

Turnout terrific

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Marjia Akter Muna from Premier Ideal High School, Oishee Oundrila Sarker from Vidyamoyee Govt Girls' High School, Rifat Jahin from Mymensingh Laboratory High School, Abhishek Roy and Atif Amer Khan from Onnisha Intl School and College qualified.

From Mymensingh Zilla School qualified Md Tahmin Intiser Shafin, Rozel Ahmed, Md Muzahidur Rahman and Md Jarid Mahubb.

The fair had eight stalls where the participants could play spelling-related games and win prizes. The Spelling Bee mascot was welcomed by all in the event, which was one of the most competitive so far.

In Dhaka, four schools were visited. From Mirpur Girls' Ideal Laboratory Institute, Parisa Islam, Sohaima Maria, Sadia Sharif Nishat and Arifa Akter qualified. From Oxford International School too, four spellers qualified as they proved equally good. They are Nazmul Hassan, Rishma Hassan, Sayem Rahman and Shabab Newaz.

From University Laboratory School and College, Md Nur-un-nabi Akash, Fahim Ibrahim and Md Fahim Reza (Anoy) qualified while from DPS STS School Dhaka, the top three were Masaba Saptorshi Anam, Monali Ipsita Rahman and Raihan Kabir Chowdhury.

In Chittagong, Champs21 visited two schools. Maisha Mehjabin, Sabi Jahana Mahila and Tasfia Mehjabeen qualified from Silver Bells School. From Haji Mohsin School, the qualifiers were Ayonsho Shen, Soumin Das and Abdullah Arshad.

Champs21 believes that the other fairs to be held across the country will be as successful as the one in Mymensingh.

Anyone who did not qualify through the school can still participate through the online game on www.champ21.com.

The Spelling Bee finals are to be held in June.

Detailed information about the competition is available on www.champ21.com, the first e-learning portal of Bangladesh. Students who want to qualify through the online rounds can visit the website and play the Spelling Bee Game to their heart's content.

Major

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inspector generals (DIGs), three assistant inspector generals, 52 police superintendents and deputy police commissioners and an additional police superintendent have been transferred.

DIG Amulla Bhushan Barua has been made DIG Telecom, Dhaka. Additional DIGs Rowshan Ara Begum and SM Kamal Hossain have been transferred to the railway and highway police ranges respectively.

DMP Deputy Commissioner Syed Nurul Islam has been transferred to Narayanganj as superintendent of police. DMP Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Monirul Islam has been made joint commissioner of the DMP.

The other transferees include Additional IG Shoibul Kanti Chowdhury (to Criminal Investigation Department, Dhaka); additional DIG Md Lutfur Rahman Mandal (to DIG Headquarters); Joint Police Commissioner Sheikh Mohammad Maruf Hasan (to DMP); and Additional DIG Mohammad Ibrahim Fatemi (to additional police commissioner DMP).

Turkey's Kurdish rebels to declare ceasefire

AFP, Ankara

Turkey's Kurdish rebels will declare a ceasefire and withdraw to their bases in northern Iraq in the spring as part of a deal brokered between their jailed leader and the country's intelligence agency, media reported yesterday.

According to the agreed timetable, the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK) will declare a ceasefire in February at the urging of their jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan, daily Hurriyet reported.



The golden ticket winners: teams of Oxford International School, Mirpur Girl's Ideal Laboratory Institute and Silver Bells School.



PHOTO: STAR

Govt may send

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Migration cost for each of them will be around Tk 40,000.

Initially, the selected jobseekers will not have to bear any expenditure, as their migration costs would be borne by the employers. However, the costs would be later deducted from their monthly wages in two years.

The selected workers will be given two months' compulsory training by trainers of the government, the minister said.

They will be given training on Chinese and English speaking, child rearing, preparing Chinese food and housekeeping, said officials of the ministry.

Hong Kong is interested to recruit Bangladeshi housemaids, as its main sources of overseas domestic workers have started curbing the flow of their citizens.

