

Cold spell

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The Bangladesh Meteorological Department yesterday recorded the lowest temperature at 10.1 degrees Celsius in Faridpur, while Dhaka experienced 12.2 degrees Celsius.

Weather may remain dry with partly cloudy sky over the country, while moderate to thick fog may occur at places during midnight to this morning, the Met office said in its weather forecast.

Night and day temperatures may rise in the next 72 hours beginning from 12:00 noon yesterday, it said.

Yesterday's other lows were recorded at 11.9 degrees Celsius in Rajshahi, 10.5 degrees in Pabna, 11.3 degrees in Dinajpur, 12 degrees both in Rangpur and Kurigram, 11.3 degrees in Panchagarh, 11.8 degrees in Nilphamari, 10.2 degrees in Jashore, and 10.4 degrees in Chuadanga.

Some 4,556 people, suffering from cold-related ailments, underwent treatment at hospitals countrywide in the last 24 hours until 8:00am yesterday, according to the control room of the Directorate General of Health Services.

Of them, 829 were admitted for acute respiratory infection, 1,735 for diarrhoea, and 1,992 for other ailments, including fever, eye, skin, dysentery, and jaundice.

Besides, at least six women are being treated at Rangpur Medical College Hospital. They suffered burns while trying to stay warm, sitting beside fires in open places in different districts under Rangpur division, our Dinajpur correspondent reports.

All of them were admitted in the last 48 hours until 12:00 noon yesterday, and they sustained 10 to 15 percent burns, said MA Hamid, on-duty doctor of the hospital's burn and plastic surgery unit.

Our Pabna correspondent adds: 270 patients were admitted to Pabna General Hospital due to cold-related ailments in the last 24 hours until 1:00pm yesterday.

Meanwhile, flight operations at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) resumed at 9:30am yesterday after five and a half hours of disruption caused by dense fog, reports UNB.

Schedules of five international flights were disrupted.

Ferry services on Shimulia-Kathalbari and Paturia-Daulatdia routes in the Padma were halted due to thick fog.

Ferries could not cross the Shimulia-Kathalbari route from 5:00am to 10:00am, reports our Munshiganj correspondent.

Eight ferries, with passengers and vehicles, were forced to anchor in the middle of the river, Shafiqul Islam, assistant general manager of Bangladesh

Inland Water Transport Corporation at Shimulia, told The Daily Star.

Ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia route remained halted from 3:30am to 7:30am yesterday, adds our Manikganj correspondent.

The bone-chilling cold largely affected livelihoods of low-income people, especially the labourers, across the country.

Labourers, who were looking for work, were seen shivering with cold at Mirpur's Pallabi labour market yesterday morning.

Prices of warm clothes have increased significantly in the city's street markets.

"Prices of warm clothes have gone up three to four times than what they were before. It's tough for me to buy those," Mona Mia, an occasional rickshaw puller who came to buy such clothes for his daughter at Farmgate, told this newspaper.

Our correspondents from other districts also reported that daily lives in those areas came to an almost standstill due to the biting cold.

Around 12,000 drivers of rental motorcycles in six districts under Barishal division are passing hard days as passengers avoid journey by bike due to the ongoing cold wave, reports our Barishal correspondent.

Motorcycle is one of the most used vehicles for road communications in the rural area in Barishal division.

Meanwhile, the shivering cold has made the lives of seven lakh ultra-poor tea workers in 156 tea gardens in Sylhet division miserable as there is an acute shortage of warm clothes, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.

Sreemangal Met office recorded the lowest temperature at 11.1 degrees Celsius there yesterday.

"Fog covers everywhere most of the time. We have been forced to stop working in the last few days, but we depend on daily incomes to buy food," said Sudama Roy, a worker at Dakhhara Tea Garden in Sreemangal.

"More than 1,200 people in Lkhai Tea Garden in Sreemangal are badly in need of warm clothes. But we could manage only 300 blankets for them," said Md Arifuzzaman, a member of local charity Artoonad, which is distributing the warm clothes.

Talking to our Lalmonirhat correspondent, Rafiqul Islam, a farmer at a char land in the Teesta river in the district, said he went to his vegetables field yesterday morning, but could not stay long there due to the cold.

The local administration has distributed some warm clothes among the char people, said Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Uttam Kumar Roy.

You are our friend

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hidden cracks and traps of bureaucracy-ridden system that prevailed everywhere. It was Abed's vow to change it all and bring these under a new structure through his work.

Perhaps, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that there is hardly anyone among the 17 crore people of Bangladesh who did not benefit in some way by Abed's work. And if that someone is a poor person or a woman from the countryside, then they must have come across Abed's activities in every step of their life -- in education, health, income generation, self-awareness and more.

