

Reform local govt bodies to check corruption

Demand citizens' rights activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Citizens' rights activists yesterday called for bringing about reforms in the local government institutions, including city corporations, in order to reduce bureaucratic controls, check corruption and improve service delivery system.

They also suggested strengthening coordination among the utility service providers such as Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa) and Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) to ensure that the citizens receive quick services and are not harassed.

The call came at a press conference organised by Nagorik Odhikar Sangrakkhan Forum (a forum to protect citizens' rights) in association with Resource Integration Centre (RIC) and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) at the National Press Club in the city.

"The ministries appear to like centralised power very much. They do not want to decentralise the administration, which is why the initiative to introduce city government system, which was taken during the tenure of the previous government, could not be implemented," said eminent economist Prof Muzaffer Ahmad.

The bureaucracy here is control-oriented rather than service-oriented, he said, adding that the same is the case with the DCC (Dhaka City Corporation), Rajuk (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripolkho) and Wasa.

"These service providers do not have any accountability," said Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, also the president of Shushashoner Janney Nagorik (Shujan).

Politicisation of the DCC and widespread bribery among its officials and employees are gradually destroying the institution, he

said, adding that such practices have deprived the lowest bidders of contracts for any work.

Prof Muzaffer suggested introducing the post of deputy mayor who will be elected as an individual not as a member of any political parties in order to make the city corporations more active.

He also suggested that the city corporation should divide the city into several zones and make available all services in each zone so that residents of a zone do not need to go far away to receive services. "Such system will significantly reduce the traffic jam," he said.

In a written speech, acting convener of Nagorik Odhikar Sangrakkhan Forum Selima Mashir said the lack of coordination among the service providers hampers their activities, causing a huge loss of public money.

The authorities should bring about legal reforms to strengthen

coordination among the private and public service providers at central and ward levels, she said.

"The power of the mayors should also be decentralised," she said.

Demanding introduction of public hearing for making the service providers accountable, Selima said the public services should be delivered equally to all citizens instead of providing any special services to the residents of any particular posh areas.

RIC Director Abul Hasib Khan demanded introduction of a system ensuring the residents' access to information about service providers' activities at the ward level.

He also suggested introducing area-based community policing, as there is a shortage of law enforcers.

RIC Urban Governance Programme Project Coordinator SMA Mueyed moderated the press conference.

Take steps to save Halda river

Speakers urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday underscored the need for concerted efforts of all to protect Halda river, the only natural breeding ground for carp fishes in the country.

They also called for taking necessary steps such as compliance with the fisheries conservation rules, restoration of loop (carp breeding areas), no fishing during the breeding season and proper monitoring, to save the river.

Chittagong Samity-Dhaka organised the seminar titled 'It is essential to preserve the natural fish breeding ground of Halda river for the national interest' at its office in the city.

In his keynote paper, Dr Mahmudul Karim, executive director of Bangladesh Shrimp and Fish Foundation, said though Halda river is the most reliable source of genetically pure and high quality brood

stocks of carp fishes like Ruhi, Calta, Mrigal and Kailbaosh, the breeding of carp fishes is declining significantly mainly due to man-made reasons.

He also said non-compliance with the fisheries conservation rules, cutting of five loops by unscrupulous people, installation of sluice gates in its tributaries and movement of motorised boats are mainly contributing to the decline in fisheries of the Halda river.

He also said restricting fishing rights to only licensed fishermen, stopping fishing during the breeding season, imposing a ban on certain fishing nets, raising awareness and providing training to egg collectors can help protect the Halda river from further deterioration.

Speaking on the occasion as the chief guest, Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Dr CS Karim said the breeding ground for fishes has not lost yet

as awareness about it has increased.

Seeking cooperation of all to save the river, he said he would try his best to ensure that the Halda river is declared as a World Heritage Site.

Syed Ataur Rahman, secretary to the fisheries and livestock ministry, the government has taken a project to save the Halda, which will be implemented from July 1.

