

China, Pak president

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Pakistan High Commissioner in Dhaka Alamgir Babar came to Suhda Sadan in the afternoon to convey his president's and prime minister's greetings to the AL chief.

Later, Babar told reporters that during the meeting with Hasina he shared views with her on various bilateral issues.

He hoped that the friendly relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan would be strengthened further in the days to come.

Our Staff Correspondent from New Delhi adds: India yesterday appreciated Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina's remark that Bangladesh's territory would not be allowed to be used as a launch pad for terrorist activities against its neighbour.

Home Minister P Chidambaram hoped Bangladesh will make a "new beginning" by denying sanctuary to insurgent groups ULFA and NDFB.

"No quarter will be given to militancy. Any banned organisation will be dealt with firmly and decisively," Chidambaram told reporters in Guwahati after a two-hour meeting of the Unified Command headed by Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi.

Meanwhile, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader LK Advani has welcomed Awami League President Sheikh Hasina's assertion that she would not allow terrorist organisations to operate from Bangladesh and said cooperation between the two coun-

6 foreigners freed

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term ended in December, 2004. After expiry of jail term, he sought political asylum in Bangladesh, which the government turned down.

"Later, his lawyer filed a writ petition, which is now pending with the High Court. We cannot do anything about him, until the court delivers its verdict," he said.

A few NGOs have been working for repatriation of the foreign prisoners, Zakir Hassan said, adding that the country has to shoulder the cost of keeping them in jail.

Talking to The Daily Star, former adviser to a caretaker government Sultana Kamal, also the executive director of Ain O Shalish Kendra, welcomed the move and said, "We are also carrying out our activities in this regard."

Replying to a query, she said, "In most cases, we do not receive any response from the embassies or high commissions of the countries concerned as they often do not want to acknowledge the prisoners as their nationals for not having any passport."

BCL captures rooms

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sub-editor of The Daily Star. They also vandalised the rooms of reporters of the daily Sangram and daily Nayadiganta.

Besides, a few former BCL leaders, who were not on the campus during the last seven years because of the dominance by JCD—student wing of BNP, had returned to campus with a good number of outsiders and firearms.

Hundreds of general students, who are roommates of JCD leaders, found their rooms locked after returning to their dormitories after the month-long Eid and winter vacations in the last three days.

A resident of Mohsin Hall told The Daily Star that he voted for the AL-led grand alliance thinking that there will be changes in all sectors. "But there is no change. Chhatra League men are doing the same as the Chhatra Dal," he said.

Sources concerned said after return of the former BCL men and their cadres the overall situation in the dormitories and on the campus is almost out of

tries is not an option but an "indispensable necessity".

PTI reports from New Delhi: In a congratulatory letter to Hasina, Advani said, "They [the people of India] are especially delighted to read in the media your categorical statement that your government would not allow the territory of Bangladesh to be used by terrorist and extremist organisations operating across the border in India."

Imam held for alleged link with militants

OUR CORRESPONDENT, KUSHTIA

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Thursday arrested an imam of a mosque at Bheramara of the district for his alleged links with an Islamist militant outfit.

According to police, Mizanur Rahman 32, imam of Bheramara upazila mosque, went to local army camp at municipality rest house at around 7:00pm and urged the army personnel to quit the camp immediately as a powerful bomb was planted there to kill them.

The army personnel instantly caught the imam and informed other law enforcement agencies of the matter.

A team of Rab-12 from Kusthia district headquarters and police from Bheramara Police Station rushed to the spot and arrested the imam.

Bomb specialists of Rab-12 also searched the camp but no bomb was found. The elite force took the imam to its office in Kusthia town for quizzing.

Rab sources said the imam might have links with certain Islamist militant outfit. They will produce the imam before the court seeking remand.

Prayers

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Maulana Noor Uddin, Acting Khatib of the national mosque, led the munajat. He sought divine blessings for peace, progress and stability of the country as well as unity of the Muslim Ummah, according to BSS. He prayed for the MPs-elect and expressed hope that they would lead the country properly and ensure peace and development in their respective areas.

Maulana Noor Uddin also prayed for peace of the departed souls of the martyred freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives during the Liberation War.

People of other faiths also arranged special prayers at temples, churches and pagodas.

