

## DOWN TO EARTH

### Massage parlours proliferate

By Asiuzzaman

The signboard outside proclaims the shop as a beauty parlour. But inside the two-room untidy shop it's a different business: massage for male customers by young girls. The usual fees: Tk 100 per person per hour.

The so-called massage bars under the cover of beauty parlours or hair-dressing salons have registered a steady growth in capital Dhaka since late 1980s. According to an unofficial estimate the city has now more than 200 massage parlours employing about 3,000 masseuses, most of them poor teenaged girls and some divorced mothers in their 30s.

Massage, according to dictionary, is an act of pressing and rubbing the body, especially of muscles and joints usually with hands. It helps to relax stiff muscles and lessen pain. But it's often difficult to draw the line between decency and obscenity in massage as in most cases the clients are males and who serve them are females.

Though Dhaka's five-star hotels have legal health clubs, including massage facilities there is hardly any trade licences for the common beauty parlours or hair-cutting shops to do this business. Still, it goes on and the sponsors see nothing wrong.

"We are committing no crime nor doing any immoral activity here," said Sattar Master who runs three such shops in Dhaka.

Sattar, who heads an association of such beauty parlours, believes the trade is benefiting poor women.

"Though many think this business as immoral, we don't think there should be any legal restriction for women working in beauty parlours or hair-cutting shops," Sattar said.

He compared the plus points of the business with those of garments industry and said, "We are employing poor and helpless women like they do in the garments factories."

Young girls employed in this business say poverty has forced them to take up this job, though they are aware of the fact that the society is still not ripe for this kind of work, especially by women.

"I'm not committing any crime. What I do here is no different from what men do in barber's shops," said a woman working at a city parlour. In reply to a question she retorted: "Why do you ask me this question? Will the society feed me and my family?" The woman lost a job at a handi-crafts shop a year ago.

Legally, it is unclear whether one can run a massage bar or not. But officials at Dhaka City Corporation say it has issued no permits or trade licences for any massage parlour in the city.

According to the officials those who are engaged in massage business have permissions for running hair-cutting shops.

Police often find it difficult to enforce the law. As there is no bar for a woman to work as a hair-dresser or beautician, police can take action only when they catch the offenders red-handed. In some recent raids police arrested many alleged masseuses, their em-

ployers and customers. But the raids touched off protests as many alleged that genuine hair-cutting shops were unnecessarily attacked.

"It becomes very difficult for us to act. The unscrupulous massage parlour owners maintain a strong network of surveillance. They can turn a sleazy massage shop into a genuine hair-cutting salon overnight," said a police official.

Still, there are complaints that police are not sincere enough to deal with illegal massage parlours.

Even Sattar Master, who owns three parlour shops, would admit that the fair rules of the business are not maintained by all in the business.

"Our association has system to check those who may encourage immoral activity in our business," he said adding that his association is trying to build this profession in line with organised industrial labour.

He said the association helps the employees increase their skill through training. It also plans to build a hostel for the women workers and provide them with transport.

Many worry that these massage parlours may gradually develop into mini brothels.

Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights view the trade as a sort of "sexual exploitation of women."

"These girls take the job because of poverty. The best way to stop this sleazy business is to arrange alternative jobs for these women," said an official at the society.



Awami League (top) and Five-Party Alliance (bottom) held two separate public meetings in city yesterday in support of tomorrow's hartal. — Star photo

### Tinbigha

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The court will pass the order on the petition on Monday next.

Another report says: The RSP leader, Sourin Bhattacharya, MP, today called for renewed efforts to send an all-party delegation to Tinbigha to allay the fears of the people of Kuchlibari and avoid any "unpleasantness" in implementing the Indo-Bangla agreement regarding leasing out of the corridor to Bangladesh.

Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, a former Vice Chancellor of JU, made an appeal to guard against any threat to democracy.

"True, we've achieved democracy... but we've to be vigilant," Prof Wahiduddin Mahmood spoke for "rule of economic law" in the country and stressed the need for restoring confidence on the financial sector.

Dr Meghna Guhathakuria, a teacher of International Relations at DU, said "democracy in our country is threatened by the militarisation of society". Referring to the military budget, she argued that the military should also be accountable like other government institutions.

Syed Ali Kabir, a former Deputy Governor of the Bangladesh Bank, made a strong plea for a second chamber of parliament.

