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AB Bank's notices on 4 Beximco companies

By Staff Correspondent
The Arab Bangladesh (AB) Bank has served notices on four Beximco companies to realise about Tk 120 crore in outstanding loans.

Last week, the bank told Salman F Rahman, Sohel F Rahman, Iqbal Ahmed and M A Quasem, all of whom are its past or present directors, to pay the amount within two months, according to sources.

If they fail to do so, they See Page 12 Col 7

Advisor to BNP chief arrested

By Staff Correspondent
Abdur Rab Chowdhury, former MP and advisor to BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia, was arrested from a court premises in his home district Laxmipur and sent to the district jail.

The arrest was made after the district court rejected Chowdhury's prayer for bail in a case filed against him in connection with violence during the last general elections, BNP sources in the city said last night.

See Page 12 Col 2

HC order on writ challenging Anup Chetia's extradition today

By SC Correspondent
The High Court today will pass an order on the question of issuance of rule nisi upon the writ petition filed challenging the proposed extradition of Anup Chetia, Secretary General of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

The division bench of the HC comprising Justice A M Mahmudur Rahman and Justice Zakir Ahmed yesterday after hearing the writ petition as motion fixed today for order.

Anup Chetia alias Golap Barua was arrested on December 21, 1997 by the police from his rented house at Mohamampur in the city.

It was learnt from the news report that the Indian government requested the government See Page 12 Col 7

India goes to polls from today

India's election
The world's largest democracy goes to the polls Monday for the second Parliamentary vote in less than two years. At stake are 543 elected and two appointed seats in the lower house of India's parliament. A simple majority is needed to govern.

Major parties

BJP Hindu nationalists. Emphasizes self-reliance. Promised to restrict the entry of foreign goods. Led by 71-year-old Atal Bihari Vajpayee, known as a moderate in his party.	CONGRESS PARTY Ruled India for 45 of its 50 years of independence. Closely associated with the campaign to end British rule. Weakened in recent years due to corruption scandals and internal rifts. Led by 83-year-old Sitaram Kesri.	UNITED FRONT Coalition of centrists, leftists and regional parties. Topped as leader of the last government after Congress accused member of supporting rebels linked to the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Members yet to decide on prime ministerial candidate.
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Current parliamentary seats

United Front	178
Bharatiya Janata	162
Congress	114 party coalition

Elections facts

- More than 600 million eligible voters - more than at least 18 years old.
- Turnout is usually about 50 percent in Indian elections.
- Voting will be spread across different regions Feb. 16, 22 and 28, and March 7.
- Polling is often staggered in India so organizers can deploy workers and security in stages.

