

Khaleda urges children to be good citizens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday called upon the children to build themselves up as good citizens for a prosperous future of the country.

She was addressing as chief guest at the prize distribution ceremony and cultural function at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre organised by Zia Shishu Academy, a pro-BNP cultural organisation.

Urging all to make the country an ideal place to prepare the children as good citizens, she said, "We are working so no children would remain hungry or deprived of schooling."

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People may lose patience if poll is delayed

Says Oli Ahmed

UNB, Dhaka

LDP leader Colonel (retd) Oli Ahmed yesterday urged the caretaker government to take initiative for holding the elections as early as possible, saying that people may lose their patience if the polls are delayed.

"Those who are in the caretaker government are the sons of the soil...they know better about the convenient time for arranging the election," he said, adding that they want election as soon as possible.

Oli was talking to reporters after having a two-hour-long meeting with Awami League President

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AK81 rifle, 600 bullets seized in CHT

UNB, Dhaka

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) seized one AK81 rifle, the latest version of AK47, and 600 bullets from Khagrachhari, Cox's Bazar and Chittagong in the last 24 hours, ending at 3:00pm yesterday.

A spokesman at the Rab head-quarter said the elite force conducted a drive at Dighinala of Khagrachhari district at about 3:00pm on Wednesday and seized the AK81 rifle.

The Rab members conducted drives at Bakalia of Chittagong city and Ukhia of Cox's Bazar early yesterday and recovered 600 bullets, he added.

Prayer Timing		
February 16		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-25	6-00
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	5-57	6-01
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Consumer protection law on the cards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is working on enacting consumer protection act to protect consumer rights and competition law to define hoarding and increase competition in the domestic market, Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam said yesterday.

Addressing a discussion on immediate challenges for the caretaker government, the finance adviser also said he is in favour of scrapping the provision of whitening black money through investing in property in the coming budget.

"I will take up the matter in the council of advisers' meeting -- whether budgetary provision of whitening black money to be continued. But my personal opinion is that this provision should be scrapped in the coming budget," he said.

The finance adviser was addressing the discussion titled 'Immediate Economic Challenges for the Caretaker Government'. Organised by Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity, the discussion was also addressed by economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud and President of International Chamber of Commerce -- Bangladesh (ICC-B) Mahbubur Rahman.

On the competition law, Mirza Azizul Islam said the government has initiated steps to increase competition in the local market and define to what extent stocks of goods would not be considered as hoarding.

Aziz said he has already asked the commerce secretary to identify the most essential products, their price escalation over a certain period of time and the reasons behind the price hike.

"It will be clear after the analysis to what extent the prices can go up rationally and if there is any unexplained part of the analysis the government will consider there might be some fraudulent practices in the market," he said.

The adviser said sometimes officials, economists and journalists make sweeping remarks on the market situation without analysing the factors behind price hike of essentials.

The adviser reiterated that the main purpose of the caretaker government is to create a field for a free, fair, neutral and credible election.

"For such a field, we need some time to take some steps. If we hold the election in the next three or four months we will not be able to guarantee a free and fair election," he said.

The adviser said they are working to stop influence of muscle power in politics and elections.

"We also want to keep the election free from loan defaulters, tax evaders and smugglers," he said.

Asked about the limitations of a caretaker government, the adviser said the constitution empowers the caretaker government to take necessary policy-making decisions for economic growth.

"We have yet to take any policy-making decision till date. What we are doing is just continuity of previous governments' decisions," he said adding that if necessary and situation demands, the interim government would take policymaking decisions too.

Turning to the current economic situation, Aziz said the macroeconomic situation is not so worrying as wage earners' remittances and exports have remained encouraging.

The foreign aid declined due to political unrest in the last few months, he said, adding that the government is now trying to bring the donors back to review the country's economic situation.

Replying to a query, he said the government shares of some companies would be offloaded in the capital market in the next 3-4 months.

He also took note of the possible adverse effects of empowering magistrates to freeze or confiscate money or property in 72 hours' notice and said he would take up the issue with the chief adviser and his colleagues in the council of advisers.

On the debate of taking policymaking decisions, Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud said it is assumed that the present caretaker government will be in office for more than three months and for

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GOLD SMUGGLING CASE Verdict deferred again to Mar 6

COURT CORRESPONDENT

ADhaka court yesterday once again rescheduled the date to March 6 for the verdict in the gold smuggling case against former president and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad.

Judge SM Mujibur Rahman of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court set the date following a time petition filed by Ershad's lawyer.

The judge on February 6 adjourned the delivery of verdict in the case as he could not complete preparing the judgement.

In the petition, the lawyer mentioned that Ershad could not

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PROF YUNUS' PLAN 15 more phone numbers to send views

UNB, Dhaka

Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus has 15 new cellphones for receiving public reaction about his plan to join politics.