How can we bid farewell to Abed who had quietly and - unbeknown to even ourselves - become an inseparable part of our everyday life?

Abed is the extra-ordinary planner for social and economic emancipation of the poor people of Bangladesh. He liberated the common people from the shackles of poverty.

He has quietly developed his enormous enterprise. He didn't wait for anyone's response to his call and marched forward; he forged ahead taking all the responsibility on his own shoulders to accomplish the task at hand.

Abed has changed the concept of NGOs all over the world. The idea that an NGO could come forward to

provide a comprehensive solution to almost all the problems in a country was absolutely unthinkable.

It was Abed, who provided us with the idea of a big NGO that can work through numerous different institutions and programmes inside the country and abroad.

Besides, his biggest contribution is establishing the science behind the management of a single NGO and a multi-dimensional NGO. This singular contribution of Abed will be remembered forever. Economic researchers in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka have often asked the question: "Whatever is done in Bangladesh is done nationwide - why not in our country?" My usual response was "No Abed has yet been born in your country".

Abed has left behind a confident Bangladesh. The story of his immense courage, self-confidence, and creativity will continue to inspire all generations to come. Abed will live as an icon of Bangladesh for posterity.

It will be easy for the next generation to take on the responsibility of building the Bangladesh of our desire on the foundations that you have built.

Abed, the nation will remain indebted to you forever.



BD Clean arranges a unique exhibition of artwork made of discarded plastic bottles and its caps at T&T playground in Mohakhali area of Dhaka yesterday. Thrown-away plastic is a leading cause of environment pollution.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Champion goes, legacy lives on

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Introduced in 2002, the programme entails giving people assets like cash, goats and cows and supplement these with one-on-one coaching in entrepreneurship, healthcare and the myriad social problems they face.

The programme has been replicated in more than 40 countries and to great success.

"Brac's programme for the poorest of the poor have durable impact. Ten years later, those people's income was higher, they owned more assets, they worked longer, they were not lazier, they were happier and healthier," Banerjee added.

As many as 95 percent of its programme participants maintain their upward trajectory even after four years of completing the programme, according to Brac.

Boosting confidence pays huge dividends, Sir Abed wrote in 2018.

"For too long, people thought poverty was something ordained by a higher power, as immutable as the sun and the moon. This is a myth. We would do well to start paying attention to the evidence, which says that giving people hope and self-esteem may be the greatest investment in human capital that any country can make."

Research shows that the assets and training have only limited effect when given alone. The real transformation comes through the one-on-one support, which gives the women hope that things can change.

"Asking policymakers to invest in optimism and self-worth may sound like a vague, soft-hearted appeal. It is anything but that," he added.

But the ultra-poor graduation programme is just one of the many initiatives that the Brac took on since 1972 with the view to easing the burden of the poor and playing a constructive role in the development of the new born nation.

Today, 10.5 percent of Bangladesh's population live in extreme poverty, down from 34.3 percent in 2000.

Brac's journey began in the district of Sylhet as a small-scale relief and rehabilitation project to help rebuild the lives of war refugees.

In nine months, 14,000 homes were reconstructed as part of the relief effort. Several hundred boats were also built for fishermen. Medical centres were opened and other essential services were ensured.

Since then Brac went from strength to strength and now has presence in 69,421 villages in the 64 districts of Bangladesh.

Along with its microfinance programme, Brac reached out to 11 crore people through its various service delivery programmes.

Apart from efforts to fight poverty, the NGO has worked in areas of healthcare, women empowerment, water, sanitation and hygiene, and legal aid migration -- with Sir Abed as the indomitable captain of the ship.

"From fighting a war of liberation to laying the bricks of building a nation from the grassroots, from helping the cyclone-distressed people to women empowerment, from micro credit to reaching out to the distant poor in the char areas and building big business enterprises -- you name it, Sir Abed left a mark everywhere," said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Along with the growth of Brac and spread of its activities in vast areas, Bangladesh too has made progress on various fronts, such as the massive slash in poverty -- from 56.70 percent in 1991-92 to 20.5 percent in last fiscal year -- to cuts in maternal and child mortality, gender parity in education and slowing population growth, he added.

In a Facebook post yesterday, eminent economist Wahiduddin Mahmud said one of the important contributions of Sir Abed was to spread the idea of home-made oral saline through Brac's one of many effective social campaigns.

Today, Bangladesh is a global leader in reducing child mortality, which is to a great extent due to the reduction of child death from diarrhoea through the widespread adoption of the oral saline technology.

"This is just one example of his so many innovative development ideas," Mahmud added.

