

Weather

Cloudy sky forecast

Light rain or drizzle is likely to occur at one or two places over Rajshahi divisions and the regions of Mymensingh and Tangail till 6pm today, reports UNB.

Weather is likely to remain dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country. Light change in night temperature is expected over the country, Met Office said.

The country's highest temperature recorded yesterday was 30.5 degree Celsius at Cox's Bazar and the lowest 10.0 degree at Dinajpur.

The sun sets in the capital today at 5.25 pm and rises tomorrow at 6.43 am.

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

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius	Humidity in percentage		
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	25.6	17.8	72	68
Chittagong	30.0	17.0	80	76
Rajshahi	24.5	15.4	87	70
Khulna	26.4	16.8	76	-
Barisal	28.0	15.4	79	80
Sylhet	27.7	15.7	74	67
Cox's Bazar	30.5	18.0	78	75

Nepal FM's trip

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use of the route for five days a week, it is virtually 'non-functional' due to inadequate infrastructural facilities at Banglabandh. The land port needs a regular customs post, and warehousing and telecommunications facilities to develop into a useful transit point.

Once the infrastructure is in place and cargo starts moving in volume, Kathmandu will be in a position to ask New Delhi to allow unhindered transit access seven days a week through Banglabandh, said an official familiar with transit negotiations.

The other transiting point for Nepalese goods through Bangladesh, which was established first, is the Birol-Radhikapur rail route. Rail wagons carrying cargo, particularly fertiliser, use this link up to Birol located at Parbatipur. This route is 'lengthy and time consuming.'

Nepal is likely to request Bangladesh to allow opening of

Rohanpur rail point at Chapainawabganj district as a new rail transit route. If Bangladesh accedes to the request, the Rohanpur rail point will link up with India's Singhabad which will allow fast movement of cargo to Nepal's borders.

Trade officials believe that the most important aspect of giving access to Rohanpur rail transit point is the prospect of opening up the Mongla port for bulk usage of Nepalese cargo, wooing away both revenue and traffic from Calcutta.

Besides, both governments will have to remove tariff barriers to allow more commodities to enter each other's market, should they want enhancement of bilateral trade, observers feel.

Diplomatic circles in Dhaka and Kathmandu are eagerly looking forward to adoption of fresh measures towards strengthened economic ties during the upcoming visit of the Nepalese foreign minister.

'PSA will prove AL's bane'

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proved that the law is being employed against the BNP leaders and activists, not against the miscreants, terrorists, killers, hijackers because they have connections with the ruling party, Bhuiyan said.

"AL activists led by several ministers damaged more than 500 vehicles in the city on December 14 after the High Court had given its ruling on the Bangabandhu murder case, but no case was filed against them," he said.

The AL government has destroyed political atmosphere in the country, jeopardised democracy, made parliament ineffective, ruined economy in a motive to stay in power permanently with the help of their masters, the BNP leader alleged.

He demanded immediate withdrawal of the false case filed against Morshed Khan, his son and others.

Bhuiyan announced that BNP would hold a public meeting at Paltan Maidan on January 11 to press for cancellation of PSA, resignation of the government and withdrawal of false cases filed under PSA against BNP leaders and activists. Khaleda Zia will address the meeting, he added.

In his speech, Khoka termed the case against Morshed Khan, his son Faisal Khan and others on charge of looting Tk 45,000 from a sweetmeat shop "unbelievable and ridiculous."

Sramik Dal general secretary Nazrul Islam Khan said, the case

Death anniversary



The first death anniversary of Mohiuddin Ahmed, Advisory Editor of now defunct Danik Desh and a former student leader, will be held today, says a press release.

A milad mahfil and doa will be held at his residence in the afternoon today to mark the occasion, the release added.

HHHHH

The second death anniversary of the social worker Begum Shahida Diwan will be observed today, says a press release.

A doa mahfil will be held after Maghrib prayers at the official residence (BGTTIC Campus) of her second son Dewan Hamidul Hassan, Senior Instructor, Bangladesh German Technical Training Centre (BGTTIC), Mirpur today to mark the occasion.

Begum Shahida Diwan was the wife of distinguished educationist and professor of Dhaka University Md Rustom Ali Diwan.

HHHHH

The fourth death anniversary of Akhtaruzzaman Ilias, a noted novelist and a former vice-president of Bangladesh Lekhok Shibir will be observed today, says a press release.

The central committee of Lekhok Shibir will place wreath at his graveyard at Bogra today and hold a discussion meeting on his works.

