

UNDP pledges support in political reform

UNB, Dhaka

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) yesterday assured the caretaker government of all-possible support to carry out its political and economic reforms.

UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Bangladesh Renata Lok Dessallien gave the assurance when she paid a courtesy call on Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed at his office.

"We can assist Bangladesh in many ways and we're supportive of the present government," the UNDP official said.

She said people's mammoth support and expectations have given the government a unique opportunity to give democracy a strong footing and carry out reforms. "Such opportunity does not come always," she added.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed said the caretaker government is

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Rly land 'grabbed' by Abbas family freed

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Railway authorities with the assistance of the joint forces yesterday recovered around eight acres of land allegedly grabbed by former BNP lawmaker Mirza Abbas and his family for about 35 years at Shahjahanpur in the city.

According to railway engineer Md Nasir Uddin, previous attempts to recover the land were failed due to pressures from higher authorities.

A Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) eviction team recovered half an acre of encroached land and brought down some billboards at Uttara Sector-6.

The team also partially demolished some houses built in violation of the Rajuk rules at Uttara Sector-3.

The Rajuk would conduct a drive at Badda today.

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) conducted drives at Mirpur Section 10 to 12 and knocked down unauthorised sunshades of buildings and small illegal establishments.

According to Magistrate Anwar Pasha, the DCC is preparing a list of big illegal structures.

CHITTAGONG DRIVE

The Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) partially demolished a multi-storey commercial complex building of Chittagong south district unit of Awami League President Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury for flouting the rules, reported our Chittagong office.

Built on around 18 katha-land in Agrabad commercial area, the complex Akhteruzzaman Centre illegally encroached the adjoining

footpaths hindering public movement and future expansion of the surrounding roads, CDA sources said.

Though the complex was supposed to accommodate offices only, it housed over 450 shops on its ninth floor defying the rule, the sources added.

RAJSHAHI DRIVE

Rajshahi University correspondent reported that the Rajshahi Development Authority with the help of the army-led joint forces knocked down more than 100 unauthorised shops at old bus terminal, Debshingpara, Seroil, Bhadra and Talaimari yesterday.

The forces also demolished ticket counters and offices of at least 15 Rajshahi-Dhaka route buses near railway station and

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Polls sought as soon as possible

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A non-elected government cannot stay in power for an indefinite period of time under the constitutional provisions, said former adviser to the caretaker government Dr Akbar Ali Khan yesterday.

"The national election, therefore, should be held as soon as possible to uphold the dignity of the constitution," he said.

He was speaking as the chair of a dissemination programme of a voter list survey conducted by Brotee in association with Power and Participation Research Centre, Unnayan Shamannay, and The Hunger Project.

Dr Akbar, who quit the Iajuddin-led caretaker government along with three other advisers, expected that the new Election Commission (EC) will consult the political parties and learn from working on the ground and the outer world for preparing a scientific and correct voter list.

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PHOTO: STAR

Artistes perform at the Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University yesterday to celebrate *Pchela Falgun*, the first day of the Bengali month Falgun heralding spring.

Goods burnt in garment factory fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Fire gutted huge amount of fabrics and 2.5 lakh pieces of ready-made clothes at a garment factory at Panchabati of Fatullah in Narayanganj yesterday.

Sources said the fire originated at about 8:00am in the finishing section on the first floor of the three-storey factory of Majumder Group.

Factory workers primarily tried to douse the fire. Later, nine fire-fighting units from Dhaka, Mandalpara and Narayanganj rushed to the scene and managed to extinguish the fire after two hours' effort.

No worker was injured in the incident but four workers fainted due to heavy smoke while trying to douse the fire.

Narayanganj Fire Station Sub-Assistant Director Golam Mostafa said the fire might have originated from electric short circuit.

Locals said vehicular movement on the Dhaka-Munshiganj Highway was suspended for about two hours due to the fire.

8 schoolchildren hurt as bus rams into van

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Eight schoolchildren and a van puller were injured critically in a road accident at Talma intersection of Nagarkanda upazila here at around 7:00 am yesterday.

