

Vast potentials seen for Bangladesh goods in CIS

By Staff Correspondent

A Bangladeshi entrepreneur doing business in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) said in Dhaka Wednesday that Bangladesh had a vast scope of exporting goods to the former USSR.

Mokhtarur Rahman, Chairman of Litmond Group of Companies while addressing a press conference at Sheraton Hotel said that the present CIS offered "a unique opportunity for Bangladesh to develop this huge market."

"The scope is there and I want to invite all Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to come forward aggressively and in a determined manner," Rahman said.

He said Bangladesh should open a branch of its bank in Moscow to facilitate the trade and urged the government to provide all out assistance to the entrepreneurs to tap the CIS market of 200 million people.

Rahman said the western countries as well as Japan, South Korea and other Asian countries have already started to penetrate this market and Bangladesh should not lag behind.

Jamaat

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Nirmul Committee was formed in the country under the direct patronisation of "foreign masters" as part of a conspiracy against Islam.

He said the Awami League, Nirmul Committee and some other so-called progressive parties were out to divide the nation and lead the country to a civil war.

Mattur Rahman Nizami said Prof Golam Azam is not the target of Nirmul Committee, the main target is to eliminate Islam from the country.

He alleged that the committee highlighted some minor incidents in Bangladesh ignoring the communal riots in India to please its foreign masters and undermine the country's image abroad.

"Don't force us to go for a vigorous movement... we do not want anarchy in the country", Nizami said urging the government to free Golam Azam.

Kamruzzaman criticised the BNP government for failure to give proper guidelines to the nation to alleviate poverty like the previous regimes of Awami League and Jatiya Party.

The movement will continue until the release of Golam Azam", Prof Mohammad Yusuf said alleging that BNP had betrayed with Jamaat which had extended support to BNP in forming the government.

Hasina bartering party ideals for power and money, says Mantu

NARSINGDI, Jan 20: Dissident Awami League leader Mustafa Mohsin Mantu today accused Sheikh Hasina of bartering the party ideals for power and money, reports UNB.

Addressing a public meeting in front of the District Awami League office here Mantu said Awami League chief is engaged in a conspiracy to oust the tested and devoted workers and leaders including Dr Kamal Hossain from the party.

He further accused Sheikh Hasina of taking in the party touts and terrorists like Niru and Ovec for unleashing disturbance in the campus and thus maintain her desire for supremacy.

Expelled from Awami League last year Mantu cautioned the party workers and leaders that Sheikh Hasina should be held responsible for dissolution of the party.

What we claim

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fancy becomes a regular part of our political culture, then political debates will lose all credibility. Yes, it is the task of the opposition to reveal to the public the shortcomings of the government. Exposing corruption must form an important part of that task. But in no case should any statement be removed from facts. The ruling party is equally, if not more, bound by this code.

We must retrieve our public debate from the present irresponsible state to a more sober, dignified and factual level. Free speech must be 'true' speech. Otherwise we will become victims of the propaganda game. Given the high rate of illiteracy, and the rather emotional nature of our public — where we react first, and only later try to verify the authenticity of what we are reacting to — politics may be reduced to mere rebel rousing.

Autocracy and dictatorship try to belittle politicians by making them look petty, quarrelsome, dishonest, divisive, unreliable, and given to misleading the people. Do we need to prove them right?

Auranga granted bail in Hotel Purbani case

Hemayeuddin Auranga, an Awami League MP, was granted bail yesterday in a case under the Anti-terrorism Act, reports UNB.

The prosecution case, according to the FIR, is that Auranga, along with four others, went to the bar of hotel Purbani in the city on October 24, last year and ordered food and drink. The waiter placed the orders accordingly.

At about 4 pm, they were requested to leave the place as the time of "closing" the bar was over. But they didn't respond. Then, police came in and arrested them. The bill of Tk 5515 was not paid.

Enam Elahi Khan, head waiter of the hotel, lodged FIR with Motijheel police under section 4 of the Anti-terrorism Act for non-payment of the bill and harassment.

After hearing both the sides, Anti-terrorism Tribunal Judge Nasiruddin Ahmed allowed the bail petition.

