

New CG urged to take steps for holding free, fair polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different organisations yesterday expressed hope and optimism that the new caretaker government (CG) led by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed will take necessary steps for holding a free and fair parliamentary election and handing over power to the elected representatives.

Fema and Janipop, two non-government organisations that monitor election, yesterday expressed satisfaction at the postponement of "not-fully-participatory" election scheduled earlier on January 22 and hoped that the new caretaker government will hold election at the earliest possible time.

In a press release, they said reformation of the Election Commission (EC) and correction of the voter list are must.

They also urged the interim government to reshuffle civil and police administration and collect personal information of the candidates for presenting to the voters.

Hailing Dr Fakhruddin as the new CA at a meeting in the city yesterday, Bangladesh Manobadikar Samonnoy Parishad (BMSP) leaders said a sense of relief returned to public life.

BMSM Chairman AHM Noman demanded abolition of caretaker government system and formation of Election Supervisory Council.

Meanwhile, leaders of Peshajibi

Samonnoy Parishad at a meeting on Friday expressed hope that the new caretaker government will restore political stability in the country.

They said the crisis is not over, yet the nation got rid of apprehended violence and worry resulting from the process of holding a one-sided election on January 22.

Dr AMS Arefin Siddique presided over the meeting, where he said holding a free and fair election with participation of all political parties is the only way to resolve the existing crisis.

He also demanded a correct voter roll with voters' identity cards and introduction of transparent ballot box.

Bangladeshi schoolboy shot dead by BSF

UNB, Panchagarh

Another victim of Friday's Indian BSF firing at Tentulia border died yesterday raising the death toll to two.

Yakub, 10, a student of class IV of Majhipara primary school and son of Abdul Motaleb of Pediagaj village, died on way to Rangpur Medical College Hospital, police said.

BSF fire from across the border on Friday left Mobarak Ali, 30, dead on the spot and injured four others of Pediagaj village. Bullet wounded Shahid Ali and Shahabuddin are undergoing treatment in Tentulia Hospital.

Nayabari BSF company commander AC Parmar at a flag meeting with his BDR counterpart Abdul Aziz at Sariajot border yesterday regretted their unprovoked fire across the border resulting in death and injury to innocent people. Parmar assured against recurrence of such incident in future, BDR sources said.

Arms factory unearthed in Cox's Bazar

UNB, Cox's Bazar

An illegal arms factory was unearthed at Natun bazar of Maheshkhali Island yesterday.

Police raided the factory and seized four guns, arms making materials and machinery. Factory owner Sarwar and his employees managed to escape sensing the police presence.

Police said they suspect guns made in the factory have been supplied to the terrorists and political thugs ahead of general election.

BRDB test results postponed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) postponed the publication of the result of its written test for the post of upazila rural development officer, assistant rural development officer and accountant due on January 16.

BRDB at a press release yesterday said due to unavoidable circumstances the result of the written test held on Friday has been postponed.

Appeal for help

A father has appealed for financial assistance for the treatment of his son who has been suffering from severe kidney ailment, says a press release.

Mashirul Rahman Mithu, 19, a student of Mirpur Bangla College, is now fighting for his life at Bangladesh Kidney Hospital at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

According to doctors, he needs better treatment immediately. But a huge amount is required for such treatment, which his father, a government employee with low income, could not afford.

He has appealed to general people and different organisations to extend a helping hand to save his son's life.

Contributions can be sent to the following account: Nadira Dilruba Parul, Mudaraba Savings Account No. 7416, Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited, Tongi branch, Gazipur.

Interested persons can also call at 01721255463 and 01818439352 to contact his family.

Taslimur Rahman speaks at a seminar on 'Implementation of Bangladesh Labour Law - 2006 and the responsibilities of employers, trade unions and workers to ensure certain rights' at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his right is Justice Naimuddin Ahmed and on his left is Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed. Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust organised the seminar.

FIRE IN CITY SLUM Victims spend night under open sky

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The victims of Friday's fire incident in which about 200 shanties were reduced to ashes near the FDC in the city have passed their day and night in inhuman condition.

