



(Left) BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia exchanges views with the journalists at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. (Right) A delegation of British parliament members calls on Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at Sudha Sadan.

cess."

Elson flashes back to the

"This mission is in effect

"For me, personally, I've

stormy days in 2007, when the

EU observers had suspended

its mission amid incidents of

the return of the suspended

been heartened by the fact

that there have been only very

few isolated incidents o

violence and intimidation so

in observing the polls, Elson

asserts: "We operate in a way

that seeks to ensure our integ-

can never prevent people who

might want to imply in some

way that we are partial one

way or the other. All we can do

is demonstrate how we go

about our business. But in fact

the European Union election

observation missions are

totally independent of the

are appointed and funded by

the European Commission in

Brussels, but not directed by it.

instructed or directed by the

commission in Brussels as to

how we should write our

reports and what we should or

European Union member

states governments and we are

independent of Eyropean

Union member states' diplo-

matic missions in

local government level in the

UK when he was elected to his

local council in 1976, and

eventually became an elected

Leader of an English County

Council. In 1989, he was

constituencies are Hindus.

The number of voters in

these constituencies is about

1.98 lakh, 2.26 lakh, 1.83 lakh,

The voters of the metropo-

lis under Barisal-5 don't face

lem is severe in some other

Around 20,000 Hindu

Hindu voters in Gouranadi

and Agailjhara under Barisal-1

lakh respectively.

Elson entered politics at

Bangladesh."

Nayan Bahini backed by voters in Barisal-1, 30 percent

Shahjahan, were entering the in Barisal-2, and about 5 per-

area with lethal weapons as cent each in Barisal 3, 4, and 6

musclemen would use money around 30,000 Hindu voters in

to woo the Hindu voters but Barisal-5.

Rumours were rife that the Another count says there are

The rumours added 2.36 lakh, 2.94 lakh and 1.83

Suktagar is not the only much trouble, but the prob-

allowed to cast their votes for are reportedly under risk as

There is no official estimate and Bakerganj under Barisal-6

how many Hindu voters are in fell victim to attacks in 2001

the district. But candidate and mostly failed to cast their

long as they are considered they were repressed in 2001.

"We are independent of the

should not assess," he says.

Elson says the observers

"We are not in any way

European Commission."

"It's worth stressing that

we are impartial," Elson says.

-- for whatever reasons

rity and impartiality."

Asked to comment on bias

"At the end of the day, we

violence and intimidation.

mission," Elson says.

far (this time).

Election process, not results | 2 Allahar Dal

FROM PAGE 16 code of conduct. "We have a code of conduct, which is internationally recognised as

agood code of conduct." About 150 observers are working under the EU team on Election Day across the country, helped by Bangladeshi interpreters. The EU budget for the 2008 election observation in Bangladesh is 3.2 mil-

lion euros. layers. At the heart of the operation is the core team of ten, usually deployed between six and eight weeks before Election Day. The core team consists of political or country, legal and media experts.

A week or ten days after the core team was deployed, the mission put in place 44 longterm observers, who work in teams of two, guided by the briefings from the core team.

Their role is to observe five and six weeks of election preparations outside the

capital," Elson says. About six or seven days before Election Day, another group, called short-term observers, joined in to observe the final preparations for the elections. They fanned out across the country to observe polling centres on Election

Day. Two days after the elections, the mission will release preliminary findings and

conclusions. The chief and the deputy chief of the EU election observation will come back to Bangladesh -- two months after the elections -- to release their final report in Dhaka. The final report also goes online on the mission's website.

important section called "recommendations" which ers?" will break down into "essential" and "desirable" recommendations.

"The purpose of the recommendations ... is putting has a very lively media enviforward proposals that we ronment." believe, if implemented, would help further improve and strengthen the political and democratic process in Bangladesh," Elson says.

Most of those musclemen

prevail. And some of those

whisper to the ears of the

helpless Hindus that it's not

certain who would come to

power and the army won't

save them throughout the

have voted for Boat and who

for Sheaf of Paddy," said a

whisper in the ears of the

the Hindus, however, dared to

talk about the issue yesterday

evening despite repeated

is also a victim of Shahjahan

Omar's gang, after seeing the

ID card helped this correspon-

dent win the trust of a Hindu

can vote as everything

changes at the night before

polls," said a middle-aged

the night tomorrow and once

we safely reach the polling

centre," added the mid-aged

farmer. He stressed the neces-

sity of special security on their

way to and from the polling

"We can say it for sure after

member of the family.

"We cannot say whether we

Finally, a BNP activist, who

When approached, none of

Hindu community.

attempts.

family.

booths.

