

## V-Day celebrated

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31-gun salute at dawn. All government and semi-government offices and public and private buildings hoisted the national flag and special prayers were offered at mosques, temples, churches and other places of worship, seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country.

State-run and private televisions and radios aired special programmes while newspapers carried special supplements highlighting the significance of the day and contributions of the common people in the Liberation War.

Main streets and road islands in different cities including Dhaka were decorated with miniature flags and bunting while some government buildings were also illuminated.

Improved diets were served in jails, hospitals, orphanages and vagrant homes on the day.

Thousands of jubilant people thronged the national mausoleum since early morning on the anniversary of the country's emergence.

After paying homage, President Iajuddin Ahmed attended a colourful rally of children and juveniles staged at Bangabandhu Stadium as part of state-level celebrations. He inaugurated the programme by releasing balloons and hoisting the national flag in the morning.

The president took salute and witnessed spectacular physical displays and exercises by schoolgoers. A total of 31 schools and institutions participated in the programme.

Addressing the function, he called for a concerted contribution to maintaining the continuity of the constitution and advancing the democracy for building a prosperous nation.

Urging for united efforts to make the national independence and

democracy meaningful, the president observed that the nation is now in a 'great war' that is to build a happy and prosperous country, reports UNB.

He hosted a reception at Bangabhaban in the afternoon. Similar reception was accorded to freedom fighters at district and upazila levels.

A weeklong exhibition of military hardware that began Friday at National Parade Square to commemorate the victory against the Pakistanis is on.

Reports said navy ships were kept open for public at Chittagong, Khulna and Mongla ports, Sadarghat in Dhaka, and Narayanganj and Barisal BIVTA jetties.

Bangla Academy and Shilpakala Academy arranged cultural functions on their premises in the afternoon. Bangladesh Shishu Academy arranged cultural function, film exhibition and painting competition.

Bangladesh missions abroad also organised discussions and cultural functions on the occasion.

The AL that chalked out a two-day celebration took out a victory procession from 'Shikha Chirantan' in the afternoon that ended at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum. Sheikh Hasina met freedom fighters, artistes of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra and intellectuals at Sudha Sadan office in the morning.

BNP took up elaborate programmes to celebrate the occasion and will bring out a colourful procession from its Naya Paltan central office premises today.

## 'Informal' move

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proposals, new advisers were appointed and tasked with resolving the crisis by forging a consensus between the two political alliances.

A meeting of the council of advisers on Wednesday decided to re-initiate moves to resolve the deadlock over EC reconstitution.

The president on Friday summoned three advisers—Shafiqul Haque Choudhury, Dr Shobek Ahmed and Ruhul Alam Chowdhury—at Bangabhaban and enquired about the progress of their move.

Adviser Shafiqul told reporters that night that they sought a few more days to complete the negotiations.

The advisers to the caretaker government yesterday attended the Victory Day reception at Bangabhaban, but they could not discuss the latest political situation with the president.

Political analysts said the situation is becoming complex with the crisis yet to be resolved although there are only four days for filing nomination papers.

If the AL-led 14-party alliance, Jatiya Party and Liberal Democratic Party, which have been demanding deferment of the election by over a month, do not file candidatures within the time, either the polls schedule will be re-fixed once again or the election will be held amid boycott by some major political parties.

latest situation," he said.

Another adviser said on condition of anonymity, "I am not aware of any kind of development over resolving the political deadlock."

Meanwhile, the time for filing nomination papers for the next parliamentary election is running out fast. The deadline is December 21.

But the AL-led 14-party alliance has already announced that it will not participate in the election under the current schedule.

The previous polls schedule had December 10 as the last date for filing nomination. The date was re-fixed in line with the advisory council's package proposal.

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## Brickfields threaten

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feet, said environmentalist Prodip Chowdhury.

Prodip Chowdhury, also the programme supervisor of Centre for Sustainable Development (CFS), said the diminishing forest in Khagrachari is going to have a negative impact on the environment in the entire region.

A Mymensingh Agriculture University student, Sathowai Marma, blamed brickfields for trees without fruits—which is a common phenomenon in his village in Golabari, where water level is also on the decline during the winter.

