

Britain keen to finalise Iraq troop deal

AFP, Baghdad

Britain's defence ministry said yesterday it is keen to finalise a deal that will make legal its military presence in Iraq and prevent a halt to its operations when a UN mandate expires this week.

"There is no pressure per se but there is a keenness to sign otherwise we would need to have a pause (in operations) as effectively there would be no legal framework," a ministry spokesman in London told AFP, asking not to be named.

Iraq's presidency council approved on December 28 a parliamentary resolution allowing the presence of non-US foreign troops in the country after the expiry of a UN mandate at midnight on December 31.

The resolution, which was approved by the Iraqi parliament last week, allows the government to negotiate bilateral agreements with other countries that will give their troops a legal basis to stay in Iraq for several more months.

Britain, which has about 4,100 troops based mainly near the southern port city of Basra, has yet to sign an agreement although officials say a

final version is on the table.

"The agreement was agreed and then approved and ratified by Iraq's Council of Ministers and the Presidency Council and during Prime Minister Gordon Brown's visit to Iraq" earlier this month, the spokesman said.

A spokesman for the British Army in Basra said the deal would need to be formally signed before it takes effect.

Britain is expected to complete its mission in Basra in May before withdrawing its forces in late July.

The United States, which has 146,000 soldiers in Iraq, in November signed an agreement with Baghdad which allows its combat forces to remain in the country until the end of 2011.

Deals will also need to be signed between Iraq and Australia, Estonia, Romania and NATO, who each have small numbers of troops stationed in Iraq.

El Salvador announced earlier this month that it would withdraw its 200 soldiers at the end of 2008, although the El Salvadorian minister of defence visited Iraq on Sunday to discuss an extension at the request of the Iraqis.

Moni Singh's anniversary of death today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 18th death anniversary of the founder member of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and one of the pioneers of anti-British movement Comrade Moni Singh, says a press release.

He was also a lifelong revolutionary who worked for the labour class and one of the advisers of the expatriate government during the liberation war in 1971.

CPB President Manjural Ahsan Khan and General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim paid rich tributes to the legendary leader.

The leaders will place wreaths at the memorial of the national hero at Postogala crematorium in the city at 7:30am.

A weeklong Moni Singh Fair will also kick off today on the Tanka Shaheed Memorial premises at Susang Durgapur in Netrakona.

Noted intellectual Prof Jatin Sarkar will inaugurate the fair.

Discussions on the life and activities of Moni Singh, photography and children's painting competition, film exhibition and cultural event will be held during the fair.

Prof Dr Shamsul Azam

METRO DESK



Today is the first death anniversary of Prof Dr Shamsul Azam, former head of Department of Skin and Venerology at Dhaka Medical College Hospital and father of former air chief Air Vice Marshal Fakhrul Azam, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad mahfil and destitute feeding programme will be held.

Obituary



Prof Kulsum S Huda, former vice chancellor of Central Women's University, former teacher of economics of Dhaka University and wife of economist late Dr MN Huda, passed away yesterday at the age of 79, says a press release.

She left behind her one son and two daughters to mourn her death.

She was buried at Banani graveyard yesterday.

Her kulkhwani will be held after Asr prayers on Friday at her Dhanmondhi residence (House-57, Road-6/A) in the city.

Badiul Alam

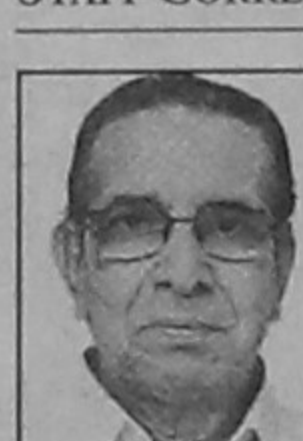
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Badiul Alam, a freedom fighter, vice-president of the Jatiya Krishak Samity and member of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh, passed away at a city hospital yesterday at the age of 65, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, two sons and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

Mahfujus Sobhan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Mahfujus Sobhan, a freedom fighter, former secretary to the government and former chairman of Uttara Bank Limited, passed away at a city hospital on Sunday at the age of 65, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, a son, two daughters, and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

He was buried with state honour at his family graveyard.

