

Nor' wester kills 15, injures over 500 in 4 northern dists

UNB, N-dists

Nor'wester accompanied by hailstorm killed 15 people and injured over 550 in four northern districts on Saturday and Sunday.

Anor'wester accompanied by hailstorm killed six people and injured 400 in Sundarganj upazila of Gaibandha Sunday night.

The victims were identified as Mujiron Bewa, 75, of Naohati, Chandi Das, 50, of Ghoghora, Kosiron Bibi, 65, and Dholi Bibi, 55, of Poran village and Hamida Bewa and Jamila Khatun, 25.

Local people said hundreds of houses and standing crops on 3,000 hectares of land were damaged, and an unspecified number of trees uprooted in 13 unions of the upazila.

The worst affected unions are Belka, Tarapur, Dahaband, Shantiram, Haripur, Kanchibari, Chandipur, Ramjibon, Chhaporhati and Bamondanga.

Fifty of the injured have been hospitalised.

A report from Rangpur adds: Three people were killed and about 100 injured as nor'wester accompanied by hailstorm lashed five upazilas of the district Sunday night.

About 12,000 dwelling houses and standing crops on over 25,000 hectares of land were damaged, and huge number of trees uprooted during the storm, which struck Sadar, Gangachhara, Pirgonj, Kaunia and Pirgachha upazilas.

Sadeque didn't back my idea of metro govt in time: Hanif

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Outgoing Dhaka Mayor Mohammad Hanif has blasted his successor Sadeque Hossain Khoka for not supporting his move to have a metropolitan government in the capital.

"I didn't get his (Khoka's) support when I was desperate to have a metropolitan government to serve my electorates better. But now that he has been elected, he is supporting my concept," Hanif told a press conference, his last as mayor, in the city yesterday. However, he wished his successor success.

"The metropolitan government is a must to address city problems," said Hanif whose attempts to form such a body failed due to lack of government initiatives.

"As the mayor, I did not have any authority over other government agencies like WASA, DESA and the DMP which are very much responsible to serve the city dwellers," he said, adding that the city people expected him to solve all civic problems as their elected representative.

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Mayors and ward commissioners take oath May 5

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected mayors and ward commissioners of three city corporations will be held on May 5.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will swear in the three mayors -- Sadeque Hossain Khoka to Dhaka, Shaikh Tayebur Rahman to Khulna and Mizanur Rahman Minu to Rajshahi city corporations -- at her office Sunday morning, official sources said.

The same day, BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan will administer oath to the ward commissioners of the Dhaka City Corporation at the Bangladesh-China International Conference Centre at Agargaon.

The detailed schedule of the ceremony will be announced soon, officials said.

Sources said the date for oath-taking ceremony was finalised yesterday in consultation with the Prime Minister's Office at a meeting of the LGRD ministry with Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the chair. Also present were State Minister for

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The district administration, however, confirmed death of one Hamida Begum, 50, who was struck by thunderbolt during the storm at her village Nagirdha in Pirgachha upazila.

The district administration distributed 20 metric tons of rice and Tk 25,000 among the victims.

In Kurigram, six people were killed and more than 50 others injured in nor'wester and boat capsized on Saturday and Sunday.

Of them, Abul Kashem, 40, of Rajibpur and Abdur Rahim, 55, of Chilmari upazilas were killed when severe nor'wester accompanied by hailstorm swept over three upazilas Ulipur, Rajibpur and Chilmari upazilas Sunday night.

Besides, three people Zobeda, 36, Anwara Khatun, 28, and Moyna Khatun, 24, of Roumari upazila drowned in the river Sonabhoori when a boat capsized on Saturday. A child was also killed on the same day when thunderbolt struck him.

Local administration sources said hundreds of houses and educational institutions, standing crops on vast tracts of land were damaged, and over 300 livestock killed in the three upazilas.

UNB Nilphamari correspondent adds: At least eight people were injured, and 2,000 thatched houses and standing IRRI-boro crops on over 1,000 acres of land damaged in heavy rains and hailstorms Sunday night.

Action plan for telecom ministry PM for more phone lines at reduced charges

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia suggested reducing telephone connection charges but increasing the number of lines instead in order to increase revenues under a massive plan unveiled yesterday.

She made the suggestion as the Telecommunications Ministry announced a massive action plan,

including installation of T&T mobile phones, at a function.

In a presentation on the present activities and future action plan, the ministry said it would install nearly 35 lakh new phones, both fixed and mobile, during its targeted time.

Presently, total number of telephones in the country, both fixed and cellular, is 15.07 lakh.

