

Time limit for draft voter list extended to March 30
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) Secretariat yesterday extended the time limit for preparing the draft voter list to March 30, as the task cannot be completed by its deadline today.

This is for the fourth time the EC Secretariat extended the time for the task. Previous scheduled dates were February 21 and March 12.

"The task for preparing the draft voter list must be completed by March 30," said a press release issued by the EC Secretariat yesterday.

However, uncertainty hangs

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PM makes first trip to Delhi today

REZAUL KARIM from New Delhi with REAZ AHMAD in Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia embarks today on her first state visit to India since assuming office in 2001 with Bangladesh pinning high hope on opening up a new chapter in Indo-Bangla bilateral relationship and keeping the issues of yawning trade imbalance and water sharing high on the agenda.

Seeking warmer relations and resolving of longstanding issues with the world's largest democracy, Khaleda will reach New Delhi at 3:00pm on a three-day visit to India, sending signals to seize the opportunity of engaging and improving the relationship.

Her official entourage includes Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and Foreign Affairs Adviser Reaz Rahman. Besides, a 40-strong high-level business delegation is also accompanying her as a sign of Bangladesh's willingness to further trade and business with its economically excellent neighbour.

Diplomatic sources in Delhi

said Khaleda Zia and her Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh hope to usher in a new era in Indo-Bangladesh relations when they meet tomorrow in New Delhi.

Speaking to the press last night, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin said, "We expect positive outcomes from this goodwill visit. We hope this will lead us to a new chapter of bilateral relations."

Upon having a last-minute consultation with the PM yesterday afternoon, he told newsmen at the belated briefing that Bangladesh

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Cellphone firms now asked to record all text messages
ABU SAEED KHAN

The government has created a fresh controversy by issuing "a grossly inconsistent" revised directive to tap mobile phone calls, prompting the operators to prepare for a legal battle against it.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) asked the mobile phone operators to record all conversations as well as to archive all text and multimedia messages and to make them available to the government whenever it wants.

Muhammad Omar Farooq, BTRC's chairman, sent a confidential

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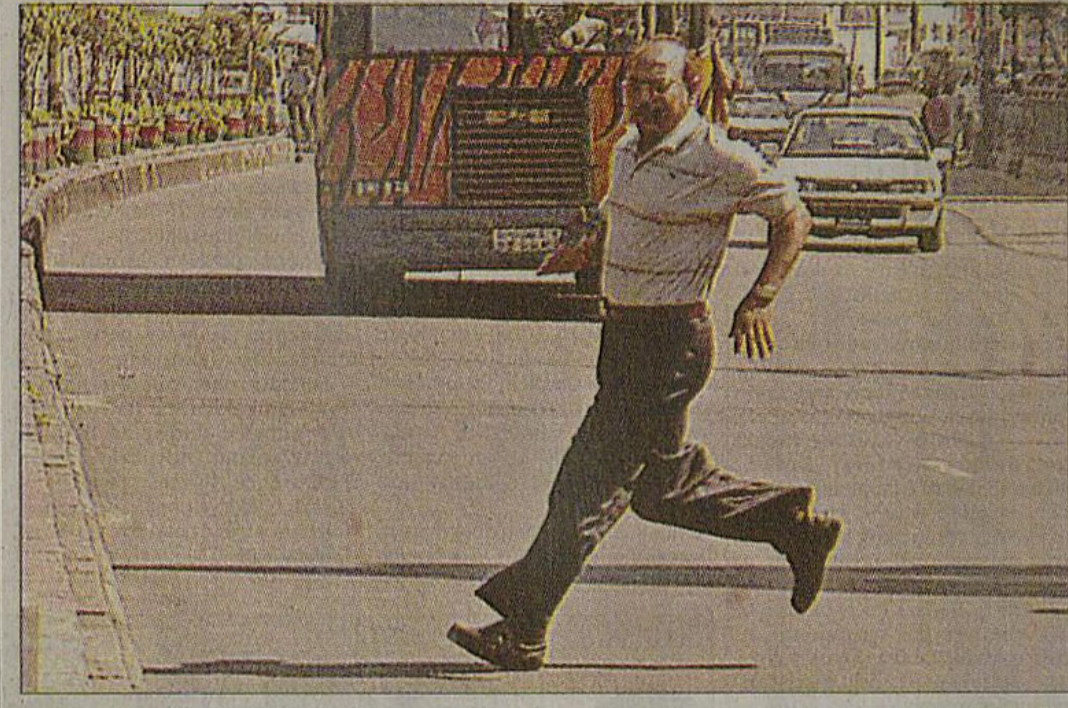


PHOTO: STAR
A man darts across Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in front of a speeding bus near Paribagh in the city yesterday. Every day the pedestrians including school-goers risk their life to cross the road in absence of a foot-over-bridge.