Earlier in September last year, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported that the country and its employment agencies were looking for new labour markets following a ban on employment from its mainland maids.

Around 97.6 percent of Hong Kong's total housemaids were recruited from the Philippines and Indonesia.

The country is now facing shortage of housemaids as

the Philippines and Indonesia are not sending their women following reports of abuse, added the newspaper.

The recruiting agencies of Hong Kong had earlier held a series of talks with their government about opening a new window of workers from Myanmar and Vietnam in vain.

Expatriates' Welfare Secretary Dr Zafar Ahmed Khan said they had taken the decision to send Bangladeshi housemaids after necessary observations regarding workers' safety.

"The Philippines is narrowing its supply of housemaids as the country's economic condition has improved. We will monitor the entire process and work with the Hong Kong authorities to ensure our women's safety," he told The Daily Star.

Hong Kong would recruit the housemaids under an agreement between the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training and the General Chamber of Hong Kong signed in May of 2012.

A Bangladeshi delegation led by Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training Director General Begum Shamsoun Nahar visited Hong Kong in November last year and held talks with the authorities concerned in this regard.

Muhith sceptic

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will be the major financier under that arrangement.

"It would be a new party. We have to negotiate terms with them and sign an agreement. It will be very time-consuming."

He said even if the project is implemented at a minimised cost, as suggested by the prime minister, it will take time.

The minister said if the project's work starts under the financial arrangement led by the WB, tender for bridge's construction can be invited in 10 days.

"It is in our best interest to proceed with this arrangement."

Muhith said he has sought an appointment from the WB president to hold talks with him in the USA next month to discuss the WB's financing of the project.

Muhith said he was yet to receive any response.

He said there are some differences of opinion between the WB and the government over the time frame for the project's implementation.

"We want to start the project's work the day the WB says yes."

When reporters told him that many think the WB is unwilling to finance the project, Muhith refuted the view and said it is a wrong public perception.

Asked whether the other two co-financiers -- ADB and Jica -- will finance the project if the WB pulls out of it, Muhith said he is trying to make sure that they stay in the project.

Meanwhile, the communications ministry inked a Tk 96 crore deal with a Bangladesh-India joint venture company to protect a Padma bridge construction yard from river erosion.

According to the agreement, the company will do work along a two-kilometre stretch of the riverbank to save Janjira yard and adjacent Mahjirkandi ferry ghat from erosion.

The work will begin next month and end in six months.

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader, who was present at the

signing ceremony, said the bridge's construction would have already started if the donors had provided the funds timely.

"We have almost completed the groundwork at a cost of Tk 1,500 crore. It would be great if the World Bank stays in the project," he told journalists.

Quader said the government has given maximum effort to arrange funds for the project and the prime minister is monitoring everything in this project.

He reiterated that the bridge's construction would start within the present government's tenure.

JS body

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But they appeared helpless when the Jamaat-Shibir men perpetrated violence and damaged public property, meetings sources said.

Following Monday's mayhem, Finance Minister AMA Muhith told reporters that such violence had proved there was an intelligence failure.

However, Home Minister Muihuddin Khan Alamgir said: "I do not find any failure of police or intelligence agencies."

Meanwhile, Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif yesterday said there might be some failure of the on-duty policemen, but there was no intelligence failure over the Jamaat-Shibir attack.

The law enforcement agencies would apply all their strength in future if the anti-liberation forces tried to attack police and public, Hanif told a press conference at the AL president's political office in Dhanmondi.

He said the government was ready to ban Jamaat-Shibir from politics if people wanted.

However, he added, banning them was not possible as the main opposition BNP was with the anti-liberation forces.

Hanif called upon all pro-liberation, secular and democratic forces and people of all professions to unite against Jamaat-Shibir.

37 identified

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Of the 59, six bodies were taken by their families and the rest 53 were buried in the capital's Jurain Graveyard on November 27.

