

AL to hold

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election under a non-partisan administration.

After an extended meeting of the city AL, the unit's General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya announced the programme and said this unit would continue to hold several programmes till January 12.

"We will not allow the BNP to create any unwanted situation in the capital," he said.

AL presidium member Mohammad Nasim, who was present at the meeting, urged leaders and activists of the party to get united and take to the streets to counter "any sort of BNP conspiracy".

Kazi Zafarullah, another member of the AL presidium, told The Daily Star that the party and the government would do everything necessary to foil any bid to create anarchy in the country.

The ruling party has already instructed its MPs and district-level leaders to observe the day through different programmes and make sure that they remain in their areas.

However, the AL will hold a grand rally at Suhrawardy Udyan on January 10 marking the homecoming day of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

On the other hand, the BNP-led 20-party alliance would observe January 5 as "Black Day for Democracy" by holding black-flag procession and protest rallies in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

The BNP has already sought permission from Dhaka Metropolitan Police for holding rallies on January 3 and 5 at Suhrawardy Udyan, Nayapaltan and Motijheel's Shapla Chattar, but has yet to get it.

If the permission is not given and the programmes are obstructed, the alliance may enforce hartals for January 5, 6 and 7, BNP sources said.



People torch a bus at Burichang of Comilla on Dhaka-Chittagong highway after it collided with an auto rickshaw yesterday killing two people.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

5,000-yr-old

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site, located around the Nevşehir hill fort near the city of Kayseri, appears to dwarf all other finds to date.

Hasan Ünver, the mayor of the city on those outskirts the discovery was found, said other underground cities were nothing more than a "kitchen" compared to the newly uncovered settlement.

Mehmet Ergün Turan, the head of Turkey's housing development administration, said the discovery was made during the groundwork for a housing project meant to develop the area.

"It is not a known underground city. Tunnel passages of seven kilometers are being discussed. We stopped the construction we were planning to do on these areas when an underground city was discovered," Turan told Turkish publication Hurriyet Daily News.

The agency has already spent 90 million Turkish liras (£25m) on the development project, but the organisation's head said he did not see the money spent as a loss due to the magnitude of the historical discovery.

The upper reaches of the city were first spotted last year but it was not until now that the size of the discovery became apparent. The organisation has so far taken 44 historical objects under preservation from the site.

The area has been officially registered with Turkey's Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board and no further building work will be done.

The Cappadocia region, once a Roman province, is fertile ground for underground cities because of its soft volcanic rock which is easy to carve.

Nevşehir province's most renowned underground settlement is Derinkuyu, a multi-level city large enough to house many thousands of people and their livestock. It lies within an hour's drive south of the new discovery.

New Year stampede kills 36 in Shanghai

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fake bills came fluttering down "like snow".

"It's too cruel. People in front of us had already fallen to the floor, and others were stepping all over them," Cui Tingting, 27, told Reuters news agency.

The stampede appeared to have taken place close to the area where, according to the Shanghai Daily, a "toned-down" version of the New Year laser display was to have taken place. The show was intended to be for invited guests only rather than for the general public.

"It was chaos, and there were only

one-third of the number of police there compared with previous years," the Beijing News quoted one Shanghai resident as saying.

Organised New Year celebrations have been taking place in the Bund area for the past three years and in 2013 they attracted almost 3,00,000 people.

Concerns about the size of the crowds and doubts that police could guarantee their safety led to the authorities cancelling this year's official public display but thousands of revellers still headed there to celebrate the New Year.

Shanghai's historic Bund

riverfront, one of the biggest tourist attractions in the city, runs along an area of often narrow streets amid restored old buildings, shops and other attractions. It runs along the bank of the Huangpu River. The China Daily newspaper in February reported that the city's population was more than 24 million at the end of 2013.

