

DOWN TO EARTH

Rent-A-Car Business in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

The city witnesses a new variety of business in answer to citizens' demands. Along the east side of the Bangladesh Secretariat near Muktaangan, several hundreds of cars and micro-buses are seen packed everyday. These vehicles are engaged in what is called rent-a-car business. Though the city lacks a regular taxi service, these vehicles may one day serve as the nucleus for such a service in future. At present, however, this new line of transport service has opened opportunities for employment for a few thousands of unemployed youths.

This business now developing as an enterprise in the private sector and limited in scope is, however, playing an important role in meeting the transport needs of the city dwellers. It may be recalled that the concept of car renting business was first introduced in the city during the time of late president Ziaur Rahman. With the idea of making the unemployed educated youths of the country self-reliant, he thought of creating alternative job opportunities for them. As an experimental measure, he launched a programme in collaboration with the Sonali Bank under which some taxi cabs were distributed among interested university students to enable them to earn extra income. Initially, the programme generated a great deal of enthusiasm, but gradually the programme failed to make much headway due to various reasons. First, there were bureaucratic complications but mainly the conditions under which the students were given the cabs were not fulfilled by them. Instead of driving the cars themselves, the students gave them to hired drivers and thereby reaped benefit for themselves. In this way, the cabs meant for providing employment to students passed

on to the hands of ordinary businessmen, who bought out these cars at a low price and there after started car renting business. Thus the loan programme of the Sonali Bank for the students for purchase of car fizzled out.

At present the car renting business is not limited to the city alone. In almost all important district headquarters, such renting services are available. Thus such renting business which began in a limited way in the eighties, has now greatly expanded in volume on account of the evergrowing demand for it.

Since employment opportunities have failed to meet the demand of the unemployed youths in the public sector, many entrepreneurs with small and medium-sized capital have come forward in this field. The highest concentration of rent-a-cars can be found, as already indicated, on the stretch of North-South Road near Muktaangan in the Purana Paltan area. Here 250 to 300 cars and micro-buses assemble everyday for hire. Besides this area, there are other locations particularly in front of big hotels where such cars are available for hire. To observers, hire charges demanded for these transports may not be considered high after proper bargaining. It compared in the light of existing cost of fuel and maintenance. These transports are mostly used by relatively well-off classes of people on occasions of marriage, parties, elections or just pleasure trips. Students of schools, colleges and universities mostly use these transports for visits to historic places as part of educational tours. Many of our people coming from abroad on holiday, use these transports for going to their village homes direct in comparative comfort and security.

With the coming of winter, this business picks up. At this time almost every vehicle is used for one purpose or another. During this season, there is an increase in marriage functions. For such purposes, the need for transport is mainly met by them. When the picnic season comes in winter, there is a big increase in their business. Since the picnickers choose a secluded place away from the hustle and bustle of city life, these transport operators get a steady business with large income because the picnickers prefer a suitable far away place for their picnic spot. According to some operators, the galling aspect of their business is the frequent disturbances caused by mashtans insistent on their demand for tolls.

It is estimated that about 20 thousand people are depended on this business for their livelihood. With the steady growth of this, competition is getting keen in this field. Nowadays rent-a-car signboards can be seen at many places in the city. In the steady growth of this business, one finds the possibility of its playing a part in improving the transport situation of the city. We all know what a traffic anarchy is caused by rickshaws on the roads of the city. The rickshaws will have to be eliminated some time or other in the future and in this process of elimination, the existing cabs can be helpful factor if they are fitted with metres. A taxi cab with metres may easily attract customers of the class who now turn to autorickshaws. Even such metred cabs may be used by other classes when required to go long distances. This may be one of the viable means in the elimination process of the rickshaws. From this perspective, these taxi cabs need all incentive in the expansion of their operations.

Ball in SLORC's court

From Page 1 Col 4

should be released unconditionally and should have free access to media with the opportunity to confer with her political colleagues for holding a meaningful dialogue with the SLORC.