"We will know who of you

FROM PAGE 1

"Whether or not the rec- thing we wish to do. We are ommendations will be adopted is entirely dependent

on the political will." "Our report ... is an assessment or a record of an election that has taken place. This is for others to decide how to use the assessment."

The assessment of the elections is based on seven key criteria that have been adopted by the European Elson explains how the Union in assessing the quality mission operates in different of elections. Two criteria stand out: The degree of impartiality shown by the election administration and the degree of freedom of political parties and candidates to assemble and express their views.

> The polls observers followed the preparatory work of the Election Commission toward today's election.

"We obviously followed in detail and with great interest the party candidate registration and nomination processes.

The polls observers also followed, quite closely, all of the campaign activity that went on -- to assess whether or not all candidates and parties are free to campaign without intimidation or fear or hin-

The media are also under the scanner.

"We've obviously been analysing coverage of the election by the media here in Bangladesh. We look at not just the nature of coverage in terms and time or space devoted to the election. We also look at whether the media are covering the elections in a fair and balanced way," Elson

"We also look at the tone of the coverage. Is it positive or The final report has an negative? Is it positive for some, but negative for oth-

> Elson declines to make any "judgemental comment" on the media before the elections, but says: "Bangladesh

"If we make any sort of appointed general secretary of judgemental comment before the UK Liberal Democrat party. Election Day, some people Elson left UK politics to pursue might accuse us of interfering a career in election observation in the process. That's the last and democratisation.

2001 still haunts Hindus in Barisal

keep the weapons for an alter-

native if the first approach

another shade of fear in the

Hindus, who might not vote

place in the region where the

of or during the elections. The

people of minority commu-

the vote bank of Awami

Hindus are suppressed ahead places.

sources say 45 percent of the votes.

well as money.

today.

League.

cadres held exactly what we are. We are not in Kurigram here to interfere in the pro-

A CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Kurigram district nayeb and acting nayeb of the banned militant group 'Allahar Dal' in Kurigram on Friday night.

The arrestees are Nayeb Rostam Ali, 22, son of Babor Ali of Nilkantha village under Kurigram Sadar upazila and acting nayeb Akhtaruzzaman Swit, 27, son of late Shahajada Asaduzzaman of Jamuna village under Ulipur upazila.

Police said Rab-5 under Rangpur raided the Rostam's house at 10:00 pm on Friday and arrested him. Later, he was handed over to Kurigram police. He was sent to jail next

Rab-5 arrested Akhtaruzzaman Swit from his sister's house at Adarsha Para in town yesterday and handed over him to Kurigram police.

Police arrested Allahar Dal chief Matin Mehedi and his four associates in Kurigram town on April 18 last year.

Police arrested 45 cadres of Allahar Dal, including Rostam and Swit, so far.

Zakir Siddiqui, captain of Rab-5, said operation will continue to arrest other militants.

Polls to witness

FROM PAGE 1 vigilant in the coastal zones.

Election Commission and home ministry sources said the drifty personnel will be ready as strike force while the members of Rab and police will remain vigilant as both strike and mobile force.

Sources said special security measures have already been taken in the hilly and Haor areas with deployment of additional security person-

Home Secretary Maj Gen (retd) Abdul Matin yesterday said highest security measures have been taken across the country for holding the ninth parliamentary election peace-

Rab Additional Director General Gulzar Uddin Ahmed told The Daily Star that Rab members would remain vigilant in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

Deployment of law enforcers at the polling centres began at 6:00am yesterday. Election materials were taken to the remote polling stations under protection of security personnel.

Officials of the home ministry and the EC said police, Rab, armed police battalion and Ansar personnel had already been deployed across the country. In the Dhaka city alone 38

928 members of police and Ansar have been deployed, voters in Uzirpur and they said. nity in Barisal are usually not Banaripara under Barisal-2 Besides, the army person-

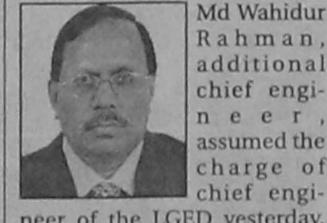
nel will be ready as strike force in the district and upazila headquarters to deal with any situation.

The EC and the home ministry have divided the polling centres across the country into two categories normal and important. Of the 35,315 centres, 20,865 have been marked important and 14,350 normal.

Of the polling centres, 33,185 are located in plain lands and 2,130 in the special

Wahid takes over as LGED chief engineer

METRO DESK



Evening

Rahman additional chief engineer assumed the charge of chief engineer of the LGED yesterday,

leadership today.

says a press release. He took the charge as Md Nurul Islam, chief engineer of LGED, will go on LPR from

today. Wahidur Rahman received ADB's Performance Recognition Award as a project director in 2001, 2002 and

Looking back at events

METROPOLITAN/NEWS

a plot to set up a partisan caretaker government.