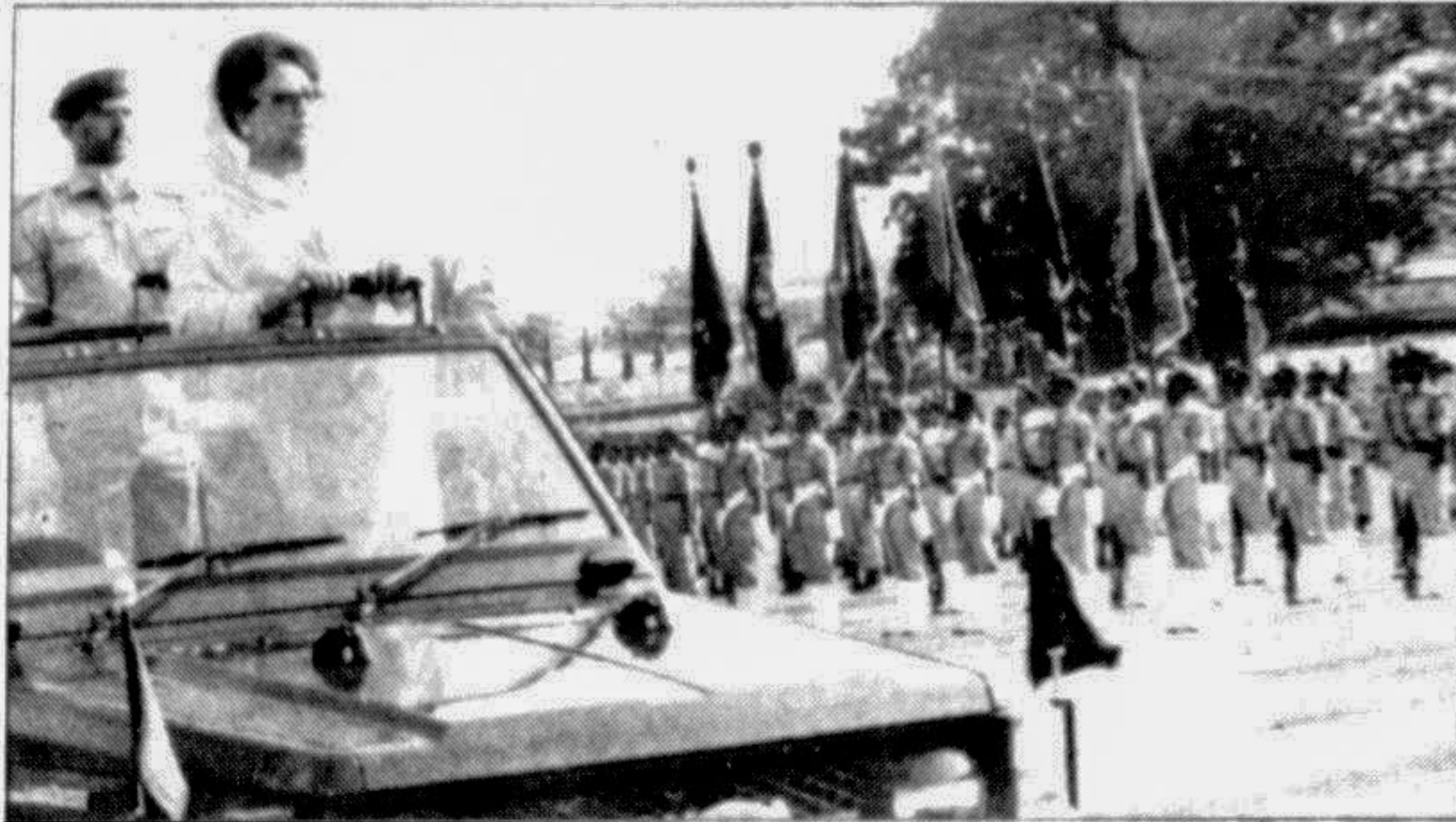
Senior Advocate Sirajul Haque appeared for the accused while the prosecution case was conducted by PP Abdur Razaque Khan and APP Masud Ahmed Talukdar.