The possibility of serious talks on country's future depends on the military rulers. If they are willing to compromise, solutions can be worked out, otherwise, the negotiations, keeping Suu Kyi in mind, would yield no result," said Dr Sein firmly. "The SLORC need to show good faith — they cannot keep showing Aung San Suu Kyi on television indefinitely."

Dr. Sein, however, viewed recent meetings of Myanmar's military rulers with Suu Kyi as a little positive development, saying, "Ice started melting, but very slowly — we have to wait and see."

He declined to comment when asked whether the SLORC is contacting his government-in-exile. Dr Sein, 51, has set up a temporary office in Washington, but his cabinet colleagues are stationed along the border areas of Myanmar.

Pointing out Myanmar's ethnic problems, Dr Sein said it is a multi-ethnic country where ethnic people occupy over half the land area and make up about 40 per cent of the 44 million population.

"From an ethnic point of view, the solution to Burma's problems lies in having equal rights, in having the ability to decide their own future and perhaps in a federal system of government", he maintained adding, "the ethnic people can also be accommodated within a genuine democracy, we cannot have second or third class citizens in a democratic Burma."

Replying a question on mass exodus of Rohingyas from Myanmar to Bangladesh, who are now being repatriated with the assistance of the UNHCR, Dr Sein said, "It would not happen if there was a democratic government in Rangoon, such a problem could easily be solved by a pro-people government."

He said that the ethnic problem in his country is on the increase since the military rulers are not accountable to anybody. "They make commitments, sign agreements, but don't hesitate to violate."

"What can you expect from a military government which did not even accept people's verdict in the elections organised by itself (SLORC)?", he asked.