Veg, fish prices

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rural markets outside the capital led to a hike in their prices in the last two days despite adequate supply.

The retailers, however, blamed the wholesalers for the price hike, saying that the wholesalers did not reduce the prices although the supply of vegetables increased in the last two days.

The prices of fish also rose by Tk 10-40 a kg in the last week despite adequate supply in the kitchen markets. But prices of hilsa came down by Tk 50 per piece following huge supply.

Expressing astonishment at the prices of essentials, many consumers said they were not expecting such a price hike after the elections.

Saidul Islam, a resident of East Razabazar, who came to Karwan Bazar kitchen market, said he was surprised to hear the prices of newly harvested potato and onion as their prices usually come down during this period of the year.

"I have bought potato for Tk 18 a kg and onion for Tk 30 a kg. I bought the two items for Tk 12 and 24 respectively from the same market last week. I expected the prices of potato and onion to come down to Tk 10 and Tk 20," he said.

Some consumers and traders said it is possible to bring down the prices of essentials if the government makes an all-out effort.

In retail markets, non-brand soya bean oil, palm and super palm oil were selling for Tk 90-95, Tk 60-70 and Tk 48-55 a kg. The price of soya bean oil was over Tk 100 a kg last week.

SCF calls

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should begin the legal process as people, specially the new generation rejected the war criminals and anti-liberation forces in the polls," said the statement signed by Harun Habib, publicity and publication committee chairman of the forum.

The forum has been campaigning across the country for two years to bring the war criminals to justice. Besides, leaders of the forum visited different parts of the country and encouraged people not to cast vote for the war criminals and anti-liberation forces.

Dulu freed

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12 years' imprisonment on August 7 last year for arson attack. Another court on July 26 sentenced him to eight years in jail for looting and arson.

Ershad

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proved that it is not a regional political party, it has now become the second largest national political party.

He was speaking at a discussion meeting at the city's Institute of Diploma Engineers Bangladesh to mark the party's 24th founding anniversary.

Meanwhile, other JP leaders, including Kazi Zafar Ahmed, present at the meeting said Ershad wants presidency of the country as per the agreement with the AL before the stalled January 22, 2007 elections. They said JP would not join the government if Ershad is not given the presidency.

Ershad said, "Jatiya Party deserves winning 27 out of the 32 seats it contested for the alliance."

"The BNP won only 30 seats contesting in more than 250 constituencies," he said, adding that this proves that JP is now a stronger party than the BNP.

JP Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Howlader, acting President Anisul Islam Mahmud and Presidium members Kazi Zafar Ahmed, Rowshan Ershad and Abu Hossain Babla were present at the meeting, among others.

Boro output

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sells at Tk 28-30 a kg. Agriculture ministry sources said Aus production target was 22 lakh tonnes last season and it was achieved. Aman production target this season is 1.30 crore tonnes. And the target would be achieved, the sources hoped.

A record quantity of 1.76 crore tonnes of Boro rice was produced last season. The target for the next season is 1.81 crore tonnes.

The sources said the government has planned distribution of 29 lakh tonnes of food through its various channels this fiscal year. But distribution of around 20 lakh tonnes would be sufficient, they thought.

"Dynamic and young leaders should be included in the committee to steer the party out of troubled waters," a former lawmaker told The Daily Star yesterday.

BNP, which won the 2001 election by a landslide, has been reduced to 29 seats in Monday's polls, while its archrival AL has won in 230 constituencies.

MPs-elect take oath

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opposition, last night told The Daily Star that they might meet this evening after the oath-taking if possible.

According to the constitution, the president shall appoint as prime minister the member of parliament who appears to him to command support of majority of the parliament members.

With Hasina sworn in as prime minister, nearly two-year long tenure of the caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed will end automatically.

A senior official of cabinet division said yesterday they have completed preparations, and are now waiting for a specific date for formation of the cabinet.

As per arrangements made by the parliament secretary, 262 lawmakers-elect belonging to the grand alliance that won a landslide victory in Monday's battle of ballots will take oath on the first day.

With the oath taking of AL's 230 lawmakers, this will be the highest number of MPs representing a single political party in the House since restoration of democracy in 1990.

