

Severe cold grips North India

PTI, New Delhi

North India continued to reel under the bitter chill yesterday as Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir recorded its coldest night of this winter and icy winds swept several parts of the region. The minimum temperature recorded in Srinagar last night was minus 7.8 deg C.

The plains of Punjab and Haryana also remained the grip of the cold wave where Narnaul was the coldest at 2 deg C. Cold winds swept Chandigarh where the low settled at 5.4 deg C. In Punjab, Amritsar recorded a low of 4.8 deg C followed by Patiala at 5.3 deg C and Ludhiana at 6.2 deg C.

The weather office, meanwhile, warned of heavy rainfall, snowfall and hail storms in various parts of Himachal Pradesh during the next 48 hours. The high altitude tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh reeled under biting cold wave with the minimum temperatures ranging between minus 17 and minus 28 deg C.

The cold wave also maintained its grip over Rajasthan.

Studies

FROM PAGE 1

Yesterday, forty one days after the act of sheer brutality, Jui started writing again, using the right hand after doctors fixed a splint to it.

"I am so excited and happy I cannot spell it out at this moment," she said with a shout of joy.

"After the incident, I had abandoned all hope of writing again with the right hand. And, therefore, I had been practising writing with my left hand so that I can take part in the HSC exams," she said, adding that she can carry on other tasks as well.

Expressing her firm intention to study further, Jui asked all to pray for her so that her dream, which her husband had tried to shatter, comes true.

With this recovery, Jui will also be able to eat food with a spoon in her right hand.

On December 4 last year, her husband Rafiqul Islam, an expatriate worker in the UAE, chopped off her fingers with a machete.

After primary treatment, Jui was taken back to her father's house in Narsingdi. Later, doctors at the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) in Savar took her under their care on January 7 and within a week they made the girl write and do other tasks with her right hand.

A splint has been attached between the remaining part of her thumb and wrist to help her hold the pen properly while another device for using a spoon.

Asked, Jui said she felt no pain and did not face much difficulty in carrying out her tasks with her "new right hand".

ATM Abdur Razzak, head of medical services of CRP, told The Daily Star that a 10-doctor team following the last seven days' work had accomplished the feat.

"As she lost all of her right-hand fingers, she will also be provided with a cosmetic glove for a better look of her hand," Razzak added.

Before damaging the hand, her husband, saying he had a surprise for her, took Jui to a room of his sister's house in the capital's Cantonment area. There he blindfolded the girl, gagged her and also tied her hands.

While Jui was waiting for a "surprise" and extended her right hand to get it, the man did something else, which was indeed the shock of a lifetime.

She was left to bleed for nearly three hours and Rafiq dumped the severed part into a dustbin.

"My only fault was that I wanted to study despite my husband's objections," Jui said, recalling the incident.

Her separated fingers could not be fixed to the limb as their cells had become inactive by the time they were collected from the dustbin and brought to the doctors.

After the incident, the cantonment police arrested Abdur Rafiq and he is now in jail.

Zardari meets

FROM PAGE 20

newspaper, DawnNews reported.

The unscheduled talks came against the background of shaky ties between Zardari's weak civilian administration and the military over a probe into a mysterious memo that sought US help in curbing the army's power.

"Chief of the army staff General Ashfaq Kayani called on President Zardari in his office today," the president's spokesman Farhatullah Babar told AFP.

He gave few details about the meeting beyond that, saying the "current security situation came under discussion".

Kayani, widely regarded as the most powerful figure in Pakistan, is also scheduled to attend a meeting of a defence committee later yesterday which comprises senior ministers and military chiefs.

"The committee is likely to discuss matters related to defence and national security," a government official said.

He declined to comment when asked whether the meeting, to be chaired by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, would help defuse tension between the civilian and military leadership.

Pakistan has been under military dictatorships for about half its history since independence in 1947, its civilian leaders thrown out in three coups.

Euro crisis

FROM PAGE 20

Germany was the only country to emerge totally unscathed with its triple-A rating and a stable outlook.

French Finance Minister Francois Baroin, speaking after an emergency meeting with President Nicolas Sarkozy, played down the impact of Europe's second-biggest economy being downgraded to AA+ for the first time since 1975.

"This is not a catastrophe. It's an excellent rating. But it's not good news," Baroin told France 2 television, saying the government would not respond with further austerity measures.

