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Taliban 'retreats' for peace deal

US warns Pakistan of more militant attacks

AFP, Peshawar

The Taliban said yesterday it had pulled back from a Pakistan district to shore up a peace deal as a US commander warned extremists were plotting more attacks to destabilise the country.

Scores of Taliban fighters moved into Buner, a district only 100 kilometres (62 miles) from Islamabad, sparking US warnings that Islamist advances pose "an existential threat" to the nuclear-armed Muslim nation bordering Afghanistan.

Officials confirmed the Taliban "withdrawal" but said local Taliban remained in Buner. Neither did the Taliban show any sign of lessening their grip on neighbouring Swat, a former tourist resort plunged into brutal insurgency.

"I do not know the exact number of my men who left the area but they all boarded in 15 vehicles to return to Swat," said Muslim Khan, the main Taliban spokes-

man in the area who presented the "withdrawal" as a goodwill gesture.

"We have withdrawn from Buner to show our commitment to make the peace deal a success," Khan said referring to a controversial agreement to enforce Islamic law in part of northwest Pakistan in exchange for an end to fighting in Swat.

He did not disclose how many "local Taliban" remained in Buner.

The government in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) slammed the Taliban advance on Buner as a violation of that agreement, which the authorities have come under increasing Western and domestic pressure to rescind.

The Taliban has shown no sign of disarming as demanded by the government.

"We will not exhibit arms as part of the deal. But our government should stop its policy of appeasing the US," the Taliban spokesman said.

Fear and uncertainty reigned in Buner despite the apparent withdrawal.

"I have resigned. I will never go to my job as I don't want my parents to be sent my body," said Hafsa, a charity worker who called herself by a single name.

"Shops are open and there are no signs of armed Taliban patrolling streets in Buner but people face uncertainty and fear that they may come back," local resident Nisar Khan told AFP by telephone from the district.

"We used to see women going to their offices before the Taliban arrived in the area, but today they did not go to their jobs," he added.

The government on Saturday deployed up to 300 extra paramilitary police to secure Buner, local police said, but army chief General Ashfaq Kayani defended a decision by the military not to intervene as "tactical" despite US pressure.

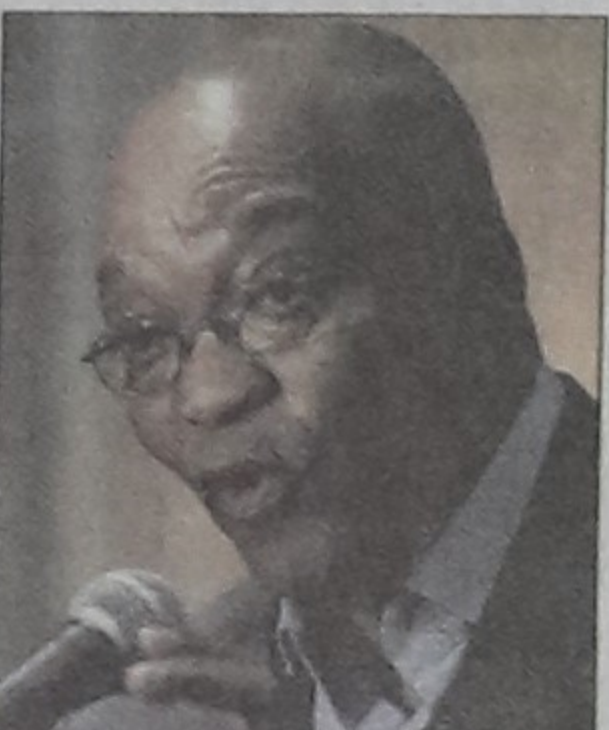
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OBAMA FRIED CHICKEN

HALAL FOOD, NUGGET'S, BURGER, SEAFOOD, ICE CREAM, GYRO, RICE, HOT WING'S, CAKE



To the owners of a New York fast-food joint renaming their business in honour of Barack Obama seemed a great way to celebrate his election victory. They were wrong. Within days they were accused of racism and embroiled in a row that encapsulates, in miniature, the nation's pride in a black president and the fact that racial tensions remain raw. Mohammad Jabbar, the Bangladesh-born manager, says the decision to change the name to Obama Fried Chicken was simple: "We love the president." What he did not realise, until African American protestors turned up this month, was that fried chicken has long been code for slavery-era stereotypes about black diets.



