

# N. Korea purge sparked by mineral disputes

AFP, Seoul

The shock purge and execution of the North Korean leader's uncle stemmed from his attempts to take control of the country's lucrative coal export business, South Korea's spy chief told lawmakers yesterday.

Jang Song-Thaek, the once-powerful uncle and political regent to young leader Kim Jong-Un, was executed on December 12 on charges which included plotting a coup and corruption.

The execution -- the biggest political upheaval since Kim took power two years ago -- sparked speculation that Jang had lost out in a power struggle with hardline army generals.

But Nam Jae-Joon, the head of South Korea's National Intelligence Service, said Jang's attempts to secure control of state-run natural resources businesses played a big part in his downfall.

Nam, briefing members of parliament's intelligence committee on the situation in the North, also said the young ruler currently "appears to have no problem" in his grip on power -- but may stage armed provocations against the South sometime between January and March to rally domestic unity.

"Jang intervened too much in lucrative state businesses...related to coal, which drew mounting complaints from other (related)

state bodies," lawmaker Jung Chung-Rae, a member of the committee, quoted Nam as saying at the closed hearing.

Jang for years handled the country's mineral exports, which go mostly to China.

The impoverished but mineral-rich North has sought for years to bolster its crumbling economy by increasing exports of coal and other minerals, which account for the bulk of its exports to China.

But Jang and his associates angered other top party officials by rapidly expanding their control over the coveted mineral businesses, Jung quoted Nam as saying.

"Kim Jong-Un was briefed about it...and issued orders to correct the situation," Jung told reporters.

But many officials loyal to Jang did not immediately accept his orders, which eventually led an angry Kim to launch a sweeping purge, the lawmaker quoted the spy chief as saying.

The regime is currently probing officials in the ruling party's administrative department once supervised by Jang as well as other state-run trading arms, Nam was quoted as saying.

"The North is now trying to erase any traces of Jang...partly by recalling many of his relatives and associates who lived overseas," Nam said.

## Jamaat leader finds it easy

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Shahjahanpur upazila Chairman Yeasin is an accused in the four cases filed in connection with a series of attacks, arson and vandalism in Bogra on March 3.

The victims of the violence allegedly masterminded by him suspect that he has gifted the piece of land to the OC under an agreement that no action will be taken against him.

The land was registered in the names of Mahmudul's brothers Mahbubur Rahman and Shaheen Reja, from Koyelgati village in Sirajganj district, which is also thought to be part of the deal between them.

On March 3, activists of the Jamaat and its student body Islami Chhatra Shibir unleashed a mayhem attacking the police station and trying to torch the upazila Awami League office. They also clashed with policemen, leaving four people dead and hundreds injured.

Yeasin, the prime accused in one of the cases for involvement in the attack on the AL office, has not been arrested yet.

Despite repeated attempts, he could not be reached for comments.

OC Mahamudul denied the allegation of

taking the bribe and claimed that he had purchased the land. He discharged his normal duties at the police station yesterday.

The Anti-Corruption Commission has also initiated a move to conduct an inquiry into the matter, ACC Commissioner Mohammad Shahabuddin told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the district SP sent a letter to the police headquarters with a recommendation that the OC be withdrawn. He also suggested taking departmental action against him on receiving evidence.

Asked why Mahamudul continued carrying out his duties, SP of Bogra Mozammel Haque said no police officer would be transferred before the January 5 parliamentary election without permission of the Election Commission.

Shahjahanpur has become a den of violence at the hands of Jamaat-Shibir men during blockades and hartals enforced by the BNP-led 18-party opposition.

So far, Jamaat-Shibir have vandalised at least 500 vehicles and set fire to another 50 in the area. They torched three vehicles yesterday but no one was arrested in this connection.

## Losses pile up for fish farmers

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Before the beginning of a new shrimp season, farmers have to keep their enclosures dried for 25 to 30 days so that they can mix lime, insecticide and fertilisers in the soil of the enclosure bed.

Besides the drop in prices, the ongoing political turmoil has struck a further blow to the cultivators as the prices of input materials such as fish feed and fries have shot up as well.

