

## China ready to work with new Bangladesh govt

### Commonwealth secy gen congratulates PM on election victory

UNB, Dhaka

China is ready to work with the new Bangladesh government to carry forward the friendship, said a spokesperson of the Chinese foreign ministry.

China reiterated that it would promote "high-quality" Belt and Road cooperation, and pursue greater progress for China-Bangladesh Strategic Partnership of Cooperation.

"As an amicable and close neighbour of Bangladesh, China firmly supports Bangladesh in implementing the political agenda in accordance with its law after the election," Mao Ning, spokesperson of the ministry, told a regular briefing in Beijing yesterday.

The spokesperson mentioned China's principles of mutual respect, equal footing, mutual benefit and non-interference in other country's internal affairs.

China congratulated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on her election victory and for successfully holding the 12th parliamentary election.

Meanwhile, Commonwealth Secretary General Patricia Scotland KC has congratulated Hasina on her election victory.

"My congratulations to you, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, on your electoral victory," she said.

The Commonwealth Secretariat stands ready to partner with Bangladesh to achieve national priorities and looks forward to working with the PM for the people of Bangladesh and all members of the Commonwealth family, she added.

## Blaze kills four newborns at Azerbaijan clinic

AFP, Baku

A late-night blaze at a maternity clinic in Azerbaijan has left four infants dead, officials said yesterday, as the Caucasus country's authoritarian leader vowed to personally oversee an investigation into the fire.

Rescuers working at night hauled out patients in incubators from the facility in the capital Baku and transferred them to ambulances, according to images released by the emergency services.

"Four newborn babies died at the Republican Perinatal Center in Baku, and three people were poisoned by smoke," the emergencies ministry said in a statement.

## Loyalists, fresh faces likely to get priority

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election, but got dropped in the cabinets formed in 2014 and 2018, may return to the cabinet, they said.

The AL won Sunday's parliamentary polls for the fourth consecutive time. The AL nominees won 222 and independents – mostly AL leaders – won 62.

The Jatiya Party bagged 11, and each AL ally, Bangladesh Workers Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Bangladesh Kalyan Party, won one seat.

Hasina, the longest serving prime minister, is going to be the head of government for the fourth consecutive term.

State ministers Mahbub Ali (civil aviation), Enamur Rahman (disaster management), and Shwapan Bhattacharjee (rural development) lost in the polls on Sunday.

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The ministers who performed unsatisfactorily may not be in the next cabinet, said some AL leaders.

The swearing-in ceremony of the lawmakers will be held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban today at 10:00am. Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury will administer the oath-taking.

The AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) will hold a meeting to select its leaders. The leader of the ALPP will then request the president to invite the AL to form the government.

Cabinet Secretary Mahbub Hossain yesterday said President Md Shahabuddin will administer the cabinet members' oath-taking ceremony at the Darbar Hall of Bangabhaban at 7:00pm tomorrow.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana wear smiles as the latter greets the premier on the Awami League's victory in the 12th national polls at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PTI

## Ukrainian shelling hits Russia's Kursk region

### One killed; drones hit fuel complex in Orlyov

REUTERS, Moscow

A woman was killed in Ukrainian shelling of Russia's Kursk region and drones struck a fuel facility in the neighbouring region of Orlyov, the two regions' governors said yesterday, amid an escalation of cross-border attacks.

In a statement posted on the Telegram messaging app, Kursk region governor Roman Starovoit said a woman had been killed by shelling in the village of Gornal, near the border with Ukraine.

At least five drones were shot down over the Kursk region yesterday, Starovoit and Russia's defence ministry said.

The governor of Orlyov region, Andrei Klychkov, said two drones had hit a fuel facility, injuring three and causing a fire that was later extinguished. He said three drones had been shot down.

In a statement posted on Telegram, Klychkov called the events "an enemy attack".

Russian border regions have repeatedly come under fire from Ukraine in recent months. On December 30, at least 20 people were killed in a missile strike on the city of Belgorod, 40 km (25 miles) from Ukraine, Russian media said.

Russia has also recently fired hundreds of missiles and drones at Ukrainian cities,

including some far behind the frontline, Ukrainian officials have said.

In the latest strike this week, Russia fired 51 missiles of various types, killing at least four people and hitting civilian infrastructure, they said.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's power grid operator said yesterday severe winter weather left more than 1,000 towns and villages without electricity in nine regions and urged residents to conserve power as the energy system has been weakened by Russian strikes.

Electricity consumption was at this week's highest levels as temperatures fell to about -15 °C in many parts of the country, grid operator Ukrrenerg said.

"The consumption level continues to grow due to the considerable drop in temperature across the country," it said on the Telegram messaging app, adding that electricity consumption in the morning was already 5.8 percent higher than the day before.

"As of this morning due to bad weather – strong winds, ice power was cut off in 1,025 settlements."

The weather caused significant damage to distribution networks with strong winds, frost, and a thick layer of ice on equipment, which delayed repair works, Ukrrenerg said.