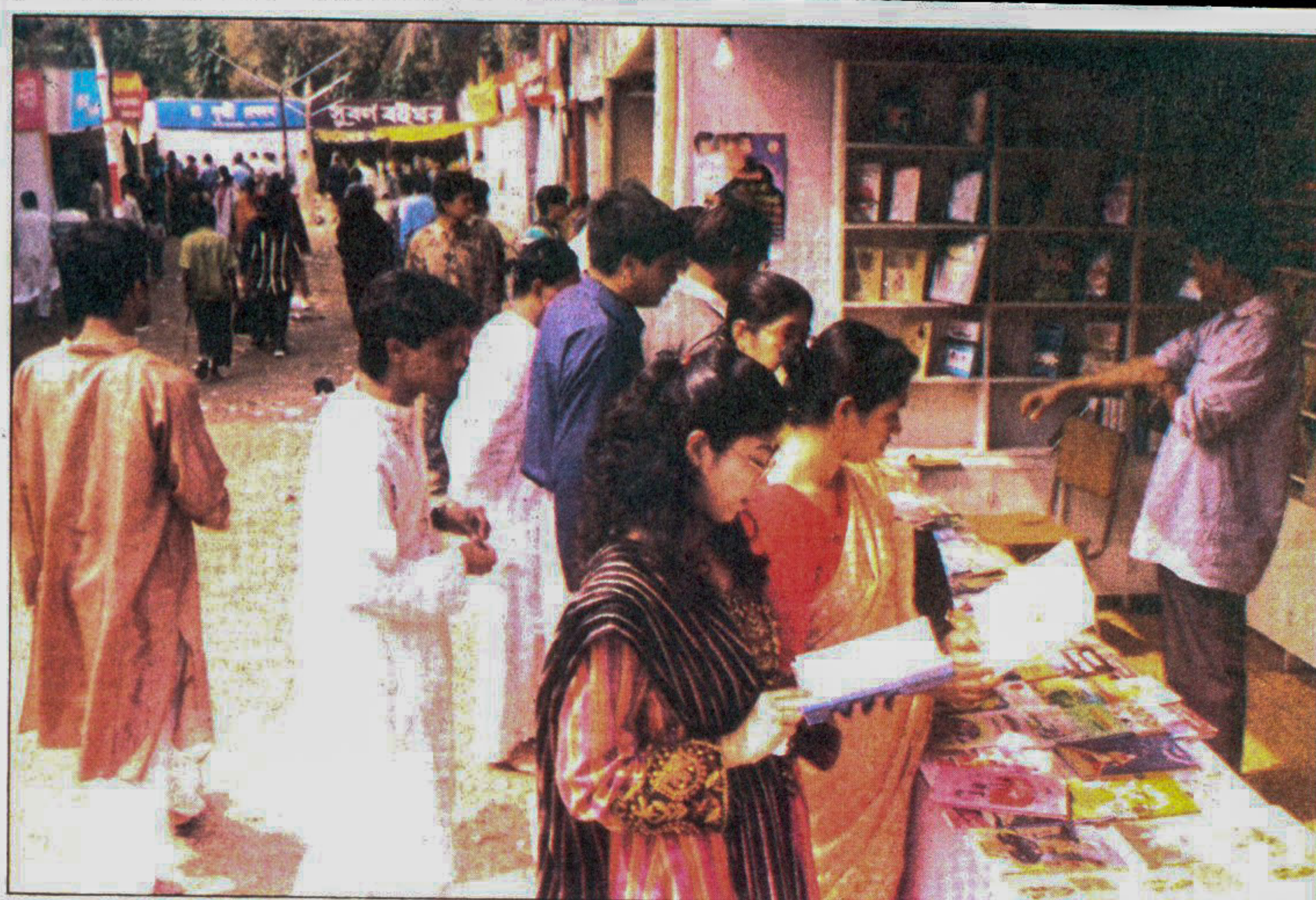
Source: AP research

From Pallab Bhattacharya
NEW DELHI, Feb 15: The heat and dust of a frenzied two-week campaign over India prepared for the first phase of staggered general elections tomorrow to elect a new parliament in less than two years with all opinion polls pointing to yet another hung House.

An estimated 27 crore people are expected to exercise their franchise in the first phase of balloting for 222 of the 543 Lok Sabha constituencies in 15 states and five union territories that will decide the electoral fortunes of Prime Minister I K Gujral, his immediate predecessor H D Deve Gowda, senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader Murli Manohar Joshi, Defence Minister Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav, Bihar strongman Laloo Prasad Yadav and Bahujan Samaj Party president Kanshi Ram, among others.

Polling in the remaining constituencies will be held on Feb 22, 28 and March 2.

Mostly, it will be a straight contest between BJP and Congress, between Congress and



Visitors crowding book stalls at the Ekushey Book Fair on Bangla Academy premises yesterday.

— Star photo by Sheikh Enamul Haq

A different book fair this year

By M M Aminul Islam
The Amar Ekushey Boi Mela continued to attract large crowds as it entered its second week yesterday.

This year the stalls have been restricted to only within the Bangla Academy premises. The authorities in the last few years had allowed stalls along the main road outside the academy premises — stretching from the Doel Chatter to TSC.

The usual festivity which used to centre around the traditional Ekushey Boi Mela has faded to a great extent with increasing police vigilance and strict maintenance of the time

See Page 12 Col 3

NBR chairman resigns 'under pressure'

By Staff Correspondent
Chairman of National Board of Revenue Shah Abdul Hannan resigned yesterday following intense pressure from an influential minister and a business house over realising huge amount of evaded tax, according to sources.

Hannan, who was on extension till April, suddenly took the decision and resigned at noon.

Before resigning he had talks with Finance Minister S A M S Kibria and conveyed his decision. Later, he handed over charge to Member (Excise) M S I Chowdhury, who is also due to retire on February 24.

When asked why he suddenly

Akheri Munajat today

TONGI, Feb 15: The three-day Bisw Itima, the second largest gathering of Muslims, next to Hajj ends today with Akheri Munajat, reports UNB.

Maulana Saad Miaji Mehbar or Maulana Zubair, members of the Sura of Biswa Tablig Jamaat, are expected to lead the Munajat, before Zohr prayers.

About 25 lakh Muslims, including 3,000 from 61 foreign countries will take part in the Akheri Munajat seeking divine blessings for the Muslim ummah and world peace.

