



Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely to occur at one or two places over Khulna, Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and the region of Comilla till 6pm today. Weather may remain mainly dry elsewhere over the country. Met office said yesterday.

The country's highest temperature recorded yesterday was 37.3 degree Celsius was at Rajshahi and the lowest 19.2 degree at Srimongal and Sayerpur.

The sun sets in the capital today at 6.16 pm and rises on Thursday at 5.47 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	32.0	21.4	78	63
Chittagong	33.2	24.8	65	67
Rajshahi	37.3	21.5	64	34
Khulna	32.7	21.2	87	63
Barisal	32.5	21.4	82	69
Sylhet	32.4	21.5	65	52
Cox's Bazar	34.5	23.0	71	70

DHAKA TODAY

Lecture

Centre for Advanced Research in the Humanities will hold a lecture on "Translation of Literature by Tagore-Nazrul to Chinese." Keynote speaker: Chinese researcher Pi Khi Yuan. Venue: Centre Seminar Room, 434 Lecture Theatre, DU, Time: 9:30 am.

PIB dialogue

Press Institute of Bangladesh will hold a dialogue on "Children and Women in Newspapers." Venue: PIB auditorium, 3, Circuit House Road, Time: 11:00 am.

Discussion

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad will hold a discussion to mark its 31st founding anniversary. It will also launch a book "Muktijuddher Smriti" on the occasion. Venue: Auditorium of the Jatiya Press Club, Time: 4:00 pm.

Retrospective on Liberation War

Zahir Raihan Film Society will screen films Kanya-by-Shameem Akbar. Venue: Auditorium of the Indian High Commission, House No 25, Rd No 2, Dhanmondi R/A, Time: 4:30 pm.

Musical programme

Amra Surjomukhi will present a solo musical evening by Sheikh Milon. Venue: Begum Sufia Kamal auditorium of National Museum, Shahbag, Time: 6:00 pm.

Theatre

Mahakal Natya Sampraday will stage its new production Sheban Shundon. Venue: Guide House auditorium, Bailey Rd, Time: 7:00 pm.

DHAKA TOMORROW

NFOWD workshop

National Forum of Organisations working with the disabled will hold a day long workshop with "Inclusive Education for the Development of the People with Disabilities." Venue: Samaj Sheba Bhavan auditorium, Agargaon, Time: 9:00 am-5:00 pm.

Retrospective on Liberation War

Zahir Raihan Film Society will screen Nadir Nam Mochumati by Tanvir Mokammel. Venue: Indian High Commission auditorium, House No 25, Rd No 2, Dhanmondi R/A, Time: 4:30 pm.

Larma sees no change in accord

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participate actively in the forthcoming national elections.

"We would certainly have a role in the next elections", he said without elaborating, apparently basing his calculations on the 'swing votes' of ethnic people. According to Sanjib Dronng, Member-Secretary of the AAF, such votes will determine the outcome of election in 15/ 20 parliament... constituencies.

But Larma blew hot on the situation in his turf. "We would resist the polls" if elections in the three CHT constituencies are not held on the basis of a separate voter list as per the peace agreement, providing voting right only to "permanent residents", he said.

Reminded that the demand for a separate voter list in CHT for national elections has been rejected by the Election Commission, he said he stands by his demand. "It will be resisted if the government resorts to repressive measures".

He explained that the Jana Sanghati Samity (JSS), of which he is the chief, would work as a "separate

entity" to resolve the CHT problems. The AAF will focus on ethnic people's issues nationally and locally, he said.

On the background of formation of AAF, Larma said the recent killings of Alfred Soren in Naogaon and Gidita Rhema in Madhupur, forcible marriage of her sister and conversion of her faith and grabbing of their property prompted the "helpless small nationalities" to organise themselves.

He also alleged that the plan to evict the Khasia people from their betel leave groves and orchards in the name of setting up an Eco-Park in Madhabkund is part of a move to "eliminate" them.

"We have decided to organise ourselves under the banner of AAF to fight such oppression", he said.

He also blasted the local administration for its non-action in preventing deforestation in CHT and vowed to protect the environment for survival of the ethnic minorities.

On the government's plans to add two more units to the Kaptai

Hydel Power Station with Japanese assistance, he said this will result in water-logging, flash floods and loss of farms.

