

The Daily Star, 1 December 2006

**BKMEA seeks release of cash incentives to pay workers' wages**

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) yesterday urged the government to release major portion of the Tk 500 crore cash incentives to the sector. The exporters feared that the knitwear sector, which is faced with severe fund constraints, would fall victim to another labour unrest in case of any failure in paying wages to the workers before the next festival, Eid-ul-Azha. The BKMEA leaders placed their demands when they met Finance Adviser Akbar Ali Khan at his office...

New Age, 1 December 2006

**CJ's move sparks SC mayhem (Shahiduzzaman)**

Agitated lawyers Thursday afternoon stormed the office and courtroom of the chief justice, Syed JR Mudassir Husain, as he stayed the proceedings of three writ petitions challenging Iajuddin Ahmed's assumption of office of the head of the caretaker government. The lawyers also damaged the doors and broke the windowpanes of the attorney general's office. They also set ablaze an expensive wagon (Nissan Petrol) of Shajahan Omar, former state minister for law. The CJ's stay order came minutes before the High Court was going to issue a rule on Iajuddin. The leaders of the Awami League-led combine, Liberal Democratic Party, Tariqat Federation, some social organisations and another individual filed three writs in the form of public-interest litigation...

The Daily Star, 1 December 2006

**Take Back Bangladesh (Zafar Sobhan)**

Things do seem pretty bleak at first blush. It seems fairly apparent now that nothing is going to retrieve the political situation any time soon. Aziz is gone, but it is clear that free and fair elections are as unlikely as before. The decision to publish the election schedule last Monday signals that the caretaker government continues to do the 4-party alliance's bidding and also that those calling the shots don't much care about public opinion. The game plan is obvious. Full steam to elections. It doesn't matter if the 14-party alliance contests or not. In fact, if not, all the better. If it does contest, that's fine, too: without meaningful election reform, the fix is already in. Hurriedly swear in a new cabinet and parliament. Brazen it out...

The Daily Star, 4 December 2006

**Package proposal placed before Khaleda, Hasina**

A team of advisers to the caretaker government talked with the two major political alliances last night with a package proposal in an apparent last ditch effort to resolve the prevailing political crisis. The proposals include making inactive two controversial election commissioners SM Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury, appointment of new election commissioners, transfers of home and establishment secretaries and others related to the electoral process, and minor changes in the election schedule creating scope for correcting the updated voter list, sources present at a daylong meeting of the council of advisers said. The package proposal also urged Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition to withdraw its indefinite countrywide blockade, the sources said adding that the caretaker government is ready to initiate more steps to create a level playing field but the blockade must be withdrawn. ...

New Age, 4 December 2006

### **Blockade shuts capital from outside**

At least one person was killed in Sylhet and more than 100 people were injured in clashes between the activists of the Awami League-led combine and the BNP-led alliance and in police action in the capital and elsewhere in the country on Sunday, the first day of the fourth phase of the blockade. At the end of the day, the AL's general secretary, Abdul Jalil, at a press briefing in Sheikh Hasina's Dhanmondi office on Sunday evening said that the blockade would continue until their demands were met...

The Daily Star, 4 December 2006

### **CHT Agreement**

We are disappointed by the lack of progress in implementation of the CHT Agreement of 1997. Over the past nine years no serious effort has been made in putting the various terms of the agreement into effect. This issue has been one patent case of apathy and unwarranted negligence on the part of the government. It is a pity that the agreement has been put in the back burner, left to languish. We do certainly owe an apology to the peoples of the CHT for the abject failure...

The Daily Star, 5 December 2006

### **Advisers decide to recast EC, transfer secretaries**

The council of advisers to the caretaker government yesterday decided to reconstitute the Election Commission (EC) and transfer secretaries of some ministries that are considered to have an important bearing on the conduct of elections. In a significant breakthrough in the efforts to resolve the long-drawn-out political crisis, they have already asked the EC to rearrange the election schedule and correct the voter list so that all parties take part in the polls. The advisers said they did not take the decisions under any pressure from any quarters...

New Age, 5 December 2006

### **Garment exports to EU jump (Kazi Azizul Islam)**

Readymade garment exports to the European Union, the largest destination of 'Made in Bangladesh' apparels, increased tremendously in the first eight months of the current year, said European Commission. Making a turnaround from the previous year's performance, Bangladesh replaced Romania to be the number four source of textiles and clothing for the EU market during January-August period. Exports increased by nearly 35 per cent in value and more than 16 per cent in volume, showed latest statistics of the commission...

New Age, 5 December 2006

### **India to develop 7 land ports along border with Bangladesh (Kazi Azizul Islam)**

India will develop seven land ports at the existing trade and immigration points along its border with Bangladesh.

The Indian cabinet last week approved a plan to establish a body named Land Ports Authority of India to manage and operate 13 land ports dubbed as the 'integrated check posts' (ICPs) along its borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan, said sources at the Bangladesh Land Port Authority. Seven of the ICPs would be set up along

the common border between Bangladesh and India to facilitate smooth movement of goods, services, and even people with requisite security clearances, said BLPA sources quoting Indian media reports.

New Age, 6 December 2006

### **CG exposed to new complications**

The caretaker government seems to have been exposed to new complications as regards implementing its much talked about package deal to end political impasse arising out of difference of opinions of the rival political camps over holding a credible election on time. Under this circumstance, both the rival political camps, led by BNP and Awami League, continued to threaten the caretaker administration with agitations in case the government prefers the demands of the one alliance to those of the other. The government's 'package deal' included sending two elections commissioners on leave and appointing yet another commissioner to take charge of the commission, immediate efforts to correct voters list, changing more than half a dozen top bureaucrats, bringing in change in the already announced election schedule keeping the poll date unchanged, etc....

The Daily Star, 6 December 2006

### **14-party starts sit-in around EC Secretariat**

The sit-in around the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat by the 14-party combine and allies passed off peacefully yesterday with the demonstrators resolving to continue the programme until the commission is reconstituted and the voter roll corrected. During the first day's demo held between 10:00am and 2:00pm, the participants appeared to be in an upbeat mood. Many of them said they believe they are now close to what they have long been agitating for. The Awami League (AL) led alliance on Monday declared that it would be staging sit-in outside the EC Secretariat to press home the demands for EC reconstitution and correction of the voter list in line with the decisions taken by the council of advisers to the caretaker government...

