

Suu Kyi foresees democratic Burma

UK pledges positive response to reforms

AGENCIES

Aung San Suu Kyi said yesterday she expected to live to see full democratic elections in Myanmar, ahead of historic talks with Britain's foreign secretary, who pledged positive response to more reforms by the nominally civilian government.

William Hague, the first British foreign minister to visit the military-dominated nation in more than half a century, urged the release of all political prisoners before holding talks with President Thein Sein.

He welcomed Myanmar's pledge to continue reforms, saying such progress, if sustained, would lead to deeper economic and political ties with the West.

He was due later yesterday to meet Suu Kyi, the Nobel peace laureate who has grown cautiously positive about the country's future since the installation of a nominally civilian regime after November 2010 elections.

"I think there will be a full demo-



PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi shakes hands with British Foreign Secretary William Hague ahead of a meeting at the British ambassador's residence in Yangon yesterday.

cratic election in my lifetime, but then of course I don't know how long I'm going to live," Suu Kyi said in an interview with the BBC.

She added that her National League for Democracy (NLD) had been officially registered, passing the final hurdle to enable it to run in

by-elections scheduled for April 1.

The 66-year-old opposition leader, who could enter parliament for the first time if she goes ahead with plans to contest the by-elections, was noncommittal on the prospects of eventually running for president.

"I'm not even sure that this is something that I would like to do," she said ahead of her meeting with Hague in the commercial hub of Yangon, where she lives.

Suu Kyi was freed from seven straight years of house arrest days after the 2010 polls.

Hague said he would try to encourage the Myanmar government to "continue on its path of reform."

Britain is the biggest aid donor to Myanmar, according to the Foreign Office, and Hague announced extra assistance after a meeting with the president, a former junta general, in Naypyitaw, the capital built in secret six years ago.

Hazare pulls out of poll campaign

AFP, New Delhi

India's popular anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare yesterday pulled out of plans to campaign against the ruling Congress party in key state elections due to poor health.

Hazare, 74, who last year triggered a massive civil protest movement against India's deep-rooted culture of corruption, had vowed to rally opposition to the Congress party in five states that go to the polls over the next three months.

But he halted his hunger strike in Mumbai last week and has since been treated at a hospital in the neighbouring city of Pune for chest congestion and back pain.

"Anna is still on medicines and he is on drip so he needs complete rest," Kiran Bedi, a close aide of Hazare, told reporters.

Arab League turns to UN for help in Syria

AFP, Damascus

The Arab League has turned to the United Nations for help after admitting "mistakes" in its Syria monitoring mission, which has come in for withering criticism for its failure to stem bloodletting.

Meanwhile, Jeffrey Feltman, the US assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs, was to hold talks in Cairo with the Arab League yesterday about the Syrian crisis, amid mounting frustration over the unrelenting violence.

The White House on Wednesday said it is "past time" for the UN Security Council to act, as "sniper fire, torture and murder" were continuing in Syria and the Arab League conditions for the regime have been dishonoured.

But the Assad regime denounced the United States for "gross interference" in Arab League affairs and "an unjustified attempt to internationalise" the issue.

And, in bid to show it was implementing the Arab League roadmap, it yesterday announced the release of 552 prisoners, taking to almost 4,000 the number freed since the start of November.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasssem al-Thani, who heads an Arab League task force on Syria, on Wednesday discussed the deadly protest crackdown with UN leader Ban Ki-moon in New York, Kuwait's KUNA news agency reported.

"We are coming here for technical help and to see the experience the UN has, because this is the first time the Arab League is involved in sending monitors, and there are some mistakes," said Sheikh Hamad, quoted by KUNA.

Taliban kill 15 kidnapped Pak troops

AFP, Peshawar

The bodies of 15 members of Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Constabulary (FC) were found yesterday, almost two weeks after they were kidnapped from a north-western town, officials said.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility for the killings.

"We have received bullet wounded dead bodies of 15 kidnapped FC men", senior local FC commander Ali Sher Mehsud told AFP, revising the earlier death toll.

