

US to support whoever wins election

Says Congressman Crowley

BSS, New York

Congressman Joseph Crowley has said whoever people of Bangladesh elect to power will get full support of the United States.

At an annual holiday celebration party at Queens museum of Art here on Thursday night, he said the US government is eager to work with new government of Bangladesh to be decided through majority of people in the upcoming election.

Crowley, also the chairman of Bangladesh Caucus in the US Congress, has expressed the hope that Bangladesh's election will be held in a free, fair and impartial manner.

He also conveyed his thanks to the present caretaker government for lifting the state of emergency.

The congressman said president-elect Barack Obama and his team wish to see Bangladesh as a corruption-free nation.

Democratic Party leader Mohammad Aminullah, America-Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ABCCI) President Gias Ahmed, Secretary Hasanzaman Hasan and Prof Mebel Gomez, among others, attended the function.

Bangladeshi doctor wins protection in Britain

AFP, London

A London court ruled yesterday in favour of a Bangladeshi doctor held captive in Dhaka by her parents seeking an enforced marriage, saying she cannot be removed from Britain without her consent.

Humayra Abedin, 32, returned to Britain this week after a Bangladeshi court ruled on Sunday that her parents were holding her against her will and that she should be freed.

The High Court in London issued an order while she was in captivity on December 5 under Britain's Forced Marriage Act, legislation which lets British courts prevent forced marriages.

"I shall grant further orders to protect Dr. Abedin and prevent her being removed from this country again without her consent," said Judge Paul Coleridge.

Abedin lives in Britain but travelled to Bangladesh on August 3 after she was told by family members her mother was seriously ill.

She had planned to return soon after but told a female cousin her family was holding her captive and planned to force her to marry a stranger.

Humayra -- an only child -- reportedly has a Hindu boyfriend in London, which has angered her Muslim family. She said after her release she hoped to move on with her life.

Rajuk to publish DAP final plan this month

BSS, Dhaka

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) will publish the final report on detailed area plan (DAP) this month.

The final report being prepared under a project since 2004 will give a detail plan for the land use in and around the city, a press release said.

ULAB organises charity concert

METRO DESK

University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) organised a Victory Day charity concert at its own campus auditorium at Dhanmondi in the city on Thursday, says a press release.

Musical bands, including Renaissance, Striking, Nirjhor and Orions, performed at the programme.

ULAB Pro-VC (designate) Imran Rahman inaugurated the concert which was attended by its Board of Governors President Kazi Shahid Ahmed as the special guest.

The media partners of the concert were Channel-i, Star Campus magazine and FM station Radio Aamar.

Proceeds from the programme have been donated to ailing DU student Simi of Marketing department.



(Left) BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia introduces Matur Rahman, a four-party alliance candidate for Dhaka-2 constituency, at an election rally at Kamrangir Char in Dhaka yesterday. (Right) Awami League President Sheikh Hasina introduces all the six candidates of the grand alliance from Jessore at an election rally at Jessore Eidgah ground.



BSF detains 4 Bangladeshi students

BSS, Feni

Border Security Force (BSF) of India detained four Bangladeshi students from Pechibaria border in Feni yesterday, officials and local residents said.

The four students of Feni Government College were taking their pictures near a frontier pillar. But the BSF men who were patrolling areas nearby called them inside the Indian territory and detained them, said a villager.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) officials said they have already sent a letter asking BSF to return the students.

SC dismisses ex-MP Mollah's petition seeking stay on HC order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday dismissed a petition seeking stay on a High Court (HC) verdict that had earlier declared legal the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) action regarding the corruption case against former lawmaker Habibur Rahman Mollah.

After hearing the petition filed by Mollah, the full bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin, however, permitted the petitioner to file a regular appeal with this court against the HC verdict after getting the copy of the verdict.

Counsel for ACC Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that following the SC order the trial proceedings of the case against Mollah will go to trial court.

ACC Assistant Director Syed Ahmed filed the case against Mollah with Ramna Police Station on October 3 last year. The charges include concealing information about wealth worth over Tk 2 crore.

Following a writ petition by Mollah, the HC on November 20 delivered the verdict that had ruled that the ACC decision to file a graft case against the petitioner was legal.

Barrister Ajmalul Hossain appeared for the petitioner.

Ex-Betar DG Ashrafuzzaman passes away

BSS, Dhaka

Ashrafuzzaman Khan, former director general of Bangladesh Betar, passed away due to old-age complications yesterday at the age of 98.

He is survived by his only son former CSP Anisuzzaman Khan.

Ashrafuzzaman Khan, who hailed from Manikganj, was also a noted writer. He authored 14 books, including novels and plays.

On March 7, 1971, he played a courageous role by coming out of Dhaka Radio Station along with his colleagues and staff members to protest the then authorities' decision not to air live the historic speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Death anniversary

METRO DESK



Today is the 19th death anniversary of noted flutist Abdur Rahman, says a press release.

