

EC distributes UP symbols tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election authorities across the country will distribute election symbols tomorrow among contenders in the forthcoming Union Parishad polls.

Today is the last date for withdrawal of candidature.

Respective returning officers (RO) will accept applications for withdrawal of candidature. After withdrawal, symbols will be distributed as per candidates' applications.

This time, the Election Commission (EC) kept reserved 10 symbols for posts of chairman, 14 for members and 10 for the seats reserved for women.

CPD dialogue

FROM PAGE 12
CPD Research Fellow Uttam Kumar Deb is the co-author of the paper.

Dr Mahabub in the paper said, "In order to push rice exports, the government of India has taken a decision to release stocks from the FCI (Food Corporation of India) to private exporters at a subsidised rate of US \$127 per ton (milled rice) while the economic cost is US \$253. This policy will expose the Bangladeshi rice market to dumping by Indian exporters."

The dialogue over, Debapriya told newsmen, "We've to think now whether we should go for any anti-dumping measures. Our import duty on rice is only 30 percent whereas it is as high as 70 percent in India."

Dr Mahabub explained in his paper how India raised import duties on various farm products to protect its domestic crop production and market.

The noted economist said, "India has turned backwards from the policy of liberalisation initiated in the early 1990s. External trade has been brought back under state trading agencies from private traders. For staple grains, India follows a policy of subsidised exports and highly restrictive import policy."

Some discussants recalled India's anti-dumping measures against export of battery to that country and strongly pleaded for "proper protection" to Bangladesh's agriculture sector within the WTO (World Trade Organisation) bindings.

"We allowed the private sector to import rice but India imports foodgrains only through state-run Food Corporation of India (FCI). This year, private sector importers are bringing in export-subsidised rice from India without even considering availability of locally grown rice. The government needs to monitor the border constantly," said Mahabub Hossain, a former director general of Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies (BIDS).

Senior Research Fellow of BIDS Sazzad Zahir also wondered, "We could do nothing about anti-dumping measures against our battery export to India. Now what should we do about rice dumping?"

Referring to the finance minister's latest statements regarding attaining food autarky and continuous import of food, some participants pointed out that importers were bringing in rice taking advantage of Indian government's policy of giving heavy subsidy on food export.

Dr Mahabub also said lowering production cost could be another way of fighting the dumping. Presenting a comparative picture, he said Bangladeshi farmers have to spend about 51 dollars for irrigating one hectare of land while it is as low as 18 dollars in Andhra Pradesh and 32 dollars in Punjab in India, only 18 dollars in Thailand and 26 dollars in Vietnam.

"In Indian Punjab, electricity is free for tube well irrigation and free water is given from irrigation canals. In Bangladesh, the major source of irrigation is privately owned shallow tube wells and power pumps, mostly run by diesel."

Dr Mahabub recommended rapid expansion of rural electrification and subsidised power for irrigation.

However, some other participants suggested subsidy in diesel price for irrigation.

Prof Ali Ashraf noted that Bangladesh moved "faster than necessary" in trade liberalisation during early 1990s and became exposed to rice dumping by India.

In his presidential speech M Syeduzzaman, a former finance minister, stressed on ensuring food security and building up capacity for policy formulation.

Other participants highlighted the need for protecting rights of poor farmers, enhancing public sector investment on agricultural research and more subsidies within the permissible level of WTO.

The participants also included former finance minister Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, Bangladesh Rice Foundation Trustee and CEO of Pran Major General (ret'd.) Amjad Chowdhury, DG of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) Nurul Islam Bhuiyan, Deputy Chief in agriculture ministry Dr Nilufer Begum, Member Director of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) Jahangir Alam, Noel Magor, Manager of the IRR's PETRA (Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance) project, European Union representative Ann Marshall, Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Lauren Buckley, Prof Abdul Bayes, FBCCI Director A Rouf Chowdhury, Dr Abdur Razzak MP, Krishak League General Secretary Harun-ur-Rashid Howladar, former economic minister to Bangladesh mission in Geneva Syed Jamaluddin and former DG of Bangladesh Jute Research Institute SM Ilyias.