"Work for distribution of BTTB

mobile phones is under way," the meeting was told.

The prime minister directed the Telecommunications Ministry to implement its action plan one year ahead of its targeted time up to June 2006.

This was the first visit by Prime Minister Khaleda to Telecommunications Ministry after

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Unified judicial service planned

STAR REPORT

The government will set up a Bangladesh Judicial Service (BJS) composed of judicial magistrates and lower court judges.

The decision was taken yesterday at a meeting of the cabinet committee formed to implement the 12-point Supreme Court directives on virtual separation of the judiciary by May 30.

The unified judicial service will have assistant judge as the post of entrance. The government decided

to form a Judicial Service Commission (JSC) to handle the appointments of judicial service officials with the advice of the President.

Till now, these officials are appointed by the executive wing of the government. The lower tier of the judiciary -- a mixture of the judicial cadre and the administration cadre -- will become independent from the executive wing of the government and be under the JSC.

There will be scope for absorb

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15 ex-secys' concern

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fifteen former secretaries to the government in a joint statement yesterday expressed grave concern over the 'flagrant violation of law and repression on prominent citizens by law enforcers'.

They demanded an immediate end to the misuse of the Section 54 and 167 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), torture on the accused in the joint interrogation cell and all forms of violation of constitutional rights.

"We are deeply concerned that police on the order of the government's higher authorities are arresting prominent citizens and unleash

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PHOTO: STAR

Prof Bikiran Prashad Barua speaks at a press conference organised by the committee for trial of killers of Buddhist monk Gyanojyoti at Chittagong press club in yesterday.

Ctg Buddhists announce agitation programme

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Members of the Buddhist community here have announced a month-long agitation programme to press their demand for an immediate and fair trial of the killing of monk Gyanojyoti Mohasthorib.

The programme was announced at a press conference yesterday at the local Press Club, organised by Gyanojyoti Bhikkhu movement committee for trial of his killing.

Leaders of the committee alleged that there is an 'evil bid' project the

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Kamal finds politics frustrating

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gono Forum president Dr. Kamal Hossain yesterday said people of the country were frustrated at the present political scenario, as there was no perceptible improvement in national life although they voted for a change through the last general election.

"People hoped that the politics of confrontation would give way to healthy politics and the rule of law would be established in the country. But they are frustrated as the state has taken a wrong path, prompting an outbreak of conflict and confrontation," Dr. Kamal told reporters in a press conference on the current political situation of the country.

People wanted a change, they voted for it, and wanted an end to terrorism. They wanted an end to extortion at bazaars, and launch and bus terminals by musclemen and their godfathers, and an end to robbery on the highway, he said.

He said they wanted an end to treating national resources like oil and gas or government land as if

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Hartal passes off peacefully in Rajshahi

ANWAR ALI, From Rajshahi

An eight-hour hartal was observed peacefully in the city yesterday.

The hartal was called by the Rajshahi Nagorik Committee (RNC), protesting police action on RNC activists during Sunday's Namaj-e-Janaja of Jubo League worker Waj Nabi Dulu, killed in a post-polls clash between Awami League and BNP.

Earlier, a day-long hartal was also observed in the city on Sunday at the call of RNC, demanding re-election to the Rajshahi City Corporation.

During yesterday's hartal, police charged batons and foiled a pro-hartal rally in front of Rajshahi Press Club, leaving 15 people injured, but escorted an anti-hartal procession led by BNP workers at Shaheb Bazar, witnesses said. Senior police officials were present during the police action on the RNC rally.

Those injured in the police action include Workers Party's city unit general secretary Liaqut Ali Liku, Jubo League's city unit president Ashraf Hossain Nabab, and Ferdous Kamal Tutul, Abul Bashar, Abul Kalam Azad and Nabab Ali. All are members of the RNC.

At Bilshimla in the city, an unidentified youth was stabbed

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EC receives complaints from 21 ward commissioners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has received complaints of polls-related irregularities from 21 ward commissioner candidates in Dhaka.

The alleged irregularities include fraudulence, ballot stuffing, rigging and capture of polling stations.

The complainants include a woman who won the just-held city corporation election, an EC official said yesterday.

Some of the complainants demanded recounting of votes, saying presiding officers at the respective centers counted ballots in an unfair manner. They also alleged that their polling agents were forced out of the polling stations during the counting.

