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Zia's birth anniversary observed

UNB, Dhaka
The 72nd birth anniversary of late president Ziaur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was observed yesterday in a low-key manner. Both factions of BNP placed wreaths at the grave of Zia at Chandrima Udyan in the capital separately. They cancelled scheduled discussions on Zia's life and works following the death of BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia's mother Taiyeba Majumdar. Khaleida Zia appointed party Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain along with leaders of his faction placed wreaths at the grave and offered special prayer at about 10:35am. BNP leaders Nazrul Islam Khan, Selima Rahman, Moazzem Hossain Alal, Khairul Kabir Khokon

More democracy needed to reform democracy

Prothom Alo roundtable told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Leaders from across the political spectrum yesterday said there should be no return to politics of the pre-1/11 era and reforming democracy should mean greater democratisation in the country. Leaders of the Awami League (AL), BNP and left-leaning and emerging parties said sustainable political reforms need to ensure strengthening of governance processes and not just reshuffle in the government organisations. They were speaking at a roundtable styled "Dialogue, Elections and Future Political Stability" organised by the daily Prothom Alo.

Kamal Hossain said it is incorrectly believed that people cannot participate in polls without arms or black money. "They say this is the reality...This reality has to be rejected without compromise," said Kamal. He said a dialogue is essential to breathe new life into Bangladesh's politics and it would set the country up for national unity to confront challenges. Former president and Bikalpa Dhara chief AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury said the chief adviser must take the initiative to hold separate dialogues with the political parties. He said the dialogues should be followed by identification of the most important issues and then a consensus on those points has to

be reached. Badruddoza also said political reforms must include selection of new leadership. "We can be proud of our history and heritage, but we cannot go forward if we are fixated on the past," he said. The former president also said the people, politicians and the government have to be responsible for the political future of Bangladesh. AL Presidium Member Tofail Ahmed said the biggest priority right now is to hold elections without the influence of muscle and black money. While admitting that politicians stand guilty of many crimes in the past two decades, Tofail said this is

Rice prices drop slightly in retail markets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The prices of rice at retail and wholesale markets in the capital dropped slightly yesterday due to joint forces' strong monitoring and a steady supply of rice during the last few days. Prices of fine rice at retail markets did not drop as much as they did at the wholesale markets. Coarse rice was selling between Tk 28 and Tk 30 a kg at retail markets yesterday while the fine rice was selling between Tk 35 and Tk 44, depending on quality. At the wholesale markets, coarse rice was selling at Tk 25.50 a kg yesterday, the price was Tk 26 a kg Thursday. Fine rice was selling between Tk 30 and Tk 40 at the wholesale markets yesterday depending on quality; those were selling between Tk 31 and Tk 41 Thursday. The joint forces officially started



Four winners of Citi Microentrepreneurship Awards 2007 pose for photo with (sitting from left) founder Executive Director of Shakti Foundation for Disabled Women Humaira Islam, economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam and Citi country officer in Bangladesh Mamun Rashid at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.



Clockwise from top: Khaleida Zia bursts into tears as she arrives at her cantonment residence to have a last glimpse of her mother who died Friday night; policemen help Arafat Rahman come out from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University; Tarique Rahman walks out of Dhaka Central Jail. Tarique and Arafat were freed on parole, like their mother, to see their deceased grandmother.



Pakistani troops kill 90 militants in tribal belt

Militants planning cyanide attack captured

AFP, Islamabad/Karachi
Pakistani soldiers killed up to 90 Islamist militants near the Afghan border Friday, as the chief of the CIA linked the leader of the extremists in the region to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Pakistani troops also captured 50 Islamist militants in an operation in the rugged tribal region near the Afghan border on Saturday. The fierce clashes were the latest in a series to rock the lawless Pakistani tribal region of South Waziristan, the stronghold of wanted Islamist warlord Baitullah Mehsud and his al-Qaeda and Taliban allies. Militants have stepped up attacks on troops in the region since opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was killed last month, underlining US fears Pakistan is spiralling out of control ahead of February 18 elections. CIA Director Michael Hayden told The Washington Post in an interview published Friday that al-

-Qaeda and allies of tribal chief Mehsud were behind her killing at a political rally on December 27. "This was done by that network around Baitullah Mehsud. We have no reason to question that," Hayden said, echoing assertions by President Pervez Musharraf's government about Benazir Bhutto's death. The CIA chief was quoted as saying there is a "nexus now that probably was always there in latency but is now active: a nexus between al-Qaeda and various extremist and separatist groups." The rebels have shown their growing strength in the past week, capturing a Pakistani paramilitary fort in the tribal belt and killing seven soldiers on Wednesday, with another 15 troops still missing. Soldiers on Friday fought off a "large number" of insurgents who surrounded another fort at Ladha in South Waziristan and attacked it with rockets, the military said in a statement.