As a result, farmers now would have to invest more than usual, said Monirul Islam.

He also said the economy and livelihoods of the people of Satkhira largely depend on shrimp and fish culture. Repeated blockades over the past one month had already taken a heavy toll on this sector. And if this situation continues for another month, overall shrimp production will significantly decrease and so will the export earnings from this sector.

Large size tilapia is now being sold at around Tk 50/kg which is sold at Tk 75 in normal times and the medium ones at Tk 30/kg against the usual rate of Tk 50. The current price of common carp weighing over a kilogramme is Tk 90/kg which is normally sold at Tk 145/kg. Large size seabass, catfish and mullets are also being sold at Taka 70-80 less than their usual rates.

Taking advantage of the situation, certain varieties of fish like catfish, mullet and seabass

are being smuggled to India, alleged some local traders.

The cultivators of Satkhira were mostly satisfied with white fish production this year and expected good returns.

The reality, however, poured cold water on their hopes.

"I released 30 maunds of fries of different varieties of white fish in my enclosure at the beginning of the monsoon and, in return, I got around 100 maunds of fish. Due to low price, I can hardly get my investment returned," said Mir Jahangir Alam of Kashibati village in Kaliganj.

"Despite low prices, I'll have to catch all the white fish soon so that I can start preparing my enclosures for the new season," said another fish producer Abdul Jabbar of Gazirhat village in Debhata Upazila of Satkhira.

The buyers too have hardly anything to do regarding the prices as they themselves incur losses due to the political deadlock.

Robin Kumar Sarker, who purchases white fish from local markets in Satkhira and sells those in Sylhet, said he used to send a truckload of white fish to Sylhet earlier, but now he does not do that due to the blockades.

"Earlier I had to pay Tk 30,000 as truck fare to Sylhet but now truckers charge Tk 80,000 for the trip," he said.

## AAP set to take over

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Almost all of the candidates of the AAP were political novices, including a rickshaw driver, a lawyer and a TV actor. Their key pledge was to clean up politics and the endemic graft that has crippled the provision of public service for the many millions who cannot afford to pay for private healthcare, schooling or basics such as water.

The party's message and symbol -- a broom -- proved popular with urban voters also struggling with runaway inflation, chronic youth underemployment and slowing economic growth.

Kejriwal, who called the party's victory a "historic win", said initially he would not form a minority government. But after lengthy negotiations in recent days, the Congress party decided to support the AAP in the Delhi local assembly. "It's a great day, a very exciting time," said Aathishi Marlena, a senior AAP activist and policy adviser.

Marlena said the challenges were daunting but that the party would meet them. "Tackling the rampant corruption, the lack of transparency and accountability, the problems faced by the common people is a matter of political will and that's what we bring to this," Marlena said.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata (BJP) party won 32 seats but no other political group was willing to offer support.

Sachin Pilot, a Congress minister, described the emergence of the AAP in Delhi as "absolutely astonishing". He said: "For my party of course it has been a setback but generally speaking the fact that individuals can come together in a very difficult space and find themselves relevant and meaningful has been a new phenomenon. In the past three or four decades it hasn't happened at all. That's something one has to recognise reconcile and then deal with."

Senior Congress officials said the party's support for the AAP would not be unconditional and would depend on its performance.

Though India's population remains largely rural, the proportion of seats in the national assembly determined by urban voters has steadily risen in recent years. Some analysts see the new middle classes in cities and, particularly, tens of thousands of small towns as determining what is likely to be a tough battle between the Congress party and the BJP in national polls next spring. Also likely to crucial are between 120 million and 150 million first-time voters.

The AAP has said it now wants to focus efforts on expanding into the huge northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which has a population of 180 million, and Bihar, another poor northern state. It hopes eventually to become a national party.

Kejriwal's announcement ended two weeks of speculation and fears of a hung assembly in Delhi, a city that has become richer in recent years but has huge problems of crime, sanitation, housing and pollution.

Though the outgoing Congress government in Delhi had been praised for successfully building a metro system and holding the Commonwealth Games in the Indian capital in 2010, it had also been hit by graft charges and suffered from the general unpopularity of the Congress-led coalition government at a national level.

