

YESTERDAY'S
TEMPERATURES

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Two floating generators on the Buriganga River opposite Sadarghat Launch Terminal in Dhaka. Local traders have set up the machines as a new business venture. They supply electricity to people living in adjacent areas during power cuts and charge Tk 300 for a combination of a fan and a light. The photo was taken from Keraniganj Alam Market area recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Democracy rests on inclusive polls

Civil society members tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A section of civil society members yesterday said the country may face "dire consequences" if the upcoming parliamentary election is not held in an inclusive, free and fair manner.

They said another "sham election" like the one in 2014 may threaten Bangladesh's status as a democratic country.

They were addressing a roundtable discussion titled, "Participatory election and democracy in Bangladesh", at Jatiya Press Club. The Dhaka Forum, a pro-BNP platform, organised it.

The speakers also expressed doubt about how the Awami League and the BNP will ensure democracy while there is no democratic practice inside the two parties.

M Hafizuddin Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government, said an inclusive election cannot be expected if the government and the Election Commission maintain the "attitudes" they are showing now.

He said the prime minister has already started her party's election campaign while the activities of another major party have been suppressed. "The EC is yet to gain confidence of the people to hold a free, fair and credible election."

Pointing to Indian army chief's recent comments on Bangladesh, he said it is regretful that neither foreign ministry officials nor ruling party leaders have yet to respond to the issue.

Barrister Mainul Hosein, another former adviser to a caretaker government, slammed Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina for terming civil society members "donkey".

He said almost all the democratic institutions have been destroyed due to the "absence of a democratic government".

"Corrupt individuals are presently being given importance in the absence of democracy and election," he said.

Echoing Mainul, former Bangladesh Bank governor Salehuddin Ahmed said the country lacks strong governance. All have to suffer if the governing system gets weakened, he said.

Salehuddin stressed the need for holding dialogues among political parties to break the current deadlock.

Pointing to question leaks and scam in the banking sector, he said if the government is sincere, the persons involved in such irregularities will be brought to book within a week.

M Serajul Islam, a former ambassador, said holding of the next election keeping the present parliament effective and its members in office will be a "violation" of the parliamentary system.

BNP standing committee member Amir Khashru Mahmud Chowdhury said enhancing the prime minister's power under the 15th amendment is a formidable obstacle to holding a free and fair election.

Abul Hasan Chowdhury, a former state minister for foreign affairs, Prof Dilara Chowdhury, a political analyst, and Dr Zafnullah Chowdhury, founder of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, also spoke on the occasion.

SSC examinee harassed at hall Stalker jailed for 10 months and 10 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A youth was sentenced to jail for 10 months and 10 days on charge of harassing a female SSC examinee at an exam centre at Rajshahi's Durgapur upazila yesterday.

Afzal Sharif, 18, a college student of Bhabanipur village of the upazila, was taken into police custody after a mobile court had given the verdict, said Assistant Commissioner (land) Samar Kumar, who led the court.

Afzal along with two friends entered the Bokhtiarpur High School centre unlawfully around 9:30am, 30 minutes prior to the exam, and started to harass the girl, said Samar, quoting witnesses.

When the other examinees protested, the three also locked into an altercation with them.

At one stage, the on-duty teachers managed to catch Afzal and produced him before the mobile court, said Mahbubur Rahman, the UNO's representative at the examination centre.

AC (land) Samar Kumar said following the statements of the girl and other witnesses, he sentenced the youth to jail.

"I told him that a mother carries a child for around 10 months and 10 days in her womb. And, he would have to serve in jail for that exact time for harassing the girl," he added.

An array of offerings

MATHEWS CHIRAN

The Amar Ekushey Granthamela is an open invitation to all. It is an event unlike any other where people of all ages spend the day with their loved ones amid festivity.

And, like previous years, Bangla Academy in collaboration with other organisations is offering various services to facilitate and enhance visitor experience at the book fair.

One such is Switch Bangladesh Foundation. The voluntary organisation offers wheelchair facilities for the elderly and people with disabilities. SBF has been providing the service at the book fair since 2016.

"We offer the service free of cost," said Mostafizur Rahman, chief coordinator of the organisation. "We also remain with the person who is availing our service to make his or her experience at the book fair pleasurable."

He said every day around eight to ten of their volunteers work at the book fair. "On holidays or weekends, we add more volunteers."

The Bangla Academy and Child Sight Foundation are supporting SBF in this regard.

Visually-impaired Ripa Tabassum visits the book fair almost every day. She avails the SBF service every time she is at the fair.

"A volunteer takes me to Soporsa Braille Prokashona on a wheelchair. It's a great help for someone like me," said the student of Eden Mohila College.

There are other facilities at the fair too.

At the north-west corner of the book fair, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) has set up a stall for making people aware of donating blood.

A visitor can also test her or his blood group there free of cost. Besides, they also provide other medical facilities for free, according to Subrata Biswas, a counsellor of Transfusion Medicine Department at BSMMU.

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Volunteers help a girl with disability move around the book fair ground at Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday. Switch Bangladesh Foundation with assistance from Bangla Academy and Child Sight Foundation offers the wheelchair service to the people with disabilities and elderly free of cost.

23-nation exercise on UN peace operation starts tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With participants from 22 countries, a multinational exercise on the United Nations peace operations, named "Exercise Shanti Doot-4", will kick off in Bangladesh tomorrow, under the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) programme.

Hosted by Bangladesh Army and sponsored by the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM), the two-week-long exercise will take place at the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT), Rajendrapur Cantonment in Gazipur.

Bangladesh is one of the leading troops contributing countries in the UN missions. "Exercise Shanti Doot-4" will certainly increase credibility of Bangladesh amongst the international peacekeeping community," said Brig Gen Md Tofael Ahmed, chief instructor (CI) of BIPSOT, at a press briefing at ISPR directorate in the capital yesterday.

Bangladesh also hosted the exercise in 2002, 2008 and 2012. "Shanti Doot" means "Ambassador of Peace".

Around 1,319 military personnel, including 566 from 22 countries, are participating in the exercise.

The countries are: Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Canada, Fiji, Ghana, Britain, Indonesia, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Philippines, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Korea, Sri Lanka, the USA and Vietnam. A good number of members of the armed forces from Bangladesh will take part in the exercise.

"The aim of this exercise is to increase participants' interoperability and peacekeeping skills prior to deployment in UN missions," Brig Gen Tofael Ahmed added.

Besides, a daylong strategic level seminar titled "Changing Role of UN Peacekeeping Operations -- Challenges and Operations" is scheduled for Tuesday.

The exercise will include three packages -- Field Training Event, Staff Training Event, and Critical Enabler Capability Enhancement, according to a release provided to journalists during the briefing. This training aims to promote regional peace and enhance peacekeeping capabilities of the participating countries, the release added.

The training will be facilitated by instructors with peacekeeping training experience. Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, security affairs adviser to the prime minister, will inaugurate the exercise, which will end on March 12.



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