Then the National Forensic Profiling Laboratory at Dhaka Medical College Hospital began DNA profiling on November 29.

A report on the test results has already been submitted to the labour and employment ministry, Ahmad Ferdous, scientific officer at the lab, said.

DNA samples of 37 victims matched samples from 36 families -- parents or children. Ten samples did not match with any of the victims.

Mikail Shipar, secretary to the labour ministry, said his office had received the report.

Asked when the families will be contacted, he said the report would be sent to the Prime Minister's Office first and then to the respective deputy commissioners.

On receiving the report, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGMEA) would move to pay compensations to the families of the victims identified, Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, acting president of the trade body, said.

Ansar Ali, who lost his wife Rahela Begum and sister-in-law Nazma Begum to the Tazreen blaze, is among those whose loved ones have been identified. He told this paper last night that he was relieved by the news.

"We can now at least offer prayers near their graves," he told this correspondent over the phone from Nishchintapur in Ashulia.

Manjurul Islam, who too had lost his wife Rehana Begum, said authorities had taken DNA samples from Rehana's mother, but as of 12:30am today he did not know whether the authorities found any match.

Meanwhile, a Supreme Court lawyer yesterday filed a petition with the High Court, seeking a directive on the government to arrest the owners of Tazreen Fashions Ltd and Smart Export Garments Ltd.

At least seven workers were killed in a fire at Smart Export on Saturday in the capital's Mohammadpur.

The petitioner, Eunus Ali Akond, also urged the HC to order the government and the two garment factories to pay compensations to the family members of the deceased and the injured.

The garment workers were killed due to the negligence of the owners in taking adequate safety measures, the petition says.

The HC bench of Justice A H M Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik and Justice Mahmudul Hoque fixed today for hearing the petition.

UN agency warns of new global bird flu threat

AFP, Rome

The UN food agency yesterday warned the world risked a surge in bird flu outbreaks unless countries strengthen their monitoring against dangerous animal diseases despite economic hardship.

"The continuing international economic downturn means less money is available for prevention of H5N1 bird flu and other threats of animal origin," Juan Lubroth, chief veterinary officer at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), said in a statement.

"Even though everyone knows that prevention is better than cure, I am worried because in the current climate governments are unable to keep up their guard," he was quoted as saying.

Sayedee verdict

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Yesterday, soon after the completion of both sides' arguments, accused Sayedee began reading out loud a 10-page speech before the tribunal. During the time he cursed the prosecution, the witnesses against him and the investigation officers.

However, he read out the highlights of his speech ignoring the court's repeated objection. During the time, he swore upon Allah and claimed that the charges brought against him were fabricated.

He termed the hacked Skype conversation between former Tribunal-1 chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq and an expatriate legal expert as an intervention of Allah.

Sayedee, who also claimed himself as a preacher of Islam, said, "I pray to Allah to give the prosecution, investigation officer and the witnesses against me الهداية [to bring someone on the right path]. And if they do not deserve it, burn them and their families in the fire of turmoil physically and mentally, the way my family, I and my followers across the globe have suffered. Be hell their eternal resting place."

The prosecution objected the remark instantly, terming it "hypocrisy". The defence also reacted to the prosecution's objection and chaos brewed up in the tribunal. Prosecutor Syed Haidar Ali later pacified the heat.

Chairman of the three-member tribunal Justice ATM Fazle Kabir then said the case was kept CAV (Curia Advisari Vult, a Latin legal term), which according to lawyers means that the verdict could be delivered anytime.

He said the prosecution and the defence would be informed prior to the delivery of the verdict.

This was the second time the tribunal kept Sayedee's case ready for verdict.

Meanwhile, during the rehearing, prosecutor Haidar Ali said the prosecution had followed the procedures as per the act. If the tribunal during judgment took under consideration the statements of the absentee witnesses given to the investigation officer, it does not clash with the law.