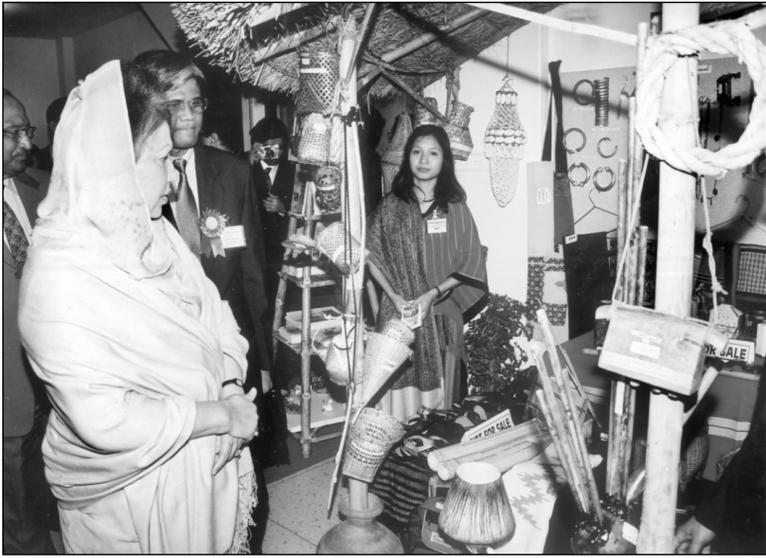


PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visits a handicraft stall after inaugurating the international seminar on "Attacking Poverty with Microcredit" at Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) in the city yesterday.

PM wants NGOs to shrug off commercial attitude

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday requested experts to suggest means of removing commercial attitude of the NGOs and perfunctory function of the government agencies concerned in microcredit operations so that they could really help people out of the poverty trap.

Activities in microcredit lending should not be limited to disbursement and recovery of credits, she said indicating changes in this field, as an international meet began here for a reappraisal of the microfinance programme.

"Attention must be paid to ensuring that borrowers get out of poverty and become self-reliant by utilising the credits properly," she said calling upon the experts to devise ways and means of extending microcredit to the real poor and ensuring that they become self-reliant by utilising the credits in a proper and planned manner.

"Credit should be combined with training and field-level monitoring and progress evaluation has to be undertaken for proper utilisation," the prime minister said inaugurating the international seminar on "Attacking Poverty with Microcredit" at Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF).

Participants from nine countries, 13 international organisations, four embassies, nine ministries of Bangladesh government, 60 different institutions and 152 PKSF partner organisations are attending the two-day meet.

Split into four plenary sessions, the seminar is being attended by the First Lady of South Africa, Zanele Mbeki, as well as policymakers, practitioners and researchers from various countries and agencies.

First Lady of South Africa Zanele

Mbeki, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, Managing Director of Grameen Bank Prof Muhammad Yunus, Chairman of PKSF Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud and Managing Director Dr Salehuddin Ahmed also addressed the inaugural session.

Assuring her government's total support to the microcredit movement all over the world, the PM expressed her conviction that it would play a significant role in eradicating poverty from the face of the Earth.

She said the role of the government in microcredit programme is quite extensive and multifaceted.

She said about 10 million rural poor people received microcredit passing its initial tests in Bangladesh, which took two decades to make a material difference in the life of the poor.

She, however, lamented that though a large number of poor benefited from the programme, only a small number of people were able to come out of poverty trap.

Khaleda Zia hoped that the seminar would be fruitful if the reasons of this gap could be identified and the measures to remove it determined.

Mentioning that her government has made poverty alleviation the main objective of all development efforts, she hoped that the seminar would be able to provide pragmatic suggestions for the fight against poverty.

The microcredit programme got an institutional shape with the establishment of the Grameen Bank.

The prime minister reiterated that her government laid utmost importance on poverty alleviation in all its programmes and for this 43 per cent allocation of the ADP was

earmarked for the purpose.

South African First Lady Zanele Mbeki in her speech appreciated the role of Bangladesh in the field of microcredit operations. She also narrated her experience of credit schemes for the refugees in South Africa.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman informed the seminar that the government had almost finalised a poverty reduction strategy for sustainable development where things like employment generation will be used as effective tools.

He lauded the organisers of the seminar that aims at analysing whether microcredits could actually reduce poverty.

Prof Yunus informed the seminar that microcredits reached nearly one crore families, the highest in the world, disbursing credits worth about Tk 4000 crore.

Contrary to the banking system where large amounts of loans turn into bad debts, repayment in microcredit operations is nearly 100 per cent, he said.

The Grameen Bank chief suggested introduction of public deposit for the microcredit organisations and formation of a regulatory body like microfinance commission to improve upon the programme.

Economist Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud noted that Bangladesh's model of microcredit is now replicated worldwide.

He reminded that a near 100 per cent repayment rate of microcredits now became "part of society's behavioural norm" which allows increasing flexibility in devising the microcredit programmes.

Delhi's alien claims

FROM PAGE 1
of the reported Indian move and how far it is justified."

