in the Foreign Ministry Shahed Akhtar and other senior officials were present during the official talks from the Bangladesh side while Greek Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs George Savvides and Ambassador to Bangladesh, based in Delhi, Yannis-Alexis Zepos were present from the Greek side.

Papandreu left Dhaka last night for Jaipur, India, concluding his two-day Bangladesh visit.

Foreign Minister Abdus Salam Azad saw Mr and Mrs Papandreu off at the airport as they and the Greek delegation boarded a special aircraft.

Sundarbans

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With Mongla thana in this connection.

OC Badrul Alam admitted that some of the terrorists injured during the gunfight managed to escape.

He said there are at least one hundred terrorists in the gang who are involved in criminal activities including murder, extortion and piracy in the Sundarbans and the River Passur.

Most of them including the ring leader Bellal are wanted in many criminal cases, OC said.

The arrested terrorists have three godfathers belonging to a certain political party in Khulna City, police said quoting confessions of the alleged terrorists who will be taken on remand for further interrogation.



Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia placed wreaths on the coffin of Mirza Golam Hafiz and offered prayers for salvation of his soul at the South Plaza of the Sangsad Bhaban yesterday.

-Star photo

JCD crisis likely to be defused soon

By Abul Kalam Azad

Crisis in Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student front of the opposition BNP, is likely to come to an end in a few days following resumption of the activities of JCD unit at Dhaka University (DU), sources said yesterday.

In a major development on Monday, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia sat with the top JCD leaders and revived the DU unit of JCD. The JCD leaders met the party chief at her official residence at Minto Road in the evening and discussed the prevailing situation of the JCD.

The student leaders briefed her about the ongoing crisis in the JCD and requested her to resolve it shortly. At the meeting, Khaleda Zia also said that a decision regarding the suspended central committee would be announced in a few days.

The Opposition leader also warned them that stern action would be taken against those who will disagree on her decision over the formation of the new committees of JCD.

"Whatever the decision is and whoever is made leader, you will have to accept my decision," Khaleda told the JCD leaders.

The BNP chief imposed a moratorium on the activities of JCD

central committee and its DU unit following a gunfight between two factions of the student wing on the DU campus on July 2, that left two outsiders killed and several other injured.

The DU unit committee, which was suspended following the violent clash, was led by Manir Hossain and Mostafizul Islam Mamun as its president and general secretary respectively. Habib-un-Nabi Sohail and Nasiruddin Ahmed Pinto were the president and general secretary of central body respectively.

The tenure of DU unit body was expired on December 3, 1999 while that of central body on December 3 this year.

The leaders and activists of both the central committee and DU unit expressed satisfaction at the move by Khaleda Zia to solve the long-standing crisis. Sources said Khaleda herself took the initiative following the failure of the BNP leaders who were assigned to solve the crisis.

Meanwhile, the BNP hardliners, despite strong criticism within party, are still trying to establish supremacy in the JCD and win over the party chief with their plans. They briefed Khaleda Zia about the student wing and

UNO assaulted by terrorists in Sylhet

SYLHET, Dec 20: Acting Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Comiganj was assaulted by terrorists today, reports UNB.

Sources said the terrorists assaulted Shah Arefin, also the Land Acquisition Officer of the Upazila.

Upon a court order, Arefin had three illegal stone collectors arrested today from Pathar Mohal owned by local wakf estate.

Earlier, Motwalli of Wakf Estate filed a case against the collectors for illegally collecting stones from Pathar Mohal for long.

To rescue the arrested three Nannu, Habib and Mosharraf terrorists led by Basir Mia swooped on the acting UNO and assaulted him.

AL candidate

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Govt Primary School and Chatiantala Primary School centres of Phulata upazila, said the presiding officers.

The Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed expressed his satisfaction at the peaceful holding of bye-election. He visited some polling centres in both the upazilas and metropolitan city.

Meanwhile, Awami League candidate Narayan Chandra Chanda alleged that BNP activists prevented voters from going to Dumuria High School centre.

He also brought similar charges against BNP activists in Phulata upazila.

When asked, officials of both district and police administration denied the allegation as AL candidate did not file any written complaint.

Dull contest, admits CEC

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centres he visited at 20 to 25 per cent but declined to give any estimate on the total turnout.

Apparently influenced by top officials of the local administration present on the spot, Syed however found the outcome of the by-polls all right.

Deputy Commissioner Azhar Ali Talukdar, who was the Returning Officer in the by-election, added two more reasons behind the low turnout the harvesting season and the month of Ramadan.