He demanded that the (Kaptai) lake management committee be reconstituted with the RC Chairman or the Hill District Council Chairman as its head to protect the lake's eco-system. The committee is now headed by the Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong.

Larma answered a number of other questions relating to his trouble with the renegades from JSS who formed the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) and law and order in CHT. But he refused to comment on the recent kidnapping of three foreigners in CHT.

The UPDF is backed by the authorities to weaken his organisation, he claimed. They (UPDF members) have killed 26 JSS members since signing of the peace accord, he said adding that UPDF is nothing but a group indulging crimes. He declined to accept the UPDF as a political entity.

EC preparing

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tion, told a group of reporters at the EC Secretariat.

On the country's political situation, Preston said the problem is domestic, and "should be solved domestically".

The delegation discussed progress of preparation for the ensuing election and the issue of international observers, he said.

Regarding the electoral law reforms, the diplomat noted that the EC and the UNDP are working together on this issue.

According to an EC spokesman the CEC identified shortage of staffers and dependency on the government as the main obstacle for the election commission to work independently.

Quoting the CEC's statement to the diplomats, Sanat Kumar Biswas, the EC spokesman, said dependency on the government machinery hampered the commission's move.

The CEC also vowed for an independent Election Commission Secretariat for smooth functioning of the quasi-judicial body, constitutionally designated for holding national and presidential elections, Biswas revealed.

The CEC was also quoted to have told the mission chiefs that he would move the reform proposals to its consideration and presidential proclamation to adopt the provisions in a bid to ensure fairness in the future polls.

He also told them about the EC's plan for special security measures, based on secret reports, in the violence-prone constituencies during the elections.

"The EC will also ensure safety of the international observers as well as security of the common voters," the CEC was quoted to have said.

The diplomats had met the CEC twice before yesterday, on December 19 last and on February 20 this year for the same purposes, EC sources said.

Ershad's bail Hearing on date shifting Apr 8

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday fixed April 8 for hearing on the petitions for shifting date regarding the bail of former president HM Ershad in connection with two corruption cases.

Judge Ahmed Jamil Mostafa passed the order after hearing the petitions submitted by the defence lawyers.

Advocate 'Sheikh Sirajul Islam, lawyer for Ershad submitted two separate petitions yesterday for shifting date stating that he (Ershad) was shifted to Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) on March 24 due to pain in his chest. But now, he has been suffering from eye disease. So, the lawyer prayed for shifting the date of hearing on the bail petition.

After hearing both the sides, the court fixed April 8 for hearing on the issue.

5 stabbed on sea beach

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Armed muggers stabbed five people, including two foreign engineers and snatched their money and other valuables on the sea beach at Cox's Bazar on Monday night.

The victims were identified as Chinese engineer Saan Daung, 28, his wife Helen Heue, also an engineer, and their guide Lion Mia, and two businessmen, Ahad Ullah Khan and Altaf Hossain. They were admitted to Sadar Hospital.

Earlier on March 15, three Italian tourists were robbed of their two video cameras and money.

72-hr hartal

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Monday (April 9), the 72-hour hartal will come to an end at 6 am on Thursday (April 12).

Mannan Bhuiyan told newsmen that as the opposition's ultimatum to the government to quit power by March 30 went unheeded, they had "successfully" enforced the 60-hour hartal and also gave a fresh hartal call. "Such programmes will continue till the government resigns."

JP representatives loyal to Nazim Rahman Manzur participated in the liaison committee meeting last night. Ershad led JP leader did not attend the meeting.

Ruhul Amin Howladar, a JP presidium member loyal to Ershad, told The Daily Star last night that BNP did not invite them to join the liaison committee meeting.

Mentionably, HM Ershad announced inclusion of five JP-men loyal to him in the opposition liaison committee as the previous representatives had expressed their allegiance to other faction of JP led by Nazim Rahman Manzur.

Heroj Rashid, Maidul Islam, ABM Golam Mostafa, Mostafa Jamal Haider, Golam Sarwar, Milon Manzur-led JP attended the liaison committee meeting last night.

123,196 cooperative societies in the country, JS told

BSS, Dhaka

State Minister for Rural Development and Cooperatives Advocate M Rahmat Ali told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday that at present there are 1,23,196 registered cooperative societies in the country.

Replying to a question from ruling party legislator Mostafizur Rahman, the state minister said there are 3,441 registered cooperative societies in the 17 upazilas of Chittagong district.