Abdul Karim, secretary to the home ministry, Nazrul Islam, director general of directorate of fisheries, Shykh Siraj, director and chief of News of Channel i, Syed Mahmudul Haq, chairman of Bangladesh Shrimp and Fish Foundation, Abu Alam Chowdhury, president of Chittagong Samity, and ATM Pearlul Islam, general secretary of the Samity, also spoke.

Businessman slaughtered in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified criminals slaughtered a businessman at his residence in the city's Kafur area in the early hours of yesterday.

The victim was identified as Mubashwer Hasan, 30, owner of Haji Montaj leather store in Rajanigandha Super market in Kachukhet.

Faisal, an employee of the leather store, found his employer lying in a pool of blood on the bed in his room on the top floor of a four-storied building at North Kafur at around 9:00am.

Sub inspector Lokman Hossain, investigation officer of the case, said Faisal went to the residence at around 9:00am and found the door locked from outside. He opened the door with a duplicate key only to find Mubashwer dead.

The police sent the body to Dhaka Medical College for autopsy.

'People's attitude needs to be changed to stop torture'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Torture and repression cannot be eliminated from the society without changing people's attitudes and mentality, said human rights activists at a roundtable yesterday.

They said government and non-government organisations should launch vigorous campaign creating awareness among people against torture and repression.

The roundtable titled 'What is to be done against torture?' was organised by Nagorik Udyog and Nirjaita Manabseba Kendra at the National Press Club in the city to mark the International Day Against Torture.

Speaking as chief guest former adviser to caretaker government Advocate Sultana Kamal said, "Our culture is not against torture, and our people are also not aware enough about their human rights."

"We have hundreds of examples of repression on women and children. People do these as education is yet to focus on them properly. We have to change our torture-prone culture. We should respect people's rights and freedom," she added.

Justice Kazi Ebadul Haq said male people torture woman in many ways and fatwa is one of the main equipment for torturing woman in the country.

Advocate Z I Khan Panna, Dr Kamrul Hasan Khan, and Nagorik Udyog Chief Executive Zakir Hossain also took part in the roundtable.

Form commission for trial of war criminals

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday called on the caretaker government to form a commission to ensure the trial of war criminals.

The people should now put forward resolute demand for the trial, Justice KM Sobhan said, adding that the caretaker government has a significant role to play in this regard.

The Forum for Secular Bangladesh, also known as Ektattar Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, organised the discussion and memorial lecture at BILIA auditorium in the city to mark the 13th death anniversary of Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam.

Delivering the lecture on 'Trial of war criminals and global opinion', Dr MA Hasan, convener, War Crimes Facts Finding Committee Bangladesh, said, "The recent investigation and trial of the mass killing in Cambodia rekindled our hope that the war criminals would be brought to justice in our country

some day."

He lamented that the successive governments have failed to realise the intensity of crimes against humanity committed during the liberation war.

Acting President of the Forum Shahriar Kabir, Vice-President Shaymoli Nasreen Chowdhury and Prof Kabir Chowdhury also spoke at the discussion.

Later, the Forum gave away Jahanara Imam Memorial Award to Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) AK Khandker Bir Uttam and Prof Ajoy Roy for their contribution to the movement to promote the spirit of the Liberation War.

Sammilito Nari Samaj, Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal and Karmajibi Nari also held discussions in the city to mark the death anniversary of Jahanara Imam.

The Communist Party of Bangladesh demanded immediate execution of the verdict of Gono Adalat (people's court), which tried the war criminals.

Launch social movement to combat drug abuse

Says Mainul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Adviser Barrister Mainul Hossain has called for a social movement to combat the abuse and illicit trafficking of drugs.

Speaking at a discussion yesterday he said it is not possible for the government alone to control the menace of drug.

The discussion was organised by the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) on the occasion of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking at the National Museum in the city.

Hinting at the government's tough stance against illicit drug traffickers and drug abusers, the law adviser said amendments were brought to Narcotics Control Act of British era in 1990.

The process is on to bring another amendment to the Act to ensure stringent action against the drug traffickers, he added.