New Age, 6 December 2006

### **Voters' roll update from Friday**

The Election Commission will start a week-long campaign for correcting the recently updated voters' roll from Friday through door-to-door visits. The assistant registration officers will collect information from people through door-to-door visits from December 8 to 10 to identify those whose names should be erased. They will arrange hearings on the matter on December 13 and 14 and will rectify the electoral roll on December 15. Besides, the eligible voters who were not included in the list earlier can apply to the assistant officers to have their names listed during the door-to-door visits...

The Daily Star, 6 December 2006

### **Bangabhaban across the years (Syed Bangabhaban across the years (Syed Badrul Ahsan)**

On the morning following the afternoon when the Pakistan army surrendered to the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Command in 1971, a huge crowd of exulting Bengalis chanted Joi Bangla as it tried to make its way into Governor's House. It was not yet called Bangabhaban, but the crowd, among whom was yours truly, felt that it would be quite

some experience taking a walk inside a place that had lately come under heavy shelling, forcing the puppet governor installed by the Pakistanis to quit and take refuge in a neutral zone set up inside the Intercontinental Hotel...

The Daily Star, 7 December 2006

**Light finally seen at end of the tunnel**

In a major breakthrough in the near debilitating political crisis, the Election Commission (EC) yesterday decided to rearrange the entire election schedule including the polling date, following a tedious negotiation among the caretaker government and the two rival political alliances. The new schedule will be announced sometime today through a gazette notification, ten days after the surreptitiously hasty announcement of the current schedule. The election commission will refix the poll schedule in its tomorrow's meeting, a press release issued by the EC Secretariat disclosed yesterday, apparently clearing the clouds regarding holding of the next parliamentary election by January 25...

The Bangladesh Today, 7 December 2006

**Political turbulence takes heavy toll on investment (Kayes M Sohel)**

The current political turbulence in the country is taking a heavy toll on the investment scenario as the inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) dipped by 50 per cent during the month of November this year compared to the same period in 2005. The proposed FDI was \$13 million in the month of November in 2006 with the Board of Investment (BoI) against \$ 26 million in the same month last year. This is the fallout of the present volatile political situation, a high official in the board said adding that the actual loss will account for much more. He pointed out that if the political uncertainty continues, the FDI growth will be adversely affected....

New Age, 7 December 2006

**RMG export to USA grows 29pc (Kazi Azizul Islam)**

Export of Bangladesh garments to the USA in the first quarter of the current fiscal year increased robustly by 29 per cent to \$863 million, said sources in the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. Exporters said they have found great potential in the USA, the world's number one apparel market, especially when new opportunities emerged after elimination of the global textile quota system in early 2005. But they fear that internal political unrest might handicap the industry and prevent them from availing themselves of such bright prospects, and also fear that the American and other buyers may divert their orders to others sources...

The Daily Star, 7 December 2006

**Take note of the rumbling in the hills (Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psc (Retd))**

Every year since the CHT Accord was signed on 2 Dec 1997, the PCJSS led by Shantu Larma has been calling upon the government to fulfill its part of the deal. We have noticed the upping of the ante every year over the last several years. In 2004 Larma had laid a six-point demand related to the fulfillment of the Accord on the government's table. The ante has been graduated further up this year when he threatened reverting to guerilla war if the CHT Accord remained unfulfilled any longer....

The Daily Star, 8 December 2006

**Election on 23 January**

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday rescheduled the upcoming ninth parliamentary elections, setting January 23 as the polling day instead of January 21, to ensure participation of all political parties in the next elections. The dates for different stages of the election--submission of nomination papers, their scrutiny and withdrawal of candidature--have also been rescheduled in the new timetable. The EC announcement of the new schedule--after 10 days of its surreptitious and hasty declaration of January 21 as the election date--came following a series of negotiations between the council of advisers to the caretaker government and political parties....

New Age, 8 December 2006

**Brawl over EC reconstitution on (Abul Kalam Azad, Ofiul Hasnat and Khadimul Islam)**

The rescheduling of the election date by the Election Commission on Thursday created hopes for an end to the current political impasse, but presidential reluctance to send yet another controversial election commissioner on leave stood in the way of a decisive solution. After a negotiation brokered by a panel of advisers to the caretaker government between the two rival political camps led by the Awami League and the BNP, the Election Commission on Thursday announced a revised schedule for the elections. According to the revised schedule, the last date for submission of nomination papers has been re-fixed on December 21 while deadline for the withdrawal of candidature is December 28. The scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on December 22...

The Daily Star, 8 December 2006

**Ershad now mulls loose alliance with 14-party**

In yet another show of ever changing political stance, Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad now mulls forging a loose alliance with the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine ahead of the next general election. He will make a formal announcement to this effect soon, sources said. The possibility of our joining the (BNP-led) four-party alliance is very slim, rather we are more likely to reach an electoral understanding with the 14-party combine, Ershad told reporters at the airport on his return from London yesterday...

The Daily Star, 9 December 2006

**Implement package offer fully within 24 hours**

The Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition and its allies yesterday jointly issued a 24-hour ultimatum to the caretaker government (CG) to implement fully the package proposal negotiated between them, and said otherwise it will not be possible for them to participate in the next general election within the stipulated 90 days. If the package deal is not implemented in the next 24 hours, we will go for tough movements including non-stop sit-in demonstrations around the Bangabhaban, 14-party coordinator Abdul Jalil told a crowded press conference at a city hotel...

New Age, 9 December 2006

**VOTERS' ROLL UPDATE: Little work on first day of door-to-door visits**

A week-long campaign of the Election Commission to correct the voters' roll through door-to-door information collection got off to a slow start on Friday. In the capital city, assistant registration officers did little work at some places in the first half of the day as required forms for correction of information and inclusion of new voters reached them at about 10:30am. In the second half of the day, the AROs started door-to-door visits to identify those whose names should be dropped and enlist new voters. A number AROs hoped that the work would get momentum from today as they spent the first day in completing the process...