Thirty-two MPs-elect from other components of the grand alliance— Jatiya Party's 27, Jatiya Samajtantirik Dal's three and Workers Party's two -- will also take oath today.

The rest 37 lawmakers-elect-- 32 from BNP-led four-party combine, one from Liberal Democratic Party and four elected as independent candidates-- will take oath tomorrow afternoon at the same place.

With the swearing in of BNP's 29 lawmakers-elect, the party will have the lowest number of MPs since its founding in 1979.

BNP's four-party allies Jamaat-e-Islami secured only two seats and BJP one seat in Monday's election.

Officials at the parliament secretary said they could not send invitation to the MPs-elect yesterday for shortage of time.

They received the gazette on poll results published by the Election Commission (EC) yesterday morning.

"So, we were not able to send invitation to the lawmakers-elect. Any lawmakers can collect invitation letters by sending their representatives or can collect that from the reception wing prior to taking oath," said a senior official at the parliament secretary.

The secretary said they would send officials to Sheikh Hasina to collect a letter from her specifying the constituency she wants to represent, Hasina

told them that she would do so before taking oath, sources said.

The AL chief won three seats in the parliamentary election.

Similarly, BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad will also have to specify the seat they want to represent as each of them won three seats.

As a result, the EC will have to hold by-election to six seats within next 90 days.

In a press release yesterday, the parliament secretary drew attention of the lawmakers-elect to their constitutional obligations.

NEW LAWMAKERS
After taking oath, the newly-elected lawmakers will sign a register book at the parliament secretary's office. Their photographs will be taken there for identity cards. But if they want, they can bring with them nine copies of their photographs each.

The parliament secretary yesterday issued a circular drawing attention of the lawmakers-elect to the procedure of getting diplomatic passports for them and their spouses, and renewal of those.

The secretary will also give them necessary forms to have official telephone and life insurance.

Officials at the secretary will collect specimen signatures of lawmakers for giving their allowances, and help them to fill up forms regarding travel.

Moreover, the secretary will provide them copies of the constitution, rules of procedure of the parliament and remuneration and allowances order 1972.

PARLIAMENT SESSION
The first session of the 9th parliament will begin at the end of this month. The constitution provides that parliament shall be summoned to meet within 30 days of announcement of the results of any general election.

The EC on Thursday published the results of ninth parliamentary election in the gazette.

At its inaugural session, the parliament will elect on the first day its speaker and deputy speaker. And the government will place over 100 ordinances promulgated during the tenure of the caretaker government for consideration within 30 days.

The House will elect the country's new president within 30 days of its first sitting, and it will also have to decide on the legality of the caretaker government.

Hasina

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her as an MP of the constituency.

When her visiting followers requested her not to give up the Pirganj seat, she said she will represent all Bangladeshis in the parliament.

Vendrell told the reporters that they discussed Hasina's future plan, and how the UN could help Bangladesh.

Replying to a query, he said they hope to see a peaceful atmosphere prevailing without any provocation, to allow formation of the new government.

Meanwhile, Dhaka city unit of AL yesterday in a special extended meeting directed its activists to follow the directions of the party chief regarding staying calm and showing tolerance towards the opposition.

President of Sabujbagh thana unit of AL in the capital, Sundor Ali, and vice-president Rahmat Ali faced the music in the meeting from their party colleagues for their alleged role in working against the party candidate there in the election.

AL Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury contested in Dhaka-9 constituency comprising only Sabujbagh thana.

Meanwhile, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday told reporters that veteran party leader Zillur Rahman should grace the post of the country's president as party leaders and supporters want to see him in that post.

Talking to a private TV channel he also said the cabinet of the new government will be comprised of 40 to 45 members.

Asked about the contract of AL with Jatiya Party (JP) regarding selecting JP Chairman HM Ershad as the president of the state, Jalil said it was a speech made ahead of the stalled January 22, 2007 election, but AL members now want to see the senior-most party leader, Zillur, as the president of the country.

2 BCL men

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submitted a list of six BCL men to the hall provost, urging him to take administrative action.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Shahbagh Police Station Rezaul Karim told The Daily Star that police rounded up BCL activists Gola Maula and Ziaul Haq at around 1:00pm on the basis of information given by the top leaders of the organisation.

However, no case was filed against them as of yesterday evening.