Home Secretary Abdul Karim said special efforts needed to save the young generation from drugs.

DNC Director General Shamsul Islam and DNC Additional Director AKM Shahidur Rahman also participated in the discussion.

According to latest statistics available at the DNC, a total of 7355 cases were filed under the Narcotics Control Act in 2006 by the department, and 7821 people were arrested in this connection.

Militant suspect held for planting bombs at Ruet

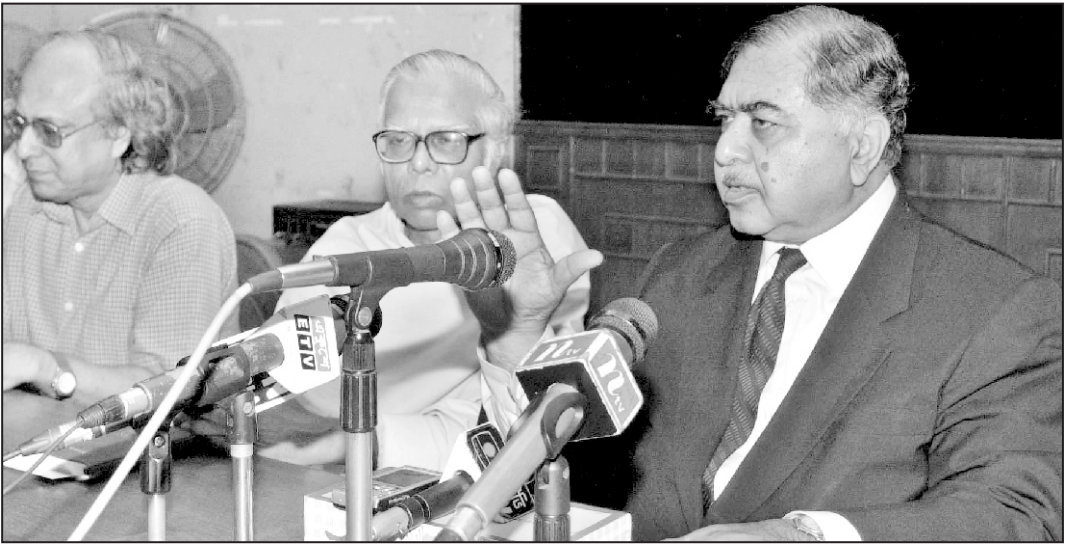
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday held a militant suspect who confessed to planting seven powerful bombs at Ruet (Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology) in the name of Jadid Al Qaeda in last one month.

He was identified as Abul Hossain Tutul, 24, son of Abdul Karim of Kajia area under Motihar Police Station in the city.

Rab picked Tutul from his shop 'Messrs Karim Hardware' near the Ruet main gate.

In Rab interrogation, Tutul confessed that he himself had planted all the seven bombs at Ruet in the name of Jadid Al Qaeda only to create panic among the locals.



Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain speaks at a press conference at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his right are columnist Syed Abul Maksud and Dr Qazi Khaliquzzaman Ahmad. (Story on Page 1)

Human trafficking still a social disease in S Asia

Says Geeteara Safiya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women and Children Affairs Adviser Geeteara Safiya Choudhury yesterday said trafficking of women and children still remains a social disease in South Asia.

"Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Convention on preventing and combating trafficking in women and children 2002 is limited only to the issue of prostitution," she said.

Geeteara was speaking as special guest at the launching ceremony of a project titled 'Prevention and protection of victims of human trafficking in Bangladesh' in the city.

It was launched jointly by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

The Royal Embassies of Denmark and Norway are funding the three-million dollar three-year project to be

implemented by the government and NGOs in 22 districts.

The project is aimed at preventing trafficking, protecting victims and potential victims, prosecuting traffickers and assisting the victims with livelihood options.

Calling upon the government and non-government agencies concerned to identify the causes behind trafficking, the adviser said mass awareness on consequences of trafficking, economic development and prosecuting the traffickers would contribute to combat trafficking.