An indigenous farmer, Mongshipur Marma, pointed out at the brickfields' impact on the local agriculture, "Paddy as well as other crop production is declining day by day as more and more cultivable fertile land is ending up at brickfields."

Mongshipur, a teacher at a local high school, also alleged that the brickfield owners regularly bribe the officials responsible for safeguarding public interest.

This correspondent made several visits to eight upazilas of the hill district and found that at least 44 brickfields in Khagrachari, Mairang, Mahalchhari, Manikchhari, Dighinala, Panchhauri, Ramgarh and Laxmichhari use up around 2 crore mounds of firewood illegally per year.

The authorities there turned a blind eye to the violations of law by the brickfield owners where they have been using timber as fuel instead of coal, said the sources.

An official in the district administration on condition of anonymity admitted some government officials' involvement in the illegal activities and said the number of brickfields might be higher than 44. "We can't get the real statistics of the brickfields as some of our officials are also involved in these illegal activities."

Five of these brickfields have valid licences while 17 more are in the process of acquiring their licences, said a second-class magistrate in the district administration on condition of anonymity.

However the DoE said only two out of the 44 brickfields have valid documents and licences.

The two licensed brickfields also use timber as firewood violating the environmental regulations, sources complained.

According to an estimate, at least 2.4 lakh mounds of firewood are required in each brickfield per year, sources said quoting a survey.

The brickfield owners, with the help of a section of dishonest employees of the forest department, cut down more than 13 crore timber trees to be

consumed at the brickfields, sources said.

Mohammad Nurunnabi, owner of a brickfield, admitted using firewood in his brickfield and wanted to 'negotiate' with local journalists as he already made 'negotiations' with authorities concerned on the matter.

A brickfield owner from Dighinala upazila said on condition of anonymity that the Brick Field Owners Association maintains liaison with the authorities and donates Tk 50,000 to 70,000 perfield to their 'fund'.

Shah-e-Alam, district forest officer, denied any misuse of the forest in return of bribes by his officials and said, "I do not know of any such use of timbers as fuel in the brickfields. I will take proper action if I catch them in action."

Khagrachari coordinator of Bela (Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association) Muhammad Abu Daud said his organisation is considering taking legal action to stop abuse of the natural forest as firewood in the brickfields.

Magistrate Sheikh Farid also requested the deputy commissioner (DC) to form a mobile court to investigate the firewood and chimney issues. However, he could not confirm if the DC has taken any such initiative yet.

## Military

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DMCH sources said the two other injured left hospital after receiving primary treatment.

Monto's brother Ruhul Amin filed an unnatural death case with Kafur Police Station, said police.

## Call for unified

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Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, late president Ziaur Rahman and countless martyrs, Liberal Democratic Party presidium member and former state minister Redowan Ahmed criticised the so-called national alliance.

On Mannan Bhuiyan's comment, where he said that the war criminals and collaborators remain unidentified even after 35 years of liberation, LDP leader Didar Bakht expressed his deep shock, "How come Mannan Bhuiyan or Sadeque Hossain Khoka utter such a lie, while they themselves once fought against these Rajakars?"

The leaders also criticised Khaleda Zia's aide to let the war collaborators hoist the national flag at their vehicles and Tarique Zia's comment where he said Jamaat Shibir and BNP belong to the same family.

The CPJ said during the turmoil of this pre-election season, a free press is crucial to the strength of the democratic process. But the press cannot be free without the assurance of safety.

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## US health

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The FDA convened a two-day meeting of outside experts to discuss Ketek in light of concerns about its safety. An agency review found 13 reports of liver failure in patients treated with the drug through September. Reports of blurry vision also have been a concern. Doctors have prescribed the antibiotic more than 5.6 million times in the United States since the FDA approved it in 2004.

On Friday, the FDA panelists voted 16-3 to say Ketek's benefits outweigh its risks in treating pneumonia. In 17-2 votes, the outside advisers said that wasn't the case for bronchitis and sinusitis, which are less serious infections and often spontaneously resolve on their own.

Dr. John Jenkins, director of the FDA's office of new drugs, declined to say what action the agency would take. The FDA isn't bound to follow the advice of its outside experts, but usually does.

