

Dhaka Day by Day

Old Town, New Hopes

by S. Bari

His lung hitched up to his knees, paan stains on his lips, a contented old man squats on his verandah. "I voted for the boat," he smiles toothlessly. In a long patient line, dozens of women, their partings red with sindoor, wait for their turn to vote. They are all Awami League supporters," whispers a bystander. Men



A little white prayer caps and their wives in burkhas queue up separately. The old town of Dhaka, that maze of alleys and courtyards and buildings heavy with old secrets, is all abuzz with election elation. In these ancient streets, new hopes are taking their first breath. Says Sala-huddin, a long-time resident of the area, "I haven't seen such free elections since 1962. Today, people are going to the polls happily. Just a while ago, elections meant sirens and motorbikes and violence. This time the women could go without any fear." At the Frashgunj school polling station, the police officer outside beams at the end of the day. "No problems," he answers, when asked if there has been any trouble. "No, our station was completely peaceful." His pride in the fact shines as bright as the brass buttons on his uniform. A proprietary air marks the voting; presiding officers and policemen alike display the smooth proceedings with a housewifely pride. "All the young people are BNP," volunteers one youth with a grin. The old town has a large Hindu population, most of whom voted Awami League, but the rivalry today is unaggressive, the atmosphere fairly relaxed. Every rickshaw puller and every shopkeeper has gone to vote. What is uppermost in everyone's mind is this incredible opportunity to practise their right

to make the future of a nation. A 93-year-old woman climbed hesitantly to the first-floor women's booths, to cast her vote with a trembling hand. A man in a wheelchair made the arduous trip to the centre. Anybody who was anybody wanted to vote. Anyone who hadn't was obviously a victim of the caprices of the voters' list.

Encouraging numbers of women crowd the centres, even in this conservative part of town. "I'm so pleased it went well. I never imagined it would be like this," enthuses Mrs. Hasena Imrat, a local housewife. What did she hope for from these elections? "For peace. For my children to get a decent education." People's wants are often so simple, and yet so elusive.

As we spoke with people lining up, a police officer requests us not to talk to voters before they cast their ballots. "I know you are journalists, but others might think you are influencing potential voters," he said politely. Impressed at this devotion to duty, we decide to interview some more policemen. "No, I didn't vote" says Parvez, a stout smiling officer.

"We're on duty; that's sixty thousand votes gone." But there is no rancour in his voice.