The Bangladesh Today, 9 December 2006

**BD textile workers get less pay from UK firms**

Textile workers in Bangladesh get paid as little as five pence an hour to make cheap clothes for UK companies Tesco, Asda and Primark, says a report. The mainly female workers regularly spend 80 hours per week in potential death trap factories, according to anti-poverty group War On Want, BBC reported on Friday. Tesco, Asda and Primark all strongly denied the allegations. War On Want based its report on interviews with 60 workers from six Bangladeshi garment factories. It said that starting wages at the factories were as little as £8 a month, barely one third of the living wage in Bangladesh...

The Daily Star, 10 December 2006

**President orders army deployment**

Disregarding strong objections from the advisory council, President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday ordered army deployment in aid of the civil administration to maintain law and order ahead of the upcoming general election. The home ministry issued a notification to that end late last night, without saying exactly when the troops will roll out. But sources in the armed forces said the deployment might start sometime this morning. Meantime, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has imposed a ban on all kinds of gatherings, meetings and processions in the Bangabhaban area. Taking effect from Saturday midnight, the ban will be in force until further order...

New Age, 10 December 2006

**Caretaker, so far (Hasnat Abdul Hye)**

To be fair to the caretaker government, they faced a task that was not their mandate as per the constitution. They had to engage in activities to reconcile the positions of the major parties. By any measure, there is no comparison between the present Caretaker Government and those that preceded it. The previous ones had a cake walk while the incumbent is walking gingerly through a minefield. This is not what was slated to be the task of the interim government. Its mandate was to help the holding of a general election in a free, fair and impartial manner. In addition, the day to day activities of the government had also to be carried out through the ministries...

The Daily Star, 10 December 2006

**The changing face of terrorism (Kazi Anwarul Masud)**

If general elections are held, albeit dependant on enabling conditions demanded by the

14-party combine for holding free and fair elections, then the Bangladeshi voters will have to take a decision whether they should vote for the Jamaat-e-Islam, which for all practical purposes had allegedly been stoking the fire of religious militancy in Bangladesh. The principal beneficiary of the messy political equations has been the increasingly influential Islamist fringe, writes Brussels based International Crisis Group in its report on Bangladesh, led by the legitimate governing parties like Jamat but extending to the violently militant JMJB and JMB. Circumstantial evidence as well as cold political logic suggests that underground terrorist groups have been cultivated and sheltered by those in power...

The Daily Star, 11 December 2006

### **Troops take to streets**

The army joined ranks with other law enforcement agencies in securing the presidential residence, Bangabhaban, as the armed forces moved out of garrisons and took positions at key locations across the country early morning yesterday. Troops in combat gear fanned out following a presidential order on Saturday that earned mostly negative reactions from a broad cross-section of citizens. The troops were seen patrolling the main thoroughfares of the capital while being stationed in different community centres in the capital. The forces did not begin their operation on a large scale yesterday but are likely to do so from today, according to sources. Deployment of troops in all district headquarters was completed yesterday, the home ministry said, hoping that the deployment will secure economic activities, a sense of peace, and a congenial atmosphere for the upcoming election...

The Bangladesh Today, 11 December 2006

### **Yunus receives Nobel**

Banker to the Poor Muhammad Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on Sunday in a ceremony graced with traditional dancers from his native Bangladesh, Norwegian royalty and tears from Hollywood star Sharon Stone. Dressed in simple traditional garb, Yunus smiled broadly as uniformed trumpeters in the balconies above heralded his entrance into the ornate main hall of Oslo's city government. The economist turned humanitarian banker, who pioneered the system of micro-credit that has helped millions of the world's poorest citizens lift themselves out of abject poverty, was accompanied by Mosammat Taslima Begum, representing the seven million members of the Grameen Bank Yunus founded...

New Age, 11 December 2006

### **Iajuddin promises polls, constitutional continuity**

The president and chief adviser, Iajuddin Ahmed, Sunday night assured the nation that the hard-earned democratic and constitutional process would continue in the country despite the deployment of Army. 'I would like to firmly assure you that our hard-earned democratic and constitutional process will continue,' he said in an address to the nation, the third after he assumed office of the chief adviser to the caretaker government. 'I do expect that I'll be able to hand over power to the government to be elected through a fair election in cooperation with the people and all concerned within the stipulated time,' he said...

The Bangladesh Today, 12 December 2006

**Four advisers resign (Md. Rabiul Islam)**

Four caretaker government advisers Akbar Ali Khan, Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, CM Shafi Sami and Sultana Kamal have resigned as their opinions and suggestions were allegedly not reflected in the major decision-making process of the interim administration. They sent their resignation letters to President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed through messengers on Monday morning. The four advisers, reportedly dissatisfied and frustrated with many unilateral decisions of the chief adviser, stepped down after two days of Iajuddin Ahmed's unilateral decision to deploy the army across the country in the name of assisting the civil administration...

New Age, 12 December 2006

**Iajuddin executing dubious designs (Zayd Almer Khan)**

The address to the nation by the president and chief adviser, Iajuddin Ahmed, late on Sunday might as well have been read out by the BNP chairperson, Khaleda Zia. One really had to overburden one's auditory nerves to make out the slightest bit of difference between what Iajuddin was saying and what Khaleda and her secretary general, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, repeat ad nauseum almost every day. And even then not much other than glaring discrepancies in diction came to notice...

The Daily Star, 12 December 2006

**Four Advisers' Resignation: Donors shocked, worried**

Bangladesh's major development partners were shocked and worried about the functioning of the caretaker government following resignation of four advisers, halfway through the election process. The US, UK, Germany and Canada appreciated the advisers' hard work to create a positive political climate for the upcoming elections and said their resignation is unfortunate. A spokesman for the US embassy told the news agency that the advisers' resignation would pose a serious challenge to the concept of neutral and nonparty caretaker government...