A milad mahfil will be held seeking his eternal peace after Asr prayers on Friday. Relatives, friends and admirers are requested to attend the programme.

Sabbir Ahmed Mukul

METRO DESK



Sabbir Ahmed Mukul, son of Jamshed Ali Jamidar, passed away due to liver complications on Sunday at the age of 45, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, a son and a daughter and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn the death.

His kulkhwani will be held today after Asr prayers at his Fakirapal residence in the city.

Fresh voters, price hike

FROM PAGE 16

Explaining, he said prices of essentials were at a tolerable level during the Awami League (AL) rule. The prices started jumping up when the BNP-led alliance came to power and rose further during the interim government's tenure. And this had a significant impact on the outcome of the parliamentary election, he thought.

Besides, people in general did not accept BNP's forging alliance with Jamaat, he said, adding it (BNP) has to sever ties.

BNP's role regarding President Iajuddin-led first caretaker government also went against the four-party combine.

The former adviser said though the AL had made some bad selection of parliamentary candidates, BNP had made very bad choice of its nominees.

Now that the AL is going to form the government, it should take the opposition into confidence, and it must not show autocratic tendencies, he said.

Another former adviser, Akbar Ali Khan, said the spirit of the Liberation War greatly attracted the young voters, and they could not be lured with money. This might have been a major cause of AL's poll victory. Public desire for a change also worked in favour of the AL-led grand alliance.

Corruption, terrorism and running a 'parallel government' (at Hawa Bhaban) were also reasons behind BNP's debacle, he said.

Now, both the new government (to be formed) and the opposition have to respect the people's verdict, Akbar Ali said. The victors should go for "poli-

tics of inclusion instead of politics of exclusion."

Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal told this correspondent, "I would have been surprised if the poll result was not like this. Such a result was expected because of the mal-governance unleashed by the four-party alliance during its five-year rule. I hope the new government will try the war criminals."

He hoped that the opposition would play a constructive role when the elected government takes over.

Justice Dr M Zahir said conscience of the nation has spoken against corruption, nepotism and terrorism, and for secularism in this election.

"We are a peace-loving nation, and we reject fundamentalism and terrorism. I hope all concerned will remember this and work together to build a better Bangladesh," he said.

Barrister Rafique-ul Haq, who happened to be the counsel for both (former premiers) Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, cautioned that absolute majority of the ruling side is a very bad thing.

Faulty nomination of parliamentary candidates by Khaleda Zia, and abuse of power, corruption and nepotism done by her party during her rule, formation of grand alliance by Sheikh Hasina and at last the allegation against Arafat

Shraddha

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Bikash Narayan Dutta, senior reporter of the daily Purbakon, will be held at his village home in Pabna today, says a press release.

Bibhuti Bhushan passed away due to old-age complications at his village home on December 2.

Observers term polls free, fair

FROM PAGE 16

Its delegates were also impressed by the efforts to ensure procedural transparency of the elections, she said.

On the basis of the IRI team's preliminary observation, she said the election process appeared organised and calm and that officials were generally knowledgeable about the laws.

The final observation report of the IRI team will be available in a couple of months.

Monitoring 250 polling stations in six divisions across the country, the 65 members of the organisation found no major irregularity.

Responding to a query, Newman said "Weak opposition does not depend on the number of seats, rather it depends on how they participate."

More than 500 international election observers, about two lakh domestic observers and thousands of agents of political parties witnessed the voting and tabulation processes, she said.

Although the campaign was abbreviated, political parties

and independent candidates had an equal and adequate opportunity to make their case before the public, the IRI observed.

It thanked the caretaker government, the Election Commission, the army and the UNDP for their efforts to register more than 80 million voters and ensure their inclusion in the new list.

