

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Road Indiscipline in City

By ASM Nurunnabi

Dhaka's road indiscipline has lately assumed terrifying proportions. The extraordinary traffic situation is to be seen to be believed. In all major cities, traffic congestion is experienced but not on the scale in Dhaka. The daily commuters, businessmen, ordinary users of buses and private vehicles have literally to break through the near-impossible conditions created daily on the roads. Movement in the capital city is therefore a regular odyssey.

The most disappointing part of this urban problem is that it not only leads to heavy fatalities caused by the rapidly disappearing discipline on the roads, but many other problems caused by uncontrolled movement of all types of vehicles, the inaction of the traffic police and almost a total lack of enforcement of any rule whatever to deal with road offences and offenders or any step whatever taken to improve the standard of mobility on the roads. In short, road discipline has completely collapsed.

Some of the notorious spots for traffic jams in new Dhaka include Gulistan area, North-South Road at Purana Paltau crossing, Gausia market area, Farm Gate area, Mouchak area, Eastern Plaza area on Sonargon Road. In old Dhaka, vehicular traffic is subject to constant jams at Tipu Sultan Road, English Road crossing, Junction near Narinda Police Outpost, Islampur Road and its several lanes and by-lanes, Mohiul Bazar area, etc. In these traffic jams, harrowing scenes in which buses, trucks, private cars, motor cycles, tempos, baby taxis, rickshaws, push carts and pedestrians are stuck up for long hours are unthinkable anywhere outside Bangladesh.

The huge number of rickshaws is held to be the main causative factor for the traffic anarchy. They outnumber cars and other vehicles by 25/30 times. Rickshaws are Dhaka's speciality. They have reached a point where they are becoming the causes of our nightmare. They take "U" turn at any point they like without any regard for the fast moving vehicles, stop their contraptions at will in front of fast moving vehicles thereby creating chances of sudden accidents. The behaviour of the public buses is also erratic. They stop in the middle of the road for as long as they wish for collecting passengers and thereby causing blockade for others, while the trucks, when they are not immobilised by traffic jams, run at a breakneck speed on busy

roads to make up for lost time, as it were.

Another factor causing traffic mess is the holding of meetings and rallies on the roads. In some areas, particularly thoroughfares have become favourite venues for the meetings. It appears that such favourite spots are those in front of the Press Club, the road north of Baitul Mukarram, the Shaipia Square and the Bangabandhu Avenue. The organisers of such meetings seem to care very little about the suffering caused to the public on account of traffic jams at these places.

Road congestion is reportedly a common problem of important urban areas of Asia. Intolerable road congestions have prompted governments from the Philippines to Indonesia to go for mass transit systems. Likewise many megacities like Calcutta, Tokyo and Hong Kong, because of space limitation, have pushed upwards from street level or downward below ground to set up light railway systems. All this is because their road network and booming populations have made commuting for both motorists and pedestrians almost impossible.

Similar situation is fast developing in Dhaka city. For the chronic traffic congestion in Dhaka streets, rickshaws are held as already noted, mainly responsible. In a megacity which Dhaka is poised to be, it is absurd to think of a primitive vehicle like rickshaw operating in its traffic system. The crucial question now is what should be done with the rising tide of rickshaws in the city. The stern reality is that they provide far too many jobs and support too many families. So no hasty decision can be contemplated without creating more viable alternatives. But a decision to remove them seems inevitable sooner and later. Otherwise, Dhaka traffic will come to a standstill in the not distant future.

Some observers have suggested that for a start we may put a ceiling on how many rickshaws our roads can hold. Given the area-wise distribution of road capacity, it may be possible to issue area-specific permits.

Some other observers are of the opinion that since rickshaws are a major factor of disorder, they may be put in a single line particularly on those roads where such a regulated movement of rickshaws is feasible. The roads, where crowding and congestion is chronic, could be divided into three parts, each earmarked

for slow-moving and speedy vehicles of different types. Most of the roads, they feel, can be easily so divided at least into two sections. Once the movement of rickshaws is regulated, about 50 per cent of the order needed on the roads would be achieved.

There are other suggestions for extension and upgrading of the city's public transport system. According to one suggestion, a scheme may be drawn up and integrated with the phasing out of rickshaws. Cooperatives of these vehicle owners can be formed under government auspices and financed through government schemes. These cooperative can own the new fleet of buses and mini coaches to replace the rickshaws. The members of the cooperatives could be involved in the new transport system, driving and conducting the bus services and maintaining the vehicles. This type of personal involvement would ensure, among other things, efficient organisation, improve the tenor of life of the participants and ease them out of back-breaking work.