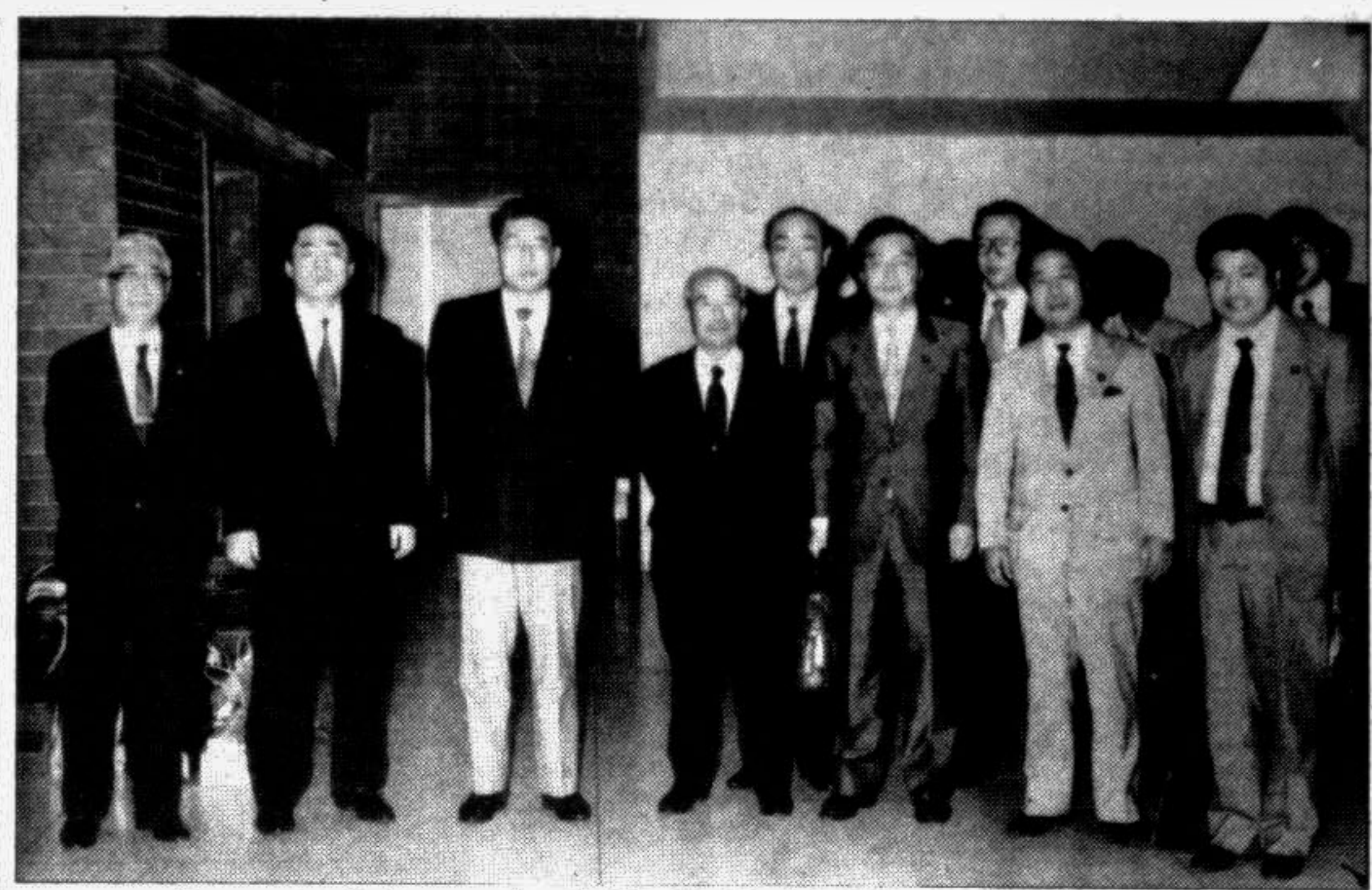
"You know, they offered me one hundred taka to join them. But my vote is priceless, isn't that right?" Philosophises a rickshaw puller. The festive feeling rings through the narrow roads coloured with campaigning banners. As the night grows darker, jubilant supporters of victorious candidates sing in the streets, those streets which have seen nearly all of this city's history, and old Dhaka echoes with new hopes.

Hearing of Moudud's case continues

Hearing of the arguments on the detention case of former Vice President Moudud Ahmed continued Thursday before a single judge bench of the High Court Division. Mr. Justice Bimalendu Bikash Roy Chowdhury, reports BSS.

Mr. Aminul Haq was still arguing in support of the detention. The court adjourned the hearing on February 24 on the prayer of both the sides till Thursday.

Barrister Rafiqul Haq appeared for Moudud Ahmed and was assisted by Mr. Azizul Haq, Mr. Aminul Haq, Attorney General appeared for the state and was assisted by Mr. Abdul Wadud Bhutyan, Additional Attorney General. The hearing resumes on March 4.



Japanese poll observers headed by Mr Hiroichi Fukuda (centre) in Dhaka.

Japanese observers hold press confce today

The nine-member election observer group from Japan headed by Mr. Hiroichi Fukuda, a member of the Japanese Parliament and brother of the ex-Prime Minister, Mr. Takeo Fududa, will hold a Press Conference today (Friday) at 9:30 am at Sonargaon Hotel Ball Room-1 on their observations of Bangladesh Parliament Election. Journalists from all the news media have been invited to attend the conference, says a press conference.

Food situation reviewed

The overall food situation of the country was reviewed at a high-level meeting of Food Planning and Monitoring Committee (FPMC) held in Dhaka Thursday with Food Adviser Prof Iajuddin Ahmed in the chair, reports BSS.

Pollution in Karnaphuli river termed alarming

By Staff Correspondent

The ESCAP has warned of the consequences of pollution in the Karnaphuli estuary if industrial and urban development in the Chittagong area continue unchanged. "It is alarming", it said in a report.

Next to population the most important ecological variable affecting the environment in Bangladesh is water. The ecological significance of changes in the water regime can be traced to agricultural production, fisheries production, desertification, health, forest destruction, domestic and industrial disruption. Any change in the normal hydrological regime can have widespread implications.

