

The north shivers in cold

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

Although the temperature rose slightly yesterday compared to the past three days, dense fog and cold winds blowing continuously from the north disrupted daily life across northern districts, including Panchagarh and Thakurgaon.

The Tetulia Weather Observatory recorded a minimum temperature of 10.2 degrees Celsius at 9:00am yesterday.

Elsewhere in the region, the minimum temperature was 10.5 degrees Celsius in Dinajpur, 10.8 degrees in Saidpur, 11 degrees in Rangpur, and 10 degrees in Kurigram's Rajarhat on Saturday morning.

On Friday, Tetulia recorded a minimum temperature of 9.4 degrees Celsius, while it was 9 degrees on Thursday, said Jitendranath Ray, acting officer of the Tetulia Weather Observatory.

Despite a mild cold wave, the maximum temperature was recorded at 23.7 degrees Celsius on Friday and 23.8 degrees on Thursday.

Although the sun appeared in the second half of the day, the cold persisted as sunlight remained weak.

The biting cold and dense fog have been hampering daily activities, with people dependent on daily earnings facing the worst hardships.

During a visit to Thakurgaon town, several day labourers were seen waiting for work at the Chourasta intersection around 11:30am. Due to the inclement weather, none were hired.

Khitish Chandra Barman, 52, said he had been waiting there since 9:00am,



as on other days. "But no one has come to hire labourers because of the bad weather. If I don't get work, it will be difficult to take rice home," he said.

Another day labourer, Jalal Uddin, 55, expressed frustration after failing to find work. "How can life go on like this? As soon as the weather turns a little unfavourable, people do not want to hire labourers. They think work cannot be done properly in such conditions," he said, adding that without any savings, meeting daily expenses becomes difficult.

Rafiqul, a rickshaw-puller in the town, said he went out around 10:00am despite the dense fog and severe cold but earned only Tk 60 until 1:30pm as fewer people came out of their homes. "I don't know how much more I can earn in the rest of the day," he said.

Abdul Malek, 45, of Madanhat village in Boda upazila of Panchagarh, said they started sowing maize seeds after noon due to the harsh weather. "It is so cold that working in the fields has become very difficult," he said.

Meanwhile, the number of patients suffering from cold-related illnesses, particularly children and the elderly, has increased in hospitals due to the severe cold.

The country's lowest temperature of 9 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday in Badalgachhi of Naogaon, Ishwardi of Pabna, and Rajshahi.



After collecting date palm sap by hanging earthen pots from the trees, a farmer carries the pots to the village market in Babuganj upazila of Barishal yesterday. He sells each pot for around Tk 300.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Seat-sharing talks testing Jamaat-IAB ties

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and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis say their opinions were not given due weight when NCP, LDP and AB Party were brought into the alliance. They argue that the current discontent stems primarily from Jamaat's "unilateral decision-making".

Despite the tensions, Islami Andolan's Senior Naye-e-Ameer, Syed Muhammad Foyjul Karim, believes the crisis surrounding seat-sharing among the 11 parties is "resolvable".

Speaking to The Daily Star, he said, "To form an alliance, sincerity is essential. There must be mutual respect and goodwill. There has to be a mindset of moving forward together. If one thinks, 'I am very big and you are very small,' then how can we walk together?"

Hinting at Jamaat, Foyjul Karim added, "There should be parity among the parties. Whatever decisions are taken should be through consultation. If that happens, no one raises questions or feels confused."

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Secretary General Jalaluddin Ahmed echoed a similar view, telling The Daily Star, "I do not think this is a crisis. Since there will be seat-sharing, every party should receive its fair share according to its standing. If that happens, there will be no crisis or complications."

From Jamaat's side, Ahsanul Mahbub Zubair, assistant secretary general and central publicity

department chief, said, "There is no such crisis here. Different parties joined us at different times, which is why the process is taking a bit longer."

PROMISED SEATS

Party sources say the latest round of discussions among the 11 alliance partners took place on December 28. On that day, Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman announced at a press conference at the National Press Club that NCP and LDP had joined the bloc of parties involved in the simultaneous movement.

News of AB Party's inclusion followed later.

According to sources, under the latest proposal, Jamaat intends to allocate 40 seats to Islami Andolan, 30 to NCP, 11 to Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, three to Khelafat Majlis, three to AB Party, two to LDP, three to Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (Jagpa), and two to Bangladesh Development Party (BDP).

However, as the seat-sharing arrangement was not finalised, Jamaat fielded candidates in 276 constituencies on December 29, the final day for submitting nomination papers. Islami Andolan fielded candidates in 268 seats. NCP submitted nominations for 44 candidates, AB Party for 53, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis for 94, and Khelafat Majlis for 68.

According to Election Commission data and sources from Jamaat and Islami Andolan,

Jamaat candidates -- contesting under the scale symbol -- submitted nomination papers even in constituencies it had promised to leave for Islami Andolan. Likewise, Islami Andolan candidates -- contesting under the handfan symbol -- submitted nominations in seats Jamaat was supposed to retain.

Most of the 24 seats where Jamaat did not field candidates were reportedly left for NCP.

