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DCC Polls Special

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NEWS BRIEFS

Control room at Home Ministry

A control room has been
opened at the Home Ministry
conference room to maintain
law and order during the city
corporation elections today.
The telephone numbers of the
control room are: 249930,
249730, 249750 and 248848.
The Home Ministry has re-
quested all concerned to in-
form about any important
matters relating to law and
order situation during the
elections, reports UNB.

Myanmar minister due Feb 7

Myanmar Rail Transport
Minister U Win Sein will pay a
4-day official visit to Bangla-
desh beginning February 7.
Officials said yesterday. The
visit will take place at the in-
vitation of Communications
Minister Oli Ahmed, they said,
reports UNB.

107 more Rohingyas go home

COX'S BAZAR, Jan 29: One
hundred seven Rohingyas re-
fugees voluntarily returned to
their homes in Myanmar today
raising the total number of
repatriated persons to 52,542.
Official sources told BSS here
tonight that this 127th batch
of repatriation, was seen off by
local UNHCR representatives,
along with Bangladesh officials
at Noyapara and Jumnapara
transit camps at Teknaf.

'Time' magazine issue banned

The government has
banned weekly 'Time' maga-
zine, January 31 issue (Volume
143 No 5) published from
Singapore for publishing an
objectionable article, ac-
cording to an official handout
here last night, reports BSS.

Voters in 4 cities pick their mayors today

Star Report

Nearly 29 lakh urban voters
go to polls today in the first-
ever direct elections for four
mayors and 192 ward com-
missioners in the Dhaka,
Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi
City Corporations.

Polling will start at 7am in
the 1366 polling centres set
up in the four cities and will
continue without break up to 3
pm. Ballot counting is ex-
pected to commence immedi-
ately after closing of the cen-
tres. The government has de-
clared the day a public holiday
in the four cities to facilitate
voters to cast their votes.

The Election Commission,
in a statement yesterday, said

it has already completed all
preparations, including string-
ent security measures, to
hold the elections lawfully and
peacefully.

But the statement went on
to seek the cooperation of the
voters and the candidates for
the peaceful holding of the
polls. "It is not possible for the
Election Commission alone to
ensure free, fair and neutral
polling. The role of the voters
and candidates is most impor-
tant in holding disciplined and
peaceful elections."

The city corporation polls
are being seen as a turning
point for a more representa-
tive local government system

throughout the country follow-
ing the return to parliamentary
democracy some three years
ago.

It is also being seen as a
"litmus test" for the major po-
litical parties as it comes mid-
way between two parliamen-
tary elections. All major parties
have fielded their candidates
for the offices of the mayor and
the commissioner for the first
time.

Forty eight candidates are
in the race for the four mayoral
seats while 1384 others are vy-
ing for the 192 posts of ward
commissioners.

The total number of eligible
voters in the four cities stands

at 28,69,040. Of them,
17,00,848 are in Dhaka, in-
cluding 6,85,622 female vot-
ers. There are 6,87,743 regis-
tered voters in Chittagong,
3,28,766 in Khulna and
1,51,683 voters in Rajshahi.

In the capital, 24 candi-
dates are contesting for may-
orship and 675 are vying for
the 90 ward commissioner
posts. In Chittagong, 12 candi-
dates are running for the
mayor's office and 301 for the
41 ward commissioners.

In Khulna, five nominees
are contesting for the post of
mayor and 176 for the 31 ward
commissioners while in

23 observers allowed to watch polls

By Staff Correspondent

The Election Commission
has permitted 23 observers 18
of them from 5 foreign mis-
sions in Dhaka, to watch the
city corporation polls being
held simultaneously in Dhaka,
Chittagong, Khulna and
Rajshahi today.

According to sources, the
foreign missions are of the
United States, the United
Kingdom, Italy, the
Netherlands and Japan while
the five local observers are
from the Khan Foundation.

Ten observers are from the
United States, three from the
United Kingdom, two each
from Italy and the Netherlands
and one from Japan.

Meanwhile, the Election
Commission could not settle
till 8:30 last night the question
of permitting 450 observers
from non-government organi-
sations reportedly because of

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An Election Commission official leading four bearers carrying empty ballot boxes to a city polling centre yesterday. —Star photo

No progress in simplification of foreign trade procedures

By Special Correspondent

The National Trade Faci-
litation Committee (NTFC) is
yet to take any step to simplify
and modernise the present
cumbersome procedures fol-
lowed in the country's foreign
trade.

