

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 *Muktangan*, 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 causes. 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 thereafter started car renting business. Thus the loan programme of the Sonali Bank for the students for purchase of cab 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 *Muktangan* 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.

Gayoom

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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.

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.

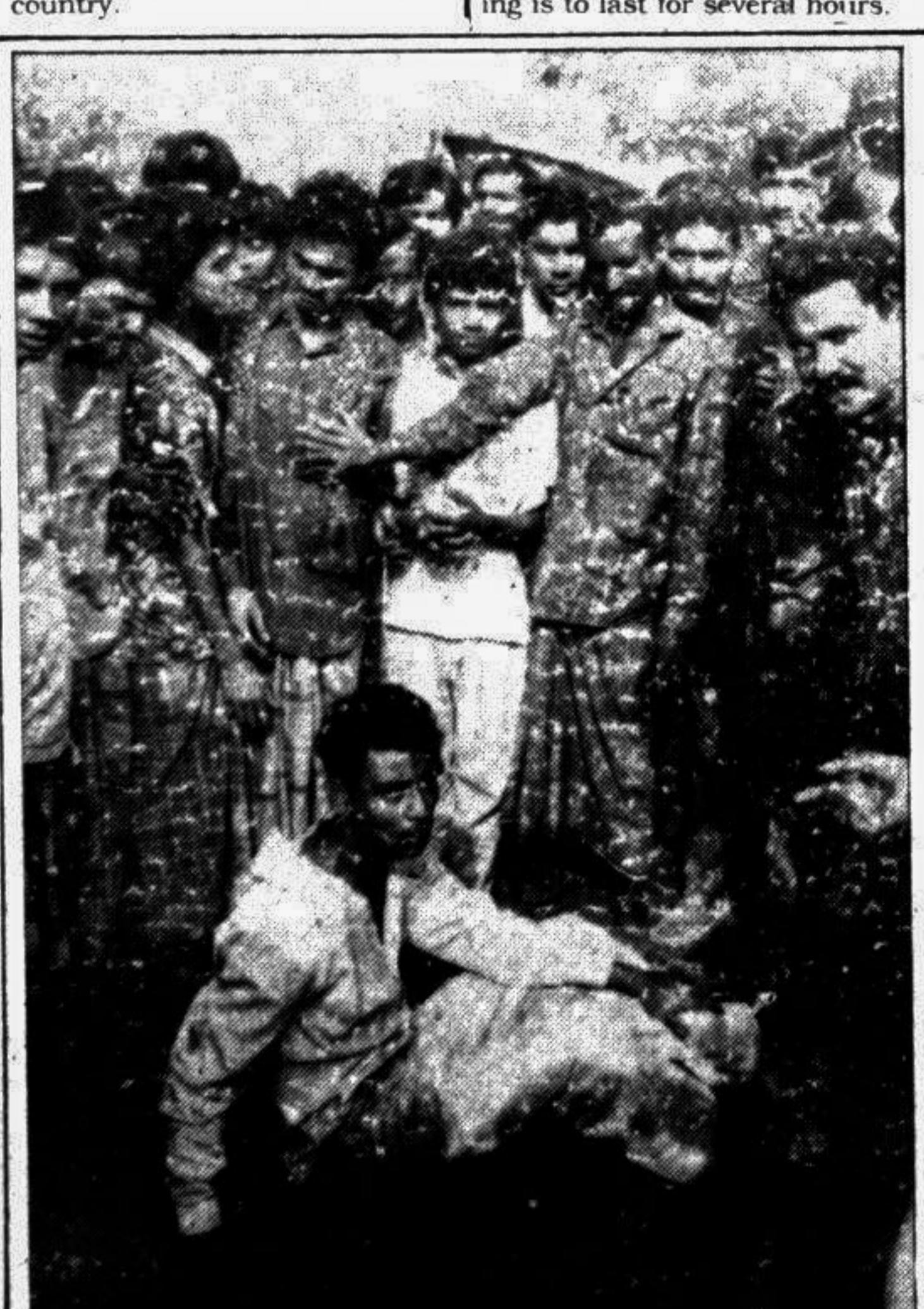
"From an ethnic point of view, the solution to Burma's problems lies in having equal rights. In having the ability to decide their own future and perhaps in a federal system of government", he maintained adding, "the ethnic people can also be accommodated within a genuine democracy, we cannot have second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