The IRI also commended the media for giving the citizens timely and valuable information.

The poll monitoring body saw some rooms for further improvement in the electoral processes, including easy identification of voter number.

"Observers even noted campaigning taking place around the polling stations, which is in direct violation of the law," Newman said.

IRI Executive Director Judy Van Nest was also present at the briefing.

The observation mission from Japan said the ninth parliamentary elections were conducted in a free, fair and peaceful manner.

Asked about the BNP's allegation of irregularities in 72 constituencies, head of the mission Goji Sakamoto told reporters at the Jatiya Press Club that they visited eight polling stations in Dhaka and found nothing as alleged by the losing party.

Sakamoto expressed hope that political parties would respect the verdict of the people and work together to develop the country politically and economically.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Masayuki Inoue and other members of the observation team were present at the briefing.

At a meeting with Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury at his office, Nirj Deva and Charles Tannock of the EU Parliament also thanked the caretaker government for holding a free and impartial election.

The election having been held successfully, now Bangladesh will be counted as one of the world's largest democratic countries, Iftekhar told reporters after the meeting.

Rahman Koko (Khaleda's son) of depositing money in a Singapore bank were the main reasons of the defeat of four-party in the election, he said.

"Sheikh Hasina will have to be very careful in running her government," he said.

Economist Atiur Rahman said, "Traditional attitude towards opposition political parties should be changed. Awami League should encourage BNP and other opposition parties to give their views in parliament, and should respect those."

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury said Sheikh Hasina and her party will now have to take the responsibility of making parliament more effective and functioning.

Business leaders expressed optimism that the new parliament would be the centre for resolving people's problems.

Talking to The Daily Star, Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury Parvez, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said the new government should form a taskforce to face any bad impact of the global financial recession.

"We expect some positive actions from the government for a vibrant garment sector," he said.



Novera Deepita's birthday today

METRO DESK

Today is the 34th birth anniversary of Novera Deepita, a brilliant journalist of The Daily Star, says a press release.

Novera, who was also a gold medalist student of Dhaka University, passed away on July 27 in 2006. She is survived by her parents, two brothers, sister and husband.

Every year, Novera Deepita Memorial Trust awards Novera Deepita Memorial Scholarship, which carries Tk 20,000, to the student securing the first place in BA (hons) examinations under the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism of Dhaka University.

Graft, food price throw BNP out

FROM PAGE 16

Although the prices of essentials skyrocketed during the tenure of the caretaker government, the upward trend began during the rule of BNP-led four-party alliance government between 2001 and 2006.

Swarna Begum, a housewife and a voter in Rayerbazar slum area, said the price of ordinary rice was Tk 10-14 a kg during the tenure of Awami League government between 1996 and 2001. But its price rose to Tk 20 during the rule of BNP-led alliance government and kept soaring in the last two years.

She decided to vote for the party that would show determination to bring down the rice price.

Lily, another housewife from a low-income group, who

queued at a Mohammadpur polling centre said, "I shall be very happy if the prices of rice, pulse and other essentials come down and a peaceful atmosphere prevails in the country after the election."

"It would be really good for us if corruption declines in the country," said Nahar, a garment worker, who cast her vote at Mirpur Bangla High School polling centre.

Nahar hoped that the election would bring a positive change and the next government would work for the betterment of people.

Anis R Rahman, a voter at Tejaon, said, "We only want that the prices of essentials remain within our reach."

Some voters also talked about other issues that influenced them to choose candidates in the

polls. Many voters said power crisis, law and order, rise of Islamist militants, terrorist attacks, politicisation and nepotism had also been the deciding factors.

The results indicate that these issues influenced a huge number of first-time voters, who constitute about 23 percent of over 81 million voters, and also the swing voters to decide on which party they would vote for.

The survey also revealed there was every possibility that about 37 percent of the voters would swing, with 14 percent already determined that they would not vote for the party they chose in the last election and 23 percent undecided about which party to vote for, meaning they could go either way.