Devotees are still pouring in

See Page 12 Col 2

Legal status of Hasibur being examined: Speaker

By Nazmul Ashraf
Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury has said he will require "a little less" than six months to give his final verdict on the legal status of newly-appointed Deputy Minister for Industries Hasibur Rahman Swapan's membership of the Jatiya Sangsad.

"Former Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali took a year to dispose of a similar issue. But I won't take such a long time. For me, it will need less than half the time Razzak Shaheb took," the Speaker told newsmen at his Sangsad office yesterday afternoon.

In this regard, a smiling Speaker said the judges also take a long time for disposal of cases.

Elected on the BNP ticket in the last general election, Swapan joined the 'government of national consensus' as a deputy minister on February 9. BNP expelled Swapan on charge of anti-organisational activities more than three hours before he took oath of office.

Humayun Rashid Chowdhury further said that the law section of the Sangsad Secretariat was minutely examining various laws relating to the va-



ICC chief arrives in city tomorrow

Star Business Reporter
Helmut O Maucher, President, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and the Chairman of the Nestle SA, Switzerland, will pay a visit to Bangladesh tomorrow.

Maucher is expected to arrive at Zia International Airport at 5:00 am on the day by his private plane.

During his one day stay, Maucher will call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Mahbubur Rahman, President of ICC Bangladesh, Latifur Rahman, Vice President of ICC Bangladesh and Chairman, Nestle Bangladesh Ltd., A Rob Chowdhury, Vice President, ICC Bangladesh, NJS Miller, Managing Director, Nestle Bangladesh Ltd. will accompany him.

Maucher will also call on the Minister for Commerce and Industries, Tofael Ahmed.

The ICC President will also attend a Luncheon Meeting with the members of ICC Bangladesh and the Bangladesh business

See Page 12 Col 1

News Analysis What's up AL's sleeves?

By Nurul Kabir
The recent induction of BNP legislator Hasibur Rahman Swapan into the cabinet of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has raised, along with raising eye-brows of many, at least a couple of logical questions in the country's political arena: What prompted the government to irritate the BNP, especially when the process of negotiations between the AL and BNP was still on for the latter to return to the House? Second, why did the AL high-command pick a BNP back-bencher, offering him a ministerial position, when the Awami League, with the support of Jatiya Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, has been enjoying a comfortable majority over the BNP-Jamaat opposition in Jatiya Sangsad anyway?

Swapan, a parliament member elected on the BNP ticket from Sirajganj-7 constituency, was made Deputy Minister for Industries on February 9 last. The Prime Minister and some of her cabinet colleagues holding important portfolios were seen witnessing Swapan's oath-taking ceremony. Many Awami League insiders, even some cabinet members, were caught by surprise at this event.

The fact that only a handful of leaders of AL knew what was happening, proves that the Premier herself took interest in Swapan's desertion of the BNP, and has gone to the extent of rewarding the deserter with a ministerial position.

Swapan's case would definitely make many veteran AL legislators, especially those as-

See Page 12 Col 1

Second phase of arms surrender today

BAGHAICHHARI (Rangamati), Feb 15: The second phase of arms surrender by Shan-tibahini guerillas takes place at Baghaichhari High School ground tomorrow, reports UNB.

Some 545 Shantibahinimen will lay down their arms and ammunition to Home Minister Major (ret'd) Rafiqul Islam at a colourful ceremony at 11:25 in the morning.

They will be led by Pele in depositing arms in presence of leaders of Jana Sanghati

See Page 12 Col 1

Aman shortfall has dealt a big blow to char people

By Inam Ahmed and Reaz Ahmad, back from northern district
Across the vast expanse of sandbars, four young men were slowly walking along. They looked exhausted, their un-combed hair were flying in the air, and there was an expression of despair on their faces. None of them had taken any food in 24 hours and they still had to go another four miles on foot to reach home.

The four men had crossed the Brahmaputra river at Chilmari Bandar in search of work. But the poverty stricken charlands in Kurigram offered them no job, not even for a single day.

Perennially an impoverished area, the charlands in Kurigram offers a specially difficult time this year to the people living there. The Aman paddy shortfall has dealt a big blow to the food security of the chars. Jobs have shrunk, leaving people desperately looking for a livelihood.

Saiful Islam, one of the four youths walking on the shoals, said, "I went to Barbaranda village of Roumari in search of agricultural work. But job too is hard to find this time as Boro plantation has shrunk."

Before leaving home, Saiful borrowed some money and gave it to his wife. "I told her to somehow manage for some days before I return with money. But I have already wasted my re-

See Page 12 Col 6



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