The euro fell by more than a cent to \$1.2650 on the news. European stocks, which had been up for the day, turned negative, but reaction to the widely anticipated news was moderate. Safe-haven German 10-year bond futures rose to a new record high while the risk premium that investors charge on French, Spanish, Italian and Belgian debt widened.

Euro-zone finance ministers responded jointly by saying in a statement they had taken "far-reaching measures" in response to the sovereign debt crisis and were accelerating reforms toward stronger economic union.

The double blow of the S&P news and the stalling of the Greek debt talks came after a brighter start to the year with Spain and Italy beginning their marathon debt rollover at lower borrowing costs this week.

S&P said the eurozone faced stresses, including tightening credit conditions, rising risk premiums for a growing number of sovereigns, simultaneous deleveraging by governments and households, and weakening economic growth prospects.

It cited political obstacles to a solution to the crisis due to "an open and prolonged dispute among European policymakers over the proper approach to address challenges."

Austerity and budget discipline alone were not sufficient to fight the debt crisis and risked becoming self-defeating, the ratings agency said.

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble played down the news, saying: "In the past months, we've come to agree that the ratings agencies' judgments should not be overvalued."

France and Austria were at risk because of their banks' exposure to the debt of peripheral euro-zone

But despite current tensions, analysts say another coup is unlikely and they instead predict early elections, possibly in the first half of this year.

The "Memogate" scandal centres on an unsigned note allegedly sent by an aide of Zardari to the US military last May, apparently to avert a possible coup after the killing of Osama bin Laden by the US in Pakistan.

The memo has pitted the army against Zardari's government and the Supreme Court is now tasked with deciding whether the government endorsed the note, and if so, if it can remain in power.

Gilani earlier this week accused the army and intelligence chiefs of failing to make their submissions to the commission investigating the memo through government channels, in an unusually bold interview with Chinese media.

The army vociferously denied Gilani's accusation and said it had passed its response through the defence ministry to the court in accordance with the law, ratcheting up tensions between the two sides.

Yesterday's defence committee meeting is, among other items, expected to finalise recommendations to frame new rules of engagement with Nato following the November 26 air strikes on a border post that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.

Pakistan quells attack on police base, 11 killed

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistani security forces yesterday quelled a militant attack on a police station in which eight people were killed including four suicide bombers, one police and three civilians, police said.

The attackers targeted the main police station in Dera Ismail Khan city near the lawless tribal region, provincial information minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain told AFP.

Three suicide bombers detonated themselves and one was shot dead by the army, police chief of the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akbar Hoti told AFP.

"Army and police units have entered the police station and a search operation is over," he said after an operation lasting over two hours.

Kite flying ends

FROM PAGE 20

The incident occurred at Baishakhi Housing at Faridabad in the old part of the city, where his family resides.

Shiplu's friend Mahfuzur Rahman Shifat, who witnessed the tragedy, said "Around 50 people, mostly children, were flying kites on the rooftops of adjacent six-storey buildings since morning. Around 1:00pm, I saw Shiplu running for a stray kite.

"Within a few moments, he fell into the narrow gap between two buildings. I peeped onto the ground only to see him lying in a pool of blood."

Hearing the scream of others, neighbours rushed to the spot and took him to National Medical College Hospital and then to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead around at 2:30pm.

When this correspondent visited the fourth floor flat of the victim's family, his mother Shewli Begum crying uncontrollably, was heard saying, "I asked my son repeatedly to come down and have lunch in time but he did not. And everything ended. How can I bear this pain?"

Shiplu's father cloth trader Jamal Akram fainted repeatedly.

It was found that their building has no staircase leading to the rooftop and no railing around it. People can come to the rooftop from the adjacent buildings with a gap of only two feet in between.

Bikes seized

FROM PAGE 20

Station Sub-Inspector Abdur Razzak said.

Fazle Rabbi, owner of the house, and his friend Farhan Ahmed were arrested for their alleged involvement in "stealing" the motorcycles, he said.

The duo, who claimed to have kept the bikes in the house for "business" purpose, however, failed to produce valid documents.

A case was filed with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station.

Razzak, also investigation officer in the case, produced the arrestees before a Dhaka court yesterday and sought their remand for three days. The court after a hearing rejected the appeal and ordered sending them to jail.

Meanwhile, in another incident, a gang of five criminals looted parts of two private cars from a garage of an apartment in Khilgaon early yesterday.

