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WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM Yunus to fly to Switzerland January 21

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus will be in Switzerland for the annual meeting of World Economic Forum (WEF) from January 21-24.

"During his four day visit, the chief adviser will join different sessions of the forum in Davos and also meet the heads of various states, governments, and international organisations," Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Rafiqul Alam told a weekly media briefing yesterday.

Lutley Siddiqi, chief adviser's special envoy on international affairs, and Lamiya Morshed, principal coordinator on SDG affairs, will accompany Yunus during the visit, he said.

The WEF annual meeting 2025, with the theme "Shaping the Intelligent Age", convenes global leaders to address key global and regional challenges.

The world leaders will discuss global challenges, economy,

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Babar now a free man after 17 years in jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Lutfuzzaman Babar, former state minister for home affairs under the BNP-Jamaat alliance government, walked out of Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj yesterday after spending 17 years in prison.

Babar's brother-in-law, Shadat Rahman, told The Daily Star that Babar walked out of the jail around 1:45pm.

He was welcomed with flowers and garlands by family members and supporters who had gathered outside the jail.

Earlier, on Tuesday, Babar was acquitted of the life sentence in the high-profile 10-truck arms smuggling case in Chattogram.

In the early hours of May 28, 2007, joint forces conducted a raid on Babar's Gulshan residence and recovered four firearms – a shotgun, a .22 bore rifle, a pistol, and a Brazilian revolver – two magazines and 297 bullets in a red-black coloured bag.

Later, he was arrested and sued over the illegal possession of firearms. After the trial, he was sentenced to 17 years imprisonment on October 30 of the same year.

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Leaders of political parties pose for a photograph with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus after a meeting on July uprising proclamation at the Foreign Service Academy in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

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Israeli strikes in Gaza kill 77 after truce accord Women, children among dead; Netanyahu says Hamas backtracking on agreements

REUTERS, Doha

Israel airstrikes killed 77 people in Gaza yesterday, residents and authorities in the enclave said, hours after a ceasefire and hostage release deal was announced to bring an end to 15 months of offensive.

The complex ceasefire accord emerged on Wednesday after mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the US to stop the offensive that has devastated the coastal territory and inflamed the Middle East.

The deal, scheduled to be implemented from Sunday, outlines a six-week initial ceasefire with the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, where tens of thousands have been killed. Hostages taken by Hamas, which controls the enclave, would be freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners detained by Israel.

Israel's acceptance of the deal will not be official until it is approved by the country's security cabinet and government, and a vote was slated for yesterday, an Israeli official said.

However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hamas of making last-minute demands and going back on agreements.

"The Israeli cabinet will not convene

until the mediators notify Israel that Hamas has accepted all elements of the agreement," a statement from Netanyahu's office said. It was unclear what impact the latest delay will have on the deal.

Hamas is committed to the ceasefire agreement announced by mediators on Wednesday, senior group official Izzat el-Reshiq said yesterday.

Hardliners in Netanyahu's government were still hoping to stop the deal, though a majority of ministers were still expected to back it.

While people celebrated the pact in Gaza and Israel, Israel's military conducted

more attacks after the announcement, the civil emergency service and residents said.

Yesterday, Hamas fighters fired a rocket into Israel, the Israeli military said, causing no casualties.

Israeli airstrikes throughout the night and early yesterday killed at least 77 Palestinians, including women and children, raising the death toll to 46,788 people, according to Gaza health officials.

The agreement calls for a surge in humanitarian assistance to Gaza, and the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross said they were preparing to scale up their aid operations.

- Israel delays cabinet vote on ceasefire deal
- Hamas is committed to ceasefire deal: official
- Trucks carrying aid lining up in Egyptian border town

HMPV-infected woman with comorbidity dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 30-year-old woman diagnosed with human metapneumovirus (HMPV) and multiple other health complications died at the Infectious Diseases Hospital in Mohakhali on Wednesday.

Sanjida Akhter breathed her last around 6:00pm, Ariful Bashir, senior consultant at the hospital, told The Daily Star yesterday morning.

"She did not die solely from the HMPV infection. She had several underlying conditions, including obesity, kidney issues, and lung complications, as revealed by X-rays," Ariful said.

Sanjida's death comes two days after she was identified as this year's first case of HMPV.

Homemaker Sanjida had no history of travelling abroad. Her husband lives abroad, but he has not visited the country recently. She hails from Kishoreganj but used to live in Narsingdi.

Apart from HMPV, she tested positive for Klebsiella Pneumoniae, a variant of pneumonia, according to health officials.

Prof Md Sayedur

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FAREWELL SPEECH

Biden warns of Trump 'oligarchy'

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden urged Americans Wednesday to stand guard against a "dangerous" oligarchy forming under Donald Trump as he delivered a dark farewell address before stepping down next week.

In a prime-time speech from the Oval Office at the end of his single term in office, he warned of an ultra-wealthy "tech industrial complex" that he said could gain unchecked power over the American people.

"Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms," the 82-year-old Democrat said.

Biden began his speech by touting the legacy of his four years in office, saying it may take time to feel the benefits but that the "seeds were planted" for Americans in the future.

But he soon turned to painting a series of dangers that he said were facing the United

States, which clearly referred to billionaire Trump's close ties to the world's richest man, Elon Musk, and other tech tycoons.

Biden warned there was a "dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a very few ultra-wealthy people" with "dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked."

He then lashed out at social media firms, with Musk having turned X into a right-wing megaphone and Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg ending fact-checking operations in the US as he courts Trump.

"Americans are being buried under an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation," said Biden.

"The free press is crumbling. Editors are disappearing. Social media is giving up on fact checking. The truth is smothered by lies told for power and for profit."

He recalled a stark warning issued by president Dwight Eisenhower in his own farewell address in 1961 about the dangers of an out-of-control military industrial complex.



NID services return to EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to repeal the National Identity Registration law that placed NID services under the home ministry, paving the way for returning the NID activities to the Election Commission.

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said the advisory council has approved the EC's request to revoke the law.

"I sincerely thank the government for swiftly approving the Election Commission's recommendation. We sent a letter on Wednesday, which was passed on Thursday," Nasir said while speaking at a programme organised by the Reporters' Forum for Election and Democracy as part of a traditional "Pitha" festival.

Four election commissioners, and Electoral Reform Commission chief Badiul Alam Majumdar also attended the event.

In September 2023, the National Identity Registration Bill 2023 was passed in parliament amid objection by opposition MPs. The bill aimed to transfer the national identity registration operation from the EC to the home ministry's Security Services Division.

About the reform commission's proposals, the CEC said, "Experts have made their recommendations considering all aspects. We will respond after reviewing these."

Badiul emphasised the importance of creating a legal framework to ensure that the EC can fulfil its responsibilities properly in the future. He also stressed the need for establishing accountability to prevent the recurrence of past irregularities.

According to him, the reform commission's survey revealed that 90 percent of respondents support holding local government elections before the national polls.



WETLANDS WONDERS

A grey-headed swamphen struts through a wetland in Chattogram. Large and striking with vibrant plumages, these birds are found in South and Southeast Asia, typically in wetlands, marshes, and along lakesides, where they can thrive amid dense vegetation and also conceal themselves from predators. As omnivorous and opportunistic feeders, they prefer plant material like seeds, stems and leaves of aquatic plants as their primary food source. While foraging, they use their long legs to wade through shallow waters. They can fly, but prefer being on their feet and are known to be quite agile on ground and in water. Though the grey-headed swamphen is currently listed as "Least Concern" on the IUCN Red List, habitat destruction, particularly the draining of wetlands, can affect their populations.

PHOTO: M HAIDER ALI