

US, UK want early credible election

UNB, Dhaka

The United States and the United Kingdom yesterday suggested fixing a clear-cut election timetable for holding early and credible elections in Bangladesh.

"As we have said previously, Bangladesh needs to set a timetable for elections, and hold them as soon as possible," a spokesman for the US Embassy told the news agency.

"A clear election timetable will permit the Bangladeshi people to see a path back to electoral democracy through reform," he said.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the British High Commission in Dhaka said they want the caretaker government to create conditions conducive to "early and credible" elections that can help sustain democracy in Bangladesh.

He made the remarks when asked to comment on the Election Commission's timeline for holding national elections after preparing the voter list with photographs that would require 18 months' time.

"Elections are essential for Bangladesh," he said. About a

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FAKE ADMISSIONS

Nexus of DU officials, coaching centres suspected

KAMRUL HASAN KHAN

The committee formed to investigate fake admissions at Dhaka University (DU) suspects that many students cheated their way to admission with the help of a number of unscrupulous coaching centres.

Sources in the probe committee said these students either did not take the admission test or were not on the merit list prepared by the dean's office.

A probe committee source said, "If these fake students are not caught, they will complete their studies and get genuine certificates. But none will know about their act of forgery."

The committee said an organised and powerful nexus comprising university officials at different levels, a section of teachers, stu-

dent leaders and a few organisations outside the university--coaching centres and consultancy firms--is involved in the mischief.

Earlier, the probe body suspected that a strong network of officials at the offices of faculty deans, departments, institutes, the administrative building and residential halls is active to prepare documents with forged signatures of the authorities to take these fake students.

Headed by DU Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof AFM Yusuf Haider, the committee was formed in the wake of allegations of inconsistencies in the admission papers of 11 students of the public administration department.

The racket takes students in different departments and institutes

in exchange of money by utilising the loopholes, especially the quota system, in the admission process.

They also eye the seats fallen vacant when students migrate from one subject to another.

In an interim report, the committee found some 30 fake students in the departments of public administration, economics, and international relations in 2004-2005 session. Later, 20 more cases of fake admission were detected in the economics department.

The committee also detected a secretary's son who got his admission in the economics department by forging documents.

"The probe committee is taking the matter of fake admission very seriously and it will proceed for

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1,000 chickens die of bird flu in Noakhali

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A poultry farm infected with avian influenza was detected in Companiganj upazila of Noakhali yesterday.

Around 1,000 of 1,800 chickens died because of the infection at the Naser Poultry Farm located in Char Hazari village of the upazila.

Although the central avian influenza control room confirmed the detection, it did not receive any report of culling the remaining 800 chickens as of filing of this report at 8:45pm last night.

With this, the number of bird flu-infected farms in the district reached to six. More than 60,000 chickens have been culled in the district so far.

A report from Khagrachhari meanwhile said 123 chickens were culled at a farm fearing bird flu infection.

The flu control room sources said the owner of the farm culled all his chickens without conducting any test following the death of some fowls from due to undetected reason.

A correspondent from Benapole reports: A few hundred chickens died at different farms of Shaikona village of Sharsha upazila in Jessore due to some "undetected" disease.

Local upazila livestock officer visited the area and collected samples for sending them to Dhaka for testing.

The chickens did not die because of flu but cholera and Ranikhet disease, he claimed.



PHOTO: STAR

The Christians gather at a special service on the South Plaza of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in the capital yesterday on the occasion of Easter Sunday.



PHOTO: STAR

A woman with her child sleeping on her shoulder at a BDR-run shop on Sher-e-Bangla Railway High School ground in the capital yesterday. Poor women have to stand in long queues for hours to buy mainly rice and lentil at cheaper prices from these shops.

Govt extends time for open market sale of rice

UNB, Dhaka

The government has decided to extend the time limit of selling rice under Open Market Sale programme up to April 24 from April 19 because of its impact on the market.

An official handout yesterday said the time limit of the OMS programme, began on March 18, was extended due to its high demand and to keep the price of rice stable.

Each dealer now can sell 1,020 kg of rice a day instead of previous quantum of 510 kg. The price of per kg rice has been re-fixed at Tk 15

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Nor'wester kills 3 in 2 districts

STAR REPORT

Nor'westers in different parts of greater Mymensingh on Saturday night killed three people and left three others injured.

In sadar upazila of Mymensingh, two people were killed and three others were injured when a nor'wester with hailstorm lashed vast areas of the upazila at around 10:30pm, reports our correspondent.

The victims are Khodeja Begum, 55, wife of late Habibur Rahman of Maigbari village and Abu Sayeed Maruf of Thanar Ghat area.

Sources said in the hour-long hailstorm, strong winds uprooted hundreds of trees and destroyed boro crops in several villages includ-

ing Khagadhar, Dapunia, Barera, Char Gobindapur, Digarkanda, Shikarikanda, Maigbari, Chhalakandi, Borobhillar Par, Narayanpur, Sutiakhai, Narayanpur, Char Laxmipur and Chhatrapur.