Auranga is now facing trial of a murder case.

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia inspecting a guard of honour presented by the police at Rajarbagh yesterday. — Star photo

PM : tradition

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"Culture means to live a better life. Our struggle today is to live a better and happy life which depends on understanding, harmony and unity", she said.

"Our aim is to build a happy and prosperous country. We want to revive our lost glory and tradition and stand with our heads high in the world community", she told a huge gathering at the function.

At the huge festival, the shepherd boy played the flute, the women husked rice, weavers shuttled their bobbins, tribal girls wove shawls, fishermen fished in the water, bauls sang their folk songs and village maidens were in their usual household chores.

Traditional cultural programmes including Monipuri songs, Santal dances, lalon songs, Gazirpala, Jari, Puthi recital, story telling, snake charming, cock fight, monkey dance and lathi khela have been organised as part of the carnival.

Police impartiality

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cess of democracy.

The Prime Minister said terrorism and democracy cannot go together. She said parliament has passed the anti-terrorism bill because the government attaches top priority to checking terrorism.

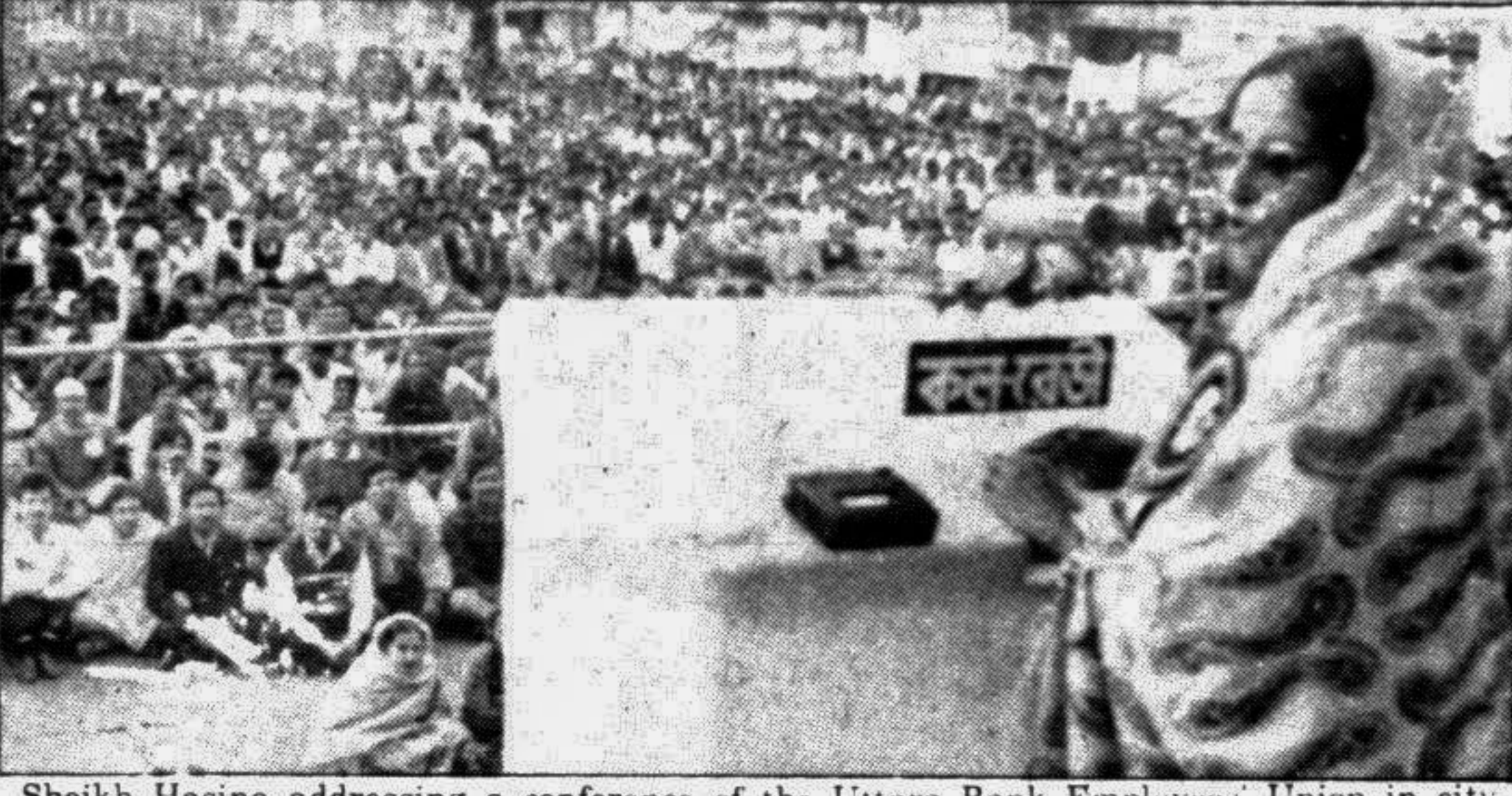
As the Prime Minister entered the parade ground, she was received by Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury and Inspector General of Police A S M Shahjahan.