The accident happened when a speeding bus hit a school van and twisted it leaving eight children and Lalan, 60, the van puller, injured, sources said.

The injured children were identified as Subarna, 8, Nital, 8, Sathi, 7, Nasrin, 6, Bakul, 5, Joydev, 7, Mita, 5, and Udayan, 5. All are students of Chowdhury Samsul Haq Shiksha Niketon.

Among the eight, critically injured Nital and Subarna were sent to Dhaka and the others were admitted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

BNP bigwigs sit today to review situation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than a week into the first round of arrests of former ministers and lawmakers by the joint forces, the national standing committee (NSC) of BNP, the highest policy making body of the party, will meet today to discuss the latest political situation.

According to a party news release issued yesterday the meeting will be held at 7:00pm with its Chairperson Khaleda Zia in the chair in her Hawa Bhaban office at Banani in the capital.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and other standing committee members were asked to attend the meeting.

The NSC will discuss some important issues including arrests of

party leaders, the latest reconstitution of the Election Commission, and the recent transfers and dismissals in police and civil administrations, party sources said.

BNP high ups are not happy about the current drive of the joint forces against corruption which resulted in arrests of many party leaders. The joint forces also raided the houses of some other party leaders prompting them to go into hiding to evade arrests, according to the sources.

In the changed situation BNP leaders are worried about their party members as a large number of party leaders and activists across the country have already been

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2 robbers killed in clash with cops, villagers

OUR CORRESPONDENT

At least two robbers were killed and 11 villagers injured as police and villagers clashed with a gang of armed robbers at Purbo Gopalpur village of Nalchhity upazila in Jhalakathi yesterday.

Other members of the gang managed to flee with around Tk 4 lakh worth of loot.

The dead robbers were identified as Hanif Howladar alias Dulal, 30, and Abdul Kader Khan, 45, from the same upazila.

Among the injured villagers, Sekandar Ali Khan, 60, and his wife Saleha Begum, 50, were admitted to Nalchhity Upazila Health Complex while their daughter Pakhi Begum, 20, Yakub Ali Khan, 53, his daughter Laizu Begum, 18, and Abdul Kader, 44, were sent to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

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Myanmar extends Suu Kyi's house arrest by a year

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military rulers yesterday extended the house arrest of Tin Oo, the octogenarian deputy to democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a senior official said.

"We extended his detention," a senior official in Naypyidaw, Myanmar's new administrative capital, told AFP by telephone.

Another official at the Home Affairs Ministry said Tin Oo's house arrest was extended by one year.

Tin Oo is the deputy leader of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party. The international community, as well as local activists, have repeatedly called for the pair to be released.

Tin Oo was arrested along with the Nobel peace prize winner in May 2003, after a pro-government mob attacked their convoy during a political tour of the country's north.

The government has released more than 100 NLD members who were arrested during the incident, but Aung San Suu Kyi and Tin Oo are both still being held under house arrest in Yangon.

He was initially held in prison in Kalay in remote northwestern Myanmar, but in February 2004 was brought back to his home in Yangon, where he has been held ever since.

The United Nations estimates there are about 1,100 political prisoners in Myanmar, which has been ruled by the military since 1962 and was formerly known as Burma.

The NLD won a landslide victory in 1990 elections but has never been allowed to govern.

| Prayer Timing | | |
|----------------------------|-------|--------|
| February 14 | | |
| | Azan | Jamaat |
| Fajr | 5-25 | 6-00 |
| Zohr | 12-45 | 1-15 |
| Asr | 4-30 | 4-45 |
| Maghrib | 5-57 | 6-01 |
| Esha | 7-15 | 7-45 |
| Source: Islamic Foundation | | |

US House resolution slams Iraq troop plan

Suicide bomber kills 18 near Baghdad college

REUTERS, Washington

US House of Representatives Democrats unveiled a resolution on Monday opposing a troop buildup in Iraq, setting up a confrontation this week over President George W Bush's war strategy.

In fresh violence a suicide truck bomber blew up near a Baghdad college yesterday, killing 18 people and wounding 40, police said.