The committee, headed by
Commerce Secretary, was
formed in May last year. It
immediately constituted a task
force for framing new rules
and procedures.

The task force, which was
asked to submit its report
along with recommendations
within four months, has failed
to accomplish the job even in
eight months since its forma-
tion.

The Director General of the
Export Promotion Bureau
(EPB) was made convenor of
the task force, comprising
representatives of Bangladesh
Bank (BB), the National Board
of Revenue (NBR), Ministry of
Shipping, the Chittagong Port
Authority, the Board of
Investment and different
chambers and trade associa-
tions.

Sources concerned said
that some sub-committees
were also entrusted to submit

reports on different sectors
related with foreign trade.
However, only one such sub-
committee, representing the
transport sector including
shipping, has filed its report to
the NTFC while recommenda-
tions from other sectors —
mainly the NBR and the BB —
are still awaited. The reports
and suggestions from these
two organisations are particu-
larly vital to preparing the final
recommendations of the
committee, the source said.

The formation of the NTFC
was suggested at a workshop
on trade facilitation, held in
Dhaka in January 1992 under
the joint sponsorship of the
ESCAP and UNCTAD.

The objective of setting up
the committee was to stream-
line, modernise and simplify
the procedures of the coun-
try's imports and exports.

The ESCAP and the
UNCTAD also promised to
provide technical assistance to
the committee in the formula-
tion and implementation of
new procedures in the foreign
trade. However, this offer of
assistance has also remained
unutilised.

The import and export

trade of Bangladesh are being
carried out under outdated
procedures which often take
too much time and prove very
retrogressive. For opening a
letter of credit and release the
consignments, a trader has to
run from desk to desk and
satisfy scores of petty officials,
causing inordinate delays and
also dislocation in supply and
demand.

Importers allege that get-
ting their consignments re-
leased from the country's ports
is often a real ordeal because of
silly formalities and restrictive
controls.

"It takes ten times more
time in Chittagong than say, in
Singapore, Hong Kong or
Japan, and we have to pay high
demurrages for the delay," said
an aggrieved importer.

Observers believe that since
the government has liberalised
the import policy, the proce-
dures should also be simplified
accordingly. Otherwise the re-
forms will be defeated.

The Trade Consultant of the
Commerce Ministry, who has
been coordinating the activi-
ties of the NTFC, was not avail-
able for comments about the
delay in the committee's work.

Biman cancels Capt Rahman's contract

The Biman authorities yes-
terday terminated the services
of the pilot arrested while al-
legedly smuggling out Tk
61.32 lakh in local and foreign
currencies on January 27, re-
ports UNB.

Captain Mohammad Azizur
Rahman was caught by Custo-
mers officials at the Zia Inter-
national Airport while proce-
eding on a scheduled Biman
flight (BG 039) for Dubai
enroute to Riyadh.

The Customs men recov-
ered the money in taka, US
dollar, UAE dirham, Saudi
Riyal and Traveller cheques
from his bag.

"In view of the above, the
Biman management has ter-
minated Captain Azizur Rahman's
service contract," a Biman
press release said.

Captain Rahman, one of the
senior Biman pilots, went on
retirement in late 1992, but
secured a one-year contract in
mid-1993.

A case was instituted
against him for violation of the
Foreign Exchange Regulations
and Customs Act and he was
handed over to Cantonment
police. The pilot was sus-
pended immediately by the
national airlines management.
Meanwhile, Our Staff Cor-
respondent

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Loan repayment dues keep climbing

By Inam Ahmed

The country is likely to face
a severe crisis with loan re-
payment within the next two
or three years as most of the
loans taken during the 1980s
are reaching maturity with the
export trade still not picking
up.

The galloping debt figure is
likely to eat into a large chunk
of the country's revenue bud-
get hampering the mobilisa-
tion of domestic resource for
economic development, ac-
cording to the financial ex-
perts.

Last fiscal year, the amount
of loan repayment was Taka
1300 crore. It is expected to
go up by another Tk 200 crore
this fiscal year. By the year
1996-97, the figure is likely to
cross Tk 2500 crore. The gov-

ernment will have to pay the
principal amount of this huge
amount from the revenue bud-
get and the interest from the
capital budget.

