

NEWS IN

brief

Bachmann quits White House race

AFP, West Des Moines

Michele Bachmann, whose bid for the Republican presidential nomination fizzled after an early boost from Christian conservatives, bowed out of the race yesterday after a poor finish in Iowa. "Last night the people of Iowa spoke with a very clear voice and so I have decided to stand aside," she said. She won only five percent of the Republican vote in Iowa, the first state-wide party nominating contest, which ended in a virtual tie between former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney and dark horse Rick Santorum, a former senator from Pennsylvania. Romney won the event.

Finland to close Pak embassy

AFP, Helsinki

Finland plans to close down its embassy in Pakistan during 2012 due to budgetary constraints, the Finnish foreign ministry said yesterday. The decision to shut the mission in Islamabad was part of a bigger scheme to trim the Nordic country's network of embassies, with closures also announced in Caracas and Manila. Foreign ministry undersecretary of state Peter Stenlund told AFP the Pakistan closure was also partly due to security concerns in the capital, pointing out that in order to stay in Islamabad the foreign

Yemen president cancels US trip

AFP, Sanaa

President Ali Abdullah Saleh has cancelled a trip to the United States, a senior official said yesterday, after requests from his ruling party that he remain in Yemen until after presidential elections. Saleh, who is set to resign formally after the February polls in accordance with a Gulf-sponsored power transition plan, announced in late December his intentions to travel to the US "in order to create favourable

Nepal sets tourism record in 2011

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal had its best ever year for tourism in 2011, with most of the growth coming from neighbouring India and China, officials said yesterday. Once a must-see destination on the famed "hippy trail", Nepal was dealt a severe blow during the decade-long civil war that ended in 2006, with tourist numbers dropping dramatically. But the new data show a marked recovery, with tourism accounting for seven percent of gross domestic product -- more than \$1 billion -- last year. The Nepal Tourism Board said there were 719,547 visitors in 2011, including those travelling over land.

INDIAN PARLIAMENTARY POLLS, 2014

Mamata eyes big

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

NEWS ANALYSIS

Paschimbanga Chief Minister Mamata

Banerjee has decided to spread the wings of her party, apparently with the ambition of becoming a greater player in Indian political scenario ahead of the next parliamentary elections due in the year 2014.

To test the waters for the first time at the national level, Trinamool Congress is going to contest elections to legislature in three of the five states scheduled to be held between February and March this year. The three states are Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous and political crucial region in North India, Manipur in Northeast where congress has 30 legislators in the 60-member assembly and Goa in the West. Congress only managed to secure 16 of the total of 40 seats in the previous assembly polls in Goa.

Interestingly, Manipur and Goa are ruled by Congress party, Trinamool Congress's coalition partner both at the Centre and in Paschimbanga.

In Uttar Pradesh, where the major

aspirants for power are current Chief Minister Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party and Mulayam Singh Yadav-headed Samajwadi Party, Trinamool is aligning with a host of obscure parties.

Whether or not Trinamool Congress garners success in the coming elections in the three states, sources in the party as well as in Congress admit that Mamata's party would fight for the same political turf and vote bank as that of Congress.

Mamata's decision comes at a time when relations between Trinamool Congress and Congress are at an all-time low since she formed Trinamool in 1998 separating from Congress.

Over the last six months, Mamata has caused embarrassment to Congress by opposing the federal government's decision on three major issues by opposing Teesta water-sharing treaty with Bangladesh, FDI in retail and the Lokpal (anti-corruption ombudsman) Bill in Rajya Sabha, Upper House of Parliament, forcing the government to put on hold its move on the issues.

The ties between Mamata and Congress in Paschimbanga have also touched a new low on the issue of

renaming Indira Gandhi Bhavan in Kolkata after rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. Besides, ever since coming to power after ousting the Left Front in elections in May last year, Trinamool Congress and Congress workers have often clashed with each other for supremacy at in districts.

Political observers believe Mamata is trying to position herself as a rallying point in upholding the states' autonomy in administrative matters.

Congress has played down Trinamool Congress' bid to jump into electoral fray in Goa, Uttar Pradesh and Manipur with the party's spokesman Manish Tewari having a dig by saying "we have seen the result of Trinamool's earlier bid in elections in Kerala and Tripura".

Congress is hoping that a positive outcome of the assembly elections in the five states will give the party to cushion the government of PM Manmohan Singh against Trinamool's tough stand on certain issues.

Whether that happens or not, one thing is clear: there is no permanent friend or foe in politics. The only thing that is constant is political interests.

Singapore ministers face salary cuts

AFP, Singapore

Singapore is slashing its leaders' unpopular multimillion-dollar salaries by at least a third, new guidelines showed yesterday, but its ministers will stay among the world's best-paid politicians.

