AFP, Yangon

Children clambered up oiled banana stalks as teenagers wrestled for greasy coconuts in street fairs held around Yangon yesterday to celebrate Myanmar's 70 years of independence.

The national holiday saw roads blocked off with pop music and live commentary blasting from sound systems in a cross between a street festival and a public sports day.

In Yangon's northern suburb of Insein, onlookers cheered a young boy as he endeavoured to climb up an oiled, suspended banana trunk to reach the Myanmar flag at the top -- a symbol of the nation's long struggle for independence.

"We need to remember this day every year. It's important for the whole country," organiser Ye Yint, 27, told AFP, sporting a Manchester United

"Younger generations need to remember the older generation that fought for our freedom."

Myanmar declared independence from British colonial rule on 4 January 1948 after a long fight championed by General Aung San, the father of the country's current civilian leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Yet official celebrations for the 70th anniversary were kept low-key despite the renewed patriotic fervour that has gripped Myanmar as it faces global

condemnation of alleged military atrocities committed against the country's Rohingya Muslim minority.

Vice President Myint Swe was the highest-ranking official to attend a solemn ceremony that started before dawn broke in the capital Naypyidaw.

But the day's meaning was not lost on ordinary people, 18-year-old Aung Thant Kyaw explained, after several bruising rounds saw him crowned champion in a wrestle for a coconut covered in grease.

"Our Independence Day hero General Aung San and his comrades fought to give our country independence," he said of a national hero who was assassinated months before Myanmar secured the independence he struggled for.

"So today we play games to celebrate our freedom and to honour him."

Other competitions included a cushion fight on a bamboo pole over a muddy pond of water, a race to snatch mouthfuls of suspended biscuits with no hands and a team competition to pass scoops of flour by hand.

But the most eye-watering was an extreme version of the 'three-legged' race for pairs of naked young boys, running along with their penises tied together using a length of ribbon.

There was jubilation for the winners but tears for the losing team who fell over halfway along the track.

including the institutions for MPO due to a "fund crisis". What was a demonstration of

about 200 teachers in front of Jatiya Press Club for the last few days grew up to well around a thousand yester-

On Tuesday, the agitating teachers rejected the education minister's call to end the programme and announced to continue it until death.

They vowed to continue the demonstration until the government gives a specific timeframe for meeting their demand.

Cold wave

FROM PAGE 1

The sun was not visible in most of these districts yesterday and there was fog early in the evening.

In Chuadanga, the mercury is expected to drop until Saturday morning, said Samadul Islam, in-charge of Chuadanga Met office.

At least two children died of cold related diseases in Chuadanga and Kurigram yesterday, our correspondents report.

One-and-a-half-year-old Meem died in Kurigram Modern Hospital while Babu, 4, died at Chuadanga Sadar Hospital.

People living in the 250 char areas or near river banks in Chuadanga bore the brunt of the cold wave, our correspondent there reports.

There has been an increase in rotavirus-infected patients in Nilphamari and on an average, 50 people are being admitted to hospi-

tals every day since Wednesday. District Relief and Disaster Management Officer Md Akhtaruzzaman said 2,000 blankets were distributed among the poor in the last couple of days.

In Thakurgaon, the drop in temperature forced people to stay indoors. The lowest temperature recorded here was 9 degrees Celsius yesterday.

The district administration has distributed 34,177 blankets among the poor, said Thakurgaon Deputy Commissioner Abdul Awal.

The deputy director of the department of agricultural extension in Thakurgaon said agricultural activities were disrupted due to cold wave. However, crops were not under threat, the official said.

Around 220 patients got admitted to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital until yesterday afternoon with cold-related diseases. The hospital has 100 beds.

In Panchagarh, at least 140 patients were admitted to the 100bed Panchagarh Sadar Hospital with

similar diseases. A total of 31,921 blankets have been distributed in Lalmonirhat. Dinajpur recorded 9.8 degrees

Conditions in Joypurhat and Naogaon were similar. [Our correspondents in Kushtia,

Kurigram, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon,

Lalmonirhat and Dinajpur contrib-

uted to this report]

Celsius yesterday.

The country's first six-lane flyover inaugurated at Mohipal in Feni yesterday. Israel opens probe into 44 more death of wheelchair-FROM PAGE 1 About 80,000 teachers, currently employed in 5,242 governmentrecognised schools all over bound Palestinian Bangladesh, are not under any pay scheme. They do not receive any "independent and impartial investigapayment, some for well over decades. AFP, Jerusalem This is because the schools do not AFP, Seoul Israel's military said yesterday it was Yesterday, Israel's military have the ability to pay the teachers, opening an investigation into the announced it was opening a probe while the government stopped

death of a wheelchair-bound Gazan man, with Palestinian officials saying he was shot by a sniper during clashes with Israeli forces.

Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh, a 29-yearold whose family said had lost his legs in a 2008 Israeli strike, was shot in the head by a sniper during protests and clashes along the Gaza border on December 15, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

chief said he was "truly shocked" by Abu Thurayeh's death and demanded an

into his death, after previously saying it was not able to determine whether he had been killed by its soldiers' fire.