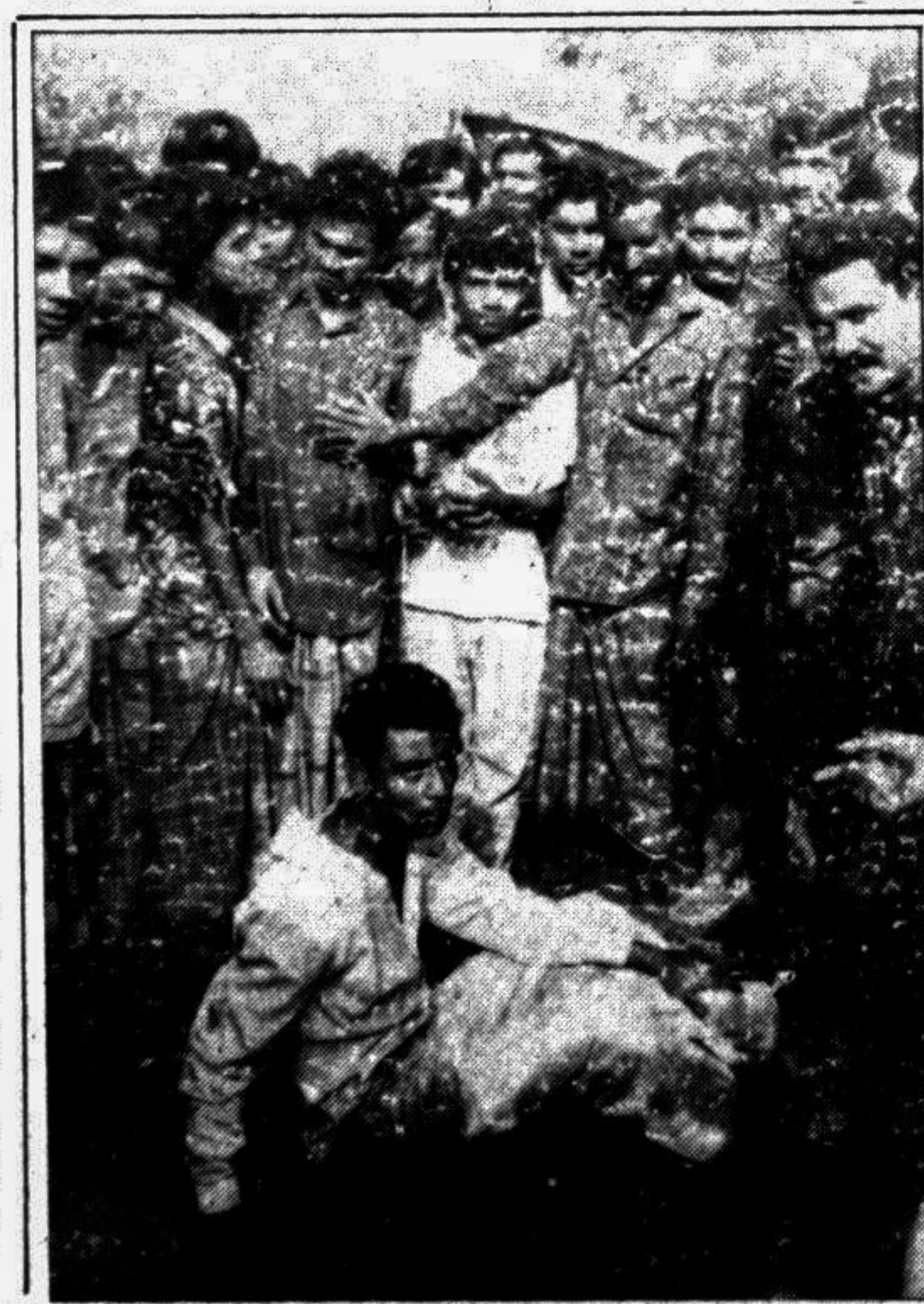
"Only when a democratic

government will be installed in Rangoon, all the ethnic problems including that of Rohingyas will be solved permanently," he assured.

Dr. Sein described the present economic situation in Myanmar as deplorable where, according to him, high rate of inflation has been prevailing.

"Some foreign companies are showing interest in investing there, but only to extract or exploit natural resources, nobody is coming up for investing in the manufacturing sector or for any long-term industrial projects", he said. It only indicates lack of confidence of foreign investors, he commented.

The military should step down and this sentiment of the people was demonstrated in the 1988 democracy uprising and the SLORC-organised 1990 general elections," said Dr Sein concluding, "Burma needs a government that can unite and rally the people, a government that is transparent, accountable and willing to rectify its shortcomings — the country needs a government which can attract the best qualified people to rebuild the country."



Gayoom

From Page 1 Col 5

Rasheeda told police Seetha was to carry a bomb and jump before a car carrying the Maldivian leader.

Under interrogation, Rasheeda said she belonged to the national security force in Maldives and was sent to India to enquire into the plot to kill Gayoom, which she said was hatched by presidential rival Ilias Ibrahim.

