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REGD. NO. DA 781 • VOL. XVIII No. 253 • DHAKA SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 27, 2008 • www.thedailystar.net • ASHWIN 12, 1415 BS • RAMADAN 26, 1429 HJIRI • 24 PAGES PLUS STAR INSIGHT PRICE: Tk 10.00

Political reforms can't be imposed

CA tells press in NY

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed Thursday said the December 18 national election will set an example for future elections in terms of fairness and credibility.

He also said his government wants to hand over power to honest and capable persons.

The caretaker government chief was speaking at a press conference of US-based Bangladesh journalists at Helmsley Hotel in New York.

Replying to a query, he said reforms in political parties cannot be imposed. They have to be carried out through a process.

However, he added, the primary target of reforms could be achieved through registration, which is now mandatory for political parties seeking election to parliament.

He said talks between the

Govt totally focused on pledge to hold Dec 18 election



PHOTO: AFP
Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed addressing 63rd session of the UNGA in New York yesterday.

Chief adviser tells UNGA session

UNB, New York

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday assured the world leaders that his caretaker government is now focused on fulfilling the pledge to hold free and fair parliamentary polls on December 18.

He expressed the hope that all political parties would participate in the elections under new laws and regulations.

"Let me reiterate here that my government is completely and totally focused on fulfilling our pledge to hold free and fair parliamentary elections on December 18 as announced last week," the CA said in a statement at the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly.

The CA said an election is the first pillar of democratic governance and during the past 20 months, his government relentlessly worked to shore up democracy's other pillars as well.

In his about 20 minutes' speech, the head of the caretaker government said the judiciary was made fully independent, National Human Rights Commission established to protect fundamental rights of all citizens and Right to Information Law enacted to provide the transparency to a well-functioning democracy.

Besides, he said, the government in consultation with political parties amended and strengthened Representation of People Order

The hydra raises heads again



PHOTO: STAR
Acid-burned Nasima, right, sitting on her bed at the Burn Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital with her mentally challenged daughter. Pursuing justice for the rape of her 11-year-old daughter landed Nasima in this state.

Acid violence increasing

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

Nasima wishes she never dared stand up to the thugs who raped her daughter, a mentally challenged preteen. The defiance cost her dearly: they burnt her with acid.

The 35-year-old mother filed a case against the rapists two years back. Ever since they kept piling pressure on her to lift it. She resisted up until the first day of this month when they avenged her persistence.

Nasima's entire torso is riddled with acid burns, from neck to chest, abdomen and back. This time she does not dare seek justice.

"Aziz and his associates, who raped my 11-year-old daughter, threw acid on me because I did not agree to withdraw the rape case on their orders," she said on her bed at the Burn and

Criminal, outlaw killed in 'shootouts'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A criminal was killed early yesterday in "crossfire" during a shootout between his accomplices and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel in the city's Holan area under Dakshinkhan Police Station.

Meanwhile, a regional leader of an outlawed party was also killed in a "shootout" between his cohorts and police at Fulbari of Damurhuda upazila in Chuadanga.

The criminal was identified as Syed Mohammad Shihab, 35, leader of "Shihab Group". The outlaw was identified as Farid Hossain, 35, regional commander of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-ML).

Rab-1 officials said they arrested Shihab at the city's Badda area around 8:00pm Thursday and following his confessional statement a Rab team along with Shihab

BNP tries to woo ex-colleagues to expand alliance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a bid to expand four-party alliance ahead of the parliamentary election, BNP leadership has started talking to some of their former colleagues who are leading other political parties now after leaving their old party.

A BNP leader claimed that Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed, known to be very critical of Tarique Rahman and Hawa Bhaban, contacted Khaleda Zia over the phone recently, and expressed his willingness to meet the BNP chief after his return from Saudi Arabia, where he currently is.

The BNP leader however said it is still not clear whether Oli along with his LDP colleagues will return

to his old party or join the four-party alliance under the banner of his new party.

Maj Gen (ret'd) Syed Muhammad Ibrahim, chairman of Kalyan Party (KP), also expressed his interest in meeting the BNP chairperson, the BNP leader said adding that KP might join the alliance.

A former BNP lawmaker yesterday told The Daily Star that his party leaders will do everything to expand their alliance to compete against Awami League-led grand electoral alliance in the upcoming parliamentary election.

"We are now trying to contact the former leaders of our party and hope all misunderstandings will be resolved through meetings

AL preparing to contest poll, says Zillur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During an iftar party yesterday Awami League (AL) declared to foreign diplomats that it is preparing to contest in the upcoming parliamentary election, and put out a call to all other political parties to follow suit.

"We believe, for the sake of democracy, all other political parties will also participate in the parliament election. The parliament election must be held on the announced date," said AL Acting President Zillur Rahman at the iftar gathering hosted by his party in a hotel of the capital in honour of the diplomats and heads of international agencies stationed in Dhaka.