"We will be assessing the advice we received from the committee and discussing that very shortly," Jenkins said.

The panel also recommended Sanofi-Aventis develop a medication guide to be given to patients, a move backed by the company.

Dr. John Edwards, of Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in Torrance, Calif., and the panel's acting chairman, called the two-day meeting particularly challenging, since it came amid concern that companies have diminishing interest in developing new antibiotics and increased interest in safety issues linked to the drugs.

Many experts fear overuse of antibiotics is hastening the increasing resistance of many bacteria to older drugs, making the development of novel treatments critical. Some panelists suggested reserving Ketek for second-line use in treating pneumonia.

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pouring out allegations against the EC enumerators and the local BNP and Jamaat leaders and activists.

They said field level EC officials visited their slums and houses accompanied by local leaders of BNP and its front organisations.

Leaders of the local units of BNP and its youth front Jubo Dal took the EC officials to their supporters' houses and slums only, alleged the aggrieved residents.

"We saw some of the field level officials writing 'A' on their papers next to the names of known Awami League supporters and activists," alleged a local resident while many around him were also echoing him.

Mostafa, a local Awami League activist was beaten by BNP activists as he protested against the alleged irregularities, said some eyewitnesses.

A former Jatiyatobadi Chhata Dal activist of ward no 5 said the allegation is true, requesting anonymity.

"We supervised and helped the field level EC officials in their work," said Golam Rasul Shamim, son of Rafiqul Islam, the general secretary of the thana unit of BNP.

"We could not register the names of many prospective voters of this area as they might move out to other places in the city before the polling day," said Shamim.

Rafiqul Islam also admitted that BNP and its front organisation leaders

and activists 'helped' the EC officials in their work.

When confronted with the allegation that Awami League supporters and activists were being left out of the voter list, he however showed utter astonishment and termed the allegation as a 'baseless rumour'.

"They (field level officials) did not include us as voters," said Nurjahan, a resident of ward no 5, adding, "They rather told us to contact the thana election office."

"The field level officials left our slum without registering us as voters," claimed Sekandar (65) and Masuda Khatun.

"We were not registered as voters at all at the time of the earlier updating of the list," Sekandar alleged.

Meanwhile, our Comilla correspondent reported that EC enumerators dropped the names of some seven thousand voters from the list in Sadar South upazila there.

The much talked about correction of the voter list in eleven days began on December 8 across the country amid lack of proper guidelines, preparation, and enthusiasm among the field level staff for the job.

Constant allegations of some major irregularities in correcting the updated voter list have been being reported both in the capital and elsewhere in the country since the process began.

## Tax exemption

FROM PAGE 1

"It is also argued that it violates the principle of equity and free flow of resources among alternative uses," the study stated, concluding. "The tax holiday facility may be withdrawn as suggested by the Revenue Reform Commission."

NBR sources said many businessmen and politicians misuse the tax-holiday for evading taxes, falsely citing income from agriculture and fisheries sectors that enjoy tax facility to induce investment.

The study suggested the current system be replaced by the existing "accelerated depreciation allowances" or a "reduced tax rate with a lower rate in earlier years", which would increase gradually.

The study also found tax exemptions are the highest in Value Added Tax (VAT) in terms of revenue loss and as percentage of revenue earning, and suggested a review of VAT to reduce exemptions. In this regard, it cited as examples commercial educational and training institutions, commercial renters, and income of brokers at the stock market.

For direct taxation, exemption is the highest in agriculture (15 percent), fisheries and forest (12 percent), and public services and labour and employment (5 percent), the study found.

Of the Tk 9,345 crore tax exemptions, Tk 1,028 crore is in the 'direct taxes' category, while indirect taxes account for Tk 8,317 crore. Of the indirect taxes, VAT exemption totals Tk 7,687 crore and customs duty Tk 365 crore.

The study recommended "organisational reinvention" of the tax administration, expanding the tax

base in categories such as income tax and VAT as well as setting an operational definition and methodology for 'tax exemption'.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are currently pressuring the government to reduce tax exemptions to boost revenue earnings.

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