Pak bid for 'Shanghai Five' membership

DUSHANBE, Jan 3 : Pakistan has sought membership of the Shanghai Five, an organisation grouping Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Tajikistan which aims to settle border disputes and promote security in Central Asia, a Pakistani embassy spokesman said here today, reports AFP.

The reasons for Pakistan's demand were not immediately given by the ambassador here, and the Tajik foreign ministry declined to comment on the bid.

The Five first met in Shanghai in April 1996 to discuss border issues but the focus of the summits has since shifted to questions of regional security and economic cooperation.

The members vowed in July to create an anti-terrorist unit in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek to quell drug and arms trafficking, as well as Islamic fundamentalist incursions in the region, notably from Afghanistan.

Pakistan has been accused of supporting the Islamic militia in Afghanistan, who faced sanctions jointly tabled by Moscow and Washington for its alleged support to international terrorism.

BNP: Speaker

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reserved seats in parliament expires on March 31, 2001. It requires two-thirds majority to restore the provision by amending the Constitution.

Reached by phone, opposition Chief Whip Khondoker Delwar Hossain said, "I cannot say anything about joining parliament without the decision of the party. The matter can be discussed in the Standing Committee meeting and I may give my opinion in that meeting."

He said the matter could also be discussed in the BNP parliamentary party.

Salt factories

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On the other hand, owners of iodised salt factories are being deprived of DOs (delivery orders) from TCB office to meet the growing domestic need. Because, TCB is failing to supply any more imported salt as the stock has exhausted.

TCB officials said that it has already distributed 30,000 tonnes. The rest 20,000 tonnes have been kept reserved for creating buffer stock. As a result, salt factories in Khulna zone are suffering from acute crisis of non-refined salt.

8 more bodies

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received 165 bodies, mostly decomposed and unidentified. One hundred bodies were buried at Chandpur municipality graveyard last night.

Namaj-e-janaza for the victims was held here today.

Meanwhile, the inquiry committee headed by Abdul Malek, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Shipping, arrived at Chandpur today.

River transport

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There are no police in the court, causing security problem. "We have repeatedly failed to catch offenders as we do not have vehicles to travel to the spots," said one of the inspectors requesting anonymity.

There is only one inspector for the entire river routes in northern districts, Dhaka and Aricha and one for Barisal, Patuakhali, Jhalakathali, Barguna and Swrupkathi.

"In many ways I am handicapped and the laws are too weak. So how can you expect to improve things in the river traffic system," said Magistrate Abdul Mannan Elias of the Marine Court.

"There are hundreds of warrants but none of the offenders turn up to surrender to the court," he added.

When contacted, Director General of Shipping Directorate Abdul Malek however said the directorate has formed special inspection teams to ensure safety river transport sector and check illegal activities.

Guest birds

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Talking to reporters, Professor Sohrab Uddin Sarker of Zoology Department of Dhaka University, who accompanied a party of environmental journalists to the JU, revealed that as many as 200 to 215 types of guest birds used to come to the country every decade back. But the number is decreasing each year because of indiscriminate poaching and scarcity of water bodies.

Prof. Sohrab said that guest birds like gangreny, gadwan, mallard, pintail, shobeller, etc fly to Bangladesh every winter from mainly Siberia and some European countries. These days, foreign birds can only be seen at Tangur Haor, Nijhum Dip, Dublar Char, Kutubdia areas.

He also informed that there are a few species of guest birds that live on trees. There are also some birds, which lays eggs there and give birth. The fledglings grow up to be resident birds. The migratory birds, on an average, stay here for nearly six months and then leave off on their flight back home.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina unveiled the plaque of the foundation stone of 'Vijoy Taranga' to be built in memory of the members of Navy who embraced martyrdom in the great War of Liberation at Chittagong Naval Academy yesterday.

PM : Indian Ocean

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hard work are essential.

She said they should keep in mind, at the end of the late session, I called upon you all to play a due role to bring necessary amendment to the Constitution," the Speaker said in his letter.

The issue of voting right of expatriates is an important factor. Resentment has grown among expatriate Bangladeshis as they have been excluded from the voters' list, prepared by the Election Commission, he said.

"It is the responsibility of all political parties represented in parliament to pacify the resentment. And I would like to request all members of the Jatiya Sangsad to play their due role in

also presented with Osmani Gold Medal and Chief of the Naval Staff Gold Medal for outstanding performance in academic and professional subjects.

Ministers, MPs, Chittagong City Corporation Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Harunur Rashid, high civil and military officials and relatives and guardians of the midshipmen attended the ceremony.

After the parade, the Prime Minister laid the foundation of "Bijoy Taranga" at Red Kin Point of the Academy in memory of the members of the Bangladesh Navy martyred during the liberation war of 1971.