The Daily Star, 12 December 2006

**Army on the street: Will it serve the intended purpose? (Harun ur Rashid)**

It is noted that the president is empowered to call emergency under Article 141A of the Constitution and also, as he is in charge of the defense portfolio, entitled to call out the army for reasons he deems fit. The president has thought it fit to call the army to join ranks with the other law enforcement agencies in maintaining law and order to ensure a fair election. On December 10, the president stated in a nation-wide address that in the past the army had been called out in aid of the civil administration to curb terrorism, tackle disasters, control traffic, distribute VGF cards, and manage water supply in the Dhaka city. This means that calling out the army to assist the civil administration is not something extraordinary...

New Age, 13 December 2006

**Iajuddin appoints 4 new advisers (Nazrul Islam and Abul Kalam Azad)**

The president and chief adviser to the caretaker administration, Iajuddin Ahmed, on Tuesday inducted four advisers to the interim cabinet after he failed to bring back the



four advisers who resigned over differences of opinion the day before. Of the four new advisers, three took oath at Bangabhaban at about 2:00pm, more than 24 hours after the four advisers quit. The other took oath there at 8:00pm. The new advisers are Mainuddin Khan, a professor of Dhaka University, retired Major General Ruhul Alam Chowdhury, Shafiqul Huq Chowdhury, and Shoeb Ahmed Chowdhury, a former bureaucrat...

The Daily Star, 13 December 2006

### **Many from minorities missing on voter roll**

Several thousand members of the minority communities in Dinajpur town who were not included in the updated voter list may not be enrolled this time also due to acute shortage of voter registration forms. Besides, the names of many under aged students of a madrasa in the capital's Mohammadpur area, registered as voters earlier, were not deleted from the list till yesterday while correction of it ends on Friday. Filed level Election Commission (EC) staffs continue to show negligence to list people who were not enrolled earlier. Severe shortage of voter registration forms is one of the main reasons for this...

The Daily Star, 13 December 2006

### **Hasina makes 27 poll pledges**

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday made 27 electoral pledges including controlling price hikes, solving the crisis of power supply, curbing corruption and militancy, and separation of the judiciary from the executive branch of the government. We would like to constitute a government that will push Bangladesh forward on the path of good governance. If we are voted to power, we will bring the price level within the people's reach and will keep it in check, we will set up a price regulatory authority to monitor the market, said the AL chief while addressing a monthly luncheon meeting of the local American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in a hotel in the capital...

The Daily Star, 14 December 2006

### **Voter awareness is the key (Zahid Hossain)**

The Washington-based National Democratic Institute has asserted that the existing voter list with 1.22 crore extra or duplicated names can be corrected with the cooperation of the political parties and the members of the civil society. But since we have very limited time at our disposal, the voter updating program must be carried out with utmost urgency and care, in order to avoid the recurrence of the recent exercise in this respect by the Election Commission. Therefore, the local representatives of political parties have to remain alert and active during the updating period, and pinpoint every defect of the existing voter list as well as to ensure their rectification...

New Age, 14 December 2006

### **Govt to go ahead with package implementation: Army to move only if situation warrants (Nazrul Islam and Abul Kalam Azad)**

The reconstituted caretaker administration at an emergency meeting Wednesday evening decided to continue the government's effort to end the political impasse through total implementation of its 'package proposal'. The meeting, chaired by the president, Iajuddin Ahmed, the chief of the caretaker government, also decided that the army, already

deployed, will be stationed at district levels and will move only if the deputy commissioners or district magistrates ask them to do so. 'The army will be moved only if the situation warrants. They will not be pulled back to the barracks. They have been asked to stay in district headquarters,' one of the advisers told New Age after the meeting...

The Bangladesh Today, 15 December 2006

**Ershad jailed for two years**

The High Court on Thursday jailed former military ruler and Jatiya Party chairman Hussain Mohammad Ershad for two years for over a decade-old scam in the purchase of Japanese boats. A single bench comprising Justice Faisal Mahmud Faizee passed the order dismissing his appeal against the trial-court verdict that had sentenced him to three years imprisonment with a fine of Tk 10,000. The High Court upheld the trial court's judgement but commuted the sentence term by a year, which means he will have to suffer in jail for two years...

The Daily Star, 15 December 2006

**Voter List Correction: Time extended by 3 days; EU to send 150 observers in phases**

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday extended the time for the ongoing field level work of correcting the updated voter list by three days--up to December 18, but was yet to re-fix the poll date. The EC also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the European Union (EU) for the latter's sending around 150 observers in three phases to Bangladesh for the upcoming national election. EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar told newsmen that a meeting of the commission yesterday took the decision to extend time for correcting the voter list...

New Age, 15 December 2006

**Allies demand much larger wedge of pie from BNP, AL (Shahidul Islam Chowdhury and Moloy Saha)**

The smaller partners in the two major political camps led by Awami League and BNP placed their rather ambitious demands before the major partners for sharing constituencies in the general elections scheduled for January 23. The two major parties, AL and BNP, are yet to settle the issue as the Jatiya Party's chairman, HM Ershad, was in two minds over joining any of the alliances. The two camps, however, will finalise the deals over sharing of seats by the end of next week. According to the leaders of the present and probable partners in the AL-led alliance, these parties together demanded about 178 seats out of a total of 300 constituencies, from the Awami League...

New Age, 16 December 2006

**Iajuddin wants political consensus on EC recast (Nazrul Islam and Abul Kalam Azad)**

The president and chief adviser, Iajuddin Ahmed, will request the two 'controversial' election officials to step aside only if the two feuding political alliances reached a consensus on reconstitution of the Election Commission. 'The president is ready to request the two officials to go on leave depending on political consensus on the issue,' Shafiqul Haque Chowdhury, the newly inducted adviser to the caretaker government, told

New Age on Friday night after meeting the president. He said the president had sent the chief election commissioner, MA Aziz, on leave in the face of vigorous street agitation by the Awami League-led alliance. Now he says he will not make any such request to anyone unless the parties reach an understanding....

The Daily Star, 17 December 2006

**'Informal' move initiated to revive package proposal**

A few advisers to the caretaker government have re-initiated negotiations with the two major political alliances about recasting the Election Commission (EC) in line with the advisory council's package proposal. Sources said President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed will request election commissioners SM Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury to go on leave--as per the package proposal--only when the two alliances led by the BNP and Awami League (AL) agree....

