

UN calls for rescue of 185 Rohingyas adrift in Indian Ocean

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations has called for the urgent rescue of 185 people, mainly women and children, on a distressed boat last heard to be near the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian Ocean.

Around 70 of those onboard are children and 88 are women, the UNHCR refugee agency said in a statement on Saturday.

"At least a dozen are feared to be in critical condition with one individual reported to have already died," it said.

"Many more could die under the watch of numerous coastal states without timely rescue and disembarkation to the nearest place of safety."

Thousands of Rohingyas, heavily persecuted in Myanmar, undertake risky sea journeys from Myanmar every year trying to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

UNHCR spokesman Babar Baloch told AFP the people onboard were Rohingya refugees, and said the agency was appealing to all the coastal authorities in the area to urgently rescue them. "It is really a desperate situation," he said.

Thousands of Rohingyas, heavily persecuted in Myanmar, undertake risky sea journeys from Myanmar every year trying to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

More than 2,000 Rohingyas are believed to have attempted the risky journey to Southeast Asian countries in 2022, according to UNHCR.

And since last year, more than 570 people, including Rohingya refugees, have been reported dead or missing at sea in the region, it said.

When it comes to the people currently adrift, the agency emphasised that "a bigger tragedy is preventable with timely efforts to save lives".

"This situation once again underlines the importance of all states in the region deploying their full search and rescue capacities to avoid human disasters happening at this scale," it said.

BNP announces

FROM PAGE 1
election at all. It does not fall within the definition of polls.

The BNP leader added that the AL is making a mockery of the polls. The results are ready, only to be announced on January 7.

Rizvi alleged that 215 BNP leaders and activists were arrested across the country in 24 hours as of yesterday afternoon. At least 645 BNP activists were made accused in seven cases during the period, he added.

The BNP and like-minded parties enforced a daylong road-rail-waterway blockade yesterday to press home their demand for an inclusive election under a neutral interim government.

The BNP alleged that over 23,000 of its leaders and activists were arrested since October 28.

BLOCKADE

The BNP and like-minded parties enforced a daylong road-rail-waterway blockade yesterday to press home their demand for an inclusive election under a neutral interim government.

It was the 12th such blockade programme called by the parties since October 31, and the first since the announcement of BNP's non-cooperation movement against the government on December 20.

At least two buses were torched in Dhaka and Cumilla yesterday, said the fire service.

Criminals set fire to a bus of "Raida Paribahan" at Postogola in the capital around 2:40pm during the blockade.

The fire service has reported 289 arson attacks on establishments and vehicles from October 28 to 6:00am yesterday. At least 285 vehicles and 15 establishments were damaged in the attacks.

Of the vehicles, 180 were buses, 45 trucks, 23 lorries, eight motorcycles and 29 other vehicles.



PHOTO: STAR, COURTESY

Prince of Wales CHRISTMAS DELIGHTS AT THE OLDEST BAKERY IN TOWN

RBR

What is Christmas without a cake from Prince of Wales, a historic bakery in Dhaka, established circa 1850 by a man from Wales. And it is a story we all know. What we do not know is the extent to which the old bakery is still popular during Christmas!

The tiny, bakery is located in Lakshmi Bazaar, Old Dhaka and is owned by a former employee Sheikh Buddh Mia and is now run by his three generations. The current owner, still boasts the traditional style of baking in a mud stove fired by wood. However, Prince of Wales, even though a popular confectionary, lacks the contemporary sparkle of bakeries in other parts of the city.

Located beside St Gregory's High School & College is one busy store during winter. Jam tarts are a mouthful of flaky puff pastry and strawberry jam for those with a sweet tooth; they can chomp down a few without feeling



guilty. "Love letters" are sort of a crumbly pastry cake that melts in your mouth leaving a mild lemony hint in your palate.

Plain pound cake, cheesecake, and the special Christmas cake with dry fruits, raisins, candied fruits, and a hint of cinnamon and slivers of almond are baked by the hundreds few days until Christmas Eve. The fruity chocolate cake with a distinct flavour of cinnamon is Christmas in every bite.

People place orders beforehand, as early as December 16, yet they need to stand in a queue to get their orders processed. People come from as far as Narayanganj, Uttara, Mohammadpur and wait for hours to get their pre-ordered goodies. Lacklustre and not decorated with Christmas lights, the bakery looks ordinary but once you step inside the tiny shop, the faint scent of cinnamon and cakes baking in the wooden oven greets you. And you do

not mind standing in the queue.