It was the ruling Awami League candidate Narayan Chandra Chando who was the real contender in the by-polls despite the fact that four others were officially in the run. Even Chando did not seem to appreciate the election, for it could not generate any sorts of enthusiasm among the voters.

"Without contest," said Chando at a centre almost devoid of voters, "an election does not appear to be an election in true sense." He also spoke about the painful efforts made to encourage voters to turn up at polling centres.

The ruling party candidate viewed that there could be a better contest and turnout of voters had his rivals become active. Other candidates were almost missing from electioneering. However, Krishak Mohammad Sadek, known for his election craze, made his presence felt at some places.

A dozen of polling centres in Dumuria and Phulata was found to be wearing a deserted look. A small number of voters, mostly women, were seen at a few centres. At places, small queues were hurriedly arranged as soon as the CEC arrived there.

Election conducting officials were found sitting idle and agents of the candidates other than that of the ruling party were missing from most of the polling booths.

The polling stations were however under vigorous vigilance of the security forces, including police and paramilitary BDR. Army was also seen deployed at one centre.

Posters seeking votes for the ruling party nominee were hardly seen while such form of campaign in favour of other candidates was almost absent. In a nutshell, there was a total absence of election festivity.

Until 2.15 p.m., officials reported a very poor turnout.

The Khulna-5 seat fell vacant following death of Minister Salahuddin Ahmed. Major opposition parties including BNP boycotted the by-polls.

Sharif's exile to herald new political culture, says Musharraf

ISLAMABAD, Dec 20: A new political culture, free of hatred, hostility and corruption will emerge in Pakistan following the exile of prime minister Nawaz Sharif's exile, General Pervez Musharraf said today, reports AFP.

In a nationally-televised address, the military ruler defended a decision to exile Sharif, one which led to criticism and accusations of a secret deal undermining national interests and sovereignty.

"The idea to exile Nawaz Sharif came to me after the suggestion from the Crown Prince (Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz) of Saudi Arabia. In my opinion, this decision will mark the beginning of a new era in our national politics."

Musharraf said the decision would help end politics of hatred, money and confrontation, witnessed during the reigns of Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, arch political foes who dominated the political scene for more than a decade.

Contrary to "drawing room gossip," Musharraf, who seized power in a military coup last October, said he had not acted out of panic when he pardoned and exiled Sharif and his relatives. "I am never in panic. I am never afraid of anything except God. I have faced death many a time in my life."

He admitted that his decision may have left some Pakistanis questioning their confidence in him, but he asked them to have

faith.

"Let me assure you, I shall never let you down," he said. Musharraf said his action showed that he had no "vindictiveness" towards the former prime minister.

"Justice demands that punishment must be fair. Vindictiveness must be shunned. I kept all this in my mind."

"This decision of exiling will usher in a new era of hate-free politics. It will usher in an era of the politics of reconciliation and money-free politics. It will bring in overall political harmony and contribute towards economic development."

He said world leaders had lauded his "bold" decision based on "tolerance and moderation."

Microbus driver

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the money. As Khalil refused to comply, driver Selim came to his help trying to prevent the mugger. The miscreants then shot Selim in his left chest and stabbed Khalil.

Both the victims were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared Selim dead. Khalil was admitted to the hospital.

Khalil filed a case with Tejaagon thana in this connection. Police later picked up Arif and Alamgir, members of Pichhi Hannan group, from Tejaagon Science College yesterday evening.

Major changes in army

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tinue to serve. This again depends on the desire of the officers to continue in service and the government's willingness to allow them to serve," one source noted.

The three major generals are Abul Munim Mansur, Commandant of the Staff College, Hasan Mashud Chowdhury, Commandant of National Defence College and Abu Kaiser Fazlur Kabir, Area Commander of Chittagong. The first two are repatriated officers and the other is a freedom fighter.

It is learnt that all the three wish to continue in service.

Some sources said the services of Maj Gen Hasan Mashud Chowdhury have been placed

under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for appointment as ambassador.

Maj Gen Fazlur Kabir is replacing him as Commandant of the National Defence College.

The government is also considering several names for the position of Area Commander of Chittagong.

Maj Gen Munim Mansur is likely to continue in his present position.

Defence institutions such as Staff College, National Defence College and Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) are considered to be outside the army organisational structure and officers commanding those are not generally considered superseded.

Training policy approved

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ing. The national training council headed by the prime minister would continue to coordinate and monitor the training programme in Bangladesh, the meeting was told.

The draft policy provides that all cadre officials will attend and successfully complete the mandatory foundation training course immediately after their induction into the services.