Since independence, Ban-
gladesh had received
25746 million US dollars in
loans and grants. Of this,
12568 million dollars, 48 per
cent, were in grants and
13178 million dollars, 52 per
cent, in loans.

The problem of loan repay-
ment has arisen as the country
had taken excessive credits
after the 1980s. Till 1977-78,
the country received 548 mil-
lion US dollars as project aid.
But after that the project aid
was about 400 million dollars
each year. In 1985-86, the

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Agitation if elections rigged, warns Hasina

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League President
Sheikh Hasina has threatened
to launch a massive agitation
immediately after the city cor-
poration polls if "there was any
rigging."

Addressing the editors and
senior journalists at her Minto
Road official residence yester-
day evening, Sheikh Hasina ac-
cused the government of try-
ing to influence the polls.

The AL chief also charged
the Election Commission "with
preparing the ground for the
ruling party to win the city
corporation elections."

Sheikh Hasina labelled a
number of accusations against
the ruling BNP and warned
that her party would have no
alternative but to go for a mass
movement "if the polls were
rigged."

The Awami League leader in
an oblique reference to the
main leaders of the BNP ac-
cused the ruling party of

intimidating the voters
through their statements. She
said ruling party leaders were
claiming that development
works would stop if they were
not voted. "Such statements
were a threat to the voters and
a violation of election rules,"
she said.

The AL chief also claimed
that a large number of
"identified terrorists" have
been released by the ruling
party to "bolster the campaign
of the BNP."

Continuing she said, "We
have received information that
in 145 centres, the BNP will
resort to terrorism. They have
brought terrorists from outside
and some of them have been
lodged in city hotels."

Hasina said, she has already
given the names of the centres
to the Election Commission.
She, however, did not elabo-
rate as to the source of infor-

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Shantibahini for truce till Apr 15

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Jan 29: The
Shantibahini leaders agreed to
extend the ceasefire in the
Chittagong Hill Tracts until
April 15 in order to continue
the peace talks with the gov-
ernment.

The agreement came today
in reply to a proposal sent by
the government last week to
the Shantibahini leaders
through the Liaison Committee
for further extension of the
ceasefire, a source said.

The ceasefire which will
expire on January 31 was de-
cided in the sixth round of
talks held on November 24 at
the Khagrachhari Circuit
House between the rebel lead-
ers and the Parliamentary
Committee led by Communi-
cations Minister Oli Ahmed.

In today's letter, the
Shantibahini leaders also
agreed to hold the seventh
round of the talks with the
Parliamentary Committee be-
tween April 5 and 10 to re-
solve the longstanding CHT is-
sue, the source added.

Earlier, during the sixth
round of talks both parties de-
cided to sit for the seventh
round by the first week of
January, but now the talks will

be delayed for over three
months.

Meanwhile, a seven-mem-
ber Indian delegation will ar-
rive at Khagrachhari on
February 2 to handover a list of
400 families of Chakma
refugees for scrutiny in a bid to
start their repatriation from
February 15.

The notice of the arrival of
the Indian team led by the
District Magistrate of South
Tripura K K Arie, was com-
municated to the Bangladesh
side which returned Friday
afternoon after holding talks in
Tripura on the Chakma
refugees' repatriation.

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PM for expanded economic ties among SAARC countries

SAARC chairperson and
Prime Minister Begum Khaleda
Zia yesterday emphasised the
need for expanded trade, and
economic relations among the
seven association members to
improve the lot of the common
masses of the South Asian re-
gion, reports BSS.

She laid the emphasis when
the parliamentary speakers,
who attended the first meeting
of the SAARC Speakers'
Council here, called on the
Prime Minister at her office
early in the afternoon.

Begum Zia pointed out that
the parliamentary democracy
had been strengthening in the
region and the trust and confi-
dence of the people of the
SAARC region on democracy
were now being increased. The
practice of democracy now in

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BCS (Admin) body demands action against doctors

By Staff Correspondent

The BCS Administration
Cadre Action Committee in a
statement Saturday called
upon the government to take
action against the doctors for
whose negligence a number of
patients had died.