CITI MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARDS Exceptional micro endeavours get recognition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Microentrepreneur award. Economist Wahiduddin Mahmud, also chairman of Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation, announced the names of the winners while chief guest of the programme Finance and Planning Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam handed over the awards. Each winner received Tk 3 lakh as cash prize. Some 4,300 individuals and organisations from all over the country competed for the awards-in four categories. The advisory council of Citi Microentrepreneurship Awards 2007 selected the winners after several rounds of screening and field interviews. Best Innovative Microentrepreneur Anwarul Islam set an example of how to overcome poverty through hard work and innovation. He used to be an ice-cream vendor selling the product from door to door. It was very hard for him to meet the needs of his family with that business, which drove him to the idea of manufacturing ice-cream sticks. MORE STORIES ON STAR BUSINESS PAGE 8

Bigots harass Ahmadiyya family

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia
An Ahmadiyya family was forced to leave their village home in Kushtia following harassment by bigots. The family of Moazzem Hossain is now living in the district town in distress, refusing to talk to the press for fear of more troubles. Local sources said a group of villagers, led by 'matbar' Arab Ali and local mosque-committee members, at Bishnudia village in sadar upazila ostracised the four-member family through a fatwa on November 3 as it was revealed that they belong to the Ahmadiyya sect. The fatwa even told the relatives of Moazzem to shun the family and said anybody found dealing with

70 people killed in Iraqi clashes

AFP, Nasiriyah
Iraqi security forces overran a mosque in southern Iraq where fighters of a shadowy Shia messianic sect were holed up yesterday, ending two days of clashes in two cities that killed more than 70 people, police said. The fighting came as millions of Shias across Iraq marked Saturday's climax of 10-day Ashura rituals, which commemorate the killing of Imam Hussein by armies of the Sunni caliph Yazid in 680.

The mosque was the last stronghold of the cultists. Wearing yellow headbands sporting the Star of David, they attacked police simultaneously early Friday afternoon in the southern port city of Basra and in Nasiriyah, about 350 kilometres (220 miles) south of Baghdad. Fighting raged through the afternoon in both cities. It died down in Basra during the night but continuing sporadically in Nasiriyah. A police official in Nasiriyah said Iraq's security forces raided hideouts of the doomsday cultists at daybreak on Saturday, flushing them out of the mosque and houses they had occupied in Al-Salhiyah suburb. "Some of the insurgents were killed and arrested while others fled during the raid," the police official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. The security forces had found the mosque to be booby-trapped and disposal experts later triggered a blast which destroyed the

Prayer Timing
January 20

	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

Govt-parties dialogue a must for democracy

BBC Sanglap told
A CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram
Democracy might be in jeopardy and unwanted elements might assume power if the present caretaker government does not hold dialogues with political parties soon to find a solution to the prevailing political crisis, said speakers at the BBC Bangladesh Sanglap yesterday. The speakers during the programme held in the district town said there is no alternative but to hold dialogues between the political parties and the government to establish democracy in the country. Dialogues can create a conge-

Thaksin allies unveil coalition government

AFP, Bangkok
The People Power Party, which supports deposed Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra, unveiled a coalition government yesterday, capping a dramatic political turnaround 16 months after his ouster. The announcement of the six-party coalition ended four weeks of suspense following last month's general elections, which had left the PPP just shy of a majority in parliament. "It took a long time to get here," party leader Samak Sundaravej told a press conference. "I am really relieved that now there's nothing more to worry about." Under the coalition the PPP-led government would control about



Ansar members stand guard in front of the Institute of Diploma Engineers in the capital, shackling rifle to their waist belt so that miscreants cannot snatch the weapons.

Asif Zardari regrets premiership for a year

HAMID MIR, from Islamabad
PPP Co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari has regretted a proposal of becoming caretaker Prime Minister for one year. Well informed sources have confided that some people close to the establishment approached Zardari recently and suggested that elections must be delayed for one year and a broad based national government is the urgent need of time. PPP Co-chairperson was not ready to listen anything about the further delay of elections. He even

Missions asked to give top priority to workers' welfare

UNB, Dhaka
All Bangladesh missions are being instructed to give utmost priority to welfare of Bangladeshi workers abroad, a spokesman for the foreign ministry said yesterday. Foreign Advisor Iftakhar Ahmed Chowdhury has directed that the missions will report on the situation of expatriate Bangladeshis to the ministry regularly on a pro-forma basis. The report will include information about total numbers of workers, professions, problems they are facing, numbers in jails, prospects of future employment and proposals to improve their conditions. "I believe such reports will not only enhance better policy coordination but also link the missions even more to the Bangladeshi