Later, she witnessed an attractive steam past of Naval ship at the Karnaphuli river, in which 17 ships of navy including, gun boat, missile ship, patrol craft and torpedo boats were used.

Khaleda urged to join JS

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these need special attention. For that, at the end of the late session, I called upon you all to play a due role to bring necessary amendment to the Constitution," the Speaker said in his letter.

The Speaker in his letter also greeted the Opposition on the occasion of the Eid-ul-Fitr and the New Year.

The sources said the letter was delivered at the Opposition Leader's 7, Mainul Road residence at Dhaka Cantonment Tuesday afternoon.

When contacted, Personal Secretary to the Speaker said the letter was confidential and sent by the APS-2 on that day.

In his last letter to Khaleda Zia, Humayun Rasheed

Bhuiyan's 'peace move'

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The JCD leaders in the statement also categorically denied newspaper reports that leaders and activists opposed to the new committee challenged the leadership of Khaleda Zia.

They also denied their involvement in the attacks on the BNP office, houses of two senior leaders and damaging vehicles and property. Presidents and general secretaries of DU and Jagannath College units and South and North units of the city committee signed the statement.

Bhuiyan told them that he would show the statement first to the party Chairperson on Tuesday and then release copies to the press. But according to party insiders, Khaleda Zia insists that the rebel leaders issue press statement congratulating the new committee.

But the JCD leaders who signed the statement outright

'Sun Fest 2001' concludes

By Staff Correspondent

The two-day sun festival titled 'Sun-Fest 2001' was concluded in the country's only coral island Saint Martin on the Bay of Bengal on Sunday amid enthusiasm among the local people and participants from Dhaka to welcome the new millennium.

More than 75 persons comprising scientists, doctors, educationists, journalists, artists, students and children set off for the island from Dhaka on December 30and reached the scenic coral island on the last day of last century to welcome the first sun of the 3rd millennium.

Bangladesh Astronomical Association (BAA) organised the programme, which is first of its kind in the country with a view to popularise the sun observation as well as to start afresh the practice of cosmological science.

A good number of local people, and foreign tourists visiting the island also joined the festival and on the first day of 'Sun-Fest 2001' the participants said good bye to the last sun of the 20th century in a festive manner.

Besides, the BAA installed a telescope for space observation in the evening and the participants had had a closer look of the moon, Jupiter, Saturn and others stars.

Later a discussion meeting was held at the Motil Nijhum premises. Dr Mofizuddin Ahmed and Dr Rezaur Rahman spoke on 'Structure of Sun and 'Sun: The Source of Life' respectively.

The programme was followed by the 31st night celebration. The beach wore a festive look as the visitors were busy in merry making.

The main programme of the sun festival was held at the 'Chera Island', a part of the Saint Martin, by welcoming the rising sun on the next day.

The participants moved towards the island in the early hours and kept on waiting for the sun to rise.

They floated a dummy of the rising sun on the Bay of Bengal and sprinkled colours on the beach rocks in honour of the first sun of the new millennium.

On the second day on Mon-

Indo-Pak troops trade gunfire in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Jan 3 : Pakistani border guards today opened fire on Indian posts in Kashmir, breaking a month's lull on the border across the disputed Himalayan territory, defence ministry sources here said, reports AFP.

They said the firing, lasting up to 20 minutes, took place in the Kathua region of the southern district of Jammu, within the Indian-administered zone of Kashmir.

"India's Border Security Force in Kathua retaliated to the unprovoked firing from across the international border," the source told AFP in New Delhi, adding that there were no casualties.

There was no immediate official confirmation of the attack, which came a month after Islamabad pledged "maximum restraint" on the border after India's ceasefire offer in Kashmir for the holy Islamic month of

Ramadan, which began November 27.

But the shooting came just days after Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee accused Pakistan of backing an alleged militant threat to attack his office.

Islamabad discarded the accusation as baseless and said it regretted the comments.

A Muslim separatist campaign in the Indian zone of Kashmir has claimed 34,000 lives since 1989. Pakistan holds the northern third of the Himalayan state, over which the two countries have fought two wars and a border conflict.

India had extended the unilateral Ramadan ceasefire for another four weeks, until January 26.

Pakistan responded with a partial troop withdrawal from the border, part of which is disputed.

Rupsha Bridge project

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gets the project work. Quoting a Japanese high official, the sources said that if the Rupsha bridge work is not awarded to a Japanese company, future Japanese project loan including financing of the proposed Paksi Bridge will suffer.