Among the concerns that led to the cancellation of the big public laser display were the number of people crammed into a small area and the difficulties in dispersing them. The laser display was to have been beamed on to the walls of historic

buildings for about ten minutes before culminating with midnight fireworks.

The tragedy unfolded as Chinese President Xi Jinping gave a New Year address in which he vowed to continue reforms while maintaining the "rule of law". He compared the twin aims to "a bird's two wings".

He said there was "no turning back" from the path of reform but said it would only be achieved alongside strong laws designed to protect people's rights and interests, and social justice. By 2020, he said, the policies would ensure China has an "all-round well-off society".

Import bill may go down by \$2b

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around Tk 5,000 crore; while the Biman Bangladesh Airlines owes it Tk 1,000 crore in arrears.

Due to favourable international oil prices, the BPC nowadays doesn't need to request the government to provide it with funds to purchase oil periodically.

The government's dependence on imported oil, specially furnace oil, shot up significantly from 2010 when it opted for a good number of oil-fired rental power plants as a short-term solution to the country's power crisis.

While the power units helped overcome the power crisis to a large extent, it brought in huge financial pressure on the Power Development Board

(PDB) that is responsible for supplying oil to the power companies.

The PDB required around Tk 5,500 to 6,000 crore subsidy annually, while the government, to offset the subsidy pressure hiked power prices several times in the last three years.

"We just need the subsidy to cover the high price of fuel," said a PDB official seeking anonymity.

"We know oil prices have dropped internationally and also at the domestic market in India. But till now, the government has not reduced oil prices, and we still need subsidy."

For now, the government has no plan to reduce domestic oil prices, as it is still observing the situation.

In recent years, the country has been spending between Tk 34,000 and Tk 38,000 crore per year to import crude, refined and lube base oil.

"If oil prices continue to stay at this level, we expect to save 35 to 40 percent of last year's oil import costs," said the BPC Chairman.

That will translate into an annual saving of around Tk 14,000 crore.

Some officials said the government could save another Tk 1,000 crore in import bill if it could secure different kinds of refined and lube base oil directly from oil producing companies instead of sourcing them from various oil distributors.

Bangladesh now buys refined oil

from 10 sources, and only one of them is an oil producing company (Kuwait Petroleum Corporation or KPC). The rest are oil distributors. The country also buys 1.29 million tonnes of crude oil from two companies -- one from Saudi Arabia and the other from the UAE.

Among the suppliers of refined oil, the KPC sells Bangladesh diesel and jet fuel. The BPC also uses the KPC's price as reference price when it buys oil from the other nine companies.

"The BPC is presently buying diesel for \$89.99 per barrel, including shipment; whereas the present market data shows the price should have been \$85.68 per barrel. That means, while buying 25.26 tonnes of diesel till June

next [in the current fiscal year], we are actually paying \$81 million extra," said an official.

A similar situation prevails in case of buying furnace and jet oil, as the market price tends to be a few dollars lower than the BPC's purchase price of oil per barrel.

"If the BPC followed a streamlined oil purchase policy where it would buy only from the oil producers, we believe it could have saved the country more foreign currency," noted the official.

"We actually don't have a policy guideline to buy oil though we buy some oil on state-to-state basis [the KPC]. But the distributors themselves are also state-owned companies,"

explained the BPC chairman.

"We select these companies on the basis of reports from our diplomatic missions. There is a little chance of buying oil from these distributing companies at a higher price."

He said Bangladesh preferred state oil producers but companies like the KPC were few in numbers. Back in 2007-08, there was a supply disruption from the KPC and that's when the government began widening the sources.

"There are many issues here, but the only issue that we should look at is whether we are incurring losses by buying from such distributors," said Yunusur Rahman.

100pc pay hike for armed forces too

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Basic pay for the lowest grade has been suggested at Tk 8,200. Civil employees working with the armed forces -- one grade below the soldiers -- are in this grade.

Generals or officers of equivalent ranked are above the highest grade. Tk 1 lakh basic salary has been proposed for them.