On the occasion, a mild mahfil and Qurankhwan will be held at his residence at 26 Bashbari, Block-D/7, Mohammadpur in the city.

Relatives and admirers are requested to attend the programme.

Shortage of skilled birth attendants obstacle to reducing maternal mortality rate

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

The country may not fulfil its target to reduce maternal mortality rate to 2.4 per thousand live births from 3.2 by 2010 due to shortage of skilled birth attendants.

The government in 2001 set the target of reducing maternal mortality to 2.4 per thousand live births by ensuring that at least 50 percent deliveries are attended by skilled personnel. Unfortunately, there has not been much progress in increasing the number of skilled attendants.

If safe delivery could not be ensured, maternal mortality and morbidity would not decline much and the rate of death of newborns, which is now 37 per thousand live births, would remain the same. Even child health situation also could not be improved as expected.

But the fact is that still only 18 percent deliveries are attended by the medically trained personnel, which was 13 percent in 2004, according to the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2007.

The reasons why the rate of deliveries by skilled medical personnel are so negligible, even after investing huge amount of money are mainly absence of field-level activities from 1998-2002 for lack of an action plan, manpower in family planning sector, skilled birth

attendants (SBAs) and medical professionals in upazila and union-level health centres.

"A gap had been prevailing soon after an unsuccessful training programme of the traditional birth attendants (TBAs) that took place from 1977-1998," said Programme Manager of Maternal and Child Health of the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP) Ashraf Ali.

As the TBAs were not government employees, they could not be monitored properly and even after receiving the 21-day training, they did not follow it and did not refer the pregnant mothers in critical condition to the nearby healthcare centres, which they were supposed to do.

It created a setback and the government had to look for a different option that started with the SBA training in 2003. Around 3400 family welfare assistants and women health assistants of the health ministry were provided with a six-month training to attend deliveries in rural areas.

According to the DGFP, the number is very negligible, as still some 11,000 SBAs are needed to provide safe deliveries in 4,500 unions across the country.

It is not possible to attain 50 percent deliveries by the skilled personnel that include doctors, gynaecologists, mid-

wives and SBAs by 2010, experts said, adding that institutional delivery is still only 15 percent as people, especially in rural areas, do not want to go to the hospitals and clinics.

"Due to the traditional practice and culture, pregnant women in rural areas show apathy in going to the medical institutions. The number of doctors in upazila and union-level health centres is also very negligible," said Dr Halida Hanum, former director general of Family Planning Association of Bangladesh.

She recommended including TBAs in SBA training programme to increase the rate of deliveries by the medically trained personnel as it is not so easy to change people's behaviour instantly and still 60 percent of the deliveries in rural areas are attended by TBAs.

The Unicef Child Survival Report 2008 reveals that around 500,000 women die in childbirth every year worldwide and the death rate of the children aged below one year who have lost their mothers is high comparing to that of the children who have mothers.

Majority of the newborn death takes place in South Asian countries and Bangladesh is one of them, the report added.



Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement, Bangladeshi Dalit Human Rights and Nagorik Uddyog jointly form a human chain in front of the National Press Club in the city yesterday to press home their 16-point demand.

Call to remove discrimination against Dalits

DU CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) yesterday demanded steps to remove discrimination against the sweeper community in society.

The organisation placed a

16-point demand at a human chain programme jointly organised by BDERM, Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights (BDHR) and Nagorik Uddyog in front of National Museum in the city.

The demands include appointment of professional sweepers in all vacant posts

for the sweepers, creating new workplace for unemployed sweepers, establishing new government-run hospital in all sweeper communities, maintaining secularism in the government policies, recruitment of sweepers' representatives in every political committees, ensuring education in mother language to the children of sweepers and ensuring rights to property of female sweepers.

BDERM President Babul Sarder, General Secretary Milon Das and Nagorik Uddyog President Jakir Hossain spoke at the programme.

3 Bangladeshis killed in fire in Kuala Lumpur

BSS, Feni

A devastating fire at a factory in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur killed three Bangladeshis in the early hours of December 16.

Employers of the deceased confirmed an earlier report of their death over telephone yesterday, family members said.

The victims were identified as Abdul Qayyum, 34, and his brother Abdul Latif, 28, sons of Tofazzal Hossain of village Gobindapur, and Abu Tayeb, 26, son of Abu Ahmed of village Lemua.

The sources said the workers were asleep when the fire broke out. Their bodies will be brought back home on December 30.

RU reopens today

BSS, Rajshahi

Rajshahi University (RU) will reopen today after a 17-day vacation for Eid-ul-Azha, Martyred Intellectuals Day and the Victory Day.

