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Fatah confirms Abbas as candidate to succeed Arafat

AFP, Ramallah

The Fatah Revolutionary Council Thursday approved the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's moderate number two Mahmud Abbas as the mainstream movement's candidate to succeed him in January polls, an official said.

Abbas, who has already replaced Arafat as chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), was named by the Fatah central committee as the party's candidate three days ago.

His nomination needed final approval from the group's Revolutionary Council, which was given during a meeting late

Thursday in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Of the 109 Council members present, 107 voted for Abbas and two abstained, said Palestinian cabinet secretary Tayeb Abdelrahim.

He had earlier said Abbas' nomination was approved by 97 to two abstentions, but said he had been mistaken about the number of people eligible to cast their votes.

Many of those who failed to attend from the 129-member strong body, were from the Gaza Strip and were unable to travel to the West Bank because of Israeli travel restrictions.

It emerged earlier Thursday that jailed West Bank Fatah leader

Marwan Barghouti also intends to run for in the January 9 presidential race.

Members of Fatah's higher committee, which is still officially headed by Barghouti, said the 45-year-old firebrand had transmitted a message via his lawyer that he wanted to succeed Arafat.

With Abbas confirmed as Fatah's candidate, Barghouti would probably have to run as an independent.

But it remains to be seen whether he is really prepared to divide Fatah. He insisted on the need for Palestinians to "retain our national unity" in a message issued immediately

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Bangla Bhai men beat up jatra organiser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Cadres of militant outfit Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMB) seriously injured an organiser of jatra (traditional theatre) and set fire to the under construction podium in Bagmara upazila on Thursday night.

Sazedul Haque, a local businessman and an organiser of the theatre, was admitted to a city clinic as the JMB activists smashed his hands and legs with hockey sticks.

A group of eight JMB cadres led by Abdus Samad kidnapped Sazed from Shikdari Bazar.

They took him to a neighbouring field, tied his hands and legs and tortured him mercilessly.

Later local people rescued Sazed unconscious.

The miscreants also torched the podium.

The militants earlier threatened Sazed of dire consequences if he did not stop holding theatre in the village.

The theatre was organised with permission from the district administration.

When contacted, Bagmara police said they were not aware of the incident as no case was filed.

Sazed's family members, on the other hand, alleged that police were helping the JMB.

Followers of JMB commander Bangla Bhai have started reorganising in the northwestern regions since last month, sources said.

Harry hurries home after kidnap scare

AFP, London

Prince Harry, the younger son of Britain's Prince Charles, returned home yesterday from a private stay in Argentina amid reports that he had cut his stay short after shots were fired not far from his lodgings.

Britain's Sun and Daily Express mass-circulation newspapers reported a possible plot to kidnap or attack Prince Harry. The Sun added that British police were understood to have received "credible intelligence" of such an attempt.

Both newspapers said Harry, who has spent most of November on a polo farm in the South American country as part of a "gap year" between leaving school and joining the military, was returning early.

Harry, who is third in line for the throne after his father and his elder brother William, arrived at London's Heathrow Airport on Friday morning, reporters at the scene said.

However a spokeswoman for the 20-year-old prince, a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, insisted that he had come home on the same day as always planned, refusing to say whether there had been an incident.

"Security is constantly reviewed, but we don't comment on security matters here anyway," she said.

A source close to royal family told AFP that the Argentine police had confirmed that "there were hunters quite nearby (where Harry was staying) a few nights ago" and they apparently had fired shots.

Poor relief in flooded Dhunat

Wasted fields under waist-high sand

PINAKI ROY, back from Bogra

This year's twin floods and collapse of a Brahmaputra river embankment beside Jamuna in the Dhunat upazila of Bogra dumped up to four feet of sand on crop fields, leaving some 50,000 bigha of land uncultivable. Yet few of the flood-affected poor in Dhunat upazila villages got neither agriculture rehabilitation assistance nor house-building grants.

During the devastating country-wide floods, Dhunat dwellers were victimized by the sabotage of an

embankment in mid-July floods. After vested interest quarter allegedly cut open the Brahmaputra flood embankment along the fierce-flowing Jamuna river, it washed over thousands of houses.

The overnight breach of the flood-control embankment forced hundreds of families to live out in the open without food. When the floodwaters receded, the villages and fields were knee-deep to waist-deep in sand.

Much of it remains today. Most local farmers are far too poor to remove the sands or rebuild their

houses. The agriculture officer of Dhunat upazila, Anwar Alam, said official records count about 20,000 bighas of land remaining uncultivated. But the local union committee chairman, Mainul Hasan Mukul, said the quantity of untillable land was much greater.

Muhammed Al Amin, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Dhunat, said: "The government has done as much as possible, but it was not enough to recover the damages of devastating floods." He admitted that more than three quarters of the

35,437 flood-affected farmers in the upazila were not included in the agricultural rehabilitation.

The policy was to assist only farmers with at least one bigha of land. According to the government statistics, 7,000 farmers own less than one bigha of land out of 20,981 in the Dhunat upazila were thus excluded. Yet these 7000 farmers, being most poor, need most help.

"I did not get any sort of government aid other than the 10 kilograms of rice per month from the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)"

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Farmers in Dhunat clear the waist-deep silt gathered on their cropland during the recent floods.

PHOTO: HASIBUR RAHMAN BLO

Top Khulna outlaw held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police arrested top criminal Ripon and his three accomplices on Dhaka road in Jessore town early yesterday.

