

DHAKA-CTG HIGHWAY

# AL moves to resist arson at Sitakunda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong north district Awami League yesterday formed 10 squads to resist any sabotage attempt on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Sitakunda upazila by BNP-Jamaat activists.

Each of the squads is comprised of 10 to 20 members of AL and its different associated bodies in 10 unions of the upazila. The decision was made at an emergency meeting at the AL Chittagong north district's office at Dost Building in the city.

AL north district general secretary MA Salam said the squads will coordinate with the union level committees of the AL and its associated bodies to make quick response to any untoward incident and to assist law enforcement agencies in their duties.

Admitting the party's failure to prevent recent anarchy by BNP-Jamaat men on the

highway, Salam said at yesterday's meeting they tried to bridge the gap between the district and union level leaders of the AL.

Environment Minister Hasan Mahmud, AL presidium member Mosharraf Hossain and local lawmaker Abul Kashem were present, among others.

On November 16, activists of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami clashed with police, vandalised dozens of vehicles and set fire to some on Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Bypass, Barabkunda and Sitakunda Sadar upazila areas.

Jamaat-Shibir men damaged and torched vehicles on the highway in Sitakunda upazila on November 20 as the body of a local Jamaat leader was found that day, three days after he went missing.

Road communications on the highway were snapped for hours on both the days.

## Drug addiction alarming

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"Yaba is the most dangerous drug ever produced and poses immense threat to Bangladeshi youths," said Prof Arup, adding, "Bangladesh is used as a transit for international drug smuggling in India, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Thailand, Nepal and Pakistan."

Two lakh bottles of Phensidyle enter Bangladesh every day while Tk 220 crore is spent on them annually, he said, adding that consumption of Phensidyle increased 10 times in the last five years.

Parents must play the lead role and educate their children on the dangers of drug abuse, maintain friendly relation with them and keep a close watch on the people their children associate with, said Gazi Nurun Nahar Sultana, principal scientist at the Centre for Advanced

Research in Sciences of Dhaka University.

Salehuddin Ahmed, managing editor of The Daily Star, said it was high time to collectively fight drug addiction to save the country's youths.

Moushumi Shabnam, a senior lecturer of cultural anthropology at North South University, who moderated the discussion, said drugs have a controlling influence in addicts in the long run and the addicts hardly ever win over their addiction.

Brother Ronald Drahozal, director of drug-addicts rehabilitation centre Apon, Ejaj Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre, Tahsin Aman and Arefeen Syed, president and secretary of AAA, spoke among others.

## AL opts to be generous

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constituencies where the JP has strong bases. And the aim is to make the JP a strong opposition in the next parliament in which the AL hopes to retain control, according to sources.

However, the AL may change its strategy if the BNP decides to contest the polls. In that case, the ruling party would participate in the election jointly with the components of the grand alliance.

Following Ershad's meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on October 20, AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam said the JP would contest the polls under the banner of the AL-led grand alliance if the BNP participated in the polls.

But if the main opposition boycotted the polls, the JP would change its decision, he said.

The JP is now trying to bring some Islamist parties to its fold. The party also plans to offer nominations to some grassroots leaders of the BNP-led 18-party alliance if it boycotts the polls, said sources.

Speaking at a discussion yesterday, AL leader Suranjit Sengupta said many BNP leaders wanted to become lawmakers, and they would participate in the election even if the BNP boycotted it.

But both the AL and JP leaders have refrained from making any comments publicly about the sharing of seats in the election supposed to be held by January 24.

Wishing anonymity, an AL presidium member told The Daily Star, "Upon the Awami League's assurance, the Jatiya Party decided to contest the polls. We have to sacrifice a good

number of seats to the party."

Sources said the JP would give the AL president a list of its desired constituencies in a day or two after the party finalises its nomination list.

The JP started selling nomination papers on November 20 and the sale will continue till November 25. The party sold at least 600 nomination forms till yesterday.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL presidium member Matia Chowdhury said the AL wanted to move with its allies and was ready to make as much sacrifice as possible for them.

"The partners of the 14-party alliance have not yet placed their demands. We will finalise the sharing of seats after they do so," she said.

Matia also said several other like-minded parties might contest the polls.

Another AL presidium member, Kazi Zafarullah, said the AL would finalise the sharing of seats with its allies once the Election Commission announced the polls schedule.

The party would also announce the names of its candidates after that, he added.

JP presidium member Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu told The Daily Star that the party was making all-out preparations to contest the polls independently.

He said the JP was holding talks with several Islamist parties for getting their support.

Sources in the AL said the party president would sit with the nomination seekers today at the Gono Bhaban at 3:00pm.

The ruling party has already sold 2,959 nomination forms.

## 18,000 evacuated after pipeline explosion in China

AFP, Beijing

Some 18,000 people were evacuated from a Chinese coastal city after an oil pipeline explosion killed at least 47 people and sent thick black smoke billowing into the sky, a local government report said yesterday.