New Age, 18 December 2006

**Voters' roll update drive ends today (Khadimul Islam)**

The deadline for door-to-door visits to correct and update the voters' roll will end today, although many assistant returning officers assigned to conduct the correction drive are yet to visit many neighbourhoods in the capital and elsewhere in the country. There are widespread allegations that deletion of names of the voters who have left the places where they were enlisted, or inclusion of eligible voters whose names were omitted, is not being done properly. Some district and thana election officers admitted that the assistant officers did not do their job properly and some of them even did not visit most of the households in their respective areas....

The Daily Star, 18 December 2006

**Advance EU team in city to watch polls**

A nine-member advance team from the European Union (EU) arrived in Dhaka yesterday to observe the general elections in Bangladesh slated for January 23. The team comprising experts in law and politics arrived yesterday morning while the team leader is scheduled to arrive tomorrow, an official in the Delegation of the European Commission (EC) in Dhaka told the news agency. The EU will send a total of 150 observers. Meanwhile, EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner in a statement said successful and credible elections would be a positive contribution to the long-term stability of Bangladesh....

The Daily Star, 18 December 2006

**An Indian viewpoint (Kuldip Nayar)**

Joi Bangla was the slogan that resounded in the streets of Dhaka and outside this month 35 years ago. Once again the same slogan reverberates all over. Then it was a war cry for liberation from West Pakistan and it exuded optimism and exuberance. This time it is for holding free, fair elections and arouses pessimism and anxiety. Those days one call from Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman, the father of the nation, made people surrender arms which they carried freely. Today, uncertainty has gripped people and they want to possess arms. Yet they are worried over security as an untoward stream of passion runs through the streets....

The Daily Star, 18 December 2006

**Election 2007: The question of level playing field (M Abdul Hafiz)**

Given the fact that many issues are yet to be resolved to ensure a level playing field for the contestants for the upcoming election -- doubts abound as to the fate of the election itself. A growing number of people are wondering if those issues can at all be addressed, consensual decisions arrived at, and the election held within the stipulated time-frame of ninety days -- a constitutional binding. They are doubtful of the possibility because the caretaker government tasked with the job is headed by a person responsible for the catalysis of some of the issues....

The Daily Star, 19 December 2006

**14-party, Ershad, B Chy form largest-ever alliance (Hasan Jahid Tusher)**

In a significant political polarisation, the Awami League (AL)-led 14-party coalition, Jatiya Party (Ershad), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and several other parties yesterday forged the largest ever alliance to advance the 'movement for a free and fair election'. Ending all speculations, former presidents HM Ershad and AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, Zaker Party Chairman Pirjada Amir Faisal, and leaders of Tariqat Federation, an Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) faction and Islamic Front Bangladesh yesterday formally joined forces with Sheikh Hasina-led combine at a grand rally at the city's historic Paltan Maidan. They announced that they will work in unison both for the elections as well as the campaign for a level playing field in the build-up to the upcoming election...

New Age, 19 December 2006

**AL, allies give 24-hour ultimatum to implement package proposal**

Sheikh Hasina, president of Awami League, on Monday gave a 24-hour ultimatum to the President and chief adviser to the caretaker administration, Iajuddin Ahmed to implement the 'package deal' that Iajuddin himself offered to ensure a free, fair and credible election. 'We demand an answer by 24 hours. We want a free and fair election, but our stand is clear ? election cannot be held according to the existing schedule announced by the Election Commission,' said Hasina while addressing a grand rally organised by the AL-led alliance at Paltan Maidan....

The Daily Star, 19 December 2006

**Time for economic leadership (Nizam Ahmed)**

The sudden, but brief call for the army to aid civil authority surprised many in the political circles, but not the people or the business community in general. The coming that thwarted the AL combine's political ascendancy may not have been well timed but was welcomed with a big smile by the past government, the BNP, who were increasingly out of ideas on the streets ruled by socialist veterans. The BNP leader, Begum Zia, has often accused them, the 14-party, of behaving as CBA leaders for not respecting rule of law, or institutions such as the judiciary, the parliament, and the EC....

The Daily Star, 20 December 2006

**Advisers' last ditch bid fails to break stalemate**

The last moment efforts of the council of advisers to resolve the electoral deadlock

through renegotiating the package proposal finalised 15 days ago failed to yield any positive result yesterday, with only a day remaining before the deadline tomorrow for filing nominations. The four newly inducted advisers yesterday renegotiated with Awami League (AL)-led 14-party the proposals for sending two election commissioners, SM Zakaria and Modabbir Hossain Chowhdury, on leaves of absence, and extension of the deadline for submission of nomination papers by a few more days, sources said....

The Daily Star, 20 December 2006

### **Judiciary faces erosion of credibility (Md. Asadullah Khan)**

An independent judiciary is a pillar of strength of the country's democracy, but it has often stumbled in the past: it is also a cause of justifiable pride. We might recall that the judiciary has a long tradition of overruling the government where it thought that the executive has acted against the letter of the law. Recalling our poignant history during the cataclysmic year of 1970, the year when Bangalees revolted against the Pakistani occupation forces, we still remember with pride that the then Chief Justice of East Pakistan, Justice B.A. Siddiqui, refused to administer oath to Lt. Gen Tikka Khan, who was appointed Governor by President Yahya Khan, replacing the senior-most Bengalee naval commander in the then Pakistan Navy. Even in our neighboring country, India, instances of the judiciary taking on the executive are galore. In 1975, a high court judge nullified the then prime minister's election to the Lok Sabha on the grounds of campaign irregularities...

New Age, 20 December 2006

### **BNP, allies demand polls on Jan 22**

Sharply opposing arch-rival Awami League president Sheikh Hasina's demand to defer the elections fixed on January 22, BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia on Tuesday demanded polls within the stipulated 90-day time-frame and continuity of constitutional democracy. 'The caretaker government has fulfilled a series of demands made by the Awami League. But we have a single demand, and that is the polls must be held within the constitutionally stipulated 90 days,' said Khaleda Zia, while addressing a 'grand rally' at the Paltan Maidan. 'The polls must be held on January 22.' Referring to the recent expansion of the Awami League-led alliance, she said that 'it does not make a real alliance, when leaders meet'...