The cuts were promised by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to ease public anger after a landmark general election in 2011, and he himself will take a 36 percent reduction in basic pay to Sg\$2.2 million (\$1.69 million).

That is still believed to be the highest salary of any elected head of government in the world -- more than four times as much as Barack Obama, who earns \$400,000 a year.

Singapore's largely ceremonial president will see his salary reduced by 51 percent to Sg\$1.54 million.

The cuts will be retroactive to the start of the current government's five-year term on May 21, 2011.

Singapore has the highest concentration of millionaire households worldwide, with 15.5 percent of all households having at least \$1 million in assets.

Despite the cuts, Singapore's top officials are still among the best paid in the world.

Hong Kong chief executive Donald Tsang earns roughly \$543,500 annually, a government spokesman said, and the Japanese prime minister gets about \$513,000 a year.

Australia's Prime Minister Julia Gillard currently earns about Aus\$367,000 (\$379,000) a year but is in line for a 31 percent rise pending the approval of parliament.



Lee Hsien Loong

Afghan govt backs US-Taliban talks

AFP, Kabul

The government of Afghanistan yesterday gave its blessing to talks between Taliban insurgents and the United States, and also to the opening of an office for the Islamists in Qatar.

The Taliban announced on Tuesday that they had come to an "initial agreement with relevant sides including Qatar" to set up their first office outside Afghanistan.

Kabul "considers negotiations the only way to reach peace and end the war and violence that have been imposed on our people", a statement said.

It added that the acceptance aimed to "save our country and people from foreigners' pretexts and servants who are used to continue war in Afghanistan".

Iran ramps up warning over US navy in Gulf

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran yesterday renewed its warning to America against keeping a US navy presence in the oil-rich Gulf, underlining a threat that Washington has dismissed as a sign of "weakness" from Tehran as new US and EU financial sanctions begin to take toll on its economy.

"The presence of forces from beyond the (Gulf) region has no result but turbulence. ... their presence in the Persian Gulf is not needed and is harmful," Iran's Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi said.

The comments echoed a warning issued Tuesday by Iran's military that it would unleash its "full force" if a US aircraft carrier is redeployed to the Gulf.

The United States dismissed the Iranian threat, saying it was proof that sanctions imposed over Iran's nuclear programme were working. The Pentagon said it would keep sending carrier strike groups through the Gulf regardless.

"The deployment of US military assets in the Persian Gulf region will continue as it has for decades," it said.

After years of measures that had little

impact, the new sanctions are the first that could have a serious effect on Iran's oil trade, which is 60 percent of its economy. Iran's currency has fallen by 40 percent against the dollar in the past month.

Asked at the Pentagon whether there was any US military plan to bolster its presence in the Gulf, spokesman George Little said: "No one in this government seeks confrontation over the Strait of Hormuz." "It is important to lower the temperature," he said.

The West has imposed the increasingly tight sanctions over Iran's nuclear programme, which Tehran says is peaceful. However experts still say they do not expect Tehran to charge headlong into an act of war.

"I don't believe either side wants a war to start. I think the Iranians will be aware that if they block the Strait or attack a US ship, they will be the losers. Nor do I think that the US wants to use its military might other than as a means of pressure. However, in a state of heightened emotion on both sides, we are in a dangerous situation," said Richard Dalton, former British ambassador to Iran and now an associate fellow at Chatham House think tank.

Settle graft issues

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Talking to The Daily Star on the sidelines of a conference in the city, he said Japan has never held its promised fund in the bridge project.

He made it clear that the government of Japan never said that it would not give the money as promised or even hold the fund.

The World Bank, which committed to provide \$1.2 billion out of the \$2.9 billion cost, suspended its funding in September last year bringing corruption allegation against the former communications minister.

Following this, other co-financers Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Islamic Development Bank (IDB) also held releasing their funds. The ADB agreed to provide \$615 million, while the IDB \$140 million for the construction of the 6.15 kilometre-long bridge. Asked about the possibility

of releasing the fund in the near future, the ambassador said since the government is yet to complete the bidding process it is not possible to release the fund at this stage.

He cited that it would be released in phases after the construction works begin.

Defending his stance, Sadoshima said, "If 40 percent of a project is completed then 40 percent of the promised fund will be released, and the fund will go to the accounts of the contractors."

The ambassador attended a two-day long international conference on "Prospects for Peace and Security through Regional Cooperation in 21st Century South Asia: The Role of Japan" organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies at its auditorium with supports from Japan Foundation.

BCL factions

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Hasanuzzaman, a passenger of the vandalised bus, said he saw many passengers including women and children bleeding profusely and running for safety.