The Friday morning blast in Qingdao ripped roads apart, pictures showed, while leaving many sections of the city cut off from utilities.

The latest government report Saturday did not explicitly state a reason for the evacuation, mention its timing, or whether people had been able to return to their homes.

But, according to official media, students from nearby schools and local residents were handed out masks over fears of possible toxic emissions.

The Global Times later reported: "Environmental monitoring shows that the concentration of toxic materials is within national stan-

dards".

The impact of the blast disrupted the supply of water, gas and electricity in parts of the city, with the government distributing 2,000 candles on Friday night.

Authorities also provided 40,000 servings of free food for breakfast and lunch on Saturday.

Electricity has now been restored in all but two communities in the district, the local government said.

The pipeline, run by state-owned oil giant Sinopec, sprang a leak early Friday and exploded several hours later as workers sought to repair it, the Qingdao municipal government said in its verified account on Sina Weibo, a Chinese equivalent of Twitter.

Sinopec chairman Fu Chengyu told state television on Saturday: "(We) are deeply grieved, we express our deep condolences for the dead, our support to their families ... and our apologies to the whole country.

## Kerry to leave Geneva for London today

AFP, Geneva

US Secretary of State John Kerry will head to London from Geneva today where he is currently involved in talks with Iran over Tehran's nuclear programme, a spokesman said.

Kerry will "travel to London on November 24" for talks with British Foreign Secretary William Hague and Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, Jen Psaki said Saturday.

Kerry arrived in Switzerland on Saturday morning along with other foreign ministers amid growing hopes for a landmark nuclear deal between six world powers and Iran.

The ministers had made the trip after negoti-

ators from both sides reported following three days of meetings that progress had been made towards reaching an accord.

Since their arrival however, officials have indicated that there are still differences preventing the signing of a deal limiting Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief.

Hague is also currently in Geneva along with foreign ministers from China, Russia, France and Germany.

News about Kerry's departure coincided with comments from Tehran's lead negotiator Abbas Araqchi that the talks were "difficult" and that Iran was not sure that a deal would be reached on Saturday.



Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury addressing a roundtable on "Fostering gender equality in politics" in the capital yesterday. PHOTO: PTD

## Robbers loot jewellers, killing staff

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

A gang of robbers shot dead a jewellery shop worker in the city's Chawkbazar Chatipotti area yesterday evening.

The victim was Gopal Chandra, 50.

Quoting locals, Mohiuddin Mahmud, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said the robbers entered the jewellery shop of Kabul Khan around 7:00pm, breaking open its shutters when the workers were working inside.

They shot Gopal as he tried to resist them, leaving him dead on the spot. The robbers then looted gold and silver ornaments from the shop and fled the scene, blasting several cocktails, the police official added.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to Comilla Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

A case was filed in this connection.

## Man burnt alive over

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Sufia Begum, has been undergoing treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Matiur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Lalpur Police Station, said Habibur had a longstanding conflict with his co-villager Haus Ali over a piece of land.

Haus and his accomplices might have set fire to the house of Habibur around 1:30am when the couple was asleep, the police official said.

Hearing their screams, locals rushed to the spot and found Habibur dead. They rescued Sufia from the blaze in a critical condition, and sent her to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Police later recovered the body and sent it to Natore Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

## EC steps up polls

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announce the polls schedule, he added.

An EC official said they were planning to hold the election on January 9 or 16. "The commission may finalise the schedule tomorrow and announce it the next day."

Earlier on Friday, Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz said the schedule might be announced by Monday (tomorrow).

According to the constitution, the next parliamentary election has to be held between October 27 and January 25.

"We have finalised a draft list of polling centres and it will be approved by the commission after the schedule is announced," said a deputy secretary of the EC.

The gazette on amended electoral code of conduct for political parties and candidates might be published today while the election officials' list is being prepared, he added.

Besides, the commission is conducting TOT (training of trainers) programme. The officials, who are participating in the TOT programme, will train the field-level officials across the country after the schedule announcement.

A five-member EC delegation on November 19 met the President Abdul Hamid and informed him about the commission's polls preparation.

## EU ups food aid to Myanmar in Kachin rebel spike

AFP, Brussels

The EU said Saturday it is upping mainly food aid to Myanmar after clashes between state troops and ethnic Kachin rebels which trapped children in a remote area.

The European Commission said it was earmarking three million euros (\$4 million) on top of 45 million in humanitarian aid awarded over the past two years.

Fighting in Kachin, near the northern border with China, erupted in June 2011 when a 17-year ceasefire crumbled. It has displaced some 100,000 people.

The EU executive said the new funds would go essentially on food aid in Rakhine, Kachin and Northern Shan states.

"Thousands of people have lost their homes and are living in dire conditions," said Kristalina Georgieva, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response.

## Speaker for talks

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meaningful, if they [political parties] can reach a consensus through an open discussion. The nation expects a free and fair election with participation of all parties. I think the opportunity for a dialogue still exists," the Speaker said.