The function was attended, among others, by Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, Ministers, parliament members, diplomats, chiefs of three services and high civil and military officials.

Earlier, the Prime Minister reviewed the parade and took the salute. She decorated the 22 recipients of Gallantry Awards with Bangladesh Police Medals and President's Police Medals. Three of the recipients were awarded the medals posthumously.

Begum Zia said the responsibility of the police has increased manifold with the restoration of democracy. She said the police have to be dependable friends of the people as the success of all programmes depend on their co-operation. She advised the members of the police to become "community-oriented and pro-people." She reminded them that they could win people's confidence, working in close cooperation with them.

The Prime Minister said the establishment of a staff college for skill development and higher training of police personnel is under consideration of the government. She said Taka 75 lakh has been sanctioned from the Prime Minister's fund for higher education of children of the police. She said the government wants to further strengthen and organise the police force, suiting to the needs of the country.



Sheikh Hasina addressing a conference of the Uttara Bank Employees' Union in city yesterday. She demanded announcement of the Wage Commission Report and implementation of the agreement with the Sramik-Karmachary Oikya Parishad (SKOP) without further delay. — Star photo

Ashuganj NGL plant

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revenue due to the non-sale of gas and NGL products," the official, refusing to give his name, says quoting a May 1992 World Bank report.

The Kailashthia Molecular Sieve Turbo Expander Plant will start producing gas and NGL from February next year, but all these will remain unused until the Ashuganj plant is ready for processing.

A stalemate is there as the Colt Engineering Corporation of Canada, the company awarded the contract to supply and install the plant, has been refusing to sign the contract, initiated November 11, 1992, citing reasons unacceptable to the government of Bangladesh.

The World Bank last month threatened that it would stop funding future gas projects if the project's implementation was delayed any further.

The 37.5-million-dollar plant was to be procured under the Second Gas Development Project (SGDP) funded by the IDA, the World Bank's soft-lending window. But the government decided to pay for the plant after the closing date of the IDA credit against it expired. The World Bank also refused to endorse the terms of the contract after a second evaluation of bids with the financial proposals revised.

The Petrobangla and its infrastructure consultants, the Pencil Engineering Consultants, took about two years to decide on the contract, for which tender was first floated July 1990, leading to the lapse of the credit. According to the Energy Minister, the IDA credit would now be diverted to a component of the proposed Third Gas Development Project.

Under the present circumstances, the Petrobangla officials speak of three options available for the government.

The options are 1) floating a re-tender through international competitive bidding, 2) approaching the IDA to include the project under the Gas Infrastructure Development Project (GIDP) and 3) considering the recent proposal from the second lowest bidder, the M/S Larsen & Toubro Ltd of India, to negotiate the price for undertaking the job.

Adopting the first option, the officials say, will lead to a delay in completion of the plant by one-and-a-half to two years, resulting in a loss of 78 to 104 million US dollars.

Accepting the second option will mean a delay of 1 3/4 to two years in completion. In this case, the loss stands at from 91 to 104 million US dollars. This option will also require a re-tender on agreement with IDA.