## Former Bhutan PM's party wins nat'l elections

### Says media report

AFP, Thimphu

Former prime minister Tshering Tobgay's party won Bhutan's election yesterday, media reported, after polls dominated by economic threats challenging the Himalayan kingdom's longstanding policy of prioritising "Gross National Happiness" over growth.

Foremost in the minds of many who voted are the struggles facing the Buddhist-majority kingdom's younger generation, with chronic youth unemployment and a brain drain.

Both parties in the election are committed to a constitutionally enshrined philosophy of a government that measures its success by the "happiness and well-being of the people".

Tobgay's People's Democratic Party (PDP) won nearly two-thirds of seats in parliament. The Bhutanese newspaper reported, with the 58-year-old conservation advocate expected to become premier for the second time.

Tobgay's PDP "wins the 2024 National Assembly general elections with 30 seats" while the Bhutan Tendrel Party (BTP) took the remaining 17, the paper said, based on preliminary results from each constituency.

## BENAPOLE EXPRESS FIRE

### Cops want 2 BNP men shown arrested

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday submitted two separate petitions before a Dhaka court to show two BNP men arrested in a case filed over their involvement in setting fire to the Benapole Express train in Dhaka on January 5.

The two accused are Nabi Ullah Nabi, joint convener of BNP's Dhaka south city unit, and Mansur Alam, a Jubo Dal leader as per the petitions filed by investigation officer Ferdous Ahmed Biswas, inspector of Dhaka Railway Police Station.

The hearing for the two petitions has been fixed today by Dhaka's Senior Judicial Magistrate Rabeya Begum.

The magistrate also directed the jail authorities to produce Nabi and Mansur before the court during the hearing.

In the forwarding reports, the investigator said both the accused were the planners, financiers and instigators of the arson attack on the train, which was planned through a video conference.

Moreover, they were directly involved in the attack that left four passengers dead.

So, they should be shown arrested in the case, according to the forwarding report.

At least four people were killed and several others were injured as the train was set on fire on the night of January 5 in Dhaka.

The next day, SM Nurul Islam, a director of the railway, filed a murder case with Dhaka Railway Police Station against some unnamed people.

In addition, on January 6, Mansur was shown arrested in another arson case filed with Bangshal Police Station, while Nabi was shown arrested in a case filed with Jatrabari Police Station over political violence. Both were placed on remand in the cases that day.

## Dengue claims one more life

### 45 hospitalised in 24 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One patient died, while 45 others were hospitalised around the country due to dengue fever during the 24 hours until yesterday morning, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the total number of deaths from dengue this year rose to four, while total number of cases stood at 485.

A total of 352 dengue patients are still undergoing treatment at different hospitals.

Last year, the country witnessed 1,705 dengue-related deaths and a total of 3,21,179 reported cases.

## Italian junior culture minister probed over stolen painting

AFP, Rome

Italian prosecutors said yesterday they were investigating a junior culture minister over allegations a painting he owned and exhibited had been stolen and modified to hide its origins – claims he denies.

Vittorio Sgarbi, a well-known art historian and critic appointed by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, is under investigation for allegedly obscuring the fact that a work of art was obtained illegally, the prosecutor's office in Macerata, central Italy, told AFP.

## Bangabandhu's homecoming day today

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nation and the supreme commander of the 1971 Liberation War, returned to an independent Bangladesh via London and New Delhi on January 10, 1972 – 290 days after being confined to jail in Pakistan.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued separate statements yesterday, paying tributes to Bangabandhu.

The Awami League has taken up various programmes to observe the historic day today, which will begin with hoisting of the national and party flags at the party's central office and the Bangabandhu Bhaban at 6:30am.

All AL offices across the country will do the same.

Meanwhile, party leaders and activists will pay homage to Bangabandhu by placing wreaths in front of Bangabandhu Bhaban in the

capital's Dhanmondi-32 at 8:30am.

On the occasion, a rally will be held at the Suhrawardy Udyan at 2:30pm, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Besides, all district, city, upazila, thana, union and ward units of the AL, along with its associate and likeminded bodies, will organise similar programmes.

In a statement yesterday, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader urged all leaders and activists of the party and its associate and likeminded bodies to observe the programmes in a befitting manner.

On the night of March 25, 1971, the Pakistan army arrested Bangabandhu from his Dhanmondi residence and sent him to a West Pakistan jail, where he was subjected to inhuman torture.

"I was a prisoner in the condemned cell awaiting to be hanged... I was

## Polls not free, fair: US

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irregularities on the election day. Washington also condemned the violence that took place during elections and in the months leading up to it.

"We encourage the government of Bangladesh to credibly investigate reports of violence and to hold perpetrators accountable. We also urge all political parties to reject violence," Miller said.

The US supports the people of Bangladesh and their aspirations for democracy, freedom of peaceful assembly, and freedom of expression.

"Looking ahead, the US remains committed to partnering with Bangladesh to advance our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, to supporting human rights and civil society in Bangladesh, and to deepening our people-to-people and economic ties," the state department official said.

In a statement, a spokesperson of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) yesterday said democratic elections depend on credible, open, and fair competition. Respect for human rights, rule of law and due process are essential elements of the democratic process.

