

Members of Committee to Support for Saving Agricultural Land of Tea Labourers form a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday in support of tea labourers. They were demanding the government abandon plans to take over rice fields at Chandpur Tea Estate in Habiganj to form a Special Economic Zone.

Anup Chetia

FROM PAGE 20 Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), told journalists he was in favour of the ongoing peace talks between the central government and Ulfa for restoring peace in Assam. He will participate in the talks, he

added.

"Many quarters have suspected that as in 1992 we will not continue the talks with the government."

However, political situation has changed, which has made them think differently, Chetia said.

"I will be part of the ongoing tripartite talks among Ulfa, central and Assam governments to resolve the insurgency issue," he said. On the role of his former colleague

and now Ulfa (Independent) commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah in the talks, Chetia said, "Contributions of Paresh Baruah should be acknowledged in taking forward our revolution in the last three decades. It is sad that he is not part of the peace talks."

Baruah has been on the run for nearly two decades.

Before being handed over to India on November 11, Chetia had been in jail in Bangladesh since his arrest in 1997 on charges of intrusion, carrying fake passports and illegally keeping foreign currencies.

Following his extradition, he was arrested by India's Central Bureau of Investigation in Delhi in connection with a murder in Golaghat.

Join us

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distressed but determined to "continue forward despite any obstacles".

The beauty queen, from Kirkuk in northern Iraq, told NBC News: "I want to prove that the Iraqi woman has her own existence in society, she has her rights like men. I am afraid of nothing, because I am confident what I am doing is not wrong."

The pageant has been fraught with controversy, prompting a backlash from religious hardliners with a number of contestants receiving death threats.

A total of 200 contestants were scheduled to take part, but fewer than 10 women participated in the final because of the threats, according to Crave Magazine.

Pageant director Ahmed Leith said the pageant was necessary to create a "sense of normalcy".

"Iraq needed this," he said. "The situation is weak here and we wanted to celebrate this the same way other countries like Lebanon and others do. To have a sense of normalcy."

Organisers attempted to adapt aspects of the pageant to keep it in line with the sensibilities of a conservative Muslim country, such as scrapping the swimsuit element of the contest.

However, a ban on hijabs remained in place, in an effort to meet enough international criteria to allow its winner to enter the next Miss Universe pageant.

Myanmarese

men, said Major Abu Russel Siddique, additional director of BGB 2 Battalion.

The BGB members then fired back, triggering a gunfight, he said.

At one stage of the gun battle, Darbesh was hit by bullets and died the gang fled, the Rab official said.

The body of Salimullah was sent to the same hospital morgue for an autopsy. Salimullah was being interrogated, said Ataur Rahman, officerin-charge of Teknaf Police Station.

8 separatists, 2 soldiers killed in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

A fierce gun battle killed at least eight separatists and two paramilitary soldiers during an ongoing antiterrorist operation in southwest Pakistan on Wednesday, officials said.

The incident occurred in southwestern Balochistan province, which borders Iran and Afghanistan. The deaths come as a roadside

bomb attack in a restive northwestern Pakistani region near the Afghan border claimed three lives, including those of two children, officials said. The firefight in Balochistan prov-

ince erupted during a raid, the military said. "The security forces raided a com-

pound as part of the ongoing operation... which triggered a gunfight between the paramilitary Frontier Corps troops and the terrorists, killing eight rebels and two soldiers," spokesman Muhammad Manzoor told AFP. He said three militants were killed

in a similar raid on Tuesday. A paramilitary lieutenant colonel and a solider were also injured.

Manzoor said those killed on Wednesday belonged to different proscribed Baloch separatist organisations but did not disclose their

Resource-rich Balochistan is the largest of Pakistan's four provinces, but its roughly seven million inhabitants have long complained they do not receive a fair share of its gas and mineral wealth.

Rebels began their fifth insurgency against the state in 2004, with hundreds of soldiers and militants killed in the fighting. The province is also riven by sectarian strife and Islamist violence.

Meanwhile, the roadside bomb was the third attack in as many days in the Mohmand tribal region, one of seven such semi-autonomous districts where the military has been battling al-Qaeda and Talibanlinked militants for over a decade.

Two separate bomb attacks on Monday had killed at least three people and wounded two others including a senior Pakistani army official.