Basic salary for lieutenant generals or officers of the same rank has been suggested at Tk 88,000.

The pay committee was formed in January last year, consisting of representatives of the three services and the defence ministry.

Before making the recommendations, the committee took opinions of the members of the armed forces. It also held meetings with the National Pay Commission.

A special allowance has been recommended for the specially trained personnel in the armed forces, Anwar added.

The finance ministry sources said basic salary for

RANK	BASIC SALARY
General & equivalent ranking officers	Tk 1,00,000
Lt Gen & equivalent ranking officers	Tk 88,000
Maj Gen & equivalent ranking officers	Tk 80,000
Brigadier General	Tk 70,000
Colonel	Tk 60,000
Lt Colonel	Tk 52,000
Major	Tk 45,000
Captain	Tk 37,000
Lieutenant	Tk 32,000
Second Lieutenant	Tk 30,000

second lieutenants has been proposed at Tk 30,000; for lieutenants Tk 32,000; captains Tk 37,000; majors Tk 45,000; lieutenant colonels Tk 52,000; colonels Tk 60,000; and for brigadier generals Tk 70,000.

The proposed salaries for various grades of soldiers and junior commissioned officers are: Tk 9,500 for soldier; Tk 10,500 for lance corporal; Tk 11,500 for corporal; Tk 17,000 for sergeant; Tk 25,000 for warrant officer; Tk 27,000 for senior warrant officer; Tk 28,000 for chief artificer; and Tk 29,000 for master warrant officer.

On Wednesday, the government formed a six-member committee headed by Cabinet Secretary M Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan to review the Pay and Service Commission report.

The committee will submit its report in six weeks.

On December 21 last year, the Pay and Service Commission, led by former central bank governor Mohammad Farashuddin, recommended increasing salary of public servants by 100 percent on average.

Black box recovery could take a week

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Hamid, to family members at a Surabaya hospital.

Hamid, 49, was buried yesterday before sundown in the suburb of Desa Sawotratap, a few kilometers (miles) from the city, at an Islamic ceremony attended by relatives and neighbors. Three members of her family were also on board the plane.

"Their house has been in a panic since Sunday," Umarayah, a neighbour, said. "Everyone in the neighbourhood knows someone who was on that plane."

Searches yesterday spanned an area of 13,500 square km involving 19 ships, four helicopters and five planes, said Fransiskus Bambang Soelistyo, head of Indonesia's Search and Rescue Agency.

A search and rescue pilot has spotted a large shadow in the sea, which rescuers believe may be the wreckage, but they have made clear the sighting is not yet confirmed.

"Until now, there hasn't been a confirmed finding or sonar image of the plane body under water," Soelistyo said.

Forty-seven divers are on standby to investigate.

"I am hoping that the latest information is correct and aircraft has been found," airline boss Tony Fernandes tweeted yesterday. "Please all hope together. This is so important."

Toos Sanitiyoso, an air safety investigator with the National Committee for Transportation Safety, said it could take a week to find the black box. Committee head Tatang Kurniadi said the focus of the search, once the waters had calmed as expected in five days, was around the shadow.

"We are backtracking from where the wreckage was found to where the plane had its last reading and that is the focus of our search," Kurniadi said. "The depth around here is 50 meters. No specialist equipment (is required). Divers can go get it."

Investigators are working on a theory that the plane stalled as it climbed steeply to avoid a storm about 40 minutes into the flight.

"What is most difficult is finding the location where the plane fell - checking whether the aircraft is really there," frogman commander Lieutenant Edi

Tirkayasa told Reuters. "With weather like this, who knows? We are still hopeful and optimistic that they'll find it. They must."

So far, as well as the bodies, debris including a suitcase, an emergency slide and a life jacket have been recovered from waters near the suspected crash site. No survivors have been found. All but seven of those on board were Indonesians.