He said that the FC men were killed in Shawa, a small town in the North Waziristan tribal region near the Afghan border.

The FC personnel were kidnapped late last month during a night-time attack on a checkpoint in the northwestern town of Tank.

WORSENING SECTARIAN STRIFE IN IRAQ Blasts targeting Shias kill 68 in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

A wave of attacks against Shia Muslims killed at least 68 people yesterday, the worst toll in nearly five months, as Iraq grappled with a weeks-long political row that has stoked sectarian tensions.

The violence, which also wounded more than 100, comes two weeks after a crisis erupted when Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, a Sunni, was charged with running a hit squad soon after US troops pulled out.

Yesterday's attacks, which targeted only Shias, were quickly condemned by parliament speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, a Sunni, as well as by Iraq's Shia-majority neighbour Iran.

"Political leaders fight each other for power, and we pay the price," said Ahmed Khalaf, a labourer who was near the site of attacks in the north Baghdad neighbourhood of Sadr City.

"How is it our fault if Hashemi is wanted, or someone else is wanted? Why should we pay instead of them?"

The worst incident saw at least 45 people killed by a suicide attack on the outskirts of

the southern city of Nasiriyah as pilgrims were walking to the shrine city of Karbala for Arbaeen commemorations marking the marks 40 days after the Ashura anniversary commemorating the killing of Imam Hussein.

Five bomb attacks also struck two Shia neighbourhoods of northern Baghdad, killing 23 people and wounding dozens more.

In Kadhimiyah, two car bombs killed 14 people, said officials from the interior and defence ministries.

In Sadr City, a booby-trapped motorcycle exploded at around 7:00am near a group of day labourers waiting to pick up work, killing seven and wounding 20 others, the interior ministry official said.

A short time later, twin roadside bombs detonated near the district's main hospital as victims were being ferried in, killing two more people and wounding 15, the official said.

In the political field, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has backed off from threats to fire ministers from the Sunni-backed Iraqi bloc who have boycotted the cabinet, the latest move in an apparent toning down of the crisis.

Death penalty sought for Mubarak

AFP, Cairo

A prosecutor in Hosni Mubarak's trial yesterday demanded the death sentence for him and his former security chief, saying the fallen Egyptian president had ordered the killings of anti-regime demonstrators.

"The law foresees the death penalty for premeditated murder," prosecutor Mustafa Khater told the court during the trial of the former president, who was toppled in a popular uprising in February.

In wrapping up the three-day case, chief prosecutor Mustafa Suleiman said for his part that "the president of the republic is responsible for protecting the people, and the question is not simply one of whether he ordered the killing of protesters, but to know why he did not intervene to stop the violence."

REPUBLICAN RACE TO WHITE HOUSE Romney gets McCain's backing after Iowa win

AFP, Peterborough

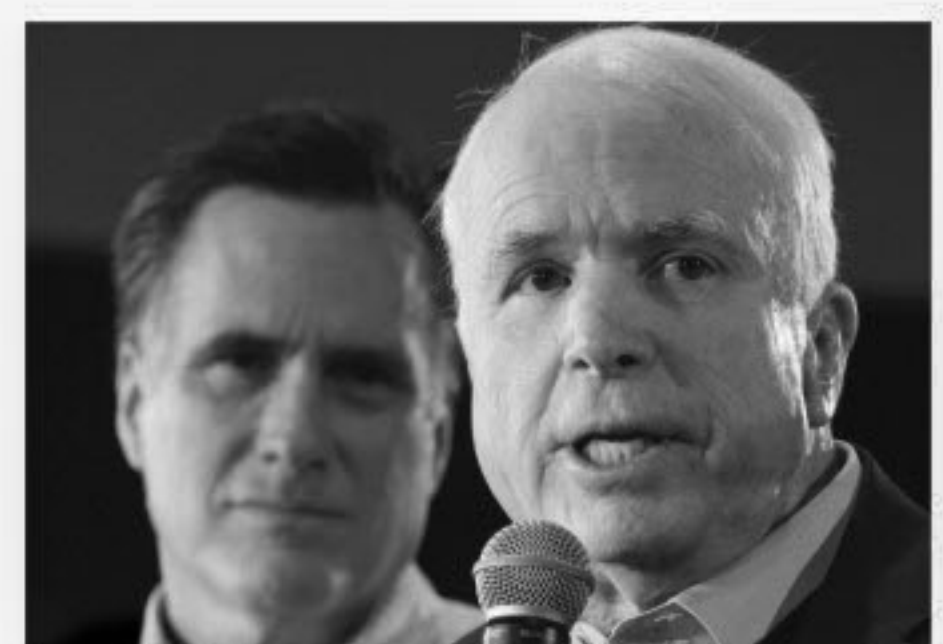
Mitt Romney took fresh fire Wednesday from his rivals for the Republican presidential nomination, but also nabbed an endorsement from top Senator John McCain as the 2012 campaign moved to New Hampshire.