"An improvised explosive (IED) device planted along the roadside exploded as a vehicle carrying five people including a driver passed by, killing two children aged eight and 10 and the driver on the spot," a senior local administration official, Naveed Akbar, told AFP.

He said two passengers were injured in the attack.

"The security agencies are investigating the incident as the target of the attack is unclear," Akbar said, adding dozens of IEDs have been planted along roads in Mohmand.

The army has intensified its offensive since the Taliban's massacre of 153 people, 134 of them children, in a school in Peshawar last December.

Overall, levels of militant-linked violence have dropped dramatically this year, with 2015 on course for the fewest deaths among civilian and security forces since 2007 -- the year the Pakistani Taliban umbrella group was formed.

Pakistan's Islamist insurgency began after the US-led invasion of neighbouring Afghanistan in 2001, which led to a spillover of militants across the border and a surge in recruitment for Pakistani extremist

FROM PAGE 20 call upon the voters to cast their votes in favour of the sheaf of paddy, electoral symbol of the BNP "for the sake of restoring democracy, ensuring the rule of law and people's life and property", added the source. Meanwhile, a special message

from Khaleda in the form of leaflets has already been sent to the party's district and municipality leaders and activists for distributing those to the voters during electioneering. In the one-page leaflet, she

explained her party's decision of joining the local body polls and reasons behind boycotting the January 5 national polls.

"In the leaflet, madam [Khaleda] also mentioned the reasons why voters should elect BNP mayoral candidates in the present situation of the country," a BNP leader said.

Modi mistake

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Russian official gently nudged him to move back.

Modi started walking following a gesture by a Russian official when the military band was playing India's national anthem at the Vnukova II airport.

After the Prime Minister stepped onto the tarmac, a Russian official made a gesture with his hand which appeared that Modi misinterpreted as he started walking. It could be that the official asked the band to start.

However, another official stopped Modi from walking following which the Prime Minister stepped back and stood in attention.

As per convention, one should stand in attention when the national anthem is played.

The Prime Minister is here on a two-day visit to hold annual summit talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

3 'outlaws'

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Mohiuddin Faruki, commander of crime prevention company-3 of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-12.

Sensing their presence, the "outlaws" opened fire on the elite force members. The Rab members then returned fire, triggering the "gunfight" between the criminals and the Rab, the Rab official said.

After the gun battle, the Rab members found three criminals lying on the spot. Some seven to eight others managed to flee, he said.

The injured were declared dead after being taken to Tangail Medical College Hospital.

The elite force also claimed to have recovered two foreign pistols, a locally made double-barrel gun, two magazines and seven bullets from the spot. Alea Begum, wife of deceased

Omar Miah at Baghil, said her husband did not come home for the last couple of days. Yesterday morning, locals

informed her that her husband was killed in Rab firing in nearby Kakua union and his body was kept at Tangail Medical College Hospital, Alea said. When this correspondent asked

Alea whether her husband was involved in criminal activities, she did not say anything. Families of deceased Kashem and

Saddam could not be contacted for their comments in this regard.

Rafiqul Islam, chairman of Baghil union, said all the three deceased were from his union, and the trio had been said they had shot down a ballistic committing different types of crimes missile fired from Yemen that was on a from their hiding places for long.

EC dragging its feet

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draft list of the ministers and MPs who have been accused in different media reports of flouting the electoral codes.

But the commission yesterday did not decide anything on this.

"We have submitted the list to the commissioners. The commission is likely to take a decision in this regard on Sunday," said a senior official at the EC secretariat. "If the commissioners decide to

issue the [probe] directives to the returning officers on Sunday, then they will have only two days before the polls. How will they be able to implement the directives?" an EC official told The Daily Star. However, the commission yesterday

sent letters to lawmakers Hashibur Rahman Swapon (Sirajganj-6) and Abu Zahir (Habiganj-3), warning them of legal actions if they violate electoral code anymore. According to news reports, the two

had taken part in electoral activities. The electoral code of conduct bars

lawmakers and ministers from participating in any electoral activities or staying in election areas. They, however, can go to the polling areas only to cast their votes. The EC yesterday decided to ask all

the returning officers to check whether any minister or MP was staying in the municipalities where polls are due on December 30. Besides, the commission yesterday

asked returning officers and the deputy commissioners to speed up mobile court activities in the municipalities and take immediate actions if anyone violates the election rules. AL LAWMAKER SUSPENDED