In a recent study conducted for integrated transport system for greater Dhaka with the financial assistance of the UNDP, the lack of co-ordination in traffic management in the activities of police, RAJUK, city corporation and road transport authorities has been noted. Among the remedial measures suggested in the study for improving traffic management are the establishment of a Transport Action Plan office, formation of a Task Force of the police, preparation of a Traffic Plan and constitution of a joint team with BRTA and police. The study also recommended formation of a Traffic Cadre exclusively for traffic management, since the existing traffic police has been found to be inadequate and lacking in competence. Since traffic jams mainly occur at important road intersections and spread into nearby thoroughfares, the study had recommended that licences may be granted to rickshaws on area basis so that they keep clear of the busy road intersections.

Everyday we are witnesses to the sad wastage of many valuable workhours as citizens are stuck up in mammoth traffic jams for long hours, helpless, exhausted and restless. It is the urgent need of the hour to deal effectively with the traffic anarchy by suitably reorganising and revitalising the traffic system.

## Magura by-election

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the area over the past two days Begum Zia promised increased development activities. On the other hand Hasina repeatedly referred to the failures of the BNP government and called it "corrupt and a breaker of pledges."

According to observers, the election promises to be a very keenly fought contest among the ruling party candidate Kazi Salimul Haque Kamal and his AL rival Shafiquzzaman Bachchu. The latter is the son of late Asaduzzaman.

The AL has had a stranglehold on the seat for the past two decades — barring a short interregnum when the JP's Nait Roy Chowdhury won the seat in the 1988 elections under the autocratic Ershad, which were boycotted by both the BNP and the AL as well as the Jamaat. In the 1991 parliamentary elections the AL had recaptured the seat with a handsome majority.

However, observers closely following the campaigning in the area, told our correspon-

## PM's gift to new bride

From Our Correspondent  
MAGURA, Mar 18: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia gave Tk 2000 to her newly married bride at the bridegroom's house in Kalkobedi, Mohammadpur thana today.

While on a door-to-door campaign, the Prime Minister entered the house of one Aktar and learnt that he had married only yesterday. It, the wife, came forward and spontaneously touched the Prime Minister's feet to offer her respects. Begum Khaleda Zia immediately congratulated the new couple and offered Tk 2000 as gift to the new bride.

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## Shantibahini, securitymen trade fire

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 18: A gunbattle between the armed Shantibahini men and the security personnel took place for two hours at an interior place of Banderban hill district on Thursday afternoon.

No casualty from either side was reported. The encounter, second in two days time, began when a group of armed tribal rebels in olive-green uniform opened fire indiscriminately on a security patrol at Mahendrapara area of Banderban district, official sources said.

But in the face of counter fire the rebels fled into deep hilly forests. Earlier, the security patrol faced such an attack on March 15 at Kaptai and a similar encounter also took place 15 days ago at Matiranga of Khagrachhari hill district.

## 'Honeytrapped'

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'Butcher of Baghdad' through an alleged close relationship with a cousin of the Iraqi dictator," The Daily Mirror said.

Sir Peter Harding, 60, quit on Sunday as chief of Britain's Defence Staff after his two-year adulterous liaison with the self-described Spanish society hostess hit British press headlines.

Newspapers said Buck, daughter of a hospital cleaner and a bricklayer, had lured ex-fighter pilot Harding, married with four children, into a "honeytrap" to help sell her story of their now finished affair to the top-selling News of the World newspaper for more than 80,000 pounds (120,000 dollars).

Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind told an opposition Labour Party spokesman in a letter on Thursday that inquiries were under way to see whether Harding's affair with the ex-wife of a former Conservative defence minister had compromised security.

Government officials said they believed there had been no security risk, despite an earlier news report that the MI 5 domestic security service intercepted love letters to see if they contained breaches of security.

"When the Ministry of Defence found out that Sir Peter was consorting with a woman who had Arab friends, the intelligence services were called in to read their letters," The Guardian said of the alleged Iraq link today.

"Lady Buck's previous love life, particularly as an escort for Iraqi businessmen, including a cousin of President Saddam, is said to have worried officials, the newspaper added.

The affair has invited parallels with the 1963 resignation of War Minister John Profumo after he admitted lying to parliament over his affair with call-girl Christine Keeler, who also slept with a Soviet military attaché.

## Holiday reporter Amallesh dead



Amallesh Sarker, a senior staff reporter of The Weekly Holiday, died of brain hemorrhage early yesterday morning at the Holy Family Hospital in Dhaka. He was 38, reports BSS.

He left behind his parents, wife, brothers, sisters and a large number of colleagues and wellwishers to mourn his death.

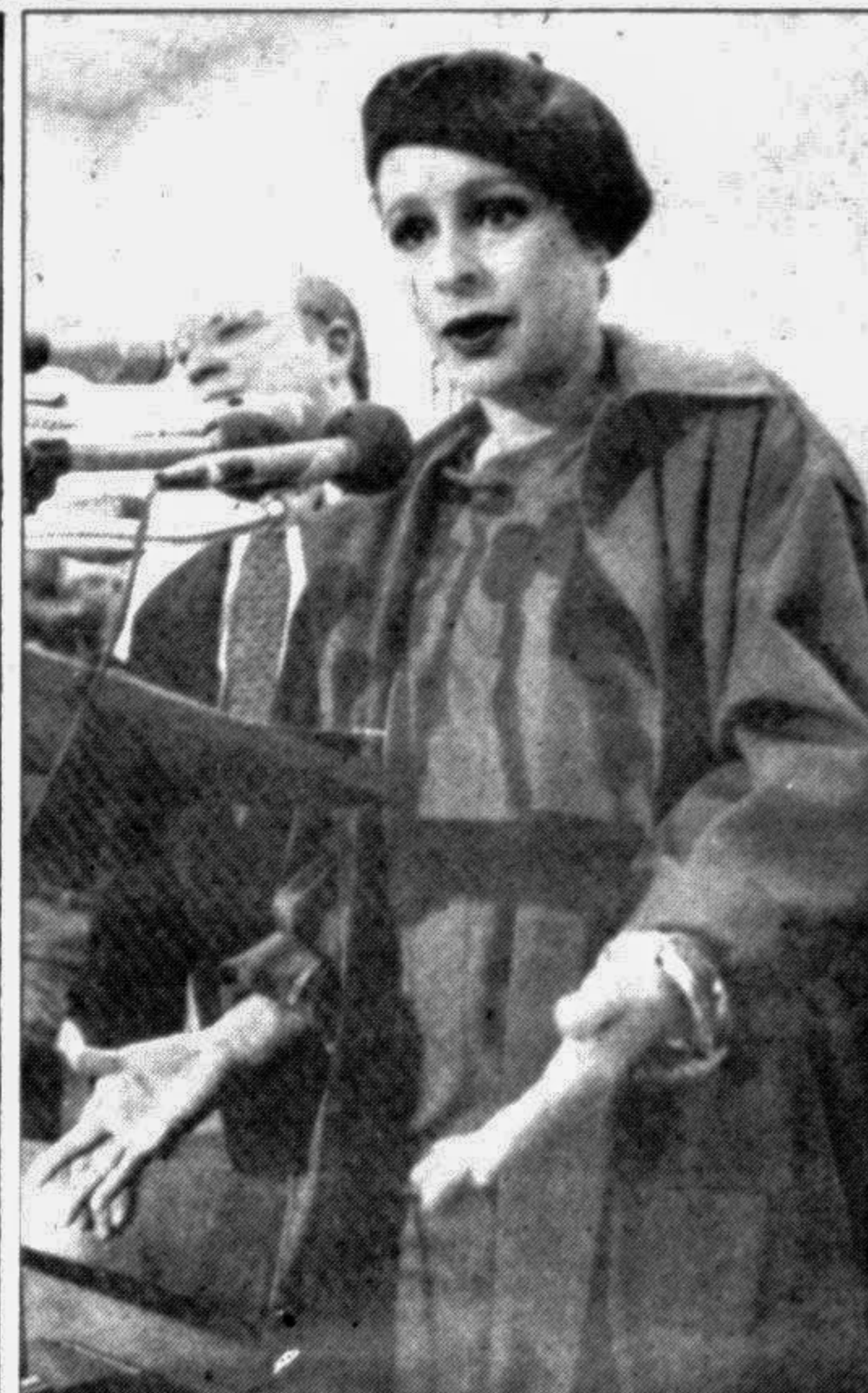
His body was brought to the National Press Club at 10 am where the grieved colleagues had the last glimpse of their beloved Amallesh who had earned love and respect of all for his professional integrity.

