

# Inflation rate up

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cent from the corresponding period of 1993-94. But the current account deficit as a percentage of the GDP, with a five per cent growth projection, increased from (-1.0) per cent to (-1.8) per cent.

Disbursement of industrial credit during the July-April period of the current fiscal stood at Tk 1547.98 crore against the sanction of Tk 2609.47 crore. Credit sanctions to the industrial ventures amounted to Tk 2212.37 crore during 1993-94 fiscal.

Alam said the credit disbursement figure reflects the growing industrialisation of the country, while noting that most of the investments were going into agro-based industries, cement, composite textiles and the knitwear sector.

Responding to a question, he said foreign direct investment during the July-March period totalled 64 million dollars, including portfolio investments, as against 49 million dollars during the corresponding period of 1993-94.

The central bank governor pointed out that a marked growth in imports in recent months, particularly of industrial raw materials and capital machinery, also indicates growing investments in industry.

Import of industrial raw materials was worth US dollar 1.53 billion, marking a 50 per cent growth over the imports of the same period of the last year.

Imports of capital machinery shot up to US 220 million dollars from dollar 120 million, machinery for small in-

dustries to dollar 385 million from dollar 235 million, and intermediary goods to dollar 277 million from dollar 196 million.

The bill on rice and wheat imports saw a sharp rise during the period to dollar 170 million, which was only dollar 31 million in the corresponding period of 1993-94. Milk powder import stagnated at dollar 34 million.

The Governor also provided figures of the export performance for the first seven months (July-January) which showed significant rise in all major sectors, including readymade garment, frozen foods and leather.

Saying that the foreign exchange reserves stood at dollar 3447 million at the end of March last, enough to meet the country's import bills of seven-and-half months, the Governor allayed concerns about any adverse impact of a big reserve.

"There is nothing to be alarmed in the reserve figures," he said. He referred to India's current reserve of 23 billion dollars, which amounts to 11 months' imports of that country. "India is not concerned," he said.

At the press briefing, the Bangladesh Bank Governor was assisted by his Deputy Governors — Mahbubul Amin, Mahabur Rahman and Shah Abdul Hannan.

## Budget session

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had started their continued of boycott sessions from March 1994. The parties have not changed their stance as yet.

The next budget session will be the 20th session of this Parliament. The four-day 19th session — the briefest — was prorogued on April 27.

The coming session would be a crucial one because the opposition members' boycott would cross the 90-day limit of absence," a source noted.

Ruling party sources said that they preferred to delay the next session by several weeks because the BNP wanted enough time before the session to strive for an agreement with the Opposition to end the lingering political impasse in the country.

Some BNP policy-makers, however, admitted that it would be difficult to reach an agreement with the opposition members keeping away from the house.

The opposition members have so far remained absent from the House for 89 consecutive working days since March 1, 1994.

According to constitutional provisions, an MP should lose his or her seat if he or she remains absent from sessions for 90 consecutive days without leave of absence from the Speaker.

Although some 147 opposition members submitted their resignation letters on December 28 last year, the Speaker, by a ruling last February, rejected all the resignations, keeping their membership intact.

The opposition parties, however, maintain that their resignations were valid and that they would not return to this Parliament again.

# Countrywide voter registration begins

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also registered as a voter on the first day at his Hare Road residence at 5:30 pm. The CEC himself was enrolled at his Uttara residence early in the morning.

EC sources said, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina were earlier contacted for appointments but neither could give time for personal pre-occupations.

Begum Zia would be registered as voter after her return from South Korea. The EC would again contact Sheikh Hasina after she returns from a tour of the northern districts today.