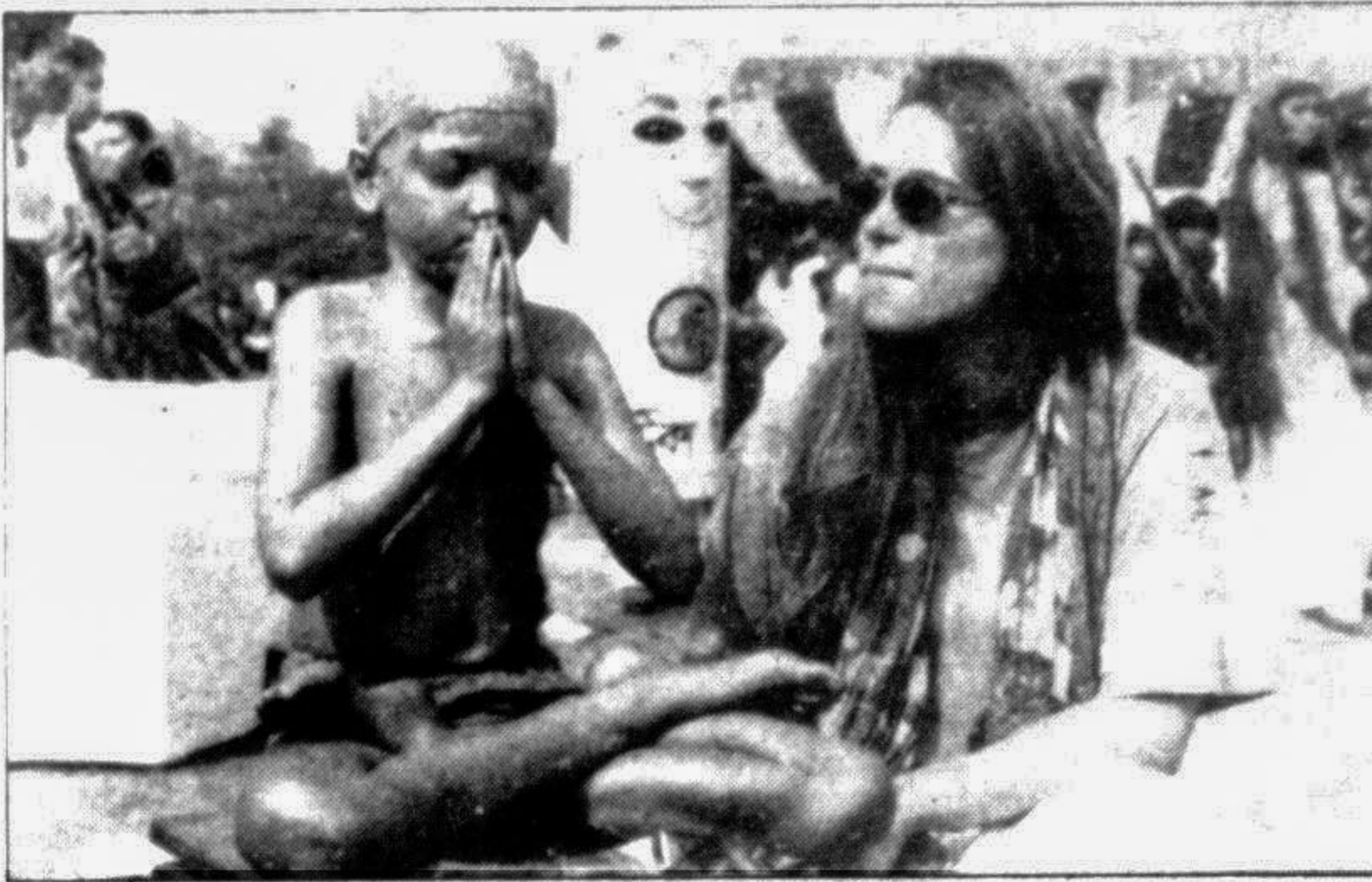
Cong : State polls

From Page 1 Col 4

In Andhra Pradesh, the home state of Rao, the regional Telegu Desam party was leading in 44 constituencies, while Congress was leading in only five seats. The state has 292-member legislature. Trend was available for only 49 seats.

Counting of votes in India take time as each and every ballot is counted manually. In Sikkim, the local Sikkim Democratic Front has won five of the nine seats, results of which were declared. The state legislature is made up of 32 seats.

In Goa, the Congress shared honors with Maharashtra Gomantak Party by winning one seat each in the 40 member state assembly. The counting is to last for several hours.



Barnia Bakhtiar (L) won the first prize 'Buddha Statue' in 'Dress As You Like' competition organised by the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation on the occasion of Tourism Month '94 at the Abahani club ground in the city yesterday. — Star photo

EU summit overshadowed by Bosnian crisis

ESSEN, Germany, Dec 9: Leaders of the European Union (EU) today began a two-day summit due to focus on plans to expand the union into eastern Europe but overshadowed by the Bosnian crisis, reports AFP.

The talks, which began with a meeting with Klaus Haensch, president of the European Parliament, got underway just after 10:00 am.

Although Bosnia is not on the formal agenda, EU officials said Britain and France, which provide the biggest contingents in the UN peacekeeping forces in the former Yugoslavia, would seek assurances from German Chancellor Helmut Kohl that he would not bow to pressure from his ruling Christian Democrats to back lifting the UN arms embargo.

Lifting of the embargo would precipitate a withdrawal

of UN troops from Bosnia in potentially hostile conditions.