### Hartal tomorrow

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organised public meetings in the city yesterday calling upon the people to make tomorrow's hartal a total success.

The Patriotic Democratic Front (PDF) held a public meeting at the Purana Palton Crossing in the afternoon.

Chaired by PDF Convenor Pankaj Bhattacharya, the meeting was also addressed by Nurul Islam Nahid, Dilip Barua, Alhaj Abdu Samad and Ahmedur Rahman Azmi.

Addressing the meeting, Pankaj Bhattacharya of the National Awami Party (NAP), a component of the PDF, asked the BNP Chief and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as to how she was shaking hands with the fascist Jamaat-Shibir group betraying the causes of the united movement that ousted the autocratic regime.

You (the PM) must decide whether you will belong to the pro-liberation democratic forces or to the anti-liberation forces," he commented. The PDF leader also blamed the government for patronising the terrorists. "Democracy could not be established by indulging in terrorism," he remarked.

The CPB leader called upon all concerned to resist the anti-liberation fascist forces unitedly.

The Five-party combine at its public meeting in front of the GPO reiterated the demand to the government to

### AL to continue

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along with the party strategy to be adopted in the given political situation, the over all preparations of different sub-committees formed earlier to hold the party council session scheduled for 27 and 28 this month, and different aspects of the 1992-93 budget proposed in Parliament by the Finance Minister on Thursday.

According to sources, the party chief Sheikh Hasina asked the convenors of the party sub-committees to complete their preparations for holding the council session on the scheduled date.

The AL chief is also learnt to have asked the party leaders attending the meeting, especially Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser, to thoroughly study the proposed budget with a view to preparing an in-depth party reaction to different aspects of the budget soon.

The ALWC, however, decided to give an instant reaction to the budget.

The meeting began at 10-30 am and ended at 1 pm.

## Democratic Forum pledges to work on basis of consensus

By Staff Correspondent

The organisers of the Democratic Forum, floated yesterday, have vowed to identify the problems of society and will strive to remedy them on the basis of consensus.

"We want to evaluate the problems from a non-partisan attitude, ... to formulate policies and guidelines in order to fight poverty, terrorism, corruption," Dr Kamal Hossain, the new body's Convenor, told a spontaneous audience of a seminar titled "Democracy, Rule of Law and National Economy" yesterday afternoon.

"We've developed a tendency to conceal the realities ... our objective would be to reveal", Hossain, also an AL leader, said.

"We begin our journey today. ... I believe we can fight successfully the problems like terrorism on campuses ... in phases, in democratic manner", Dr Hossain who presided over the seminar added.

"Political management is the core of all crises", said Barrister Amirul Islam.

He regretted that "the victories we achieved in our long history of struggle could not be sustained".

An emotion-choked Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed likened the country's political scenario to the Gresham's Law where bad money drives away good money.

"Politics has become an forbidden area for those who are educated, free thinkers?"

On the budget, he said education got the highest only in paper not in real terms.

"The budget contains borrowed knowledge, cliches theories", said the noted lawyer denouncing the massive indirect tax provisions — more than three-fourths of the total tax.

Prof Rehman Sobhan, a former Director General of BIDS, spoke of a policy of "governance" that should be adopted in the light of the country's needs, necessities and realities.

Sobhan, who served as an adviser to President Shahabuddin Ahmed's interim administration, said there was nothing new in the budget but found "some good reformative measures."

Prof Mozaffar Ahmed, a noted economist, alleged violation of two basic principles of economy in a democracy — no taxation without representation and no expenditure without legislative authorisation.

He deplored the facts that "the JS finance committee cannot discuss the budget, the MPs have no role when the budget is revised in December... and as the House continues discussion on budget the government gets a permission to spend for the first three months at least at level of the previous year."

Referring to the proposed budget 1992-93 Prof Ahmed said: "It's a reactionary budget in the sense that the Finance Minister reacted to the changes in the first and second worlds."

"This is a budget of vested interest, for a vested interest, by a vested interest."

Suggesting a change in the procedure of budget formulation, the Professor called for ensuring popular participation in the process and reducing the role of bureaucracy and technocracy.

S A M S Kibria, a former Foreign Secretary, emphasised on bringing back the sense of security the citizens without which "talk of democracy and the rule of law is meaningless."

"Whatever consensus is given, there won't be investment without this sense of se-

curity", the former Executive Secretary of ESCAP said.

