

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Deplorable aspects of medicare

By ASM Nurunnabi

Hospital services have so long been exclusively a government enterprise. The government hospitals, which form almost the whole of the nation's medicare system, seem to be suffering from an appalling condition. These hospitals are a chronic patient to three maladies: the ineptitude and apathy of the authorities, overflowing by patients and pervasive corruption. The situation prevailing in most of the government hospitals, according to observers, is little short of a national shame. The national health authorities have seemingly abandoned all thoughts of ever salvaging these hospitals from their present chaotic condition.

It may not be far from the truth to say that people often come out of these hospitals more ill than when they went in.

What appears to be galling is a scandalous connection between the private nursing homes, the government hospitals and some sections of practising medical men. It is an open secret that the government hospitals are used by some of their government appointed doctors as a patient recruiting centre for the private clinics. This has led one observer to comment that this utter lack of professionalism has, more than any other drawback, including the absence of even basic medical equipment, been contributing to the undoing of the main body of our collective medical enterprise.

According to observers, an unethical practice is much in evidence in another sphere. Many patients in the city are victims of physician's self-referral: Sending patients to facilities in which the doctor has a financial interest. Lately self-referral has spread quietly in many areas of medicare including physical therapy and rehabilitation, X-rays, laboratory

testing, etc. Self-referral operates on a simple principle: the more patients doctors refer, the more money they make. Although most doctors do not participate in self-referral deals, no one knows for sure exactly how many do.

It is a fair guess that many of our independent clinical labs and physiological labs in the city are owned wholly or partly by referring physicians. Many doctors justify self-referral by saying it helps assure quality care. In the opinion of independent observers, that is just not true.

Self-referral mostly preys on patients stricken with a serious illness, people who trust their doctors to make decisions. Money, of course, is the obvious reason. The money is not earned from any service performed by these doctors. It is just a kick-back for referring patients.

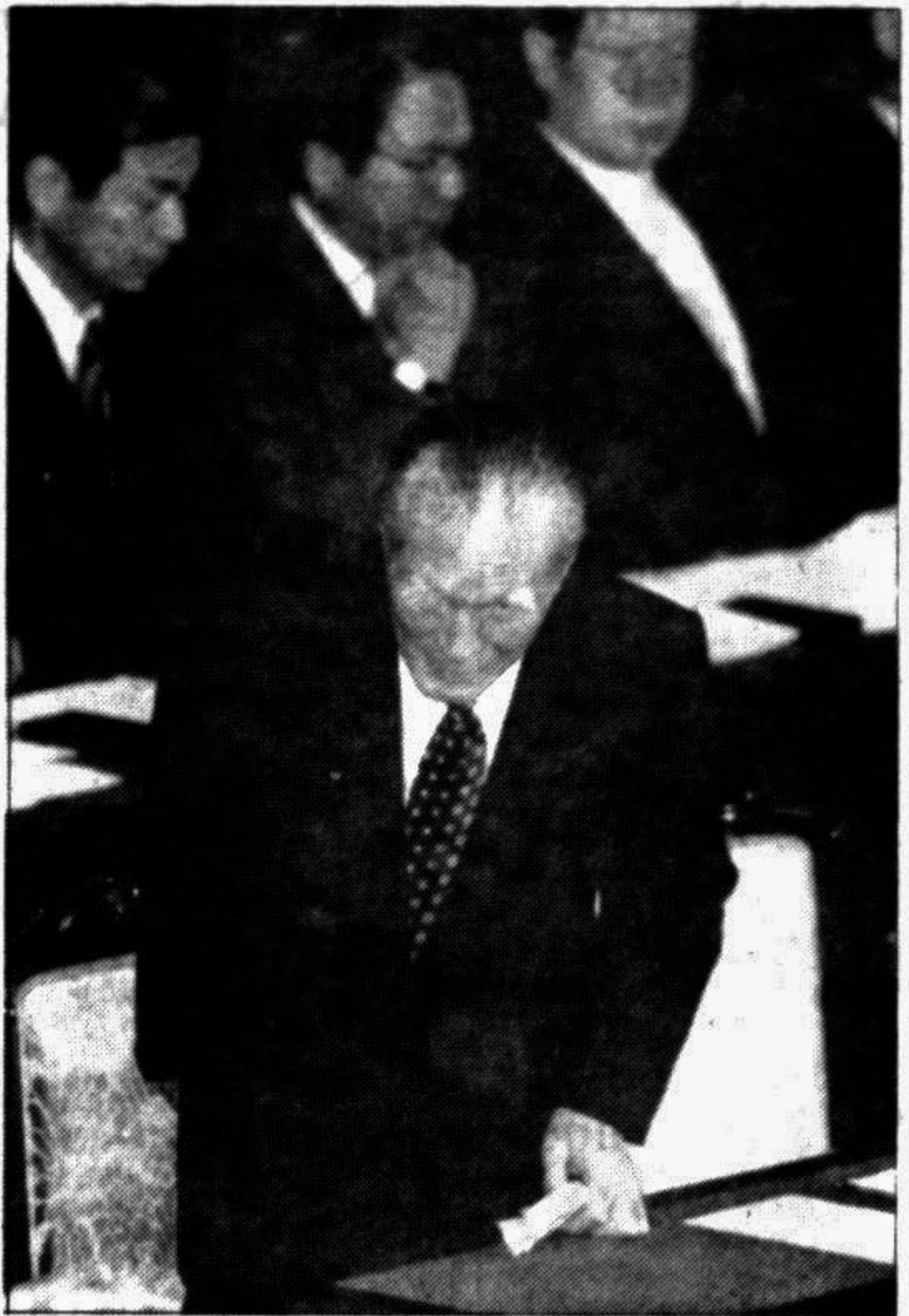
In many cases, self-referrers run up profits by another method ordering expensive tests and procures for questionable medical reasons. The practice of self-referral potentially brings about erosion of patient-doctor trust. This may be avoided if conscientious doctors are careful not to allow commercialism to encroach on the practice of medicine.