Because of the bill former chief justice KM Hasan was supposed to be the chief adviser to the caretaker government but the Awami League (AL) alleged that Justice Hasan had been the internal affairs secretary of BNP during Ziaur Rahman's regime. The party also announced that they would not take part in the election under Hasan's caretaker government.

Later, appointment of Justice Abdul Aziz as the chief election commissioner and Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria as election commissioners deepened the crisis. Preparation of a voter list with at least 1.24 crore fake voters by the Election Commission (EC) also added to the crisis.

The then BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and AL general secretary Abdul Jalil sat in dialogues but failed to bring any positive

Towards the end of the BNP-led government's tenure, Justice Hasan declined to take charge as the chief adviser.

As both the major parties failed to choose a neutral person for the post, President Iajuddin Ahmed, who was chosen as the president by the BNP-led four-party alliance, assumed the office of the chief adviser on October 29, 2006.

However, Iajuddin failed to perform neutrally and his dubious role in running the administration prompted four advisers of his cabinet to step down in December that year.

Iajuddin appointed four new advisers but failed to create an atmosphere for holding the ninth parliamentary polls.

The AL-led grand alliance boycotted the election and announced to resist it. But the BNP-Jamaat-led electoral alliance desperately put pres-

candidates representing 29

parties and alliances as well as

elections were held on May 7,

1986 where a total of 1,980

candidates representing 28

parties and including 453

independents contested 300

dictator HM Ershad, bagged

highest 153 seats while Awami

1986 elections. Nearly

66.31percent of the 47,876,979

registered voters exercised

The fourth parliamentary

elections were held on March

3, 1988. As many as 1,192

candidates, representing eight

League won 73 seats in the

The third parliamentary

FROM PAGE 1

independents.

their franchise.

ment and the EC to hold the election on January 22, 2007.

Finally, Iajuddin stepped down as chief adviser along with his ten advisers and declared the state of emergency on January 11. The next day he appointed Fakhruddin Ahmed the chief adviser and, on Fakhruddin's advice, ten other advisers to the new caretaker government.

A few weeks later, the caretaker government launched an all-out drive against corruption and arrested many corruption suspects including political leaders which overphone. received huge public support. The special court has convicted many corrupt persons.

leaders of both the AL and BNP took initiatives to imple- parties and rescheduled the parties but they did not get levelleaders.

ers arrested the two top lead- the poll date but later, discussers--AL President Sheikh ing with political parties a Khaleda Zia. Even there was an initiative to exclude the two from politics which ultimately failed. Hasina was even barred to return to the country from the UK. The government, however, later removed the restriction.

Khaleda expelled party secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan just before her arrest on the morning of September 3, 2007. Against this backdrop, the

chief adviser reshuffled his cabinet on January 9 this year as new advisers took oath after the resignation of five advisers. The government then

decided to open dialogues with the political parties to minimise the gap with them. Khaleda's eldest son Tarique Rahman left the coun-

Past elections at a glance

contested the 300 seats.

bagged by Bangladesh

Nationalist Party (BNP), which

formed the government with

Khaleda Zia as prime minister.

Awami League secured 92

seats while Jatiya Party of HM

the registered voters totalling

elections were held on

February 15, 1996. All the

BNP boycotted the controver-

sial election. Only 26.54 per-

cent voters exercised their

franchise in the elections

contested by 993 candidates

slipped through the fingers.

Seventeen years into the

restoration of democracy,

Bangladesh remains patheti-

cally spread-eagled on institu-

tions that could sprout effec-

tive good governance, and

create infrastructure for devel-

opment -- ports, power sta-

tions, communication back-

bone. Corrupt practices

became the name of the game.

And power of the powerful

lawlessness.

created a vicious cobweb of

In the seventh general

major political parties except

Voters' turnout was

The sixth parliamentary

Ershad won 35 seats.

Jatiya Party, led by military approximately 52 percent of

parties and including 214 with party affiliation and

were held on February 27, 1996 under the caretaker

1991 with 2,787 candidates, government, a total of 2,574

representing 75 parties and candidates took part. The

The fifth general elections elections held on June 12 in

independents, took part in the another 457 independents.

62,289,556.

try for London a day after her release on September 11. Tarique had also been arrested

including 424 independents, candidates represented 81

The highest 169 seats were independents. Bangladesh

got 116.

74.9 percent.

cal turmoil.

tion today.

sure on the caretaker govern- on corruption charges and then released on bail. Before leaving the country in a statement he said he resigned from the party post and will not stay in politics.

