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Thaksin allies cleared to form government

Thai court rejects challenges to election victory

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's Supreme Court yesterday cleared the way for allies of ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra to form a government, rejecting legal challenges to their victory in last month's polls.

The People Power Party (PPP), which campaigned as Thaksin's political successor, won general elections on December 23 but fell just shy of a majority of the 480 seats in parliament.

The party's victory was threatened by cases at the Supreme Court as well as dozens of vote fraud investigations before the Election Commission.

On Friday the court rejected the most important legal challenges, including a charge filed by a rival politician accusing the PPP of being an illegal front for Thaksin.

After Thailand's military toppled Thaksin's government in September 2006, the deposed premier was barred from politics for five years and his once-dominant Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party disbanded.

The court also rejected charges that the PPP broke election law by distributing CDs featuring videos of Thaksin, who has been living in exile since the coup.

Shortly after the court ruling,

the Election Commission announced that it had settled most of the vote fraud investigations and certified the wins of 460 of the 480 members of parliament.

That means the lower house will have enough members for a quorum to convene next week.

The PPP has already announced that it will unveil a six-party coalition government on Saturday, leaving the rival Democrat Party alone in the opposition.

Surapong Suebwonglee, the PPP's secretary general, said he was relieved by the court's verdicts.

"We appreciate that the Supreme Court has delivered justice to us. We were always opti-

mistic that we would receive a fair trial," he said.

Chaiwat Sinuwong, the Democrat Party politician who filed the most important charges, said he would consult with his lawyers on further legal action.

But the Democrat leadership has publicly repudiated his efforts, prompting him to resign from the party.

The PPP still face several smaller legal challenges, but those are seen as minor hurdles to forming a government that is widely expected to welcome back Thaksin from self-imposed exile in Britain.

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1500-year-old brick structure excavated in Bogra

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

The Department of Archaeology recently excavated brick structure of a temple more than 1,500 years old and a dilapidated wall from the Gupta dynasty at the Vasu Bihara site of Shibganj upazila in Bogra.

Archaeologist Mahabubul Alam, assistant custodian of the department, said the brick built temple resembles the temple of Vasu Bihara constructed during the Pala dynasty suggesting it belonged to the same period.

Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang, during his visit to the area between 639AD and 645AD, saw several temples near Vasu Bihara which is known as Narapatir Dhap, Alam said.

Nahid Sultana, custodian of the department, said during the ongoing archaeological excavation, walls, held together with mud,

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Workers excavate the brick structure of a 1,500-year-old temple at the Vasu Bihara site of Shibganj upazila in Bogra. An ornamental brick, inset, found at this site.



Former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu being escorted to a prison van yesterday after a Dhaka court placed him on a three-day remand.

Pintu's bail prayers rejected, taken on 3-day remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu was yesterday taken on a three-day remand in connection with the grenade attacks on Awami League rally on August 21 in 2004.

A CID team led by ASP Fazlul Kabir arrested Pintu in front of his wife's official residence in the city's Motijheel area on Thursday night.

ASP Fazlul Kabir of CID produced Pintu in the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court at noon. Seeking a 10-day remand for the ex-deputy minister, the ASP referred to the earlier statement given by Harkatul Jihad (Huji) chief

Mufti Abdul Hannan, saying that Pintu was one of the masterminds of the attacks.

After hearing, Judicial Magistrate Abdullah Al Mamun granted three days' remand for Pintu.

Earlier on January 3, the joint forces picked up Pintu from the city's Gulshan area and released on January 5.

Talking to reporters, ASP Fazlul Kabir said Pintu was arrested in connection with the grenade attacks. He declined to disclose more for what he said was for the sake of investigation.

Pintu's lawyer Advocate

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Anniversary of Zia's birth today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 72nd birth anniversary of late president Ziaur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

On this day in 1936, Ziaur Rahman was born at Bagbari in Bogra.

Both factions of the party have drawn up programmes, including discussion meetings, to mark the day.

Leaders and workers of Khandaker Delwar led faction will place wreaths and offer special prayers at the grave of Ziaur Rahman at 10:00am. They will hold a discussion meeting at Engineers' Institution auditorium at 3:00pm.

Leaders and workers of pro-Saifur faction will also place wreaths at the grave and offer special prayers. They will hold a discussion at a city hotel.

In a message on the occasion, Khaleda Zia appointed BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain paid glowing tribute to the founder of the party.

Prayer Timing		
January 19		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-40	5-44
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Address some crucial issues urgently or they may cast a shadow on election

Discussion in city told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Holding a free, fair and credible general election may be mired in uncertainty if issues like spiralling prices of essentials, food shortage, unrest in garments sector and discontent over release of detained Dhaka University (DU) teachers and students are not addressed immediately on a priority basis.