JATIYA PRESS CLUB Shaukat, Sabuj re-elected president, secy

UNB, Dhaka

Shaukat Mahmood and Kamal Uddin Sabuj have been re-elected president and general secretary of Jatiya Press Club for 2009-10.

The election to the management committee of the club was held on Thursday.

Other elected office-bearers are Syed Akhter Yusuf -- senior vice-president; Abdur Rahman Khan -- vice-president; Kazi Rawnak Hossain and Nurul Hasan Khan -- joint secretaries; and Syed Abdal Ahmed -- treasurer.

The members are Kader Gani Chowdhury, Parveen Sultana Musa Jhuma, Farid Hossain, Hasan Hafiz, Shamsuddin Ahmed Charu, Farida Yasmin, Abu Taher Khokon, Mustafa Kamal Majumder, Bakhtiar Rana and Momtaz Bilkis Banu.

Reject war criminals in elections

Projonmo '71 urges voters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at press conference yesterday urged the countrymen to reject war criminals in upcoming parliamentary elections, terming them a threat to sovereignty and independence of the country.

Projonmo '71 organised the press conference at Liberation War Museum in the city.

Presenting the keynote paper, president of the organisation Shaheen Reza Noor said that some political parties are backing the anti-liberation forces and they are contesting the polls.

Though the caretaker

government and Election Commission said they would take measures to bar them from contesting the polls, no steps were taken to this end, he said.

The war criminals must be brought to book for the sake of civilisation and the rule of law, he added.

On the behalf of the children of the martyrs, he called on all not to vote for any anti-liberation elements, corrupt persons and criminals.

Asif Munir, Tahmina Khan, Syed Maksud Ali, Abdul Wahab and Mizanur Rahman were present at the programme.



Former adviser to a caretaker government ASM Shahjahan speaks at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the city yesterday. On his right is Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumder. Shujan organised the event. (Story on page 16)

Give priority to health sector

Speakers urge political parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday called on the political parties to prioritise public health sector after forming the next government.

They said this at the roundtable jointly organised by Bangladesh Pharmaceutical Society (BPS), Pharmacy Graduates' Association (PGA), Consumers' Association of Bangladesh (CAB) and Doctors for Health and Environment at the National Press Club.

Presenting a keynote paper, Prof ABM Musa of Pharmacy department at Dhaka University placed an eight-point demand to be reconsidered by the parties who are going to form the next government.

He called for keeping the pharmaceutical industry out of any strike or movement in future for the sake of the treatment and wide exports potential.

Musa said, "Political parties should have their goals well defined and prioritise the health sector with time-bound planning."

He further said that rural public health should be

ensured by turning the health centres into full-fledged modern hospitals equipped with sophisticated instrument, medicines, doctors and nurses.

The government should take a modern combined health policy immediately to improve the country's present poor health scenario and initiate a central system to control the standards of medicine, food and cosmetics like the developed countries, he added.

Musa said as population is a burning problem in our country, the parties should pay their attention to the resolution of the problem, adding that the treatment provided by the hospitals and clinics should ensure accountability to improve the quality health service.

Prof Sitesh Chandra, Dr Rashid E Mahub, Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, CAB president and executive editor of the Janakantha Borhan Ahmed, CAB General Secretary Kazi Faruk, BPS General Secretary Mujib Khan, PGA General Secretary Ishtiaq Ahmad and Dr Mostak Hossain also spoke.

WEATHER TODAY

No change in temperature

UNB, Dhaka

Weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country having chances of light rain or drizzle at one or two places over northern part in the next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Moderate to thick fog may occur over the northern, western and central parts and the river basins and light to moderate fog elsewhere over the country.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 28.5 degree Celsius was recorded at Sylhet and the lowest of 13.5 degree at Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:16pm today and rises at 6:37am tomorrow.

The 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	19.4	16.2	96	86
Chittagong	24.6	17.5	94	82
Rajshahi	19.2	15.3	94	89
Khulna	23.0	14.5	94	90
Barisal	23.5	14.3	98	92
Sylhet	28.5	14.6	67	74
Cox's Bazar	28.0	18.8	85	84

DHAKA TODAY

Roundtable

The daily Prothom Alo organises a roundtable on 'Election and future Bangladesh'. Venue: Prothom Alo office. Time: 10:00am.

Seminar

Surgery department and Endocrinology department of Birdem, and Society of Laparoscopic Surgeons of Bangladesh jointly organise a seminar and a live surgery on bariatric surgery. Venue: Birdem hospital. Time: 8:00am.

Rotary Dhaka Central

The regular meeting of Rotary Club of Dhaka Central will be held. Venue: Dhaka Club. Time: 1:30pm.



Students of Marketing Department of Dhaka University form a human chain in front of the National Press Club in the city yesterday seeking financial assistance for the treatment of their friend Sharmin Taskin Simi, a second year student of the department, as her two kidneys have been damaged.