Police said the criminals tied up the building's security guard Nokul Kumar and fled with the parts around 4:15am.

According to Sub-Inspector Asaduzzaman of Khilgaon Police Station, the gang entered the garage by cutting grills of a balcony, and tied up the guard's hand and mouth at gun-point. They looted some parts of two private cars and fled the spot.

Tenants of the apartment rescued the guard in the morning. A case was filed with Khilgaon Police Station.

Little hope of consensus

FROM PAGE 1

tenure expires in early February.

President Zillur Rahman, on the advice of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, however opened talks with the political parties on December 22 seeking their opinion over the formation of a new EC. By the time the talks concluded on Thursday, 23 political parties, including the ruling AL and main opposition BNP, joined the talks.

Of them, 13 political parties, including the BNP, strongly proposed a restoration of the caretaker government system although it was not on the agenda. Six parties, including the AL and Jatiya Party, opposed the CG system either at the dialogue or outside. Two of the remaining four parties that did not say anything on this issue had earlier talked in favour of the caretaker system.

The number in favour of the CG would have been more had two other components of the BNP-led four-party alliance -- Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote -- been invited to the talks.

Most of the parties proposed the enactment of a law in line with the constitutional provision to ensure the formation of a controversy-free EC.

One of the more interesting and remarkable aspects of the talks was the completely opposite position adopted by the AL and BNP.

The BNP urged the president to take the initiative for a restoration of the CG system before the formation of the new EC. It did not make any suggestion about the formation but clarified its stance that it would not accept it without a restoration of the CG, which was abolished last year by amending the Constitution.

Before the BNP, two other opposition parties -- Jatiya Party of Bangladesh and Liberal Democratic Party -- at the talks with the presi-

dent had also spoken almost on a similar note.

In contrast, the ruling AL delegation strictly confined its discussions to the EC formation. After the talks at a press conference, the AL general secretary questioned the motive of the parties that proposed a restoration of the CG.

It is now almost certain that the possibility of forging a consensus over the formation of the EC is very slim and in that case the new commission might run into a political controversy. Moreover, the political impasse which developed after the abrogation of the CG may deepen further in the coming days.

In such a situation, the political parties that proposed a restoration of the CG also requested the president to take steps for reinstating the CG for holding free and fair parliamentary polls.

In response, the president repeatedly informed political leaders about his "inability" to do so. In his defence, he cited a limitation of his "constitutional powers". He, however, assured the political leaders that he would convey their suggestions to the government.

The BNP-led opposition parties demonstrated largely a positive gesture by joining the talks with the president. Now, it is the ruling party's turn to do something to break the political impasse.

Either the ruling AL or the government may open talks with the opposition to resolve the stalemate. The premier may also advise the president to open talks with the parties to this end before the political situation gets volatile and confrontational further.

The president's holding talks with the parties to resolve political crisis, particularly over the CG issue, is not new in the country's political landscape. It took place in 1996 amid a grave political crisis.

Pakistan learnt no lesson

FROM PAGE 1

The Caravan, a Britain-based magazine, published an interview of Imran on its January issue. Imran told the magazine the events (Bangladesh's Liberation War) in 1971 provided a lesson about the rule of law.

"Had people been punished, we [Pakistan] would not be going through this again," said Imran.

The cricketer-turned politician told the magazine he had overheard instructions to kill Bengalis in 1971 when he was in Dhaka to play a cricket match.

He claimed he had been on the last flight out of Dhaka before the Pakistani army launched an assault on March 25, 1971.

"These ears heard people saying: 'Small and dark. Kill them. Teach them a lesson'," he said. "I heard it with my own ears."

Imran, who was on a cricket tour as an 18-year-old youngster, however did not identify who gave the instructions and to whom.

Now the leader of Pakistani political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Imran said he now hears similar instructions within

Pakistan.

"It's exactly the same language which I hear this time," he said in the interview, adding that today it is Pashtuns who are ill-treated.

"In Pindi, in Lahore, in Karachi, they've been picked up and thrown into jail because they are Pashtun. This is a sad legacy."

According to media reports, around 30 to 35 million Pashtuns living in Afghanistan and Pakistan are the direct victims of the "war on terror" since 2001, when Pakistan became the partner of the USA in the "war on terror". The media termed it "Pashtun genocide". Pashtuns want neither Taliban nor the army on their land.

The former cricketer believes if the Pakistani offenders of 1971 had been punished, the Pashtun would not be harassed in Pakistan today.

