



The country's first six-lane flyover inaugurated at Mohipal in Feni yesterday.

PHOTO: FILE PHOTO

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About 80,000 teachers, currently employed in 5,242 government-recognised schools all over Bangladesh, are not under any pay scheme. They do not receive any payment, some for well over decades.

This is because the schools do not have the ability to pay the teachers, while the government stopped 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 yesterday.

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

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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 hospitals 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 100-bed Panchagarh Sadar Hospital with similar diseases.

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

Conditions in Joypurhat and Naogaon were similar.

[Our correspondents in Kushtia, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon, Lalmonirhat and Dinajpur contributed to this report]

Israel opens probe into death of wheelchair-bound Palestinian

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's military said yesterday it was opening an investigation into the 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-year-old 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.

The United Nations' human rights chief said he was "truly shocked" by Abu Thurayeh's death and demanded an

"independent and impartial investigation".

Yesterday, Israel's military announced it was opening a probe 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 Thurayeh was injured as a result of riot dispersal means or what caused his death.

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

AFP, Seoul

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 anti-espionage activities -- Yonhap news agency said.

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

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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 those programmes in 2005, but carried out its first atomic blast the following year. It walked out of the talks three years later, detonating its second device soon afterwards.

Street games as Myanmar marks 70 yrs of independence

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 top.

"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.

Two Russian servicemen killed in Syria mortar attack

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 shelling from a mobile group of militants. 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 sources, but the ministry said the 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.

With four fatalities this is one of 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 subsequent trip.

Factional fights

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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 vice-president 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 Mahbulul 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 followers 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

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Chhatra League, denied the allegation.

"Chhatra League men are not involved in the incident. The victim did not hold any post in the unit," Shibli said.

The body was sent to Pabna Medical College morgue for autopsy.

the campus for celebrating the anniversary. When they were trying to enter the college, the groups were locked in a clash.

Akhter Hossain, officer-in-charge of Shahporan Police Station, said additional law enforcers had been deployed on college campus to fend off further clashes.

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 Barisal correspondent.

Barisal city unit BCL President Md Jasimuddin, who organised the programme, alleged that supporters of his rival group, led by Raiz Ahmad Manna, attacked his men and damaged a cake, four motorcycles and chairs.

Five BCL activists, including Jasimuddin, were hurt.

Contacted, Raiz denied his involvement in the attack.

Awlad Hossain, officer-in-charge of Barisal Kotwali Model Police Station, said on information, police went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Amend rules

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SCBA Secretary and BNP Joint 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 secretariat for the judiciary until the rules regarding the SC are amended.

Oziullah was speaking at a press conference at the SCBA media centre.

Earlier on Wednesday, the SC accepted the disciplinary rules formulated by the government for the lower court judges.