Kaiser Ahmed, son of the current proprietor, explains that they follow the age-old recipe for all their confectionaries, especially the Christmas cake.

"During December and January, our bakery works round the clock. Our Christmas cake is only Tk 350 a pound, the plain cake is Tk 200, and tarts and love letters are only Tk 30 apiece. We keep the price low because we believe in the founder's kindness and goodwill as our source of inspiration.

"We even have the option to help people bake their own cakes. They bring in all the ingredients and we prepare it for them. We bake around 300 cakes in season for retail sale plus the huge number of orders placed by the people," Ahmed says.

Lakshmi Bazaar is lined with food carts, selling a wide array of items starting from momos, dosas, chaats, fruits, pizzas, and boiled eggs, and is ever busy with people flocking the lane for entertainment. You can always treat yourself to old Dhaka yummies while waiting for your oven fresh baked goodies.

It is a ritual for many to take this trip to Lakshmi Bazaar every Christmas and enjoy the goodies from this traditional bakery. It makes for a perfect Christmas gift.



Migrants cross through a pillar cut by smugglers in the US-Mexico border fence near Lukeville, Arizona, US on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Char voters may become a deciding factor

FROM PAGE 1

Voters in these areas tend to be enthusiastic about elections and their votes would significantly impact the election result, said locals and civil society members.

"These voters are more likely to show up to the polling centres than the ones residing in the town. Elections are a festival to them," Aulad Hossain Babor, president of Faridpur Nagarik Moncho, told The Daily Star.

Late Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, who was elected a member of parliament five times from this constituency from the BNP, always had the blessings of these voters.

Local AL leaders and voters say Azad is likely to fare well in these three BNP strongholds.

Aleya Begum, a resident of Samad Matubbar er Dangi, a village in North Channel union, did not know the name of the AL candidate.

"No one from the 'boat' came to seek votes in our area nor were any posters put up," she told this correspondent.

During a visit to three villages in the North Channel and Decree Char Union, only posters of Azad could be seen.

According to locals, Azad has been conducting mass contacts in those areas since the beginning of this year. Mentionable, Azad did seek nomination from the AL in November, but the party went with Shamim for Faridpur-3.

Meanwhile, the internal feud in Faridpur AL, which first came to light during the Zilla Parishad election last year, has now become more evident with one faction supporting Shamim and the other Azad.

Such divisions could result in a setback for the AL nominee as other candidates would try to cash in on it, said local AL activists.

Job creation, curbing graft AL's priority

FROM PAGE 1

The party is expected to pledge a reform for banks and the financial sector in general. Financial crimes such as syphoning off money abroad will be dealt with an iron hand.

The AL will also eliminate homelessness and rehabilitate beggars.

The 2022 declaration mentioned that the AL would take the country's power generation capacity to 40,000MW by 2030 and 60,000MW by 2041. This promise is likely to come up in the manifesto.

Bringing around 8 crore people under the universal pension scheme and senior citizens under social insurance will be prioritised.

Steps will be taken to protect the minority communities while the use of environment-friendly products will be ensured.

A faction led by Faridpur district unit General Secretary Ishtiaq Arif and Joint General Secretary Amitabh Bose is backing Shamim.

On the other hand, AL central advisory council member Bipul Ghosh, district AL Vice President Faruk Hossain, former president Subal Chandra Saha, former general secretary Syed Masud and a faction of the city AL is supporting Azad.

These two factions are now going toe to toe in conducting electioneering, mass contact and gatherings.

Though the issue has now become the talk of the town, the AL claimed that there is no division in the party.

Contacted, Ishtiaq Arif, general secretary of Faridpur district AL, said, "The president and I are working together, taking everyone along with us to secure victory for the Awami League,"

Candidates can campaign

FROM PAGE 1

to undertake for the welfare of their constituents if elected."

However, the SMS will have to be sent in adherence to the prescribed code of conduct.

The SMS will be sent through the Application to Person service provider, a third-party SMS aggregator.

There are a total of 147 A2P SMS aggregators in the country, according to the BTRC.

