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Kuwait emir dies

REUTERS, Kuwait

Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, who rebuilt his Gulf Arab state after US-led forces drove Saddam Hussein's occupation troops from the country in 1991, died yesterday at the age of 78.

Sheikh Jaber, who had ruled since 1977, died after a long illness and the country's ailing crown prince is set to take over as ruler of 78.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

PM flies to Kuwait to offer condolences

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will leave Dhaka this morning for Kuwait to offer her deep condolences to the Kuwaiti people at the demise of Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan will accompany her.

Khaleda Zia is going to express her deep shock at the death of the Emir personally on behalf of the government, people of Bangladesh and herself, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin said.

The prime minister's visit is the reflection of the Bangladesh's solidarity with the government and the people of Kuwait at this hour of bereavement, he said and added that the visit would be seen in the light of close brotherly and friendly relations between the two countries.

The prime minister, who leaves Dhaka at 9:30am today, will formally offer the condolences this afternoon and also congratulate the new Emir. She is expected to return home tomorrow morning.

Bangladesh Ambassador in Kuwait Nazrul Islam Khan, who is

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Dhaka still in Eid hangover

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The city has not yet regained its usual busy looks although the government offices resumed work yesterday after five days of Eid-ul-Azha and weekend holidays as most private offices and business houses are yet to start operation.

The presence at the government offices was quite low and most officials and employees spent the day by exchanging Eid greetings, embracing each other and idling.

Many seats and rooms at the secretariat were found empty because many officials are yet to join work as they took leave for

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

VOTER LIST CONTROVERSY

Commissioners fail to reach CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chief election commissioner (CEC) still remains incommunicado as the other two election commissioners wait for him to convene immediately an Election Commission (EC) meeting to decide on the voter list in line with the High Court's directives.

Election commissioners M Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali have yet to succeed in contacting CEC MA Aziz despite making several phonecalls to his residence last week. Aziz did not respond to any of the calls.

The two made yet another call at about 12:00 noon yesterday, but

the staff of the CEC residence told them that he had gone to the hospital, the commissioners told journalists.

The CEC was in fact home when the phonecall was made, but he did not talk to them. When a group of journalists went to his residence yesterday, they were not allowed to meet him and the security personnel at the entrance said the CEC returned home from the hospital by 11:00am.

"Actually, we have failed to get to the chief election commissioner and we don't know what will become of the meeting of the commission," Munsef Ali said.

He and Mohammad Ali yesterday

discussed the prevailing situation at the commission. They decided to implement the High Court's January 4 directives.

In presence of Munsef Ali, Election Commissioner Mohammad Ali made the yesterday's call to the CEC residence to enquire about his condition and the issue of holding an immediate meeting of the commission.

"But we couldn't talk to him nor to his wife as the person at the other end hung up the phone and did not receive our call afterwards," Mohammad Ali said.

Meanwhile, officials of the SPRC

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Govt trying to snatch people's voting rights

Says Hasina on return from hajj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the BNP-Jamaat alliance government is trying to snatch the people's constitutional right to franchise through manipulating the voter list.

"The chief election commissioner, with direction from the government, has continued voter listing violating the High Court's order," Hasina, who is also the chief of the main opposition Awami League (AL), told journalists at the Zia International Airport on her return from Saudi Arabia after performing Hajj.

"The BNP-Jamaat alliance government had come to power by

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

JMB man jailed for 15 yrs in first-ever verdict

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

In the first-ever verdict on an explosives case against a JMB operative, a court here yesterday sentenced him to 15 years' rigorous imprisonment and fined Tk 2,000 or two-month jail in default.

Special Tribunal Judge Bhabani Prasad Shingha awarded the punishment to Obaidullah Sumon, 25, a member of the banned Islamist militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), for possessing explosives and bomb-making materials.

Sumon is the first Islamist militant to be convicted since the August 17 countrywide near-simultaneous bomb blasts. He

also stands accused in another case still under trial filed in connection with the August 17 terror strike.

The police arrested him on September 14 in a Gazipur den with explosives, power gel and 50 detonators. The same day Sub-Inspector Shahjahan of Nikhlee Police Station filed the case against him under the Arms and Explosives Substances Act, which was disposed off yesterday.

Later, Sumon was also shown arrested for planting a bomb in Number 32 Bus Stand area in the town on August 17.

During the hearing of the explosives case yesterday, Sumon confessed to the crime and said, "I don't want any lawyer. I will

accept any verdict given by the court, as I was found with the detonator in my hands."

A total of 154 cases have been filed so far in connection with the August 17 orchestrated bomb blasts in 63 districts.

Another 42 cases had been filed in connection with the subsequent bomb attacks and incidents of JMB den busting until December 26, according to government figures.

A total of 642 people have been arrested to date in connection with 196 of the cases. Of the arrestees, 102 are still under investigation and the police have charged 478 others in 92 cases. Twelve of the cases are currently undergoing trial in various courts.