Going for third option will save at least six months time needed to finalise the award of the contract under a re-tender, they say, thus reducing the estimated loss to 52 million US dollars.

Meanwhile, a section in the government is still trying to give the contract to the Colt Engineering Corporation that did not sign the initial contract by the extended deadline, January 15, raising new demands.

However, Colt continues to remain intransigent.

The company told the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) of the Petrobangla January 13 that it could continue discussions on the contract provided the PIU agreed to the draft, suggested by Colt, and also amended the wording of the bank guarantee for performance bond and advance payment guarantee in such a way that client (Petrobangla/GOB) could not encash them unconditionally.

The PIU ordered encashment of the bid bond November 26 as Colt did not respond to queries whether it was ready to sign the contract by November 30 as agreed. Later the date was extended upto December 15. The deadline was extended again upto January 15 which too, was not honoured by Colt.

On December 16, the Canadian company sent a draft letter of credit (L/C) with amendments. On December 22, the firm's Finance Director faxed to PIU to say that Colt agreed to the wording of the L/C as amended by the PIU.

But, 15 days later, on January 7, 1993, Colt disclaimed its agreement to the amended draft of L/C saying,

that the Finance Director was not authorised to make this agreement. It also stated that it was not willing to discuss the project any further and requested return of the bid bond money already encashed by Petrobangla.

Even after expiry of the twice-renewed deadline, according to authoritative Energy Ministry sources; the Government is still expecting a positive outcome of Colt's taking the job.

The obvious question that is being raised is: Why is the government bent on giving the contract with so much concession to a company refusing it? What are the compulsions?

Some even go to the extent of asking: Can Colt do the job? If not, what recourse does the Government of Bangladesh take? Forfeiting five per cent warranty bond after spending 37.5 million US dollars?

Has anybody ever verified whether Colt has ever worked as a turn-key contractor or a general contractor for a similar project?

And what happens if Colt walks off after getting third phase payment (about 25 million US dollars)?

Who was verified the technical and financial capability of Colt's doing the job?

Allegations have it that Colt's yearly turnover is less than 30 million US dollars. And that is why the company is demanding changes in payment terms.

In normal cases, Colt should have received export credit guarantee from Canada. Then it would not need any added confirmation that it is now asking for, to the L/C. Why is it not getting EXIM bank guarantee from Canada?

All these are very valid questions considering the impact of the delay in procuring the plant on the future donor-funded gas projects.

Commenting on the situation, a senior official of the ERD that coordinates the government's external aid mobilising efforts said: "Suspension of the power sector credit should have been an eye-opener for the government (now that this project threatens a similar event)."

EC : Campaign

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tricts while the second one is scheduled to leave Monday for another seven northern districts.

All six teams are expected to complete their trips by next week.

About 20 policemen and Ansars including five armed police and two armed Ansars would be deployed at each polling centre, the sources said adding that reserved forces of BDR would also be guarding the election areas.

The mobile courts would be led by magistrates.

Meanwhile, the EC is considering a proposal by human rights groups to monitor the coming municipal polls.

SAARC seminar

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nomie integration of the region is the only option for South Asia to withstand the threats of market restriction emerging from the growing trend of forming regional trade blocs across the world.

The scenario of intra-regional trade in SAARC has been constantly pathetic—only three per cent of the total trade turnover of South Asia compared to nearly 40 per cent in case of ASEAN.

Moreover, lack of co-operation has led to competition among SAARC members for a common product in the international market, providing buyers with the chance to dictate prices. Such competition has resulted decline in the prices of commodities like tea and jute.

The Calcutta meet called for a halt to the intra-regional competition and instead strongly recommended formation of commodity-wise consortia for exporting agro-based traditional produce—tea, jute, coffee, sugar.

As the meeting agreed to steer South Asia into a regional economic bloc, the chamber representatives of poorer nations within the SAARC called for special preferences.

Latifur Rahman of MCCI recommended that there should be some mechanism in the framework of economic co-operation for smaller and weaker nations like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh so that initial trade liberalization does not generate controversies.

Imbalance in intra-regional trade is widespread. India and Pakistan having superior infrastructure and technology are enjoying increasingly favourable balance in trade with the rest of South Asia.