In reply to another question from ruling party MP Abdul Latif Mirza, Advocate Rahmat Ali said at present there are 132 branches of cooperative banks in the country.

2 rickshawpullers die

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them bullet-hit, as armed activists of ruling Awami League and opposition BNP clashed intermittently from about noon at Mukhtarpar near the town.

A UNB report said the clashes ensued when ruling party activists raided the area to retaliate an attack on the father of a Juba League leader by BNP men.

At least 100 shots were traded and scores of bombs set off during the clashes that continued till about 9 pm.

In Dhaka city, pickets threw a bomb at a ruling party procession led by State Minister for Shipping Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya near the Jatiya Press Club at about 11:30 am. None was injured.

The AL activists ran away and later looted some shops at Topkhana Road. Shop owners Aziz and Monir alleged that AL activists looted Tk. 15,000 and Tk. 5,000 in cash and goods from their shops respectively.

Police baroned activists of Jatiya Chhatra Samaj, student front of Jatiya Party (Matin-Nazim), when four bombs were exploded near their rally at Bijoynagar at about 10:40 am. Police picked up two activists from there.

Police fired at least 20 tear shells to disperse a procession of Jatiyatibadi Secchhasheba Dal, a front of BNP, near Kakrail crossing at about 3:45 pm when four bombs went off there. The procession was going to the BNP central office at Naya Paltan.

Police again lobbed tear shells and dispersed a joint rally of pro-Opposition student fronts in the same area when three bombs went off there at about 6:30 pm.

Jatiyatibadi Chhatra Dal activists damaged a bus near Kataban crossing at about 12:45 pm. They also cashed a Minister when he was passing through the area in his official car. Pickets set fire to two rickshaws at Bijoynagar at about 10:20 am.

Pickets exploded several bombs during a clash with police at Laxmibazar in Old Dhaka.

A microbus caught fire on Road No. 11 at Baridhara at about 3 pm when pro-hartal pickets threw two bombs on it. A car of an embassy was also damaged there.

Police said bomb explosions injured a minor boy and a woman at Nazimuddin Road, a rickshaw van driver at Islambag, a rickshawpuller at Pallabi and the Demra union AL general secretary at Jatra Bari.

Our Staff Correspondent reports from Chittagong: At least 20 people were injured, three of them bullet-hit, in clashes between activists of BNP and AL at Agrabad and Sitakunda in the port city.

Police arrested 15 people and filed cases against 19 Opposition leaders and activists with Double Mooring thana under the Public Safety Act yesterday for their alleged involvement in "destructive activities". A total of nine cases have been filed under the PSA against over 150 Opposition leaders and activists in Chittagong during the three-day hartal.

A UNB report from Nafore said at least 30 people were injured, eight of them bullet-hit, in a clash between Opposition and ruling party activists at Malanchibazar upazila headquarters yesterday. Seven of the bullet-hit persons, all BNP activists, were rushed to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Witnesses said the clash ensued when AL activists attacked a 4-party joint procession there at about 10:30 am. At least 25 gunshots were fired and 35 homemade bombs exploded during the clash.

Our Magura Correspondent reported that over 10 people were injured, four of them critically, in a clash between BNP and AL activists at Rajibbarpara, six kilometres off Magura town. Police picked up 14 people from the spot. The injured people were admitted to the local hospital.

Another UNB report from Chandpur said some 15 people including ASP Shafique Uddin were injured in a clash between ruling party and Opposition activists in the town at about 10 am.

The clash ensued when AL activists attacked a meeting of BNP activists at Chowdhury Ghat. The clash soon spread to Shapla Chhatra, Leker Par and Bakultala areas.

A UNB reports from Mymensingh said at least 20 people including four policemen were injured in the town in clashes between pro-and anti-hartal activists. Ten of them were injured at Choto Bazar crossing.

The four policemen were injured when a bomb was thrown on a police patrol team on the KB Ismail Hossain Road.

Reports from Kurigram said a clash between activists of Jatiyatibadi Chhatra Dal and Chhatra League at Dada Square left eight people injured. Hartal supporters damaged a microbus and a car and assaulted the TNO of Sadar thana.

UNB adds from Pabna: Some 100 people were injured in a series of clashes between Awami League and BNP activists at Chatmohar and Suzanagar upazilas.