28 'grenades' seized

FROM PAGE 1

December 23. According to sources, the Rab team around 6:00pm raided a multi-storey market at Terry Bazar—a wholesale cloth market in a densely populated area near Anderkilla—and recovered the grenades in two rooms on the third floor of Jahan Bhaban. The members of the elite force also recovered a good number of books and cassettes of the militant organisation.

A Rab special team, comprising members of the intelligence wing of Rab Head Quarters in Dhaka, Rab-7 and Rab-11, held JMB operative Masum at Begumganj in Noakhali in the morning. Rab-7 Commanding Officer Lt Col Zahidur Rahim told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

Masum was arrested following confessions made by the two JMB operatives held near Chandina on December 23.

"Acting on Masum's confessional statement we recovered the grenades and arrested

Masum's associate Khorshed in the evening," said Zahidur.

Talking to journalists in presence of Rab officials at Terry Bazar, Masum said JMB formed a seven-member squad to kill Khaleda. He said he was a member of the squad and had training for such operations.

The plan to kill Khaleda was abandoned as he and another JMB operative had a feud which created division in the squad, claimed Masum.

Masum said he became a member of JMB after he met JMB operatives Asad, Habib and Sohag when he was earning his living selling syrupy drinks (Sarbat) at Anderkilla intersection.

He became acquainted with other members of the organisation at "Dawati Baithak" (invitation meeting) that was usually held after prayers at Anderkilla mosque, he said.

He said Khorshed was recruited through the Dawati Baithak.

Masum said on December 13 Asad gave him the handmade grenades in a box to keep in his custody.

On December 22, he took the grenades to a village near Chandina where he, Asad and Habib stayed in a house and had training on how to hurl grenades.

After the cancellation of the attack, he brought the grenades back to Chittagong and kept those in his room at Terry Bazar before going to his village home from which he was arrested yesterday.

On December 23, Rab recovered three improvised hand grenades from Nabaibad village in Devidwar upazila of Comilla, around an hour after BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia addressed an election rally four km away in Chandina upazila headquarters.

Rab arrested two operatives of JMB, and seized a 10kg bomb from a JMB den at Nabaibad village.

Dec 29 polls set high standards

FROM PAGE 16

courtesy call on him at his office in the morning.

Goji Sakamoto, member of the House of Representatives of Japan, observed Monday's parliamentary election was conducted in a very systematic and nice manner.

The voting was "orderly and peaceful", he said and also termed the voter list systematic.

The Japanese lawmaker appreciated the caretaker government's performance and the leadership of Chief Adviser Fakhrudin for all preparations in holding a fair and peaceful election.

He said this was the fourth-time visit of the Japanese election observer team to Bangladesh and this time they were very impressed and pleased with the election.

Akihiro Nishimura, also member of the House of Representatives, accompanied Goji as member of the mission.

Goji said the winning party should take responsibility and work according to the manifesto while the losing party should cooperate.

"All should work together to build a better Bangladesh," he was quoted as saying.

Referring to their visits to many polling centres and talks with voters, he said election was well maintained and voters were found "delighted and excited towards democracy".

The Japanese observers appreciated the law and order situation.

The CA said his government had worked for last two years, carrying out reform of electoral rules and election code of conduct, for holding an election without violence and practice of corruption by ensuring that voters can cast their vote without fear.

"The voters cast their votes peacefully in a festive mood," he said, adding that this was "one of the highest turnouts of voters so far".

Regarding voter list, the CA said this task is indivisible and the Election Commission with all-out support of the government prepared the voter list with photographs of over 80 million in less than a year.

The CA said the presence of the Japan's election observer team gives an essence to show how strong and excellent friendship exists between the two countries. He hoped that the support of Japan as a big development partner would continue.

Talking to a delegation of British election observer team, the CA said heavy voter turnout reflects deep commitment to democracy and good governance.

