

NEWS IN brief

Ex Gujrat CM resigns from BJP

IANS, New Delhi

Former Gujarat chief minister Keshubhai Patel has resigned from the BJP yesterday.

He has announced his decision to float a new political party ahead of Gujarat polls. He, along with former union minister Kanshiram Rana, stepped down only months ahead of the assembly elections in the state.

Earlier, Keshubhai called chief minister Narendra Modi a "demon" who is responsible for the misery of common people of the state. "Narendra Modi is a demon who is responsible for the misery of common people of Gujarat. Do not give him vote and he will



Keshubhai Patel

13 refugees die in Assam camps

PTI, Guwahati

13 refugees have died while over hundred have been affected by malaria in camps in Assam's Kokrajhar, Chirang and Dhubri districts, which were rocked by recent violence, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said yesterday.

The health department was working in 303 relief camps in the four affected districts and so far blood tests of 8102 refugees have been conducted with over hundred of them testing positive for malaria, Sarma told reporters here.

Altogether 117 doctors, including 30 deputed by the central government, have so far treated 93,789 patients in the camps with 47 cases referred to hospitals, he said.

All measures are being taken to ensure that an

China Uighurs discouraged to fast

AP, Beijing

China is discouraging some Muslims in the far western region of Xinjiang from fasting during Ramadan.

The government says the move is motivated by health concerns, but others said that it's a risky campaign to secularise the Muslim minority.

Several city, county and village governments in Xinjiang have posted notices on their websites banning or discouraging Communist Party members, civil servants, students and teachers from fasting during the religious holiday.

Muslims around the world abstain from food and drink from dawn to dusk during the 30-day period. Regional spokeswoman Hou Hanmin was quoted in the state-run Global Times newspaper on Friday as saying authorities encourage people to "eat properly for study and work" but don't force anyone to

Heavy rain causes havoc in Indian state

10 killed, 38 missing

PTI, Dehradun

Ten people were killed and 38 others went missing as incessant rains battered Uttarakhand yesterday triggering landslides, cloud bursts and flash floods which flattened homes and stranded hundreds of pilgrims with the Chardham Yatra coming to a grinding halt.

The state government has sounded a high alert after the MET department's warned of very heavy rains and sought the help of the army to mitigate the sufferings of the people.

Nineteen labourers went missing following a cloud burst in the upper hills of Uttarkashi district.

Similarly, 19 others also went missing from Gangori, Dunda, Uttarkashi town and Barkot areas in the district.

MYANMAR ETHNIC UNREST Egypt denounces attacks on Muslims

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's foreign ministry yesterday denounced attacks against Myanmar's Muslim minority, saying its envoy in the Buddhist-majority east Asian country had seen extensive damage caused by sectarian clashes.

The ministry statement came a day after protesters in Cairo burnt the flag of Myanmar's mission.

Ministry spokesman Amr Rushdi "condemned the violence Muslims have been subjected to in Myanmar," the statement said.

Egypt's envoy in Myanmar witnessed "a big disparity in the extent of damage that afflicted each community, as it was clear the Muslim areas were subject to more violence and damage."

Rushdi said he understood the extent of anger Egyptians felt over the attacks on Muslims, but said Egypt was committed to protecting foreign missions and called for calm and for diplomacy to be given a chance.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, which fielded President Mohamed Morsi in the June election, urged the foreign ministry to take "tangible steps" to end what it called the "ethnic cleansing" of Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya minority.

Violence which erupted in June in Rakhine state between Buddhists and Rohingya left about 80 people dead from both sides, official figures showed. However, the Human Rights Watch said that figure appeared "grossly underestimated".

CROSS-BORDER ATTACKS FROM PAKISTAN

Afghan ministers face axe

AFP, Kabul

The Afghan parliament yesterday voted to dismiss two top security ministers at a critical time amid tensions with Pakistan and increasing insurgent attacks as Nato prepares to withdraw its troops.

The move obliges President Hamid Karzai to replace Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak, who has strong support among Afghanistan's Western allies, and Interior Minister Bismillah Mohammadi.

The lawmakers charged that they had failed in their handling of cross-border shelling barrages blamed on neighbouring Pakistan and other security issues in a country facing an insurgency by hardline Taliban Islamists.

In a brief statement after the vote, Karzai's office acknowledged that parliament had the right to disqualify ministers and said he would react after a national security council meeting today.

The men are expected to continue serving in an acting capacity until the president introduces replacements.

"General Abdul Rahim Wardak will



Rahim Wardak



Mohammadi

continue serving in the ministry as the acting defence minister until a new minister is introduced by the president," Defence Ministry spokesman General Zaher Azimi told AFP.

The two ministers were summoned to appear yesterday before the Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament, to defend their handling of the cross-border shelling and the overall security situation in the country.

