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India, Turkey,
Egypt envoys
meet Tarique

BSS, Dhaka

Three foreign envoys paid courtesy calls on BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman at his Gulshan office yesterday.

Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma met Tarique Rahman around 5:10pm, said BNP media cell member Sayful Kabir Khan.

On the same day, Turkish Ambassador Ramis Sen paid a courtesy call on the BNP chairman in the evening. During the discussion, the two sides exchanged views on various issues of bilateral interest between Bangladesh and Turkey, Sayful said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed were present at the meeting.

Egyptian Ambassador Omar Mohie Eldin Ahmed Fahmy also met Tarique. The courtesy meeting was held at 7:30pm, with Fakhrul and Salahuddin present.

**Cold wave grips north,
threatens livelihoods**

**Panchagarh records lowest
temperature at 8.3°C**



STAR REPORT

A persistent cold wave has gripped northern Bangladesh for several days, intensifying the suffering of poor and marginalised people and threatening their livelihoods.

Panchagarh recorded the country's lowest temperature at 8.3 degrees Celsius in the 24 hours ending at 9:00am yesterday.

The worst affected are people living in riverine char areas along the Brahmaputra, Teesta, Dharla, Dudhkhumar and Gangadhar rivers, where poverty, inadequate shelter and lack of warm clothing have compounded the impact of the cold. Many are burning straw and dry leaves to keep warm.

Farmer Ratin Chandra Das, 65, of Gangadpur village in Rangpur Sadar upazila, said a biting cold has prevailed for nearly three weeks with no signs of easing. "The cold is gradually becoming more severe. If this continues, survival itself will become difficult," he asked.

Farmer Abed Ali, 50, from Shimulbari village, warned that prolonged cold conditions would seriously disrupt agricultural production.

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'A particular party being favoured ahead of polls'

Alleges Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam yesterday expressed concern about whether a level playing field exists ahead of the upcoming election.

He alleged that the government's special protocol for a particular political party is sending a troubling signal that could undermine electoral fairness.

He also claimed that false and negative reports about the NCP are being published in mainstream media.

Nahid made the remarks while speaking to journalists yesterday after

**Educating women key to a kinder world
Says Oxford University VC Irene Tracey at AUW commencement**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Educating daughters will create a kinder world, said Oxford University Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey yesterday, speaking at the 12th commencement ceremony of the Asian University for Women (AUW).

She said the female graduates carry forward the skill of soft diplomacy -- the ability to appreciate differences and understand those not like them.

Human history has become more and more a race between education and catastrophe, she warned.

The programme, held at a hotel in Chattogram city, conferred honorary doctorate degrees on seven distinguished individuals and awarded degrees to 235 women from 11 countries.

"Among today's graduates, 51 have come from Afghanistan, a country where there is currently virtually no progress in women's education. We hope that one day they will return to

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Farmers separate chaff from Aman paddy using rakes during the Nabanna season, allowing cold winds to carry away the lighter husk while the grains collect below. Despite a good harvest, farmers are disappointed as wholesale prices remain low at Tk 1,100-1,200 per maund. The photo was taken at Katianangla village in Batiaghata, Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Mob rule, shrinking freedom mark post-July politics

Speakers tell policy dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mob violence, state inaction, and growing self censorship have emerged as defining features of the post-July political landscape, speakers said yesterday, warning that the rule of law has weakened rather than improved since the uprising.

They said as the election approaches, space for human rights and freedom of expression is shrinking, with vaguely worded laws still being used as "political weapons" amid weak accountability.

The observations were made at a policy dialogue titled "Political Parties, Human Rights and Freedom of Expression", organised by the Centre for Governance Studies at the CIRDAP auditorium in the capital. Civil society members, politicians and journalists attended the event.

CGS Executive Director Zillur

Mob culture did not arise on its own but was enabled by the state. Extortion, tender manipulation and land grabbing have continued since the uprising, with political parties still relying on "money, muscle and religion".