Each year about 26,000 sq. km or 18 per cent of the country is flooded by monsoon rains. During severe floods, the affected area could be more than 52,000 sq. km or 36 per cent, equivalent to 60 per cent of the net cultivable area. The floodplain ecosystem has adapted to this flooding regime over the millennia. The waters seep into the soils and percolate down to recharge the underground aquifers. Haors, beels and baors are filled providing spawning habitat for fish, winter habitat for migratory birds from Europe and Asia and groundwater recharge well into the dry season. The silt load carries nutrients to fertilize the soils. The onset of the floods initiates spawning cycles in fish, each species seeking out specific habitats. Finally as the pressure of the fresh water reaches the coastal area, both on the surface and underground, it pushes back the inland intrusion of salt water.

Most of the water originates outside the country, the Ganges flows for about 2,600

kilometres, of which, only 230 km. lie in Bangladesh. The Brahmaputra, from its origin in Tibet to the confluence with the Ganges is 2,800 kilometres, yet the river flows for only 270 km in Bangladesh. Over the years, the hydrologic regime and the natural processes have been changed. Vegetation in the Himalayas has been reduced causing faster runoff resulting in shorter flood surges and lower flows in the dry seasons. Peak discharge during monsoon season for the Brahmaputra is 121,000 cubic metres per second, yet drops to 3,650 in the winter.

Forest vegetation on the Barind Tract in the northwest and in the Madhupur Tract, north of Dhaka, has been greatly reduced, decreasing the amount of water held by the surface soils and reducing percolation into the aquifer. Dams have altered the hydrological flow. The Farakka Barrage, in India, has reduced dry season flows in that portion of the Ganges which flows through Bangladesh, by 50 per cent. Haors, beels and baors have been drained or cleared for agriculture, reducing fish spawning habitat and the amount of water percolating into the underground aquifers during the dry season. Most of the haors and beels of the Ganges-Brahmaputra floodplain have been converted into agricultural land; Chalan Beel, in the northwest, once covered more than 100,000 hectares and has been reduced to less than 2,500.

Embankments, road construction, drainage channels,

river training and river closures have all changed the normal flow patterns affecting fish reproduction and utilization. The direct loss of fish harvest from flood-land removal has been estimated at 37 kilograms per hectare. Studies of the effects on fisheries, from submersible embankments in beels and haors, have postulated reduced production and dominance by low value species.

Finally, with lower dry season flows there is less pressure counteracting the landward migration of salt water into underground aquifers in the coastal areas.

Industrial development is being encouraged. Many of the polluting industries are located along major waterways and effluent disposal takes place, in most cases, without pre-treatment. The large volume of effluent generated daily by polluting industries in urban areas such as Dhaka, Chittagong, contain both degradable and persistent organic and inorganic wastes and toxic metallic compounds and chemicals. Self sufficiency in agriculture and flood control are two of the main priorities of government planning. The current Five Year Plan has among its objectives:

To provide a timely and dependable supply of irrigation water and

To improve drainage and control floods, salinity, tidal water intrusion and river erosion.

The plan hopes to increase the irrigable area to 3.8 million hectares which is over 87 per cent of the potential area. Furthermore, an extent of 3.2 million hectares is to be brought under flood control and improved drainage. The National Water Plan has targeted groundwater use to increase by 200 per cent. The irrigable area is to be further increased by the use of low-lift pumps, deep and shallow tubewells and hand tubewells. Development plans for the Barind Tract call for up to 1,000 new deep tube wells to tap the groundwater reservoir.

Symptoms of ecological change

In any equation when one of the major variable has been altered to the extent that the hydrological regime has been changed as outlined above, other quantities in the equation must adjust. Symptoms of ecosystem adjustment are evident in Bangladesh.

Wells in the rural areas were originally hand dug to tap ground water and thus were relatively shallow. They provided adequate water supply under normal conditions.

Directive to take proper care of diabetic patients

Presidential Adviser in charge of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women's Affairs and Youth and Sports and President of Bangladesh Diabetic Association Alamgir M A Kabir inaugurated the newly constructed seventh and eight floors of the main building of Bangladesh Diabetic Hospital in Dhaka on Thursday, reports BSS.

The Bangladesh Diabetic Association has extended the building to provide more facilities to the diabetic patients. It would help greatly to meet the ever increasing demands of treatment of diabetic pa-

tients. After inauguration of the building, the Adviser visited its different rooms and wards and directed the concerned officials to take proper care and attention of the patients.

Gaffar arrested

KHULNA, Feb 28 : Police arrested former Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism H M A Gaffar late last night from a house at Shamsur Rahman road in Khulna City, reports BSS.

Mr. Gaffar who was absconding since the fall of Ershad regime contested the parliamentary polls on JP ticket from Khulna-5 constituency but lost to Awami League candidate.

