



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.

EC dragging its feet

FROM PAGE 20
 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 Mahbulul 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 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 parliamentary member, they are getting additional benefits in conducting electoral campaigns," Hanif said, adding that many AL-nominated mayoral 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, meanwhile, 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 the allegation while talking to reporters after a meeting with the CEC at his office yesterday afternoon.
 The party leaders also demanded deployment of additional security 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 car was vandalised at Gazimura while he was going to attend a campaign programme for the BNP-backed mayoral 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 AL of "unleashing terror" and 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 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 yesterday.
 Another court in Nagarkanda municipality of Faridpur sent the brother of BNP's mayoral candidate Saifur Rahman to jail for two weeks for creating panic in the election area.

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.

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 anti-terrorist 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 province erupted during a raid, the military said.
 "The security forces raided a compound 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 soldier were also injured.
 Manzoor said those killed on Wednesday belonged to different proscribed Baloch separatist organisations but did not disclose their names.
 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

Khaleda

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

FROM PAGE 20
 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.

Saudi hospital fire kills

FROM PAGE 20
 Government-controlled al-Ekhbariya television interviewed a witness who said the cause of the fire seemed to be electrical, and that it took only three minutes to sweep through the hospital.
 "We could hear the women screaming," 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 white-walled hospital. Some rescuers used a ladder to gain access through a window.
 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 hospital 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.

3 'outlaws'

FROM PAGE 20
 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 committing different types of crimes from their hiding places for long.

Turkish PM accuses pro-Kurdish party head of treason

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

Join us

FROM PAGE 20
 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

FROM PAGE 20
 smugglers opened fire on the BGB 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 while he was being taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital. Two other members of 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, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station.
 Four cases were filed with Teknaf Police Station in this connection.