Since public health sector may seem to have collapsed, the private sector is taking over. Here also the picture is not so bright. It is alleged that these private hospitals, with a few exceptions, tend to fleece their patients and yet do not have their own surgeons and doctors or even the necessary equipment. Since most of the private hospitals run a good business, one may wonder how their patients who, by and large, appear not to be economically well off, can afford the exorbitant charges made by them. One explanation that

emerges is that, since government hospitals fail to provide appropriate treatment in most cases, patients suffering from serious illnesses, have no choice other than the private hospitals, even though to arrange the wherewithal to pay for their charges, they have to sell the property. This provides a sad picture of the desperate alternative that most poor patients are faced with.

Another deplorable aspect of the medicare system relates to the poor standard of diets supplied to patients in government hospitals. During the current financial year, the allotment of expenditure for patients in cabin, paying bed and general bed has been fixed at Tk 30/- Tk 26/- and Tk 22/- per day respectively. Even though these provisions are not adequate, the general complaint is that food is not supplied within the prescribed quota of prices. The indoor patients get for their breakfast four thin slices of bread, finger-sized banana and a few spoonfuls of sugar — all much below the prescribed quantity. For their mid-day and evening meals, they are supplied with bad-smelling coarse rice with watery lentils and nominal measure of meat/fish and vegetables. The cabin and paying bed patients are particularly aggrieved because they feel that they do not get their money's worth. From a random survey, it appears that sixty per cent of the patients do not take the hospital diets supplied for mid-day and evening meals: they are dependent on outside supplies.

For these drawbacks in diet supply, the hospital authorities take the plea that on account of the upward trend of prices and insufficient budget allotments, it is not possible for them to supply the patients the prescribed quota of food with proper quality.



Japanese Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama bows after the House of Representatives yesterday passed a resolution expressing deep remorse for Japan's wartime atrocities. — AFP photo

## Japan expresses remorse for atrocities in WWII

TOKYO, June 9: Japan's ruling coalition passed a resolution of remorse for World War II through Parliament tonight, but an opposition boycott and Asian criticism shattered hopes for a harmonious commemoration of the war's end, reports AP. Japan's biggest opposition group, the New Frontier Party, boycotted the vote in Parliament's more powerful lower house when the ruling coalition rejected its demand for several minor alterations to the resolution.

## BBC apologises for showing wrong footage

NEW DELHI, June 9: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) apologised Friday for showing footage of the Chechnya war in a story about the Muslim insurrection in the northern Indian state of Jammu-Kashmir, reports AP. "The mistake was the result of confusion over incoming picture feeds," said a statement by BBC World Service Television's London-based editor Johan Ramsland.