The summit is expected to endorse a strategy designed to prepare six eastern European states for EU membership and review the union's strategy for fighting unemployment.

Progress on implementing a commission white paper on growth, competitiveness and employment was expected to take up much on Friday morning.

A warning by Spain also threatened to create a row at the summit.

One killed in road accident

By DMCH Correspondent

An engineer was killed while another person was injured seriously in an accident at Bijoy Sarani in the city yesterday, according to police and medical sources.

The accident occurred when a bus hit a parked auto-rickshaw, leaving two passengers seriously injured.

Of them, Dewan al Mamoon, an engineer of LGRD Ministry succumbed to his injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Shamim Ahmed, 30, another passenger was shifted from DMCH to the Chest Diseases Hospital. His condition was stated to be critical. Tejaon police arrested drivers of the bus and the auto-rickshaw.

Medicine worth Tk 2 lakh looted in Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Dec 9: Cash and goods worth about Tk two lakh were looted by a gang of miscreants from two drug stores at Aushkandi bazar under Habiganj thana of Habiganj district, midnight last night.

According to reports, a gang of miscreants armed with deadly weapons attacked the bazar at midnight. The gang which came by a microbus tied up the night guard and looted medicine and cash worth about Tk two lakh from the stores. The miscreants also took the night guard and left him at a place, several miles off the bazar. When contacted, the officer in charge, Nabiganj thana confirmed the incident. But no arrest has yet been made.

Lawyers' Forum criticises

Hasina's remark

The Nationalist Lawyers' Forum of Bangladesh have strongly criticised Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina for her comments about a judge of the High Court in reference to a case pending before the court, reports BSS.

Justice T H Khan and Abdul Wadud Khandakar, convenor and member secretary respectively of the forum, in a joint statement yesterday said Sheikh Hasina's remarks that appeared in Bengali daily Bhorer Kagoj yesterday were "not only devoid of all norms, but made with intent to bring into hatred the court established by law and is also a punishable offence".

Sheikh Hasina in her statement said "I have apprehension of not getting justice from the court where the case is being heard for one of the judges of the court was the president of Bagerhat committee of BNP" that appeared in the paper under the caption "Sheikh Hasina about Parliament Boycott Case".

Human Rights Day

From Page 1 Col 7

sion. President Abdur Rahman Biswas called upon every country and nation to meet the challenge the humanity faces today in respecting human rights and also to set the right example for the future.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, in a message, emphasised full acceptance of the crucial linkage between human rights and the people's right to development.

The crucial linkage between human rights and the right to development must be fully accepted while the recognition of inter-dependence, indivisibility and universality of human rights is essential, she said.

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina, in a message, said that political and economic rights of the people have to be restored.

The Midnight File

Protest against Nobel Peace Prize to Arafat: 4 held

OSLO, Dec 9: American Rabbi Av Weiss and three of his assistants were arrested here today during protests against the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to PLO leader Yasser Arafat, police said. The four were arrested for demonstrating too close to the Nobel committee building in the Norwegian capital, while a fifth person was arrested at a synagogue in the city, reports AFP.

5 more die in Karachi violence

KARACHI, Dec 9: Gunmen, ignoring national protests, have killed at least 20 people in Karachi in two days escalating violence that poses the most serious law and order challenge to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Police and ambulance workers said 15 people were killed on Thursday and at least five today when newspaper offices were shut in a nationwide strike to protest against the murder of a Karachi editor by gunmen last Sunday. No newspaper will appear tomorrow, reports Reuters.

AIDS in Bangladesh

From Page 1 Col 4

abroad. However, researchers and medical professionals suspect that the total number of people with HIV could be much higher than what has so far been detected in the country.

Only a nationwide survey, which is yet to be made, could tell the truth, they pointed out.

According to a statistical model commonly used by the World Health Organisation (WHO), there are 39,971 HIV infected people in Bangladesh.

Some of the members of the National AIDS Committee (NAC) and some NGOs involved in the anti AIDS campaign, however, say that one in every 6,000 people in Bangladesh has been infected with HIV, putting the total figure at 20,000.