The team, led by Baroness Pola Uddin, made a courtesy call

on the CA at his office in the afternoon.

The Bangladeshi-origin Pola, member of the House of Lords, congratulated the CA and his caretaker government on accomplishing hard jobs and successful holding of the general election fairly at a peaceful atmosphere.

Referring to their visits to many polling centres, Pola said the chief adviser and his government have every right to be proud of holding a free and fair poll.

CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim briefed newsmen about the meetings. UK's High Commissioner in Dhaka Stephen Nicholas Evans was also present.

WEATHER TODAY logo with sun and clouds

Moderate to thick fog likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Moderate to thick fog may occur over the river basins and light to moderate fog elsewhere over the country during midnight till morning, Met Office said in a forecast.

Night temperature may fall slightly over the country, it said.

Highest temperature 27.6 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 10.0 degrees Celsius at Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:22pm today, and rises at 6:42am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

Table with columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening)

BNP at lowest ebb

FROM PAGE 1

If the two major political parties are judged in historical figures, it is the BNP that ended up with a stunning defeat in two divisions in a battle of ballots. Despite running into a debacle in 2001, the AL did not face such a fate as BNP's.

Regardless of a win or failure in the elections since 1991, the BNP always bagged a significant number of seats in Dhaka division and—also some in Sylhet.

In the 2001 parliamentary elections, the BNP obtained 193 seats alone with 56 in Dhaka division out of its 90 constituencies, nine out of 19 in Sylhet, 19 out of 37 in Khulna, 17 out of 23 in Barisal, 50 out of 59 in Chittagong.

In the June 12, 1996 elections, the party was beat by the AL, but won 116 seats and emerged as the largest ever opposition party in parliament. The BNP won 30 in Dhaka division, 34 in Chittagong, 32 in

Rajshahi, 12 in Khulna, three in Sylhet and five in Barisal division.

In the 1991 parliamentary polls, the BNP clinched 140 seats with a significant number in the major divisions and formed the government with support of Jamaat-e-Islami.

But Monday's elections shaped up into a nightmare for the BNP as it bagged only 15 seats in Chittagong division, eight in Rajshahi, two in Khulna, and two in Barisal division.

The latest election results reduce the BNP to the level of Jatiya Party in terms of winning parliamentary seats. After being thrown out of power, the Jatiya Party that had governed the country for long obtained 35 seats in 1991 elections, 32 in 1996 and 14 in 2001.

According to results, only 25 BNP candidates, including party chief Khaleda Zia, who bagged three seats, came out successful against 259 nominees.

Most people blamed the BNP's defeat on five years of its "misrule and unbridled corruption" in the country and also on its close ties with Jamaat-e-Islami that has a controversial anti-liberation past.

Jamaat, which was constitutionally banned immediately after the country's independence for its anti-liberation role and allowed to do politics again after the bloody changeover on August 15, 1975.

Jamaat worked its way into the mainstream politics with a significant share in power in 2001, leveraged by the BNP.

This time, Jamaat failed to avert its downfall, as its previous gain was pared down by a humiliating win of two seats.

In its first parliamentary election in an independent Bangladesh in 1991, Jamaat had bagged 18 seats and emerged as a power player in politics by extending its support to the BNP to form government.

It had tried its luck in the June 1996 elections and nominated 300 candidates, but obtained only three seats. Most of their candidates' security deposits were forfeited.

In a new strategy, it partnered with the BNP and managed 17 seats in 2001 elections. But it could not prevent its downfall in Monday's polls as it won only three seats though nomination over 40 candidates, including its chief and secretary general.

On the other hand, the AL won a landslide victory after the country's first election held in 1973. The party came to power in the June 1996 elections with 146 seats.

The AL lost out to the BNP-Jamaat-led four party alliance in 2001 and finished the election race with only 62 seats.

In its election strategy, the AL teamed up with Jatiya Party, preventing it from straying into the BNP folds. In the unofficial election results of 295 constituencies, the AL cruised along with 229 seats.