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN
TIB Executive Director

Narratives of the uprising are being "commodified" for political gain, similar to how the Liberation War was exploited over the past 15 years. The erosion of rights is closely tied to political culture and the electoral cycle.

ZILLUR RAHMAN
CGS Executive Director

Rahman said narratives of the uprising are being "commodified" for political gain, similar to how the Liberation War was exploited over the past 15 years.

He said the erosion of rights is closely tied to political culture and the electoral cycle.

"Human rights and freedom of expression are not isolated issues. Experiences show that as elections near, these spaces shrink," he said, warning that threats, violence, harassment and self censorship are narrowing civic space.

While acknowledging discussions on legal reform, Zillur said changing laws alone is not enough. "If laws remain vague and oversight weak, they can easily become political weapons," he said, adding that this fuels fear and uncertainty.

Expressing scepticism about power structures, he said whether they are political leaders or

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A student receives a degree from the Asian University for Women Vice-Chancellor Dr Rubana Huq at the 12th commencement ceremony of AUW in the port city yesterday. A total of 235 graduates from 11 countries were awarded degrees at the event. AUW also conferred honorary doctorates on seven notable figures for their contributions to society.

PHOTO: STAR

'Level playing field vital for credible polls'

EU Election Observer Mission chief says EC, law enforcers must not be politicised

PORIMOL PALMA

A level playing field for the election is essential, and institutions, including the Election Commission and law enforcement agencies, must not be politicised, European Union Election Observer Mission (EOM) chief Ivars Ijabs has said.

"A level playing field is essential because democracy means each citizen is equal, implying that financial or gender inequalities should not play a role," he said in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on Friday.

An 11-member core team of the EU EOM is already in Bangladesh and is meeting various stakeholders, including the EC, civil society groups, women and minority organisations, and political parties, to assess the overall election environment.

Eventually, 200 independent observers from the EU will come to Bangladesh to observe the polls and referendum scheduled for February 12.

We will not be involved in the political game, but we will watch how a result is achieved and provide a report with recommendations afterwards, as we see this as a partnership with Bangladesh.

IVARS IJABS

Asked why Bangladesh's election is important to the EU, Ijabs said, "In a turbulent world, we need stable, predictable, and democratic partners for investment and cooperation, and Bangladesh has proven it can be such a partner. This is why your election is so important to us."

Explaining the method of election observation, Ijabs compared the mission's role to that of spectators in a cricket match.

"We will not be involved in the political game, but we will watch how a result is achieved and provide a report with recommendations afterwards, as we see this as a partnership with Bangladesh," said Ijabs, a member of the European Parliament from Latvia and a political scientist.

Asked about the current election environment based on observations so far, Ijabs said most meetings had been positive, although the mission has only just begun its work and has not yet met political parties.

He said the election is particularly significant as it is taking place alongside a referendum for the first time after a mass uprising.

"We have met many active young people who stood behind the July uprising in 2024, and we will expand our daily contacts with local civil society," he said.

On the importance of a level playing field, Ijabs said it is fundamental because all citizens are equal in a democracy. While the influence of administrative and financial resources is an issue in many democratic countries, he said it was too early to make preliminary assessments of the situation in Bangladesh.

He said the EC should not be politicised, adding that the mission has already met the EC and will

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**Bring the culprits to book for attacks on minorities
32 citizens urge govt**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty-two citizens yesterday condemned the killings of and attacks on members of minority communities ahead of the 13th national election.

In a statement, they demanded that those responsible be brought to justice and given exemplary punishment.

The signatories said, "Based on media reports, we are observing with deep anger and concern that in the weeks leading up to the 13th national election, there have been successive planned killings, including the murder of minority citizens, and attacks on their homes and arson incidents, creating a public perception that these acts are aimed at destabilising the country before the election."

They cited the killings of Dipu Das in Bhaluka of Mymensingh, Rana Pratap Bairagi in Jashore and Sarat Chakraborty Mani in Narsingdi.

The citizens noted that communal harmony is a long-standing tradition in Bangladesh and that hatred against any particular religion, community, or ethnic group is rare.

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