BFUJ and DUJ conduced the premature death of Amallesh Sarker.

Amallesh Sarker started his career as a journalist with The Daily Azad during his student life. He also worked with the news department of Bangladesh Television. He joined The Daily Sangbad in 1981 as a sub-editor and continued there till 1988. He attended a training course titled 'Journalist in Europe' for one year in 1988. On return he joined The Weekly Holiday where he worked with proficiency and skill till his death.

During his professional career, Amallesh Sarker visited France, Italy, Britain, Spain, Belgium, Hungary, India and Nepal.

The body of Amallesh Sarker was taken to Mymensingh town yesterday and was cremated at the Kwatkhali crematorium.



Alina Fernandez Revuelta, daughter of Cuban President Fidel Castro, speaking to reporters during a press conference in Washington Thursday. Revuelta defected to the US last December, greatly embarrassing her father, whom she has called a 'tyrant'. — AFP photo

## Israel dismantling bases in Gaza to meet deadline

GAZA, Mar 18: The Israeli army is dismantling parts of a military base in the occupied Gaza Strip ready to meet an April 13 deadline to pull out, despite suspension of Israeli-PLO peace talks after the Hebron mosque massacre, reports Reuter.

Palestinians and Israelis said today that troops had accelerated the dismantling of permanent structures in the bases in areas slated to come under limited Palestinian self-rule according to the peace accord signed last September.

Some facilities had already been completely evacuated, they said.

Palestinian witnesses said they saw soldiers dismantle at least two military outposts in Gaza City and in the southern town of Rafah over the past few days.

"They are taking down observation towers and moving out mobile homes from some of the biggest military bases in Gaza City," said one witness.

A senior Arab official in the Israeli civil administration said authorities had already set up alternative offices near the Erez crossing point to Israel and installed computer networks and communications facilities.

The official said some employees were scheduled to start work from the new offices on Sunday.

"Israel is speeding up the evacuation of its governing bodies from the Gaza Strip," he said.

The Israeli army had been slowly dismantling certain military installations and preparing alternative locations for soldiers and its civilian employees since the signing of

the peace deal in September.

Put Israeli security sources confirmed that preparations were under way to meet an April 13 deadline for withdrawal — should the government order the army to do so.

"The moves are to make it easier for the redeployment (of forces) as quickly as possible. We are moving unessential equipment," one source said.

He said the moves had not affected the army deployment in the Gaza Strip. Troops whose quarters had been dismantled, for instance, were now housed in tents.

Israeli military officials said nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

## Lalbagh murder

One more suspect arrested

By Staff Correspondent  
Police yesterday arrested another suspect in the city's post-polls Lalbagh carnage in which six people were gunned down.

The suspect, Abul Hossain was arrested from Baligon village under Tongibari thana of Munshiganj district early yesterday morning. He was detained in the city's Detective Branch office at Minto Road for questioning.

A defeated ward commissioner candidate, Alhaj Abdul Aziz, allegedly led an armed attack on the supporters of his rival Humayun Kabir on January 31, a day after the polls. Six supporters of Kabir were killed in the armed attack at Nawabganj, Lalbagh.

The main suspect in the murder — Abdul Aziz — is still at large. Police have raided all possible hide-outs to nab Aziz and his accomplices but so far failed to arrest many of them.

Abul Hossain left his house at 8, Abdul Aziz Lane, Nawabganj, soon after the murder and took shelter in Baligon village.

The sixteen other accused in the case, who have been named in first information report (FIR) of police, are also absconding.

Police believe some of the accused may have left the country.

Bhutanese princess jailed in Taiwan

TAIPEI, Mar 18: A Taiwan court sentenced a Bhutanese princess to 10 months in prison today for attempting to smuggle 22 rhino horns into Taiwan last year, state television said, reports Reuter.

Princess Dekpa Wangchuck, 43, who is free on bail, did not show up at the district court in the northern country of Taoyuan for the sentencing. It was not immediately known if she would appeal against the verdict.

She could have been sentenced to up to one year in prison for violating the islands conservation laws.

Wangchuck was arrested last September while trying to smuggle 14 kg (31 lb) of rhino horn and nine bears' gallbladders into the island from Hong Kong in her luggage. The rhino horn is estimated to be worth at least US dollar 758,000.

