

3 asylum offers for Snowden

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for asylum to six countries, in addition to the 20 he has already contacted, according to WikiLeaks, which claims to be in regular contact with the former National Security Agency contractor.

Most of the countries have refused or given technical reasons why an application is not valid, but several Latin American leaders have rallied together with expressions of solidarity and welcome.

"As head of state of the Bolivarian republic of Venezuela, I have decided to offer humanitarian asylum to the young Snowden ... to protect this young man from persecution by the empire," said Maduro who, along with his predecessor Hugo Chávez, often refers to the US as "the empire".

The previous day, Maduro told the Telesur TV channel that Venezuela had received an extradition request from the US, which he had already rejected.

A copy of the request, seen by the Guardian, notes

that Snowden "unlawfully released classified information and documents to international media outlets" and names the Guardian and the Washington Post. Dated 3 July and sent in English and Spanish, it says: "The United States seeks Snowden's provisional arrest should Snowden seek to travel to or transit through Venezuela. Snowden is a flight risk because of the substantial charges he is facing and his current and active attempts to remain a fugitive."

It adds that he is charged with unauthorised disclosure of national defence information, unauthorised disclosure of classified communication intelligence and theft of government property. Each of these three charges carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment and a fine of \$250,000.

Describing Snowden as "a fugitive who is currently in Russia", it urges Venezuela to keep him in custody if arrested and to seize all items in his possession for later delivery to the US. It provides a photograph and two alternative passport numbers - one revoked, and one reported lost or stolen.

Maduro said he did not accept the grounds for the charges.

"He has told the truth, in the spirit of rebellion, about the US spying on the whole world," Maduro said in his latest speech. "Who is the guilty one? A young man ... who denounces war plans, or the US government which launches bombs and arms the terrorist Syrian opposition against the people and legitimate president, Bashar al-Assad?"

Ortega said Nicaragua had received an asylum request from Snowden and the president gave a guarded acceptance.

"We are an open country, respectful of the right of asylum, and it's clear that if circumstances permit, we would gladly receive Snowden and give him asylum in Nicaragua," Ortega told a gathering in Managua.



Armed with laptops, campaign workers of the mayoral candidates help out voters with necessary information to cast their votes. All they needed to help them were the last five digits of their national ID card. The photo was taken outside the Tongi Kindergarten School polling centre yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

ElBaradei

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has used his Twitter feed to renounce violence "of all forms".

However his appointment is unlikely to appease Islamists who have regarded him as too liberal and have resolved to stay on the streets until Morsi is returned to power.

ElBaradei, 71, has also defended the army's takeover and supported the temporary arrest of senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In an interview with the BBC, he said: "It is not the army who took over, it is the army who acted on behalf of the people."

ElBaradei has said the Muslim Brotherhood should be part of the political process but has supported the arrest of senior figures belonging to the movement, saying they had been "plotting".

Britain set to deport Abu Qatada

AFP, London

Britain is expected to fly radical Islamist cleric Abu Qatada to Jordan today to face terror charges, ending a decade-long legal battle over the fate of the man once dubbed Osama bin Laden's right-hand-man in Europe.

London is deporting the 53-year-old Palestinian-born cleric after the two governments last month formally approved a treaty guaranteeing that evidence obtained by torture would not be used against him in any trial.

Prime Minister David Cameron has said he will be "one of the happiest people in Britain" after the departure of Abu Qatada, who has been in and out of British prisons while successive British governments have

tried to expel him.

British officials refused to confirm any details, but local media reported he would be driven from the high security Belmarsh jail in south London and flown out at 2:00 am (0100 GMT) Sunday from RAF Northolt airbase in west London.

His wife and five children are expected to remain in Britain, where he first came in 1993 seeking asylum.

A Jordanian official told AFP earlier this week that Abu Qatada was expected to leave Britain "in the early hours of Sunday" and arrive later that morning in Jordan.

"He will arrive in Jordan on a military plane, escorted by Jordanian and British guards," the official said.

Vote rigging

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help the law enforcement agencies to maintain law and order.

The election in Gazipur was held in a fair and peaceful manner without any major untoward incident, said the CEC.

He noted that all the EC officials and employees involved in the election process have performed their duties properly.

People at home and abroad were informed about the real situation in Gazipur as the mass media projected the situation in the constituency - both inside and outside the polling centres, mentioned the CEC.

Regarding deployment of army in the GCC polls, he said, "Before every election, we make an assessment of the situation. Police, BGB and army are deployed wherever it is necessary. In this case, we didn't feel that we need to deploy army anywhere [in Gazipur]."

Accolades for brilliance

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batchmates that it was time they had taken out their training wheels and stood for themselves.

Chief guest of the occasion, the first Bangladeshi woman to conquer the globe's highest peak, Nishat Majumder, said: "Each of you have a Mt Everest inside, the summit of which is higher than the peak of the Everest."

She advised them to listen and nurture the dream that lies like the Everest in the heart and reach out for the peak.

Introducing The Daily Star's new page for the young "Shout", its editor and publisher Mahfuz Anam said, "The achievement and reward you are about to receive today is only the beginning of a brilliant life ahead."

"The future is in your hands," he said, adding that the awardees should not only build an efficient, successful and prosperous Bangladesh but must build a just and fair nation where the gap between the rich and the poor would lessen.

"As students you must inculcate the values of ethics, harmony, sharing and respect for others," said Mahfuz Anam.

He urged the parents and

families of the awardees to impart these values at homes. He said the parents must teach their children the beautiful values of religion as well as to respect other religions, views, cultures and beliefs.

"The spirit of tolerance will come from schools and homes," he said.

The editor concluded his speech through an appeal to the awardees that they must remember to serve the country. "Have Bangladesh in your mind, heart and dreams."