India's export to Bangladesh grew by 211 per cent in a decade from 52.2 million US dollars in 1980-81 to 162.4 million in 1991-92. Dhaka's export to New Delhi, on the other hand, shrank by 2 per cent during the period from 24.8 million to 24.3 million.

The MCCI President reportedly cautioned the meeting that trade liberalization without arrangement of safety net for weaker members would aggravate inequalities.

Clinton

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deadlock and drift is over"— a reference to the past dozen years of divided political power in Washington. "A new season of American renewal has begun."

"It will not be easy," he said. "It will require sacrifice. But it can be done and done fairly, not choosing sacrifice for its own sake, but for our own sake."

The stylized turnover of the office began earlier when Bush graciously greeted the Clintons, Gore and his family at the White House. "Good luck to you," said Bush, reaching out to shake the hands of his guests.

Bush, the fifth living former-president, arranged to be in Houston before the sun set on Bill Clinton's Washington.

By then, Clinton and his wife, Hillary, will be donning formal clothes to join the celebrating Democrats at 11 inaugural balls, cheering their return to power after a 12-year drought.

First was the parade, traditional, fun-filled, noisy and quirky—witnessed by the Clintons and daughter Chelsea, from an enclosed reviewing stand in front of their new home on Pennsylvania Avenue. The marching will go on for hours, with participants from every state, including the high school band from a place called Hope, Ark. Clinton was born there 46 years ago.

Before the day is over, the new president is expected to start putting his own stamp on the government.

Awaiting action are a sheaf of executive orders. They would carry out some of Clinton's campaign promises and reverse the policies of 12 years of Republican rule that viewed active government as a costly obstacle to free enterprise.

Minutes before Clinton's oath-taking, Albert Gore was sworn in as the 45th Vice President of the nation, the junior partner with Bill Clinton in an ambitious new generation team that returned Democrats to the White House.

The Midnight File

France accuses US of going beyond UN resolutions in Iraq

PARIS, Jan 20: France accused the United States today of going beyond UN resolutions in last Sunday's cruise missile attack on the Baghdad suburbs. Foreign Minister Roland Dumas said the inauguration of Bill Clinton as US President should ease tension with Iraq provide President Saddam Hussein abided by UN Resolutions, reports Reuter.

UK welcomes Iraq's truce offer

LONDON, Jan 20: Britain today expressed welcome to the Iraq's ceasefire offer, describing it as a "significant climb-down" by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, BBC TV reported today. But at the same time, the Downing Street warned that Iraqi leader should be judged by what he did and not what he said, reports Xinhua.

Major to visit India

LONDON, Jan 20: Prime Minister John Major will visit India later this month, Major's office said Wednesday. Major, accompanied by a group of British businessmen, will be in India from Jan. 23-28. Major's Downing Street office said. The Prime Minister will be chief guest at the Indian Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi on Tuesday. He will also visit Bombay. On his return, Major will pay a brief visit to Oman for talks and lunch with the Sultan, Downing Street said, reports AP.

Babri Mosque demolition

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The resolution of the Awami League-led Opposition also proposed enactment of stringent laws against communalism and communal politics in the SAARC countries and ensure implementation of the proposed law prohibiting communalism and communal politics.

The House yesterday witnessed a seven-hour deliberation on the Babri Mosque issue with a two-hour lunch break from 3pm to 5pm.

The House resumed at 11 yesterday morning and was adjourned at 8 last night following adoption of the resolution.

BSS adds: The Acting Deputy Leader of the Sangsad, Major General (ret'd) M Majidul Huq, last night told the Sangsad that the government took an unambiguous and strong stand on the "Babri Mosque" demolition in India.

He also categorically said that timely actions taken by the government helped maintain communal harmony in Bangladesh.

The Acting Deputy Leader was winding up the general discussion on the "Babri Mosque" issue that lasted for four days.

Huq said the demolition of the "Babri Mosque" in Ayodhya by the Hindu fanatics represented an act of heinous crime of unparalleled magnitude that stunned the entire world.

The Islamic world in particular was shocked and angry over the razing to the ground of the historic mosque, he said.