Brac's main goals, which are poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor, have remained unchanged all through its journey, said its former vice-chairman Mushtaque Chowdhury.

The NGO worked on alleviation of income poverty through several interventions, one of which is through microfinance.

"But Brac does not only provide money. It brings with it training and other social empowerment programmes."

It is difficult to put a number on

Brac's contribution to poverty cuts, said Chowdhury, also a professor of Columbia University in New York.

But he said they did an exercise on Brac's contribution to GDP in 2000 and found it was 1.15 percent.

"An organisation having 1.15 percent of GDP is a huge thing. That is one of measure of what Brac has done in quantitative terms. Sir Abed, Brac, poverty alleviation and development of Bangladesh cannot be separated," he added.

Firoja Begum, who was left helpless one day when her husband left her in pregnancy until Brac came along, could not agree more of Sir Abed's impact.

Like Suifa, she too got support from Brac's ultra-poor graduation programme in 2012.

"I had to work as a farm labourer to survive in those days before I got support from Brac. I do not have to do it anymore. We have got so much from him," said a confident Firoja over phone from Satkhira, a southwest district.

The ultra-poor graduation programme was closest to Sir Abed's heart, said its head Mst Rozina Haque.

"He just could not stand to see people suffer."

He went to so many villages to meet with the programme participants and learn what they needed, she said.

"Small is beautiful, but scale is necessary -- these were the exact words of Sir Abed. This is just a small example of the larger-than-life visionary he was."

Following this ideology, they will work towards expanding the programme to more locations to serve as many most marginalised and vulnerable groups as possible in the coming days, she said.

This means, hundreds of thousands more like Suifa will get the self-belief to make something out of their lives.

"Women like me would never be able to stand on their own feet without the help of Brac. I would have never been able to walk alone without their assistance. I pray for his departed soul," Suifa added.

FUNERAL

The body of Sir Fazle Abed would be kept at the Army Stadium from 10:30am to 12:30pm today for everyone to pay respect, said Brac Executive Director Asif Saleh and Brac International Executive Director Muhammad Musa.

His namaz-e-janaza would be held there and he would be buried at the Banani graveyard.

Seven sent to jail for raping two women

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A Moulvibazar court yesterday sent seven people to jail in a case filed over gang-raping two women on Friday night in the district's Kamalganj upazila.

The accused are: Yusuf Ali, 25, Alamgir Hossain, 25, Rubel Mia, 25, Salim Mia, 28, Ravi Lal Urao, 28, Bikash Munda, 28, and Abu Sufian Babul, 26.

All of them are residents of different villages in the upazila.

The victims, aged between 22 and 24, are currently receiving treatment at Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital, said Arifur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kamalganj Police Station.

The two women hired a CNG-run autorickshaw from Moulvibazar municipality area to their home around 8:00pm on Friday, the OC said, adding that one of them had a seven-year-old boy with her.

After a while, Yusuf, the autorickshaw driver, took a sudden turn into a narrow lane, saying that the main road was bumpy ahead, the OC said, quoting the victims.

When the vehicle reached Kalanga area, the driver picked up two more passengers, despite protest from the two women who had reserved the autorickshaw for the whole journey.

As the vehicle reached Deorachhara Tea Garden, a remote area, four people got off another autorickshaw parked there and stopped the first one.

The seven then dragged the two women to a nearby forest and raped them, the OC said.

Later, they dropped the women and the child off somewhere near their house around 11:30pm and fled.

Being informed, police arrested all the perpetrators from different areas on the very night, the OC said.

Husband of one of the victims yesterday filed a case with Kamalganj Police Station accusing the seven.

Separating party from the govt?

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in the past, expressed her desire to go into retirement, however, did not give any hint about the future leadership yesterday.

The seven ministers of the Hasina-led 47-member cabinet, who were not named in the committee yet, are Housing and Public Works Minister SM Rezaul Karim, party's former legal affairs secretary; Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, former finance secretary of the party; State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Deputy Minister for Water Resources AKM Enamul Haque Shamim and Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury -- all three former organising secretaries in the previous committee; State Minister for Religious Affairs Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, former religious affair secretary; and State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Fazilatun Nessa Indira, former women affairs secretary of the party.

However, they could still be included in the committee as its 39 posts were vacant, said party insiders.

Obaidul Quader is the road transport and bridges minister. Apart from him, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque was elected presidium member while Education Minister Dipu Moni and Information Minister Hasan Mahmud were elected joint general secretaries.

Of the 42 elected office-bearers

the highest number of leaders -- 19 -- were from Dhaka division, followed by Chattogram division, 9.

Two joint general secretaries from the previous committee -- Jahangir Kabir Nanak and Abdur Rahman -- were included in the AL presidium, the party's highest policy-making body.