ANC clinches S Africa polls Zuma to be president

AFP, Pretoria

South Africa's ruling ANC swept general elections with just short of two-thirds of the vote, the final count showed yesterday, putting party leader Jacob Zuma at the doorstep to the presidency.

The election commission was expected to certify and announce the results later Saturday, but the final tally showed the African National Congress (ANC) taking 65.9 per cent of the vote.

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Farmers to get subsidy, rice price support

Assures Matia, opens Sidr project in Barisal

PORIMOL PALMA, from Barisal

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury yesterday said the government would provide farmers with both input subsidy and price support of rice to ensure food security in the country.

"We are a pro-agriculture and pro-farmer government. Earlier we had supported the farmers and it will continue," she said while speaking at the inaugural function of a USAID-funded project titled "Improved Livelihood for Sidr-Affected Rice Farmers" at Barisal Club.

In a meeting of Food Monitoring and Planning Unit, the government's procurement price of rice will be fixed today (Sunday), she said.

The assurance comes just when the Boro farmers across the country are worried about down trend of rice price, which is now lower than the production cost.

Matia Chowdhury said when the rice price was Tk 9-11 per kg, the previous Awami League government had procured rice at Tk 12 per kg encouraging farmers to produce rice next time. She said the government would continue

giving subsidies to agriculture as it is the major income-generating sector in the rural areas.

After launching the project, the minister at a press conference said it will not be a problem for the government to stock sufficient food grains despite some limitations.

While asked how the government would stock surplus food when the country is expected to have a good Boro yield with surplus food, she said the government will have to procure rice for its many programmes like VGF, VGD, Food for Work, open market sales (OMS) and food rationing, adding, "as stocks deplete, we shall procure rice for stocks."

Matia Chowdhury lauded the USAID assistance for the project, which is promoting use of urea deep placement (UDP) technology popularly known as 'guti urea' that reduces the cost of fertiliser by around 30 percent and increases production.

To bring down rice production cost for the farmers, the minister sought US assistance and investment in dredging riverbeds and canals to

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Govt leave proposed to be halved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Pay Commission has made a number of recommendations for the government staff, including bringing their casual leave down to half.

The finance division has already completed work on the Pay Commission report and will submit a summary to the finance minister in a couple of days.

Sources said the finance minister, after consulting with the prime minister, will form a committee to suggest ways of implementing the report. The commission submitted its report to the finance minister on Thursday.

The government employees now enjoy 20 days casual leave while the commission suggested bringing it down to 10 days. However, the commission did not make any

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BNP reforms reeling from intra-party row

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

The process of reorganising the main opposition BNP is being obstructed by serious intra-party conflicts among its top leaders over formation of district committees as announcement of its district level convening committees remains stalled.

Meanwhile, the party is yet to finalise its decision on the fate of 'convicted and corrupt' among party men though they are ineligible for any party committee as per its constitution.

Clause 7 of the party constitution says individuals known to be corrupt or infamous individuals in society are ineligible for the party's national council, national executive committee, national standing committee or executives at any level.

National Standing Committee of BNP, highest policymaking body of the party, last month decided to form convening committees in organisational districts dissolving all district committees by April 7.

The party high command, however, failed to finalise the names of conveners and joint conveners of the convening committees, BNP

insiders said. Party Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain on Thursday said they are still working on it for announcing all district level convening committees soon.

But party insiders said the names of convener and joint convener could not be finalised because of internal conflicts among some senior leaders who are trying to get into district level convening committees.

Standing committee is yet to take any decision on forming many district committees like Feni, Comilla, Manikganj, Barisal and Chittagong and Dhaka city.

Feni, known as Khaleda Zia's district, are divided into two factions--one led by chairperson's brother Saeed Iskander and another by Mosharrar Hossain MP-- while decision on Comilla committee could not be taken due to an obstacle allegedly made by standing committee member Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain.

