

AL's Syed Ashraf questions joining Saudi-led military coalition

Public Administration Minister Syed Ashraf Islam at a cabinet meeting in Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday questioned Bangladesh joining the Saudi Arabia-based 34-member Islamic military coalition to combat terrorism.

He said a parliamentary approval was necessary beforehand and that he had come to know about the participation from newspapers, several ministers quoted him as saying during an unscheduled discussion after the meeting.

The Awami League (AL) general secretary also wanted to know why Bangladesh got involved when some Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states including Iran had not, the ministers told The Daily Star.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who chaired the meeting, responded saying Bangladesh's role was a part of its position against



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talks to leaders of the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association, a platform of teachers' associations in the country's 37 public universities, at Gono Bhaban in the capital yesterday over demands to remove "disparities" in the eighth national pay scale and to retain the selection grade and time scale and over the ongoing indefinite work stoppage enforced by the teachers since January 11.

BNP's Mosharraf rebuts reports about his understanding with ruling AL

Senior BNP leader Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain yesterday said he did not negotiate his bail with the government to get out of jail.

Criticising media reports that he reached an understanding with the ruling Awami League to split BNP as a condition for securing bail, he asked, "Why did I have to be in jail for 22 months if I had negotiated with the government?"

The BNP standing committee member was addressing a BNP discussion at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, marking the 80th birth anniversary of former president Ziaur Rahman.

Mosharraf came out of jail on bail on January 13.

On January 10, the Supreme Court upheld his bail in a money laundering case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2014 on the charge of amassing over Tk 9.53 crore between 2001 and 2006 and

SHUJAN doubts recent municipal election's credibility

Claims quality of electoral system declining since last JS polls

The recent municipal polls cannot be termed fair and impartial because they fell short of the standards of credible elections, civil society organisation SHUJAN said yesterday, based on its observation of the entire electoral process, including voting.

Shushashoner Jannoy Nagorik cited that an accurate electoral roll, freedom of all aspirants to contest, participation of multiple candidates, and an intimidation-less voting environment were indicators of a credible election.

"An analysis of the overall scenario suggests that the municipality polls did not meet the standards," SHUJAN Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar told a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU),

OTHER CLAIMS
 High turnouts unbelievable
 Many aspirants intimidated into quitting
 Voter list incomplete

where information about the new mayors was presented.

Elections in 235 municipalities were held between December 30 and January 12.

In a statement, SHUJAN said the municipality polls were held with a "faulty and incomplete" voters' list, many aspirants were coerced into quitting the electoral race, and in many places voters were intimidated and vote counting was untrustworthy.

The overall turnout was 72.93 percent in the elections, while SHUJAN said in five

municipalities it was 90 percent and in 74 municipalities it was over 80 percent.

Experienced election observers see such high turnouts as unbelievable, the statement said.

SHUJAN also said the quality of the electoral system had been deteriorating since the January 5 parliamentary election in 2014, and it went down further in the subsequent upazila polls in 2014 and city corporation votes in Dhaka and Chittagong last year.

"The downtrend of quality continued into the recent municipality polls.... If the flaws are not corrected, the entire electoral system may collapse," it said.

The organisation also analysed the information of 233 new mayors on the

Nagorik Oikya demands proper treatment for interned Manna

Nagorik Oikya yesterday demanded that its convener, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, be provided proper treatment and released.

"On January 16, Manna fell unconscious in jail. His wife rushed to see him...She was not allowed to meet her husband and was sent back," one of the civil society platform's leaders, Jinnur Rahman Jinnu, told a press briefing in the capital yesterday.

Manna was arrested on February 24 last year, a day after his telephone conversation with BNP leader Sadeque Hossain Khoka about strengthening the anti-government movement, among many other issues, was leaked. A sedition case was filed against the two on March 5.

Teachers' strike halts 19 finals at JU

6 more to be postponed too; students fear session jam

Nineteen final examinations under 10 departments and two institutes of Jahangirnagar University (JU) have been postponed due to the ongoing indefinite work abstention of public university teachers protesting "disparity" in the eighth national pay-scale.

JU teachers started the strike from January 2 as part of a movement led by the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA).

"If the stalemate continues, six more finals will be postponed," JU exam controller office sources said.

Apart from classes and exams, regular academic meetings, preparation of question papers and halls' administrative activities were also postponed.

At the same time, students are fearful of suffering long periods of session jams.

Seeking anonymity, a second year student of economics said, "We are afraid of session jams. We want teachers to negotiate with the authorities and resolve the issue. Why are we facing this crisis?"

Meanwhile, students have started to leave dormitories early for the weeklong winter vacation starting today.

Fans want citizenship for Peter Custers

Expressing frustration over the government's "reluctance" to recognise contributions of late Dutch journalist and researcher Peter Custers towards Bangladesh's development, discussants at a memorial meeting yesterday demanded that he be granted citizenship posthumously.

In his lifelong friendship with Bangladesh, Custers worked on climate change issues, towards ensuring the rights of farmers, women and garment workers and supported the trial of war criminals, they said.

"Peter Custers, a friend of Bangladesh: memorial meeting" was organised by Bangladesher Bandhu Dr Peter Custers Swaron Committee in the capital's Liberation War Museum.

"Peter Custers felt he was a citizen of Bangladesh. He might have loved this country more than his own.

Majority area of capital vulnerable to earthquakes due to soft soil

Experts say at DNCC, Plan International workshop

An expert at a workshop yesterday urged compliance with Bangladesh National Building Code, especially height restrictions, since 65 percent of Dhaka comprises soft soil which has low bearing capacity and tends to retain seismic waves for longer periods in the event of an earthquake.

The presence of 1.40 lakh unreinforced masonry buildings and 50,000 short column buildings (containing short and regular columns within the same storey which tend to buckle under stress) illustrates the

Most bridges will be destroyed isolating capital
 7.5 magnitude at Madhupur fault to destroy 72,000 buildings, damage 1.35 lakh
 Tk 350cr rescue equipment to be purchased in 2 years

risks posed by earthquakes, said Prof ASM Maksud Kamal.

Quoting a 2010 survey under Comprehensive Disaster Management

Programme, the chairman of Dhaka University's disaster science and management department urged government initiatives to reduce vulnerabilities, saying there was a lack of awareness and rescue preparations.

Addressing the workshop, organised by Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Plan International in the capital's Spectra Convention Centre, other experts said fires and damaged utility networks would cause the most casualties during a major earthquake in the capital.

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QUANDARY
 (noun) a state of perplexity or uncertainty over what to do in a difficult situation.

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