The fire ripped through the Ramma slum at around 4:00pm on Friday, rendering about 1000 people homeless. They are now crying for food, shelter and warm clothes as they have lost everything in the fire.

"I along with my four daughters spent the whole night under open sky amid biting cold," said Mintoo Hawlader, a victim, in tear-choked voice yesterday.

Mintoo, the only bread-winner

for the poverty-stricken family of six and earns Tk 90 a day, doesn't know when and how he would be able to manage a shelter for his family.

"My family have neither a single blanket nor enough food," he said.

Although several organisations have brought food and clothes for them, but outsiders have taken those away, the fire victims said.

Water used by the fire fighters to distinguish the blaze remains stagnant in the slum area, adding to the plights of the victims.

Dwellers of neighboring slums came to the victims' aid yesterday by collecting money to buy foods for them.

3 die in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Three people were killed and three others injured in separate road accidents in Sirajganj and Patuakhali yesterday.

Our correspondent in Sirajganj reports: Two people were killed and two others injured when a fish-laden truck skidded off the road and fell into a roadside ditch at Pancholia Bazar yesterday morning.

Reazul, son of Asadur of Ghatkhali, was crossing the road when the two-wheeler hit him at around 10:30am. He was rushed to Amtali upazila health complex where he succumbed to his injuries at 3:00pm.

The motorcycle rider, Zulhas, was also injured seriously as he fell to the ground during the accident. He is now undergoing to Patuakhali General Hospital.

The accident took place on Dhaka-Natore highway at around 6:30am as the driver lost control of the Natore-bound truck while giving side to another vehicle amid dense fog, sources said.

The injured were admitted to Sadar hospital in the town.

Police recovered the bodies and sent those to Sadar hospital morgue. A case was filed with Solonga police station.

Our correspondent in Patuakhali adds: An eight-year-old boy was killed when a speeding motorcycle knocked him down on Patuakhali Kuakata road in the morning.

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WEATHER TODAY Rise in temperature likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather will remain dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may also occur at places over the river basins during late night to early morning, said Met Office.

It said that night temperature may rise slightly over the country.

Highest temperature 28.9 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Teknaf and lowest 07.0 degree Celsius at Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:32pm today and rises at 6:44am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature		Humidity in celsius	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	24.5	12.6	65	60
Chittagong	28.4	13.4	74	62
Rajshahi	23.0	10.5	95	64
Kulna	24.6	12.5	90	67
Barisal	25.0	10.5	84	79
Sylhet	25.0	12.2	79	64
Cox's Bazar	28.0	14.4	60	64



PHOTO: PID
Newly appointed Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed stands in solemn silence after placing wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar yesterday.

3 die in Kashmir village gunbattle

AFP, Srinagar

Two Islamic militants and a civilian were killed yesterday in a gun battle in Indian Kashmir, police said, a day after region's army chief vowed to intensify operations against rebels.

The three were killed in the village of Sumblar, near Bandipora town, 60km north of summer capital Srinagar.

"The area was sealed on information that militants were hiding there. As troops marched towards a house, militants opened fire that was returned," police officer Imtiaz Ahmed said.

He said a civilian trapped in the crossfire was also killed.

The gun battle came a day after India's army chief in Kashmir, lieutenant general AS Sekhon, said troops would step up counter-insurgency operations.

The insurgency, launched by militants in 1989 against Indian rule, has left more than 44,000 people dead by official count and double that tally according to the separatists.

Violence continues in Kashmir despite a slow-moving peace process launched in 2004 between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan aimed at settling all disputes between the neighbours, including over Kashmir.

Each country holds part of the Muslim-majority region and claims it in full.

Laden not seen in Pakistan Says Taliban leader

REUTERS, Dubai

A top Taliban leader in Pakistan said in remarks aired yesterday his group would protect and guard al-Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahri if they turned up in tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

"I have not met Osama or Zawahri and they did not come to our region. We hope to see them and if they show up in our area we will protect them with our bodies and souls," Mullah Mohammad Nazir told Al Jazeera television in remarks dubbed into Arabic.