Commenting on the newspaper reports, Shamsheer questioned whether the migration of 20 million people took place before or after the partition of India in 1947.

During the Liberation War in 1971, nearly 10 million people took refuge in India and in February 1972 the Indian authorities on record made an open statement that all of them had returned home, he said. "We would like to know if the Indian estimate goes back to 1947."

The foreign secretary added, "It's nothing more than an inspired anti-Bangladesh propaganda ploy done from time to time seeking to project Bangladesh in negative light internationally."

Later in an interview with the BBC Bengali Service, he said the Indian authorities had always been vague about alleged illegal Bangladeshi immigrants there. "We have always denied that any Bangladeshi lives in India unlawfully and we will continue saying so unless they can prove their claim."

Asked what Dhaka would do if Delhi starts sending the so-called Bangladeshi back, he said, "We'll then take step. But we hope no people would be forced out from one country to another. It won't be acceptable to any country."

What Bangladesh would say officially about the reported Indian plan would be decided only after an official communication between the two countries on the issue, Shamsheer said.

Our New Delhi correspondent Palab Bhattacharya adds: the Indian government has decided to

launch a multi-purpose National Identity Cards scheme as a pilot project in 13 states to help detect illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan, Indian Home Secretary N Gopalaswami said.

West Bengal aside, the other states are Tripura, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The project will cover 28.5 lakh people in specified areas of the 13 states, he added.

The decision came shortly after Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani told Tuesday's meeting that 15 million Bangladeshis and 11,500 Pakistani nationals were illegally staying in India.

Advani said illegal immigration posed a serious threat to India's internal security and immediate steps should be taken to identify and locate these immigrants and "throw them out."

The deputy prime minister said 11,500 Pakistanis had come to India with regular papers and passports but have overstayed. He asked the states to carry out special drives to detect these foreigners.

He pointed out that the federal government's powers to detect and deport those foreign nationals overstaying in India have been delegated to state governments which should not go soft in tackling this problem. "There is no reason why our states should be soft on them."

At the same time, the government has decided to strengthen internal security to effectively combat the threat of terrorism.

Revenue reforms

FROM PAGE 12
regarding the adverse impact that will follow the withdrawal of tax holiday in the country's industrial sector, the finance minister said that the commission made the suggestion because it was being misused.

In addition to that, the commission observed that such facilities did not bring any benefit to other countries, he added.

The minister said the commission found various loopholes and leakage in the government's revenue collection systems and revenue administration. "The government cannot hope for national development with such loopholes and low revenue earning," he said referring to the observation made in the report.

"The interim report focused almost on all areas, giving main thrust on eliminating the loopholes in revenue collection and increasing income of the government," said Mostafizur Rahman while talking to the newsmen after submission of the report.

Some other members of the commission including FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Haroon, Prof. Abu Ahmed of Dhaka University and Mahub Ullah of Chittagong University were present when the report was submitted.

Chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) Shoiab Ahmed was also present during the submission. The members of the commission held an hour long meeting with the minister after submitting the report.

The report has recommended that the government impose Value Added Tax (VAT) on 18 service sectors, 12 import items and one domestic manufacturing sector -- ball pen. The service sectors include bank credit cards, ATM, discount cards, coaching centres, posh clubs, immigration services, legal and medical services.

Without suggesting a tax rate or giving the full list of the items to be brought under the tax net, Mostafizur Rahman said that 15 per cent VAT should be imposed on 12

Muhuri murder

FROM PAGE 12
College, on November 16, 2001.

Of the accused, five are in jail hajat, three on bail and four others remain fugitive.

Mohammad Shahjahan, an accused, came out of hiding and surrendered before the court on Tuesday.

IO replaced

FROM PAGE 1
Meanwhile, the one-member Judicial Commission headed by Justice Sultan Ahmed Khan yesterday talked to local political leaders, lawyers and elite as part of the investigation into the deadly blasts.

Leaders of all major parties, including BNP, Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami, appeared before the commission to make their submissions.

Justice Sultan, who arrived here Tuesday for a third round of investigation into the December 7 bomb blasts, left for Dhaka yesterday morning.

So far, he has taken depositions of a total of 66 people.

Nineteen people were killed and over 200 injured in the serial bombings of the four cinema halls here on December 7 during Eid vacation.

Goswami murder

FROM PAGE 12
Later, a murder case was filed with Dhanmondi police station.

In the case, three eye witnesses gave judicial statements before the CMM's Court on different dates.