But this number is contested by some other NAC members who say that the total number would be much lower, because the variables used in the WHO's EPI statistical model — like sexual behaviour and use of hypodermic needles — were different in Bangladesh's case.

"We are basically a needle shy people," said Maj Gen (Retd) MR Chowdhury, Chairman of the NAC's Technical Committee.

"Drug abuse is not widespread in our country unlike in the western societies," he explained. "Husbands are faithful to their wives, though recently we see a growth of promiscuity, particularly among the educated."

The global picture of HIV is yet more dismal with 17 million people infected — one

in every 350 people in the world is infected, according to a document on AIDS released recently for the press.

The highest toll would be in Africa with 10 million people trailed by three million in South and South East Asia.

The WHO estimates that over one million children are infected with HIV, the document said.

In neighbouring India alone, some 15 lakh people — or one in 600 people — are carrying HIV. The situation in Myanmar is even worse with 70 per cent of all intravenous drug users carrying HIV.

In Malaysia, the number of HIV carriers has trebled in just one year and in Cambodia, the increase is 10 times in one year.

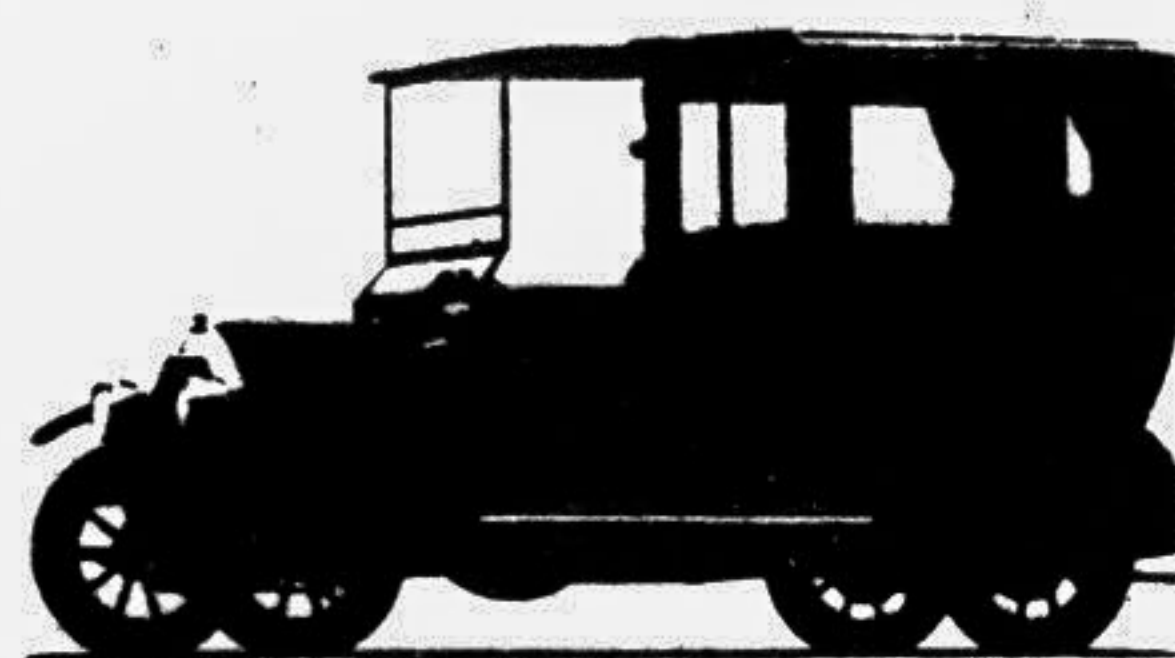
Researchers believe the HIV AIDS situation in South Asia would continue to get worse in the next five to 10 years because of its unbridled population growth, lack of resources and absence of political will.

The WHO's EPI model predicts that more than 7,00,000 Bangladeshis would contract the disease by the year 2000 — unless something could be done immediately.

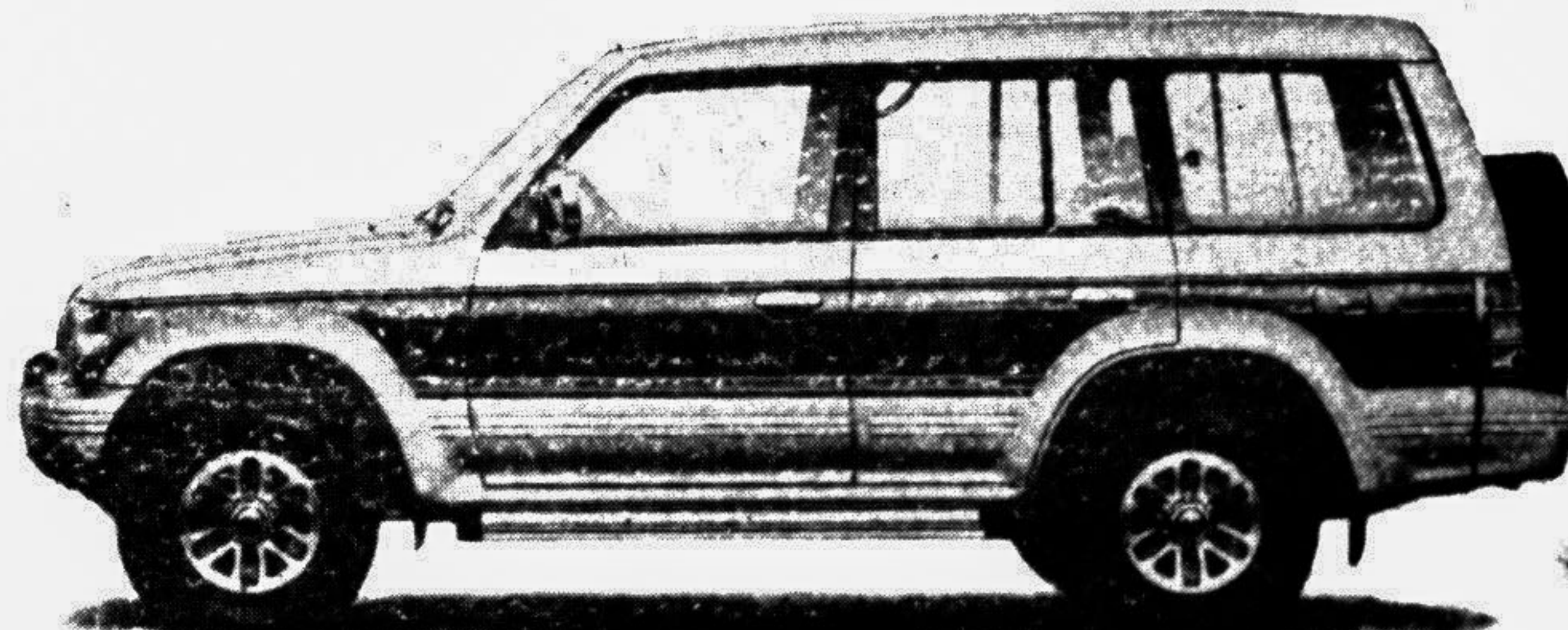
Despite being sandwiched between AIDS-infested Myanmar and India, the anti-AIDS campaign in Bangladesh is yet to take off as required, sources concerned noted.

Only recently, the NAC has started bloods screening facilities at a hospital in the city and put up a few billboards and organised seasonal seminars and talks which are far from the rural majority.

We put a lot of thought into our first car.



75 years later, our cars think a lot about you.



MITSUBISHI PAJERO V6 '95

RANGS LIMITED

113-116, OLD AIRPORT ROAD, TEJGAON, DHAKA-1215
PLOT # 3, CDA AVENUE, SHOLOSHAHA C/A, CHITTAGONG

Editor : Mahfuz Anam

Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. FAX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA.

A mugger (sitting) was caught red handed and beaten up by a group of people at the AGB colony in the city's Motijheel area yesterday. — Star photo