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Govt mulls full lifting of ban on indoor politics

CA also tells nation of gradual withdrawal of emergency depending on 'needs and circumstances'; steps soon to open talks with parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said the government is considering lifting restrictions on indoor politics countrywide and gradually relaxing the state of emergency depending on 'needs and circumstances'.

Addressing the nation on the first anniversary of the caretaker government in office, he said his administration would soon move to open dialogue with political parties in line with the decision taken by the advisory council Thursday.

"I hope the political parties will capitalise on this situation to be democratic and free of corruption. The sooner it happens, the better," said Fakhruddin.

In his speech, he outlined various steps and achievements of the government since taking over on January 12 last year.

"We hope the government, Election Commission and the political parties will hold discussions between themselves to pave the way for an ascent to democracy," he added.

Full text of speech on page 5

"I reaffirm our commitment to holding the national election by December 2008 and if possible even earlier," said the chief adviser, who in his maiden address to the nation on January 21 last year pledged to have the stalled ninth parliamentary election held as early as possible.

"The government has been



trying to create a level playing field for everyone so the election is free, fair and acceptable," he observed.

He said he hopes to see a democratically elected government by

this time next year and that government would be dedicated to meeting the basic needs of the people.

Calling on everyone including the political parties to establish honest and competent leadership at all levels, Fakhruddin said, "In accordance with your wishes, we will surely hold an election acceptable to all, free from terrorism and influence of black money and

muscle power."

"Such a spontaneous transition is rare in the world history. But we are going to do that because we believe democracy has no alternative," he noted.

Amid growing political violence and public displeasure, President Iajuddin Ahmed stepped down as the chief adviser along with 10

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CA's speech hailed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of political parties and civil society members yesterday hailed the chief adviser's speech saying that it would dispel doubt and confusion in people's mind about the next general election.

Terming the CA's speech 'positive' and 'satisfactory' they told The

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RMG workers block Rokeya Sarani again for wages

Mirpur stands still for whole day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred garment workers yesterday took to Rokeya Sarani at Sheorapara in the capital and blockaded the busy street for the entire day in support of their 12-point demand including timely payment of their salary and overtime allowance.

The agitating workers withdrew their programmes around 9:00pm when they struck a deal with officials of the factories. The sudden blockade snapped vehicular movement on the street from 8:00am to 9:00pm. It caused gridlocks all over Mirpur area during the morning and evening rush hours.

Factory staffs concerned said encouraged by the successful demonstrations of the workers of SQ Group in the first week of this month, the workers of nearby Outwear Fashion Ltd, Outright Fashion Ltd and Outfit Unit-2 started demonstrating on the street from 8:00am. Workers of several nearby factories joined them later on.

Witnesses said workers of

Outright Fashion Ltd started the demonstration at 8:00am. Later, the workers of several other garment factories including two of the same group joined them.

They paraded the street and chanted slogans in support of their demands. The workers also organised rallies on the street.

Sources said several garment factories in the area were closed during the demonstration and a few agitating workers pelted some factories with brickbats when workers of those factories refused to join their agitation programme. A huge number of policemen were deployed in the troubled area.

Their 12-point demand include payment of salary and overtime by the first week of every month, fixing the duty time for workers from 8:00am to 7:00pm, if workers are asked to work after 7:00pm the factory has to provide food for them, providing weekly day-off, providing 100 percent of a month's salary as annual bonus, a stop to all whimsical termination of workers and the factory has to pay three

months and 13 days' salary along with all due overtime allowances when firing a worker.

The other demands are night allowance for workers on night duty, a stop to torture of workers and the use of offensive language against them by their superiors, maternity leave with three months' pay for female workers and a stop to the termination of demonstrating workers.

"Most of the garment factories are providing their workers with all these facilities, but the owner of the three factories never bothered to provide us the facilities," said a worker wishing not to be named.

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturer and Exporters Association (BGMEA) leaders and the garment factory management and workers' leaders sat at the BGMEA Bhaban last evening to resolve the issue. In the afternoon, members of joint forces went to Sheorapara and took 30 demonstrating workers to the meeting.

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ESSENTIALS

No price relief despite good supply

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Prices of essential commodities are yet to come down within the reach of Dhaka city residents, although the market got enough supply over the last one week.

The government initiatives including setting up of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) operated fair price markets and open market sales (OMS) of essentials also could not affect the soaring prices much, market sources said.

Consumers alleged that the spots for OMS in the city seem to have been chosen without giving

enough thought to it, while the amounts of rice at those spots were also quite inadequate compared to the demand of the low income group population.

The government sells 850 kilograms (kg) of rice a day through around 400 OMS spots in the city every alternative day, allowing a consumer to buy 3 kg each day, whose name, address, and signature are taken each time he or she buys from the government open market.

Visiting wholesale and retail markets in the city The Daily Star found that supply of all essential

commodities including rice, wheat, and edible oil was adequately steady over the last one week.

Wholesalers in Babu Bazar, Badamtoli, Karwan Bazar and Mohammadpur Krishi Market informed The Daily Star that they have adequate rice in their stocks, but sales have dropped over the last couple of days.

An employee of Akota Rice Agency in Mohammadpur Krishi Market said as consumers started to stock rice at the start of the prices going haywire about 10 days ago,

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Pro-Khaleda BNP for early polls, Saifur backers prefer roadmap

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pro-Khaleda faction of the BNP yesterday demanded holding the next parliamentary election as soon as possible while pro-Saifur faction of the party asked for the election to be held as per the roadmap announced by the Election Commission (EC).