In Chatmohar, the trouble ensued at about 11 pm on Monday when supporters of Awami League allegedly attacked a procession of BNP.

Police fired rubber bullets and teargas shells and brought the situation under control.

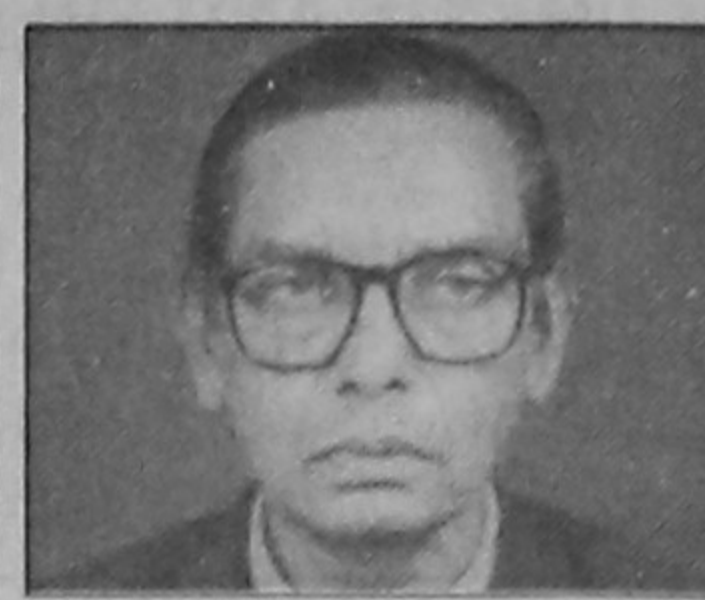
Some 80 people from both sides were injured during the hour-long clashes.

Of the injured condition of 8 people was stated to be critical.

Police filed a case under PSA against 19 BNP leaders and workers, including leader Prof Sultan Mahmud.

The opposition pickets halted a local train at Chatmohar railway station yesterday morning creating panic among the passengers.

Besides, BNP activists attacked a passenger bus and torched it at Bhitbila in Suzanagar upazila leaving 20 people injured.



Ex-MP Abid Ali dead

BSS, Dhaka

Abid Ali, a former member of the Gono Parishad and the Jatiya Sangsad, died of cancer at BIRDEM Hospital in the city yesterday. He was 67.

An organiser of Sector No-6 in the Liberation War, Ali was a member of the Central Advisory Committee of Bangladesh Awami League.

He played a commendable role in different movements, including the struggle against autocracy and for restoration of democracy.

He will be buried with full state honour at his family graveyard at Rasulganj village under Patgram upazila in Lalmonirhat today.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited the hospital to pay her last respect to the late parliamentarian.

In a condolence message, the prime minister said valiant freedom fighter Abid Ali was a dedicated and honest leader of Awami League.

One dies, 8 fall sick after taking toxic food

UNB, Pabna

An SSC examinee died and eight others of his family fell sick after taking toxic food at Sundarandipur village under Santhia upazila in Pabna on Sunday.

Police said all the family members of Abdul Hye fell sick soon after they took rice cooked by his wife Sakina Khatun.

The sick were identified as Enamul Haq, 16, Morzina Khatun, 17, Munira, 7, Sakina Khatun, 30, Mayuri, 4, Nazma Khatun, 25, Sharifa Banu, 26, Saiful Islam, 5, and Faruq Hossain, 14, were admitted to Santhia Upazila Health Complex.

Later, Enamul died at the hospital.

Meanwhile, police arrested Sakina Khatun in this connection.

Opposition hope

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local leaders of the party. He got 70,184 votes while his nearest rival from BNP got 45,184 votes in the last election.

But this time the situation is quite different due to murders of AL's political rivals, alleged patronisation of activists of outlawed BPCP and BCP and repression on members of the minority community and grabbing of their lands, the alliance leaders claimed.

Nurul Huq of AL won the Khulna-6 (Koira-Paigacha) seat in 1996 election, polling 66,033 votes. His nearest rival Shah Ruhul Quddus of Jamaat-e-Islami got 49,023 votes. Quddus had won the seat in 1991 elections. The alliance leaders say Quddus will get the seat in the next election because Koira is a vote bank of Jamaat where the ruling MP "did not pay any attention."

Islami Oikya Jote, a component of the alliance, has no political strength in Khulna to seek nomination for any of the six seats.