Former shipping minister Shajahan Khan, who hogged the headlines for his controversial activities in the recent past, was also included in the committee. Previously, he did not hold any party posts.

In the 17-member party presidium, all but Nanak, Abdur Rahman and Shajahan Khan, were from the previous presidium.

Former office secretary of the party Abdus Sobhan Golap was elected publicity and publication affairs secretary while Biplob Barua, former deputy office secretary, as office secretary.

Earlier in the day, the council session started around 10:30am at the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh auditorium in the capital with participation of 7,337 councillors from across the country.

In her address at the beginning of the programme, Hasina asked AL leaders and activists to strengthen the party further for fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the people.

"The Awami League should be organised in a way so that it can

uphold people's confidence and trust," she said, urging the AL men to be more responsible in building the nation.

When her speech was over, Hasina along with all the other office-bearers from the previous committee resigned and requested the Yusuf Hossain Humayun-led three-member Election Commission to pick the new leaders.

AL presidium member Abdul Matin Khasru proposed Hasina's name as the party president, and it was supported by another presidium member, Pijush Kanti Bhattacharya.

Jahangir Kabir Nanak proposed Quader as the general secretary, which was supported by Abdur Rahman.

After being re-elected the party chief, Hasina thanked the councillors and sought their blessings to run the party.

Addressing the councillors, she said, "I have been leading the party for the last 38 years. So you should consider my age [in the future]."

Later, she announced the names of the 42 office-bearers after being urged by the councillors to do so.

She said the names of the other office-bearers would be announced later following consultation with the new leaders.

AFM Bahauddin Nasim, an organising secretary in the previous committee, was elected joint general secretary while two members of the central committee -- SM Kamal

Hossain and Mirza Azam -- got the posts of organising secretary.

Mahbubul Alam Hanif was re-elected joint general secretary while three organising secretaries of the previous committee -- Ahmed Hossain, BM Mozammel Haque and Abu Sayeed Al Mahmud Swapan -- were re-elected to the same post. Previous committee's organising secretary Misbah Uddin Siraj was yet to find a post.

Shammi Ahmed, Delwar Hossain, Engineer Abdus Sabur, Mrinal Kanti Das, Harunur Rashid, Asim Kumar Ukil, Shamsunnahar Chapa, Dr Rokeya Sultana, Faridunnahar Laily and Sujit Roy Nandi retained their secretariat posts for international affairs, forest and environment, science and Technology, Liberation War affairs, youth and sports, cultural affairs, education and human resources, health and population affairs, agriculture and cooperatives, relief and social welfare respectively.

Previous committee's Nazibullah Hiru and Meher Afroz Chumki were elected law affairs and women affairs secretaries respectively.

In their speech at yesterday's council, representatives from seven divisions demanded punishment to those party leaders who patronise infiltrators. They said the infiltrators were creating divisions within the party and requested the party president to identify and expel them.

The council session brought some changes to the party charter.

For example, the number of members of the party's think-tank -- advisory council -- was increased to 51 from 41, while posts of assistant secretary of the sub-committees were abolished. Instead of having assistant secretaries, the party would form committees under every secretarial department.

Besides, Bangladesh Awami Matsyajibi League, a pro-Awami League organisation working for the welfare of the fishermen, got the status of AL's associate body.

Hasina also announced the names of the 41-member advisory council members who got re-elected. The AL chief would declare the 10 other names in the committee later.

Addressing a press conference at the party president's Dhanmondi office later in the day, Quader vowed to make the AL more dynamic under Hasina's leadership.

Asked about the full-fledged committee, he said, "Still some posts are vacant. We hope to start working with new enthusiasm a day or two after the full committee is announced."

He hinted that some new faces might be included in the committee.

Replying to a query on the ministers who were not included in the partially-announced committee, Quader said the party's president did not want to increase the burden on

some ministers.

"There are some ministers in the committee and their responsibilities would change," he added.

Rouhani concludes Japan visit, seeks support for Iran

AFP, Tokyo

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani wrapped up his two-day visit to Japan yesterday as Tehran, under US sanctions pressure, sought economic support from Tokyo.

Rouhani's trip to Japan, the first by an Iranian head of state in two decades, came after deadly protests over fuel price hikes in his country, where the economy has been hit by US sanctions over Tehran's nuclear programme.

The Iranian leader on Saturday held a closed meeting at a Tokyo hotel with Japanese business leaders, during which he criticised those sanctions and expressed hope for strengthening long-standing ties with Japan, public broadcaster NHK said, quoting the Iranian foreign ministry.

The American sanctions were re-imposed last year after President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the multinational Iran nuclear deal.