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SHAH CEMENT

No deputies for ministers

State ministers have no ministers above them

BAHARAM KHAN and ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

In a departure from the way she formed her previous cabinets, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina this time chose not to appoint any state minister to a ministry where there is a minister and any minister to a ministry where there is a state minister.

The only exception is Nasrul Hamid, who was the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources in the previous cabinet. In the new cabinet, he is the state minister for power, with Hasina assuming the responsibility of the entire ministry.

Save for Hamid, the other 10 state ministers have the full responsibility of their respective ministries, The Daily Star has learnt from people with knowledge on the matter.

There are 39 ministries in total.

Feuds between ministers and state ministers in the last cabinet might have prompted Hasina to form her fifth cabinet in such a manner, they said.

For instance, in her previous term, the ministry of health and family welfare had Zahid Maleque as the minister and Murad Hasan as the state minister.

Owing to a rift between the two, Hasan was moved to the ministry of information and broadcasting, where he served as the state minister for information.

Apart from this, the ministry of local government, SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



Every morning, thousands of people gather at Narayanganj's Central Kheya Ghat to cross the Shitalakkhya and get to Bandarghat on the other side. Risking their lives, hundreds gather on a single boat while having to remain cautious and alert for the entire journey. Locals say a bridge over the river, connecting the two sides, would relieve them of their daily ordeal. The photo was taken yesterday.

Taiwan votes ruling party back to power



REUTERS, Washington/ Taipei

Taiwanese voters swept the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) presidential candidate Lai Ching-te into power yesterday, rejecting Chinese pressure to spurn him, as China said it would not give up on achieving "reunification".

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden said the United States does not support the independence of Taiwan following the polls result.

"We do not support independence..." Biden said, when asked for reaction to Saturday's elections.

Lai's party, which champions Taiwan's separate identity and SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

In fetters, he attends father's funeral

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A local Chhatra Dal leader, who recently landed in jail in a criminal case, was made to attend his father's funeral in fetters by prison authorities in Patuakhali yesterday.

Nazmul Mridha, the joint convener of Chhatra Dal's Mirzaganj upazila unit, was taken out of Patuakhali District Jail to attend the namaz e janaza (funeral prayers) of his father Motalab Hossain Mridha, 62, at West Subidkhali village around 3:00pm.

Although the jail authorities opened Nazmul's handcuffs, the shackles on his legs remained, said his brother, Rasel Mridha. "Nazmul pleaded with the police to remove his shackles, but they refused. He could not even put soil on his father's grave because of time restraints put on his release."

Nazmul's father Motalab was a former president of the BNP's Deuli Subidkhali union unit and a member of the union parishad. His funeral prayer was held in their village. He was buried around 4:30pm, said family members.

Police said the court had granted Nazmul release from 3:00pm to 5:00pm.

Hafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Mirzaganj Police Station, said the shackles were kept for "safety reasons".

On December 20 last year, Nazmul was arrested from in front of his in a case filed under the Explosives Substances Act and subsequently sent to Patuakhali jail.

Snehansu Sarker, member secretary of BNP district unit, condemned the incident, saying, "Nazmul is not involved in any crime. He is just involved in BNP politics. That is why he was arrested and treated inhumanely."



Yemen's Houthis vow 'strong response'

UN envoy urges restraint

REUTERS, Washington

The Houthi movement threatened a "strong and effective response" after the United States carried out another strike in Yemen overnight, further ratcheting up tensions as Washington vows to protect shipping from attacks by the Iran-aligned group.

The strikes have added to concerns about the escalation of the conflict that has spread through the region since the Palestinian militant group Hamas and Israel went to war, with Iran's allies also entering the fray from Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

The latest strike, which the US said hit a radar site, came a day after dozens of American and British strikes on Houthi facilities in Yemen.

"This new strike will have a firm, strong and effective response," Houthi spokesperson Nasruldeen Amer told Al Jazeera, adding there had been no injuries nor "material damages".

Mohammed Abdulsalam, another Houthi spokesperson, told Reuters the strikes, including the one overnight that hit a military base in Sanaa, had no significant impact on the group's ability to prevent Israel-affiliated vessels from passing through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea.

The Pentagon said on Friday the US British strikes had "good effects". SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Hans Grundberg, UN special envoy for Yemen, yesterday, urged maximum restraint by "all involved" in Yemen and warned of an increasingly precarious situation in the region.

The Houthis say their maritime campaign aims to support Palestinians under Israeli siege and attack in Gaza, which is ruled by the Iran-backed Hamas. Many of the vessels they have attacked had no known connection to Israel.