The prime minister suggested that the trainees, who received training abroad in a particular field, after returning to Bangladesh should serve in that specific ministry, division or department at least for one year for which he or she has been awarded scholarship and fellowship.

Hasina told the meeting that there is no alternative to training for the government officials to run the administration effectively.

The report was discussed in the meeting in detail to improve the quality of services of the government officials.

Ministers Zillur Rahman, Shah AMS Kibria, Tofail Ahmed, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, ASHK Sadique and MA Mannan, State Ministers for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Cabinet Secretary Kazi Shamsul Alam, Principal Secretary to the PM Dr SA Samad, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr M Faruquddin, Finance Secretary Akbar Ali Khan and ADAB Chairman Khushi Kabir were, among others, present in the meeting.

BB suspends two

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ing out a bag full of polymer notes after office time. Although the amount could not be confirmed, some BB officials said it could be between Tk 13,000 and Tk 15,000.

When the BB Governor Dr Mohammad Faruquddin came to know of the incident he immediately asked the relevant department to take departmental action against the culprits. He also ordered a probe to find out if others are involved.

The BB officials are having hard times to deal with hundreds of people who come there every day following the issuance of new Tk 10 polymer note on December 14.

On top of it, everyday they are receiving an increasing number of requests from high government officials including minis-

ters, bankers and journalists asking for one or two bundle of new Tk 10 polymer notes.

Although hundreds of people 'everyday' through the BB Motijheel office to collect the polymer note, only few of them get the banknote.

However, from the first day of issuance the new Tk 10 polymer note is selling between Tk 15 and Tk 20 in the city. A bundle of 100 polymer note worth Tk 1000 sells at Tk 1400. However, similar bundles were available in Motijheel area at Tk 1100 each yesterday.

The introduction of the new polymer note triggered chaos and damage of windowpanes of the Bangladesh Bank's Motijheel office. Police had to intervene to disperse the agitating people who got frustrated after failing to get their hands on the hot bills.

Block 15 kept open

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Shell's last operation in this block -- an exploratory well drilling at Sandvip East -- began in June last with an approved budget of six million US dollars.

Sources said that after drilling to the prime depth of 3,600 meters, Shell gave up hopes of hitting any oil or gas there. Shell formally informed this to Petrobangla two weeks ago.

If Shell had adequate time, it might have had taken initiative to drill the last prospective spot at Sandvip West. A Petrobangla source noted that while the existing data puts the Sandvip West as the last prospective spot, the latest drilling in the same geological structure in Sandvip East proved negative.

After signing the PSC in 1995, the block's original operator British oil company Cairn conducted seismic survey covering some 1500 km in straight lines.

Later Cairn drilled one exploratory well in Semutang Hill Tracts. The gas reserve found in Semutang was assessed as 'too little' to justify the field's development.

In early 1998, Cairn undertook the drilling of the offshore Hadda exploratory well with a budget of 12 million US dollars. But it ended without any positive result.

Meanwhile, the PSC for this block was extended for the first time as per contract and Shell oil took over the operation of Cairn's two blocks -- 15 and 16. After a break in the exploration activities in block 15, Shell started the drilling in Sandvip.

Shell is also the operator of block 16, which includes the Sangu gas field. Petrobangla owes Shell over 70 million dollars in outstanding bills for purchase of Sangu.

CHT engr murder Blood-stained clothes of suspects recovered

From Our Correspondent

KHAGRACHARI, Dec 20: Khagrachhari police raided the residence of one Kamolendu Dewan at the town's Narayan Khajia area and recovered blood-stained clothes of some suspects earlier arrested in connection with killing of M Shahjahan, Executive Engineer of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB).

Police acting on information from the four suspects, who were arrested from the town's Sanibar area last week in connection with the killing, also recovered a knife used in the killing and part of a footwear.

Meanwhile, Matrang police arrested one Hafez Ahmed alias Hafez, a First Information Report (IFR) named accused from Matrang area.

M Shahjahan, Executive Engi-

neer of CHTDB, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in front of his residence on Wednesday last.

The arrested are identified as Nurul Alam, 20, Aunshi Marna, 23, Anuttur Chakma, 26, and Ripon Chakma, 22.

Pankaj, night guard of the deceased engineer, identified the suspects as involved in the killing and one of the accused Nurul Alam confessed that seven of them were involved in the killing incident.

However, police is yet to unveil the motive behind the killing.

Meanwhile, different professional bodies and socio-cultural organisations have continued to protest the killing of M Shahjahan and demanded trial of the persons responsible for the gruesome murder.