

Bush hopes polls to be held on time

Hails Bangladesh democracy

UNB, Dhaka

US President George W. Bush hopes that the next general elections in Bangladesh will be held on schedule with participation of all the way it was held in the past, terming Bangladesh a vibrant democracy.

Bush expressed the views in a letter wrote to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca formally handed over the letter to the prime minister at her office yesterday.

The US President in his letter gave positive recognition to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's steps in curbing militancy, saying many countries of the world are victims of such terrorist acts. So, it is imperative that all should work together, he said.

Briefing newsmen after Rocca's meeting with the prime minister, SEE PAGE 19 COL 3

Curb terror finance, militancy to skirt US sanctions

Rocca tells Dhaka

STAR REPORT

The US yesterday asked Bangladesh to take several steps including curbing militancy and terror financing so that it does not face sanctions under the US Terrorist Financing Act.

The visiting US State Department Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca yesterday said Washington is deeply concerned about the rise of militancy and human rights scenario in Bangladesh and wants to see quick and positive solutions to the problems.

Rocca conveyed the concerns of her government to the prime minister, foreign minister and state minister for home affairs during separate meetings yesterday. She said the United States also wants to see that the next general elections are held in time.

She categorically asked State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar to immediately arrest Jama'at ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman and his associate Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, operations commander of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh.

The US government strongly asked Bangladesh to stop money laundering, as it believes the militants are getting their funds

through such unlawful channels.

Sources said the US has suggested several steps including routing money laundering and sharing information with each other to avoid sanctions dictated by its Terrorist Financing Act.

Sources said, under the proposed information-sharing programme, Dhaka will provide Washington with any information it seeks about any individual or organisation and vice versa. Both the countries will share information and intelligence for the interest of each other. The Bangladeshis to be involved in the information sharing will be trained in the USA.

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Biswa Ijtema begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The three-day Biswa Ijtema begins today at Tongi with more than two million devotees from across the country and abroad thronging on the bank of the Turag river to attend the grand congregation of the Muslims.

Delivery of sermons on the tenets of Islam at the Ijtema venue however started yesterday after Maghrib prayers. The congregation will end on Sunday with the Akheri Munajat (concluding prayers).

Meanwhile, preparations for the annual event were already completed and volunteers were however seen yesterday giving some final touches to the huge canopies erected on more than 160 acres of land on the eastern bank of the Turag.

The Ijtema venue has been expanded to the western side as the organisers expect a larger gathering this time.

Islamic scholars from home and abroad will deliver speeches every day at the Ijtema highlighting various aspects of Islam. The speeches will be translated in SEE PAGE 19 COL 7



PHOTO: PID

Visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca meets Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

The family of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria form a human chain as part of their "Blue for Peace" programme in Dhanmondi in the city yesterday on the eve of the first anniversary of his assassination.

SAMS Kibria's first death anniversary today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation today pays tribute to former finance minister and Awami League lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria, who was assassinated in a grisly grenade attack in his hometown in Habiganj on this day last year.

Kibria's murder had sparked violent protests in the streets and the opposition alliance put the blame on the government.

Different foreign missions in Dhaka and the international community also protested against the killing of Kibria, who was also executive director of the Escap with the rank and status of the UN under-secretary-general.

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ONE YEAR OF KIBRIA MURDER

Mastermind remains unknown

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The mastermind behind the assassination of veteran Awami League leader and former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria remains untraced even after one year into the grisly grenade attack that also killed four others at an AL rally in Habiganj.

Investigators said the investigation is complete but they failed to find out the source of the grenade used in the January 27, 2005 attack in lawmaker Kibria's hometown.

The trial is yet to begin although the government announced last year that the trial of the two cases, filed after the carnage, will be held at Sylhet Speedy Trial Tribunal.

The charge sheets in the two cases -- one filed for murder and the other for explosives -- and the report of a high-powered government investigation team have put into question the integrity of the investigators and authenticity of the probes.

In the two charge sheets and the government committee report having almost identical contents, the investigators accused 10 people of the grenade attack, without mentioning anything about the mastermind of the attack and the

source of the grenade.

Both Kibria's family and complainant of the cases Advocate Majid Khan, Habiganj district Awami League organising secretary, are dissatisfied with the investigation while the slain AL lawmaker's relatives demand neutral international probe.

Investigation Officer (IO) of the murder case Munshi Atiqur Rahman yesterday told The Daily Star that the trial was delayed as the High Court stayed proceedings of the case after the complainant filed a writ petition demanding further SEE PAGE 19 COL 4

378 officials promoted to DS rank

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prime minister last night approved the promotion of 378 senior assistant secretaries (AS) to the rank of deputy secretary (DS).

The gazette notification to this effect however was not published till late last night.

