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BNP bags Magura-2 seat

From Munir U Ahmed

MAGURA, Mar 20: BNP candidate Kazi Salimul Huq Kamal was unofficially declared winner of today's by-election in the Magura-2 constituency of the Jatiya Sangsad by a handsome margin over his nearest rival the Awami League candidate.

Salimul Huq, better known as Kazi Kamal, 37, bagged 73,248 votes against AL candidate Shafiquzzaman Bachchu who polled 39,623 votes in 99 polling centres out of the total 102 centres. Polling in three centres, having a total of 5,813 votes, were postponed by the Election Commission because of violence during balloting.

The seat comprising the Shalikha and Mohammadpur thanas, felt vacant upon the death of Advocate Mohammad Asaduzzaman, who was an AL MP and father of Bachchu.



Kazi Salimul Huq Kamal

The Jatiya Party's Nital Roy Chowdhury mustered 20,794 votes, the Jamaat's Golam Akbar 7,732 and the IQJ's Maulana Mahbubur Rahman 3,122 votes.

With this victory in Magura, the BNP's strength in the 330-seat parliament now stands at 174 (including two independent and one NAP) against the AL's 91.

Earlier, the BNP won another by-election in Bhola where Mosharraf Hossain Shahjahan won the seat freed by AL's Tofael Ahmed.

In Magura, 1,45,430 ballots were cast out of a total 2,06,624 votes. Of the total votes cast, 911 were deemed invalid. The voter turnout was 70.40 per cent.

The three centres where polling was postponed were: the Kullia High School centre under Sadar thana (1,938 votes), the Hatbaria Govt Primary School under Shalikha thana (2,288) and the Barochara Govt Primary School, also under Shalikha thana (1,587 votes). The Election Commission is likely to announce a fresh date of re-polling in these three centres soon. However the results of these three centres would not affect the final results because the margin separating the two main contestants is 39,623 votes.

Balloting continued from 8 am to 4 pm without break and the returning officer announced the unofficial results by midnight last night.

Polling continued generally peacefully in almost all the centres barring some serious incidents in three centres, where the respective polling officers declared the polling postponed.

Polling was briefly interrupted in four centres for some time due to disturbances but resumed later.

At the Barochara Government Primary School centre, the presiding officer was

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To ease rising interest crunch Early repayment of debts planned

By Inam Ahmed

The government plans early repayment of some outstanding foreign loans to ease the interest crunch on some sectors, according to Finance Ministry sources.

These loans with high interest rates will mainly be considered for early repayment. Details of the plan will be submitted to the Finance Minister sometime next month, sources said.

'Some suppliers' credit are charged with too high interest rates and if Bangladesh can repay these early, a lot of foreign exchange can be saved,' a government official said.

The concerned department has already sorted out high interest loans to the tune of

about 300 million US dollars, which should be paid off the soonest.

One reason behind this early repayment move is that the government has now quite a comfortable forex reserve and can afford to part with some of it to avoid high interest amount accrued to the principal amount. The forex reserve now stands at around 2.5 billion US dollars.

On the other hand, management of this huge forex reserve has become a problem for Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Bank deposits its reserve with other commercial banks abroad against which it gets interests. But recently, the

Surya Sen's birth centenary today

By Staff Correspondent

The birth centenary of the legendary anti-British revolutionary Surya Sen will be observed today.

The observance committee formed to celebrate the centenary of 'Masterda' — as he was popularly known — will bring out a procession from the National Press Club at four this afternoon. They will also pay a floral tribute to the valiant hero who stunned the British colonial rulers by temporarily storming and capturing the Chittagong armoury, the reserve police lines and the telegraph and telephone office in 1930.

Although Sen was later captured and hanged in January, 1934 by the British yet the short-lived success of his bravado was enough to spark a

AL rejects election, calls hartal Mar 23

From Staff Correspondent

MAGURA, Mar 20: The opposition Awami League rejected the polls results in Magura-2, alleging rigging and violence during balloting and demanded repolling in the constituency.

The party also called a half-day nationwide hartal on Wednesday (March 23) and demonstrations in Magura and Dhaka on the preceding two days to protest the alleged rigging.

'The election has been rigged heavily and we reject it,' AL chief Sheikh Hasina told reporters at a post-election press briefing here.