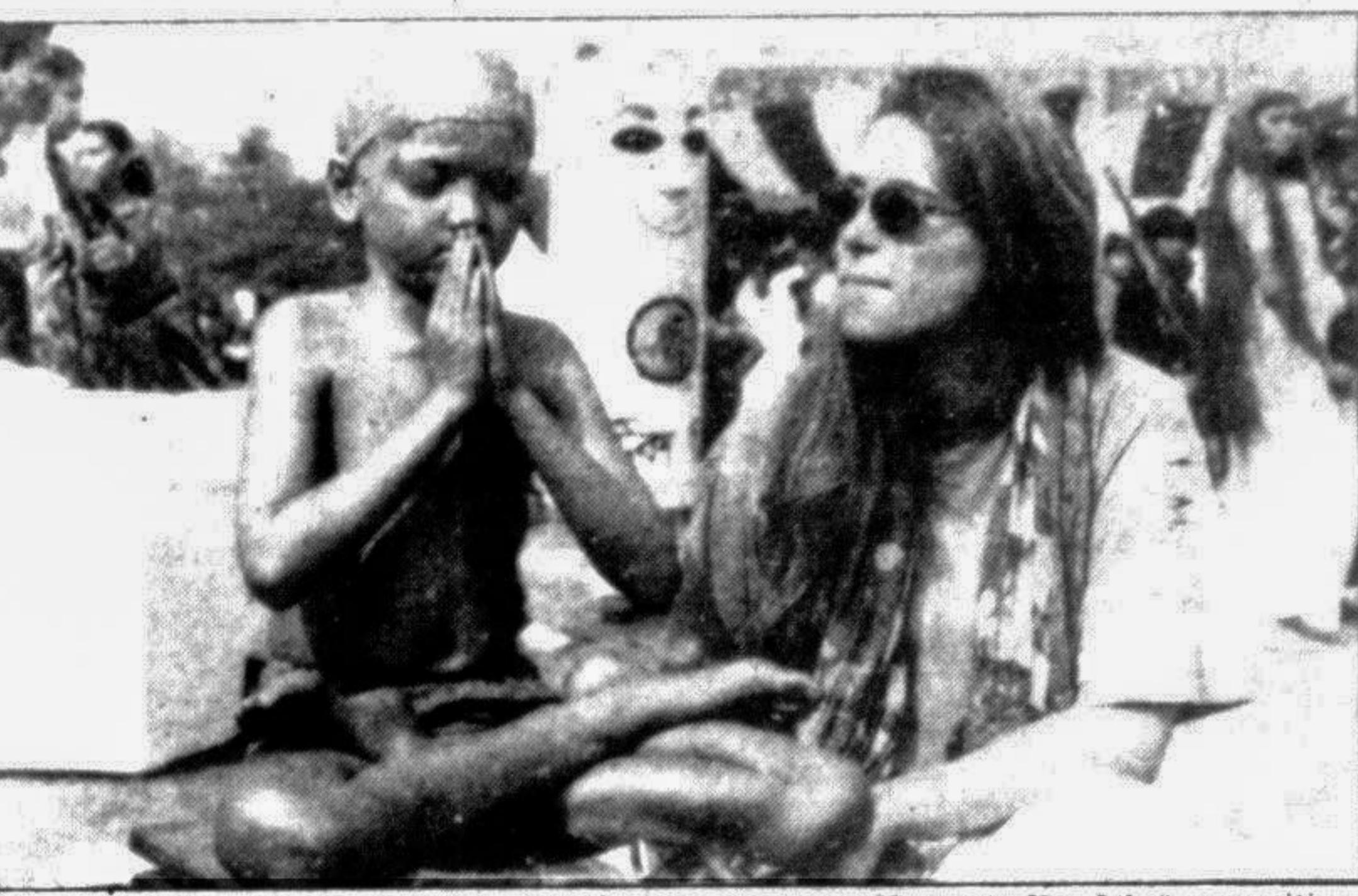
"What can you expect from a military government which did not even accept people's verdict in the elections organised by itself (SLORC)?", he asked.