According to Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP), Ripon is an armed cadre of outlawed Purbia Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) and accused in journalists Manik Saha and Humayun Kabir Bahu murder cases.

Senior officials of Jessore district police are quizzing Ripon and his accomplices.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Jessore Sadar Police Station said Ripon used to stay in the houses of Mizan and Reaz who are also armed cadres of PBCP (Janajuddho) and FIR-named accused in Manik Saha and Balu murder cases.

17 killed in powerful quakes in Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

At least 17 people were killed, over 130 injured and more than 300 homes destroyed yesterday when an earthquake hit a town in Indonesia's Papua province for the second time in nine months, officials said.

Terrified residents in the coastal town of Nabire have pitched tents outside their homes amid continuous aftershocks and badly need more tents and medicine, a senior police officer said by phone.

"A total of 11 bodies have been identified but there are six others which are still buried under rubble of destroyed buildings," said Commissioner Wempi Batlayeri, the

town's deputy police chief.

The state Antara news agency, in a report from the provincial capital Jayapura, gave a similar death toll.

The quake and smaller shocks had injured 133 people, 30 of them seriously, and destroyed 328 homes and other buildings, Batlayeri said.

"The current condition in Nabire is pitch black, there is no lighting. Almost every minute aftershocks can be felt," he told AFP by telephone.

Residents set up camp outside their houses fearing further tremors while tents were pitched outside the town's main hospital to treat victims.

The police officer said limited

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Project for 3 observatories finally gets green signal

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

The government has decided to resume implementation of a seismic observatory in Sylhet after a setback of three years.

Implementation of three such observatories in Sylhet, Gazipur and Rangpur and overhaul of another in Chittagong under a project were suspended for the last three years due to fund shortage.

The project has been renamed Development of Seismological Service and its cost revised to Tk 14 crore.

An official on Thursday said the four-year-old project has recently got approval of Ecneec (Executive Committee of the National Economic Council).

We hope to float tender for seismological equipment soon after

observing necessary formalities, he added.

Construction of the three buildings was complete about three years back. But the Public Works Department (PWD) did not hand over them to the Department of Meteorology.

Moreover, the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance stopped funding the project after it came to power in 2001. The alliance government also withheld release of funds sanctioned earlier, said a senior official of the meteorology department asking not to be identified.

According to the project proposal (PP), the government was to finance the venture, but later they decided to procure equipment from the donors.

Initially, some donors showed interest but turned back due to delay

in construction of the three buildings.

The revised Tk 14-crore project will now be implemented by the government's funding, as all efforts to obtain donors' assistance failed.

Earlier, a Tk-10-crore project styled Development of Agro-Meteorological & Seismological Service was first undertaken in 1999-2000 by the then Awami League government.

A revised PP later raised the project cost to Tk 18.17 crore, and the three buildings were constructed and the four-decade-old observatory in Chittagong partly overhauled.

As the risk of earthquake has now increased in the wake of some recent tremors, the necessity of the observatories was deeply felt.

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15 children rescued from Dublarchar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Coastguards rescued 15 children from Dublarchar adjacent to the Sundarbans and the Bay of Bengal on Thursday night.

Commanding officer M A Matin of Mongla Coastguard Station yesterday said the children aged between 6 and 12 were rescued from different dry fish farms in the char area. They were employed in odd jobs and physically tortured by the fish farm owners.

On the same night, the coastguards arrested 15 pirates in Swarankhola upazila who were about to commit piracy in the fishing boats. Two firearms were recovered from their possession, Coastguard sources said.

The arrestees are Akka, Panna, Delwar-1, Alam, Yunus, Jalal, Alam-2, Khokon, Shafiqul, Yunus-2, Khalil, Sentu, Nasir and Delwar-2.

'Resist move for immunity to WB'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday called for a robust movement against the government move to give immunity to the World Bank (WB).

Following 'dictates' of the WB, the country over the years has made hardly any progress, they said at a discussion held at Swaparjito Swadhinata Chattar near Teachers Students Center (TSC) in Dhaka University (DU).

The discussion was organised by Bangladesh Odhikar O Unnayan Kendra (BOUK), a citizens' forum on 'Immunity of International Financial Institutions: Bangladesh Context'.

"The World Bank speaks of democracy, accountability and transparency. But now their des-

peration to get immunity has raised question about its own respect for democracy and transparency," said MM Akash, an economics professor of DU.

He said the WB does not give any aid to Bangladesh, it just gives the country loans, and the government has to pay it back with the public money. "So, why should our government be so keen to grant immunity to the World Bank?" questioned professor Akash.

Hinting at WB Bangladesh Mission Chief Christine Wallich, Akash said she has been shamelessly lying to the media that the Bretton Woods institution enjoys immunity in all other member countries. The fact is officials of the WB may get

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Ulfa claims blowing up oil well

AFP, Guwahati

A powerful Indian separatist rebel group claimed responsibility Friday for blowing up an oil well and injuring at least five soldiers in the restive northeast.

A spokesman for the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) told reporters the blasts Thursday were in response to a "lack of positive response from the Indian

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| Prayer Timing | | |
|---------------|-------|--------|
| November 27 | | |
| | Azan | Jamaat |
| Fair | 5-10 | 5-45 |
| Zohr | 12-45 | 1-15 |
| Asr | 3-45 | 4-00 |
| Maghrib | 5-19 | 5-22 |
| Esha | 7-00 | 7-30 |

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