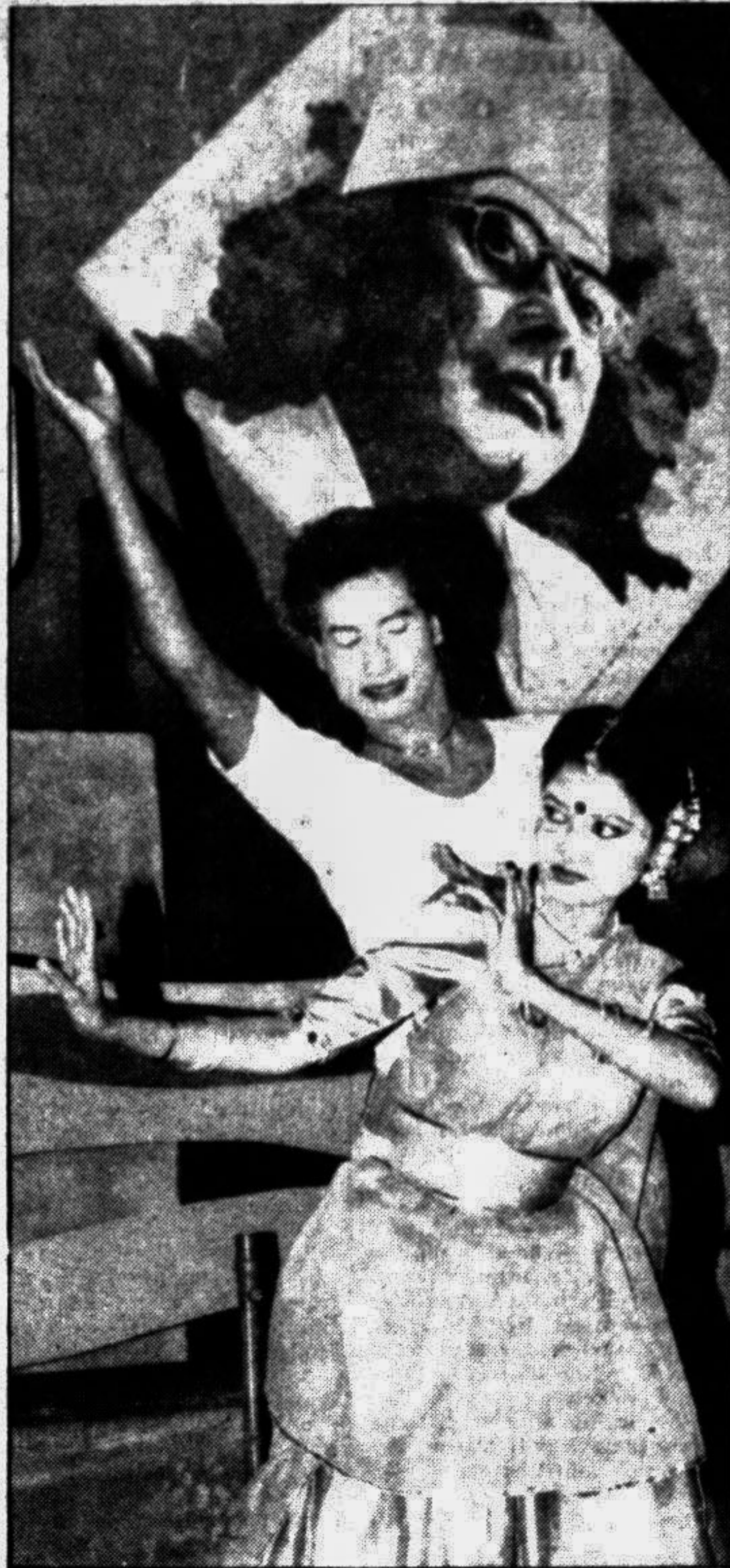
Justice Minister Hannan Shahi was registered at his village Ghagutia under Kaptipada thana in Gazipur district yesterday.

In the city enumerators, selected and trained by the EC, visited a few areas on the first day. A resident of Green Road area said two enumerators visited his house in the evening and collected information. A school teacher acting as an official enumerator visited Dhanomdi Road No 9 in the afternoon, said an inhabitant of the area.

Over four lakh enumerators — mainly teachers of schools, colleges and madrasahs, field workers of the Family Planning and Agriculture Departments — would be making house-to-house visits until May 31. Each enumerator would receive an honourarium of Tk 1000.

From June 1, their supervisors — one for every four enumerators — would be knocking at every door to collect and verify the information gathered. Fresh registration would also be made, if necessary.

Each enumerator will be recording information about some 200 eligible voters on



A dance drama was performed at the Shilpakala Academy auditorium yesterday as part of the three-day celebrations of the birth anniversary of national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. — Star photo

## Tributes to Nazrul

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Newspapers brought out special supplements while Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh put up special programmes highlighting the life and works of Poet Nazrul.

Begum Zia inaugurated a national level programme, a three-day 'Nazrul Mela' and a handicraft fair at the Shilpakala Academy on Monday.