However, these standards were not consistently met during the election period, the statement said.

Expressing concern at the significant number of arrests of opposition party

members before polling day, the official condemned the acts of intimidation and violence that took place prior to and during the campaign period. Such conduct has no place in political life.

"Not all political parties took part in the elections. The Bangladeshi people did not therefore have the fullest range of voting options."

The statement said the UK and Bangladesh share a deep and historic friendship. Creating the conditions for a sustainable political settlement and vibrant civil society will enable long-term growth.

"We encourage all political parties to address their differences and find a common way forward in the interests of the people of Bangladesh. We will continue to support this process."

**'PROBE POLLS IRREGULARITIES'**  
The European Union has called upon the Bangladesh authorities to ensure a timely and full investigation into all reported election irregularities in the spirit of transparency and accountability.

EU High Representative Josep Borrell, on behalf of the EU, in a statement yesterday said they welcome the agreement of the Bangladesh authorities to make public the upcoming report and recommendations of the EU Election Expert Mission.

The EU regretted all major parties did not participate in the January 7 national

polls. The statement said the EU takes note of the outcome of the elections and reiterates that the long-term EU-Bangladesh partnership is underpinned by the values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

The EU condemned the acts of violence that occurred during the electoral period and urged all to refrain from violence in the post-election period.

"It is also key that the rule of law, judicial independence, due process and the right to peaceful assembly are respected and upheld in this period and beyond. In this regard, detention of opposition figures is highly concerning," read the statement.

The EU strongly encouraged all stakeholders to respect political pluralism, democratic values, international human rights standards, and engage in peaceful dialogue.

"It is essential that the media, civil society and political parties can carry out their work without censorship or fear of reprisals."

Borrell said the EU will continue to work with the Bangladesh government on the priorities that characterise their longstanding relations in the political, human rights, trade and development spheres, including the country's possible future access to the GSP+ preferential trade scheme.

## This election most free, fair

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Hasina made the remarks when her AL leaders and activists gathered at her official residence the GonoBhaban to congratulate her on the party's landslide victory in 12th parliamentary election.

The victory has paved the way for her to become the prime minister for the fourth consecutive term and a fifth term in total.

Hasina thanked the Election Commission for holding a successful election with support from law enforcement agencies, armed forces and others concerned.

She mentioned that the BNP Jamaat clique hatched many conspiracies to foil the election, adding that the BNP cannot survive in Bangladesh as they follow the advice of "their foreign masters".

"The BNP was out to foil the national election. They have some masters. They don't know the people of Bangladesh. It will not be possible [for the party] to survive in Bangladesh by following the advice of these masters."

She said the AL has no foreign masters as the country's people are its strength.

The AL chief said this election has been the most free, fair, disciplined, participatory and competitive of all the polls since 1975.

## Fakhrul shown arrested

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During yesterday's hearing at the same court, defence lawyer Md Asaduzzaman said the charges against his client in these nine cases are not specific; he has rather been named as an instigator.

The defence cannot file bail petitions in these cases until police showed him arrested, he told the court.

The counsel submitted petitions before the court in this regard so they can proceed with the bail petitions.

The court granted his petitions, and fixed today for the bail hearing.

"Fakhrul has been suffering from different ailments, including heart complications. Besides, his health condition is worsening day by day. The authorities will be responsible if something happens to him," said the lawyer.

Fakhrul was present during the hearing, and was sent to jail after the court proceedings.

On December 18, the High Court directed the Chief Metropolitan

"We have proved that the election can be held in a free and fair manner under the Awami League government."

The PM asked her party leaders and activists to work in unison for the welfare of the country and its people, adding that conspiracies are being hatched to cash in on conflicts among the party members.

"So, work shoulder to shoulder for the welfare of the country and its people... Forgetting everything..."

Hasina said that the non-participation of some political parties in the election does not matter as the participation of the masses matters.

She recalled that the people had overthrown the BNP government within a month and a half of assuming power through vote rigging in the 1996 (February) election.

"The people of Bangladesh never accept any injustice," she said.

Hasina's younger sister Sheikh Rehana presented a bouquet to her elder sister to congratulate her for the election victory.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader also spoke on the occasion.

Earlier, the central executive body of the AL led by its general secretary greeted the party president with a bouquet.

Magistrate's Court in Dhaka to accept, hear and dispose of the bail petitions of Fakhrul in the nine cases after a writ petition was filed challenging legality of a magistrate court's refusal to accept the petitions.

On December 31, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, chief metropolitan magistrate, fixed yesterday for hearing of the petitions.

Of the nine cases, six were filed with Paltan Model Police Station, while the rest were filed with Ramna Model Police Station.

The charges in the cases include killing of a police constable, illegal gathering on the street, vandalising vehicles, rioting, snatching a police weapon, damaging properties, assaulting police personnel and preventing them from discharging their duties.

On October 29, Fakhrul was arrested in a case filed with Ramna Police Station over the attack on the residence of the chief justice during a clash with police on October 28.