'It is now proved that no election can be held under this government. So we want fresh elections under a care-taker government,' the AL chief said at the crowded press conference at the AL candidate's city residence, just two and a half hour after the balloting was completed.

Sheikh Hasina said the AL had won the seat since 1954 without any break, a fact which had shaken the ruling party. She alleged that out of the 19 unions that comprise the constituency, the BNP activists had captured 13 and rigged the polls.

Sheikh Hasina also accused the Chief Election Commissioner of helping the BNP implement the 'blue print' by leaving Magura ahead of the crucial polls.

She also alleged that the Deputy Commissioner and Police Super had used their official positions to favour the ruling party. None of the 45 mobile magistrate courts was provided with a transport for carrying out duty, she added.

AL central leader Tofael Ahmed, MP, Sajeda Chowdhury, MP, Mohammad Nasim, MP, K M Jahangir, MP, Harunur-Rashid, MP, Khan Tipu

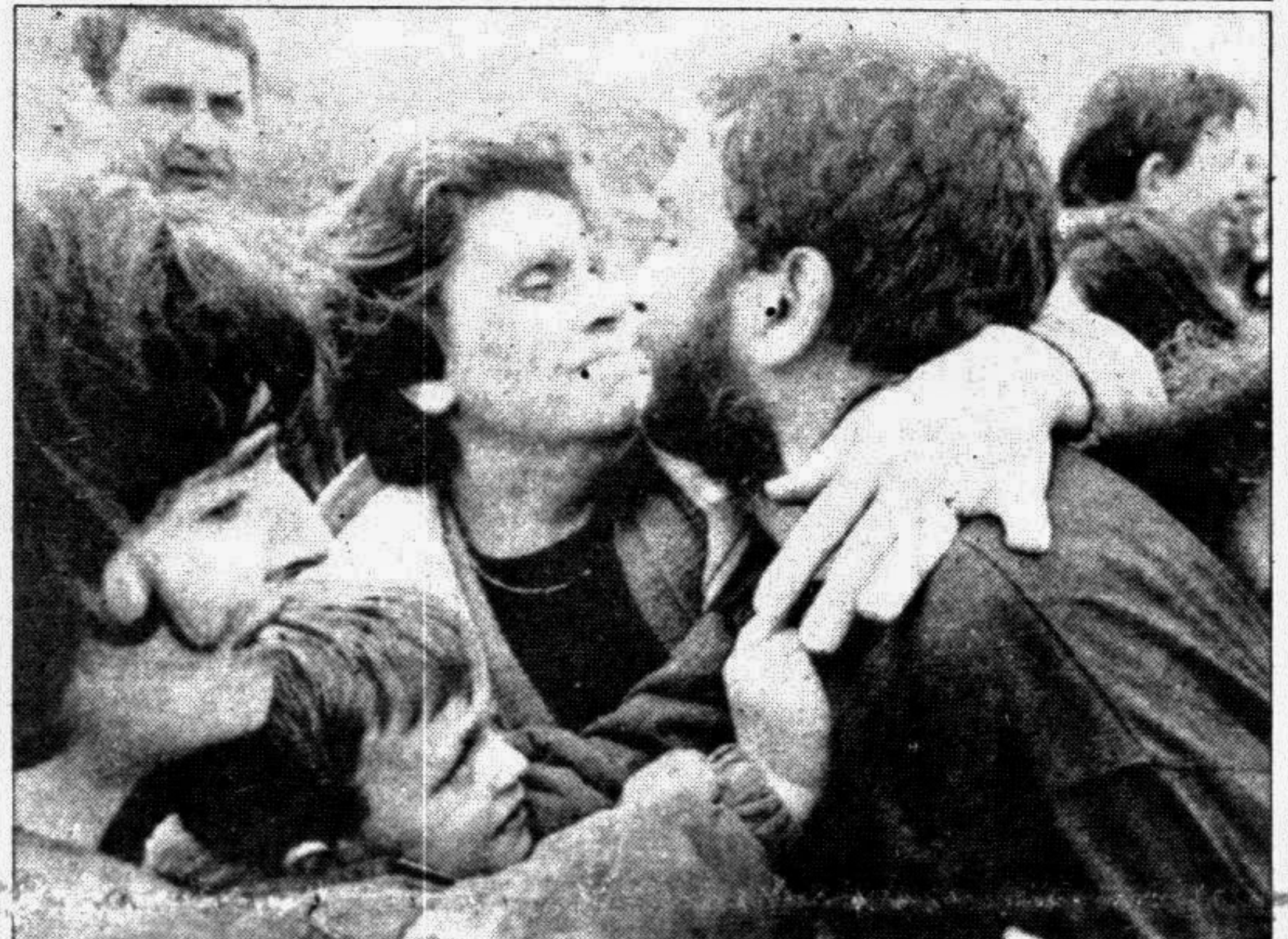
CEC Rouf denies having spoken to the press

By Anwarul Huq and Nurul Kabir

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice Abdur Rouf yesterday denied having spoken to any member of the press prior to his departure from Magura Saturday evening.