PHOTO: STAR

Sadarhat terminal is thronged with passengers as several launches arrive there at the same time yesterday due to foggy weather. The terminal is too small to cope with such rush.

ASIAN HIGHWAY

Neighbours plan road networks bypassing Bangladesh

RAFIQ HASAN

The government's refusal to join the Asian Highway network connecting 32 Asian countries with Europe has led to an opportunity for the neighbours to develop road network bypassing Bangladesh, said experts.

In April, 2002, India, Myanmar and Thailand signed an agreement to develop a road network among themselves and a number of high level discussions followed to accelerate the work, they pointed out.

Under the agreement, India offered financial help to Yangon for developing its road and establishing a road link between its eastern provinces and Myanmar port city Akyab.

Besides, India would develop its road from Assam to Kolkata and New Delhi for giving the network a final shape.

"Now these countries may

accelerate the development of the network and declare it as part of the Asian Highway following the refusal of Bangladesh," said Dr M Rahmatullah, former director of The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific (ESCAP), the sponsor of Asian Highway.

A road already exists in that direction and the only requirement is to upgrade it according to the standard of Asian Highway, he pointed out.

The refusal to join such a big road network may cause a great damage to the interest of Bangladesh, Rahmatullah said, adding that if Dhaka had agreed to join, the other countries would have easily agreed on the roads through Bangladesh as part of Asian Highway because it would be much shorter.

As Bangladesh declined to join,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Lower court judges start token protest

Govt yet to meet their demands

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Judges of the lower courts across the country yesterday wore black badges during court proceedings protesting government inaction to meet all of their 11-point demand.

The token protest programme was taken following the declaration of Bangladesh Judicial Service Association (BJSA) at its 55th annual conference on December 21, where it vowed to carry on the protest if their demands are not fulfilled by January 10 this year.

The judges would continue the protest programme for today and tomorrow.

The BJSA on November 21 last year asked the government to provide tax-free vehicles and firearms for all the judges across the country along with personal gunmen and guards at their residences. It also pressed the government to pay Tk 50 lakh each as compensation to the families of the judges, bombed to death by Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Cold claims 15 more lives

STAR REPORT

At least 15 people including six women and two children died of biting cold or cold-related diseases in the last 24 hours as the ongoing cold spell continues to sweep across the country.

Six people including four women and children died of cold and cold-related diseases in Kamarkhanda and Kazipur upazilas in the district yesterday, reports our Sirajganj correspondent.

The dead are Rakib Hossain, 10, son of Alam Khan of Nishchintapur village, Rahela Khatun, 6, of Dhopakandhi village, Khodeza

Khatun, 50, of Peztola village and Kesmot Ali, 70, of Dogachha village in Kamarkhanda and Amena Khatun, 65, of Chalitadanga village and Alef, 60, of Paikordi village in Kazipur.

A severe cold wave blowing over the region since last week is causing acute sufferings to the people, especially the poor and ultra poor in 16 districts. The children and elderly people of the poverty-stricken families are the worst sufferers due to lack of warm clothes.

Besides, a shroud of dense fog is hampering the road and river communications on different routes in the region.

Road mishaps have marked a rise in the region, especially on Dhaka-Dinajpur Highway. At least 15 people were killed in road accidents last week in Sirajganj alone.

Meanwhile, the hospitals in the district are struggling to provide treatment to an influx of patients of cold related diseases every day.

The district administration has claimed it had distributed 4,000 rugs among the poor on the eve of Eid-ul-Azha. But at present there is no sufficient allocation of warm clothes.

RAJSHAHI
An inmate of Rajshahi Central Jail died of cold at Rajshahi Medical

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Two mothers, their 2 sons die in Sylhet road mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two mothers and their two sons met tragic death in two separate road accidents in the district yesterday.

Orpula Begum, 30, and her son Sumon, 10, of Barisal were hit by a truck at around 10:30am while waiting for a minibus on the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway. They were returning home from a relative's house at Khashikapon of Balaganj upazila.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

A hospital in sickbed

Haunted by crooks, Suhrawardy Hospital begs for patients; needs early launch of medical college

AZFAZ AZIZ AND SHAHEEN MOLLAH

A sophisticated 375-bed hospital in the city remains perpetually half empty due to mismanagement, corruption and reign of criminals, while every other government hospital is at the end of its tether in coping with a huge influx of patients.

Hidden behind the National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital (NIOH) on Mirpur

Road, Shaheed Suhrawardy Hospital in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar is mistakenly known to many as the National Institute of Cardio-Vascular Diseases and Hospital, which was transferred to an adjacent plot long ago.

"Most of the people of Dhaka as well as the districts don't know that it's a fully furnished general hospital," an emergency counter clerk at the hospital told The Daily Star during a recent visit. They still take it for a cardiac

hospital.

Even many doctors are not aware of the hospital's existence and refer patients to other already overcrowded hospitals, sources at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) said. If the DMCH doctors cannot accommodate patients in their hospital, in most cases they send them to Mitford Hospital and vice versa, they added.

In a vast 19.8 acre compound,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

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