"As stated previously, the IDF's (Israel Defence Forces) operational review concluded that no live fire was aimed at Abu Thurayeh," it said in a statement.

"Based on the information gathered during the review, it was not possible to determine whether Abu The United Nations' human rights Thurayeh was injured as a result of riot dispersal means or what caused his death.

Educate yourselves

FROM PAGE 1

Hasina, president of the Awami League, was addressing a function at the Gono Bhaban where leaders and activists of the BCL, a pro-AL student body, gathered to meet her on the occasion of its 70th founding anniver-

The PM advised them to take the country forward upholding the main principles of the organisation. "You'll have to advance towards peace and progress by holding the torch of education.

"When you go to your villages, you'll have to encourage illiterate children to learn to read and write... this is my request to you on the occasion of the Chhatra League's founding anniversary," she said.

Hasina also came down heavily on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for her comments on the construction of the Padma Bridge.

"Any person who has a little bit of sense and who has some knowledge cannot utter those words. By making this remark, Khaleda Zia has exposed that she has no ability to construct such a bridge," she said.

Earlier at a discussion at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh on Tuesday, Khaleda said the underconstruction multipurpose Padma Bridge would be risky to use as it is being built with flaws.

"The Padma Bridge won't be constructed during the Awami League government's tenure. Even if they somehow build the bridge, please don't use it as there will be a huge risk," Khaleda said at the discussion.

Yesterday, the PM said if Khaleda had some knowledge, she would have known how a bridge is constructed.

"Some knowledge that Khaleda Zia possesses is used for making money through embezzlement and theft, and burning and killing people. She can only do these evil deeds," Hasina said.

The PM said the World Bank brought corruption allegations against

the government regarding the Padma Bridge construction. "But we challenged the World Bank's allegations, saying that no graft

took place in this regard ... we could do this as we are honest. "We assumed power not to change

ple." Hasina said the BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami alliance had established "a reign

of terror" during its five-year rule.

our own fate but that of general peo-

"They could not do anything for people. They only bettered their own fate

while in power." She further said corruption by Khaleda's two sons was proved at a US | agency said. Federal Court and a Singapore Court.

"Tarique Zia was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment and fined Tk 20 crore for laundering money. We have brought back the money siphoned off

by Koko." She also mentioned that the BNP chief is being tried over embezzlement

of orphans' money. Referring to the Unesco's recognition of Bangabandhu's historic 7th March Speech, the premier said it has brightened Bangladesh's image globally.

It is the number one speech among the 41 most inspiring speeches in the world. But this historic speech could not be aired or broadcast for a long time due to restrictions, she added.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, among others, was present at

the function. BCL President Saifur Rahman Sohag and General Secretary SM Zakir Hossain also spoke there.

Man spends

FROM PAGE 20

Mohammad Shamim, the eldest son of Nurul, said they sought help from ASI Bulbul who told them to contact constable Mizan. Mizan demanded Tk 40,000 to

arrange bail for Nurul, claimed Shamim, a carpenter. They could not manage that kind of

money, he said. Shamim went to Khulna on January

and learnt from a court clerk that Nurul was not an accused in the case and there was no arrest warrant for Nurul, said Shamim. A letter was issued from the court

that day and it reached Mymensingh Central Jail yesterday. Nurul was released on bail, said

Shah Rafigul Islam, the jailer of Mymensingh Central Jail. OC Jakiur yesterday claimed that

they had received the arrest order through the office of superintendent of Mymensingh police and they had carried out the order.

It is not possible to instantly verify an order's authenticity, claimed the

are investigating the incident."

OC. SA Newazi, additional police superintendent of Mymensingh, said, "We

S Korea's Park 'took money from spy agency': reports

PHOTO: FILE PHOTO

Ousted South Korean president Park Geun-Hye was yesterday charged with accepting millions of dollars worth of bribes from the state spy agency, news reports said. Park allegedly received between 50

and 200 million won (now \$47,000 to \$188,000) from the National Intelligence Service (NIS) every month from early 2013 -- soon after her swearing-in -- until mid-2016, prosecutors told South Korean media.

The cash -- said to total 3.65 billion won (\$3.4 million) -- was reportedly delivered by NIS agents to Park's aides in uncrowded parking lots or in back alleys near the presidential Blue House.

The money came from the spy agency's "blind budget" -- millions of dollars of special funds that can be spent without receipts for antiespionage activities -- Yonhap news

Park is said to have spent much of the funds for personal purposes, including Botox injections, clothes and illicit mobile phones used by her friends, including close confidante Choi Soon-Sil.

Prosecutors have demanded 25 years in prison for Choi, charged with colluding with Park to extort millions of dollars from conglomerates

including Samsung. Park is already on trial on 18 charges including bribery, coercion and abuse of power for offering governmental favours to tycoons.

China

FROM PAGE 20

Tuesday to discuss "matters of mutual interest" including the North's participation in next month's Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

North Korea has rattled the international community in recent months with multiple missile launches and its sixth and most powerful nuclear test -- purportedly of a hydrogen bomb.