The victims and their

families had been waiting anxiously for the verdict, he said, adding that the prosecution had been successful in proving Sayedee guilty of all charges.

Sayedee is facing 19 charges of crimes against humanity, including looting, killing, arson, rape and religious conversion, which were allegedly committed by him during the Liberation War in 1971.

Haidar Ali then sought capital punishment for Sayedee.

A total of 44 persons including the investigation officer, witnesses and absentee witnesses gave deposition against Sayedee while 17 persons were produced as defence witnesses.

Following a Dhaka court order, Sayedee was arrested along with Jamaat leaders Motiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed on June 30, 2010, in connection with hurting the sentiment of Muslims.

Nizami and Mojaheed are now also facing crimes against humanity charges at the war crimes tribunals. Chief prosecutor Ghulam Arief Tipoo of the international crimes tribunals placed the charges against Sayedee before the tribunal through its registrar on July 11, 2011.

The tribunal framed 20 specific charges against Sayedee on October 3, 2011.

The trial finally began on November 20, 2011, with the prosecution's opening statement.

SQ CHOWDHURY CASE
The tribunal-1 yesterday rejected three petitions of the war crimes accused BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury.

The petitions were: initiating contempt of court proceeding against a reporter and the editor of Bangla daily Jugantor, review of order on an adjournment petition and review of an earlier order on taking testimony closed-door.

The Tribunal rejected the contempt petition saying it did not find any material for initiating contempt proceeding after perusing the report that was published on January 18.

The rest two review petitions were rejected as the defence had failed to maintain the time bar.

The tribunal, however, heard submissions of the

defence and prosecution on another petition, in which the defence sought necessary steps so that SQ Chowdhury could take part in the ongoing parliament sessions.

The tribunal fixed today for the order on the matter.

Earlier in the morning, the Tribunal-1 asked to submit investigation report or formal charge against war crimes suspect Jamaat-e-Islami central leader Mir Kashem Ali on March 3.

Kashem was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

No room

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The premier said the cooperation between Bangladesh and neighbouring India to fight terrorism is on the right track.

She expressed satisfaction over the signing of the Extradition Treaty and Revised Travel Arrangement (RTA), and hoped that the RTA would make the visa-obtaining process easier and help increase people-to-people contact.

Hasina also said Bangladesh is eagerly waiting for ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement 1974 and its protocol by India to implement various clauses, including exchange of adversely-possessed areas.

In this context, she mentioned that Bangladesh wants early signing of the Teesta Agreement.

Termining poverty a common enemy of the region, Hasina described various programmes of her government to reduce poverty.

She mentioned that about five crore people have been elevated to middle-class status during the last four years following the pragmatic steps of her government.

The premier recalled India's great role in the Liberation War in 1971 saying the people of Bangladesh would always remember their contributions.

PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad briefed reporters after the meeting.

Ambassador at-Large M Ziauddin, Premier's Principal Secretary Shaikh Md Wahid-uz-Zaman, Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka Pankaj Saran, among others, were present.

Suranjit says sorry

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It, however, did not proceed against Suranjit, a minister without portfolio, since he had offered unconditional apology for his comments on war crimes trial on December 22.

The show-cause notice followed a December 23 report by Bangla daily Amar Desh, in which Suranjit was quoted as saying, "The next year is 2013. Verdicts [in cases] against 14 identified war criminals have already been prepared. Trial of these war criminals would be over anytime in 2013. Their death sentences will also be implemented. None will be able to resist."

Suranjit was asked to explain his "imaginary comments" on verdicts in the cases pending with the tribunal.

During yesterday's hearing, Abdul Baset Majumder, a counsel for Suranjit, said his client's statements were distorted in the report.

Suranjit never meant to lower the image and dignity of the tribunal, said the lawyer, adding that the minister offered unconditional

apology if any portion of his speech hurt the administration of justice.

The tribunal, in its order, said the alleged comments did not seem to be prejudicing the cases pending with the court but could cause people to develop a wrong perception about the trial procedure.