Camel jockey back home

NAIMUL HAQ

It was a reunion, long expected and eagerly awaited.

Fifteen-year-old Masud and his family got reunited yesterday after about 10 years.

His father Bachchu Mollah broke into tears as he walked into the room where Masud, used as a camel jockey for years in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), was waiting to be handed over to his family. He was trafficked to the UAE at the age of five.

The reunion took place at the office of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), whose initiative made it a reality.

"I have finally found my son and I cannot express how happy I am now," an emotion-charged Bachchu Mollah told this correspondent at the BNWLA office.

Mollah, a carpenter, along with his 'missing child' went back to his village Dewanjikandi in Matlab upazila of Chandpur yesterday evening. More than 500 villagers were waiting with flowers and sweets to welcome the boy.

Masud's mother was too sick to travel to the city. So she stayed back home while other members of the family were busy decorating their house before Masud returned. He has four sisters and two brothers.

The boy was rescued by the BNWLA more than a year ago. One Syed Mia had stolen him from a relative's house in the capital about 10 years back and had sold him to a company owning camels for races in the UAE.

"I won many races as a jockey and my employer, an Arab, paid me 350 riyals per month. But the entire amount was deposited with Syed

Ctg mayor, two others get bail in graft cases

UNB, Chittagong

Metropolitan Session Judge's court yesterday granted ad interim bail to Mayor of Chittagong ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury and two others accused in three corruption cases.

Two other accused are Chief Engineer of City Corporation Rezaul Amin and contractor Mohammad Shafi. The trial of the cases was set to begin on February 10.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed the cases accusing them of misappropriation of Tk 14,00,00,000 of public funds. Investigation officer submitted the charge sheet against them.

Mist and cold

FROM PAGE 1
remain unchanged in the next two or three days. Quoting the committee of weather specialists he said, "From January 11 the temperature might rise. But the temperature would fall again on January 15-16."

The dense fog has greatly worsened the situation, Rahman added. Meanwhile, the lowest temperature recorded in the country yesterday was 7.9 degree Celsius in Chuadanga, while the highest was 25.8 in Teknaf.

The capital also felt the chill yesterday, with the mercury dropping to 12.2 degree Celsius. The met office forecasted that thick fog would persist over the northern parts of the country for the next 24 hours, and a mild to medium cold wave would sweep over Jessore, Kushtia, Sathkira, Rajshahi and Sylhet during the next 36 hours.

Meanwhile, at least 51 persons died, including eight in the capital, due to the cold wave in the last 8 days, according to unofficial sources.

An unidentified beggar was found dead yesterday at Farmgate park of the city at 11.30 a.m. Abul Khayer of Tejgaon PS took him to the Dhaka Medical Hospital and doctors declared him dead.

Our Khulna correspondent reported that the cold wave has claimed the lives of 15 people during the last eight days in Keshabpur Unazilla of Jessore district, and one person died in Bagerhat. Over 400 people, including children, are undergoing medical treatment in Keshabpur and Jessore with different cold-related diseases.

Those who have died are Sarat Das 85, Komarpole village, Mozaher Mollah 90, of Bhalukghar, Kamu Bibi 74, of Bhogati, Yasin Morol 91, of Bhogati, Rabbi 1, son of Nurul Islam of Bhogati, Bilashi 82, of Bhogati, Dulal Mandal 55, of Patharghata, Kalipada 104, of Mirzanagar, Nitya Ghosh 76, of Sattaria, Moramtaz Ali 69, of Athanda, Akbar Ali 76, of Jhikre, Mahajan Morol 72, of Nipakathi, Akher Bibi 90, of Bhogati, and a nine month old son of Buddhadeb of Bhogati.

Our Barisal correspondent reported that the cold wave claimed 13 lives in Barisal and other southern districts over the last few days.

They are identified as Harol Roy 60, and Sharat Bala 30, of Agailjhora, Anil Hazra 49, of Pairsaahat, Asia Khatun 46, Ahad Ali 76, Amzad 60, and Joesh Bala 80, of Katalia in Jhalakathi, Issa Mollah 70, Ayub Ali 80, of Betagi, Barguna, Kalachan Das 60, and Khalek 60, of Dumki, Patuakhali, Alema Khatun 70, and Rabi Kanta Shil 75, of Borhanuddin, Bhola.

According to UNB, an elderly woman, Abishkar Begum, 75, died Tuesday of severe cold at village Diara Chandi Poldia in Sadar upazila of Manikganj.

Euro missions

FROM PAGE 1
political secretary to Sheikh Hasina.

