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The Daily Star

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Holiday Notice
 The offices of The Daily Star will remain closed today on account of the Holy Shab-e-Barat. Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper on Friday, January 28.

NEWS BRIEFS
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Plan formulated to reactivate BSRS

By Soheli Manzur

A comprehensive plan has been formulated to reactivate the dormant Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS), according to official sources.

Under the plan, the BSRS expects to mobilise Tk 86 crore by the end of the current year by issuing debentures, realising overdue loans and starting commercial banking.

Sources say, the BSRS plans to start commercial banking from July this year and a floor of the Sharif Mansion in Motijheel has already been re-erected.

The authorities of the BSRS are expecting Tk 15 crore by the year-end as bank deposits, Tk 50 crore from debentures and Tk 21 crore from the loanee entrepreneurs of its projects.

The Sangstha has also estimated that it needs Tk 115 crore for BMRE (balancing, modernisation, rehabilitation and expansion) of the projects financed by it.

At present, the BSRS has only Tk 29 crore in its reserves and if the planned funds can be mobilised, it can easily meet the requirement for working capital and funds for BMRE of the projects.

The BSRS has identified 63 projects as viable and has been considering their rehabilitation through rescheduling of loan liabilities by waiver of interest and, in exceptional deserving cases, through the debt-equity swap mechanism.

The Sangstha is also planning to revitalise some of the projects which have become sick primarily because of weak management.

The corporation is considering new financing on selective basis. Joint ventures and projects like the export-oriented finished leather goods manufacturing units, knitted fabrics, electronics and computer software, were identified by the BSRS as the priority industries for financing.

At present, the BSRS's liability to the government is Tk 97.46 crore, of which Tk 34 crore is overdue. The outstanding loan of the entrepreneurs of BSRS-financed projects to the corporation is about Tk 900 crore. Tk 605 of that amount is now overdue.

The number of non-performing projects of the BSRS is 109, of which 42 projects are now closed, while the number of performing projects is 39.

The number of intermittently performing projects is, see Page 12 Col 6

Foreign exchange regulations simplified

Star Report

The country's commercial banks have been permitted to go for forward dealings in any valid foreign exchange transactions independently by the central bank.

A circular issued by the Foreign Exchange Division of the Bangladesh Bank yesterday also withdrew the restrictions on swapping forex to help the dealers cover their own risks in forward transactions.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) also directed the scheduled banks to close the forward contracts within the terms 'without any exception' and said no renewal of contracts would be allowed at previous rates. If in any case, a contract is renewed, the new agreement would be deemed as a fresh contract and the concerned parties would have to fix a new rate for transaction of foreign exchange, the BB circular said.

To check unscrupulous profiteering, the central bank see Page 12 Col 4

Campaigning closes at midnight tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

Friday midnight being the deadline for stopping all electioneering, the political parties contesting the city corporation polls are now frantically busy making last-minute efforts to win over the voters.

Under the election rules, candidates have to stop campaigning at least 48 hours before the midnight of election day. The ruling BNP and the Jatiya Party (JP) will hold their concluding election rallies in the capital today. The Awami League and the Jamaat-Islami rallies are scheduled for tomorrow, while Manzurul Ahsan Khan of the Left Alliance held his main rally on Tuesday.

The BNP rally will be held at the Manik Mia Avenue at 3 this afternoon.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, along with other leaders, will address the gathering.

The Awami League's last campaign rally is also scheduled at same time and venue tomorrow. Sheikh Hasina will be the main speaker.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Aminul Haq will appear this morning before a High Court bench which Tuesday issued a rule upon the Election Commission, the Ministry of Local Government and the Dhaka City Corporation to showcase why they should not be directed to comply with the direction of the Chief Election Commissioner regarding violation of law and rules by the candidates.

The rule nisi was issued upon a writ filed by the Environmental Lawyers' Association seeking an injunction restraining the Election Commission from holding the polls on the already scheduled date — January 30 — on grounds of breach of the election rules by the candidates.

With the elections knocking at the door, the major political parties have been trying to exploit the religious sentiments of the voters to secure see Page 12 Col 1

Shab-e-Barat tonight

By Staff Correspondent

The holy Shab-e-Barat will be observed by the Muslims tonight.

Considered as the night of fortune and forgiveness, the occasion will be marked by night long prayers.

Special prayers will be offered throughout the night at homes and in mosques for the peace and prosperity of the individuals and the Muslim ummah.