The new government will be sworn in on Thursday. The BJP called the AAP's decision a betrayal. "The AAP accused the Congress of being the most corrupt. Today they have compromised on their principles. This is gross betrayal," said Harsh Vardhan, the BJP's chief ministerial candidate.

## Hefajat rally

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said AFM Nizamuddin, assistant superintendent (Hathazari) of police.

Hefajat high ups, many of whom are also top leaders of the BNP-led 18-party alliance components, said they were likely to announce a fresh programme today from Dhaka protesting the "government's pressure on it" to cancel the Shapla Chattar rally.

Meanwhile, talking to The Daily Star, a Hefajat leader said BNP spokesperson Nazrul Islam Khan on Saturday phoned the Hefajat's central joint secretary general and enquired about the rally.

"He [Nazrul] wanted to know whether we would stick to our stance on holding the rally on Tuesday. The BNP leader also said they [BNP] would consider if we requested them to shorten the blockade programme [ends 5:00pm today]," mentioned the Hefajat leader, who was present during the telephone conversation.

Hefajat's 13-point demand includes a reinstatement of the phrase "Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah" in the constitution as one of the fundamental principles of state policy.

## 7 bomb makers

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The commissioner said Monir, Babu and Sohail had expertise in making crude bombs while Ripon, a rickshaw puller, used to supply those to bomb throwers in the city.

The two others, Manik and Rubel, used to blast the bombs, he said.

Hurling crude and petrol bombs at public establishments has become a common occurrence during the ongoing hartals and blockades across the country.

Hundreds of people had already suffered shrapnel wounds and burns in arson attacks while many met an agonising death.

At the press briefing, the DB joint commissioner said, "We are trying to arrest the gang members. We had information that they [arrestees] had collected 50 kgs of explosives."

"They had already used 42 kgs of explosives to make bombs which were delivered and blasted. With the seized explosives, they could make around 1,500 crude bombs," he added.

Monirul said the gang received training from a leader of Islami Chhatra Shibir and used to carry out subversive activities following the direction of a Chhatra Dal leader.

He, however, did not disclose the names of Shibir and Chhatra Dal leaders.

According to the Police Headquarters, around 1,617 crude bombs were blasted and 386 were recovered from different places across the country only in first 18 days of this month.

On December 20 and 21, Rapid Action Battalion recovered 132 crude bombs and huge bomb-making materials from the Geneva Camp in the capital's Mohammadpur.

Sources in the law enforcement agencies said some unscrupulous people alongside the political cadres are getting involved in making and selling crude bombs.

## 3 BRTC buses

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journey during the blockades.

In Noakhali, blockaders attacked an air-conditioned BRTC bus at Maijdee Bazar around 10:00am, putting barricades on the road. They also broke glasses of the bus by throwing brick chips, witnesses said. Starting from Sonapur depot in the town, the bus was heading towards Dhaka.

Police escorting the bus fired around 40 bullets from shotguns and shot several teargas shells to disperse the marauding pro-blockade activists.

Nurul Amin Khan, president of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) district unit, claimed that at least 10 activists of the BNP and JCD had suffered bullet injuries in the firing.

Police demanded brick chips thrown by the blockaders also hurt one of their fellow personnel.

Anisur Rahman, superintendent of police in Noakhali, said JCD activists had attacked the bus, and hurled brick chips at them, prompting them to fire in retaliation.

Later, police conducted a raid in the area, and picked up five people, suspecting their involvement in the attack.

In Bogra, blockaders threw two petrol bombs at two BRTC buses parked in front of a bus depot near Shatmatha area in the town around 10:00am. The buses were bound for Banglabandha and Joypurhat respectively.

Police and witnesses said one of the bombs went off, and gutted a seat of a bus. The law enforcers doused the fire. The other bomb did not explode.

Police shot at least seven rubber bullets to disperse the attackers. The blockaders then blasted crude bombs to create panic in the area.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (Sadar) of Bogra, Gazir Rahman, said two blockaders were arrested from the surrounding area with phensidyl and machetes in connection with the attack.