The candidates will have to approach the aggregator first, who will forward the text to the BTRC for approval before dispatching it to voters through the operators.

Mobile operators' officials said that candidates had already initiated

contact to avail themselves of this service, and they are ready to provide the service.

However, mobile users will be able to stop the flow of promotional texts through the "Do Not Disturb (DND)" service.

The mobile operators introduced the option of blocking these SMS for users several years back following instructions of BTRC.

To activate the service, Grameenphone users have to dial *121*1101#, Banglalink users *121*8*6# and for Robi and Airtel it is *7#.

However, if the customers activate the DND service, the flow of all types of promotional SMS will be stopped.

Christmas today

FROM PAGE 1

human beings.

Decoration of Christmas trees with colourful lights, special prayers, distribution of gifts among children, and exchange of pleasantries are the main features of the day's festivities.

Christmas carols and hymns will be sung before and after the prayer sessions at the churches on the day.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages on the occasion.

The President will host a reception at Bangabhaban on the occasion.

The Archbishop of Bangladesh, ambassadors and representatives from different foreign missions, distinguished members of the Christian community, religious leaders, and professionals will join the reception.

A group of singers will perform Christmas carols at the reception.

Later, President Shahabuddin will cut a Christmas cake with members of the Christian community.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar, and private TV channels and radio stations will air special

programmes highlighting the significance of the day.

The day is a public holiday. The national dailies will publish special articles marking Christmas.

In his message, President Shahabuddin said, "People of all religions perform their religious rituals freely. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman dreamt of building a non-communal Bangladesh."

The President called upon all to work together to materialise the dream of the Father of the Nation and build a happy, prosperous and 'Smart Bangladesh' declared by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Hasina, in her message, said, "One of the goals of Jesus Christ was to establish justice and peace in the world...Christ had sacrificed himself for the endangered and starving people, and he remains immortal in history," she mentioned.

She also called upon all to work together to build a 'Smart Bangladesh' to build a hunger-poverty-free, non-communal 'Sonar Bangladesh' as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

EC wants Jan 7 as general holiday

UNB, Dhaka

The Election Commission has requested the Ministry of Public Administration Ministry to declare January 7 as a general holiday on the occasion of the 12th Parliamentary Election.

"As the 12th national election is scheduled to be held on January 7, it is necessary to declare the day as a general holiday," said a release signed by Deputy Secretary of Election Management Atier Rahman.

The letter also sought directives to take necessary steps for declaring January 7 as a general holiday.

Earlier, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Habibur Alal announced that the 12th parliamentary election of the country will be held on January 7.

The CEC came up with the announcement for the next election schedule while addressing the nation on November 15.

According to the constitution, the tenure of the current government will end on January 29, 2024.

3 die after being hit by trains in 2 dists

STAR REPORT

Three people died after being hit by trains in Jashore and Joypurhat yesterday.

In Jashore, two people died in the early hours when a train collided with a truck at the Churamonkati level crossing in Chaugachha upazila.

The deceased are truck driver Parvez Alam, 53, and his assistant Nazmul, 38, said Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Jashore Railway Police Station.

The Chaugachha-bound truck got onto the rail tracks by mistake due to limited visibility caused by heavy fog around 5:30am, said witnesses.

They also said the gateman in charge of the Churamonkati level crossing was asleep, so the gates weren't lowered at the time of the incident.

The accused gateman, Md Szal, however, blamed the truck driver for not paying heed to his signal.

The bodies were sent to Jashore General Hospital for autopsy, the OC said, adding that the incident was now under investigation.

In Joypurhat, a man died after a train hit him in Akkelpur upazila. Nitai Agarwala, 52, of Puratan Bazar, was resting on the tracks near the Akkelpur Railway Station and was unable to move to safety in time before the train hit him, said Moktar Hossain, officer-in-charge of the Government Railway Police (GRP) at Santahar station.

He died on the spot. The police handed his body over to his family members.

Tunisians vote for new chamber with little enthusiasm

AFP, Tunis

Tunisians trickled into polling stations yesterday in the first local elections for a second chamber of parliament under a constitution pushed through last year by President Kais Saied.

Opponents of Saied argue the election is the latest step in the president's "authoritarian" agenda.

Saied, a former law professor who was elected president in 2019, seized executive powers two years later, sacking the government, dissolving parliament and declaring he would rule by decree.