## Biennale Int'l Art's 100th birthday today

VENICE, Italy, June 9: The Biennale International Art exhibit celebrates its 100th birthday Saturday with provocative works on the human body and a much admired visitor from abroad — Diana, Princess of Wales, reports AP. More than 70 countries have brought hundreds of artists to show the cutting edge of contemporary art in 27 pavilions and in locations around the shimmering lagoon and St. Mark's Square.

## CPA refutes press report

CHITTAGONG, June 9: The Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) tonight refuted the content of the report published in some dailies that all shipping lines have suspended indefinitely the carrying of containers bound for Bangladesh due to heavy congestion in Chittagong Port, reports BSS.

In a press release, CPA said the report based on a press release of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) was not factual and no shipping companies have given any notice or any report on the suspension of carrying containers to CPA.

When contacted by the CPA, the representatives of a AAPL, PIL, Menhong and Sea Consortium and BSC in Chittagong expressed astonishment on the press report and said they had not received any information from their respective companies in this regard, the press release added.

Four ships were being loaded and unloaded in the Chittagong port today and four more ships are scheduled to arrive in the port by June 15. Even no ships carrying container awaiting at the outer anchorage, for having berth today.

It is a fact that the ships carrying container have to wait at the outer anchorage for four to five days due to little congestion caused by huge import of goods, strike of C and F labour and inclement weather during the last two months, the press release said.

During the last few months, import through Chittagong port has increased to a great extent and the port authority has taken all possible measures for quick handling of goods. A meeting on the issue was held between the port users and CPA on May 7 and on the recommendation of the meeting, the CPA informed the port users that tariff will be exempted if the containers are handled with the equipment of shipping companies.

The CPA was endeavouring to make all container handling equipment operative in time with the recommendation of the BGMEA. Measures have also been taken to bring the spare parts through Biman. At present the position of container handling equipment is satisfactory, the press release said.

Meanwhile, one straddle carrier and one top lifter have been brought from the Mongla port. There is no necessary equipment is available at Chittagong port. An agreement has already been signed to provide 20 more equipment to Chittagong port and it is expected that the equipment will reach the port by the end of this year. Tender has also been floated to procure on rent four straddle carriers for Chittagong port and some top lifters for LCD, Dhaka.

The CPA has repeatedly requested the container owners to shift empty containers from port. A decision has also been taken in a meeting with commerce minister held on May 31 to unload the containers at 'X-shed' of Chittagong port.

The CPA urged all not to publish fabricated and unconfirmed news items which could give a faulty picture of the country.

## CSE body

From Page 1  
The CSE sources said that the outcome of the recent visit by a CSE delegation to Thailand, Colombo and Bombay would also be reviewed. The CSE delegation led by its chairman Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, MP visited those places to see the automated process used in the stock exchange operations there.

## The Midnight File

### Indian troops kill Pak bank official

MUZAFARABAD, Pakistan, June 9: A Pakistani bank official has been killed by Indian troops firing across the ceasefire line in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, family members said today. They said Abdul Gayyum, who worked for the state-run Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan (ADB) was shot on Thursday afternoon in the remote Neelam Valley of Pakistan-ruled Kashmir while travelling on foot, reports Reuter.

### People's Daily blasts US

BEIJING, June 9: The United States permitted a visit from Taiwan's president to encourage the island to declare independence and curb China's growing power, the Communist Party newspaper said. The People's Daily editorial, to be published in Saturday's editions and carried by the Xinhua news agency Friday night, was the latest broadside inspired by Lee's US visit, reports AP.

## Instrument of genocide

From Page 1  
UN officials in Sarajevo however, said they had no knowledge of any such meetings or discussions early in the week and wondered if the minister referred to a UN delegation which travelled to Pale on Thursday.

In Paris, European Union leaders held their first summit with newly elected French President Jacques Chirac, who along with the British is pressing for a tougher stance in Bosnia. The leaders were to announce a new EU negotiator on Bosnia, Swedish former Prime Minister Carl Bildt, known for his military expertise as well as his art of diplomacy. French and British government sources said on anonymity.

Heads of state from the 15 EU nations arrived at Elysee Palace for what was billed as a working dinner, all refusing comment. While most drove in, British Prime Minister John Major walked over from the British Embassy next door, greeted by Chirac. "Hi John," he said.

Chirac, who took office May 20, set the gathering as a get-acquainted even. But urgency over how to respond to Bosnian aggression and to protect the embattled UN peacekeepers in Bosnia overshadowed the agenda.