In Chapainawabganj, the district

committee of the ruling party suspended the memberships of Chapainawabganj-1 MP Golam Rabbani, also president of Shibganj upazila AL; Ataur Rahman, general secretary of the unit, and rebel mayoral candidate Karibul Hoque Razin, also general secretary of Shibganj municipality chapter of the party. District AL President Moinuddin

Mondal and General Secretary Abdul Wadud last night signed three separate letters suspending their memberships for "violating discipline of the party". The letters stated that Razin was

contesting the polls violating the party's decision and lawmaker Rabbani and Ataur were campaigning against the AL-nominated candidate. The suspension orders would be

sent to the party central committee for approval. Moinuddin, Wadud and Rabbani could not be reached for comments.

'EC FAVOURING BNP' The Awami League has alleged that the EC was not playing an impartial role in conducting the municipal polls.

"The Election Commission is being kind to them [BNP] and unkind to us,' said AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif.

He was talking to reporters after meeting Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad at the latter's office yesterday. "Despite being the ruling party, the

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Awami League is not getting equal treatment from the commission. So, we have come here to request that the CEC to show impartial and equal attitude towards us." "As the BNP does not have any

parliament member, they are getting additional benefits in conducting electoral campaigns," Hanif said, adding that many AL-nominated mayor candidates are being harassed by the returning officers and local administrations. The CEC, however, denied the

allegations and said the commission was discharging its duties without bias. Main opposition Jatiya Party, mean-

while, has alleged that its mayoral candidates are being harassed and threatened by the ruling party men in some municipalities. JP presidium members Sayed Abu Hossain and SM Faisal Chisty raised

ers after a meeting with the CEC at his office yesterday afternoon. The party leaders also demanded deployment of additional security

the allegation while talking to report-

forces in "vulnerable" polling stations. In response, the CEC said adequate security measures would be taken to

ensure fair elections. POLLS VIOLENCE

While campaigning, BNP's mayoral

candidates and supporters were attacked allegedly by the AL men in two districts yesterday. In Jessore municipality, BNP-

sponsored Maruful Islam and his supporters came under attack when they were electioneering at Misson Para. Four people were reportedly injured in the incident. In Laksam municipality of Comilla, former BNP lawmaker Anwarul Azim's

he was going to attend a campaign programme for the BNP-backed mayor candidate. Against this backdrop, BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed at a press briefing at the party's Naya Paltan central office accused the

car was vandalised at Gazimura while

demanded the EC ensure security for BNP men during the polls. Meanwhile, the party expelled Mofiz Uddin Sarker, a rebel candidate in Bhaluka municipality of

AL of "unleashing terror" and

Mymensingh. FIVE PENALISED BY MOBILE

COURTS A mobile court fined five aspirants, including two mayoral candidates, in Gaibandha municipality as they had brought out motorcycle processions

Another court in Nagarkanda municipality of Faridpur sent the brother of BNP's mayor candidate Saifur Rahman to jail for two weeks for creating panic in the election area.

Turkish PM accuses pro-Kurdish party head of treason

yesterday.

REUTERS, Istanbul

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu accused the head of Turkey's pro-Kurdish opposition party of treason yesterday for using a trip to Moscow to condemn Ankara's shooting down of a Russian warplane over Syria.

Selahattin Demirtas, co-head of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), met foreign minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow on Wednesday and criticised Ankara for shooting down the warplane near the border with Syria last month. Moscow denies it had entered Turkish airspace.

"They take sides with whoever Turkey is facing a crisis with. Demirtas

saying in Moscow that Turkey's downing of Russian jet was wrong is a total disgrace and treason," Davutoglu told a meeting of businessmen in Ankara.

"Our main duty is to raise our voice against Russian cruelty. Supporting Russia while it kills civilians in Syria is treason not only against this country, but also against humanity."