Japanese team meets Hasina

The visiting Japanese parliamentary delegation Thursday met with Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at her 32 Dhanmondi residence, party sources said, reports UNI.

Japanese contribution in the economic development of Bangladesh came up for discussion in the meeting. The two sides stressed continued friendly relations between the two countries.

Bangladesh troops safe

According to the latest information received from Saudi Arabia, all members of the Bangladesh Army contingent there are safe, an ISPR press release said Thursday, reports BSS.

Reception

Deputy High Commissioner of India Satyabrata Paul hosted a reception at the chancery premises in Dhaka on Thursday to say goodbye as he completed his assignment in Bangladesh.

He is leaving for home soon. Education Adviser Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, high Government officials, diplomats, journalists and elites of the city attended the grand reception.

Qul khwani

The quikhwani of S.C.G. Samdani, the News Editor of the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) will be held today after Asr prayer at his residence, 3/C, old Sobhanbag Officers Colony in the city, reports BSS.

His relatives, well wishers, friends and admirers have been requested to attend the quikhwani.

Mr. Samdani died of a massive heart attack on Tuesday night. He was 50. He left behind one daughter, his wife and a host of well wishers, friends and admirers. He was born in a respectable Muslim family at Chandpur district.

PROGRAMME

The Seventy Second birth anniversary of noted Journalist, Columnist and Politician Khandaker Abdul Hamid shall be observed on March 1, 1991, according to a press release. To commemorate the occasion a Milad Mahfil and discussion meeting on the life and ideology of late Khandaker Abdul Hamid will be held in the auditorium of Sherpur Town at 4 pm. Similar programme has also been chalked by local BNP workers at Sherpur Town.

Weather

Thundershower likely

By Staff Correspondent

Rain/thundershower accompanied by temporary gusty winds is likely to occur at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka divisions and the regions of Comilla and Sylhet. Weather is likely to remain dry elsewhere over the country. Night temperature may fall by 1-2 degree Celsius.

Yesterday's westerly low lies over Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and adjoining West Bengal. Another low lies over eastern Madhya Pradesh and adjoining Orissa. Seasonal low lies over south bay.

The sun sets today (Friday) at 6:02 p.m. and rises on Saturday at 6:21 a.m.

Outlook for subsequent two days : Little change. Extended outlook for another five day days : Weather may improve. The highest maximum temperature on Thursday was recorded at 32.8 degree Celsius at Jessore and the lowest minimum of 15.2 degree at Mymensingh and Srimangal.

Temperature and humidity of some cities and towns record on Thursday are :

City/town	temperature in Celsius		humidity (%)	
	max	min	9 a.m.	6 p.m.
Dhaka	31.0	19.2	68	66
Chittagong	31.4	19.5	82	60
Rajshahi	30.5	16.3	73	-
Khulna	31.7	17.2	84	66
Cox's Bazar	31.6	19.0	79	67

The minimum temperature of some international cities :

Calcutta	21	Beijing	-2
Bombay	18	Karachi	15
Colombo	23	Delhi	13
Bangkok	26	Singapore	24
Hongkong	19		

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CROSSWORD PUZZLER

ACROSS

- Vipers
- Toll
- Sea in Asia
- Jimmy of music
- Rodent
- Pander
- To state further
- Wild
- Kind of curve
- Note of scale
- Deposits
- Year
- Latin conjunction
- Man
- Pencil duck
- Orange
- Opening
- Peer Gynt's mother
- Cut
- Eat
- Hellfire tyre
- Possessive

DOWN

- Furniture
- Drugs, lees
- 3 Drags, lees
- Tin symbol
- Rubs, chafes
- All - (tentative)
- Schrod. abbr
- Misera ID
- Regret
- Customs
- Property tax official
- For fear that
- Perceive by touch
- Lantern
- Under-garment
- Tellurium symbol
- Get up
- Weakness
- Mollifies
- Greek letter
- Weapon
- Bitter vetch
- Transgress
- Helps
- contents
- Country of Asia
- Arms ID
- Competitor
- Measured step
- Presently
- Rant
- Escaped
- Otherwise
- Emmet
- Before
- A Gabor
- Compass point
- Supposing that

Answer to Previous Puzzle

APT EDIT DIVA
LIE ROME IRAN
ETA IMPLEMENT
CASTS ELAN
ER ADS EMIT
HAS OWE ASIDE
US APE EMS LA
GIANT FRAHEM
EAST LOG IO
HEAR ISTLE
STREET CAR EOS
LOAM HERO LOP
YENS EDEN STY