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SECRETARIAT FIRE

Work of ministries to continue in depts for now

No journos, visitors to be allowed entry until further notice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bureaucrats whose Secretariat offices have been gutted in a fire will work at the office rooms of relevant departments for the time being.

The government yesterday also decided that journalists with accreditation cards and general people with temporary passes will not be allowed entry to the Secretariat complex due to "security concerns".

The committee formed by the Cabinet Division to investigate the fire started its work yesterday.

A secretary to one of the fire-affected ministries said he sent a representative to assess the situation yesterday. The representative reported to him that the affected building is currently without electricity and water supply.

The secretary, who requested anonymity, said they were planning to have staff from the affected ministries and divisions continue their work in other departments under his ministry.

Some officials of these ministries already started using rooms of his department on Thursday, hours after the fire ravaged parts of the heart of the administration.

"We are also considering whether we can use some rooms from other ministries in the Secretariat," the secretary told The Daily Star.

He said despite the fire, they will easily be able to

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A forensic team member examines the aftermath of a devastating fire that broke out at Building No-7 of the Secretariat in Dhaka early Thursday. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BNP activist murdered in broad daylight

Masked men shot him, then slit his throat

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Noakhali

A BNP activist was shot and hacked to death in broad daylight by a group of masked assailants in Noakhali's Begumganj upazila yesterday.

The incident occurred near Sujaitpur Purbo Jame Masjid in the upazila's Alaiyapur union after Jummah prayers around 1:45pm.

The victim, identified as Kabir Hossain, alias Chhali Kabir, 33, from Sujaitpur village in Alaiyapur union, was an active ward-level activist of the BNP.

"There were three cases filed against Kabir," said Begumganj Model Police Station Officer-in-Charge Liton Dewan told The Daily Star.

The police could not identify or arrest anyone involved in the murder till the filing of this report at

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UP member 'gang-raped, poisoned' to death

STAR REPORT

A 50-year-old woman union parishad member had been poisoned to death after she was gang-raped in the Majipara area of Narail, according to doctors and family members.

Basana Mallik was a member of wards 1, 2, and 3 of Majipara Union Parishad and a resident of Poradanga village.

She died at Jashore General Hospital while undergoing treatment on Thursday night.

Resident Medical Officer Bazlur Rashid said it seemed from the injuries that the woman had been gang-raped.

"We found poison in her stomach. More details will be known after we get the viscera report," he said.

Locals and family members said Basana was returning home after distributing subsidised goods of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh on December 24 when a local man named Rajibul called her and offered to return some money he had earlier borrowed from her.

The man asked her to meet him and as she complied and went to Daulatpur village, Rajibul along with other local men named Faruk, Chanchal, and Shafiqul raped her at the house owned by one Moktar Molla, said her grieving son Rinku Mallik.

The perpetrators filmed the act and demanded a ransom of Tk 200,000 to

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Houthis fire missile at Israeli airport

Launch drones at Tel Aviv; UN chief denounces 'escalation'

AFP, Sanaa

Yemeni rebels claimed a strike against the airport in Israel's commercial hub of Tel Aviv yesterday, after Israeli air strikes hit rebel-held Sanaa's international airport and other targets in Yemen.

The Israeli strikes on Thursday landed as the head of the UN's World Health Organization (WHO) said he and his team were preparing to fly out from Yemen's Houthi rebel-held capital.

Hours later yesterday, the Houthis said they fired a missile at Ben Gurion airport and launched drones at Tel Aviv as well as a ship in the Arabian Sea.

No other details were immediately available.

Yemen's civil aviation authority said the airport planned to reopen yesterday after the strikes that it said occurred while the UN aircraft "was getting ready for its scheduled flight".

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether they knew at the time that WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was there. Israel's attack came a day after the Iran-backed Houthi rebels claimed the firing of a missile and two drones at Israel.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres denounced the "escalation" in hostilities

between Israel and the Houthis and called the Sanaa airport strikes "especially alarming".

He said bombing transportation infrastructure posed a threat to humanitarian operations in Yemen, where 80 percent of the population is dependent on aid.

Tedros was in Yemen to seek the release of UN staff detained for months by the Houthis, and to assess the humanitarian situation.

He said he and other UN staff were about to board their flight when "the airport came under aerial bombardment".

Yemen's Houthis have stepped up their attacks against Israel since late November when a ceasefire took effect between Israel and another Iran-backed group, Lebanon's Hezbollah.