Seizing the initiative from a deadlocked Senate, the House is expected to vote on Friday on Bush's decision to send another

21,500 troops to fight the unpopular war after each of its 435 members is given the chance to speak for five minutes.

It does not force the president to do anything, but supporters say they hope a strong statement against his policy will make Bush reconsider. The simple, two-sentence resolution also pledges support for US troops.

"Congress and the American people will continue to support and protect the members of the United States Armed Forces who are serving or who have served bravely

and honourably in Iraq," the resolution says, adding:

"Congress disapproves of the decision of President George W. Bush announced on January 10, 2007, to deploy more than 20,000 additional United States combat troops to Iraq."

Bush indicated he was not planning to watch the House debate, telling an interviewer on C-Span television: "I've got a full day tomorrow" and "I already know what the debate is."

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Emergency declared in Guinea

AP, Conakry

The president declared a state of emergency, announcing in a broadcast on state radio and television that he has ordered the army to "take all necessary measures" to restore order after three days of violent protests.

The death toll from rioting and clashes with security forces reached at least 27 on Monday as the West African country's major trade unions called for President Lansana Conte to step down after his apparent violation of a power-sharing agreement.

Conte said in the broadcast late Monday that he had ordered the army to "protect the people of Guinea from the risk of a civil war."

The violence started Saturday following Conte's appointment of a close ally from his Cabinet as prime minister. The move angered many

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PHOTO: STAR

Rapid Action Battalion recovers two grenades from an under construction building at Demra in the capital yesterday but fails to capture the criminals.

N Korea agrees to nuke disarmament

AFP, Beijing

North Korea agreed yesterday to shut down key nuclear facilities within two months in exchange for badly needed fuel, part of a broad agreement aimed at ending the regime's controversial nuclear programme.

In return, the United States would hold direct talks on diplomatic relations with North Korea -- a member of US President George W. Bush's "axis of evil" -- and begin looking at removing it from the US list of terrorist nations.

The deal came after nearly a week of gruelling six-nation talks in Beijing aimed at convincing the secretive Stalinist state, which tested an atomic bomb for the first time in October, to abandon its nuclear weapons.

Chinese negotiator Wu Dawei

said an "important consensus" had been reached at the talks, which would resume in Beijing on March 19 to verify that the deal is being properly implemented.

"It marks an important and solid step for the six-party talks and a nuclear-free Korean peninsula," Wu told reporters. "This progress has made the talks a success."

Under the deal, North Korea would have 60 days to shut down its main Yongbyon nuclear reactor and allow United Nations nuclear inspectors back into the country.

Meanwhile, the energy-starved regime would receive a first tranche of 50,000 tonnes of fuel oil -- part of an eventual one million tonnes if the accord progresses as spelt out and the North permanently disables its key nuclear facilities.

Chief US envoy Christopher Hill said he was pleased with the out-

come but warned there was still a long way to go before the end goal of a denuclearised North Korea was achieved.

"This is only the end of the beginning of the process. We have a lot of work to do," he told reporters.

Previously, North Korea agreed at six-way talks in September 2005 to scrap its atomic plans but then boycotted the negotiations for over a year, and still earlier agreements foundered on disputes between Washington and Pyongyang.

South Korea, the United States, China, Russia and Japan have been holding nearly four years of on-again, off-again talks with the North, one of the poorest and most isolated nations in the world.

In 2002, President Bush lumped

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ANTI-CRIME DRIVE

2 grenades, 10 firearms recovered

STAR REPORT

The army-led joint forces, during its ongoing countrywide drive, arrested at least 1,623 people on various charges and recovered two hand grenades, 10 firearms and six homemade bombs within 24 hours preceding 6:00pm yesterday.

Meanwhile, Shamim-Al-Mansoor Siddiqui alias Azad Siddiqui, younger brother of Krishak Sramik Janata League (KSJL) President Abdul Kader Siddiqui, was placed on a four-day police remand yesterday. Army-led joint forces arrested Azad, accused in 26 criminal cases including three murder cases, at Ichchapur of Kalihati upazila in Tangail on Monday.

Tangail police produced Azad

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