## Dinosaurs to be back!

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found in the DNA of modern birds, she believes scientists may be able to "design" genomes of the prehistoric creatures.

The theory echoes the plot of Jurassic Park, but comes after a recent attempt to bring back the animals using techniques more faithful to those used in the 1993 film failed.

The Steven Spielberg production saw geneticists recreate dinosaurs using DNA recovered from bloodsucking insects which had been caught in sticky trees before it turned to amber.

However Dr Woollard, from Oxford University's Department of Biochemistry, has suggested the feat could be achieved by "de-evolving" birds.

"In theory we could use our knowledge of the genetic relationship of birds to dinosaurs to 'design' the genome of a dinosaur," she said.

However, despite the theoretical possibility, there are practical obstacles and ethical questions that cannot be ignored.

Even if surviving dinosaur DNA was uncovered, it would be found in very short fragments.

To make a full genome, scientists would have to combine together millions of short fragments of nucleic acids in exactly the right order.

The Royal Institution's 'Life Fantastic' Christmas Lectures, presented by Dr Woollard, will appear on BBC Four on December 28, and 30 at 8:00 pm.

## Two more truckers injured

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the truck when it was parked for unloading and the driver was caught in the blaze.

Nazrul, 27, sustained burns when blockaders hurled a petrol bomb targeting the rice-laden truck at Shafipur in Kaliakoir upazila of Gazipur.

The helper, who also sustained minor injuries, said they were going from Dinajpur to Chittagong and when they reached Shafipur, a group of four to five people hurled a petrol bomb inside the driver's compartment.

As fire erupted inside his compartment, the driver lost control and the truck veered off the highway and fell in a ditch, said helper Nuruzzaman.

Doctors said Nazrul suffered burns in his respiratory organs and while Quamrul in the lower part of his body.

Meanwhile, the condition of truck driver Shaheen and his helper Majedul had not improved much as of yesterday, doctors said.

Shaheen and Majedul were admitted to the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Sunday, Shaheen with 70 percent burns and Majedul with 90 percent burns.

They were injured in Sirajganj on Saturday night, when blockaders hurled a petrol bomb at their truck carrying vegetables from Naogaon to Comilla.

Doctors said the two, who were seen at the hospital's High Dependency Unit yesterday afternoon, were in critical condition with damaged respiratory organs.

Majedul could only wheeze and utter broken sentences that were barely audible.

"They just burnt me and I don't know why," he murmured.

Attending to him at the hospital, Majedul's sister Sumi said, "He had no enmity with those who set him on fire."

"Our parents in Naogaon have been restless since they heard the news, but could not come to Dhaka because of the blockade," she grieved.

Majedul was asking for painkillers as the nurse pushed an injection into his waist. He calmed, but started tossing about in pain barely

ten minutes later and asked for more medicines.

"Give me some sleeping pills so that I can sleep and don't have to wake up again," he murmured to a relative.

Also critical was the condition of Shaheen, who could only stare blankly at the wall, his face burnt and eyes half-closed.

He could not sleep most of the time since the incident, said his cousin Khalilur Rahman.

Shaheen had joined work the day he came under attack, he said, adding that Shaheen needed to step out of home to provide for his family.

Meanwhile, Geeta Sen, who had sustained 11 percent burns in an arson attack in Shahbagh, was improving again.

She had improved once before, following which she was discharged from the hospital on December 5. She was re-admitted there a week ago, as her condition deteriorated at home.

Partha Shankar Paul, resident surgeon of the burn unit, said she might have been infected at home.

## Nigeria president orders probe of political hit list charge

AFP, Lagos

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan yesterday said he had ordered a probe into a rash of allegations, including the creation of a political hit squad, levelled against him by former leader Olusegun Obasanjo.

Obasanjo, who served as president from 1999-2007, penned an open letter to Jonathan on December 2 that accused him of training a private militia to assassinate political rivals.

A founding member of Jonathan's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Obasanjo also accused the president of gross incompetence and urged him not to seek reelection in 2015.

## US too won't send polls observers

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send observers was not connected with bilateral relations.