PIROJOUR

At least 20 people including lawmen and journalists were injured during a clash between police and a faction of BCL in Pirojpur town yesterday.

The clash started around noon when police intercepted a procession brought out by one of the BCL factions on the occasion of 64th founding anniversary of the student wing.

Witnesses said BCL district unit president Faisal Mahbub Shuvo and its vice-president Masud Ahmed Rana had announced separate programmes marking the day.

Shuvo faction brought out a celebration procession from Mukul Fouz office while Rana faction from the organisation's district office.

To avoid collision between the rival factions, police barred Shuvo group near Sadhana Bridge in the town. The activists held a meeting there.

When police obstructed the procession of Rana fac-

tion in front of the Central Jame Mosque around 11:45am, the agitated activists started hurling brickbats at police.

Police then retaliated with batons and brought the situation under control around 12:30pm. The faction then held a meeting at Swadhinata Mancha.

Fashiul Alam Bacchu, a correspondent of Channel I, and Firoz Ahmed, a correspondent of Desh TV, were injured allegedly in police beating.

Sub-inspector Tapas Kumar, also the acting officer-in-charge of Pirojpur Sadar Police Station, said eight policemen including Assistant Superintendent of Police Md Akramul Hossain, Habildar Matiuir Rahman, Nayek Ansar Ali, constables Abul Kalam, Anisur Rahman, Abul Bashar, and Md Faruk and female constable Zi Bo were injured by brickbats and had to be admitted to hospital.

Rana alleged that police attacked their peaceful procession without any provocation and injured at least 12 of his activists.

ASP Akramul Hossain said special police patrol was deployed in the town to maintain law and order.

Egypt Islamists reach out to rivals

REUTERS, Cairo

The Islamist Muslim Brotherhood was edging towards a dominant role in Egypt's first free parliament in decades yesterday, but said it would not impose its will over a new constitution and would work with all political rivals on the blueprint.

"All political forces and intellectuals in Egypt, regardless of their political and religious allegiances, will take part in writing the constitution," said Mursi, whose comments were published on the Muslim Brotherhood's website on Tuesday.

Egyptians went to the polls for a second day in the final stage of the election for the assembly's lower house, the first free legislative vote since military officers overthrew the monarchy in 1952.

The vote is part of the ruling army council's plan to hand power to civilians before July, ending its turbulent interregnum that began with the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in February in a popular uprising.

Hasina

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Conference Centre in the PM Office, marking Police Week 2012.

Sheikh Hasina directed the police administration to ensure security of life and property of common people.

She also asked the policemen to allow the opposition party to observe its peaceful democratic programmes but obstruct its "destructive" activities strictly. The opposition's programmes, such as road marches, are fine and the police have to help them hold such activities.

"Opposition parties have their democratic rights; they can observe any peaceful demonstrations."

She thanked the police force for ensuring law and order favourable to economic growth and restoring the country's image through their outstanding performance against terrorists and militants.

The prime minister noted that the global community now considered Bangladesh as a model of development instead of a land of militants. Responding to various demands, the prime minister said the government was considering increasing "risk allowance" for the police.

Inspector General of Police Hassan Mahmood Khandker delivered the welcome address while Additional IGP Shahudul Haque gave the note of thanks. Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Benazir Ahmed, Deputy Inspector General of Dhaka Range Asaduzzaman Mia and Police Super Quamrul Hasan also spoke on the occasion.

Militias may drag Libya into civil war

Says NTC chief

REUTERS, TRIPOLI

Libya risks sliding into civil war unless it cracks down on the rival militias which filled the vacuum left by Muammar Gaddafi's downfall, the head of the interim administration said after an outbreak of violence in the capital.

Mustafa Abdel Jalil, chairman of the National Transitional Council (NTC), issued the stark warning in response to a gun battle between militias in one of Tripoli's busiest streets which killed four fighters.

More than two months after anti-Gaddafi fighters captured and killed the former dictator, Libya's new rulers still struggle to exert their authority as rival militia leaders refuse to cede control of their fighters and hand in their arms.

"We are now between two bitter options," Abdel Jalil told a gathering in the eastern city of Benghazi late Tuesday.

"We deal with these violations (clashes between militias) strictly and put the Libyans in a military confrontation which we don't accept, or we split and there will be a civil war."

"If there's no security, there will be no law, no development and no elections," he said. "People are taking the law into their own hands."

City to get

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for six months due to land disputes.

Abdul Baki Mian, project director (PD) of the Kuril flyover, said the width of the one-way flyover with four loops (two Y loops and two U loops) will be 6.7 to 9.2 metre.

The exit points of the Tk 254-core flyover will be on Banani, Nikunja, Airport Road, Pragati Sarani and Purbachal roads, he said.