Authorities have been collecting DNA from relatives to help identify the bodies.

"We are asking universities to work with us - from the whole country," said Anton Castilani, executive director at Indonesia's disaster victims identification committee.

Relatives, many of whom collapsed in grief when they saw the first television pictures confirming their fears on Tuesday, held prayers at a crisis center at Surabaya airport.

The plane was travelling at 32,000 feet and had asked to fly at 38,000 feet to avoid bad weather. When air traffic controllers granted permission for a rise to 34,000 feet a few minutes later, they received no response.

Man shot dead in a city hotel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
A man was shot dead by two unidentified criminals at a hotel in the capital's Motijheel yesterday evening.

The deceased was identified as Abdul Hamid, 45. He was an employee of a shipping company based in Chittagong, said Tofail Ahmed who was with Hamid during the shooting.

Hamid was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

According to police sources, Hamid was staying in a room close to Tofail's on the first floor of Motijheel Residential Hotel. While Tofail had

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Acid thrown at pre-wedding programme

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Four others, including two kids, also suffered injuries in the incident.

"The gaye holud started around 8:00pm [on Wednesday]. I was sitting on a wooden makeshift stage at the centre of our front yard," said Selim, a wholesaler of raw fish in Baipal, Ashulia.

"Around 12:10am [yesterday], the generator shut off and before we could grasp what was happening, I felt a burning sensation on my skin as a hot liquid ran down by face and neck."

Of other victims, Rabeya Akter, 8, a neighbour's daughter, and Selim's nephew Tohra Akhter, 18, were on the stage. His niece Shahina Akhter, 28, and another nephew Siam, 5, sat on chairs close by.

All of them were immediately

rushed to Chandpur Sadar Hospital but Selim and Rabeya, whose conditions were critical, were referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Selim suspected that the acid attack was carried out by Shifat, a young man who had called him 15 days earlier over the phone and asked Selim to cancel the marriage.

"He [Shifat] told me he was in love with my fiancée," said Selim. His engagement with a girl, who recently passed her HSC examination, at the same upazila was held a month ago.

"When I told my family members about this, they said that a week before the telephone call, a young man visited my village home and made the same demand to my elder brother," he said.

"I had asked both my fiancée and her father about the young man.

They said they know him as he resides in a neighbouring village and studied at the same school with her. But there was no relationship between the young man and the girl."

Getting the assurance from the bride's side, Selim decided to go ahead with the ceremony.

Several guests later told Selim that they saw Shifat at the ceremony. Checking Shifat's Facebook account they claimed to have found a status, posted at 11:55pm on Wednesday, which read that he may not live after 15 minutes.

Shifat remains absconding.

Of five suspects identified by police, two have been detained, said Mohammad Ehsan Shah, additional superintendent of police of Shariatpur. But he didn't give names of the arrestees.

Partho Shankar Paul, residential physician of the Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery at DMCH, said Selim's recovery would take about two months and he would need a number of operations.

Rabeya got almost her entire face burnt.

"Both patients would require plastic surgery on their faces once they recover from the burns," said the doctor.

"We are a poor family. Rabeya is the youngest among my three children. Their father died four years ago," said her mother Sorola Begum, a day labourer and sole bread-winner of the family.

"I would not be able to earn anything for our living if I stay here beside my daughter, let alone save money for her plastic surgery."

Meanwhile, Law minister Anisul Haq told BBC Bangla yesterday that no new law is required to try acid throwers.

He said that all the government needs to do is issue a gazette to bring acid violence cases under speedy trial tribunals.

The minister hoped such a step would reduce incidents of acid throwing.

Selina Ahmed, director of the Acid Survivors Foundation, an NGO that provides support to acid attack victims, said, "Presumably, only 12-13 percent convictions are made in acid violence cases filed with police."

She said that since most of the incidents take place at night, the perpetrators often evade arrest and sometimes they bribe the victims to withdraw the cases.