The new phones are 01712594837, 01811065657, 01714337750, 01716977367, 01715562750, 01711159202, 01711314035, 01817610018, 0190639309, 01718670585, 01712906384, 01717407764, 01720194110, 01712749622 and 01712123485.

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PHOTO: STAR

Portraits of former prime minister Khaleda Zia and former state minister for youth and sports Fazlur Rahman are still in place at the entrance of Bangladesh Football Federation office in the capital.

22 cop aspirants look for ex-minister's APS

Accuse him of bribery

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Twenty-two police job aspirants are looking for the assistant personal secretary (APS) to former state minister for home affairs Lutfozzaman Babar to get back their money, which they claimed the APS took promising the jobs.

The job aspirants are among the 757 selected to be recruited as police sub-inspectors and sergeants. The selection, however, was cancelled recently after a probe committee found gross irregularities including bribery, political influence

and nepotism in the selection process.

The 22 aspirants out of the 24 from Netrakona are now searching for Mirza Haider Ali who, the aspirants claim, took Tk 4.5 lakh from each of them promising them police jobs.

The aspirants are allegedly leaders and activists of BNP's student wing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal while the two others are activists of BNP's coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami's student front Islami Chhatra Shibir, sources in an intelligence agency said.

"I managed Tk 5 lakh selling most of my cultivable land and gave the money to Haider for my son's job," said a father of a job aspirant from Madan upazila of the district. "I want my money back and I also want Haider's punishment," he told The Daily Star seeking anonymity.

Wishing not to be named, a brother of a sub-inspector's job aspirant from Mohanganj upazila claimed he gave Haider Tk 4 lakh for his younger brother's job even though Haider is his relative.

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NATIONAL CHILD CANCER DAY OBSERVED Costly treatment leaves 50pc children untreated

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

Five-year-old Shanto suddenly found himself bleeding from the nose and mouth and the doctors diagnosed it as leukemia, a form of blood cancer.

Totally unaware of the severe consequences of the disease, the little boy from Jhenidah, who was to enter a village primary school, was seen watching a movie on the television smilingly at the Ashic Foundation that arranged free accommodation for ten such children undergoing treatment for cancer.

Child cancer is curable in many cases but in this country 50-60 per cent patients diagnosed with cancer fail to get treatment only for financial reasons -- this is the observation made on National Child Cancer Day yesterday.

Despite increasing awareness among the parents that early diagnosis and proper treatment can cure cancer, more than 50 per cent patients cannot afford the costly treatment, said Prof Afiquil Islam of Department of Paediatric Haematology and Oncology, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib

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Outlaw killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

An activist of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Lal Pataka faction was killed in an encounter with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday at Shonapur village of Ataikula thana.

The dead was identified as Abdul Gofur alias Jamai Gofur, 35, from village Durgapur of the same thana.

According to a Rab 12 press release, a team of Rab from Pabna camp raided Shonapur village at around 7:30pm where criminals belonging to PBCP Lal Pataka faction were gathering for a meeting.

The criminals opened fire on Rab as soon as they sensed Rab's

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PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) bulldozes a metal workshop built illegally on a Wasa land at Shyampur in the capital yesterday.

Iraq shuts borders with Iran, Syria

Suicide attack kills 11

AGENCIES, Baghdad/Ramadi

Iraq has closed its borders with Iran and Syria as part of a security crackdown aimed at stopping foreign fighters and weapons entering the country, an Iraqi Interior Ministry official said yesterday.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the closures took effect on Wednesday.

"The plan to close the borders went into effect last night. Many points were closed, but I can't confirm that all were shut," Lieutenant-Colonel Christopher Garver told Reuters earlier.

Iraq had said it would shut the borders for 72 hours. The US military said on Wednesday the aim was to allow procedures and the layout of border positions to be revamped.

Washington accuses Syria of allowing foreign fighters to cross its long, porous borders into Iraq and says Iran is supplying weapons, including roadside bombs, to Iraqi militants to kill US soldiers. The two countries deny the claims.

Iraq said on Tuesday it would close four border crossings with Iran and two with Syria to try to quell

sectarian violence in Baghdad.

A large-scale US and Iraqi security operation began to bite yesterday, with thousands of troops on the streets and fighter jets screaming a high-decibel message in the skies overhead.

Iraqi officials said that corpses of only five murder victims had been found overnight -- extremely low by the Iraqi capital's recent bloody standards -- in what they said was a sign that death squads had gone into hiding.

Commanders have warned that it will take months for "Operation Law and Order" to make a lasting difference, and that US troop levels will not peak until May at the earliest, but the plan was clearly moving into gear.

"Intelligence-focused searches accompanied by clearing operations were conducted by coalition and Iraqi security forces in multiple locations across Baghdad," said US army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Scott Bleichwehl.

Meanwhile, a suicide car bomber attacked an Iraqi police station in the western city of

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