BJP, Congress

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internet media company's expose of corruption in defence deals and the Congress may gain from the episode more than thought earlier. So, all efforts should be made to deny the Congress the scope to derive benefits from a triangular battle.

If the alliance between the BJP and the AGP does fructify, it will see the parting of ways by left parties and some minorities outfit which are now with Mahanta's party. These parties, according to analysts, may come together to form a Third Front in Assam, causing a further split in anti-Congress votes.

Business bodies concerned

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Clashes on the streets and continuous hartals leave serious damaging effects on the business and economic activities, thereby increasing cost of business and tarnishing the country's image abroad, said the statement signed by FICCI president Wali Bhuiyan.

The platform of foreign companies doing business in Bangladesh observed that the major political parties here are professedly private sector friendly. But "from their activities it appears that they simply bother to care for the interest of the business community if it suits their political interests."

In order to attract more foreign investment, which Bangladesh needs very much for capacity building, the FICCI said, it is important to make sure that existing foreign investors do not become disinterested to continue their businesses here.

President of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) Benajir Ahmed also expressed deep concern over the existing political situation saying that it is hard to keep pace with international trade, if the present political instability continues.

He also urged the political parties

to resolve the prevailing crisis, otherwise it would be difficult to survive in the global trade.

In a press release yesterday BGMEA president Kutubuddin Ahmed said the current political crisis in the country is seriously affecting export of readymade garments.

He also said it is very important to gain confidence of foreign buyers for garment business, but the existing political turmoil may lead up to loss of confidence.

Zimbabwe

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one-day series than the practice game.

"There are possibilities of playing young players like Ashrafur, Sharif and Mushfiqur Rahman in the practice match. But then we will also have to consider that we do not have enough practice matches for others to get the feel of the conditions here," he said.

Although the Academy team comprises upcoming players and the match would not draw any crowd, Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak said that they would closely observe the game to get to know about the Bangladeshi players. (More stories on Page 9)

BNP MP to face action

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Nasim referred to the incident of "stealing" cigarette by Prof Shahidul Islam MP in Dubai and said he was freed at the initiative of Deputy Speaker Advocate Abdul Hamid, who tried his best for his release for the sake of image of the country.

Bitterly criticised Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia for claiming her MP to be innocent and demanding release of the people arrested in this connection. "No arrested person will be released," he said.

The home minister informed the parliament that 507 terrorists were arrested across the country for creating violence in the name of hartal, and action would be taken against them under the Arms and Explosives Act and Public Safety Act.

Asking the BNP-led opposition alliance to shun the path of hartal

and anarchy, Nasim said the tenure of current parliament would expire on July 13. "After that the power will be transferred and a caretaker government will be formed for holding general election."

The minister, who earlier on the day visited the Dhaka Medical College Hospital to see the people injured by pro-hartal activists, said Khaleda failed to do anything by hartal other than causing sufferings poor people, killing drivers and injuring rickshaw-pullers.

He said opposition leaders keep their industries open during hartals, but try to stop production by others. He specially named the industries owned by deputy leader of the opposition Prof B Chowdhury and Dandy Dying and motor launches run by Khaleda Zia's family.

PM: Why not polls

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the opposition programme.

Hasina wondered what the opposition leader would do if the aggrieved people listed the cars and industries belonging to the opposition leaders and start damaging or burning those.

"Has the opposition leader ever thought of such a consequence?"

She said the opposition would not call hartal any more if the people took to the streets to protest such destructive programme. The prime minister remarked that the opposition leader was baying for blood and corpses to reap political benefits.

To another question, she suggested that victims of the hartal or the State could file cases against the hartal-callers under section 302 of the CrPc and assured government's cooperation.

She also asked the people to reject such forces in the next election.

The prime minister told another questioner that 42 people have been killed and 418 cars damaged during hartals and other agitation programmes by the opposition since June, 1996.

Three outlaws beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

The activists of an outlawed party were beaten to death by the villagers at village Namo Sylot under Tarash Upazila in Sirajganj District in the early hours of yesterday.

The victims were identified as Jahangir, 25, Elias, 29, and Moklesur Rahman 31.

Police and witnesses said about 20 members of an outlawed party stormed into three houses at Namo Sylot village at around 3 am, beat up the inmates and looted gold ornaments, money and other valuables.