Late last month more than 300 heavy artillery shells and rockets were fired from Pakistan into Afghanistan's eastern Kunar province, killing at least four people, Afghan officials said.

It was the latest in a series of barrages and led Karzai's government to warn Pakistan that any further cross-border shelling could significantly harm relations between the two strife-torn neighbours.

Pakistan denied the accusation, calling it "incorrect".

Afghanistan and Pakistan typically blame each other for violence by Taliban Islamic militants plaguing both sides of their porous

ROW OVER SOUTH CHINA SEA

China hits back at US

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday voiced "its strong dissatisfaction and opposition" after the United States accused Beijing of raising tensions by setting up a new military garrison in the South China Sea.

Foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang was cited by the official Xinhua news agency as making the remarks after the United States hit out at China over its decision last week to establish the garrison in the disputed Parcel Islands.

The US criticism "completely ignored the facts, deliberately confounded right and wrong, sending a seriously wrong signal," Qin was quoted as saying in a statement.

It did not help efforts aimed at "safeguarding the peace and stability of the South China Sea and the Asia Pacific region," he said.

China's decision to establish the garrison and the tiny city of Sansha in the hotly contested archipelago infuriated other claimants Vietnam and the Philippines, which accused Beijing of intimidation.

State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said in a statement Friday that the United States was "concerned by the increase in tensions in the South China Sea and are monitoring the situation closely".

Disputed claims in the South China Sea



"In particular, China's upgrading of the administrative level of Sansha city and establishment of a new military garrison there covering disputed areas of the South China Sea run counter to collaborative diplomatic efforts to resolve differences and risk further escalating tensions in the region," he said.

China says it controls much of the South China Sea, but Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam all claim portions. Vietnam and the Philippines have accused China of stepping up harassment at sea.

Highway robbery

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Every day more than ten thousand vehicles leave Chittagong and Mongla ports with imported goods for different parts of the country while a huge number of vehicles rush to the ports with export items, Manik said. The robbers get information from some owners, who either have connections with those gangs or themselves run the gangs.

Vehicle owners send messages to the gangs when someone book a truck or covered van for carrying goods, Manik added.

Elaborating further, he said that when a truck goes missing with goods, some leaders of the vehicle owners' association become active. They advise goods owners not to file any case to avoid police harassments and assure them of compen-

sation.

The leaders then contact the robbers and after negotiation the total loss is divided into three portions -- the truck's owner gives one third, robbers give another one third and the owner of goods bears the rest.

"We know some of our association leaders are involved with robberies and stage the 'compensation drama'. But we can do nothing as they have political backup," Manik said.

To bring a change, the association leaders had demanded that the government conduct polls to elect a new body for the association, which had not been done in last sixteen years.

Deputy Inspector General of Highway Police Humayun Kabir told The Daily Star that transport owners' involvement in

robberies is a new dimension and that highway police had no proof to substantiate the allegation.

"I don't know how a vehicle owner gets involved because he never rents out his vehicle directly. He gives it to an agency which deals with goods owners," he said adding, however, that police would look into the matter.

The performance of highway police in curbing robberies is not satisfactory as they have a shortage of manpower.

To meet the needs they are going to introduce two more regions-- north and south. The north one will be formed with Sylhet, Mymensing and Dhaka districts and the south with Khulna, Barisal and Faridpur districts. A superintendent of police will be in charge of each region, Humayun said.

Poison-apple

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Mafiz Uddin Fakir, president of Idilpur Pineapple Growers Cooperative Association, said representatives of chemical companies as well as many agriculturists "convince the farmers by saying the chemicals are used worldwide" and that they are good for the fruit and not at all harmful to humans.

Most farmers are unaware of the correct amount to be applied, said Dr Mohammad Nurul Huda, Madhupur upazila health and family planning officer, adding that farmers use excessive amounts of chemicals.

"Long-term consumers of such fruit become vulnerable to cancer, liver and kidney diseases, and for pregnant women they are even more dangerous," he added.

Pineapple grower Golam Mostafa of Moter Bazar village said last year when law enforcers asked local farmers not to use excessive chemicals, the use of chemicals dropped significantly. "But this year there is no trace of the law enforcers, and all are

back to the old practice."

"Representatives of different chemical companies come here with agriculture officials and recommend chemicals for pineapples," he added.

Dr Hazrat Ali, Madhupur upazila agriculture officer, denied the allegations. He, however, said hormones are recommended only once before the budding stage as they help pineapple buds to flower and increase yields.

"The representatives of the chemical companies and local shopkeepers stalk the farmers and almost compel them to spray hormones on the fruits," added Dr Ali.

When a fruit is sprayed with excessive hormones, it gets larger but fails to ripen, he said. "Then the farmers use harmful chemicals like 'ethylene' and 'carbide' to make the fruits yellow. They do all this just to capture the early market when prices are high."