Romney won the first battle in the 2012 White House race in dramatic fashion on Wednesday, wresting Iowa from devout Christian conservative Rick Santorum.

McCain, who beat Romney for the party's 2008 nod but fell to President Barack Obama, told voters here that they had a chance to help the former Massachusetts governor virtually wrap up the nominating fight in their January 10 primary.

A big win here would give Romney's campaign "such momentum that it cannot be stopped," then carry the candidate through South Carolina's January 21 primary and "get this thing over with, get the real contest going," the Arizona lawmaker declared.

Romney, who enjoys a vast lead in New Hampshire, was to head to South Carolina yesterday.



But Romney still faced a fierce battle with his more conservative rivals for the right to take on Obama in the November 6 elections - like former senator and Christian conservative Rick Santorum, whom he bested in Iowa by just eight votes out of more than 120,000 cast.

Romney will also face former House speaker Newt Gingrich, who blamed attack ads by Romney and surrogates for his fourth-place finish in Iowa. Gingrich aimed to put up TV ads attacking Romney in New Hampshire, South Carolina and Florida.

Ghulam Azam faces The Daily Star

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again arranging and classifying them properly.

The tribunal received the "rearranged and reclassified" charges against Ghulam Azam and said the charges, on 62 counts, were now filed "duly". It fixed January 9 for passing an order on whether they will be taken into cognisance.

In the charges, six counts were for conspiring with the Pakistani occupation force to commit crimes against humanity. Three counts were for planning to commit crimes and atrocities, 28 counts were for incitement, 24 counts for complicity, and one specific charge for murder and torture during the 1971 Liberation War.

The charges against Ghulam Azam include leading mass murder of intellectuals on December 14, 1971, and killing 38 prisoners of Brahmanbaria jail.

He was also held responsible by the prosecutors for all atrocities committed across the country between March 25, 1971, and December 16, 1971.

The three-judge tribunal headed by its Chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq yesterday also fixed January 9 for hearing a petition recently filed by Ghulam Azam seeking to be relieved of the charges.

Ghulam Azam is considered by many a symbol of war crimes during the Liberation War.

The prosecution yesterday morning resubmitted the formal charges and other relevant documents to the tribunal through its registrar office in line with the tribunal's earlier order.

On December 12, the prosecution pressed formal charges containing 52 counts of crimes against humanity against Ghulam Azam and sought for his arrest. The tribunal on December 26 sent the charges back to the prosecution saying that the charges were not "properly arranged

and classified". It also ordered the chief prosecutor to reorganise and rearrange the charges in a "systematic form" and resubmit by January 5.

After finishing the tribunal's proceedings for the day, Chief Prosecutor Ghulam Arief Tipoo told reporters at his office yesterday that they mentioned in the formal charges that Ghulam Azam was responsible for all collective and individual crimes against humanity committed by Pakistan occupation forces and their auxiliary forces in 1971.

Rana Dasgupta, a member of the prosecution team, told The Daily Star that in the new formal charges against Ghulam Azam, 10 counts of crimes against humanity have increased due to reclassification of the charges as ordered by the court.