The national level functions were arranged in Dhaka, Trishal in Mymensingh, Comilla town and Daulatpur in Comilla where Nazrul had spent a considerable part of his life.

In the capital, various national organisations, including the Nazrul Institute, Bangla Academy, Shilpakala Academy and Shishu Academy organised discussions, cultural functions, exhibition, recitation and fair.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs concluded its two-day programme through a discussion yesterday at the 'Kavi Bhawan' in the capital, where Nazrul lived till his death in 1976.

## Malaria claims

### 50 in Sherpur

SHERPUR, May 25: Malaria that broke out in 25 villages of three thanas of the district claimed so far 50 lives including 20 children in the last three weeks, reports UNB.

Civil Surgeon of Sherpur Mohammad Lutfur Rahman, however, confirmed only nine deaths in Nalitabari, Jhenigati and Sribordi thanas during the period.

# MOU on child labour

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Expressing 'great surprise and disappointment' at the rejection of the earlier MOU by the BGMEA members, he hoped that a revised MOU could be formulated during the fresh round of talks.

"With continued effort a MOU can be developed to maximise the development of the garment sector and to help the children," he said. He noted that the main issues to resolve in the new MOU relates to two specific points on educating the re-trenched children and setting up an independent verification mechanism to ensure compliance, which coincides with the BGMEA decision, and also the two conditions set by the CLC to stop their boycott campaign.

The US embassy officials confirmed that AAFI would not be involved in the next round of negotiations and that it would include the government, for the first time, along with the embassy, the ILO, Unicef and the BGMEA. "We would support some changes (in the MOU) to accommodate the concerns of the BGMEA," the embassy spokesman added.

"Under the next round of talks we would like to work out a two-track programme," he noted. Allaying the concerns of the BGMEA, he said provisions would be made for those international buyers who seek the complete elimination of child labour and a separate phased elimination framework for those buyers who want to help the children by agreeing to a work-and-study programme for the children. In line with the ILO Convention 138.

But when his attention was drawn to the fact that Bangladesh is yet to ratify that particular ILO convention, he said there is nothing preventing the BGMEA from adapting to it.

On the BGMEA stipulation of only allowing the government, US embassy, Unicef and ILO in monitoring compliance with the MOU, he said that neither the embassy nor the Unicef have any desire to carry out inspections. But he hinted that the existing inspections by the international representatives of the international buyers could be incorporated, which the BGMEA also favours, and stressed the independence and integrity of the monitoring mechanism. "We want to find out more about the buyers' inspectors, utilise their experience and may be, use them in some way," he said.

The US official said that a comprehensive, socially responsible plan for the phased elimination of child labour was "far more preferable than by just simply throwing them into the streets," referring to the unilateral BGMEA announcement for the total elimination of child labour from the garment sector by October 31, 1995.

"The US government hopes this MOU can be successfully concluded. And both the US and the Unicef are ready to contribute substantially towards the cost of the children's education and monitoring," he added. "But the US government is not willing to force anyone to sign it. It is a

voluntary thing." He said US funding for the programmes could amount to some 500,000 dollars, which would be channelled through the ILO's international programme for the elimination of child labour (IPEC).

He said that the embassy had contacted the CLC to inform it about the latest developments and asking it to refrain from 'negative' campaign against the Bangladesh garment sector. And the Coalition agreed to temporarily postpone its threatened boycott programme, he added.

"The CLC said that it will watch the developments over the new MOU during the next few days and will refrain from the negative campaign for the time being," he pointed out. The CLC also reiterated its earlier commitment to support the Bangladesh garment sector if a comprehensive MOU is concluded, he said. "They agreed to initiate a campaign—'Buy a blouse from Bangladesh and send a kid to school'— if the MOU is concluded."

Responding to a question, he brushed aside allegations that the draft MOU was a 'conspiracy', saying "The MOU was intended to place Bangladesh in the most favourable position with respect to the US consumers," and to maximise the welfare of the garment industry from impending harm.

When his attention was drawn to charges that the original MOU represented a form of US protectionism, he said, "I can't see how this could be protectionist."

He reasoned that if the US importers stop buying Bangladeshi garments they are not going to buy it from America as the wages there are 55 times higher than in Bangladesh. "It would help garment companies in other Asian countries, but it doesn't help the US garment industry at all."