Allured by the traffickers, the women and children mainly become the victims of this cross-border menace, she said, adding that employment opportunities for the potential victims could reduce such exploitation.

IOM Business Advisory Board Member Ikram Sehgal of Pakistan said, "It is a heinous crime and we should

combat it together by eradicating poverty and educating people."

He said a large number of the trafficked victims are vulnerable to HIV.

According to IOM, women and girls are trafficked for hard labour, sex trade and domestic work, while the boys are recruited to act as beggars in India, Pakistan and the Middle East in particular.

IOM South Asian Regional Representative Shaidul Haque said lack of safe migration mechanism often prompts people to take up exploitative ways of migrating.

Norwegian Ambassador Ingebjorg Storfing and IOM National Programme Officer Zakia K Hassan also spoke at the ceremony chaired by Secretary to Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Rokeya Sultana.

The wilting children

FROM PAGE 1

playground for the children. A clean mat has been rolled out over the cement floor. Large pictures of Mickey Mouse and Donald Ducks hang around. On the white mat are four children all almost of the same age around seven or eight.

Annesha (5 years 8 month) lays down a railway, carefully putting together the tracks. Asad, 6, watches with glee, a big rail engine in his hand. All set, the engine starts chugging round and round the track. But Tripti, 6, does not like it much, or she has other ideas. She tromps across the track, upending the engine with its wheels still going round and round in motion. Asad throws a plastic bunny at Binti and starts crying. Tripti just smiles. "They cry," she announces and runs her tiny hands on her scalp – the curly hair vanished with the intensity of chemotherapy.

"What are these?" she has black patches on her head and hands and legs, as if she was hurt badly.

Tripti glances at the marks and says: "B-e-l-a-d. I have B-e-l-a-d. That is why."

"I also have b-e-l-a-d." Tripti comes forward and chirps in her high-pitch voice. These children, they all have it what they call b-e-l-a-d for blood cancer. They are just part of the 6,000 or more children who get this deadly, inexplicable disease every year in Bangladesh. Without knowing what fate they are approaching, they mostly die as Salma Chowdhury would tell us at this shelter home for children called ASHC (an abbreviation for A Shelter for Helpless Ill Children). In the last over four years, the centre received 170 cancer children. Only 19 of them are alive today.

"I started this cancer centre after my own son died at four from the disease. Many parents coming from distant places cannot afford treatment of their children in Dhaka. They don't have places to stay as cancer treatment is a lengthy process, often taking two to three years," Salma says. "So I have opened this place where the parents can come and stay with their children for free. They have to cook their own food in the kitchen. Sometimes, we arrange medicines, but that is a rare thing to happen as fund is in short supply."

And cancer treatment is costly as Rani, mother of Tripti, would say. "I have sold my everything and still I don't know if my daughter will be cured one day. Every week, every month I have to come to Dhaka from Gaibandha for chemotherapy. My whole life is now ruined. We have already spent over two lakhs taka. Just today I had to buy a medicine for 5,900 taka. I don't know what is my daughter's future."

"I will be a doctor," Tripti mutters shyly. She pretends administering an injection with her fingers. "It hurts. But I don't cry." And then she smiles, showing her bloody gum. Infection. It happens when they go through chemotherapy dripping low-intensity poisons into the body to kill the weak but fast growing cancer cells. They also get diarrhea and stomach pain.

Tripti runs away to her mates. These children, they don't like to fuss around with the grown-ups and they barely need their mothers staying at the centre in separate rooms. These children know they don't have all the time in the world and they want to use it playing.

"I want to go home. I want to see my chickens," mutters Annesha. "My mejokaku (uncle) loves me a lot. He

buys me toys. I want to see him."

"No one knows how much time God has left for them," Salma says. "Here, you see all the children we still hope against hope to be cured. I can't provide much for them, but I still try from my pocket."

But she runs another centre in Dhanmondi where Rakib stays. This one is much more plush. A real nice modern building. Jazzy toys and colourful foreign books deck up the rooms. There is the nice piano you can play and sing to the karaoke. The music system hums slowly. The sports cars that run on remote controls. Nice colourful beds almost looking like the ones of the dwarfs of the Snow White movie.