Some of them belonged to the ruling coalition and the rest were independent candidates. The complainants are Tasmina Ahmed Ila of reserved (for women candidates) ward 22, Mohammad Nurul Haque

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Apr 30	4-30	6-27pm
May 1	5-25 am	

Prayer Timings		
Apr 30		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-33	6-38
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		



PHOTO: STAR

Businessmen stage a sit-in in front of Chittagong Press Club yesterday, demanding rescue of Monir Ahmed, an abducted businessman, and punishment to the abductors.

Indian cabinet minister quits protesting Gujarat riots

AP, Ahmadabad

A member of the national Cabinet resigned yesterday on the eve of a Parliament debate on the government's handling of religious violence that has killed more than 900 people in Gujarat state.

Two Muslims were killed, and five people were injured, in an explosion yesterday when a group of Muslims were handling bombs on the roof of a house in the Mansuri district of Ahmadabad, the state's commercial hub.

Ram Vilas Paswan, the minister for coal and mines, handed his resignation letter to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, to express his resentment over the failure of the Gujarat government to stop two months of sectarian violence, said a spokesman for Paswan.

The prime minister accepted the resignation, Press Trust of India reported.

The four Parliament members

from Paswan's Lok Janshakti (People's Power) party, one of 19 parties in Vajpayee's coalition government, will vote against the government at the end of today's debate, said party spokesman R.S. Bidhuri.

Paswan has joined in the opposition demands for the removal of Gujarat's top elected official, Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who is a member of Vajpayee's party. Paswan had also urged the imposition of federal rule in the state.

The official death toll in India's worst Hindu-Muslim violence in more than a decade increased to 902, while human rights groups and Western diplomats say more than 2,000 have died.

The violence in Gujarat began when a Muslim mob set fire to a train carrying Hindu pilgrims on Feb. 27, leading to Hindu reprisals.

Groups of Hindus and Muslims have used crude homemade acid and gasoline bombs and other incendiary devices to attack one

another and to set fire to shops, offices and homes.

Two people were killed Sunday night, one of them when police opened fire to disperse Hindu and Muslim mobs in Ahmadabad's Kalupur neighborhood. At least 22 others were injured in clashes in different parts of the city, police said.

The opposition parties held up proceedings in India's Parliament for a week until the chairmen of both houses agreed to allow debates -- leading to a possible censure vote -- on the government's handling of the situation in Gujarat.

The debate in the most powerful lower house, the Lok Sabha, begins today. The upper house, the Rajya Sabha, begins its debate Thursday.

Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party was widely expected to win the motion. Losing the censure vote would not bring down his government, but it would be an embarrassment and could expose fissures in the governing alliance.

Govt has tarnished country's image in 6 months: Hasina

UNB, Washington

Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir were tortured on police remand and Tanjim Soheli MP was beaten up by police "in flagrant violation of human rights."

Hasina blamed the government for creating an infernal situation through repression on her party men and burning down their houses and business besides repression on the minorities and rape of girls.

People want to get rid of this "terrible situation," she told the gathering of expatriates in the United States.

Referring to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's planned trip to USA for attending the UN conference on children, the ex-PM said it would be "mockery" with children as she alleged that rape of minor girls of seven to 12 years by "BNP cadres" continued back at home.

The Awami League chief also recounted that while in power in the previous term, Khaleda Zia had similarly attended women's conference in Beijing after the rape and murder of Yasmin in Dinajpur, which she said was a cruel joke with the womenfolk.

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8 get life term for killing college student in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Eight people were sentenced to life term for killing Murad Ahmed Chowdhury alias Shipor, a student of Madan Mohan College in Sylhet town.

The Additional District & Sessions Judge, First Court, Sylhet passed the judgement Sunday afternoon.

Shipor, a second year student, was returning home from a coaching centre in the afternoon on February 25, 1996. A gang of young people hit him with sharp weapons and left him in a critical condition on roadside. He was rushed to the Osmani Medical College Hospital and when being shifted to Dhaka, he succumbed to injuries.

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Alamgir undergoes chekup at DMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former state minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir was brought to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday for a health chekup.

He was sent back to jail after his X-ray and ultrasonography were done. Asked about Mohiuddin's condition of health, Dr Mizanur Rahman, head of the Department of Radiology, DMCH, told this correspondent to contact the higher authorities.

Family members have complained that Mohiuddin has more ailments that are not being treated properly.

Police prevented photojournalists from taking snaps of Mohiuddin on the way to the DMCH. As a result, an altercation followed.

Mohiuddin was arrested at the Zia International Airport on March 15 under the Section 54 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

He was then placed on police remand and allegedly tortured during interrogation. After the completion of remand period, Mohiuddin was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail and a sedition case was filed against him.