The award ceremony was organised in association with Brac Bank, Monash University Malaysia and Edexcel.

Syed Faridul Islam, head of Risk Management, Brac Bank, praised the students for outperforming the students of English speaking countries, despite the fact that the awardees have grown up in a country where English is a second language.

Amid Hossain Chowdhury, a Monash Graduate in Business and Commerce, also congratulated the awardees and told them about the opportunities of higher studies available in Monash University, Malaysia.

Premila Paulraj Canitius, assistant vice-president of

Edexcel (Indian subcontinent), congratulated the awardees saying that they had competed against 1.5 million students of more than 92 countries in achieving their outstanding results.

Referring to teacher's training, she said, "Direct connection has been found between the investment we make in training teachers and the results of the students."

Shamim Ahmad, principal of Amity British Academy, from where another top achiever Muhammad Zareef Kamal earned 12 A Stars in O-level, said, "Our teachers have tried to give their best and supported Zareef whenever he needed help."

Ali Mohiuddin Al-Shams, executive administrator of Maple Leaf International School that secured the highest number of A Grades this year, said "It is the cooperation among teachers, parents and institution that brings out the potential of a student."

Students of BAFSHEM, Playpen, Maple Leaf International School, Scholastica, and Mount Royal Academy performed songs and dances at the ceremony.

4 'robbers' killed in gunfight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bhola

At least four alleged robbers were killed and 35 others wounded in a gunfight between two gangs over establishing supremacy at Teliarchor in Bhola yesterday.

The dead are Zainal, 40, Giyas, 40, Jahir, 32, and Salahuddin, 35, said Humayun Kabir, sub-inspector of Tajimuddin Police Station.

District police Superintendent Md Moniruzzaman, however, said he had heard five people died in the gunfight, which began around 7:30pm.

Police said there was a longstanding conflict between Zainal group and Giyas group over controlling Teliarchor and Chor Jahiruddin areas.

The two groups exchanged at least 200 bullets, said Humayun Kabir, adding that police recovered one gun, two bullets and several local weapons from the spot.

BNP backed candidate wins in Sonaimuri municipal polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

BNP backed candidate Motahar Hossain Manik was unofficially elected mayor of Sonaimuri Poursava yesterday.

Motahar bagged 4,521 votes while his nearest rival Awami League-backed Nurul Haque Chowdhury secured 3,788 votes, said election officials. Polls to the pourasava was held peacefully.

Meanwhile, a mobile court fined three people, including a woman, Tk5,000 each for casting fake votes. Defaulting on the fine, they will have to serve a jail term of seven days each.

Mali lifts state of emergency

AFP, Bamako

Mali lifted a nearly six-month state of emergency yesterday, the eve of the start of a presidential election campaign for July 28 polls in the troubled west African nation, the security ministry said.

The decree enforcing a curfew and forbidding public gatherings was put in place on January 12, a day after France launched a surprise intervention to help Mali's weak army drive out Islamists occupying its north for nine months.



PHOTO: STAR

People take the tin roofing of a house to higher ground as a flash flood inundates Char Sindurna village at Hatibandha of Lalmonirhat yesterday.

Free, festive, fair

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beside him was Zahidul Islam, an agent of Ajmat, who echoed Sukur.

Ajmat termed the voting peaceful but his opponent Mannan blamed Ajmat and election officials of rigging the polls.

Ajmat cast his vote at around 9:00am at Little Flower School centre in Gazipur. "I will respect the voters' decision," he said afterwards.

Casting his vote at Salna Islamia Fazil (Degree) Madrasa centre at 9:25am, Mannan expressed confidence in winning if the election was free and fair.

Jahangir Alam, an Awami League rebel candidate who had quit the race on the instructions of party high-ups, said his symbol, pineapple, on ballot papers might have a negative impact on his party-blessed candidate Ajmat.

"I requested all not to vote for my symbol,"

Jahangir told The Daily Star. Voters, especially female ones, expressed frustration at many centres as they had to wait in queues for a long time in the scorching heat. There were some physically challenged voters among them.

Almost all modes of vehicles were on the streets of Gazipur, violating the electoral code of conduct.

Some alleged that a few councillors had hired rickshaws to bring in voters from their homes.

WOMEN CAMPAIGNING
A good number of women were seen trying to persuade voters near the entrance of many polling centres, even though the time for campaigning ended at midnight Thursday.

Some were relatives of candidates while some were their supporters.

Smiling broadly, they were making a last-ditch effort to woo voters.

A woman, standing outside Teknag Para

Government Primary School polling centre, was holding a handbill of her brother-in-law who was running for councillor. Every time a voter came, she appealed, "Please vote for him."

She said, "I came here before 8:00am and sought votes. My sister and other family members are working at other polling centres."

Five women were chanting slogans and seeking votes for a councillor candidate in front of West Chandana Govt Primary School gate near Gazipur Chourasta.

"He [Moslem] is the most capable person here. So he will win," one of the women said.

FESTIVITY
A festive mood prevailed at the polling centres, especially in the rural areas.

Temporary food stalls offering hot snacks were outside polling centres in some areas with many small vendors hovering around.

Many voters brought their children along with them. And some children just went to watch.

"This is the first time I am seeing any election. It's a whole lot of fun," said class-IV student Tafsir Ahmed of Rover Palli High School at Bahadurpur.

Setting up a makeshift shop near the polling centre, Jashim was selling piyaju (a traditional snack made with onions and lentils), fried peas and other items. He said the sale was quite good.

HIGH-TECH HELP
Supporters of many candidates used laptops at some polling centres to help voters with necessary information.

Zobeda Khatun instantly got her serial number on the voter list after she gave the last five digits of her national ID card at Darus Sunnat Karamotia Madrasha. "This is fast and accurate," she said.