"Only when a democratic



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

— Star photo



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

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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 AF.

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 focus on the tragedy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kashmir issue, Middle East problems, Cyprus question, civil war in Afghanistan, situation in Somalia and Muslim problems in the Philippines.

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 autorickshaw, 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.

Tejgaon police arrested drivers of the bus and the autorickshaw.

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Dec 9: Cash and goods worth about Tk 2 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 2 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.

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 legislator is made up of 32 seats.

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

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

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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 Avi 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 Reuter.

AIDS in Bangladesh

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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 infected 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 70,000 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.

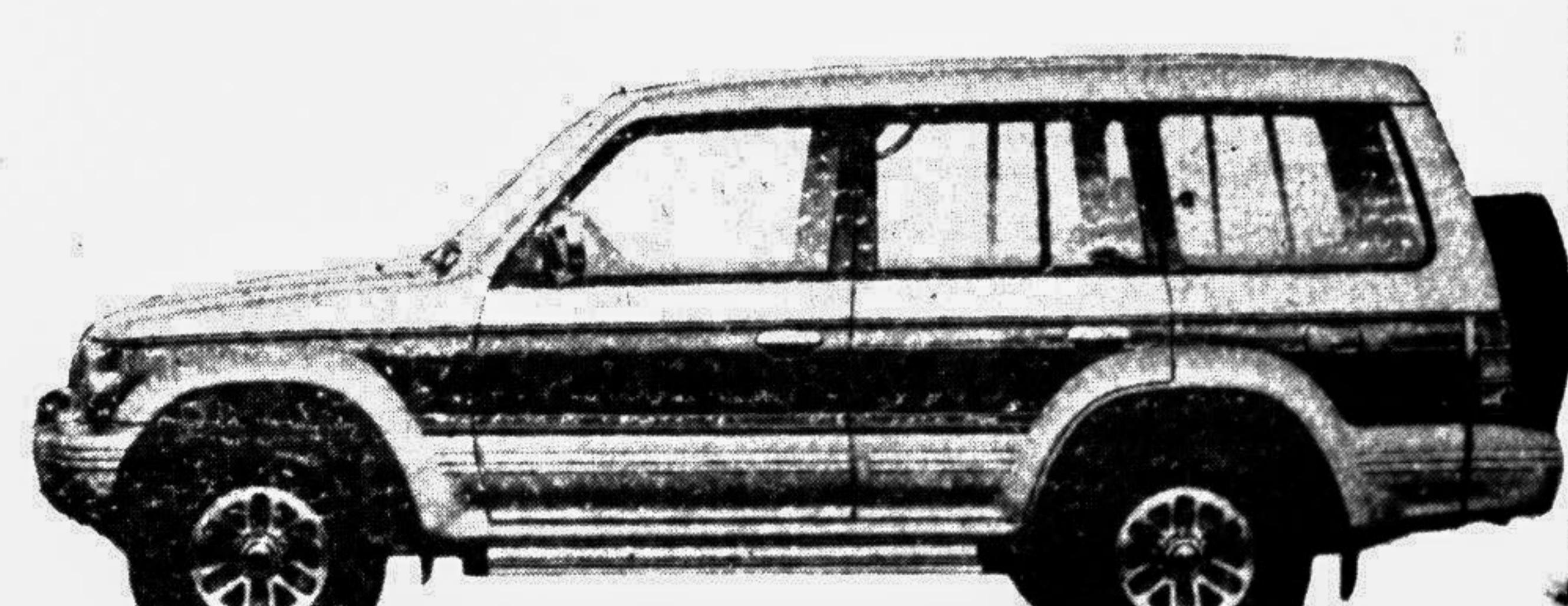


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