The Japanese consultant sought some last minute clarification from the bidders on one working day before the Eid vacation and closed its evaluation process on December 31, the sources claimed.

The Chief Engineer of RHD and the consultant held a meeting Monday last. At the meeting, the consultant said that it found both the Chinese bidders "non-

responsive" as they "did not fulfil the technical criterion".

The RHD will now scrutinise the consultant's report and send its opinion to the Communication Ministry which will send the recommendations to the JBIC.

Upon receiving a green signal from JBIC, the RHD will open the offers of technically qualified bidders.

The company which will be selected will have to complete the project within 40 months of signing of the final agreement.

The proposed three-lane bridge will be 16 meters wide and 1360 meters in length. The main bridge will be 630 meters in length.

Mosque burned down in Kashmir

Delhi blamed for vandalism

ISLAMABAD, Jan 3 : Pakistan today alleged Indian "official complicity" in the burning down of a major mosque in the New Delhi-ruled zone of the divided Himalayan state of Kashmir, reports AFP.

"Pakistan, like the people of Jammu and Kashmir holds the Indian occupation authorities entirely responsible for this deliberate act of vandalism," a Foreign Office statement said.

"This desecration of a historic mosque, which has been carried out with official complicity, has caused deep outrage to the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir."

The destruction resulted from the "failure of the district authorities to provide adequate protection to the mosque ... and from the deliberate delay in bringing the fire under control," it added.

Indian officials imposed an indefinite curfew Tuesday on Kishtwar following protests in the town Monday after the grand mosque of Kishtwar, the Jamia Masjid, was completely gutted by a fire.

Officials said the fire was caused by a short circuit, a claim rejected by the protestors.

India and Pakistan hold parts of Kashmir and have fought two wars over the territory since their independence in 1947.

A senior Foreign Office official separately reacted to New Delhi's decision to hold village level elections in Kashmir, calling it a "regrettable" move.

"The decision to hold Panchayat elections is particularly regrettable at this time when efforts are underway to launch a peace process on Kashmir," the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan quoted the unnamed official as saying.

The official said the All Party Hurriat (Freedom) Conference, the main Kashmiri separatist alliance based in Indian Kashmir, had already announced a boycott of the polls.

BJP to formulate polls strategy today

NEW DELHI, Jan 3 : India's ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party will hold a three-day executive meeting from Thursday to formulate strategy for coming state elections, reports AFP.

Elections are due in the politically crucial northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the eastern states West Bengal and Assam and the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

"We will broadly discuss strategy," BJP president Bangaru Laxman told reporters Wednesday, adding that one focus of the meeting would be the forging of regional alliances.

The BJP dominates India's coalition government, and controls a number of states in partnership with regional parties.

Commenting on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's recent decision to extend a unilateral ceasefire in the restive state of Kashmir, Laxman said he had the full support of the party rank and file.

"But we would caution him about Pakistan's increased militant activity ever since the ceasefire was extended," Laxman said.

India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir, where a Muslim insurgency against Indian rule has claimed 34,000 lives, since 1989.

On the controversial proposal of building a temple over the ruins of a razed mosque in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya, Laxman said the party stood by Vajpayee's statement that the government would abide by any court ruling on the issue.

"There is no confusion on this," Laxman said.

The campaign to build the temple is supported by the BJP but does not figure in the coalition government's manifesto out of consideration for the party's more secular-minded allies.

Thousands of Afghans stranded at Tajik border

KABUL, Jan 3 : Thousands of displaced Afghans are living under mounting hardship along the country's border with Tajikistan, which has been requested by the United Nations to allow the refugees into its territory, a UN report said today, says AFP.

Around 10,000 Afghans, uprooted by recent fighting in the northeastern province of Takhar, are living on the banks of Pyandy river on the Tajik border, according to the report.

They lack food, proper shelter and drinking water and face 'grave security risks' because of sporadic shelling into the area which has injured some refugees, the UN said.

A request from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the Tajikistan government to allow the displaced people to enter Tajik territory is yet to elicit a response, the report said.

Among the displaced people were a number of armed men belonging to the anti-Taliban military commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

The UNHCR has earmarked around 250,000 dollars to assist the people and preparations are under way to airlift plastic tarpaulins from Copenhagen to the Tajik capital Dushanbe, it added.

More than 200,000 people fled their homes in and around Takhar during the Taliban's summer military campaign during which the ruling militia took the provincial capital, Taloqan, on September 6.

Around 50,000 of the displaced people entered Pakistan, forcing Islamabad to close its border with Afghanistan.

The UN report said the number of Afghans officially registered in the new refugee settlements in the Pakistani border area of Peshawar had reached 47,000.