About the reactions of the Bangladesh government, the Acting Deputy Leader said the cabinet met at a special meeting on December 7, last year, immediately after the demolition of the mosque and came out immediate reactions on the issue.

"The response of the government was strongest that I have ever seen during my long career in British, Pakistani and Bangladesh days", he said.

"Brushing aside allegations from certain quarters that the government had demonstrated 'weak-kneed' policy on the issue, he asked 'what else could be more forthright and stronger than the reactions of the Bangladesh government?'"

Huq read out the decisions of the cabinet meeting and said steps were also spelt out for the maintenance of law and order in the country following the developments in India.

UNB adds: Sheikh Hasina yesterday demanded enactment of stringent laws against communal politics in the seven-member SAARC countries for ensuring peace and religious harmony in the region.

Hasina condemned desecration of the historic mosque by Hindu fundamentalists and demanded its rebuilding on the original site in Ayodhya as well as compensation to affected Muslims in India.

Hasina made a double-prong attack on the governments of India and Bangladesh for their "failure" in protecting minorities in the two neighbouring countries.

She criticised the BNP government for what she said suppressing the facts about raping, loot, arson and destruction of property and temples of minority Hindus in different parts of the country after the demolition of Babri Mosque on December 6.

Ministers and ruling party MPs, she said, made self-contradictory statements in the House on the question of outbreak of communal violence in the country. Some admitted the violence while others denied.

Referring to the shooting on the long march in Jessore on January 4, she said the government first backed the marchers and then killed the innocent musallis like birds, "firing on long march and killing of innocent people were to please Indian Prime Minister Rao," she told the House.

Responding to a remark by LGRD Minister Barrister Abdus Salam Talukdar on raping Hindu women in Barisal, Hasina blasted him for his "bad taste and indecorous comment" about women.

"To rejoice in the incident of raping women is sheer shamelessness... Pakistan occupation forces also revelled after raping Bangladesh mothers-sisters in 1971," said an irritated Hasina.

The opposition leader was also critical of Prime Minister Begum Zia's absence in the House yesterday and said the Prime Minister must speak about her government position and answer to opposition members' allegations.

Meanwhile, Jatiya Party leader Barrister Maudud Ahmed yesterday criticised the silence and inaction of the Indian government over the Babri Mosque and said secularism, one of the state principles of India, collapsed with the razing of the historic shrine by Hindu zealots.

"The Indian government stepped into the traps set up by Hindu fundamentalist forces", he said, adding that Muslims in India will never forgive the Rao government for the demolition of the mosque.

The government has been playing a "double role" on the question of Babri mosque and its aftermath and said people are confused about the government's actual position.

"Why the government trying to hide the facts of communal violence in the country? The government must admit the fact and there is no shame in admitting the fact", Ahmed said.

Speaking on the resolution, LGRD Minister Abdus Salam Talukdar said demolition of Babri Mosque and killing of Muslims in India are part of an international conspiracy to annihilate Muslims.

In this connection, he referred to the killing of Muslims in Bosnia and the Palestinians who are equally victims of the international conspiracy.

Salam - Talukdar, also Secretary General of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party, said Indian secularism is a mere facade. Destruction of mosques and killing of Muslims were conducted in India with active connivance of the administration.

Talukdar was critical of the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina for her reported statement that the SAARC summit scheduled in Dhaka (January 13-14) was postponed due to law and order situation. But Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao himself admitted that he could not leave the country for the summit due to internal situation.

Armed forces team leaves for Bosnia today

A ten-member team of Bangladesh Armed forces leaves Dhaka today (Thursday) for Bosnia-Herzegovina to monitor the no-fly-zone as military observer of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), reports UNB.

This will raise the total number of Bangladesh officers in UNPROFOR to 24.

The team comprising four officers of Bangladesh Army and six of Bangladesh Air Force is led by Wing Commander AKM Hiron Chowdhury.

Earlier, 45 civilian police monitors and 14 military observers were dispatched to work for UNPROFOR. Bangladesh has also contributed troops to current UN operations in Cambodia, Kuwait, Western Sahara and Somalia.