It has shrugged off a raft of new sanctions and heightened rhetoric from Washington as it drives forward with its weapons programme, which it says is for defence against US aggression. But the new year has begun on a

more positive note with the two Koreas on Wednesday restoring a cross-border hotline that had been shut down since 2016, after North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un offered to send a team to the Winter Olympics hosted by the South in February. The Olympic offer prompted Seoul

to respond with its offer for talks next week -- the first since 2015. A six-nation effort to dismantle

North Korea's nuclear programmes was begun in 2003, bringing together China, the United States, both Koreas, Russia and Japan. North Korea pledged to give up

second device soon afterwards.

"Chhatra League men are not involved in the incident. The victim those programmes in 2005, but carried out its first atomic blast the did not hold any post in the unit." Shibli said. following year. It walked out of the The body was sent to Pabna talks three years later, detonating its

Two Russian servicemen killed in Syria mortar attack With four fatalities this is one of the AFP, Moscow

Russia's defence ministry yesterday

said two servicemen were killed in a mortar attack by Islamist militants in Syria on New Year's Eve, but denied media reports seven military planes were destroyed. "As darkness fell, the Hmeimim air base was subjected to sudden mortar

As a result of the shelling, two servicemen were killed," the defence ministry said in a statement to Russian agencies. The Kommersant business daily reported seven military planes had been "practically destroyed" in the attack, citing two military-diplomatic

shelling from a mobile group of militants.

report was "fake". The news comes a day after the ministry announced a Russian helicopter crash in Syria that killed two pilots following a technical fault, also on December 31.

sources, but the ministry said the

deadliest single days for the Russian army in Syria since it entered the conflict and brings the total number of officially reported losses to 44. Security around the Hmeimim base

was being stepped up after the mortar attack, the defence ministry said. "The Russian air force in Syria is combat-ready and continues to fulfill

all intended tasks," the statement added. Russian President Vladimir Putin made a surprise visit to Syria last month where he ordered the start of a pullout of Russian troops, saying their

task in the war-torn country had been

largely completed. Three battalions of military police and officers of the Russian Center for Reconciliation would remain in Syria, as well as two Russian bases, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said on a subse-

the campus for celebrating the anni-

versary. When they were trying to enter

the college, the groups were locked in a

Shahporan Police Station, said addi-

tional law enforcers had been

deployed on college campus to fend

In yet another development, a

group of BCL activists attacked their

rivals while they were celebrating the

anniversary at Nuria High School in

Barisal city Wednesday night, adds our

Jasimuddin, who organised the

programme, alleged that supporters of

his rival group, led by Raiz Ahmad

Manna, attacked his men and dam-

aged a cake, four motorcycles and

Five BCL activists, including

Contacted, Raiz denied his involve-

Awlad Hossain, officer-in-charge of

Barisal Kotwali Model Police Station,

said on information, police went to the

Barisal city unit BCL President Md

Akhter Hossain, officer-in-charge of

quent trip.

clash.

off further clashes.

Barisal correspondent.

Jasimuddin, were hurt.

ment in the attack.

Factional fights

FROM PAGE 20

had been deployed on campus to avoid any untoward incident.

At least 20 rooms of Suhrawardy Hall and some rooms of Shahjalal Hall were vandalised during the clash, he added

Mansur Alam, former senior vicepresident of BCL CU unit, who leads the Sixty Nine Group, alleged that men of former deputy office secretary of the unit Mizanur Rahman Bipul carried out the attack on his supporters to foil the anniversary programme.

Bipul, also the leader of Varsity Xpress Group, refuted the allegation, saying that the supporters of Mansur attacked his men without provocation.

Police later detained Arifur Rahman, a third-year student of philosophy, who is an activist of the Varsity Xpress Group, said Additional SP Abdullah.

Meanwhile, at a programme organised by BCL Chittagong city unit yesterday, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif urged BCL leaders and activists to maintain discipline.

"A disciplined organisation can lead the nation in the right path," he said, referring to the glorious past of the BCL. In another incident, at least four

BCL activists were wounded in a clash over taking control of Sylhet MC College to celebrate the anniversary programme, reports our district correspondent. Police and BCL sources said follow-

ers of Hiron Mahmud Nipu, former president of BCL Sylhet district unit, organised a programme at the college to celebrate the anniversary. Their rival group, led by Rayhan

Chowdhury, former secretary of Sylhet district unit BCL, also planned to enter Criminals

FROM PAGE 20

Chhatra League, denied the allega-

iat for the judiciary until the rules regarding the SC are amended.

Oziullah was speaking at a press

accepted the disciplinary rules formulated by the government for the lower

spot and brought the situation under Amend rules SCBA Secretary and BNP Joint

control.

chairs.

Secretary General AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon, among others, spoke there. Meanwhile, pro-Awami League faction of the association protested the

demand from the SCBA president. Md Oziullah, SCBA senior vice president and a leader of its pro-AL

faction, said the SCBA president's demand is tantamount to contempt of court as the SC has already accepted the gazette notification issued by the government on the disciplinary rules. He further said there is no scope for establishing an independent secretar-

conference at the SCBA media centre. Earlier on Wednesday, the SC

Medical College morgue for autopsy. court judges.