"In reality, we are unable to stop the ill practice since there is no government ban

Oscar Pistorius

FROM PAGE 1

"My goal here was to qualify for the semifinal, and I am glad I have managed it," said Pistorius later. The South African clocked a time of 45.44 seconds, which while still being quite far off his personal best, was enough to propel him to his desired semifinal target.

"I started a bit slowly," said Pistorius.

Indeed he had, as the weight of the watching thousands seemed to put a little bit of pressure on him. "I slipped slightly, but I am not really the best of starters," said the South African. But with the crowd egging on their favourite Blade Runner, Pistorius regained ground towards the end of the race and managed to streak through into second spot, just behind the 18-year old Dominican Lugelin Santos.

The youngster was later asked about Pistorius.

"Bueno, si, Bueno," he said. "He is a good man, always talking to everyone," said

Santos, despite the obvious language barrier. Every single athlete who walked through the mixed zone before Pistorius echoed Santos. Pistorius 'had a big heart', said one and all were united in the belief that his prosthetic legs gave him no advantage.

"I don't know whether to laugh or cry," said Pistorius. "It is incredibly difficult to separate the occasion from the event," he admitted. The Olympics after all is the pinnacle of track and field sport and for Pistorius it perhaps provided extra inspiration.

Not that he was short of muses.

"My mother always told me that the loser is not one who competes and finishes last, but one who does not compete at all," said Pistorius.

Those are certainly words to live by.

The South African is not expected to make the 400-meter final, but his mother's words will doubtless drive him on to greater achievements, if

40pc electricity loss

FROM PAGE 20

India's power sector is lousy with thieves. Men like Chandrakant are the least of them.

As much as 40 percent of the power generated in India is not paid for. The bulk of it is stolen.

India suffered the worst blackouts in history this week, which left over 600 million people without power. The lights are back on, for now, but the crisis is evidence of deep problems in a sector teetering on the edge of bankruptcy for the second time in a decade.

Investigators have yet to pinpoint the cause of this week's shut-downs. Early, contested reports suggest states were drawing more than their share of power. Scanty rainfall has driven up demand, as farmers switch on electric pumps for irrigation, and cramped hydro-electric supply, which generates about 20 percent of

India's electricity.

The deeper problem, however, stems from decades of populist pricing and inefficiency that have pushed losses at state utilities to an estimated \$10 billion in the year that ended in March, according to the Planning Commission, a top government advisory body.

In the most recent fiscal year, utilities lost an estimated 1.07 rupees per kilowatt hour, up 40 percent since fiscal 1999.

New Delhi is now contemplating a \$21.7 billion bail-out for state utilities, last thrown a lifeline in 2001.

The problem really begins in the ground, with coal.

Coal accounts for more than half of India's electricity supply.

Efforts to force Coal India - an inefficient government behemoth with a near monopoly on coal mining -

to ramp up supply have foundered. Fights over land acquisition and stalled environmental clearances have made it difficult to open new mines. Power companies now are looking overseas for coal.

In the last four years, the cost to utilities of buying power rose 21 percent - faster than ever before, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers - but they have been unable to pass that on to consumers because of price regulations.

Politicians currying favour with the farm vote have granted free or heavily subsidised power for agriculture, while idealists have fought to bring affordable light to the poor.

Much of rural electricity is unmetered, creating opportunities for abuse.

Kameswara Rao, executive director of energy, utilities and mining at PricewaterhouseCoopers in India, said India should

force states to raise rates in line with inflation and sell off part of their distribution grids to private companies.

Regulators, however, have been reluctant to raise consumer prices, preferring to push utilities to become more efficient. States don't want to cede control of their massive utilities, which rake in billions of dollars in annual revenue.

With their rickety finances, state power companies have not been able to keep pace with rising demand and have expanded the grid faster than they can manage it, analysts said.

Even though Indians use very little energy - per capita consumption is a third of the world average - there is not enough juice to go around. India has allocated 14.5 percent or more of its budget to the power sector since 1969, but has managed to add only half as much capacity as planned for the

Iconic voice falls silent, forever

FROM PAGE 20

country passed away at the city's United Hospital at 6:20am on Saturday. He was 77.

Hamid, suffering from bone cancer, was put on life support the previous noon after his condition deteriorated following a surgery on his spinal cord.

Admired and adored by millions for his baritone voice and simple narrative of words, Hamid was the forerunner of a golden generation of sports commentators which includes the late Taufiq Aziz Khan, the late Khoda Boksh Mridha, Nikhil Ranjan Das and Manjur Ahsan Mintu -- who enthralled the sports-loving masses with their rich vocabulary, sense of proportion and a keen understanding of sports in general.