Earlier, his brother Koko was also released on parole and left for Singapore for treatment.

On June 11, AL chief Sheikh Hasina was released following an executive order for treatment abroad.

After the release of both Hasina and Khaleda four advisers met them. The chief adviser also talked to them Elections to four city cor-

porations and nine municipalities were held on August 4 Meanwhile, a group of with a record voter turn out. The EC negotiated with all

ment reforms within the ninth parliamentary polls in December as per its electoral support from the grassroots roadmap announced July 2007 The commission primarily

Besides these, law enforc- announced December 18 as Hasina and BNP Chairperson demand of the BNP-led alliance, shifted it to December 29.

The caretaker government withdrew the state of emergency on December 17 to ensure congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election.

Obituary

BSS, Dhaka

Dr Hasmat Ara Begum, wife of Alhaj Siraj Uddin Dowla founding chairman of Mohammadi Group of Companies Limited, and director of the group of companies, passed away at a city hospital yesterday at the age of

She left behind three sons, two daughters, granddaughters and grandsons and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn her death.

She was buried at her family graveyard in Bagerhat.

parties and also included 284

Awami League formed the

government securing 146

seats in the election while BNP

parliament was held on

October 1, 2001. A total of

1,935 candidates representing

54 parties and including 484

independents contested the

key political rival Awami

League got only 62 seats. Total

turnout of voters was nearly

elections, scheduled for

January 22, 2007, was

cancelled after declaration of

the state of emergency on

The nation finally goes to

January 11, 2007 amid politi-

the ninth Jatiya Sangsad elec-

The ninth parliamentary

BNP won 193 seats while its

30,000 voters may not be able to vote in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

At least 30,000 security personnel, who became voters in Khagrachhari, may not be able to cast their votes due to their transfer or engagement in maintaining law and order on

the election day. District Election Office sources said they had enlisted at least 30,000 security personnel including army, BDR, police, ansar and VDP members as voters but due to their transfer or duty they would not be able to cast their votes.

Admitting the fact, District Election Officer Nurul Hasan Bhuiyan said, "Due to time constraints we are not getting ballot papers on time, otherwise, they could cast their votes through postal ballots."

However, those who will be deployed near their polling centres may get a chance to cast their votes, if time and environment allow, he added.

Khagrachhari hill seat comprises eight upazilas including Khagrachhari sadar, Panchhari, Dighinala, Mohalchhari, Manikchhari, Matiranga, Laxmichhari and Ramghor.

According to Election Office sources, the total number of registered voters in the constituency is 3,38,425.

Death anniversary METRO DESK



death anniversary of Principal Humayun Khalid, a freedom fighter, lawmaker and educationist,

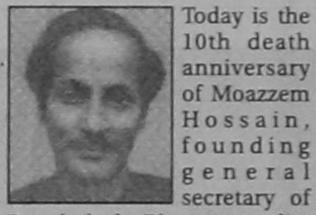
The sixth

will be observed today, says a press release. He was also a member of the constitution committee of

the newborn country and founder principal of Nagarpur Degree College in Tangail To mark the occasion, a

special prayer will be held on the college premises for the salvation of the departed soul.

The election to the eighth Moazzem Hossain STAFF CORRESPONDENT



of Moazzem Hossain. founding general secretary of Bangladesh Photojournalist Association, and a senior

On this occasion, Qurankhwani will be held at his Shantinagar residence in the city. Food will also be distributed among the destitutes.

photojournalist of Bangladesh

Observer, says a press release.

Test of hope as polls today after 7 years

FROM PAGE 1

elections.

challenges of a new leadership and brace for the future -- plan and execute, watch and chart routes. It is a time that the world did not see after the 1930s -- a time of great recession when all economies are slumping one after another like a pack of falling cards. It is a time when one can only boast if one is fool enough, and then find the carpet being whisked away from under your feet. It is a time when great economies are in recession and the corporate world for good cheers today. One is bottoming out.

may differ, but the last two It is then a great challenge years were not all that wastedand also a time for great acu-- we need a break from all this men for leaderships to take to reflect on what went wrong and take a headlong dive to over power after a fresh election. Barack Obama has taken correct them. The elections the risk and poured out his slated for today was actually wisdom by taking in the wise scheduled for January 22, paigning that everybody afternoon. men and women under his 2007, but that could not be would agree differs by miles fold and reeled out his job- held as we saw a great marcreating schemes. Still the year shalling of the judiciary to get today know who they are the end of the voting session --2009 is deemed to be a lost to the top of the caretaker voting for, they know their not one by the hackneyed olds year for him and others government a person desired around the globe. For by the BNP and its allies. We Bangladesh, even with a small saw how the puppet of a president in Iajuddin Ahmed who elected. export dependency for growth assumed the position of the -- only 20 percent of its GDP relies on selling goods outward -- and a near zero foreign portfolio investment, the ofthe BNP and its allies. incoming leadership needs to have the veracity, insightfulness and modernity

reaped at its best and many tarnished. Every hope put

more growth numbers just down quickly.