"However, a responsible person should be restrained and careful in making any such comment on a sub-judice matter...."

The court also said, "This tribunal legally expects that the responsible persons, especially those who are associated with the party in power, shall prove their prudence in future restraining themselves from foretelling imaginary result of the case and time limit for disposal of sub-judice matters, in the interest of upholding independence of the tribunal and fair justice."

Earlier, the tribunal made similar observations while disposing of two contempt of court petitions against Awami League leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and

Matia Chowdhury.

Meanwhile, the tribunal yesterday accepted a petition filed by the prosecution for permission to submit additional evidence in the case against Jamaat leader M u h a m m a d Kamaruzzaman.

The documents are -- two newspaper reports and a list of collaborators arrested in Dhaka after the Liberation War.

Bangla dailies Purbadesh and Dainik Bangla on December 31, 1971, published reports on arrests of 15 collaborators, naming Kamaruzzaman as one a m o n g t h e m . Kamaruzzaman's name was also there on the collaborators' list prepared by detectives between 1972 and 1973, the prosecution said.

Meanwhile, the security of the international crimes tribunals has been tightened in the wake of Monday's violence by Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir to pressure the government to stop the war crimes trial.

FBI team talks on terror with home boss

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team from Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) held a meeting with Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir yesterday to discuss various issues including militancy.

The team also visited Inspector General of Police (IGP) Hassan Mahmood Khandaker at the police headquarters.

Ministry sources said the FBI team discussed on how to check the proliferation of militancy and to increase competency of law enforcers by providing training.

The FBI team was briefed on how the present government took steps to combat militancy which rose in 1995, a meeting source said.

Michael Welch, assistant director for International Operations accompanied by Special Agent in Charge David Bowdich, Assistant Special Agent in Charge

Suzette Morgan, Asia Chief Lamont Siller, the FBI Legal Attaché Daniel Clegg, Supervisory Special Agent Laura Kriegbaum and Supervisory Special Agent John Dunn were present in the meeting.

According to a letter sent to the foreign ministry from the US Embassy in Dhaka, the visiting FBI team arrived in Dhaka on January 28 for a two-day visit.

During the visit the FBI team is also scheduled to hold meetings with National Security Advisor Major General (Retd) Tarique Siddique, Director General (DG) of National Security Intelligence (NSI) Major General (Retd) Manzur Ahmed, DG of DGF Major Gen (Retd) Sheikh Mamun Khaled, and chiefs of Criminal Investigation Department, Detective Branch of Police and Special Branch of Police, according to the letter.

Activists of BCL, the student body associated with the ruling Awami League, chased the workers of the BNP-backed student body as a JCD procession tried to enter the campus through Doyel Chatter around 9:00am, witnesses said.

Of the cocktails, eight were exploded at Nilkhet, five at Palashi, two at Shahbagh and two in front of the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC).

Police arrested one at Shahbagh intersection following the explosions. The arrestee was identified as Sanullah, a student of Jamiatul Aziz Madrasa in Mohammadpur, said Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

Earlier on Monday, a JCD leader was beaten up by BCL activists near the TSC. Following the assault, JCD activists exploded 11 cocktails between 9:00am and noon on the premises of Curzon Hall, Zahurul Haque Hall, DU Central Library and Arts Building.

A BCL activist filed a case against 44 leaders and activists of Chhatra Dal including JCD President Abdul Qader Bhuiyan Jewel, General Secretary Jabur Rahman Habib and JCD DU unit President Mohidul Hasan Hiru for the explosions on that day.

Dutch queen handing throne to son

CNN ONLINE

Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands will abdicate her throne to make way for her son Prince Willem-Alexander. She will formally end her reign on April 30 -- the 33rd anniversary of her coronation.

The queen turns 75 on Thursday. She had three children with her husband, Prince Claus, who died in 2002. The oldest Willem-Alexander will succeed her to the throne.