Power supply was disrupted during the storm and it was resumed yesterday afternoon.

One of the victims, Khodeja Begum, died of a massive heart attack while Abu Sayeed Maruf was electrocuted and died on the spot.

The three injured were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. They are Runa, Tahera and Momena.

In Kishoreganj, another nor'wester lashed several unions in

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Mirza Abbas sent back to jail after medical check-up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained former public works minister Mirza Abbas was taken to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) Hospital yesterday for some diagnostic tests as his physical condition deteriorated.

Prison authorities took Mirza Abbas to the hospital at 11:00am and sent him back to prison after two-hour long diagnostic tests including X-ray and ECG of chest.

He has been ill in the central jail for several days and the tests were conducted as per prescription of the prison doctors treating him, said DIG (Prison) Major Shamsul Haider Siddiqui.

"Different parts of his body were swollen and his diabetes increased unusually," the DIG quoted the doctors as saying.

BSF kills farmer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Border Security Force (BSF) of India gunned down a Bangladeshi farmer on Dharmagarh border under Ranishankoil upazila of Thakurgaon district yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Manirul Islam, 23, son of late Afsar Ali of village Chakma Basti under Ranishankoil upazila, BDR officials in Thakurgaon said.

As BSF troops of Shreepur camp in India opposite Dharmagarh BDR camp of Thakurgaon opened fire when the victim along with other farmers were irrigating their croplands yesterday morning, Monirul died on the spot, BDR sources quoted people of Dharmagarh border as saying.

After the incident, BSF of Shreepur camp took the body into the Indian territory.

Commanding Officer of local BDR battalion Lt Col Rafique said they lodged a strong protest to the BSF and urged them to return the body.

But the BSF officials of Shreepur camp were yet to response, BDR officials said.

ICC WORLD CUP 07 Pietersen keeps England alive

SPORTS REPORTER

A 140-run partnership for the third wicket between Ian Bell and Kevin Pietersen kept England's hopes alive to post a challenging total against world champions Australia in their Cricket World Cup Super Eights clash at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua yesterday.

Bell was dismissed for 77 off 90 balls but Pietersen was batting on 74 (89 balls) as England, having elected to bat first, reached 192 for five after 39 overs.

Bell's dismissal on the total of 164 saw Australia take edge when they removed Paul Collingwood and Andrew Flintoff in quick succession to reduce England to 179-5.

Ravi Bopara, whose sparkling half-century almost guided England to an unlikely win against Sri Lanka, was batting on seven.

Cricinfo adds: England's innings followed a familiar pattern as early

problems for the top order were repaired by Pietersen and Bell, who came together at 24-2.

Shaun Tait ripped out two quick wickets with an express spell but crisp half-centuries from Pietersen and Bell meant Aussie skipper Ricky Ponting had to juggle his resources in absence of Shane Watson.

Areshuffled opening partnership -- Bell moving up as Andrew Strauss returned at number three -- failed to deliver as Michael Vaughan was undone by Tait in the fourth over.

Tait was hostile from his first delivery, shooting a bouncer past Vaughan's nose, and the England captain failed to get on top of a ball that bounced from back of a length and fended it into his stumps.

Strauss had an early chance to impress in his first outing in two months, but after one pleasing square drive he was also undone by

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Muggers loot Tk 16 lakh from fast food shop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed muggers snatched Tk 16.22 lakh at a fast food restaurant at Uttara in the capital yesterday firing several shots that left one injured.

The injured was identified as -- Bilal Hossain, an executive of Asian Mission and Properties. He and his colleague Abdullah Bhuiyan took the money to Daruchini Fast Food in Sector-3 for paying a landowner from whom they had bought a piece of land.

Police and witnesses said a gang of seven in a CNG auto-rickshaw and on a bike reached the spot about 12:30pm, moments after the two officials got there with the money and sat at a corner where the landowner and his lawyer were waiting.

"Four muggers stormed into the fast food restaurant and started firing indiscriminately. At one point they grabbed the bag containing the money and left the scene quickly," Officer-In-Charge (OC) of Uttara Police Station Syed Nazrul Islam told The Daily Star.

Bilal Hossain suffered a bullet wound in his hand and was admitted to local Lubana clinic.

Police said the two officials drew the money from the Uttara branch of Islamic Bank in the morning and were supposed to come to Tejgaon for registration of the land after the payment yesterday.

Police picked up five people from the fast food restaurant for interrogation.

None could be arrested as of 8:15pm.

Indian FM injured in car crash

AP, New Delhi

Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee, a longtime stalwart of the ruling Congress Party, arrived in New Delhi in a special Indian Air Force plane after being seriously injured when a truck slammed into his car in eastern India, officials said yesterday.

Mukherjee was received at the airport by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, MK Mukherjee, an aid to injured minister said. From the airport the minister was rushed to the an army hospital in the city, the official added.

No other details were immediately available.

The Press Trust of India news agency described his condition as serious in its initial reports filed soon after the accident, although a lawmaker from the governing Congress party, Adhir Chowdhury, said the foreign minister was out of danger.