Talking to The Daily Star at his Election Commission office last night, the CEC observed that the press reports published Sunday claiming that he had left Magura the day before apprehending unfair means in the by-election were unfounded.

A section of newspapers carrying a UNB crested news item said, the CEC had left Magura with a note of doubt about the fairness of Sunday's by-election. The news item claimed, 'Justice Rouf expressed his doubt in remarks he made in front of journalists and leaders of political parties after the BNP (had) refused to send nominees to the proposed (all party) vigilance



A Croatian HVO Soldier is hugged by his family as he arrives in the western part of Mostar in Herzegovina Saturday after being released by Muslim-led Bosnian army. — AFP photo

Dhaka reaffirms opposition to racism

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has reaffirmed Bangladesh's unequivocal opposition to racism and racial discrimination in all their forms, reports UNB.

In a message on the occasion of the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination today she said: 'We are, today, witnessing unfolding of a new chapter in our struggle against apartheid, the most abhorrent form of racism. South Africa, which has been once the most entrenched bastion of racism, is in the threshold of a historic transformation. We hope multi-party elections scheduled for next month will usher in a new, non-racial and democratic South Africa, ending one of the darkest chapters in human history.'

But she lamented that the menace of racism and racial discrimination might not disappear with the dismantling of apartheid alone.

'Today, we are witnessing

NEWS BRIEFS

SAARC TCA meet in Islamabad Apr 17-18

The 13th meeting of the SAARC Technical Committee on Agriculture (TCA) will be held on April 17-18 in the Pakistan capital Islamabad. All the member states of the SAARC will participate in the meeting. The TCA will consider matters relating to agriculture projects, meeting of the counterpart scientists and recommendations of the Governing Board in regard to SAARC Agriculture Information Centre (SAIC), reports UNB.

Justice Rahman off to New Delhi

Justice M H Rahman, the senior judge of the Supreme Court, left Dhaka for New Delhi yesterday for attending the international conference on shaping the future by law. The conference is organised by the Indian Law Institute in collaboration with the UNICEF, reports BSS.

Train derails in Rajshahi

RAJSHAHI, Mar 20: Two bogies and a passenger compartment of the mail train from Chapainawabganj were derailed today at Bahrampur near Court Station resulting in minor injuries to 10 people. Witnesses said the slow moving train was derailed at about 12 noon due to loose track, reports UNB.

BAU first year classes

From Our Correspondent MYMENSINGH, Mar 20: The first year classes under all faculties of the Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) will begin from March 23.

Diarrhoea claims 3 more in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent BARISAL, Mar 20: Diarrhoea claimed 3 more lives and attacked 118 persons in Patharghata and Banna thanas of Borguna district during last 24 hours ending this evening.

According to official sources, the most affected areas are Patharghata, Banna, Amtali and Sadar thanas of Borguna.

Majidul praises BNP, EC for 'fairness'

From Our Correspondent

MAGURA, Mar 20: Agriculture Minister M Majidul Huq yesterday said that the BNP once again proved through its conduct in the Magura by-election that it believed in the democratic ideal of free and fair polls.

The minister told a crowded press conference at the Magura Circuit House at 9 pm last night that the Election Commission deserved appreciation for upholding its traditional fairness and neutrality in the conduct of polls.

The press conference was also attended, among others, by Energy Minister Dr Khader Mosharraf Hossain, Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and several BNP MPs.

Asked by correspondents if the ruling party had worked according to a 'blueprint' for rigging the polls, as alleged by the Awami League, Majidul Huq replied that the BNP always believed in respecting the wishes of the people and not in any coercive or foul means.

Replying to a question, Majidul Huq said that Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina stayed in the Magura Circuit House till 6:30 pm Saturday.