The Bangladesh Today, 20 December 2006

### **UK, USA, Canada call for resolving crisis**

British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury on Tuesday apprehended unwelcome consequences for Bangladesh democracy if the disputes over the coming polls are not resolved immediately. Echoing the same sentiment, the United States and Canada called on political parties to resolve the remaining obstacles to full participation in a free, fair and credible election. The reactions from the country's development partners to the disputes over the election date and removal of the controversial election commissioners came as the Awami League-led alliance threatened to boycott the polls. They announced a nationwide strike on December 21, the last date for filing nomination papers, to press home their demands....

New Age, 21 December 2006

**Caretaker govt takes fresh move to end crisis (Nazrul Islam, Abul Kalam Azad and Mustafizur Rahman)**

The interim caretaker government on Wednesday decided to try to compel a 'controversial' election commissioner to go on leave, and rearrange the timing of the polls in an apparent bid to end the uncertainty of holding the country's ninth parliamentary elections. The advisers of the interim cabinet claimed that it was a settlement negotiated with parties from both sides of the political divide, but the Awami League-led alliance rejected the decision, saying it was 'misleading and partial'. 'The government tried to mislead the nation through partial implementation of the package proposal that it had earlier agreed upon,' Abdul Jalail, the AL's general secretary, told reporters at a press briefing in the evening....

The Daily Star, 21 December 2006

**Feni Marginal Field: Gas sale deal with Niko approved after 2 years (Sharier Khan)**

After two years of delay and disagreements, the government yesterday approved the gas sales purchase agreement (GPSA) with Canadian company Niko Resources for purchase of gas from the Feni marginal field, Niko officials said. But as promised by former energy ministry adviser Mahmudur Rahman, the GPSA is not addressing any issue related to compensation for the Tengratila gas field blowouts. The compensation issue has apparently become so quiet that it seems Bangladesh did not lose anything in the two rounds of blowouts, regretted a Petrobangla official. ..

The Bangladesh Today, 21 December 2006

**Nation heading for a calamitous unilateral election**

The nation is heading for a calamitous unilateral election with political confrontation, clashes and violence seeming unavoidable as the caretaker government, the Election Commission and the BNP-led 4-party alliance are going ahead with their plan of holding the election on January 22 and the AL-led grand alliance sticking to their demand for rescheduling of the poll date. According to sources, the election is going to be a sole 4-party alliance show with most political parties remaining aside...

The Bangladesh Today, 21 December 2006

**Sudden 'stay' of HC order takes nation by surprise**

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed the execution of the High Court ruling that made mandatory furnishing of eight specific information by the aspiring parliamentary candidates while filing nomination papers. Justice M Joynul Abedin, the vacation chamber court of the Appellate Division, passed the order following a petition filed by one Abu Safa, an Election Commission press release said. On May 24 last year, the High Court ruled upon the Election Commission to collect information on the candidates of parliamentary elections, including their academic qualifications, profession, source of income, criminal records, if any, and assets and bank liabilities...

The Daily Star, 21 December 2006

**Exploitation of domestic workers (Nazrul Islam)**

Sheuli Khatun (40), an experienced nakshi-kantha maker of Bhatai Bazar of Shailokupa

in Jhenidah district, gets Tk 1,500 for stitching a kantha. She takes, on an average, a month to complete a nakshi-kantha. Some local entrepreneurs supply her the required materials. An average-standard nakshi-kantha that costs around Tk 3,000, including the wage, generally fetches at least Tk 7,000 at a city outlet. It takes at least 180 hours of strenuous labor to complete a nakshi-kantha...

The Daily Star, 22 December 2006

### **Army used to tackle hartal after 16 years**

For the first time since restoration of democracy through a mass upsurge in 1990, the government that too a caretaker one yesterday employed the army to tackle political demonstrations in the city and elsewhere in the country. Deployed on December 9 following a unilateral decision of President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed, the armed forces swung into action to disperse the pickets in Dhaka yesterday. The troops chased off supporters of the 14-party combine and its allies as the latter clashed with the police, damaged a couple of vehicles and set fire to another car in Shyamoli in the morning....

New Age, 22 December 2006

### **EU monitors believe credible polls still possible**

European poll monitors were apparently optimistic that a credible election is still possible provided the stakeholders act responsibly. They also believe that political parties will narrow down their differences on key issues and work together to ensure a peaceful election. 'If the political parties and all those who organise the electoral process act responsibly towards a genuine election, there is still hope?,' said Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, head of the European Union Election Observation Mission to Bangladesh, at a news conference in the Lake Shore Hotel on Thursday....

The Daily Star, 22 December 2006

### **Guntanamo Bay returnee**

Early this week, Mobarak, a Bangladeshi national held in the infamous Guantanamo Bay, was handed over to the Bangladeshi authorities in Dhaka by the US government. He had been detained at the Guantanamo Bay for long five years on suspicion of having possible links with the al-Qaeda. But Mobarak on his arrival in Dhaka was promptly detained by the airport police and was remanded on the plea that he needed to be quizzed to see if he had any criminal record and verify his antecedents....

New Age, 22 December 2006

### **The president's last chance at redemption**

Iajuddin's last chance at redemption now is to see the implementation of that package through. The one thing that this caretaker government has proved is that it can pressure the Election Commission and its commissioners to do as it says, even though it cannot legally instruct or direct them. If the participation of the AL-led alliance now depends on the moving aside of a couple of election commissioners and another new schedule being announced, the caretaker government can twist enough arms to make that happen....

The Daily Star, 23 December 2006

**Grand alliance almost finalizes seat sharing**

Awami League (AL)-led grand electoral alliance almost completed its preparations for contesting the upcoming election whenever it happens, according to alliance sources. Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad yesterday morning met AL President Sheikh Hasina in her Sudha Sadan residence in the capital and discussed the issue of seat sharing with her. AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil sat with Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leaders in his Gulshan residence yesterday evening to discuss the same while LDP President Badruddoza Chowdhury was scheduled to hold talks with Sheikh Hasina at the time of filing this report late last night....