Most of the promotees are from the 1985 batch. Sources in the establishment ministry said the wholesale promotion will cause problems as there are not as many posts of DS. Many will have to remain officials on special duties (OSD).

At present some 200 officials of different ranks are OSD.

Over the last one and a half months, the Superior Selection Board (SSB) sat thrice to finalise the list of promotees. Initially the board had 550 officials on the list to choose from and most of them were from '85 batch. Some 122 officials have been left out in the process.

More than a hundred senior AS missed promotion despite having requisite qualifications and marks.

The last time in May 2005, 327 senior assistant secretaries were promoted to the rank of deputy SEE PAGE 19 COL 4

HC rejects bail prayer of Galib

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday rejected three bail petitions filed by Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab) chief Asadullah-al Galib in arms and explosives cases.

After hearing the petitions, Justice Sharifuddin Chaklader, Judge of a single bench of the High Court, passed the order.

Advocate Rafiqul Islam Mehedi, Counsel for Galib, told the news agency that an appeal against the court order will be filed with the Supreme Court.

Police arrested Galib, also a teacher of Rajshahi University, on February 23, 2005 on charge of leading the Islamist militants in northern Bangladesh from his Rajshahi University residence.

The three cases were filed SEE PAGE 19 COL 1

MADHYAPARA HARD ROCK

Project plunges into deep crisis for mine builder's inefficiency

KONGKON KARMAKER and SHARIER KHAN

The Tk 1,275-crore Madhyapara hard rock mining project is in a deep crisis as it can neither start production nor overcome its manifold technical problems caused due to incompetence of the project's North Korean builder Namnam.

About 10 percent of the project work is still to be completed. As per the latest government approval, Namnam was to hand over the project in October last year and the mine was supposed to start production in November. But the company failed to do so.

Initially, the mining project was supposed to be completed in 1998.

"Namnam's gross inefficiency has triggered serious conflicts between Petrobangla and the builder," one source said.

Highly expensive mining equipment on the surface and underground are now rusting due to lack of use, say sources in the Madhyapara Granite Mining Company Ltd (MGMC), a company of Petrobangla.

Experts say Namnam's repeated failures to complete the project demand that the government oust the company from the site, where it is staying illegally since October-November last year, and get a SEE PAGE 19 COL 1

USERS' PERSONAL DETAILS

Mobile phone operators get 2-month deadline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has asked the mobile phone operators to complete the registration of personal details of the existing subscribers within two months.

The telecoms regulator held a meeting with the top executives of the cellphone operators yesterday. Senior officials of the intelligence agencies explained the necessity of the directive at the meeting.

The registration of the subscribers' personal details is the first step the BTRC has initiated as part of the controversial tele-tapping ordinance in the name of national security. SEE PAGE 19 COL 3

'Sick' CEC off-limits to media

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) authorities yesterday imposed a restriction on the media, preventing journalists from entering the hospital's cabin block where the chief election commissioner (CEC) is admitted for treatment.

Security personnel yesterday barred a group of reporters from entering the cabin block saying the higher authorities have instructed them not to allow any journalist into the cabin building. SEE PAGE 19 COL 2

SPLIT EC Alis face alienation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election commissioners M Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali are being sidelined in the Election Commission (EC) for their staunch opposition to preparing a fresh voter list unilaterally decided by the chief election commissioner (CEC).

The EC Secretariat has virtually excommunicated the two commissioners, as no officer is allowed to communicate with them and fearing the consequences no officer also dares to contact them, sources said. SEE PAGE 19 COL 4

The prevailing situation has reduced the role of the commissioners, both of whom are scheduled to retire on April 18, to a nominal presence in office, as the EC Secretariat does not inform them about any development in the commission or discuss any issue.

"We have nothing to do. We just follow the directives of the higher authorities," a senior official at the EC Secretariat told The Daily Star wishing anonymity.

Meanwhile, sources said, CEC MA Aziz and the two newly-appointed election commissioners

Fuel dearer in dists as dealers create artificial crisis

UNB, Dhaka

Fuelled by rumour of price hike, the filling stations in most districts yesterday stopped selling diesel, kerosene and petrol that may seriously affect boro cultivation.

A report from Dinajpur said the filling stations in all 13 upazilas of the district have stopped selling petroleum products in the wake of rumour of price hike. This resulted

in acute shortage of diesel badly needed for Irri-boro cultivation in its peak season.

Scarcity of petrol and diesel was reported from other parts of the country including Sherpur and Bhola. In Bhola, petrol was sold yesterday at Tk 80 and kerosene at Tk 60 per litre.

In Kurigram, the filling stations have stopped selling, saying the SEE PAGE 19 COL 1

Heartiest Welcome

To

H.E. Mr. Nimal Sirpala De Silva

H'ble Minister for Healthcare & Nutrition of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

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