Jamaat has also withdrawn its candidates from Dhaka-13 for Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Mamunul Haque and from Kishoreganj-6 for the party's Joint Secretary General Ataullah Amin.

On the other hand, despite not fielding candidates in 24 seats for other alliance partners, Islami Andolan candidates remain in constituencies promised to the party. The Chormonai Pir's brother and the party's Senior Naye-e-Ameer, Syed Muhammad Foyjul Karim, submitted nomination papers in Barishal-5 and Barishal-6, where Jamaat candidates are also contesting.

Two other Islami Andolan candidates, Syed Ishaq Muhammad Abul Khair from Barishal-4 and Mosaddeq Billah Al Madani from Dhaka-4, also submitted nominations. Jamaat had agreed to vacate two of these three seats, yet fielded candidates in all of them. Islami Andolan Secretary General Yunus Ahmed is

contesting from Khulna-4.

DEAL PROGRESS

Party sources say Islami Andolan initially demanded 150 seats, later reducing its claim to 120. It is still seeking more than 70 seats and is unwilling to settle for just 40.

Syed Muhammad Foyjul Karim said, "It's not that a compromise on seats is impossible. If both sides have the right intentions, if both genuinely want to bring Islam to power, and if no party in the alliance harbours ambitions of ruling alone, then this is not a problem at all."

Asked when the seat-sharing deal might be finalised, Jamaat's Ahsanul Mahbub Zubair told The Daily Star yesterday, "Tomorrow [Sunday] is the last day for scrutiny of nomination papers. We hope to finalise and announce the agreement within this week."

Expressing similar optimism, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Secretary General Jalaluddin Ahmed said, "Since we are an alliance and public expectations from this alliance are very high; we are prepared to make concessions, if necessary, to keep the alliance intact."

Foyjul Karim added, "The key point is that we have not broken the alliance so far. No one has been expelled, and no one has left. We will try to work together inclusively. But if anyone thinks they alone will go to power, then it will not be possible to move forward."

Foyjul Karim

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He earned Tk 4 lakh from waaz-mahfils, Tk 7 lakh from teaching and 3.22 lakh from rent last year.

In his tax return, his gross wealth was estimated at Tk 1.64 crore.

Foyjul, who is running from Barishal-5 constituency, owns a .22 bore rifle. His wife received 187 bhoris of gold in gifts. During the last tax cycle, Foyjul received a gift of Tk 60 lakh from his wife, according to his affidavit.

Mamunul

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and a case under the Anti-Terrorism Act registered in 2021. The former is under trial, while the latter under investigation.

The third case, filed with the Darus Salam police station in Dhaka in 2013, has been stayed by the High Court.

He has faced a total of 41 legal cases, including four for manslaughter and seven for attempt to murder, filed between 2012 and 2021. Thirty-seven of these cases were disposed of in 2025 and one in 2024. He was acquitted in five of these cases, while the rest were withdrawn by the state.

The highest number of cases -- 19 -- were filed in 2021, the year Helafat-e-Islam waged a movement against the arrival of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Dhaka, resulting in clashes with law enforcers.

Riyadh urges dialogue between Yemen factions

AFP, Mukalla

Saudi Arabia on Saturday called for dialogue between factions in southern Yemen amid clashes in resource-rich Hadramawt province, where the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) seized vast swathes of territory in recent weeks.

In a statement posted to social media, the Saudi foreign ministry called for "a comprehensive conference in Riyadh to bring together all southern factions to discuss just solutions to the southern cause".

Politics bowls Fizz out of IPL

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"We will seek an explanation from them about the current situation," said the BCB director who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "In particular, we will convey the public discontent that has arisen over the issue and how the BCB feels humiliated by the way things have unfolded. They had given clearance to one of our players to play, and now he is unable to do so. The BCB is deeply hurt over this matter," the board director added.

Questions were raised also regarding shifting Bangladesh's matches in next month's T20 World Cup, set to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

"We will first seek clearance from the ICC. This security risk will be conveyed to the ICC with due seriousness," the director further said.

Bangladesh are set to play three of their four group-stage matches at Eden Gardens -- KKR's home venue, which had already received threats of disruption from protesters if Mustafizur featured in the IPL -- and the other group game in Mumbai.

Meanwhile, in a social media post, Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul said he has "instructed the BCB to ask the ICC to shift Bangladesh's World Cup matches to Sri Lanka." He also asked the "information and broadcast adviser not to broadcast the IPL in Bangladesh".

Mustafizur's removal from the IPL had caused outrage among the cricket-crazy netizens in Bangladesh. Despite the IPL having a large following in Bangladesh, fans took to social media in support of the country's ace pacer, some even calling for a boycott of the T20 league by the Bangladesh media.

In the last few days, pressure had been mounting on KKR and its majority owner Shah Rukh Khan from ruling BJP politicians and religious leaders to release Mustafizur, citing what they claimed a lack of safety of the minorities in Bangladesh.

According to Indian media reports, religious leader Devkinandan Thakur slammed Shah Rukh for Mustafizur's inclusion, and ruling party politician Sangeet Som had labelled the

Bollywood star "a traitor". Mustafizur fetched INR 9.20 crore at last month's mini-auction, making him the most expensive Bangladeshi player in the IPL history.