The noted sports personality was buried at the Mirpur Martyred Intellectual Graveyard, but not before

namaz-e-janazas at Gulshan Niketon, Gandaria East End Club premises and Bangabandhu National Stadium -- a favourite venue of the deceased -- where friends, relatives and people of the sports fraternity paid their last respects.

Manjur Ahsan Mintu, one of his fellow commentators who was introduced to the Bengali commentary of Radio Bangladesh by Hamid, recollected fond memories after attending the janaza at the BNS yesterday.

"I used to deliver commentary on radio in English when Hamid do the Bengali commentary to do the Bengali commentary for Radio Bangladesh in 1973, and since that day I became a colleague and a lifelong friend," Mintu said.

"In those days there was hardly any specialisation in sports. We used to participate in all sports that went around -- football, cricket,

volleyball, handball. And we gave everything we had for whatever we earned. He played with a passion and gave his best as a sports commentator and journalist," said veteran sports journalist Kamruzzaman, a contemporary of Hamid's.

Abdul Hamid was a renaissance man in the truest sense.

Born in 1935 at Nobodeep, Nadia in India, Hamid was schooled in Gandaria, Old Dhaka, but it was at Jagannath College that he attracted widespread attention while commenting on a football match.

His sporting career flourished as he kept playing football, cricket and volleyball simultaneously, representing the East End Club and the Wanderers Club in football in the late 50s before drifting to another profession altogether -- banking.

But it was sports com-

mentary that made him a household name. Having started with Bangladesh Radio's Urdu commentary in 1963, Hamid began Bengali commentary in 1973 and immediately gained wide recognition. He had also started anchoring sports programmes on Bangladesh Television from 1964.

Alongside he was also involved with sports journalism, working for Daily Jihad, Daily Azad and Daily Inquilab. He had been working as sports editor in Daily Amader Shomoy from 2003 till his death.

For his wide contribution to sports, Hamid was felicitated with the National Sports Award in 1976 and Ekushey Award in 2003.

In death he has left behind countless admirers and a memory of his rich voice, the absence of which will be a source of sorrow for

Panjabi catches imagination

FROM PAGE 20

Lubnan have joined the foray in showcasing their designs ahead of the Eid festivities. The local fashion boutique houses have popularised the once less-adorned panjabi among the youth and middle-aged population.

Two to three decades ago, the elderly citizens were the main users of panjabis. It has been accepted as a fashion year in the later years, said Mohammad Abdur Rouf, general manager of retail of Aarong, a pioneer in popularising the panjabi among urbanites.

"The market for panjabis is growing by 20 percent," said the official of the country's biggest fashion boutique that uses fabrics made by local weavers.

No estimates for the annual market size of panjabis could be found. But operators said

demand for panjabis has grown manifold in the past two decades, spurred by rising fashion consciousness among the middle and upper income segments.

The emergence of hundreds of small and medium fashion boutiques has added a different dimension to the colours and designs of panjabis and made it popular among men of all ages.

Eid is the main season for panjabi sales. However, the traditional wear has gained popularity among men of all ages on other social and cultural occasions including Pahela Boishakh, 21st February (Mother Language Day) and December 16 (Victory Day).

Eid accounts for at least half of the annual sales of panjabis, said Abdur Hai, president of shop owners association in Sharif Market, the main wholesale hub for panjabis.

Hai said he makes over 2 lakh pieces of panjabis a year now through contract manufacturing. Before 1988, his production hovered around 8000-10,000 pieces, he added.

"The panjabi is now a trendy item," said Hai. The number of wholesale stores and markets has increased overtime along with rising demand, he added.

Khalid Mahmood Khan, entrepreneur of fashion boutique Kay Kraft, has linked the growing demand for panjabis to changes in designs and patterns.

"Short panjabis in colourful designs and patterns have helped attract a growing number of youths to the panjabi," he said. "It has broken the old concept that panjabis are for the elderly."

"The market for panjabis has grown mainly because of the endeavours of local fashion houses. This is a segment that has expanded

on its own, offsetting the influence of foreign clothes on the fashion conscious people."

"Demand for short panjabis is higher among buyers outside Dhaka this year," said Humayun Kabir Bhutto, manager of LB Garments at Sharif Market.

Nearly 1 crore pieces of panjabis are sold from the market a year, he said. "We mainly sell ahead of Eid," he said adding that the wholesaler recorded a rise in sales this year.

Khan of Kay Kraft said sales of panjabis and other clothes is satisfactory so far.

Rouf of Aarong also said sales are higher ahead of the coming Eid festivities.

"People have started shopping for Eid in advance," said the official of Aarong that aims to sell 3 lakh pieces of panjabis this year.

Half the targeted yearly sales of panjabis may come from the current Eid festival