movie by his action. We saw a to outlast this depression. great ploy to doctor the results Bangladesh waits for such a as the bureaucracy was jog-The records are poor for gled up and down, and side-Bangladesh and so are their outcomes. A sharply divided allies. The violence and the and bickering political leadership could breed in fractious speech-making. policies and corruption. Despite the over 6 percent

GDP growth for a few straight tion was being toppled, one years, the sunshine could not after another. Every reasoning

the emergency was declared and a new caretaker govern-tics. ment came to power. The military took a deeper control and backed the government. A task was initiated to correct the wrong, to stop the rotting. We have achieved only a

minuscule of the task, but we did accomplish something. Today, we have a voter list that that were enlisted by the last process to favour the ones that But there are also reasons the election results. The list culture that lived on lies and also carries photos of voters to rhetoric, a sub-culture of vice minimise the risk of false and protectionism and milivoting, translucent ballot tancy and false notions. And boxes have been introduced to the answers will be given bring more transparency in today when the about eight the process. Good sides to the crore voters will walk down to already shown in the camfrom any before. Most voters correct answer will be found at track records and can decide conditioned by the age-old whether they want a man or cultures and sub-cultures but by woman like them to be a huge 31 percent youths who

chief adviser of the caretaker shady track records running in a globalised future in its all-hued government and toed the line the elections, but the difference from before is that we all for the narrowness of political We saw a chief election know who they are. And we tunnel vision, and they want to commissioner in MA Aziz who hope the voters will remember bloom into a society of greater could at best match a joker in a their past when exercising tolerance. their franchise. These are the people who cannot keep their today will be shaped by a great stinky past buried under the extent by these youths. This carpet. And the rest depends election, this new journey into ways. Then we saw the horrid on the voters -- whether they democracy after two years of lash-out from the AL and its want to elect them or not, mouth-stifling emergency by whether they want to aspire a military-backed government deaths. The brutally ferocious for a leadership that can scale pushed upon the country after the mountainous challenge 15 years of restoration of We saw how every institu- ahead will be decided today as democracy in 1990, this whole they parties go for the test of new set-up of institutions and popularity. Testing popularity the wishes of getting more will is an easy task, but making it usher in that childhood begin-

When it was the end of line, journey is all that matters and a task of an old hand in poli-

The nation today searches itself for an answer to the ricocheting question of whether it wants the same old culture to continue -- a culture that bred in protecting the killers and murderers by the power holders for handsome bribes, a practice that led to has shed 1.3 crore fake voters skewing of procurement ruling government to doctor walk the corridors of power, a massive electoral reforms are the polling stations from 8 in the morning until 4 in the

A bright hope is that the would take up a ballot paper for Yet there are people with the first time. The youth dream of prosperity. They have little care

The dawn that beacons last on an arduous political ning. We hope Amen.

Dry weather likely UNB, Dhaka

the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

light to moderate for elsewhere over the country.

Moderate to thick fog may occur over the river basins and

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over

Highest temperature 26.5 degrees Celsius was recorded

The sun sets in the capital at 5:21pm today and rises at

yesterday at Jessore and lowest 11.0 degrees Celsius at

Requesting not to publish his name he continued, "If my Weather is likely to remain dry with partly cloudy sky over name is mentioned, that might cost either my life or my honour or both."

The atmosphere is different this year and the Hindus were hoping for a change. But a comment of local UP Chairman Abul Kalam Azad has buried all their hopes again.

"Those who support Boat won't be allowed a piece of earth in my union," the farmer quoted Azad as threatening them at a recent public meet-

him during the BNP-led alliance rule. ning that Azad's supporters, known as cadres of Sohel-

a "selection" process as he did not let anyone stand against A report came in the eve-

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were: Humidityin City/Town Temperature in Celsius percentage Max Morning Min Azad became chairman in 15.2 Dhaka 24.0

6:40am tomorrow.

the country, Met Office said.

15.0 71 Chittagong 24.5 84 78 25.2 13.4 96 Rajshahi 24.8 13.5 87 80 Khulna 12.5 89 Barisal 24.0 Sylhet 14.1 78 26.0 14.0 67 Cox's Bazar 26.4 79