He said in January and February of 1971, Ghulam Azam and his associates held several meetings with the then Pakistan president Yahya Khan and the then East Pakistan governor and martial law administrator Gen Tikka Khan, who later became internationally known as the "Butcher of Bengal". He said the meetings were held for hatching conspiracies and to plan the annihilation of Awami League supporters and the Hindus. Rana said the collaborators termed the Hindus and Awami League supporters "miscreants", "intruders" and "brokers of India" after Awami League won a landslide victory in December, 1970 national elections.

Tajul Islam, a counsel for Ghulam Azam, told the media that the prosecution brought the charges against his client to harass him for political purposes. The charges brought against Ghulam Azam have no legal grounds since no charges of war crimes were proved before the Supreme Court during his citizenship case, the lawyer claimed.

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The colloquium will begin with a plenary session titled ICT in Healthcare: Ensuring Efficiency and Accountability at 9:30am at The Daily Star Centre.

The Daily Star in association with Golden Harvest, Summit Group, Citi Group, D.Net, and LifeSize is organising the programme. Leadership Colloquium is a yearly event launched by the newspaper to bring local initiatives into focus and make a global model out of them.

Renowned experts from the USA, UK and India along with Bangladeshi specialists are expected to participate in the academic discussion. David Aylward, a global health and technology expert from the USA, is expected to deliver the keynote speech at the plenary session.

Another expert from the USA, Kimberly Rook, along with Bangladeshi experts--Mridul Chowdhury, Kaosar Afsana and Sheikh Mohsinuddin-- will also

deliver speeches at the session, which The Daily Star editor Mahfuz Anam is set to chair. Six technical sessions focusing on different aspects of information and technology used to ensure healthcare for all will be held on the first day of the event.

The programme will conclude with a second plenary session titled "ICT in Healthcare: Strategic Roadmap for Bangladesh," to be held at noon at the same venue on January 7.

Three more technical sessions will be held on the second day. They will include video conferencing and exhibition.

Other foreign experts to join the colloquium are Alain B Labrique from the USA, Ali H Rashidee from the USA, Ravi Gupta from India and Murali Shanmugavelam from the UK.

Topics to be covered in the technical sessions are Telemedicine, Telehealth, Mobile Health, Patient Record Management, and Hospital Management.

People's interest first priority

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different from each other's but we must put the interests of the country and its people above that of party," she said in an address to the nation marking three years of the Awami League-led grand alliance government formed on January 6 in 2009, after a landslide victory in the December 2008 elections.

In the previous two years, the prime minister addressed the nation on January 6 but this year she did so a day earlier.

In her 42-minute address, Hasina, also AL president, mentioned her government's successes in different sectors since it took over.

"I have to say with sorrow that we did not get any cooperation from the opposition in running the country during the last years. Rather, most of the time they (opposition) have taken stance against the people and the country while opposing the government."

She went on, "Without any reason, they have been boycotting parliament month

after month. The leader of the opposition (BNP chief Khaleda Zia) attended the House sittings only on six days, and spoke hour after hour uninterrupted... Even after that why is this boycott?"

On war crimes trial, the premier said, "While we have begun trial of the war crimes accused, the opposition leader is trying to protect the war criminals, and conspiring to destabilise the country through hartal, arson and killings."

Urging Khaleda not to protect Razakars and Al-Badr through destructive activities, Hasina said, "I want to say firmly that we must try the war criminals on the soil of Bangladesh whatever obstacles come."

The premier said they have been able to reduce the price of rice despite continued rise of it in the international market, and to increase the income and purchasing capacity of people.

She claimed the government has also been able to give the national economy a

strong base despite the global economic meltdown. Hasina said the power situation was terrible when she had formed government. And this government has added 2,900 megawatt of electricity to the national grid in three years.

She further said a massive gas production and distribution plan has been implemented, raising production by 350 million cubic feet of gas per day.

Recalling her election pledge to ensure food security and to increase agricultural production, Hasina said, "The government has almost succeeded in implementing this pledge in three years."