She was speaking at a roundtable titled "Fostering gender equality in politics" organised by Democracy International, United Nations Development Programme and UN Women at Bay's Galleria in the capital.

Asked whether a level-playing field will be ensured if the election is held without the dissolution of parliament, she said every step should be taken as per the constitution.

To empower women, political parties should facilitate their participation in politics on a larger scale. The parties should also nominate more women to contest the election for increasing their representation in parliament, Shirin said.

Equal opportunities should be given to

women in the electoral contest, she said. "I hope that political parties will come forward to ensure one-third representation of women in their organisational structure."

Addressing the programme as the special guest, Anneli Lindahl Kenny, Sweden ambassador to Bangladesh, said participation of women in politics would strengthen democracy.

Parliament member Rasheda Begum Hira said social stigma, objections from families and harassment by partymen were the main barriers to politics for women.

Bangladesh Krishak League joint women affairs secretary Shamima Shahriar urged the media to highlight the achievements of women in politics so that more women are encouraged to engage in politics.

UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Neal Walker and representatives of different organisations and media also spoke.

## SURVEILLANCE ROW

# Aussie PM writes to Indonesian president

REUTERS, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott yesterday said he had written a letter to Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono over a spying row that has knocked relations between the neighbours to their lowest point since the late 1990s.

Allegations that Canberra spied on the Indonesian leader and his wife have triggered anti-Australian demonstrations in Jakarta and have begun to damage commercial ties, with a state-owned Indonesian firm on Friday suspending talks with Australian cattle farmers, citing trust issues.

Abbott, speaking to reporters in Sydney, said he had replied to a letter from the Indonesian leader, but he did not give any details.

Indonesia has demanded an apology from Australia over the allegations, which emerged from leaked intelligence released by U.S. whistleblower Edward Snowden.

"I have written to President Yudhoyono and the letter is now in the process of being delivered," said Abbott, who emphasised the importance of the relationship with Indonesia and acknowledged the damage the row had done.

"Now, obviously, there will be good days and there will be better days," Abbott said of the relationship.

Australian Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce said he had postponed a visit to Indonesia due to the row.

Former prime minister Julia Gillard has told CNN Abbott should promise not to tap the Indonesian leader's phone in future, citing the way US President Barack Obama handled

similar allegations that the US was spying on German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Indonesia is a major importer of Australian agricultural produces such as wheat and live cattle, while Australia is Indonesia's 10th-largest export market.

Yudhoyono said on national television on Wednesday he was freezing military and intelligence cooperation, including on the thorny issue of asylum seekers, a perennial irritant in relations.

The spying row is straining relations already soured by pressure from Abbott's government since it was elected in September to return asylum-seeker boats to Indonesia, which Jakarta has resisted. Asylum seekers, many from South Asia and the Middle East, often try to reach Australia via Indonesia.

Abbott has not publicly confirmed the spying but has expressed regret for embarrassment the media reports caused Yudhoyono and his family.

Konyndyk said the next step was for USAID and other international aid agencies to refocus their efforts on long-term recovery and reconstruction, giving priority to shelter and livelihoods for farmers and fishermen.

The United States has increased its typhoon aid to nearly \$52 million, but latest estimates from the United Nations showed the disaster rehabilitation plan would cost \$348 million. Only 38 percent of the plan is funded.

The United Nations is working to finish a blueprint for a Haiyan Action Plan reconstruction strategy by December 9. The World Bank has increased to almost \$1 billion its aid to support relief and reconstruction.

## US military scales down aid efforts in Philippines

REUTERS, Manila

The US military has begun scaling back its emergency relief operations in the Philippines as work shifts to recovery and rehabilitation in typhoon-hit areas, a US aid agency official said yesterday.

Typhoon Haiyan, the most powerful storm to make landfall this year, struck the central Philippines on November 8, killing more than 5,200 people, displacing 4.4 million and destroying an estimated 12 billion pesos (\$274 million) worth of crops and infrastructure.

The US Navy has pulled out its nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the USS George Washington, but still has ten C-130 aircraft delivering relief supplies. Last week, the United States had 50 ships and aircraft in the disaster zone.

Jeremy Konyndyk, director for Foreign Disaster Assistance at the US Agency for International Development (USAID), said the U.S. military had started to reduce its presence to allow civilian aid agencies to step up efforts.

"What we have seen, particularly over the past week, is now civilian and private-sector commercial capacity has started coming back up again and that is taking the burden off of the military actors," Konyndyk told Reuters in an interview.

"You don't want the military playing that role in the long run, they are an interim bridging capacity there, but in the long run, that really needs to be civilian role."

Konyndyk said there had been significant progress in meeting people's basic needs as more roads and ports opened in the worst-hit Leyte and Samar islands.

"Food has been distributed to 3 million people, shelter kits have been delivered to tens of thousands of families. I think the situation with immediate humanitarian needs is becoming stabilised."

Aid delivery was gathering pace as access to affected areas improved, the U.N. humanitarian office said in its latest report. However, major issues remained including the distribution of food and access to clean water and shelter material.