The AL chief, along with many of her senior colleagues had, literally occupied the Circuit House during the entire day Saturday despite the fact that it was meant to be the office of the Election Commission from that day, Huq said.

Majidul Huq apprehended that the forced stay of Sheikh Hasina in the Magura Circuit House till 6:30 pm yesterday was the reason for annoyance which caused the Chief Election Commissioner to leave for Dhaka.

The Agriculture Minister said that the Prime Minister had vacated the Circuit House the night before at 10 pm while other BNP ministers and leaders also left on Friday night or by early Saturday morning.

Huq thanked the police administration for maintaining

AL lodges protest with CEC

Awami League Advisory Council member Shah AMS Kibria yesterday petitioned the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) for action against alleged irregularities in the Magura by-election, reports UNB.

In a letter to the CEC, Kibria alleged that ruling BNP supporters, some equipped with arms, captured a number of polling centres, prevented voters from casting votes and assaulted minorities in some villages. Some of the injured people have been hospitalised.

A good number of voting centres in Shalikha and Mohammadpur thanas were occupied by the BNP workers preventing voters from exercising their franchise freely, he said.

On the basis of initial reports, Kibria named the worst affected polling centres where 'gross irregularities' had been committed till 11:30 am. The centres are Sandra, Nowkila, Krishnapur, Talchari, Vautali, Thaipara, Kalibari, Satakhali, Dhaneswargati, Singrabazar and Aminbazar in Shalikha thana.

JP demands fresh polls

MAGURA, Mar 20: Jatiya Party leader Kazi Zafar Ahmed MP today demanded fresh election in Magura-2 and resignation of the government on charge of vote dacoity, reports UNB.

Addressing a press conference here tonight, Kazi Zafar said the BNP had prepared a blueprint in advance to rig the election. 'BNP killed democracy by committing vote robbery.'

The JP leader criticised the role of the Election Commission and said that the Chief Election Commissioner had showed his lack of responsibility by leaving Magura on Saturday after realising the situation. Without leaving Magura, the CEC could have postponed the election, he added.

Jatiya Party, in protest against today's vote dacoity, has announced country-wide half-day hartal on Wednesday. It also called for staging demonstration in Magura and Dhaka tomorrow and throughout the country on Tuesday.

North, South agree on restructured GEF

By Chapal Bashar

After prolonged negotiations for over a year, the industrial and the developing countries have reached a consensus to reconstitute the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for which a two billion dollar fund will be provided for three years starting this July.

Eighty-seven countries representing the Group of 77 (G-77) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) met in Geneva March 14-16 to settle the issues about giving a permanent structure to the GEF. A two-member Bangladesh delegation comprising Abdullah Haroon Pasha, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests and Syed Jamaluddin, Economic Minister at the Bangladesh mission in Geneva, attended the meeting.

The GEF, which started functioning in July 1991 for helping developing countries to protect the environment, will complete its three-year pilot phase in June this year. During this pilot phase a number of projects were under-

taken in developing countries for which about 800 million US dollars were spent.

According to informations available in Dhaka, the participants of the Geneva meeting unanimously adopted a document titled 'Instrument for the Establishment of Restructured Global Environment Facility'.

The document, incorporating objectives and activities of the GEF, will be effective from July 1, 1994. The restructured GEF will have a secretariat at its headquarters to be located in Washington. The World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Haroon Pasha, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests and Syed Jamaluddin, Economic Minister at the Bangladesh mission in Geneva, attended the meeting.

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Bar Council debars 2 lawyers for misconduct

By Staff Correspondent

Two lawyers have been severely reprimanded recently by the Bangladesh Bar Council for professional misconduct.

A tribunal of the council found Razaul Karim Bhuiyan and Mahfuzur Rahman, both members of the Supreme Court Bar Association, guilty of professional misconduct and took the punitive measures.

A press release of the council, issued by its senior assistant secretary Taslimuddin Khan yesterday, said that as the legal adviser of the Dhaka Central Cooperative Bank Razaul Karim Bhuiyan was authorised to withdraw Tk 3,90,500 from the Rent Control Court. Bhuiyan withdrew Tk 3,63,000 on August 1988 and kept the matter secret from his client.

In the face of the bank's pressure, the advocate paid Tk 3,22,500 and charged the rest as his legal fees.

