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Dhaka Day by Day



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 Facilitation Committee (NTFC) is yet to take any step to simplify and modernise the present cumbersome procedures followed 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 formation.

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 streamline, modernise and simplify the procedures of the country's imports and exports.

The ESCAP and the UNCTAD also promised to provide technical assistance to the committee in the formulation 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trade of Bangladesh are being carried out under outdated procedures which often take too much time and prove very retrogressive.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 releasing 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 getting their consignments released 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 procedures should also be simplified accordingly. Otherwise the reforms will be defeated.

The Trade Consultant of the Commerce Ministry, who has been coordinating the activities of the NTFC, was not available for comments about the delay in the committee's work.

Biman cancels Capt Rahman's contract

The Biman authorities yesterday terminated the services of the pilot arrested while allegedly smuggling out Tk 61.32 lakh in local and foreign currencies on January 27, reports UNB.

Captain Mohammad Azizur Rahman was caught by Customs officials at the Zia International Airport while proceeding on a scheduled Biman flight (BG 039) for Dubai enroute to Riyadh.

The Customs men recovered 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 terminated 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 suspended immediately by the national airlines management.

Meanwhile, Our Staff Corr.

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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 reform, Parliament Saturday gave its preliminary blessing to the package, reports AP.

In a victory in a race against the clock, both houses approved the reforms in quick standing votes. Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa had indicated 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 opposition, lawmakers approved earlier 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 Washington ahead of his February 11 summit with President Clinton.

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

To get a compromise agreement, Hosokawa was obliged to back down on a key corruption-fighting measure in the original reform package, giving up on a plan to ban corporate contributions to individual politicians.

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

the agreement as a "starting point" and urged the government to get busy with economic policy.

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

Legislative leaders, some reluctantly, supported the compromise. "We have decided to accept the compromise agreement because we should avoid wasting the entire effort we have made so far," said Tomiochi 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 efforts to clean up money politics.

Japanese newspapers hailed

Loan repayment dues keep climbing

By Inam Ahmed

The country is likely to face a severe crisis with loan repayment 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 budget hampering the mobilisation of domestic resource for economic development, according to the financial experts.

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 budget and the interest from the capital budget.

Since independence, Bangladesh had received 2574 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 repayment has arisen as the country had taken excessive credits after the 1980s. Till 1977-78, the country received 548 million 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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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 region, 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 confidence 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 condemned 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 Majibar Rahman and Syed Shah Alami, termed the new pay-scale announced by the government discriminatory 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 issued by the PROKRICH, an organisation of the engineers, agriculturists and doctors, saying that they are involved in a conspiracy of dividing the government officials through defamatory comments.

Dhaka denies Delhi's allegation

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

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

Commenting on the observations 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.

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 government.

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 decided in the sixth round of talks held on November 24 at the Khagrachhari Circuit House between the rebel leaders and the Parliamentary Committee led by Communications Minister Md. Ahmed.

In today's letter, the Shantibahini leaders also agreed to hold the seventh round of the talks with the Parliamentary Committee between April 5 and 10 to resolve the longstanding CHT issue, the source added.

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

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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.

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