Two held in Ctg with AK47 rifles
CU CORRESPONDENT

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested two close accomplices of top-notch Shibir cadre Nasir and recovered two AK47 rifles, 197 bullets, three magazines and two passports on Saturday.

One of the AK47 rifles was reportedly among the six that went missing during the biggest-ever haul at CUFL jetty on April 1, 2004, Rab sources said.

The arrestees were identified as

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PRINCIPAL WAIVER TO DEFAULTERS BB lifts provision Bankers still want more clarification

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has withdrawn part of its controversial circular related to rescheduling of defaulted loans.

The BB in an amended circular yesterday withdrew the provision that allowed the banks to waive the principal amount of a defaulted loan if no further facility is extended to the defaulter. Bankers appreciated the move but also demanded that the central bank should withdraw other clauses of the circular to save nationalised commercial banks from being used for election financing.

The Bangladesh Bank in a circular on February 14 said, "If there is any principal waiver, no fresh facility will be allowed till the full settlement of compromise amount."

The BB in its yesterday's circular declared the clause as void.

Following the BB's 14th February circular a number of public and private bank officials told The Daily Star that the provision would put the banks under pressure for waiving both the

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Participation of all parties needed for acceptable polls
Says Chammas
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Participation of all political parties in the upcoming general elections is needed for acceptable polls, US Chargé d'Affaires in Dhaka Judith A Chammas said yesterday.

"I hope all political parties will exercise their democratic responsibilities and rights in the general election," Chammas said. She was speaking at a meeting organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) at its conference room.

Termining the general election a 'critical' one and forecasting that the polls will be observed widely

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TATA INVESTMENT Gas pricing key to reaping benefit

Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud submits report to BoI
STAR REPORT

Gas pricing is the key to determining Bangladesh's net economic benefit from Tata's investment, eminent economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud has pointed out.

He also saw no reason to offer any tax-breaks or other incentives

operations will be equal to the amount of total subsidy if given at \$1 per mcf of gas to the Indian giant, he observed in a report prepared for the Board of Investment (BoI) which he submitted yesterday.

Prof Mahmud was also critical of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) report on Tata investment proposal for making highly exaggerated claims of the indirect benefits of Tata investment in Bangladesh.

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Sikri pins high hope on trade boost

REAZ AHMAD and REZAUL KARIM

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Veena Sikri pinned high hope on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's India visit beginning today in boosting trade between the two South Asian neighbours.

In a recent exclusive interview with The Daily Star at her office, the Indian envoy expressed hopes that signing of separate accords on trade and investment protection would see the Indo-Bangla

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Veena Sikri

NEW MOORING TERMINAL PRIVATISATION Body formed to work out tender strategy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday formed a high-powered committee to work out strategy for calling international tender for the management of the under-construction New Mooring Container Terminal by private operators.

The 12-member committee headed by Lutful Khabir, member (operation) of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA), has been asked to prepare necessary documents and submit a report in 15 days.

The committee was formed at a meeting chaired by Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain between the government and the country's leading chambers and trade bodies.

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury has been opposing the idea of privatising the terminal as "it goes against the act of the CPA".

The committee also comprises

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Business bodies for immediate privatisation steps

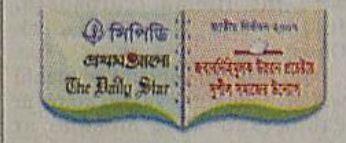
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's leading chambers and trade bodies have urged the government to take immediate steps to privatise the operation and management of the under-construction New Mooring Container Terminal of Chittagong Port.

Leaders of the chambers and trade bodies in a statement yesterday also asked the government to appoint a competent operator at the terminal following the experiences of neighbouring countries for competitive facilitation of Bangladesh trade.

For efficient cost-effective and speedy handling of the container terminals, management and operation of a number of terminals of these countries have been handed over to private sector, while owner

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Citizen's dialogue begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The citizens' dialogue begins today with an aim to bring the development issues to the fore and to mobilise public opinion in favour of nominating the honest and competent persons to contest the next general election.

Organised jointly by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, the dialogue titled 'National election 2007: The civil society initiative in accountable development efforts' will start at 2:30pm at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel Ballroom.

Through a dialogue process involving a cross section of stake

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MGH Group wishes the very best to the meeting between Bangladesh and Indian Prime Ministers. The ever-growing trade co-operation between the two countries is what encouraged us to invest into MGH's regional setup, including six offices in India.