Delwar Hossain is facing a big challenge in his district Manikganj from local leaders as they are creating obstacles to form its convening committee.

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One more dies from diarrhoea

Heat spell continues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One more person died in the capital from diarrhoea yesterday raising the number of deaths from the disease in the city to 29 in just two months.

The nationwide death toll now stands at 34.

A woman named Sufia, 40, from city's Khilgaon area was declared dead on arrival after she was brought to ICDDR,B yesterday noon, hospital authorities said.

The woman was rushed to the hospital when her condition deteriorated. Doctor's said that if she had been taken to a hospital in time, she might have been saved.

"The woman in question died before we could attend to her. She was suffering from severe dehydration," said Dr Azharul Islam Khan, head of Short Stay Unit of the hospital.

Meanwhile, some 634 patients were admitted to ICDDR,B till yesterday evening. On Friday 665 patients were admitted with diarrhoea. A record 1,027 people were admitted on April 11.

Doctors say the number of diarrhoea patients in the pre-monsoon season this year, and the severity of the cases, has broken all records of the past 40 years.

"During this period, we generally attend to 400 to 450 diarrhoea patients every day.

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Relatives of Sufia take her body back to Khilgaon from ICDDR, B at Mohakhali in the capital yesterday after she was declared dead on arrival.

US calls for truce in Lanka right away

UN presses Colombo to facilitate humanitarian missions for trapped civilians in war zone

AFP, AP, Colombo

The UN's humanitarian chief was due in Sri Lanka yesterday as international concern over civilians trapped in the island's war zone fuelled a White House call for an immediate ceasefire.

John Holmes' three-day mission will focus on pushing the government to facilitate humanitarian missions in and around the conflict zone and to allow proper access to tens of thousands of displaced civilians, the UN said.

Tens of thousands of civilians trapped in Sri Lanka's northern war zone are facing starvation, the Tamil Tiger rebels warned Saturday as the UN sent its top humanitarian official to assess the crisis.

Reports of chaos in the northern war zone have increased in recent days as the Sri Lankan military pushed forward with its offensive to destroy the rebel group and end this Indian Ocean island nation's bloody, quarter century civil war.

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Wildcat strike by Faridpur interns

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

The interns at the Faridpur Medical College Hospital (FMCH) went on an indefinite strike yesterday following a clash between hospital staff and the relatives of a patient over treatment.

Three people -- physician Moshir Rahman, Rab member Faizur and Mejbuddin -- were wounded in the incident.

Witnesses said Hafizur Rahman, 30, who had been seriously wounded in an accident at Mokshedpur, was admitted to the FMCH on

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Merry time for overloaded trucks

Weigh stations at Jamuna bridge out of order for 2 months

GOLAM MOSTAFA JIBON, Strajganj

Overloaded vehicles especially goods-laden trucks now ply undeterred on the Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge as the weigh stations on both sides of the bridge have remained inoperative for the last two months, posing risks to the bridge.

A section of unscrupulous policemen and officials of Marganet-One, assigned to maintain the bridge, are allegedly allowing overloaded vehicles to cross the bridge in exchange for bribes from vehicle drivers.

Sources said load-cell machines of the weigh stations went out of order two months back but the Marganet-One authorities did not take any step to replace those.

Movement of vehicles on the bridge increased significantly after the weigh stations became inoperative, said an official of

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Fortune-seeking woman lured to Lebanon, sold to brothel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brokers in Jessore lured Fulban to Lebanon in January this year with promises for a job with a salary of BDT 12,000 a month and once there, sold her to a brothel.

The poor woman, in her mid thirties, had sold her homestead and also borrowed money to come up with Tk 70,000 the agents wanted.

"Once in Lebanon, the agents there sold me to a brothel for \$2,000. Since I refused to work there, the people at the brothel

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INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE Chennai-Kolkata match rained off

AFP, Cape Town

Steady rain caused the abandonment of the Indian Premier League (IPL) match between Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders without a ball being bowled at Newlands Saturday.

It was the second match to

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Prayer Timing		
April 26		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-29	6-34
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation