

## DOWN TO EARTH

# A Railway Station With a Mixed Record

By A S M Nurunnabi

The history of the Kamalapur Railway Station is associated with the transition of the city's position from the capital of a province to the capital of an independent state. Prior to the independence period, particularly after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the need was felt to shift the station from its old site at Fulbaria, when the railway tracks ran through the heart of a growing city at several points. Then, in 1967, the new station, endowed with a unique architectural style, came into being at Kamalapur. It formed an architectural landmark with an air of openness and expansiveness.

Since then there has been a tremendous growth of the city. This has taken away much of the open look of the railway station. Now in the heavy cluster of rickshaws and baby taxis parked in their stands in front and the constant crowd of incoming and outgoing passengers, the spaciousness, as contemplated by the planners, has been lost.

If you happen to be a passenger with some luggage, the first jolt that you will receive upon entering the precincts of the station is from the tussle among the waiting porters to take your luggage. When that tussle is settled, the next ticklish thing is to haggle about the portage charge. Since there are no prescribed rates of such charge, a lot of ill-temper is caused at the beginning of your journey. The same is true also in the case of incoming passengers who sometimes fall easy victims of their bargaining tactics. It is not clear what stands in the way of the railway authorities to fix rates of portage. This thing,

though simple in nature, can be a cause of unnecessary harassment to the passengers.

Another surprise awaits you. No railway time table book is available for the public. It was understood that the time table book was last published in 1991. It is difficult to understand how, without such a book, the public at large will be able to have an over-all idea of the working of the railway system. The railway offers various facilities to the travelling public. Such facilities are usually described in the time table book together with other useful information on many aspects. Such information is also necessary in the interest of tourist traffic, both domestic and foreign. Some observers commented that on account of the absence of such publication, the railway revenue is somewhat adversely affected. This seems to reflect poorly on the railway administration.

Some other necessary facilities are absent. For example, no toilet is provided on the station premises except for upper class passengers. There is also no waiting room for male lower class passengers. In this situation, those passengers, who form the bulk of the passenger traffic, experience extreme inconvenience. There are also no seating arrangements for passengers within the station. Since all the eight platforms of the station lie in an uncovered area, passengers are always exposed to the vagaries of nature. In a tropical country like ours, where rains and storms are frequent, passengers suffering while alighting and boarding trains in such circumstances knows no bounds. The protection, security and lighting

arrangements in the station are also found to be inadequate. This reportedly gives scope in some area of the station to anti-social elements to carry on their activities.

There are, however, some redeeming features. It was noticed that booking facilities are adequate. For each express train, a separate booking counter has been provided and so also for local trains. This minimises the period of waiting for the intending passengers. The enquiry and reservation sections also appeared to function properly, although there are complaints that, when contacted 'over telephone from outside, they sometimes tended to be lukewarm in their response. The presence of beggars, vagrants and other undesirable elements within the inner operational area of the station also appeared to be controlled.

However, in the opinion of observers, a real test of the performance of the station management comes on the occasions such as major festivals when there is a heavy rush for booking of tickets. At such times, it is alleged that black marketing of tickets becomes rampant in collusion with dishonest elements. If in future the station authorities, by adoption of appropriate measures, can minimise such irregularity on such occasions, it will earn the appreciation of the travelling public.

In this context, the station management may keep in mind that big stations like this one play an important role in projecting a favourable image of a country to outsiders on the basis of their satisfactory record of passenger handling.



A Rose Show at Dhanmondi Women's Complex in city yesterday. (Story on Page-2)

— Star photo

## Seven-day Unnayan Parishad seminar begins

# Opposition obstructing efforts to rapid development: Huda

By Staff Correspondent

Barrister Nazmul Huda, the Information Minister, yesterday accused the mainstream opposition in parliament of obstructing government efforts to attain rapid development in different sectors which is affecting everyday life of the people.

The minister was addressing the inaugural session of a seven-day national seminar styled 'Bangladesh: The past two decades and the present' organised by the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad at the Planning Academy auditorium.

Presided over by the Parishad Chairman Dr Kazi Kholiqzaman, the inaugural session was addressed by Rashed Khan Menon MP, Parishad Vice Presidents Prof Khaleda Salauddin and Dr Mahbubul Hoque.

The minister said that the democratically elected government of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) wanted to implement massive development programmes with a view to alleviating poverty, spreading education, creating employment opportunities and accelerating the pace of economic growth with the sincere cooperation of the strong opposition in parliament.

"But the opposition parties are now desperately trying to involve the government to settle silly issues instead of smooth implementation of the development programme," the minister regretted.

While evaluating the country's economic situation Nazmul Huda told the audience that Bangladesh, with most of its people left in poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and ill health, was lagging far behind the rest of the world.

Underlining the reasons for the present situation, the minister said that the government of the early days of independent Bangladesh was not accountable to the people.

"The democratic steps taken by the late President Ziaur Rahman, in both the fields of politics and economy, in the late seventies were disrupted by the autocratic regime of Ershad during the eighties."

Rashed Khan Menon MP said that underdevelopment, poverty and different brands of autocracy marked the last two decades of the nation's history.

"We, in fact, failed to attach adequate importance to the necessity of innovative self-thinking about the ways and means of developing our own economy," Menon remarked adding "the governments of the past two decades were dependent on the prescriptions of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the development of our society."

Talking of the present, Menon said the elected BNP government failed to bring about any change in the pattern of economic policies

practised by the autocratic regime of Ershad during the last decade.

Menon, suggesting measures to overcome present economic crisis of the nation, said that the government should look for an "alternative development method based on democratic reforms in the country's present economic system."

Menon's alternative system includes radical land reform, restructuring of the bank loan system with a view to providing the peasants with adequate capital, special poverty alleviation programme in the rural areas, setting up of appropriate infrastructure for industrialisation, enforcing labour discipline in the industrial units on the basis of democratic trade union rights of the workers, increasing labour productivity, spreading mass education, reducing expenditure on the armed forces and conservation of environment.

Kazi Kholiqzaman, in his presidential address, said that development programme of the democratically elected government should primarily aim at alleviating poverty of the people.

"Economic growth does not necessarily mean eradication of poverty," Kholiqzaman said adding, "alleviation of poverty depends on the equitable distribution of national wealth among the people."

## BTV

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public meetings, preached to her the Mirpur electorate for her party's nominee for the crucial constituency.

The voting is slated for Wednesday.

At least five cabinet members, the city mayor, a number of ruling party MPs and, of course, the candidate Syed Mohammad Mohsin also figured in the news items along with the Prime Minister.

The leader of the Opposition in parliament Sheikh Hasina also spoke at two meetings in Mirpur as part of electioneering for her party's bet, Kamal Majumdar.

When asked about the blackout, a senior official of the BTV News said that they had no early information of Sheikh Hasina's meetings, though all the national dailies carried the report.

Nothing was conveyed from the Opposition leader's office either, he said adding that BTV would start covering the leader from today (Saturday).

The BNP meetings were well covered because of the TV team tagged to the PM's office, the BTV official explained.

## Stranded Pakistanis

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the settlement of the returnees. They worried that their majority would be offset if the newcomers moved south, home to bulk of the Biharis, from Punjab.

A bomb blast in Sindh killed 13 newly repatriated Biharis and injured 14 others on January 11.

During a trip to his home province Punjab 11 days after the explosion, Prime Minister Sharif advised the returnees not to move out of the province.

Re-settlement would create administrative problems and help his political opponents with propaganda opportunities, Sharif told the inmates of Okara Bihar colony.

Pakistan People's Party of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto opposed the planned repatriation while Sindh Muhajirs and Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami supported the return.

## The Midnight File

### Iraq ready to give UN list of arms suppliers

MANAMA, Jan 29: Iraq is ready to give the United Nations the list of companies that supplied Baghdad's chemical, ballistic and biological weapons programmes the head of a UN team said here today. Nikita Smidovich said upon arrival from Baghdad that it was the first time Iraqis had indicated they were ready to provide such a list, reports AFP.

### Bush named for Nobel prize

WASHINGTON, Jan 29: A Nevada congresswoman has nominated former President Bush for the Nobel Peace Prize for his "monumental leadership" in driving Iraq out of Kuwait, bringing Arabs and Israelis to the peace table and sending troops to feed Somalia. Rep Barbara F Vucanovich, a Republican, wrote to the Nobel Committee of the Norwegian Parliament, reports AP.

## Employers oppose

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porations excepting Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BICIC) have the capability to pay the higher wages and other benefits as recommended by the commission.

The WB team also said that the wage hike would put the power sector in serious trouble.

The Wage Commission Report finalised on December 30, 1992 recommended the national minimum wages for the public sector workers at Taka 1000 and the private sector workers at Taka 900 per month. The report has been submitted to the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on January 18 for her consent.

In addition, the national minimum wage for private sector recommended in the commission report is Taka 900 per month. Compared to this, the existing highest minimum wage in the garment industry is only Taka 627 per month.

According to an estimate, the sectoral yearly financial involvement for six public sector corporations due to the implementation of the report would be Taka 259 crore on account of wages alone.

Of this amount, Taka 140 crore would be needed for Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), Taka 60 crore for Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (BTMC), Taka 14 crore for Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BICIC), Taka 21 crore for Bangladesh Food and Sugar Industries Corporation (BFSIC), Taka 16 crore for Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) and Taka eight crore for Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation (BFIDC).

In view of this huge financial involvement, the BEA opposes the recommendations stating that fixation of higher wages for public sector by as much as 51 per cent at the starting level would make the public sector enterprises more unviable financially. The private sector now apprehends that wage hike in public sector would also have a sympathetic effect on the private sector.

On the issue of national minimum wages, the BEA feels that this would cut across opportunities for new employment. Employers also charge that issues relating to productivity such as productivity norms, and productivity-linkage wages were not covered in the commission's report although it was included in the terms of reference of the commission.

According to the recommendations of the commission, each worker is entitled to Taka 1610 per month as basic wages, house rent, medical allowance, dearness allowance and conveyance allowance. This amount was fixed at Taka 1064 in 1985 which shows that the proposed wage is 51.3 per cent higher than the last one.

The commission fixed the total amount on these same heads at Taka 627 in 1977.

The new Wage Commission Report shows Taka 1000 as basic wages, Taka 400 as house rent, Taka 150 as medical allowance and Taka 60 as conveyance allowance. Compared with this, the 1985 report stipulated Taka 560 as basic wages, Taka 196 as house rent, Taka 100 as medical allowance, Taka 168 as dearness allowance and Taka 40 as conveyance allowance.

On the other hand, the report proposes Taka 729 per month for each worker as other benefits. This includes Taka 100 as provident fund, contribution Taka 166 as gratuity, Taka 166 as festival bonus, Taka 46 as leave encashment and Taka 250 as other allowances like night shift and washing allowances.

Compared with this, the other benefits in the 1985 Wage Commission Report was Taka 266 only which means the proposed benefit package shows a 173 per cent increase from that of the last report. In the last report, the breakdown of the other benefits was:

Taka 46 as provident fund, contribution Taka 46 as gratuity, Taka 46 as festival bonus, Taka 14 as leave encashment and Taka 112 as other allowances.

Moreover, against a wage increase of public sector workers by over 40 per cent in real terms during 1984-85 and 1990-91, the financial plight of the corporations aggravated. During 1990-91, the public sector industries incurred a loss of Taka 446 crore as against the total asset of Taka 9370 crore indicating a negative return of (-) 4.76 per cent on the total asset.

Hike of wages is now blamed for the aggravating financial plight of the sector corporations. Last year, wages accounted for 165 per cent of the value addition of the BJMC and 95 per cent of BTMC.

Bangladesh faced one of the highest wage hike during the last decade. Manufacturing wages in the United States increased by 50 per cent during the period, it increased by 118 per cent in UK, 45 per cent in Japan, 45 per cent in Canada and 114 per cent in Singapore. But the rate of increase was 232 per cent in Bangladesh for the same period.

The BEA also feels that there is no justification for fixing national minimum wages and that higher wages would be ensured through demands for skills represented by workers. The BEA notes that the national minimum wage is a government intervention which would hinder productivity and create distortion.

## Yeltsin

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liament, he said, "We don't want any break with Pakistan, but there are principled positions against which we would not like to go."

"We sustain the Indian position on Kashmir and support the unity and integrity of India," he said.

Yeltsin urged India to help stabilise the situation in South Asia which he said was becoming 'hemmed in' by territorial and 'multi-ethnic' problems. He made a veiled reference to the Ayodhya incident, which sparked communal turmoil in India and on a less intense level in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

"We are aware how important it is for India to preserve inter-communal peace," Yeltsin said expressing Russia's opposition to "any use of religion for narrow political ends."

Yeltsin said the nuclear threat had receded, but it was important to strengthen the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which neither India nor Pakistan have signed.

## UNHCR

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UNHCR pulled out from the repatriation process alleging that Dhaka was sending the refugees home forcibly.

Bangladesh, however, insists that all of more than 17,000 refugees so far repatriated went back home voluntarily.

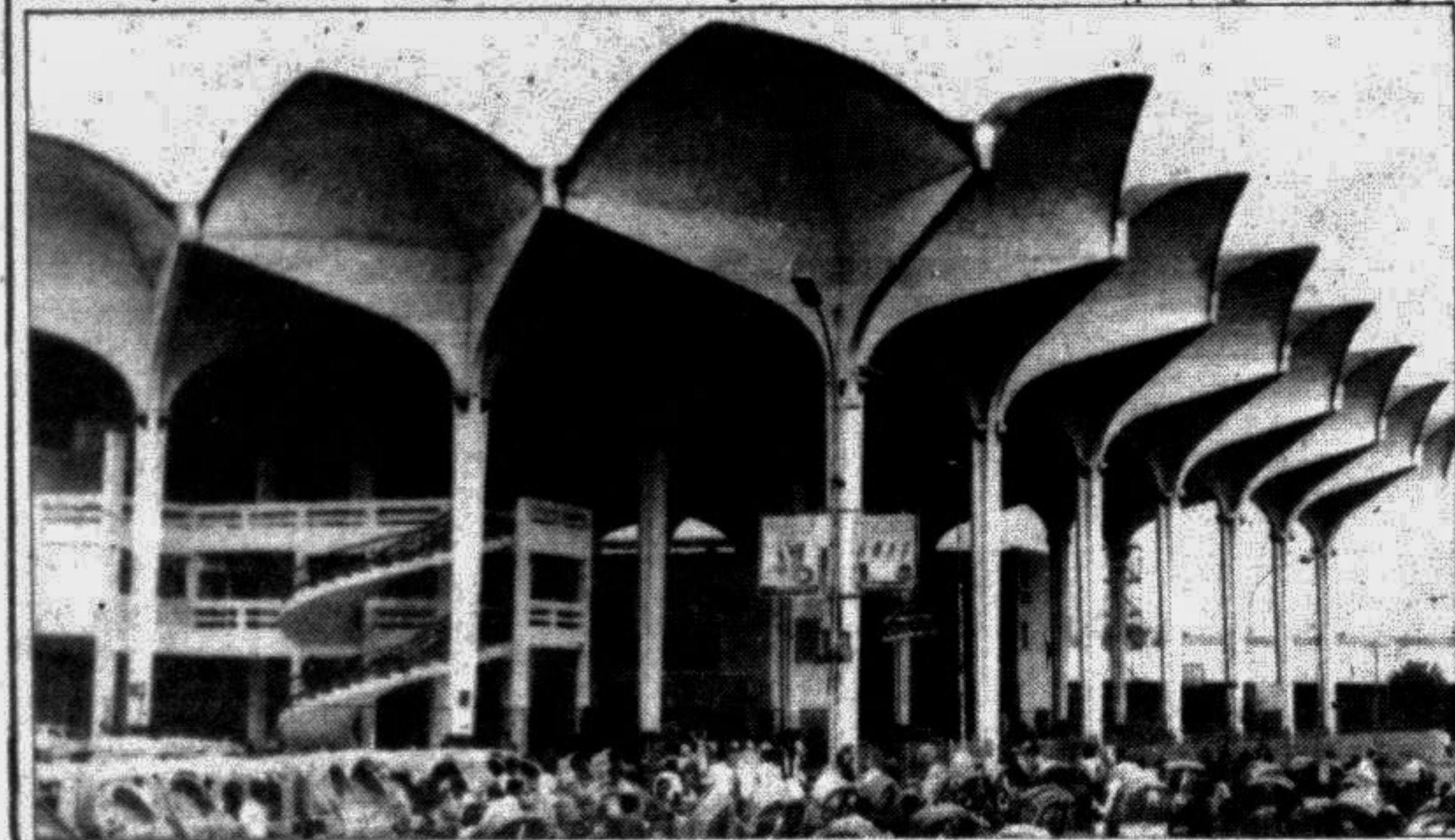
Meanwhile, Bangladesh and UNHCR have edged closer to a new phase of cooperation on the refugees and their repatriation. "We are trying to arrive at a comprehensive package of measures for cooperation that will help us achieve our common objective," Bayandor told this correspondent.

He said Director at UNHCR's Asia Bureau Werner Blatter will visit Bangladesh in the second week of February to discuss the packages with government officials.

Bayandor said Mrs Ogata accepted a government invitation to visit Bangladesh. No date has been set.

On his return home on Thursday from a week-long visit to the United States after talks with UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and US officials Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman said there was no more misunderstanding with the UNHCR.

Rahman's visit was prompted by the UNHCR and the US allegations of forced repatriation of the refugees.



## PM: Vote Mohsin

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establishment of democracy. We have established democracy and with the help of people we want desired economic development.

Detailing her government's development programmes the BNP Chairperson said immediately after coming to power her government had to clear all back log left by the autocratic regime.

She said "we have already achieved in restructuring our socio-economic base aimed at achieving emancipation for the toiling masses of the country."

Begum Zia said the government had already fulfilled many of the long standing demands of the people across the country which were greatly neglected by the autocratic regime.

A number of bridges, culverts and roads had been constructed during the brief period of the present government, she said adding that infrastructural facilities had also been significantly expanded including expansion of power supply and gas distribution system and other facilities to provide the nation with strong base of socio-economic progress.

The Prime Minister called upon the local people to cast their vote in favour of BNP candidate Syed Mohammad Mohsin to strengthen the hands of the present democratic government.

The Prime Minister said her government had given special emphasis on the development of the women and it had already chalked out various programmes for their uplift.

## Hasina

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the present government also failed to stop unabated smuggling of Indian goods which flooded the markets affecting the local industries. "Now people will judge which party is faithfully serving the interest of India", she told the rally amidst cheers.

Hasina called the BNP rule "a story of misery, bluff, frustration, corruption and terrorism."

Referring to various problems facing the people in Mirpur including the dilapidated condition of roads and schools, Hasina said the government is duty-bound to repair roads, provide electricity, gas and water as people give the government taxes for these amenities.

The Awami League leader hoped that people will not make any mistake this time in casting their vote for "boat" to ensure their rights to food, work, education, shelter and medicare facilities.

Referring to the post-75 regime, Hasina said the Zia government tried to consolidate his power by killing 2,500 jawans, 600 officers of the army and 500 officers of the air force.

Hasina claimed that no soldier was killed in three and a half years rule of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She also recalled the reconstruction and rehabilitation programme of the Awami League government in the war-ravaged country. The Bangabandhu government established military academy, rebuild the army, BDR, police and ansar, set up Islamic foundation and madrasa board.

Had Bangabandhu been alive today, Bangladesh would not have turned into a nation of beggars, she declared.

The meetings were also addressed, among others, by Mohiuddin Ahmed MP, Begum Sajeda Chowdhury MP, Amir Hossain Amu, Mohammad Hanif, Kamal Majumdar and local leaders.

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