A small lake will be dug along the flyover for beautification and to protect the place from encroachment. Two footbridges on Airport Road and on Pragati Sarani will also be built, said the PD.

The construction work of around 2 km-long roads surrounding the flyover is also going on, he said.

MIRPUR-AIRPORT ROAD FLYOVER

Construction of 45 percent of the Mirpur-Airport Road has been completed so far, said PD Brig Gen Abu Sayed Mohammad Masud.

"We have already completed the foundation work including the pilings, pile cap and sub-structures," he said.

The army's Special Works Organisation (SWO) took charge of the project last June with the target of completing it by October this year.

The SWO engaged Mir Akhter Hossain Ltd for constructing the flyover with Tk 90.55 crore and Abdul Monem Ltd for the overpass and the linkage bridge with Tk 71.38 crore. The cost excluded construction materials.

Project sources said the government has so far disbursed Tk 35 crore for the

project. If the government fails to disburse fund timely, the project deadline may exceed, they added.

The construction of the 0.8 km Banani overpass will also be completed within October. The overpass will have six lanes and there will be a designated road. A link bridge will connect the overpass with the flyover, the PD said.

GULISTAN-JATRABARI FLYOVER

The Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover project seems to be making a good headway and is likely to be inaugurated two to three months early of the stipulated time, said PD Ashiqur Rahman.

The 10-km flyover stretches from Dhaka-Chittagong highway towards Palashi through Gulistan and Kaptan Bazar.

The defunct Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is the implementing agency of the project while Belhasa Accom and Associates Ltd, is the concessionaire.

Indian construction firm Simplex Infrastructure Ltd is working as contractor of flyover project while Lea Associates South Asia is engaged as the concessionaire's design consultant.

Though the construction works have been going on keeping the utility service structures intact, but in some cases, relocation of the structures is needed, said an official of DCC.

The authorities of utility services-- Wasa, Titas gas, DPDC and BTCL -- have already submitted a proposal of Tk 92.60 crore to the government for the relocation.

cern.

According to a report of Ain O Salish Kendra, 51 people disappeared last year, 15 of them were found dead later on.

A report of Odhikar, another rights group, says 22 people disappeared from January to November, 2011 while the number of missing people was 16 in 2010 and two in 2009.

JU teacher jailed

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Technology, who is now in Australia on study leave, did not respond to an HC rule issued in August to explain his comment and later again a summon issued last month to appear before the court.

After the death of filmmaker Tareque Masud and journalist Ashfaq Munier Mishuk in a road accident in Manikganj, Ruhul Amin commented on his Facebook page on August 13 why Sheikh Hasina does not die when many people were dying in road accidents.

Delivering the verdict on a suomoto rule, the HC directed the foreign secretary to inform the government of Australia of its order and take steps to bring Ruhul Amin back from Australia through diplomatic channel immediately.

The bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim came up with the directive yesterday, two days after the JU teacher failed to respond to an HC summons.

The HC ordered the inspector general of police

to arrest him without any delay on his return to the country.

It also ordered the JU authorities to take departmental action against Ruhul Amin as per relevant rules and the directives.

The HC bench on August 18 last year issued a rule asking Ruhul Amin to explain in two weeks why he should not be prosecuted for his "derogatory comment". The accused did not make any reply to the rule.

On December 12, the HC ordered him to appear before it on January 2 to explain why he should not be punished for committing contempt of court by not responding to its earlier order. But he had neither appeared before the court, nor made any response to its order.

Deputy Attorney General ABM Altaf Hossain told The Daily Star that the HC yesterday fixed today for passing its judgement on a rule it issued against Ruhul Amin for posting the comment.

He said the government had communicated the HC orders to him in Australia, but he defied the order.

ETP work

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government came to power, he said the relocation of tanneries from the city's Hazaribagh was pending for the last few years for a legal tangle.

The complication emerged as Indian company VA Tech WABAG, the second lowest bidder for the treatment plant, brought an allegation against the winning bidder, Chinese JLEPCL-DCL's, of submitting a flawed bank guarantee.

The Indian company filed a case with the HC, saying the winning bidder had sent the bank guarantee through SWIFT (an electronic money transfer code) in violation of the rules of the government's Central Procurement Technical Unit.

"However, the court will give its verdict on the case tomorrow [today]. I hope we will be able to start the construction work after that," Dilip Barua said hoping that the verdict would go in favour of the government.

The government proposed the relocation of leather factories to Savar in 2003. The under-construction Savar Leather Industrial Park will accommodate about 155 factories, the minister said. A site of nearly 200 acres of land in Hamyetpur has been developed for the Tk 5.45 billion project.

The tanneries now discharge thousands of litres of untreated and highly toxic liquid waste into the Buriganga river every day, posing a threat to human and animal health.