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CA firm on holding polls as early as possible

UNB, Tangail

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said his caretaker government is determined to hand over power to an elected government through holding a free, fair and credible election as early as possible.

"The prime objective of this government is to hold a free, fair and credible election so that honest and competent people get encouraged to contest the polls," he told a big public gathering in Tangail.

"There would be no difficulties in exercising voting right and the

polls would be free from the influence of black money and muscle power," he said addressing the inaugural function of National Tree Planting Movement and Tree Fair 2007 to open the countrywide three-month-long afforestation campaign.

This is for the first time that a head of the government inaugurated the national tree-planting movement outside the capital.

Fakhruddin in his 70-minute speech said the interim government is making efforts to accomplish some prerequisites for holding the election, particularly to prepare flawless voter lists with

photographs and electoral reforms.

He said the reconstituted Election Commission has formulated electoral legal reform framework. The EC has held dialogue with different professional groups on this matter and would hold dialogue with political parties too.

The EC is also working to prepare voter list with photographs by applying modern technology. It is taking some time as this is a new process for Bangladesh as well as for other countries, Fakhruddin said.

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Fakhruddin faints at function, goes home after check-up

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed fell ill out of exhaustion at a public function in Tangail yesterday morning and later had a check-up at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka.

Fakhruddin, however, returned to his residence in good health in the afternoon.

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Jalil in CCU with chest pain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil was admitted to the coronary care unit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) last night as he complained of chest pain.

"We sent Mr Jalil to a prison cell

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Babar remanded again; Jalil, Selim sent to jail

Bengal Group chief picked up; residences of Jalil, Mintoo raided

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil, its Presidium Member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, and former BNP lawmaker also businessman MA Hashem were sent to Dhaka Central Jail, while another BNP leader also former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman Babar, and AL Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah each were sent to four days of remand yesterday.

Jalil complained about chest pain soon after the court had ordered to send him to prison. He was later admitted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University's coronary care unit last night.

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Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil, left, being taken to jail from a Dhaka court yesterday; former state minister for home affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar, right, being taken on a fresh four-day remand.

Dhaka getting ready as 'fortress against terrorism'

Mainul tells UN team

UNB, Dhaka

Law Adviser Mainul Hossain yesterday told a UN counter-terrorism team that Bangladesh is doing everything to organise itself as "fortress against terrorism".

"Bangladesh does not want to be treated as among the terrorism-concern countries," he told the delegation members, who arrived here earlier in the day for an appraisal of the ground situation in Bangladesh.

Sergey Karev, director of Assessment and Technical Assistance, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate of the United Nations, and Walter Gehr, project coordinator, Terrorism-Prevention Branch, met him at his office.

The adviser made it clear that

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Twin jeopardy for Old Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Frequent power snaps and water crisis compounded by scorching weather have been severely disrupting life and trade especially in the old parts of the city.

In the summer, Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) faces around 70 crore litres of water shortage due to electricity blackouts and lower production capacity. On the other hand, Dhaka Electricity Supply Authorities (Dessa) said they have to contend with a shortfall of around 600 megawatts (MW) in electricity supply a day.

Small traders seem to be the worst affected. The crafts workers in the Old Dhaka have to face power failure at least four times in the first four hours of the workday.

The conch shell workers at Shankhari Bazar used to design 25

pairs of Shankha (conch bangles) a day, whereas now they struggle to come up with even 10 pairs for continual power outages.

"We just can't do without power since we use electric saws to cut the conch shells. We need light also to have the conch shell ornaments engraved with designs. The job requires immense craftsmanship and cannot be done in the dark," Pradip Kumar Nath, a conch artist, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Usually, the workers could earn up to Tk 200 for crafting 100 conch shells, but in the summertime plagued by power disruptions their income comes down to Tk 40.

Faced with similar problems, some businessmen at Islampur told this correspondent that newspaper reports are of no use; it's all their "lot in life".

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Draft coal policy draws sharp criticism

Experts say it would drive away investors

SHARIF KHAN

The sixth draft version of national coal policy, now being prepared by the energy ministry, draws sharp criticism of investors and some experts who believe it will drive away investors and will fail to tap into the vast coal potentials of the country.

The draft being prepared by a committee headed by the ministry's additional secretary Wahidunnabi Chowdhury has also left a big question mark on the issue of the open pit method of mining—which is opposed by a section of experts and activists.

A top energy ministry official, however, said he was aware of the

problems of the new draft. "We can not go for a prohibitive policy that discourages efficient investors and encourages low quality investment like that in Barapukuria. This draft is still undergoing changes and it will require approval of the ministry first," the official said.

Experts say Bangladesh's untapped coal potentials in north Bengal can meet the country's power demands for 60 to 90 years at the present rate of power consumption and drastically transform the economy. But to tap into even a quarter of the resource, billions of dollars of investment is needed.