As a member of Bhutan's royal family, she has a diplomatic passport, but Taiwan and Bhutan do not have formal diplomatic relations.

## The Midnight File

### Columbia returns to earth

CAPE CANAVERAL, Mar 18: Five astronauts returned to earth aboard the space shuttle Columbia today, touching down in Florida after a near-record two-week science and technology research mission. Columbia touched down at the Kennedy Space Centre at 8:10 am EST (1310 GMT) after a 13 day 23 hour voyage just 50 minutes short of the duration record set on its previous mission in September. The astronauts, four men and one woman, had a diverse schedule of secondary assignments while automated furnaces and sensors carried out 11 major materials experiments in the open cargo bay, reports Reuter.

### Security forces on alert in Pak cities

ISLAMABAD, Mar 18: Security forces were on alert in major Pakistani cities following a bus bomb blast overnight that killed six people and wounded 25, police said today. The blast occurred in the industrial city of Gujrat, Punjab province, the bus was packed when the bomb exploded. Four people were killed instantly and another two died in hospital, reports AFP.

### Rabin, Arafat talk over phone

JERUSALEM, Mar 18: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat spoke by telephone today about renewing peace talks. Israel radio said. A senior Israeli official confirmed that the conversation had taken place but would not say who initiated the call or what was discussed. "The conversation went on for a few minutes," said the official, who asked not to be identified, reports Reuter.

## Elect BNP nominee

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During her mass-contact campaign the BNP chairperson stopped at over 100 places as thousands of villagers came out of their houses to greet her.

She also launched door-to-door campaign villages and advised the villagers to start dairy and poultry farming, fish cultivation and tree plantation and sought votes for 'sheaf of paddy' the BNP's election symbol.

At the Banagram public rally Advocate Lutfur Rahman, a leader of Magura district Awami League and a brother of late Awami League MP Asaduzzaman, announced his joining in the BNP.

Agriculture Minister Majid ul Huq, Post and Telecommunications Minister Tariqul Islam, Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, State Minister for Civil Aviation Abdul Mannan, whips Ashraf Hossain and Abdul Karim and BNP Nominee Kazi Salimul Huq accompanied the BNP chairperson during the campaign.

The Prime Minister dwelt at length on various development programmes undertaken by her government.

## Muslims, Croats

From Page 1 Col 7

first major step toward peace, adding: "It is the hope of all present today that the Serbs will join in this process as well."

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic also took part along with Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic and Bosnian Croat representative Kresimir Zubac.

Izetbegovic called the signing "a great day" for Bosnia but reminded the audience that the fighting still raged in several parts of his country.

"This means that our efforts for peace must continue without hesitation," he said. "Our people want only two things: peace and justice, or, as they say, 'fair peace'."

He said "fair peace" means that "our country will keep its borders and the villages and cities from which our people have been expelled will be able to resettle the refugees."

"Those who are responsible for war crimes will have to be brought to justice," he said.

Tudjman said: "We hope that this agreement will help create the conditions for lasting peace and the return of stability to our people."

The federation agreement involving two of the three warring factions followed last month's US-led NATO military intervention in which a Serb artillery bombardment of Sarajevo, the Muslim-dominated Bosnian capital, was essentially halted under threat of NATO air raids.

## FAP authorities

From Page 1 Col 7

Encompassing Tangail Sadar, Pabail, Delduar and Kalihati thanas of the district, the Tangail CPP started back in 1990 and is scheduled to be finished by the end of this year.

Environmentalists as well as a section of pro-environment NGOs fear that the civil engineering structures proposed by the FAP would seriously damage the country's environment, agriculture and fish resources.

The embankments and other structures, as suggested by the FAP, would also displace a huge number of people, they say, entailing even greater hazards than the recurring floods, they say.

They argue that such programmes should be planned after thorough consultation with the people at the grassroots level.

However, the FAP authorities say the programme will bring about long-term solution to the flood problem as well as economic benefits by scientific use of the land, its waters and other resources.

Meanwhile, the Dutch parliament, at a recent session, observed that the FAP-20 project should go ahead because of the greater national interest of Bangladesh.

Each component party of the alliance would have the right to direct its own activities but would not be allowed to do anything contrary to the spirit of the front.

The proposed front will be formally announced at a press conference in the city.