Dr Fasteuddin Mahiab, a former Planning Minister, praised the "basic approach of the budget" but "disagreed with the 'whole-sale liberalisation of trade'".

Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, a former Vice Chancellor of JU, made an appeal to guard against any threat to democracy.

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Prof Wahiduddin Mahmood spoke for "rule of economic law" in the country and stressed the need for restoring confidence on the financial sector.

Dr Meghna Guhathakuria, a teacher of International Relations at DU, said "democracy in our country is threatened by the militarisation of society". Referring to the military budget, she argued that the military should also be accountable like other government institutions.

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### Democratic Forum

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"We won the independence through a bloody and heroic war of liberation (in 1971) ... The people through another heroic struggle in 1990 brought about the downfall of an authoritarian regime and paved the way for restoration of democracy but the expectations remained unfulfilled," the forum in its declaration said adding, "With a view to achieving these goals, we have taken the initiative to establish the Bangladesh Democratic Forum."

Plan to resume loans by House Building Finance Corporation and reduction of duties on construction materials was also hailed by MCCI which hoped that the moves will result in easing of the housing problem.

Welcoming the provision for retention of 10 per cent export earnings, the Metropolitan Chamber urged the government to extend facilities to the local textile industry.

The SP feared that another clash might break out at any time.

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Both the groups claimed that Mia belonged to their groups.

Adamjee clash

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been stepped up in and around the mills area.

He said that the reason for the sudden flare-up was being investigated into.

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## Budget: Agri-subsidy cut under fire

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The CPB leaders criticized the budget for reducing subsidy from the agricultural inputs and also said that the budget provided no measures for poverty alleviation.

They said that the government could reduce the revenue expenditure by some unproductive sectors like defence.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) hailed the budget for giving topmost priority to the education and agriculture sector.

It also praised the simplification and rationalisation of the tax rate and reduction of tax burden on the common people. The BGMEA expressed concern over the reduction of tax from 60 per cent to 50 per cent saying that the demand of the exporters was exemption of 100 per cent tax in conformity with the facilities prevailing in neighbouring countries.

MCCI however suggested major reforms in foreign exchange rate management and liberalisation in existing exchange controls to increase competitiveness of local exports.

Our staff correspondent adds: Saifuddin Ahmed Maniq and Nurul Islam Nahid, President and General Secretary respectively of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) in a statement Friday said that the inflation rate shown in the proposed budget was not consistent to reality.

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expressed dissatisfaction for not having any direction in the new budget to salvage the jute industries from the existing crisis.

Federation of Bangladesh Shop Owners' Association while commenting on the proposed budget said that the budget provided no pragmatic measures to salvage the local industries. Rather some of its steps would throw the small traders of limited capital.

The statement issued by its President Helal Uddin and General Secretary Md Shahabuddin also said that the locally manufactured products would have to face threat because of reduction of duty on the import of a number of foreign goods.

It, however, observed that the proposed budget would fail to bring about major changes in the shattered economy of the country.

The Patriotic Democratic Front (PDF) at a meeting yesterday with its convenor Dilip Barua in the chair said that the general people would be affected seriously by the new tax imposed on daily commodities.

He, however, mentioned that the poultry industries would be affected due to enhanced duty imposed on the import of wheat.

Bangladesh Krishak Federation President Abdu Sattar Khan and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha President Dr Shamsunnahar Dol in a joint statement criticized the proposed budget saying that it had been prescribed by the World Bank and IMF and thus ignored the interest of the peo-

ple of limited income.

They also condemned the budget for reduction of duty on the import of luxury items and imposing the same on the essential commodities.

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## The Midnight File

### Serbs-Bosnians accord to remove arms from Sarajevo airport

SARAJEVO, June 19: Warring Serbs and Bosnians have reached agreement on removing heavy weapons from around Sarajevo airport and the facility could reopen for emergency aid flights by the end of next week, a U N spokesman said here today. The besieged Bosnian capital was relatively calm this morning, following sporadic shooting overnight, on the fourth day of a ceasefire broken by serious fighting earlier in the week, reports AFP.

### 20 Tigers killed in Lanka

COLOMBO, June 19: Ground troops backed by a helicopter gunship attacked a Tamil Guerrilla concentration in eastern Sri Lanka, killing at least 20 rebels, military officials here said today. Security forces fired rocket propelled grenades and blew up a truck belonging to the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at Palamnadu in the coastal Batticaloa district Thursday, officials said, reports AFP.