Following the decision, Indian politician and current Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor called out the BCCI for "deplorably" forcing Mustafizur's removal, reiterating that politics should not be dragged into sports.

In a tweet posted soon after Mustafizur was officially released by KKR, Tharoor questioned whether the same decision would have been made had the Bangladeshi player belonged to a different religious identity.

"What if the Bangladeshi player in question had been Litton Das or Soumya Sarkar? Who are we punishing here: a nation, an individual, his religion? Where will this mindless politicising of sport lead us?" he wrote.

On Friday, Tharoor had spoken on the matter to Indian news agency ANI. "Cricket should not be made to bear the burden for attacks on minorities in Bangladesh... we should try and insulate some areas from others," Tharoor said.

"Mustafizur Rahman is a cricketer and has nothing to do with any of these things. He has not been personally accused of any hate speech or condoning or defending any attacks. Mixing these two things is simply not fair.

"If we become a country that isolates all of our neighbours and say nobody is playing with any of them, how does it do any good? ... It is purely a sporting decision, and we should not let politics come into this... We surround Bangladesh on three sides, we cannot isolate them, we have to play with them," he added.

Former India all-rounder Madan Lal also criticised the BCCI, saying the Indian board "has taken this decision because nobody can challenge them". He also urged that "politics should not be involved in sport".

Bangladesh team's specialised batting coach Mohammad Ashraful also stressed that "cricket must not

be mixed with politics", while former Bangladesh skipper Akram Khan echoed the sentiment, calling it an "injustice" towards Mustafizur and raising concerns over what it could mean for Bangladesh's World Cup games in India.

Mustafizur, who last played for Delhi Capitals and has been a regular feature in the multi-billion-dollar franchise league, could not be reached for comment.

Ukraine hosts talks with Nato, 15 allies in Kyiv

Moscow says Kyiv trying to 'torpedo' peace efforts

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine is hosting security advisers for crunch talks yesterday as Kyiv insists negotiations are zeroing in on a deal, while Russia claims a deadly New Year strike torpedoed the efforts.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said around 15 countries would attend the talks, along with representatives from the European Union and Nato, with a US delegation joining via video link.

Leaders from the so-called coalition of the willing are expected to convene in France next week after yesterday's talks.

The latest peace push comes after Zelensky announced in his New Year's Eve address that the US-brokered plan was "90 percent" ready, but cautioned that important territorial issues remain.

Russia occupies around a fifth of Ukraine and has hit its smaller neighbour with an almost daily barrage of missiles and drones that have killed thousands of civilians and displaced millions.

Kyiv has repeatedly said Russia is not interested in peace and is deliberately trying to sabotage diplomatic efforts in order to seize more Ukrainian territory.

Most mobile phone shops stay shut for 3rd day

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manufactured by local industries stayed open, confirmed a local handset manufacturer.

The manufacturer claimed that only shop owners dealing in grey-market handsets in a few large shopping malls in Dhaka and Chattogram had kept their stores closed, while most handset shops across the country remained open. Officials of the Mobile Phone Industry Owners' Association of Bangladesh (MIOB), which represents local manufacturers and assemblers, also opened several stores at Jamuna Future Park yesterday.

Since the NEIR system launch, numerous users have complained of an unusually large number of handsets registered against their NIDs.

Many users expressed concerns that someone else may have used their NID numbers, either intentionally or unknowingly, to register devices or SIMs, raising fears of identity theft, SIM fraud, and unauthorised handset activation.

Some also feared that crimes or illegal activities committed using those devices could be traced back to them, potentially causing harassment or legal complications despite having no involvement.

BTRC Chairman Maj Gen (ret'd) Md Emdad ul Bari said historical data uploaded into the system made it appear that a large number of handsets were registered under a single NID. For example, if a SIM was inserted into a handset for a few minutes for emergency use or testing, that handset's IMEI -- a unique 15-digit identifier assigned to a mobile device -- would be tagged with the NID as SIMs are purchased using an NID.

He also said BTRC regularly recycles mobile numbers that remain inactive for a certain period, after which operators resell them to

new customers. As a result, IMEIs of devices previously used with those numbers may appear linked to the new SIM owner's NID.

Besides, Internet of Things (IoT) devices also carry IMEI numbers, which can further inflate the number of devices shown under a single NID.

"We will sanitise the data phase by phase, but it will take time. Customers do not need to panic," Bari added.

He, however, said he did not



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

have the exact data on how many customers were facing an unusually large number of IMEIs linked to their NIDs, but the number could be in the hundreds.

Meanwhile, in a Facebook post, Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser for telecom and ICT, said after the launch of NEIR, millions of cloned and counterfeit mobile phones were found operating with fake or patterned identifiers on Bangladesh's networks, exposing the scale of longstanding irregularities.

He said these devices would not be shut down immediately to avoid public disruption and would instead be tagged as "grey."

Many citizens have unknowingly been using low-quality counterfeit phones that never underwent radiation or other safety tests, posing serious public health and security concerns, he added.