The magazine says until his visit to Dhaka in 1971, Imran had believed in the Pakistani state propaganda of the time, which painted the rebellion as the work of a few Indian-backed militants.

"That was the first time I

city

In the face of a sustained

non-cooperation movement, the then prime minister Khaleda Zia had moved to hold talks with the opposition, but the opposition refused to sit with the government. They demanded that the president hold the talks. On the advice of the then PM, erstwhile president Abdur Rahman Biswas opened talks with the political parties.

Sheikh Hasina as the AL chief led her party delegation to the talks on March 10, 1996. Incumbent President Zillur Rahman himself was a member of that delegation as the then general secretary of AL.

So, if advised by the PM, President Zillur Rahman will have no "limitation of powers" to open talks with parties to resolve the political impasse developing over the CG.

The president himself may advise the PM to take steps to resolve the crisis. He does have significant powers to draw the attention of the government to any crucial national issue. Article 48 (5) of the Constitution that gives him the power states: "The Prime Minister shall keep the President informed on matters of domestic and foreign policy, and submit for the consideration of the Cabinet any matter which the President may request him to refer to it."

As he analyses this particular power of the president in his book "Constitutional Law of Bangladesh", eminent jurist Mahmudul Islam writes: "On paper this may not appear to be a power at all, but it has considerable importance. A man of high stature, integrity and experience holding the office of the President can exert great influence on the executive government by way of advice and counseling and play a great role in building a bridge between the government and the opposition."

Stampede kills 10 in India

AFP, New Delhi

At least 10 people, including six women were crushed to death in the middle of the night when a stampede broke out at a religious shrine in central India, media reports said yesterday.

The victims had gathered outside the Muslim shrine of Hussain Tekri in Madhya Pradesh state to take part in a religious ceremony after midnight on Friday.

Police pushed the crowds back, causing people to fall down and get trampled to death in the dark, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency said.

"Six women and four men were killed in the incident," police official Rajesh Vyas told PTI.

The shrine attracts tens of thousands of people each year who believe that a visit can cure any illness.

Stampedes are a regular risk in India where policing and crowd control are often inadequate at temples and on pilgrimage routes, where throngs of fervent devotees congregate on auspicious occasions.

The last major stampede was in January 2011 in the southern state of Kerala when more than 100 people died as panic spread among worshippers crossing mountainous terrain in the dark to visit a shrine.

Chinese PM visits Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao arrived in Kathmandu yesterday for talks marking the first visit to Nepal in a decade by a leader of the world's second-largest economy.

The agenda for the visit has not been disclosed but analysts expect Wen and Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai to discuss investment from Beijing worth billions of dollars for wide-ranging infrastructure projects.

Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun said the leaders would sign agreements "on increasing Chinese assistance to Nepal" and discuss the impoverished Himalayan nation's fractious peace process.

Wen is also expected to seek support for Beijing's policies in the restive region of Tibet, which has seen a wave of self-immolations over the past year in protest at Chinese rule.

Bus ride

FROM PAGE 1

through a veil of thick fog, their bus skidded off the road and tumbled around 300 feet down a steep slope near Thanchi of Bandarban.

Of them, U Hla Ching, 60, Key Ki Nue and Hla Sa Thui are among the 17 killed and the other two among the 25 seriously hurt in the plunge.

Writhing in pain on a bed at the Chittagong Medical College Hospital hours after the accident, Daw was looking for U Hla and Key Ki. But no one around had the heart to tell her that her father and little sister are no more.

Daw, a class-nine student, and her classmate Ma Mya Ching were pulled out of the wreckage by locals as U Hla and the younger two girls -- Key Ki, a class-seven student, and Hla Sa Thui, a class-six student -- lay dead on the spot.

Ma Mya was undergoing treatment at the Bandarban Sadar Hospital.

Daw's uncle, Hla Pha Shu, also headman of Thanchi, said, "My brother was to drop everyone at their schools, pay their re-admission fees and buy books. The girls had plans to buy some new clothes before their classes begin."

Before going to drop Daw, Ma Mya and Hla Sa at Tilak Mukherjee Memorial School in Moksudpur, U Hla Ching was to go to Cox's Bazar to drop his little girl Key Ki at Ramu Girls' High School.

A freedom fighter, U Hla, was president of Thanchi union Awami League. He had a grocery shop near his house in Thanchi Headmanpara.