US intelligence chief John Negroponte said on Thursday al-Qaeda leaders were holed up in a secure hide-out in Pakistan, but the government there says the United States has not given it any information about their presence in Pakistan.

Negroponte told the US Senate select committee on intelligence that Pakistan was the centre of an al-Qaeda web that radiated out to the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

Pakistani newspapers said last month Nazir had been appointed as Taliban chief in the country's tribal area bordering Afghanistan.

Obituary

BSS, Gopalganj

Sri Shukhranjan, president of Gopalganj Lokonath Brahmachari Sangha, passed away due to a cardiac arrest yesterday at the age of 40.

He left behind his wife, one son, one daughter and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

Shukhranjan was cremated at Gopalganj Grand Crematorium.

17 killed in Lanka landslides

AP, Padiyapeella

Air force helicopters yesterday started evacuating dozens of sick and wounded people from the central tea growing region where landslides have killed at least 17 people, officials said.

Thousands of others, some wailing at the loss of their homes and uncertain future, waited on high grounds adjoining the area's main road to be air lifted after local administration asked residents to leave.

"We have been told to leave," said Kumara Samarakoon, who ran a provision store. "Not all will go, but there is fear" of more landslides.

The landslides triggered by heavy rains damaged at least 1,600 homes, leaving an estimated 9,000 to 16,000 people homeless across 15 villages near Nuwara Eliya, a mountainous region in central Sri Lanka known for its lush tea gardens, the Defence Ministry said.

"Our forces have redoubled efforts and we have rescued dozens of people," military spokesman, Brig. Prasad Samarasinghe said in the capital, Colombo.

Samarasinghe said the army had deployed military helicopters along with 100 soldiers to search

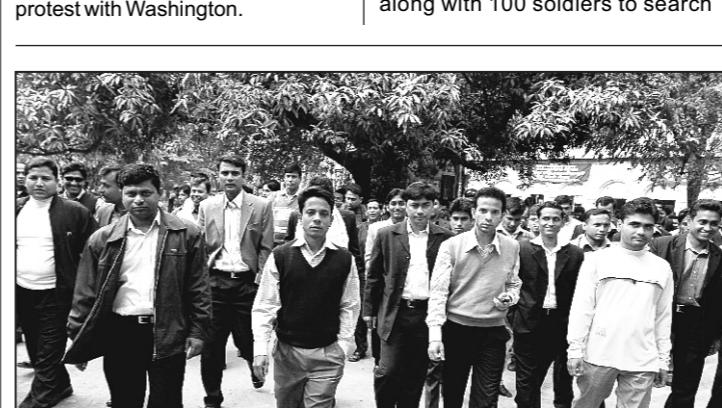


PHOTO: STAR
Leaders and activists of two student organisations -- Jatiyatabadi Chhatri Dal, left, and Bangladesh Chhatri League, right, -- converge on Dhaka University campus near the Madhu's canteen separately yesterday.

Bush's new plan in Iraq US defeat Says Iraqi al-Qaeda-linked group

REUTERS, Dubai

An Iraqi militant group linked to al-Qaeda dismissed President George W Bush's new strategy in Iraq as proof of a US defeat, an Internet statement said.

Bush said on Wednesday he was sending about 21,000 more American troops to Iraq when he announced his long-awaited new strategy in the Arab country racked by sectarian fighting.

"We say that these announcements are a declaration of defeat and an attempt to escape from Iraq, to send more troops will not change anything in the battle. On

the contrary the crusaders will not win this battle, they instead spread targets for our Mujahideen fighters."

The United States has about 130,000 troops in Iraq now.

The authenticity of the statement could not be immediately verified.

Last week, the group urged its followers to confront a US-backed security plan in Baghdad announced by Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, saying it was an Iranian ploy to hit Sunnis.

Death anniversary

Today is the 16th death anniversary of Abul Qasem FCA, founder-president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB), says a press release.

Abul Qasem, who was also a president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI), established his firm A Qasem & Co. in 1953, which is the oldest chartered accountant firm in the country.

He was also a member of the Senate of Dhaka University and the