## NSC lottery draw results

The draw for the eighth lottery of the sports development fund was held at the conference room of the National Sports Council (NSC) yesterday, reports BSS.

Labour and manpower minister M Shawkat Ali was the chief guest on the occasion.

The first prize of Taka 40 lakh was won by the ticket holder of Za0056456. The holder of ticket number Gha 0280975 won the 2nd prize Tk 10 lakh while the winner of the third prize Taka five lakh is ticket number Uma 0262318.

The National Sports Council earned about Taka 17 crore from the eight lotteries held so far.

## Fertiliser crisis: Probe body to visit Kishoreganj

The Judicial Enquiry Commission, formed to probe the country's recent fertiliser crisis, will talk to the people of Kishoreganj district on May 30 and 31. The concerned people are requested to give their statements to the commission at Kishoreganj Circuit House from 9 am to 1 pm and 2 pm to 4 pm, reports UNB.

# The Midnight File

## Russian troops kill 123 Chechen rebels

MOSCOW, May 25: Russian troops killed 123 rebels in 24 hours of fighting in the breakaway republic of Chechnya but lost eight of their own men, the Interfax news agency reported today, citing several sources. It quoted Mikhail Egorov, the commander of Russian troops in Chechnya, as saying "the Chechens are firing on federal troops with tanks, artillery and rockets," and that eight Russians were killed and another 20 wounded, reports AFP.

## JMB to be completed on schedule

BHUAPUR (Tangail), May 25: Communications Minister Col (Retd) Oh Ahmed today said the Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge (JMB) construction would be completed by December 15, 1997 as scheduled, reports BSS.

He said that the JMB project alone would contribute 2 to 3 per cent to the growth of the GDP.

Costing nearly Taka 4,000 crore, JMB is one of the biggest projects undertaken in Asia and is the biggest in South Asia, he said.

He was briefing editors and senior journalists who were taken to the bridge side this morning to witness the progress of construction work of the project. Secretary, JMB project Mohammed Ali, assisted the minister during the briefing.

## PM's personal physician ill

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The Prime Minister's personal physician Brigadier Mahtabul Islam was taken seriously ill on board the flight carrying Begum Khaleda Zia and her entourage to Seoul yesterday morning. As soon as the flight landed for a stopover in Hong Kong, the personal physician was rushed to the St Teresa Hospital.

Brig Mahtab had myocardial infarction and he was put under observation for 72 hours, his family sources said. Meanwhile another physician left Dhaka yesterday to be with the Prime Minister during her trip, according to a source concerned.

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## BDR-BSF flag meet held

From Staff Correspondent  
CHITTAGONG, May 25: A battalion commander level flag meeting between the Bangladesh Rifles and the Indian BSF today decided to withdraw the reinforcements by both the sides immediately in order to restore peace along border, highly placed sources said.

The meeting held at Jalia, a border village in Tripura, also decided to maintain status quo in the disputed land at Fenchara river catchment and inform the higher authorities of the respective countries about the situation, sources added.

About 200 Border Security Force BSF personnel in Tripura took position along Asalong border of Khagrachhari lastweek. The trouble initially began following clashes between two groups of farmers of the two countries over cultivation of disputed land in Fenchara catchment, sources said.

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## Hasina

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was just attempting to make political gain from the issue.

Reiterating her promise to realise Bangladesh's just share of the Ganges water, Hasina said she had talks with Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao on the matter while she visited Azmir Sharif in India recently.

"We are confident of resolving the Ganges water sharing issue and the Farakka problem if we go to power," the AL chief said.

In her speeches, Hasina also assured of resolving other problems like unemployment and desertification of the northern region, if people voted her party to power.

About her pledges, Hasina said, "We don't make hollow promises but act in accordance with our commitments." She termed the BNP government a "pledge-breaker."

Claiming that the people were now tired of BNP's misrule, the AL president said, "Those who had voted for BNP in the last general elections are now agitating against it for its corruption, nepotism and vote-barcity."

"AL is your party and it is pledge-bound to establish your fundamental rights and it will never violate its commitments," Hasina told the meetings.

Local Gano Forum leader Advocate Nazrul Islam along with his followers joined the AL during Hasina's public meeting at Shibganj.

Hasina is due to visit different areas of Natore district today before returning to the capital.

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