Behind all this swanky looks lurks death in its ugliest guise. The palm prints. The reminders of the loved ones who has moved on to that strange, enigmatic world leaving you behind. The colour wash. The imitation of life. The transience of human life.

"Rakib! Did you have your lunch?" Salma asks and the little boy shrieks something incomprehensible.

"How much time he has?" Salma asks herself. "I got some funds from .. and set up this palliative care centre for those like Rakib."

Palliative is the last stage in a cancer patient's life when they have nothing to look forward to but some relief from pain and despair. And a cancer patient's last days are the most horrific. Slowly, they watch the last strand of life draining out of them. The pain becomes excruciating. Their kidney fails. Their lungs become full of water. Their body swells. They have throbbing pain in head.

"It is then they need some intensive care," says Salma. "They deserve the best time of their life when time is so little so that they can pass away peacefully. We try to give them love. And we try to give physio-

logical support to parents who are facing the imminent disasters of their life. This really matters to the patients."

And it mattered to Imran who came here when he was only 13. When he was 15, the doctors uttered the final verdict and Imran was shifted to the Palliative care centre where he stayed for a few months. Then as his condition deteriorated beyond any more treatment, he was taken to his home in Chatkhil, Noakhali.

On May 6, Salma got a call on her mobile. It was Imran. "Madam aunty, I want to come to the centre once more," Imran's voice sounded feeble.

"Yes, you will come Imran," Salma replied, knowing very well this will not happen. You need ambulances to shift patients in their terminal days and ASHC has no such vehicles. "You get treatment there and get well first."

Six days later, Imran became restless. At three in the afternoon, he asked his mother to make a bed on the floor. As he was laid there, he asked for his father's mobile. "I want to make a call to madam aunty," Imran's voice sounded laboured.

As the phone was passed to him, he held it tight. And then he closed his eyes to the world. Forever.

Imran's palm prints still show on the art paper. A pair of bright yellow imprints. Imprints that speak of another world unknown to all living beings. Imprints that say 'I was here one day'. Imprints that say 'I will not be here tomorrow'. Imprints that say 'Hold my hand'.

Talk

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) organises a talk on 'Creating a South Asian community: India-Bangladesh relations' by Indian Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon. Venue: BEI conference room. Time: 3:45pm.

Workshop

Action in Development organises a workshop on 'Trade and investment related EU legislation'. Venue: Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Krishi Khamar Sarak, Farmgate. Time: 9:30am.

Exhibition

The inaugural ceremony of a special exhibition, organised by Liberation War Museum, to pay tribute to poet Sufia Kamal and Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam, will be held. Venue: Liberation War Museum. Time: 5:00pm.

Workshop

Nari Udyog Kendra organises a workshop on 'Role of UP in corruption prevention'. Venue: LGED Bhaban. Time: 9:30am.

Report launch

IUB Talk

Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) organises a talk on 'The Madwoman's Tale' by Dr Nuzhat Amin. Venue: IUB library building. Time: 5:00pm.

CD launch

Ahsania Mission Book Distribution House will launch three compact disks (CD). Venue: Boi Bazar, Dhanmondi. Time: 3:00pm.

Seminar

D Net organises a seminar on 'Regional trading arrangements: opportunities and pitfalls for Bangladesh'. Venue: Cirdap auditorium. Time: 10:00am.

Consultation meeting

The inaugural ceremony of a national consultation meeting to implement Bangladesh Vision paper (2030) will be held. Venue: NEC Bhaban. Time: 10:00am.

Joint forces yesterday held a superintending engineer of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) on various charges.

Sources said a team of joint forces arrested CCC Superintending Engineer (Electrical) Md Shahidullah while he was coming out of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) office at around 7:30pm.

He was taken to the camp of joint forces in the city for interrogation.

Shahidullah was suspended from CCC a month ago after the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Chittagong sued him on May 27, on charges of opening Bijoy TV, a private channel, illegally.