Different religious organisations, including the Islamic Foundation have chalked out programmes to mark the occasion.

Thousands of people will offer *fateha* at the graveyards of their near and dear ones for their salvation.

Newspapers will publish special articles while Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television air special programmes highlighting the significance of the night. Newspaper offices will remain closed today.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner has requested see Page 12 Col 7



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and her party's mayor candidate Mir Nasiruddin waving to the audience during an election rally near the Alankar Cinema crossing in Chittagong yesterday. — Star photo



Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina speaking at an election rally to mobilise support for Md Hanif, her party's DCC mayor candidate, at the Mohakhali Wireless Gate in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Elect my partymen for development: Khaleda

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 26: Prime Minister and BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia said here today that some political parties with no programme, and taking advantage of the upcoming city corporation polls, have become active to mislead the people with false propaganda.

"As the country is heading towards progress, these parties have nothing to do than criticise the government," Begum Zia said.

The Prime Minister was addressing an election meeting in the port city during her day-long campaigning in support of her party's mayoral candidate for the Chittagong City Corporation Mir Md. Nasiruddin.

Begum Zia urged the electorate to vote for her partymen to spearhead the ongoing development programmes without being swayed by the propaganda of the opposition parties.

"We struggled for nine years to restore democracy in the country and now you can freely exercise your right to franchise in the city corporation polls," Begum Zia said, adding: "We have introduced an accountable administration."

She announced that a full-fledged television station would be set up in Chittagong. Steps will also be taken to make the Chittagong port and the airport of international standard.

Begum Zia said honest and competent men would be needed by the city corporations to implement the development programmes of the BNP government.

Introducing Mir Nasiruddin, Begum Zia urged the voters to elect him as the mayor to ensure the development of the port city.

The meeting was also addressed by the Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Abdullah Al-Noman and Mir Md. Nasiruddin.

Begum Zia, whose arrival here today was delayed for some hours, due to inclement weather, also addressed over a dozen rallies besides undertaking extensive mass contact tours through the city. Thousands of people attended the rallies and cheered.

Special measures taken to check rigging: CEC

Chief Election Commissioner Justice Abdur Rouf said here yesterday that special measures had been taken to check any rigging and false voting in the city corporation polls on January 30, reports BSS.

In an exclusive interview with the BSS, Justice Rouf said the returning officers of the four divisions have been instructed to monitor voting pattern in every hour beginning 7 am by providing the number of votes cast and also indicating the number of ballot papers for both the mayor and ward commissioner candidates.

Justice Rouf said the returning officers would let the Election Commission know about the number of votes cast in every half an hour after 1 pm till the polls closed.

Four deputy election commissioners of the four divisions — Dhaka Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna — would work as the returning officers to conduct the city corporation elections, he said.

The Chief Election Commissioner said the people, who lost their faith in the election process, had regained confidence in the election system after the successful holding of the parliamentary polls, in 1991. "Our all out efforts are to keep their (people's) hopes alive in the future polls," he added.

Referring to the union council elections, he said the election see Page 12 Col 2

BNP using black money to woo voters: Hasina

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday accused the BNP government of using black money to woo the voters in the DCC elections as, according to her, most of the city dwellers were preferring the AL's mayoral candidate Mohammad Hanif.

Hasina made the allegation while addressing rallies and wayside gatherings during her visit to different areas of Gulshan in the capital yesterday afternoon.

Alleging large-scale corruption in the administration, the Opposition leader solicited votes for Hanif to enable the AL to establish a corruption-free city administration. "Hanif is an honest, efficient and sincere man who always stood by you," she told the voters who gathered around her and chanted slogans for Hanif and his election symbol — the Fish.

The AL leader hoped the city dwellers would evaluate the qualities of a dedicated politician like Hanif.

Dismissing the contention that there would be no development if an opposition candidate were elected mayor, Hasina said "those who believe in such a claim are living in a fool's paradise". The city corporation is run by the taxpayers' money, she said and called on the voters to give their verdict in favour of Hanif so that the public money could be utilised properly.

Meanwhile, mayoral candidate Mohammad Hanif conducted mass-contact programmes at Nolgola, Baro Katra, Chhoto Katra, and Mitford Road areas in the old part of the city yesterday and addressed gatherings there. He also talked to a cross section of people and requested them to vote for him.