Foreign investors and some experts say the draft has grossly

digressed from the previous versions especially in the areas of royalty and coal export options. "Some ideas reflect extreme nationalism and reservations against private investment," quips an expert. "The basic idea for having the policy has been wrongly translated."

The suggested royalty for coal development would practically shoot up to 30 percent, given the present coal price. This implies that coupled with taxes, a coal development would have to pay around 50 percent of coal sales revenue to the government—which investors term "absurd" for carrying out any business.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Forest plunderers living on nerves

PINAKI ROY

All forest officials, especially the top ones, are panicking now, slowing down the usual bustle in the offices of the forest department considerably, since the sacking of Osman Gani, the recently detained corrupt chief conservator of forest (CCF).

The panic among the officials was multiplied by a news report that the anti-corruption task force interrogators have been preparing a list of other corrupt forest officials.

Sources in the forest department said there are plenty of reasons for the forest officials to be panicked as almost all of them got rich with illegally earned wealth. While visiting the headquarters and the Dhaka zone office of the department this correspondent

found forest officials huddled in small circles talking about Gani and the likely omen he had brought upon them.

When asked about the present situation in the department, one of them said, "Nobody is clean in this department. Everyone from the top to the bottom is corrupt and they all are really panicking about their futures."

"Osman Gani not only destroyed himself, he brought down uncertainties on many officers," he added.

A forest department source said Gani used to draw only Tk 20,400 as his monthly salary, but the joint forces recovered about Tk 4 crore in cash, gold ornaments and documents of large sums of bank deposits from his possession so far

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PHOTO: STAR

Amid scorching heat women along with their children wait in a long queue to collect water from army personnel. The photo was taken from water-starved Bashpatti area of Mohammadpur in the capital yesterday.

NASIM'S GRAFT CASE Judge feels embarrassed to hold trial

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday felt embarrassed to conduct trial of a graft case against detained former home minister Mohammad Nasim while another Dhaka court issued an arrest warrant against Jatiya Party (Manju) leader Anwar Hossain Manju in a criminal case.

The hearing on a seven-day remand prayer to interrogate controversial businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun in connection with an extortion case will be held on Wednesday in his presence.

Besides, the High Court granted anticipatory bail for three months to former minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf along with three others and ex-BNP lawmaker Nazimuddin Alam and a dozen others in separate criminal cases.

NASIM CASE Judge Malik Abdullah Al Amin of the Special Court for Dhaka Division yesterday felt embarrassed

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Controversial NGO RIHS shut down

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Bangladesh chapter of giant Kuwait-based NGO Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) is still running its offices and covertly continuing activities through some other NGOs, despite cancellation of its registration around one month ago.

The RIHS, also known as Jamiatul Ehyat-ut Turaj, played highly suspected roles by supplying funds to Islamist militants in the country, reliable sources said.

The NGO Affairs Bureau in an official letter on May 6 informed RIHS of the government decision of cancelling its registration.

Meanwhile, RIHS has appealed to the NGO Affairs Bureau for reconsidering cancellation of its registration.

It also intends to hand over one of its landed properties to an organisation named Mesbah Foundation. RIHS has landed properties in Rajshahi, Gazipur,

Mymensingh, Dhaka and elsewhere.

The government in 2004 banned suspected Al Qaeda donor Al Haramain Foundation (now banned worldwide) but many Haramain staffs including five foreign nationals joined RIHS that eventually topped the list of suspected donors to militants.

Two Bangladeshi Haramain staffs -- engineer Masudur Rahman and Mujibor Rahman -- are still working with the RIHS as its director of projects and receptionist.

However, NGO Affairs Bureau Assistant Director AKM Humayun Kabir told The Daily Star, "The cancellation was decided following directives from the highest level of the government. So the question of considering any RIHS appeal does not arise at all."

The Bureau has nothing to do with RIHS properties and its foreign staffs living in the country, he added.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Lightning kills 18 in 4 dists

STAR REPORT

At least 18 people died and 17 others were injured after being struck by lightning in Mymensingh, Lalmonirhat, Netrakona and Rangamati yesterday.

At least nine people were killed and five were injured in Mymensingh alone yesterday, our Mymensingh correspondent reports.

District Relief and Rehabilitation Office (DRRO) sources said five people died in Sadar, two in Phulpur and one each in Hahua and Nandail upazilas.

The victims are Monir, 20, of Char Jalikhana, Rabbi, 13, Rafique, 12, of Char Jalikhana, Md Rafiq, 13, of Miaz Bari, Shahed Miah, 30, of Bhawanipur, Rani, 9, of Shakai,

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Announcement

Today's Issue of The Daily Star contains monthly FORUM free of charge.

-- Editor

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