ACC Deputy Director Abu Md Arif Siddique filed the graft case accusing CCC Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury and three other CCC officials, including Shahidullah.

Superintending engr of CCC held on graft charges

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

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EXTORTION CASE

Ajker Narayanganj editor jailed for 3 years

A CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A Narayanganj court yesterday sentenced the Ajker Narayanganj Editor Tofazzal Hossain to three years' imprisonment and fined him Tk 10,000, in default, to suffer six months more in an extortion case.

Judge Anwarul Islam of the Speedy Trial Tribunal, Narayanganj handed down the verdict.

The court also acquitted publisher of the daily Dil Mohammad Dulu and SM Sohag, a reporter, of the charges.

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) caught Tofazzal red handed while extorting money from a local contractor at River View Market on March 14.

The deputy commissioner cancelled declaration of the Ajker Narayanganj for violating government regulation.

Janakantha reporter wins Monajatuddin Memorial Award

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shankar Lal Das, a reporter of the daily Janakantha, has won Monajatuddin Memorial Award 2006 for his stories on 'Life and living of the char inhabitants.'

The prize includes Tk 25,000 in cash along with a crest and citation that will be handed over to Shankar Lal, Golachipa correspondent of the daily, on December 29, in observance of the 12th death anniversary of freelance journalist Monajatuddin.

Adjudicators of the award committee include Editor of The Independent Mahbubul Alam (chairman), Executive Editor of the daily Samakal M Sanaulah Lablu (member) and Executive Director of Mass Line Media Centre Kamrul Hasan Manju.

Today is the 62nd birth anniversary of Monajatuddin – pioneer of investigative journalism at grass roots level in the country.

He started his career as a journalist in the 60s and later joined the daily Sangbad in 1976. Finally he joined the daily Janakantha in 1995 and died while working on an investigative report.

Monajatuddin had written 12 books and was awarded many prizes, including Philips Award and Ekushey Padak (posthumous).

A memorial lecture will be organised at Bishwa Sahitya Kendra auditorium at 10:00am today to observe his birth anniversary.

Chairman of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism of Dhaka University Prof Sheikh Abdus Salam will deliver a lecture titled 'Journalism and newspaper in Bangladesh-India: Rising through activity and declivity.'

Former Justice Gulam Rabbani will attend the programme as the chief guest while Dr Atiur Rahman will preside over the programme.

Rehana new NSU Foundation chairman

Rehana was elected chairman of NSU Foundation for 2007-08 unanimously at its 15th annual general meeting yesterday, says a press release.

Rehana is the first woman to be elected as the chairman of NSU Foundation. She previously served the foundation as vice chairman.

Rehana is an executive member of the Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Bangladesh (WEAB) and the United Nations Association of Bangladesh (UNAB).



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Regional consultation on disabled children begins

A three-day regional consultation of South and Central Asia began in the city yesterday with a view to formulate policy to preserve the rights of physically challenged children in the light of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, says a press release.

Save the Children Sweden-Denmark, Action Aid Bangladesh and National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOVD) jointly organised the programme attended by representatives from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

The consultation aims at determining the role of the government in implementing the UN convention regarding preserving the rights of disabled children.

The meet will also try to develop a children and disability advocacy 'implementation handbook'.

Light to moderate rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at a few places over Khulna, Barisal and Chittagong divisions and at one or two places over Dhaka, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy rainfall is also likely at places during the period, Met Office said predicting nearly unchanged day temperature over the country.

Highest temperature 35.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sylhet and Rangpur and lowest 24.8 degree Celsius at Rangamati.

The sun sets in the capital at 6.50pm today and rises at 5:13am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	34.5	27.8	62	56
Chittagong	33.2	26.6	61	74
Rajshahi	34.8	26.6	84	70
Khulna	34.2	27.2	72	79
Barisal	33.5	27.0	74	74
Sylhet	35.0	27.2	80	67
Cox's Bazar	34.1	26.3	63	72