Usually in local government elections and by-polls, the EC assigns some of its upazila and district-level officers as election observers. This time, the commission is thinking about engaging them in the national polls, an election official told The Daily Star.

The 28-member European Union on December 20 and the Commonwealth of 53 independent countries on December 22 made it known that they would not send observers, saying the environment was not conducive to an inclusive and credible election despite many efforts.

Diplomatic sources said that the entire international community was perturbed at the prevailing political situation centring around the 10th general election.

The UN, EU, US, China, Canada, Japan and others had left no stone unturned to mediate a breakthrough between the ruling Awami League and opposition BNP.

With the government gearing up for the election, the BNP-Jamaat-led 18-party alliance enforced aggressive blockades one after another. Violence flared up countrywide, claiming more than a hundred lives in the last one month.

Against this backdrop, the US urged the major parties to continue their dialogue and redouble their efforts to find a solution.

People deserve the opportunity to elect their representatives in a climate free of violence and intimidation, its statement read.

"The nation's political leadership -- and those who aspire to lead -- must ensure law and order and refrain from supporting violence, inflammatory rhetoric, and intimidation."

The US says it believes all parties and citizens have the right to freely and peacefully express their views. "The government is responsible to provide space for such activity; equally, the opposition is responsible to use such space in a peaceful manner."

On December 20, a spokesperson of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton in a statement said the EU had decided to halt for now preparations for the deployment of an Election Observation Mission as the political forces had failed to create the necessary atmosphere for the election.

## Too embarrassing for AL grassroots

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The party top brass are also uncomfortable at the media reports on the wealth of party ministers, state ministers and MPs, said sources in the AL.

The ruling party, however, will do nothing about it at this moment, as it is now more concerned about the January 5 polls and the opposition's agitation.

"The party chief [Sheikh Hasina] is aware of the issue and will take steps against them after the election. The corrupt ministers and state ministers might not be included in the next government," a senior AL leader told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Matiur Rahman, acting president of Sunamganj district AL, said, "Some of the ministers, state ministers and MPs have amassed wealth beyond belief, tarnishing the party's image."

He added, "The Awami League is a party of Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Bangabandhu and Shamsul Haque. This party is based on ideology, not business."

Momtajul Islam, general secretary of Nilphamari district AL, said the leaders who had earned crores of taka illegally did great harm to the party.

"The grassroots leaders and activists are disappointed and have lost confidence in the party," he said.

Slamming the ministers who amassed wealth by illegal means, Matin Sarker, general secretary of Mymensingh district AL, urged the party president to take organisational action against them after probing the corruption allegations.

He said the party has to take the blame for their unethical activities. "Those who are loyal to Bangabandhu cannot support this."

Shahin Chaklader, general secretary of Jessore district AL, said individuals, not the party, are to blame for such misdeeds.

"If any leader had gathered wealth illegally, the

party should take action against him," he added.

Urging the party to go tough on the corrupt leaders, Abdul Wahab, general secretary of Sujanagar upazila AL in Pabna, said the party must not spare those who would be found guilty of indulging in corruption.

"As a member of the Awami League, I don't support this."

Ishak Ali Sarker, president of Birol upazila AL in Dinajpur, said the party should look into the sources of income of every AL minister.

Stressing the need for a law to make it mandatory for ministers and MPs to publish wealth statements every year, Mohammad Ali Khasru, general secretary of Sandwip upazila AL, said the party ministers who made money by abusing power had betrayed the party chief.

The AL's image would be damaged for these ministers, he said.

Humayun Kabir, acting general secretary of Companiganj upazila AL in Sylhet, said though a section of leaders were involved in corruption, the whole party would now have to pay the price.

## Deposit arms

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national polls.

The order will take instant effect and the arms will remain deposited in the government custody till January 15, said a press release of the home ministry.

The authorities also imposed restrictions on carrying the firearms from December 27 to January 15, it added.

Issued under the arms act, it said owners failing to comply with the orders will have to face punitive action.

The order will not be applicable to law enforcement agencies and personnel engaged in ensuring security of semi-government, non-government and financial organisations and others