Addressing the gatherings, Hanif pledged that if elected he would make sincere efforts to solve the problems facing the city dwellers.

Hanif also visited the Dhaka University and the Engineering University campuses.

Jan 30 declared public holiday in 4 cities

The government has declared January 30 a public holiday in the four cities where city corporation elections will be held on that day, reports BSS.

According to a notification issued by the Establishment Ministry, city corporation elections will be held in the four cities of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi on January 30.

All government, semi-government, autonomous and semi-autonomous offices, mills and factories and educational institutions located in the election areas of these four cities shall remain closed on January 30 to enable the officials and employees of these offices to cast their votes, the notification said.

MCCI against public holiday

By Staff Correspondent

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) yesterday urged the government not to declare January 30 as a public holiday for the forthcoming elections in the four city corporations.

"The country's economy, already affected by the recent hiccups, can hardly afford public holiday for what are essentially events restricted to the four cities only," said Latifur Rahman, president of the MCCI, in a statement.

The economy suffers a loss of at least Tk 150 crore from one day's production loss in non-agricultural activities, the statement noted.

"We feel that a public holiday is not necessary; instead, those who are registered as voters, may be spared 3 or 4 hours from their work to enable them to cast their votes."

The MCCI statement further added: "We, therefore, strongly urge upon the government not to declare any public holiday on the 30th instant."

Indian silence on Kashmir disappointing: Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 26: Pakistan expressed its disappointment today on the Indian peace package saying that the proposals remained silent on the core issue of Kashmir plaguing relations between the two neighbours, reports AFP.

"We feel Indian policy is to talk on relatively less important issues," Foreign Secretary Shaharyar Mohammed Khan told reporters here in the first official reaction to the latest Indian move.

The proposals handed by his Indian counterpart Jyotindra Nath Dixit to Pakistani High Commissioner in New Delhi Monday include measures to make the line of control dividing Kashmir into Indian and Pakistani zones as line of peace and tranquillity.

It also calls for disengagement of troops from the disputed Siachen glacier and broadening the scope of an existing agreement barring attacks on each other's nuclear facilities to cover population centres and economic targets as well as paving the way for eradication of nuclear threat in the subcontinent.

New Delhi invited Islamabad to resume talks after a two-day session between Khan and Dixit here on January 2-3 ended in deadlock, mainly over Kashmir.

"India wants to show the world that it is engaged in negotiations so that pressure of the public opinion and the governments is deflected from the core issue of Kashmir," Khan said.

Giving his "preliminary reaction" to what was described as "non-papers" he said by and large they contained the same thing Dixit had indicated earlier this month.

Agargao slums dwellers served eviction notice

Star Report

A scheduled visit by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to the National Science and Technology Museum at Agargao early next month is turning out to be a bane for the slum dwellers living in the area.

The squatters were served a six-day eviction notice by the concerned authorities in their over-anxious bid to make the neighbourhood look clean during the auspicious visit.

The eviction notice, issued by the Executive Engineer of the Works Division II at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar on January 24, asked for the removal of all bus-tees (slums) from both sides of the street leading to the museum by January 30 or else see Page 12 Col 6

Twin worries for BNP

By Special Correspondent

After assuming state power following a free and fair general election in 1991 the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is now facing the biggest challenge. And this challenge is for retaining the party's hold on the four metropolitan cities.

Only three days are now left for the January 30 polls when about three million voters of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi are scheduled to turn out at the polling booths to give their verdict in the city corporation elections. This is for the first time that the mayors are going to be elected directly, along with the ward commissioners.

Like other major parties, the ruling party has also fielded candidates for the mayorships and the offices of commissioners. The BNP leaders and activists including party chief Begum Khaleda Zia are now nearing the end of their hectic campaigning for these local bodies elections.

Although the polls next week are only for the city corporations, and the BNP would remain the ruling party whatever the results — at least until the next Jatiya Sangsad (JS) elections — yet, the emphasis laid on these elections by almost all the major parties, as well as the seriousness of their see Page 12 Col 1

61 more Rohingyas go home
 COX'S BAZAR, Jan 26: Sixty-one Rohingya refugees voluntarily went back to their homes in Myanmar today raising the total number of repatriated refugees to 52485. Official sources told BSS here tonight this 125th batch of repatriation was seen off by UNHCR representatives along with Bangladesh officials from Noyapara transit camp at Teknaf here today.