New Age, 23 December 2006

**Democracy of the undemocratic (Nurul Kabir)**

The Supreme Court in a democracy is expected to broaden the legal scope for the people, by way of positive judicial activism, to choose better candidates in the national elections and thus exercise greater authority over the electoral process that brings in to existence the national body of lawmakers for five years. But the Supreme Court of Bangladesh has rather quietly blocked, on December 19, a legal scope for the electorates, created earlier by the High Court in 2005, to form informed opinion about the parliamentary candidates before casting their votes...

New Age, 24 December 2006

**BNP, allies file nominations today**

Almost all the candidates of the BNP-led alliance will submit nomination papers today to contest the polls slated on January 22 although the alliance high command deferred making public the candidate list amid informal talks among the caretaker government, Election Commission and the rival political camps for bringing in changes in the polls schedule. The list will, however, be made public today unless the Election Commission changes the last date for submission of the nomination papers, which is today. The BNP chairperson, Khaleda Zia, did some last-minute adjustment in the list of candidates on Saturday...

The Daily Star, 24 December 2006

**AL, allies may go to polls**

The Awami League-led alliance has decided in principle late last night to go to polls if the Election Commission (EC) extends the deadline for submission of nomination papers--which expires today-- by three days. The grand electoral combine refrained from declaring its decision to participate in the polls after the EC in the evening unexpectedly went back on an early morning understanding between the 14-party and the council of advisers about extending the time limit by four days. The 14-party alliance will take part in the election if the deadline for submitting nominations is extended now by three days, a top AL policymaker told The Daily Star last night. We also informed the council of advisers about the decision of our presidium meeting....



The Daily Star, 25 December 2006

**Grand alliance finally goes to election**

In a major policy shift, the Awami League (AL) led grand electoral alliance yesterday said that it will participate in the January 22 election as the Election Commission (EC) brought some changes in the polls schedule. The AL and its allies who forged the largest ever alliance on December 18 will file their nominations tomorrow. The change in the AL-led alliance's stance came after a series of negotiations for over one and a half months between the council of advisers to the caretaker government and the two major political alliances. In the morning, the EC extended the deadline for submission of nominations by two days, setting December 26 as the last date. Earlier, the closing date was yesterday....

The Daily Star, 26 December 2006

**Battle for ballot begins: Nomination paper submission closes today**

The battle for ballot between the two major political alliances kicks off today as the candidates of the Awami League (AL)-led grand electoral alliance file their nominations for the election slated for January 22. Most of the contenders of the BNP-led four-party alliance have already filed nominations. Those who have yet to register their names for the race will do it today, the last day for submitting nominations. However, none of the alliances has announced the official list of their nominees, as both the sides could not yet reach an understanding over sharing seats for the election. The final lists will not be made public before the closing date for withdrawing candidature that is January 3, sources said....

New Age, 26 December 2006

**Protest against AL's deal with Khelafat Majlish continues**

The left parties and groups in the Awami League-led alliance, who threatened on Sunday to quit the combine in case of AL's failure to scrap its deal with Islamist fundamentalist Khelafat Majlish, softened its stance on Monday and decided to stay back in the alliance. The left leaders, who asserts that the AL-Khelafat agreement is contradictory to the alliance's professed principle of establishing secular democratic values in the society, had a meeting with Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence Monday morning and demanded that the accord be scrapped immediately....

The Daily Star, 26 December 2006

**Outsourcing free and fair election (Dr. Abdullah A. Dewan)**

Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed's recent claim that all reforms issues were resolved reminds me of a high school arithmetic problem with which I once struggled: How long would it take for a monkey to climb a 30 foot oily pole if he climbs two feet every three minutes and then slides down one foot? Iajuddin's reform initiatives have a similar nuance. With one positive move on some issue he makes a negative shift that neutralizes or recompenses the positive. He hemmed and hawed with every reform initiative while the clock kept ticking toward the 90 days election dead line -- only to benefit his benefactor....

The Daily Star, 27 December 2006

**Highest ever nomination filing as parties can't pick candidates**

The largest ever number of nomination papers were filed yesterday while the two major electoral alliances have yet to finalise and disclose the lists of their nominees in 300 constituencies for the January 22 parliamentary election. Wrapping up the first step of nomination process, the Election Commission (EC) last night disclosed that 4,146 nomination papers were filed. One thousand and three hundred nomination papers were submitted for 90 constituencies of Dhaka division, 934 for 59 seats of Chittagong division, 860 for 72 seats of Rajshahi, 516 for 37 seats of Khulna, 296 for 23 seats of Barisal, and 240 for 19 seats of Sylhet division....

The Daily Star, 27 December 2006

**AL shoots itself in the foot (Mahfuz Anam)**

What a tribute the Awami League has paid to the martyrs of the Liberation War in the very month of our victory. There was perhaps no better way to 'honour' the intellectuals who were brutally killed on 13th of December, 1971 for a modern, scientific and secular Bangladesh than by signing a deal with Islamic extremists and pledging to permit fatwa, introduce shariah laws, and basically to lay the foundation for a religious state in the future...

New Age, 27 December 2006

**SC rejects Ershad's appeal, orders him to surrender in trial court (Shahiduzzaman)**

The Supreme Court on Tuesday turned down the appeal of military despot and chairman of Jatiya Party, HM Ershad, who was sentenced to imprisonment for two years' in the Japanese boat purchase scam case, and ordered him to surrender to the lower court. The chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, Justice Joynul Abedin, passed the order, dismissing two separate petitions filed by the State and Ershad. In its petition, the State sought recall of the Appellate Division's order that permitted Ershad to file a petition seeking permission to appeal against the High Court's verdict, delivered on December 14, upholding his conviction in the Japanese boat purchase scam case...

