

## Secretary Akhtar turns into deputy secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Power Division Secretary ANH Akhtar Hossain finally landed three notches down to deputy secretary yesterday after he was elevated to the prestigious post under the presidential quota during the immediate past BNP-led government's rule.

Akhtar was transferred back to his original deputation as a deputy secretary at the Water Resources Ministry.

This is the first transfer after the new adviser for energy and power, Tapan Chowdhury, took charge.

Besides being made secretary under the presidential quota, Akhtar was given double-promotion twice despite having the rank of a deputy secretary.

The Daily Star reported on December 10 that Akhtar was made secretary from the rank of deputy secretary from the rank of deputy secretary.

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## STATE OF EMERGENCY

# New advisers assert protecting rights

### Talk EC recast, voter list update; CA allocates portfolios

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The newly formed council of advisers to the caretaker government yesterday started searching for ways to reconstitute the Election Commission (EC), and to update the voter list for holding the next parliamentary election in a free and fair manner.

It also directed the authorities to uphold the fundamental rights of the people as much as possible while formulating rules under the emer-

gency power ordinance to enforce the state of emergency declared by the president on Thursday.

Highly placed sources in the home ministry said in accordance with the council of advisers' direction, they will exclude some fundamental rights including freedom of speech, thoughts, and movement from the prohibitive rules, which are being prepared to impose a ban on political activities like hartals, blockades, rallies, etc.

At its maiden meeting chaired

by Chief Adviser (CA) Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, the reconstituted council of advisers also discussed introduction of much talked about voter identity cards and transparent ballot boxes.

A circular will be issued soon postponing the parliamentary election, which was set for January 22, Adviser Major General (retd) Abdul Matin told reporters emerging from the meeting held in the CA's office.

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## BDR, BSF trade heavy gunshots

BSS, Rangpur

Tension is mounting along the border areas of Panchagarh, Naogaon and Joypurhat districts following exchange of heavy gunfire between Border Security Force (BSF) of India and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) overnight, frontier people and official sources told BSS.

The BSF have already amassed a large number of troops and taken up position in bunkers with heavy weapons while the BDR men are on high alert. Villagers on both sides of the border are reported to have been fleeing to safer places, as they feared the situation might escalate.

The local and officials sources said the Indian side used automatic weapons along the borders of these three districts to fire hundreds of bullets at Bangladeshi villages and nearby BDR outposts from yesterday midnight. They said the BSF

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PHOTO: STAR

Workers demolish a fountain at the Dhaka Sheraton intersection in the capital yesterday to widen the street. The fountain was built during the last Saarc Summit in Dhaka in November 2005.

## AL, BNP want free, fair polls the soonest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The two political rivals of the country—Awami League (AL) and BNP—both want to see a free and fair election and handover of power to an elected government as soon as possible.

Both the parties formally expressed their views in favour of the election after holding meetings yesterday to discuss the latest political situation.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil appreciated the "role of the army" in reconstituting the caretaker government but the BNP did not make any comment on the issue.

The AL-led grand alliance also put forward a three-point demand—recasting the Election Commission, updating the voter roll, and depoliticisation of the administration. But the BNP decided to observe the formation of the interim government and its activities for a few days. The four-party alliance will hold a meeting soon to finalise its position on the new government.

BNP The BNP National Standing Committee at a meeting hoped that necessary steps will be taken to hand over power to elected government.

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## EC to invite 2 major alliances for dialogue

### All local govt polls postponed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will invite the two major political alliances to discuss how to hold the ninth parliamentary election peacefully after all activities of the January 22 poll were postponed following the proclamation of the state of emergency Thursday night.

Meanwhile, all ongoing local government elections have been postponed until further instructions, EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar told reporters at his office after returning from the chief

adviser's office yesterday.

"We will invite all political parties, especially the two major alliances, to discuss solutions to the prevailing political deadlock and holding of the ninth parliamentary elections peacefully," Sarkar said.

The EC secretary, however, did not make any comment on the fate of the January 22 elections and the EC position on it—whether the poll has been postponed or cancelled.

"If possible, we will send the invitation letters to the respective political parties today [yesterday]."