Over 200 personnel from police and the DB launched the raid at 11:30pm, sources said.

They raided Bangabandhu Hall, Ziaur Rahman Hall, Kobi Jasim Uddin Hall, Masterda Surya Sen Hall, Mohsin Hall, F Rahman Hall, Zahurul Haque Hall, Jagannath Hall and Salimullah Hall.

Moklesur Rahman, assistant commissioner of police (Ramna Zone), who led the raid, told The Daily Star, "The raid was conducted on information that illegal arms were being brought to the dormitories."

"No illegal arms was recovered and none was arrested till 1:00am," Moklesur said adding that the raid might continue for half-an-hour more.

DU Proctor Prof Dr AK Firoz Ahmed told reporters that the raid was conducted following some untoward incidents on the campus.

Delwar

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"You said you want cooperation. She [Khaleida Zia] was the prime minister thrice and you too held the post once. Now you should come forward and request her to work together."

Pointing to AL, the BNP secretary general said, "During electioneering, they relied on fictitious stories that we have committed corruption and patronised terrorism. We didn't expect it from them."

He also said that what role the BNP MPs will play in parliament will depend on the leader of the house, deputy leader of the house and speaker.

Tigers

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his debut in 1997. Jayawardene has scored 7926 runs at 52.84 and is Sri Lanka's leading run-scorer in Tests. He is also 74 away from the 8000-run mark.

The Bangladesh thinktank has to decide whether they want to continue playing three seamers including Mahbubul Alam or take a second specialist spinner in left-armed Enamul Haque. But it would hinge on the overhead conditions, as the early moisture would benefit the seamers.

On the flipside, the barren wicket would have a lot for the spinners and warrant an extra spin bowler.

Israeli jets destroy

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warplanes hit some 20 houses believed to belong to Hamas militants and members of other armed groups, Palestinians said.

They said the Israelis either warned nearby residents by phone or fired a warning missile to reduce civilian casualties. Israeli planes also dropped leaflets east of Gaza giving a confidential phone number and e-mail address for people to report locations of rocket squads. Residents stepped over the leaflets.

Israel used similar tactics during its 2006 war in Lebanon.

Most of the targeted homes Friday belonged to activist leaders and appeared to be empty at the time, but one man was killed in a strike that flattened a building in the Jebalyia refugee camp in northern Gaza.

More than 420 Gazans

India abandons search for 300 missing in Bay

AFP, Kolkata

The Indian Coast Guard called off its search yesterday for 300 illegal migrants who went missing after abandoning their boat near a remote island chain in the Bay of Bengal last week.

"We have abandoned the search operation as no one could be found alive or dead over the past four days," said Kripa Nautiyal, deputy inspector general of the coast guard for Andaman and Nicobar islands.

Around 400 migrants, from Myanmar and Bangladesh, had been drifting on the boat for days in their efforts to get to Malaysia.

The 105 migrants who were rescued from the floating vessel are being kept in a temporary camp in Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

So far only two bodies have been recovered.

A coast guard official said earlier that many migrants could still be alive, since no bodies have turned up on the shore.

The Indian territory of the Andaman and Nicobar islands comprises a chain of 536 islands in the Indian Ocean, of which only 58 are inhabited.

Suicide blast kills 23 near Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

A suicide bomber killed 23 people and wounded at least 42 yesterday at a tribal meeting near the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, security plan spokesman General Qassem Atta told AFP.

The bomber detonated his explosives vest at a lunch meeting of Sunni Arab sheikhs in al-Yusufiyah, a small town south of Baghdad, Atta said.

"Twenty-three people were killed and at least 42 injured," Atta said. "The suicide bomber was a member of the tribe who was close to the leading local sheikh."

"He entered the meeting through a back door."

A defence ministry source said the attack took place at about 2pm (1100 GMT).

Lankan troops

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The brutal Sri Lankan conflict over the Tigers' demand for a separate Tamil homeland has claimed tens of thousands of lives since 1972.

President Rajapakse pulled out of a ceasefire deal last year and vowed to crush the Tigers once and for all.

Since then, the rebels have been on the defensive, losing strongholds in the east of the island last year and steadily retreating in the north.

Rajapakse had vowed Thursday in a New Year's address that 2009 would see a final "heroic victory" over the rebels.