The roadmap stipulates election will be held by December this year.

Leaders of both the factions said the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine had created an anarchic situation that forced the president to impose the state of emergency in January 2007.

The two factions came out with their views at separate press brief

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No progress yet in talks over rice import from Delhi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka and New Delhi made no progress yesterday in the first day's talks over the price of five lakh tonnes of rice that India agreed to export to Bangladesh, according to BBC Bangla Service.

Food Secretary Ayub Ali told BBC that the two sides were still in discussions to agree on the price and decide when the rice would be made available to Bangladesh.

An Indian commerce ministry official, preferring anonymity, said, "There was no progress in the talks."

The quality of rice, price and time of purchase are still unclear

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Procession at DU to free teachers, students

RU teachers form human chain

DU CORRESPONDENT

Students of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday continued their demonstrations on the campus demanding unconditional release of the detained university teachers and a student.

'Students against repression', formed mainly by the left-leaning student organisations, brought out a silent procession from Aparajeyo Bangla at 11:00am and paraded the campus.

About 1,000 students along with the activists of Jatiyatabadi

Chhatra Dal (JCD), and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), participated in it.

No classes were held at the Arts Building and the Curzon Hall following a two-hour class abstention programme.

However, a few classes were held in the Business Studies Faculty with a small number of students.

Another group of students belonging to the 'Students against repression' brought out a silent procession at the Curzon Hall.

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Students of Dhaka University wearing symbolic gags bring out a procession on campus yesterday demanding the release of their arrested teachers and a student.



Workers of garment factories blockade Rokeya Sarani at Sheorapara in the capital yesterday demanding timely wages and overtime allowances.

PHOTO STAR

Khulna Jute mill workers continue agitation over arrears, higher pay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Situation in the Khulna-Jessore industrial belt is still edgy as casual workers of six jute mills continued their agitation and work stoppage programmes to drive home a five-point demand that included payment of arrears and rise in daily wages.

Meantime, workers of seven jute mills, who were sent into forced retirement, submitted a memorandum to Textiles and Jute Adviser Md Anwarul Iqbal Friday, demanding payment of gratuity and provident fund.

Workers of Alim Jute Mills and Crescent Jute Mills, who quit their jobs under Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS), also staged demonstration yesterday for payment of arrears.

Shahidul Islam Gias, convenor of action coordination committee that was formed by casual workers, said new programmes, including road and rail blockades, would be

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NAT'L UNIVERSITY ENGLISH EXAMS Probe into question leak after students protest on streets

DU CORRESPONDENT

The National University (NU) yesterday formed a committee to probe the allegation of question leak of 2nd Year Honours English Compulsory Examinations 2006.

The three-member investigation committee, headed by NU syndicate member Enamul Haque Shaheed, has been asked to submit its report by seven work days, said highly placed sources at the NU.

Meanwhile, students of a number of NU affiliate colleges including Dhaka College and Eden College yesterday staged demonstrations in the capital to protest recurring question leak and deferment of examinations.

An urgent meeting of the NU, chaired by its acting Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof Syed Rashidul Hasan, decided to form the probe committee and announced that

the postponed courses, that were scheduled to be held on January 12 and 13, would now be held on January 29 and 30, the sources said.

Earlier on Thursday, the 1st and 2nd paper English Compulsory

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BENAZIR ASSASSINATION Musharraf rules out UN probe

AFP, Paris

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf ruled out a United Nations probe into the assassination of former premier Benazir Bhutto, in an interview with a French newspaper published yesterday.

Musharraf told Le Figaro that UN involvement was out of the question, and that the investigation into Benazir's murder would be handled internally with the help of British police from Scotland Yard.

Benazir's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, and her son Bilawal have both called for a UN inquiry, along the lines of the world body's probe into the killing of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri.

"This is not possible. Another country is involved? Pakistan is not Lebanon," Musharraf said in a transcript released by the government, referring to the implication of Syrian officials in the Hariri killing.

"It's a simple murder. We have our own institutions and we can count on the help of Scotland Yard. I hope that the investigation report will be made public before the elections," he added.

General elections are due February 18. They were postponed by nearly six weeks because of widespread riots over Benazir's killing at a political rally on December 27 that threw the nation into turmoil.

Bilawal said last week that the family and Benazir's Pakistan People's Party wanted a "UN sponsored investigation, because we do not believe that an investigation under the authority of the Pakistan government has the necessary transparency."

The Pakistani president insisted

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Sidr victim's body found

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Decomposed body of another Sidr victim was recovered from a ditch in South Khali Union under Sharonkhola upazila of Bagerhat district yesterday morning.

The victim was identified as Robi Molla 10, son of Halim Molla of Chalitabunia village.

Locals found the body floating in the ditch at Chalitabunia village at around 9:00am and recovered it. They later buried the body.

With the recovery of the body, the official death toll from Cyclone Sidr in Sharonkhola upazila now stands at 669.

Special assistants get portfolios

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday allocated portfolios to his three newly appointed special assistants.

Raja Debashis Roy was given CHT affairs ministry while Brig Gen (ret'd) MA Malek post and telecommunications ministry and Prof M Tamim energy and mineral resources ministry.

The three special assistants to the chief adviser were appointed on Thursday with rank and status of state minister under a new arrangement, aimed at expanding the cabinet of the caretaker government.

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