Kurdish politicians have accused Ankara of focusing military efforts on Kurdish militia in Iraq and Syria and failing to take up the fight with Islamic

Russia, which imposed economic sanctions on Turkey after the Nov. 24 incident, has sharply criticised

Judges to be appointed

FROM PAGE 20 But the government has not apparently

taken any initiative in this regard, the source said, adding that the president appoints HC judges and promotes them to the Appellate Division following recommendations of the chief justice. The chief justice sends the recom-

mendations to the president through the law ministry after the government requests the chief justice for recommendations. The Supreme Court Bar Association

(SCBA) has long been demanding appointment of judges to the vacant posts for quick disposal of pending SCBA President Khandker Mahbub

Hossain told this correspondent recently that there were some senior, skilled and experienced judges in the HC Division of the SC. But the government was taking no

initiatives to promote them to the Appellate Division considering that they would not become loyal to it (government), he claimed. "I feel the government will promote

chairperson, said.

In 2009, the then president raised the judges from the High Court Division after the senior and experi-

three separate benches could have been constituted to dispose of a large number of cases quickly, he added. The backlog of pending cases at the apex court, meanwhile, is increasing

Had four to five judges been

appointed to the Appellate Division,

though the rate of case disposal has risen since a handful of judges are now left to handle a lot of cases and the filing of new cases has gone up as well. According to SC reports, 15,545 cases were pending with the Appellate

Division as of June 30 this year, up from 15,346 on December 31 last The Appellate Division has disposed of 5,911 cases last year, 5,035 in 2013, 2,905 in 2012 and 1,359 in

2011, according to a report published in February this year. The last time the SC saw new appointments was in March 2013 when four judges were appointed to the Appellate Division from the HC.

the number of judges at the Appellate Division from seven to 11 prior to the disposal of some important cases linked with the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur enced judges retire," Khandker Rahman and the fifth constitutional Mahbub, also an adviser to the BNP amendment, among others.

smugglers opened fire on the BGB

while he was being taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital. Two other members of

Four cases were filed with Teknaf Police Station in this connection.

Saudi hospital fire kills But Eissa Amaish, whose sister was Government-controlled al-Ekhbariya

electrical, and that it took only three minutes to sweep through the hospital. "We could hear the women scream-

television interviewed a witness who

said the cause of the fire seemed to be

ing," said the man, who was not named. Photographs published on Twitter by the civil defence agency showed heavy smoke and an intense blaze which appeared to have severely damaged the interior of the whitewalled hospital. Some rescuers used a ladder to gain access through a win-

Criticism of Saudi Arabia's ruling family is frowned upon, but a string of comments by Twitter users suggested the fire was the result of official negligence and criticised a series of accidents at public facilities in the kingdom this year. "Does the health minister have the

courage to submit his resignation after the fire at Jazan General Hospital? What disaster lies after this calamity?" tweeted one person, whose account identified him as Mohammed Alsubaie, from Riyadh. A correspondent for Saudi-owned

al-Arabiya television reported he had seen several emergency doors locked with chains when he visited the hospi-

tal after the disaster. He said the hospital had previously received official warnings over safety violations. The region's Director of Health Affairs, Ahmed al-Sahli, denied any safety problems, telling al-Arabiya that many people had been able to escape easily

from the blaze because the doors were

open and safety equipment was in place.

killed in the fire, blamed the hospital's management. "What happened in this hospital was a crime of murder," he told al-Arabiya. "This hospital was not equipped at all to deal with a fire." In a brief statement, Falih said he

recognised the ministry had failed, but

that it was too early to identify the causes of the disaster and a committee would investigate them. "When we have deaths like this number, there is no doubt that there is a failure in the system of the ministry of health, and we would like to ensure

that this will not occur again at any

other hospital," he said. A deadly crush at the haj in Makkah in September killed 769 people, according to Saudi officials. Reuters calculations based on numbers provided by the pilgrims' home countries showed the death toll was at least 2,070.

in Mecca's Grand Mosque when a crane working on an expansion project collapsed during a storm, crushing pilgrims below. In August, fire swept through an oil workers' residential compound in the town of Khobar, killing 10 people. Jazan, near the Yemeni border, is the

Two weeks earlier, 110 people died

the local economy by building an industrial complex that produces and uses oil products for manufacturing. The city has also been caught up in Saudi Arabia's military intervention

focus of a \$20 billion plan to develop

against Houthi rebels in Yemen this year. On Tuesday, Saudi authorities