Acting upon a complaint by the bank, the Bar Council tribunal, with Advocate Ahmed Ali as chairman, debarred Razaul Karim Bhuiyan from le-

Agro-science now compulsory in schools

By Staff Correspondent

Barrister Sircar said all the secondary-level schools would be provided with necessary infrastructure within a short time for running the courses.

The government has decided to introduce agriculture as a compulsory subject for the students of secondary schools of the country from the current session.

A high-powered committee is now working on the details of the curriculum, Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar disclosed at a press conference held yesterday at the ministry.

The minister said the subject would be introduced from Class Six to Class Nine in the current year and in Class Ten the next year.

He also informed newsmen that trade courses would be introduced for the students of classes Nine and Ten this year as optional subjects.

The agriculture subject would comprise poultry science, pisciculture, tree plantation, animal husbandry and shrimp cultivation while the trade course would include electrical, mechanical and automobile engineering as well as other related subjects.



Jamiruddin Sircar

the teachers and provide the schools with infrastructural facilities.

He said there are some 40 lakh students at the secondary levels. If all of them can be taught these subjects, they would be able to employ themselves even when they stop their studies.

Regarding the examination system, Sircar said of the total marks for each subject, 60 per cent would be for the subjective questions and 40 per cent for objective questions.

Computers will evaluate the answer scripts of the objective questions. The optical mark recorder (OMR) is able to check three thousand papers of objective subjects in only one hour, he said.

The new system of evaluating answer scripts would check malpractice and speed up the evaluation, the minister said.

He also mentioned that the results of the SSC examinations of the four boards would

Jamaat demands repolling in Magura

The Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday rejected the result of the by-election and demanded repolling in Magura-2 constituency, accusing the ruling party of massive rigging, reports UNB.

In a joint statement, Jamaat leaders Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, Sheikh Ansar Ali MP, Abdul Matin and Prof Golam Akbar said BNP activists captured almost all the polling centres in Shalikha and Mohammadpur thanas depriving the voters to exercise their right of franchise.

They said the Jamaat had drawn the attention of the Chief Election Commissioner to the possible rigging before the election and the apprehension proved true.

The Jamaat leaders said massive rigging by the BNP in Magura by-election once again proved that without care-taker government, election under a party government cannot be impartial.

Jamaat will hold demonstration in Magura and Dhaka today to protest the rigging in election.

Pakistan closes its Bombay consulate

ISLAMABAD, Mar 20: Pakistan said today it was closing its Bombay consulate because the Indian authorities have been uncooperative, a move which could further strain the two nations' already tense relations, reports AFP.

The decision was conveyed to New Delhi through the Indian High Commissioner who was summoned to the foreign office here earlier in the day, a foreign office spokesman said.

The main cause of the tension between the two neighbours is Kashmir, over which they have fought two wars since their independence in 1947. Pakistan and India have also traded accusations of sabotage and hostile, covert activities.

The foreign office spokesman said the consulate in Bombay has been closed 'with immediate effect due to (the) non-cooperative and negative attitude of the Indian authorities.'

The statement, carried by the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), said the decision was made because the consulate could not function effectively.

Pakistan had asked the Indian government to lease Bombay's Jinnah House, named after Pakistan's founding father Mohammed Ali Jinnah. The Indian authorities had taken over the house after the 1947 partition of the subcontinent.

The spokesman said India first agreed to the Pakistani proposal, but then had 'gone back on its commitment' to lease the premises.

The Indian authorities subsequently refused to facilitate the acquisition of suitable premises for the consulate, he said.

The Maharashtra state government had in effect 'acted in a manner that made it extremely difficult to carry (out) its assigned functions,' he said.

30 injured as transport workers, rickshawpullers clash in N'ganj

From Our Correspondent NARAYANGANJ, Mar 20: Death of a rickshaw-puller in a road accident here this afternoon triggered off clashes that continued for four hours between the transport workers and rickshawpullers at different parts of the town.

At least 30 people were injured and several buses, shops and dozens of rickshaws damaged during the clashes.

Bus communication between Narayanganj and Dhaka was disrupted for two hours since the start of the clashes at around 1 pm.

According to police the accident occurred when a Dhaka-bound minibus hit a rickshaw and ran over the rickshawpuller at the Chashara crossing. The dead was identified as Abdul Rahman.

The bus hit another rickshaw injuring its pillion at Jamtola while it was speeding