There has also been much progress in developing the communications system in the country, she said.

Referring to appointment of administrators for the district councils, she said elections to the councils would be held soon.

The premier said law and order is under control. Steps have been taken to

form different specialised police units like tourist police, marine police, separate investigation units and specialised national police bureau of counter terrorism to curb militancy.

The prime minister said her government is doing everything possible to modernise the armed forces.

A total of 4,501 information and service centres have been set up as part of the government's initiative to build a "Digital Bangladesh", she mentioned.

Moreover, Bangladesh has improved bilateral relations with its neighbours and other countries.

Export of manpower has increased in the last three years with 14.33 lakh people now working abroad.

The prime minister said Bangladesh has become a role model in the world in different sectors including in poverty alleviation, food security, healthcare, education, and empowerment of women.

BRTC buses disappoint Quader

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buses from China.

At a view-exchange meeting at the BRTC headquarters in the city's Motijheel, he asked the officials how the buses' condition had turned so bad in a short time of their purchase.

The communications ministry imported 275 buses at Tk 29 lakh each excluding tax from China in 2010 when Syed Abul Hossain was the communications minister. Many of the buses have become inoperative by now.

In response to the minister's query, Col Kazi Zahirul Haq, director (technical) of BRTC, said they had awarded the lowest bidder the contract to import buses as per the rules.

Quader, who recently replaced Abul, said, "We

can't buy substandard buses just to comply with the rules," and reminded them that there was no complaint against the 260 South Korean buses purchased in 2011.

"I don't want to talk about the past but we have to take lessons from the past and correct ourselves," he added.

He told the BRTC officials that the transport fares fixed by the government were not being followed.

"There are also allegations of charging people extra fares in Dhaka and Chittagong where fares have not been hiked," he said instructing officials to ensure that commuters are charged the government-fixed fares. Alluding to the criticism of

his predecessor, Quader said the communications ministry had earned a bad reputation but he did not want to continue with it.

390 NEW BUSES
As many as 340 double-decker buses, 100 of them air-conditioned, and 50 articulated buses, popularly known as "bendy buses", will arrive by June this year. The buses have been purchased from India with the line of credit India gave to Bangladesh.

"A large number of them [buses] will reach here in March," BRTC Chairman MM Iqbal told the minister.

Quader asked him to run more buses on the routes where the demand for transport was very high.

Tuku sees both sides of police

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attack happened in presence of police. Ten truckloads of firearms and ammunition were also smuggled into the country in their presence.

But it was the police that put up the first resistance at Rajarbagh Police Lines against the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971," said Tuku in response to the IGP's remark that police have succeeded in combating militancy in the country.

He was speaking as special guest at the annual general meeting of Bangladesh Police Service Association (BPSA) at Rajarbagh Police Lines.

"People are very unhappy with the police department that could not work freely in the past."

The state minister said it is understandable that police have to act on instruc-

tions of the people in power. He, however, acknowledged police's role in combating militancy in the last three years.

Prime Minister's adviser on public administration HT Imam in his address said, "I see ominous signs in the information I sometime receive but we will move forward and build a better Bangladesh."

He said it seems the prime minister's promises become less and less important as orders are passed downwards through the chain of command.

Earlier, IGP Hassan Mahmood Khandker said police have done well in curbing crimes and militancy, and peaceful holding of the cricket World Cup and several elections.

Police high-ups at the meeting expressed frustra-

tion at lengthy bureaucratic procedures for getting things done.

Additional IGP AKM Shahidul Hoque, also BPSA president, and Deputy Commissioner of Detective Branch Monirul Islam, also BPSA general secretary, urged Home Minister Shahara Khatun and PM's adviser HT Imam to take steps to end bureaucratic manoeuvring and red tape.

Referring to the Warrants of Precedence, IGP Khandker said despite having same ranks and salaries as government administrators, police officials are not given their due status and honour. It often creates scopes for misunderstanding between them and government officials.

The BPSA leaders also demanded a special salary structure for police.