The group, which controls Sanaa and much of the west and north of Yemen, has also fired drones and missiles on the Red Sea at Israel itself.

The guided missile destroyer Carney used Tomahawk missiles in the follow-on strike early yesterday local time "to degrade the Houthis' ability to attack maritime vessels, including commercial vessels," the US Central Command said in a statement on X, formerly Twitter.

In Sanaa, government employee Mohammed Samei said the attacks were an act of "brutal aggression" and marked a new stage of a war Yemen had endured for 10 years.

Hussein Kabsi, a retired government employee, said supporting the Palestinians was a "religious and moral duty".

"Our stance is unwavering, we will SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

PM to visit Germany in mid-February

DIPLomatic CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's first foreign visit after her fifth term as the head of the government will be to Germany in mid-February.

"We are expecting the prime minister to attend the Munich Security Conference [on February 16-18]. We have registered for the conference and informed the German authorities that our prime minister will attend," said Bangladeshi Ambassador to Germany Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan.

He told this correspondent yesterday that there are some procedural aspects that are yet to be finalised.

Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan said global leaders from around the world will be gathering at the event.

"The conference aside, we are trying to arrange some bilateral meetings between our prime minister and the world leaders, including the German chancellor and European Union president," he said.

The Munich Security Conference 2024, taking place from February 16 to 18 at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof in Munich, will offer SEE PAGE 6 COL 7

Hasan Mahmud must tread lightly

Experts say new foreign minister faces an even more polarised world

PORIMOL PALMA

Newly appointed Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud, who faces a geopolitically complex world order, will find it hard to navigate the global powers and maintain the balancing act that Bangladesh has so far been doing well, foreign policy experts say.

There was a clear polarisation between the US-led western bloc and China, Russia and India over Bangladesh's January 7 election, which was boycotted by the opposition BNP and allies.

"This gulf between the two blocs will yawn wider," said M Humayun Kabir, former ambassador and now president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

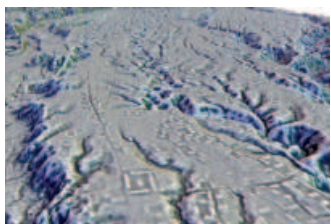
He said that China's statement, following the victory of Awami League, was clear that Beijing wants to advance the cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative, which is a global geopolitical project of the country.

On the other hand, the US statement mentioned its geopolitical project - the Indo-Pacific Strategy, which, analysts say, is aimed at containing Chinese influence in this region. "The US and other western countries have spoken of advancing economic cooperation but also the aspects of democracy, human rights, freedom of civil society and media," Kabir said. SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

"The upcoming challenge for the new regime lies in navigating this shifting dynamic."

PROF OBAIDUL HAQUE, of the international relations department at Dhaka University.

Network of ancient cities found in the Amazon



AFP, Paris

Archaeologists have discovered the largest and oldest network of pre-Hispanic cities ever found in the Amazon rainforest, revealing a 2,500-year-old lost civilisation of farmers.

The vast site, which covers more than 1,000 square kilometres (385 square miles), was long hidden by the jungle in the Upano valley on the foothills of the Andes mountain range in eastern Ecuador.

However, a French-led team of researchers have used laser-mapping technology as well SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



Doaa Abu Lashin, a Palestinian woman, says goodbye to her daughter Zeinab Abu Lashin who was killed in an Israeli strike, at Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Israel keeps pounding Gaza

REUTERS, Doha/ Gaza

Israel kept up bombardments in the Gaza Strip yesterday as its deadly offensive on the enclave approached 100 days with no end in sight.

In the southern city of Rafah, an Israeli airstrike on a house sheltering two displaced families killed 10 people, the Gaza health ministry said.

Holding up a photo of a dead girl with a piece of bread in her hand, Bassem Arafah, a relative, said the families in Rafah had been eating dinner when the house was struck on Friday night.

"This child died while she was hungry, while she was eating a piece of bread with nothing on it, where is the International Criminal Court to see how the children die?" Arafah said. "Where are the Muslims ... and the world leaders?"

The killing in Gaza and the dire humanitarian situation has shocked world opinion and fuelled growing calls for a ceasefire.

The Israeli military said yesterday its forces had killed numerous "militants" in the southern area of Khan Younis and in the central Gaza Strip. It said it was looking into the reported strike in Rafah.

Hamas said its fighters fired at an Israeli helicopter in southern Gaza's Khan Younis.

In the central Gaza Strip, residents reported intense gunbattles and tank shelling and Israeli air strikes in Al-Bureij, Al-Nusseirat and Al-Maghazi, areas housing refugees and descendants of the 1948 war.