Moreover, the ban on indoor politics and state of emergency have to be lifted soon for the election to be held as per the roadmap already announced. The caretaker government must also take initiative to bring the war criminals of 1971 to book for creating a congenial atmosphere for polls.

This was the unanimous view of participants at a discussion on "Existing economic crisis and way out-Election roadmap" organised by Sammilito Samajik Andolon (SSA) in the capital yesterday.

The discussants made a six-point recommendation for resolving the crises now facing the nation.

The recommendations include building an adequate food stock by importing essentials on government initiative, flawless and timely distribution of food, proper market monitoring and control if needed, making public necessary information about food stock and distribution, considering food ration system.

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Freedom fighter Lt Col Qadir's grave traced after 36 years

PORIMOL PALMA

He disappeared at a time when people were being killed everyday, leaving his family in a sudden and total loss, from which they would never be able to recover.

Although the family could not make any headway in finding out his whereabouts they however kept at it relentlessly for over three decades.

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PICTURESQUE KHAGRACHHARI

A little attention can make it a prime tourism spot

JASIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

Picturesque hill district of Khagrachhari, despite having plenty of natural features to be a prime tourist destination, is losing out due to absence of cellular communication and modern tourism facilities.

Harmonious existence of culturally diverse ethnic groups along with its breathtaking landscape showcasing several artificial and natural lakes, scenic valleys and natural waterfalls, Khagrachhari, with a little more infrastructural development, can stand out and turn into a favourite choice of tourists from home and abroad.

Khagrachhari is laid out on 2,600 square kilometres of rugged

terrain where six lakh inhabitants from different tribes of Chakma, Marmas, Tripuras, Santals, Pankhos and Rakhines live peacefully with Bangalee settlers.

The locations that draw most visitors are tourist spots and Parjatan motel at Ramgor upazila, Alutilla Parjatan spot and Buddhist temple, Reechang natural waterfall, Debotar Pukur, Panchhari Aranya Kutir, Dighinala suspension bridge, Krishi Gabeshana institute, and the snaky and curved Chenghi and Mainee rivers.

The Alutilla Parjatan spot attracts most visitors as it is only 15 to 20 minutes away from Khagrachhari town. The Alutilla Buddhist temple, a mysterious cave and several majestic water-

falls are also located here. The fascinating view of the town and the River Chenghi from hilltops can mesmerise any visitor.

Reechang natural waterfall, the largest waterfall in Khagrachhari, is located in the dense tropical rain forest of Alutilla.

Another popular attraction, Debotar Pukur or the pond of gods, is situated about a thousand feet above the sea level on top of a hill. The level of water in this pond remains the same all year round and visitors are allowed to go for a dip in it.

Khagrachhari has a number of government and private rest houses, motels, hotels and guest-houses that are rented out at very

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Nicholas Burns to step down

AFP, Washington

The third highest-ranking official at the US State Department and the pointman in talks to step up sanctions on Iran, Nicholas Burns, is quitting his job, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said yesterday.

Burns, the under secretary of state for political affairs, will be succeeded by the US ambassador to Moscow, William Burns, the department said. The two men are not related.

After 26 years as a top notch, soft-spoken career diplomat, Burns "has decided it was time for him to retire from the Foreign Service," Rice told reporters in a surprise announcement.

"He's decided that it's the right moment to go back to family concerns. And while it is a sad thing for us, it is certainly something that I understand and respect," Rice said, with Burns by her side.

Prior to his latest assignment in

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Laldighi Park opens after a decade

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Laldighi Park developed at the picturesque Laldighi, a lake in the centre of the port city, was inaugurated yesterday after a 10-year wait.

LGRD and Cooperatives Adviser Anwarul Iqbal inaugurated the park in a ceremony at 6:30pm.

Chittagong City Corporation took the initiative to develop the park in 1995 over an acre of land on the bank of the historic Laldighi dug in the British era.

The lake is only 25 feet from Laldighi Maidan.

The development work was completed in 1997 under a Tk 2.15 crore project but it could not be formally inaugurated due to bureaucratic red tape.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony Adviser Anwarul Iqbal said such parks are essential in every city of the country for offering city dwellers the scope to spend their

leisure in touch with nature.

He said the government has decided to double the allowances of union parishad chairmen and members from next April. The ward commissioners of the city corporations would also enjoy better allowances soon, he added.

He urged different bodies of local government to workout income-generating plans.

Acting Chittagong City Corporation Mayor M Manjur Alam chaired the ceremony where Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Hossain Jamil and Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) Commissioner M Akbar Ali were special guests.

Earlier, the adviser inspected the under-construction Kanchannagar-Dhurang Road in Fatikchhari upazila and attended a views-exchange meeting with local union parishad chairmen and members.



PHOTO: STAR

Reechang waterfall is one of the most attractive tourist spots in Khagrachhari. Like this, there are some 10 waterfalls in the district.