Zillur said withdrawal of all 'false cases' against Hasina is essential to create a congenial atmosphere for free, fair and transparent elections, and remarked that it will be impossible to move forward without making Hasina's

Kuwait to give aid to build Padma Bridge

UNB, New York

Kuwait has assured Bangladesh of providing necessary financial support for construction of Padma Bridge.

Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Nasr Muhammad Al-Sabah gave the assurance during a bilateral meeting with Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed on the sidelines of the 63rd session of UN General Assembly at UN headquarters on Thursday.

After the meeting, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim told newsmen that the Kuwaiti premier told the chief adviser that his country would provide financial assistance for construction of Padma Bridge from the Kuwait Fund.

He requested the CA to send details of the bridge project for processing the financial assistance.

Al-Sabah also said his government has taken steps to enact new

Indian troops kill 7 Huji militants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indian troops in Assam yesterday shot dead seven suspected militants claimed to have belonged to Bangladesh's banned Islamist outfit Harkatul Jihad Al Islami (Huji), reported agencies.

Indian defence ministry spokesman Rajesh Kalia said the operation was launched following up leads that a group of Huji operatives were to meet another near Guwahati, capital of the north-eastern Indian state.

The location of their meeting was tracked down through mobile interceptions.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Home Secretary Abdul Karim said he has heard about the Indian claims. "We'll start dealing

with the matter once we are informed formally."

Quoting a statement of the Indian defence ministry, BBC, AP, AFP and Reuters reported that a platoon of soldiers yesterday encircled a militant hideout at a village in Dhubri district.

As they asked them to surrender, the militants opened fire at them, forcing the troops to hit back and kill the Huji operatives.

According to the statement, the Indian army recovered six revolvers and two kg explosives from the site after the gun battle that lasted for over two hours.

Contacted, Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad said his forces have been keeping a close watch on the activities of Huji and other militant outfits.

Lailatul Qadr tonight

UNB, Dhaka

Muslims across the country will observe the holy Lailatul Qadr tonight.

The holy Quran was revealed on this night to show the mankind the path of worldly and eternal emancipation.

Special prayers will be offered at all mosques, seeking blessings of Allah for continued peace and progress of the Muslim Ummah. Devotees will visit the graves of their near and dear ones and offer munajat (prayer) for the salvation of the departed souls.

Qurankhwani, milad and religious discussions will be held at mosques on this holy night.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed gave separate messages, greeting the Muslims across the world and seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country.

Newspapers published special articles, while Bangladesh Television and private TV channels will air special programmes highlighting the significance of Lailatul Qadr.

Turning safe automobiles into vehicles of death

Substandard gas cylinders still being widely used

KAILASH SARKAR

Unauthorised workshops have been converting fuel oil run motor vehicles into compressed natural gas (CNG) powered ones fitting them with cylinders that are not made for containing the specific type of gas, turning safe automobiles into vehicles of death.

The substandard cylinders often are made from metal electric poles, oxygen cylinders, cylinders of fire extinguishers, and other kinds of materials not suitable for making CNG cylinders, according to officials of the Department of Explosives.

Some legal conversion centres also often use similar substandard cylinders and other conversion kit parts ignoring the fatal risk factor, the officials added.

They said noticing widespread use of inappropriate cylinders in converted motor vehicles, the department already intensified its inspection drive and expanded it countrywide.

According to the rules made by Rupantarita Praktik Gas Company Ltd (RPGCL), the CNG conversion monitoring authority in the country, a CNG cylinder must be able to withstand pressure of 3,000 pounds per square inch

(psi). But the substandard cylinders being used in converted automobiles can barely withstand 1,000psi of pressure.

An official of RPGCL, which is also responsible for issuing licenses for CNG conversion workshops, said the cylinders that exploded in the country so far were all substandard, and no standard cylinder exploded so far.

AHM Nuruzzaman, assistant explosives inspector, told The Daily Star, "Apart from the capital city, officials in Rajshahi, Sylhet and Chittagong divisions were also



Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, the brains behind the Kendro.

Unesco award for Bishwo Shahitto Kendro

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bishwo Shahitto Kendro has been selected as one of the laureates for this year's prestigious Jan Amos Comenius Medal of the Unesco for its outstanding achievement and innovations in the fields of teaching and educational research.

The award will be given away on November 26 during the 48th session of the International Conference on Education at the Geneva International Conference Centre. Unesco Director-General Koichiro Matsuura will preside over the ceremony.

Director of International Bureau of Education Clementina Acedo in a letter invited Bishwo Shahitto Kendro Chairman Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed to the award ceremony.

"Director-General of Unesco Koichiro Matsuura has approved the proposal made by the Comenius Jury to



PHOTO: STAR
Explosives department officials seize a number of substandard CNG cylinders at a conversion workshop in the city's Segunbagicha on Tuesday.

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