## Saifur: Budget

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Parliament effectively. Saifur Rahman said that the opposition members did not do justice to their respective electorates by boycotting the budget session.

The Finance Minister said that he would take a personal initiative to end the impasse and would try to persuade the boycotting opposition members to participate in the budget discussions.

However, he added "even if they do not come we will still continue the proceedings as it is a constitutional obligation and the electorates have not voted us to do otherwise."

He pointed out that the proposed budget was formulated according to the BNP election manifesto to fulfil its commitment to the people.

"Our objective is to create a competitive macro-economic environment in which the economy would flourish and push the nation towards its march forward," Saifur Rahman said.

He claimed that the proposed budget for 1992-93 would provide a "solid foundation" for an export-led economy which would help get the nation out of the "low-income-low-growth trap".

Planning Minister Zahiruddin Khan and State Minister for Finance Muzibor Rahman, Secretaries of the Ministries of Finance, External Resources Division, Internal Revenue Division, Planning, Governor of Bangladesh Bank and other officials were present at the press conference.

The Finance Minister noted that the administrative machinery involved in the economic development process would be made more dynamic and responsive to implement the budgetary policies.

He said the administrative decision making process would be decentralised and the "unhealthy practices" due to the discretionary powers would be removed to make the administration "corruption free".

The BNP government believed in an open economy and the budgetary measures were aimed at removing the "distortions and the bad effects of the administrative machinery," the Minister added.

He said that rules were being framed to automatise the decision making process by decentralising the administration. He also assured that the high-handedness of the taxation and customs administration to unnecessarily harass people would be curtailed.

Defending the budgetary policies, he said emphasis was laid on an export-led economy since the policy of import substitution with high tariff barrier did not help the nation attain the desired economic goals.

The Minister said that the inward-looking policies had earlier impeded the growth of a self-reliant economy.

"We have earned independence so that we could take our own economic decisions," he noted, adding "the nation can neither enjoy its independence nor will democracy survive if we continue to lean toward others for resources to fund our development projects."

Replying to another question, the Minister said the budgetary proposals would also help curb smuggling with the economy being more open and the high tariff-wall eliminated.

He also ruled out the possibility of increased gold smuggling as the budget allows import of upto one kilogram of gold.

Asked if there would be any retrenchment of surplus workers from the public sector enterprises, he categorically said that there would be no retrenchment at least during the next two years.

But a process of "voluntary separation" with benefits would be initiated under a Taka 150 crore programme.

Stressing the need for raising the purchasing power of the people, he said employment opportunities would have to be expanded by increasing investment to boost production and industrialisation.

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## PM: Cadre services

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Coordination Committee chairman Md Abu Hena and secretary general Md Ruhul Matin, honorary general secretary of the Engineers Institute M A K Azad, BMA secretary general Dr Gazi Abdul Huq and secretary general of Krishibid Institute Javed Iqbal.

Blaming on the autocracy and corrupt practices of the previous regime for the country's economic failure, she referred to spectacular development achieved by Korea and Thailand and urged the engineers, doctors and agriculturists to put in their best efforts for the country's overall development.

The Prime Minister also called upon the professionals to attain competence and efficiency for taking the challenge of the next century which, she said, will be the century of development and science and technology.

Referring to the administrative reforms of late President Ziaur Rahman, Begum Zia said all cadre services are equal in a democratic system and they are complementary to each other.

"We want to create equal opportunity for all on the basis of merit and qualifications," she said.

## AL reaction

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said, but after one year it now shows that no sector has achieved the target.

The resolution said that the Finance Minister, without reviewing the last year's performance, had expressed high optimism while announcing the next year's budget.

FM back home

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tary of State, Eagleburger, in Washington and the UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in New York on way back from Rio de Janeiro.

The early return of the refugees to their homes in Myanmar was stressed in the talks, he said.

The Foreign Minister, among other issues, discussed the garments export from Bangladesh with the importers in New York as well as with the US Deputy Secretary of State.

Replying to a question, he said Bangladesh welcomed the decision of the emergency meeting of the Islamic foreign ministers in Istanbul for an end to the ethnic strife in Bosnia.

"We are against such strife and want peace," he said.

Mario Cesar de Moraes Pita, Charge d'Affaires of Brazil in Bangladesh and the Additional Foreign Secretary, A H Mahmood Ali, were, among others, to receive the Foreign Minister at the airport.

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