United Nations agencies and other international aid groups previously had offices in Kilinochchi but pulled out late last year at the government's request as fighting escalated in the region.

2 murdered

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Abdul Mannan of North Bisil of Shah Ali. Criminals killed her and took three tolas of gold ornaments from her house.

Mannan said returning from a mosque around 1:30pm he found his wife wounded inside the house. She was declared dead on arrival at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Kamrul Haque, officer-in-charge of Shah Ali Police Station, told The Daily Star that the head of the deceased was smashed.

have been killed and some 1,700 have been wounded in the Israeli campaign, Gaza health officials said. The number of combatants and civilians killed is unclear, but Hamas has said around half of the dead are members of its security forces and the UN has said more than 60 are civilians, 34 of them children.

Three Israeli civilians and one soldier have also died in the rocket attacks, which have reached deeper into Israel than ever before, bringing an eighth of Israel's population of 7 million within rocket range.

The mosque destroyed Friday was known as a Hamas stronghold, and the army said it was used to store weapons. Hamas has boasted that more than 100 of the mosque's worshippers have been killed in the past on missions against Israelis.

Rizvi

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settle the issue of oath taking of the party's lawmakers-elect within a day or two.

He also criticised Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad who on Thursday termed the incidents of violence across the country "isolated" and said "during a period when power is being transferred from one government to another, such type of incidents are not uncommon."

Such a statement from the police chief will inspire the anarchists, Rizvi observed.

He alleged that the AL's Ruppjan unit president had forced Ruppjan BNP General Secretary Nuruzzaman and another upazila panna candidate Mafizuddin to withdraw their nomination papers at gunpoint.

AL activists also abducted Rajib, son of Jessore's Abhayanagar BNP Organising Secretary Alauddin, and clobbered his legs with hammer, said Rizvi, who also cited other incidents of violence in Comilla, Dhaka, Munshiganj, Feni, Natore, Sylhet and Khulna.

A number of former ministers and BNP candidates who were defeated in the December 29 parliamentary polls met Khaleida and apprised her of anomalies at the polling centres in their constituencies during the polls.

Meanwhile, Khaleida yesterday visited BNP leader of Kuliarchar, Kishoreganj, Nitya Lal Das, who is undergoing treatment at Apollo Hospitals in the capital. Nitya Lal was allegedly attacked by AL activists after the polls and suffered serious injuries.

2 killed

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Meanwhile, a polling agent of BNP injured in a post-election violence on Monday at Hajatkhola of Comilla died early yesterday, UNB reports.

Shamsul Haque, a teacher of Hajatkhola High School who worked as a polling agent at a local centre, came under attack of miscreants while returning home after counting votes in the evening.

Shamsul was admitted to Mamoni Hospital in the town where he died after three days of fight for life.

At least eight people were injured, six of them seriously, in a clash between supporters of BNP and AL at Kalukandi of Mohammadpur upazila in Magura Thursday evening.

Police and witnesses said armed AL and BNP supporters locked in a clash over establishing supremacy in the area, our Magura correspondent reports. Both groups attacked the houses of their rivals and looted valuables. They also destroyed six houses, according to police and locals.

Police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and army personnel later reached the spot and brought the situation under control.

Seriously injured Samirul, 45, Nazrul, 40, Chunnusidker, 25, Enamul, 27, Dhalaboru Begum, 70, and Hasan, 30, were admitted to Magura Sadar Hospital.

Meanwhile, criminals attacked the houses of a local BNP leader and his relatives at Haripur of Barura upazila in Comilla and injured seven people, a correspondent in Comilla reports.

Criminals attacked the houses of Khashab BNP unit Joint Secretary Abul Hashem and his relatives around 6:00pm Thursday. They ransacked the houses and looted mobile phones, 20 tolas of gold and Tk 45,000 in cash.

Injured Hashem's wife Mahbuba Akhter, 45, daughter-in-law Rifat Jahan, 28, Hashem's daughters Fahmida Akhter, 25, Fahima Akhter, 20, and Kona Akhter, 18, and a child Taniya, 5, were admitted to Barura Health Complex.

Three of them were in a critical condition, hospital sources said.

Officer-in-Charge Ranjit Kumar Saha of Barura Police Station said a police team has been sent to the spot to investigate.