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## VANDALISM AT SC Court accepts charge sheet against 13 lawyers

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday accepted the charge sheet of the case filed against eminent lawyers Dr Kamal, barristers Amir Ul Islam, Rakanuddin Mahmud and 10 others for vandalising on the Supreme Court (SC) premises on November 30 last year.

The court also granted the petition filed for exempting Dr Kamal and 11 others from appearing in person before the court on

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## Commentary

# We can be repressed but not silenced

### The hated press advisory calls should stop immediately

MAHFUZ ANAM

Most regrettably, the newly formed caretaker government headed by Dr Fakhrudin Ahmed seems to be headed in the direction of a confrontation with the independent media, both electronic and print. For the first time in 16 years this writer received a call from the press

information officer of the ministry of information very gently, saying: "I hope you are aware that we are in an emergency." I asked him what he meant and under what authority and on whose directive was he calling me. He avoided my questions and I told him never to call me again with anything that has to do with restricting press freedom.

Obviously this official was not calling me on his own. So who are pushing the 'just-born caretaker government towards an inevitable clash with the independent media? Let us make it unambiguously clear and say with as much forthrightness as possible that we will never accept censorship or any attempt

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PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL

Logs and branches of chopped down trees lying on a field at Bangladesh Open University in Gazipur. At least 90 trees were felled on the university premises and sold for Tk 48,059 although the market value is several lakhs.

## Photojournalists detained at BOU for taking snaps of tree felling

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) yesterday detained two photojournalists at an office room on its Gazipur campus for about seven hours as they took photographs of trees the authorities had chopped down.

The photojournalists are Shawkat Jamil, senior photographer of The Daily Star and Indrajit Ghosh of The New Age were detained around 3:30pm.

However, the authorities released the two around 10:30pm last night when journalists from the dailies, who went there from the capital, and local journalists of the district rushed there. The police reached the campus around 6:00pm but did not make any initiative to have them released.

Earlier, security guards of the

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## Toxic ship barred from Chittagong Port

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday denied ocean liner MT Apsheon entry to Bangladesh until it is decontaminated first somewhere outside the country's boundary.

The bar on the contaminated ship, which is on a Greenpeace watch list of 50 ships in the spotlight, came after the media had exposed that it was heading for Chittagong's ship breaking yards without being decontaminated.

The Department of Shipping in a letter to all the agencies con-

cerned asked not to allow Apsheon into Bangladesh.

The shipping department asked Pakiza Enterprise, importer of the vessel to be scrapped, to decontaminate the ship somewhere outside the territory of Bangladesh to the satisfaction of the department before bringing it in.

Pakiza Enterprise earlier secured a no objection certificate (NOC) from the shipping department to import the contaminated vessel for scrapping.

Chief Chemist of the Department of Shipping Md

Musharraf Ashraf said, "We have alerted the Chittagong Port Authority, Bangladesh Navy, Collector of Customs, Bangladesh Bank, the Department of Explosives, and Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association asking them to take necessary actions immediately."

The authorities asked the Department of Explosives and the navy not to inspect the ocean liner and not to issue a clearance unless and until it is satisfactorily decontaminated.

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## 3 JMB cadres held with 28kg power gel

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested three Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) activists from different places of the district and also recovered 56 packs (28 kgs) of power gel from one of the arrestees early yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team comprising members of Rangpur Rab and its intelligence wing in Dhaka held Hosen Ali, 48, from his house at Purbachan Ghat under Kounia upazila and recovered the power gel. Rab-5 chief Maj Hamdur said.

Earlier at 3:00 am, the team

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## 2 outlaws killed by rivals

A CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Members of the outlawed Purbia Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Red Flag faction allegedly hacked and shot two rival party members to death at Ataikula upazila in Pabna on Saturday night.

The dead were identified as Kasmat Ali, 25, son of Ajahar Ali of village Ratanpur and Khan Jahan Ali, 32, uncle of Kasmat and son of

Ebad Ali Mollah of the same village in Ataikula upazila.

Locals discovered the bodies at Jagannathpur Maskhata early yesterday morning and informed the police of the matter. Police rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies.

Police claimed party rivals of the two victims were behind the killings. They sent the bodies to Pabna

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