The Bangladesh Today, 27 December 2006

**Jamaat wants 40 seats, BNP agrees to give 31: 4-party alliance finalises 255 nominations**

The BNP-led alliance started distributing the approval letters of nominees for the 9th parliamentary election on Tuesday, although it could not reach any consensus on seat sharing between BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. Sources said, the alliance leader, Begum Khaleda Zia, agreed to give Jamaat 31 seats but Jamaat wants more than 40 seats. A high powered delegation headed by Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed held an hour-long meeting with Begum Zia on Monday night at Hawa Bhaban, but the meeting could not reach any consensus. Against the backdrop, Jamaat on Tuesday night sat in a meeting to devise the next course of action about the seat sharing...

The Daily Star, 27 December 2006

**Khaleda, Ershad to vie from 5 seats, Hasina from 4**

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad submitted nomination papers to contest the next parliamentary election from five constituencies each while Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina will contest in four seats. Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and Executive President Oli Ahmed, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and its leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, and AL leader Mohammad Nasim filed their nomination papers to contest the polls from two constituencies each...

The Daily Star, 29 December 2006

**100 hurt as hartal paralyses Rangpur over Ershad's fate**

Fierce clashes between police and activists of Awami League-led grand alliance marked the dawn-to-dusk hartal called by the alliance in Rangpur and Lalmonirhat districts yesterday while the hartal in Kurigram, Gaibandha and Nilphamari districts passed off almost peacefully. Half-day hartal was also observed at Sylhet-3 and Habiganj-3 constituencies. At least 100 people including police, activists and leaders of the grand alliance and journalists were injured in a series of clashes at different places in Rangpur town during the hartal hours, reports our Rangpur correspondent.

New Age, 29 December 2006

**AL, BNP camps field only 11 female candidates (Shahidul Islam Chowdhury)**

Leading women's rights activists of the country strongly criticised the major political combines for nominating a negligible number of female candidates in the ensuing national polls. They found the political parties' attitude towards the women repugnant of the democratic idea of equal rights of women in general and need for political empowerment of women in particular. Notably, the two contesting political camps, led by the Awami League and the BNP, have fielded only 11 female candidates to contest for 19 constituencies of the 300-strong national parliament...

The Daily Star, 30 December 2006

**AL's alliance to go for blockade Jan 7-8**

Awami League (AL)-led grand electoral alliance yesterday announced back-to-back countrywide blockades on January 7 and 8 demanding publication of a 'properly' corrected and updated voter list, and resignation of Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed. Speaking at a packed news conference yesterday, AL President Sheikh Hasina warned, if the demands are not met, the president's official residence, Bangabhaban, will be blockaded indefinitely. If the demands are not met even after the countrywide blockades, Bangabhaban will be blockaded indefinitely, Hasina said at the grand alliance news conference flanked by Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President AQM Badrudozza Chowdhury, and top leaders of AL-led 14-party coalition....

New Age, 30 December 2006

**Ershad, 71 others appeal before EC against rejection of nominations**

The Jatiya Party chairman, HM Ershad, and 71 other intending candidates, whose nominations were initially rejected, filed appeals with the Election Commission till Friday evening seeking reversal of the decisions of the returning officers to allow them to contest the forthcoming elections. The filing of such appeals will continue till this afternoon. The commission will hear the appeals during December 31-January 2, a day before the withdrawal of the candidature. The Election Commission will also sit on January 1, the Eid day, for hearing in the cases. Ershad's lawyer Kazi Muhammad Sirajul Islam filed five appeals on Friday morning on behalf of the former president against rejection of his nominations....

The Daily Star, 30 December 2006

**Hindutva with a vengeance (Kuldip Nayar)**

Lal Krishna Advani, the BJP leader, chided the media once for dividing his party into hardliners and soft-liners. All of us are the same, he said. He is correct. The competition now is: who is the hardest? The reason why the media goes wrong is the thinking, probably wishful, that the BJP might realise one day that the modern age and the medieval period cannot be grafted together. Hindu fundamentalism is a line of desperation which the BJP has adopted. It should know that religion does not buy political support. This is as true of India as the rest of South Asia. Pakistan and Bangladesh are Islamic republics, but they have never allowed the maulvis to cross the double-digit figure in their parliament. Religious parties were able to do well in Pakistan at the last polls because the military rulers wanted political parties to do badly....

The Daily Star, 30 December 2006

**Fair elections: Within or beyond 90 days? (Dr. M S Haq)**

If the election is held within the constitutionally stipulated 90 days, there are chances AL and other political parties of the grand alliance would not participate in it, unless those parties decide otherwise within a reasonable period of time between now and the start of relevant election processes against the backdrop of the election date recently re-fixed by the government. On the other hand, if the election is held on a date beyond the 90-day time limit, there are possibilities BNP led alliance might boycott the election, save and except another election date is acceptable to them....

The Daily Star, 31 December 2006

**AL men refuse to work for 'militant' candidate (Julfikar Ali Manik)**

Shocked leaders of Sylhet Awami League (AL) refuse to work for AL-led grand alliance nominee in Sylhet-6 constituency Maulana Habibur Rahman, a madrasa principal with the background of working for a 'Taliban-style' rule in Bangladesh. The crisis within the local AL, sparked by the surprise nomination of Habibur, came on the heels of AL's widely criticised deal with Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish (BKM) led by Shaikhul Hadith Allama Azizul Haq on December 23. In the deal, both sides agreed, among other points, to recognise fatwa (religious edict) by certified Hakkani alems (educated clerics) and implement government recognition to the degree conferred by traditional qwami madrasa if the AL-led alliance comes to power. Both Habibur and Azizul are the leaders of banned

Islamist militant organisation Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami (Huji) in Bangladesh and both have links with international militant groups....

The Daily Star, 31 December 2006

**Nomination Rejection:EC starts hearing today on 124 appeals**

The Election Commission (EC) today starts hearing of 124 appeals filed by aspirants challenging the validity of the returning officers' (RO) decision rejecting their nomination papers.

On the first day, the EC may hear the appeals of Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad to decide whether he can contest the January 22 parliamentary elections. The Election Commission asked me to attend the hearing tomorrow, Ershad's lawyer Sirajul Islam, who went to the EC Secretariat to enquire about the timetable of hearing, told reporters yesterday....