The committee also con-
demned the methods adopted
by the doctors, engineers and
agriculturists for realising
their demands and asked for
compensation to the families
of the affected patients.

The statement, signed by
Dr M Majbar Rahman and
Syed Shah Alam, termed the
new pay-scale announced by
the government "discrimi-
natory" and demanded that the
facilities under the new order
be also given to the officials of
the administration cadre.

The BCS statement also
criticised the statements is-
sued by the PROKRICH, an
organisation of the engineers,
agriculturists and doctors, say-
ing that they are involved in a
conspiracy of dividing the gov-
ernment officials through
defamatory comments.

Dhaka denies Delhi's allegation

The Ministry of Home
Affairs sources yesterday re-
gretted the observations made
by the Indian Home Minister
at a press conference in
Shillong recently about alleged
ISI operations from Bangla-
desh, reports BSS.

Allegations of this nature
whenever received have always
been investigated and the
Indian authorities were in-
formed of these being baseless,
the sources added.

Commenting on the obser-
vations the sources further
said that the Indian authorities
should be on guard against
certain elements who were
engaged in thwarting efforts
being made to foster good
neighbourly relations between
the two countries.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Tomorrow's The Daily Star
will be 28 pages. It will have
a 16-page anniversary
supplement, plus the regular
12-page issue.

Don't miss the 28-page issue
of your favourite newspaper,
at the regular price of Tk 4.00.

The Daily Star entered its fourth
year of publication this month. On
this occasion we express our grateful
thanks to our readers, patrons and
advertisers for their service and
continuous support.

The Daily Star

Always trying to serve its readers better

Diet okays Hosokawa's reform bills

TOKYO, Jan 29: A day after
Japan's Prime Minister saved
his job with a last-minute
compromise on political re-
form, Parliament Saturday gave
its preliminary blessing to the
package, reports AP.

In a victory in a race against
the clock, both houses ap-
proved the reforms in quick
standing votes. Prime Minister
Morihito Hosokawa had indi-
cated he would quit if he did
not get the reform measures
passed during the legislative
session, which was in its final
day.

Under a compromise
worked out late Friday by the
government and the opposi-
tion, lawmakers approved ear-
lier versions of the package
with the understanding they
would be revised in the next
legislative session.

Resolving the question over
political reform leaves the
Hosokawa government free to

concentrate on more pressing
measures — particularly the
economy. The government was
holding talks Saturday on long-
delayed measures to help pull
Japan out of perhaps its worst
recession since World War II.

Hosokawa also must turn
his attention to working out a
trade agreement with Wash-
ington ahead of his February
11 summit with President
Clinton.

"Economic policy is our
most important priority now,"
the Prime Minister told re-
porters after the parliamentary
votes.

To get a compromise agree-
ment, Hosokawa was obliged to
back down on a key
corruption-fighting measure in
the original reform package,
giving up on a plan to ban cor-
porate contributions to indi-
vidual politicians.

Under Friday's deal, worked
out in six hours of talks with

Yoshi Kono, chief of the oppo-
sition Liberal Democratic
Party, corporate donations will
be limited, but not banned for
the next five years.

Despite the watering down
of the measures, the reforms
will fundamentally alter
Japan's electoral system to
discourage the influence ped-
dling that has toppled several
recent governments.

The plan announced by
Hosokawa and Kono will re-
place the current system of
multiple-seat lower house dis-
tricts with 300 single-seat dis-
tricts, to discourage candi-
dates from the same party
from competing against each
other by peddling pork-barrel
favours to constituents.

A remaining 200 lower
house seats will be allocated in
proportion to the total number
of votes each party receives.

Japanese newspapers hailed

the agreement as a "starting
point," and urged the govern-
ment to get busy with eco-
nomic policy.

"More important than
reaching an agreement on po-
litical reform, the people are
waiting for recession-fighting
measures to pull (Japan) out of
its protracted economic
slump," said the mass-circula-
tion Yomiuri newspaper.

Legislative leaders, some
reluctantly, supported the
compromise. "We have decided
to accept the compromise
because we should avoid
wasting the entire effort
we have made so far," said
Tomichi Murayama, leader of
the Socialists, the largest party
in the ruling coalition.

But the Socialists, and some
other proponents of reform,
said the latest agreement had
undermined Hosokawa's ef-
forts to clean up money poli-
tics.