The Houthis Al-Masirah TV said the Israeli strikes killed six people, after earlier Houthi statements said two people died at the rebel-held capital's airport, and another at Ras Issa

- » WHO chief was at the Yemen airport during Thursday's Israeli strikes
- » Six people were killed in Yemen
- » Humanitarian operations in Yemen under threat

No bar for Khaleda to participate in next election

Says attorney general

STAR REPORT

There is no legal bar for BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to participate in the next general election, said Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman yesterday.

"The false cases filed against Khaleda Zia have already been settled," he said.

The attorney general was speaking at a shadow parliament organised by Debate for Democracy at the FDC in the capital.

"If convicted of killing in July, many Awami League leaders, including Sheikh Hasina, would be ineligible to participate in the election," he said.

AL's participation is not crucial to make elections inclusive, he added.

"Those who destroyed the election process, tore the constitution apart, and violated people's rights have been identified as the villains of history."

The attorney general also said the martyrs of the July uprising will forever

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Nasa makes history with closest-ever approach to Sun

REUTERS

A Nasa spacecraft has made history by surviving the closest-ever approach to the Sun by any human-made object.

Nasa said yesterday that its Parker Solar Probe was "safe" and operating normally after successfully completing the closest-ever approach to the Sun.

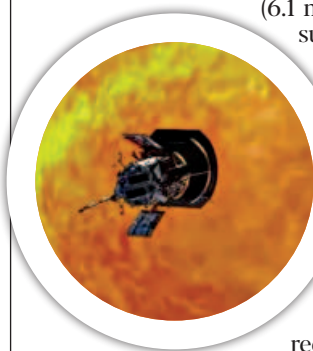
The spacecraft passed just 3.8 million miles (6.1 million km) from the solar surface on December 24, flying into the sun's outer atmosphere called the corona, on a mission to help scientists learn more about Earth's closest star.

The agency said the operations team at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Maryland received the signal, a beacon tone, from the probe just before midnight on Thursday.

The spacecraft is expected to send detailed telemetry data about its status on January 1, Nasa added.

Moving at up to 430,000 mph (692,000 kph), the spacecraft endured temperatures of up to 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit (982 degrees Celsius), according to the Nasa website.

"This close-up study of the Sun allows Parker Solar Probe to take measurements that help scientists better understand how material in this region gets heated to millions of degrees, trace the origin of the solar wind (a continuous flow of material escaping the Sun), and discover how energetic particles are accelerated to near light speed," the agency added.



3 killed in clash between rival groups

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Shariatpur

Three people including a union parishad member were killed yesterday following a clash between two rival groups in Madaripur's Banshgari area.

The deceased are Akhtar Shikdar, 42, a member of Banshgari union parishad and senior vice-president of the union's ward-8 Awami League, his son Maruf Shikdar, 20, and Akhtar's associate Sirajul Chowkidar, 35.

The incident also left at least 12 people injured, said Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Kalkini Police Station Mohammad Humayun Kabir.

According to police and locals, Akhtar had a longstanding dispute with local Union Parishad Chairman Mostafizur Rahman Sumon over establishing supremacy in

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Women mourn over a body at a hospital in Gaza City yesterday. Palestinian sources said that Israeli strikes in Gaza killed at least 45 people on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

PLANE CRASH IN KAZAKHSTAN

Azerbaijan hints at possible foul play

Preliminary probe says jet crashed due to 'physical external interference'

AFP, Moscow

The Azerbaijan Airlines plane that crashed in Kazakhstan this week suffered physical "external interference", the airline and Azerbaijan's transport minister said yesterday, citing preliminary results of an investigation, adding to speculation it was hit by a Russian air defence system.

The jet crashed near the Kazakh city of Aktau on Wednesday, killing 38 of the 67 people on board, after attempting to land at its destination in the Russian city of Grozny and then diverting far off course across the Caspian Sea.

Russia's aviation chief said yesterday that Grozny was being attacked by Ukrainian drones at the time the plane had tried to land, but the Kremlin has declined to comment on reports the plane was accidentally shot down by Russian air defence missiles.

Statements from Azerbaijan citing the investigation into the incident suggest Baku believes the plane was hit mid-air.

"Based on the opinion of experts and on the words of eyewitnesses, it can be concluded that there was external interference," Azerbaijan's transport minister, Rashad Nabiyeu, told reporters.

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