The accident took place late Saturday as Mukherjee, 72, was travelling back from his parliamentary constituency north of Kolkata, eastern India's main city, said Raj Kanoria, a senior police official in the state of West Bengal, where the crash occurred.

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Free national commission sought for biotechnology

Experts for review of biotech policy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a conference yesterday made recommendations to the government that an independent national commission for biotechnology be established and the existing biotechnology policy reviewed to facilitate coordinated research in biotechnology and its use in various fields.

The experts also said it was impossible to go ahead with the existing biotechnology policy and the way National Institute of Biotechnology (NIB) is formed and run.

The recommendations came at a press conference on the concluding day of the three-day-long conference titled "Promotion of Biotechnology in Bangladesh: National and International Perspectives" which was held at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases and Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR, B) in the capital.

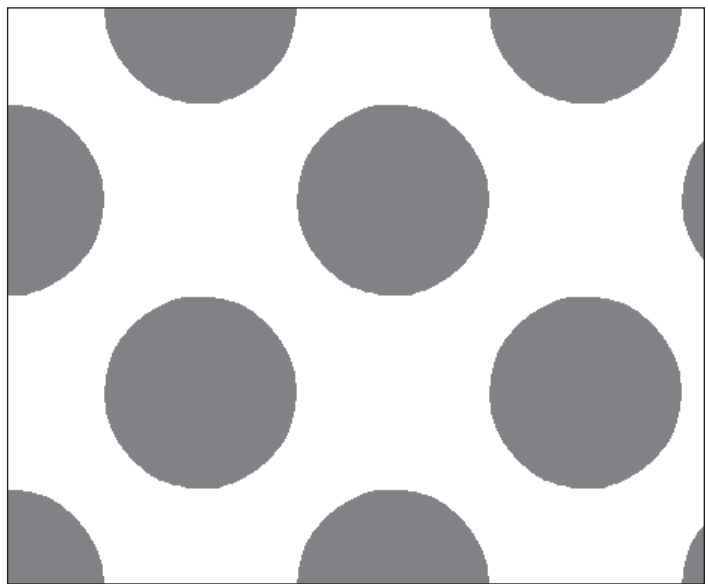
The conference concluded with a call to explore the potentiality of biotechnology efficiently to achieve the challenges of the 21st century. The experts said biotechnology would help bring revolutionary

developments in agriculture, industry, healthcare and other sectors.

The Ministry of Science and ICT, Dhaka University, Brac University, Bangladesh Academy of Sciences, ICDDR, B, Incepta and Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd jointly organised the conference.

The conference proposed formation of an independent national commission for biotechnology comprising secretaries from all relevant ministries, eminent biotechnologists and representatives from academic and industrial

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Iraq attack kills 23 4 more GIs die in bomb blast

AFP, Baghdad

At least 23 people were killed in Iraq on Sunday where violence showed no let-up four years after the ouster of Saddam Hussein, except for a drop in execution-type killings in the capital patrolled by some 80,000 troops.

In the deadliest attack on Sunday, a car bomb near a residential building in an industrial zone in Mahmutiyah, a town south of Baghdad, killed 17 people, local mayor Moyaid al-Amary said.

The attack coincided with a US military announcement that another

four American soldiers had died in a roadside bomb explosion in Diyala province, where insurgents have become increasingly active in recent months.

Saturday's bombing pushed to 21 the number of US troops killed this month alone and to 3,269 since the March 2003 invasion, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

Another six Iraqis were killed in Baghdad on Sunday, five of them in a car bombing in Al-Alam, a mixed Shia-Sunni district that has been rife with sectarian conflict.

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8-yr-old boy sent to jail on rape charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chittagong court yesterday sent an eight-year-old boy to jail after he was charged with raping a five-year-old girl in the port city.

Chittagong Metropolitan Magistrate MM Mokhesur Rahman sent Foyzal Ahmad Pappu, who was claimed to be eight years old in the first information report (FIR), to jail custody after police produced him before the court.

Sources said policemen from Khulshi Police Station earlier arrested Pappu at his shanty in

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Iraq premier barred from Iran airspace

AP, Baghdad

Iran refused to allow the Iraqi prime minister to fly across its airspace as he was travelling to Tokyo, members of the delegation travelling with Nouri al-Maliki told The Associated Press early Sunday.

The delegation members said al-Maliki's plane was diverted on Saturday night to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where al-Maliki stayed in the airport for more than three hours while his government aircraft was refuelled and a new flight plan was filed.

Two members of the delegation told AP about the incident by telephone from Dubai. A government official in Baghdad confirmed their account. All spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the information.

All three said the Iranians told al-Maliki's pilot that they were not informed in advance of the prime minister's need to cross Iran by air. None of the three had any information on whether that was true or an Iranian action designed to inconvenience and embarrass al-Maliki.

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Prayer Timing		
April 9		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-40	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-21	6-24
Esha	7-45	8-15
Source: Islamic Foundation		