Earlier, an ambassador of a European country told The Daily Star that many European nations have been following with great attention the treatment of politicians under arrest in Bangladesh. They want to have an assessment of how the democratic institutions work here.

Water prices

FROM PAGE 1
The officials said WASA needs to raise its water tariff even more to pay back the loans against foreign-aided Shayedabad plant that presently saves 15 per cent of WASA's total water supply.

Besides, inflation and other factors need to be adjusted to water tariffs, they said.

WASA has already proposed further increase in the tariff rates, which, after getting approval of the government, may come into effect from July 1 this year.

Increase over 5 per cent requires prior approval of the government.

Dhaka WASA currently supplies 150 crore litres of water through its pipeline in the capital city, against an estimated demand of 190 crore litres.

Although supply is much lower than actual demand, WASA relaxes its water supply in winter months due to decline in consumption.

BNP: CEC crossed the line

FROM PAGE 1
the troops have a limit to bear with all these time-consuming tasks.

He said the government has ensured adequate law enforcement by the BDR and police. It is also providing other logistics to the Election Commission to ensure a smooth and peaceful voting.

Another senior minister took a swipe at Syed. "How could a long serving top bureaucrat like MA Syed seeks army deployment in the Union Parishad elections? He held important government positions for long and is still in a constitutional office. His demand is ridiculous..." the minister said.

Government policymakers said the army is usually deployed in general elections as it is a one day affair.

Sources said the policymakers yesterday again discussed the CEC's demand and noted that the CEC should have thought about the viability and consequence of such a deployment.

Political Secretary to the Prime Minister MA Harris Chowdhury said it would not be wise to deploy army because people do not expect army to get involved in the polls to the lowest tier of the local government now that the law and order is back to normal.

He said the government has been extending all logistic supports

Army pullout

FROM PAGE 1
drawn scathing criticism for the government.

Sources at the Prime Minister's Office said the army also feels that troops no longer need to be camped at many thanas and in several districts as crime incidents in those areas have drastically reduced.

They said the army drive would continue as usual in district headquarters and specific upazilas and also some remote areas. If needs be, the drive would be intensified.

to the EC and will provide adequate supports.

"There is no example of deployment of army in any Union Parishad elections since the British regime," he added.

Asked whether the government is violating the constitution by turning down the CEC's plea, he said his claim is unfounded. "Although I am not a constitution expert, I can say that his constitutional interpretation is not correct. Rather his comments are misinterpretation of the constitution. It is not correct that the government can support the Election Commission only by providing army."

Harris Chowdhury said the current law and order is far better than anytime before and it is not at all required to deploy army in the upcoming UP polls. Deployment of army in the UP polls may cause alarm among the people.

Meanwhile, sources at the home ministry said that all law-enforcement agencies have been ordered to get ready for election duty. Besides, civil administration at district and upazila levels has also been asked to extend all possible support to the EC for holding a peaceful, fair election.

Charity trap

FROM PAGE 12
convinced Ali to sign a bond on November 22 last year for the concert. Ali is believed to be illiterate.

None of the youths let Shabana or her father know about anything further.

The bond, a copy of which was collected by The Daily Star, does not give details on the youths' identity or whereabouts. Nor was any bank account opened for the girl.

When Ali called Galib, one of the organisers, by cell phone to inquire about the bond, he threatened him (Ali) with death and asked him to show up at the concert as scheduled.

They said the CEC has already been conveyed the message that government would provide all logistical support to the EC, except army deployment. If necessary, a high-profile delegation would formally meet the CEC.

Shazneen case

FROM PAGE 1
for one and a half hours yesterday, Latufur Rahman turned down the contention of lawyers of accused Hasan, Minu and Parvin that Hasan was present during Shazneen's janaza and burial. "Hasan did not attend the janaza and burial of Shazneen" he said.

Latufur Rahman also told the court that Hasan, Minu and Parvin were involved in the incident. He also gave evidence against them.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, the youngest daughter of Latufur Rahman, chairman of Transcom, was raped and murdered at their Jamaat-e-Islami, appeared before the commission to make their submissions.

Justice Sultan, who arrived here Tuesday for a third round of investigation into the December 7 bomb blasts, left for Dhaka yesterday morning.

So far, he has taken depositions of a total of 66 people.

Nineteen people were killed and over 200 injured in the serial bombings of the four cinema halls here on December 7 during Eid vacation.

Goswami murder

FROM PAGE 12
Later, a murder case was filed with Dhanmondi police station.

In the case, three eye witnesses gave judicial statements before the CMM's Court on different dates.