The dinner follows last weekend's agreement among EU and NATO defense ministers to form a rapid reaction force of up to 10,000 troops to back up the 22,000 peacekeepers in Bosnia.

## Child labour

From Page 1  
representative in Bangladesh Ralph C. Carrier when they called on him at his residence in the city yesterday afternoon. The problem of child labour in Bangladesh was discussed in details and it was informed by the US Ambassador that they were actively working on this issue to explore all possible options for a suitable solution.

## Cairo summit

From Page 1  
news conference, Mubarak said: "I have no problem to go to Israel... but why you make a big fuss about this every now and then?"

US and Israeli officials both said they thought good relations between Israel and Egypt improved the chance of a Middle East peace embracing all Israel's neighbours.

"Today Egypt and Israel stand as the bastions of peace, the regional pillars of peace," said Christopher. "When the two countries come together in a partnership they can achieve an enormous amount of progress in the pursuit of peace."

## Nepal

From Page 1  
The NDP is yet to take a decision on the Congress of Nepal, party leaders said.

The Congress withdrew support to the minority government last month, accusing it of running a totalitarian regime.

Today, the Congress held a huge protest rally in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, demanding the dismissal of the government. Thousands of people attended the rally braving a drizzle.

The Nepali Congress came to power in 1991 after pro-democracy demonstrations ended an absolute monarchy in the country. But fighting in the party brought its downfall last year and it couldn't complete a five-year term.

## SAARC trade unions

From Page 1  
union activities in Bangladesh, he described it as smooth and sought cooperation to help production in industries.

The WFTU Secretary General Dev Kumar Ganguly urged the governments of SAARC countries to extend their cooperation towards the trade unions of the region.

He also called upon the trade union leaders to close their ranks in respective countries saying that struggle for improving the lot of working class would not be possible in divided platform.

"We must unite and coordinate our activities among ourselves to carry forward our mission towards the cherished goal," he said and asked the trade unions to work hand in hand in line with the government to government cooperation of the SAARC countries.

Ganguly said the World Federation of Trade Unions wants to see ratification as well as improvement of the international labour standard.

He said international labour standard had become important in many countries in view of market economy. "Due respect is now shown to the working class in some countries," he said.

The WFTU Secretary General also said that it was the duty of respective governments to ensure jobs and create employments to remove poverty.

Referring to child labour in countries like Bangladesh, he said poverty was the main reason for child labour. "We must fight poverty first to fight child labour," he said.

The director of ILO office in Dhaka Paul J. Baily said that ILO was now looking forward to sitting with world financial organisations like World Bank in the decision-making table within the year 2000.

## BNP has failed to run country, say Mizan

KHULNA, June 9: Jatiya Party acting Chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury yesterday charged the ruling BNP with politicising the administration and plundering the public money by misusing power, reports UNB.

"The BNP has totally failed in running the country," he told a public meeting at Dak Bungalow premises here this afternoon.

He said the government rather fulfilling its election pledges, resorted to repression by killing the workers and farmers across the country.

Referring to the Farakka and push back issues, Mizan Chowdhury said the government has totally failed to protect the country's interest for its subservient foreign policy.

He said the BNP is now plotting a new conspiracy against their leader Ershad by reviving the Manzoor murder case after 14 years.

"To err is human being," Mizan Chowdhury said adding that there were some mistakes during their rule. He regretted for their past misdeeds.

Presided over by JP Khulna City President SMA Rab, the meeting was addressed by Shah Moazzem Hossain, Mia Musa Hossain, Gaffar Biswas, Mominuddin Ahmed and Suwas Banerjee.

## Gheor AL

From Page 1  
leaders at about 7.30 am. They repeatedly chopped Sikkim Ali, 40, President of Ballakhora union Krishak League and Vice President of Ballakhora AL, with ramdao and exploded home-made bombs to keep the public away from the spot.

The miscreants later abducted JP leader Gazi Khan, 50. He still remains untraced, police said.

A large number of people who gathered in the hat saw the gruesome killing but could not resist the miscreants because of bomb explosions, police said.

## Investments remain low

From Page 1  
confidence in the common-man, going to villages and not to Paris-Washington; enable the marginal man to make meaningful investment in self and productive activity; reaching quality primary health care and quality primary education to all; reducing unproductive public sector expenditure; devising public expenditures to stake-holders at an agreed minimum price and placing the common man at the centre of policy.

MA : The economic reform agenda was conceived exogenously and forced on by foster fathers in connivance with the lumpen bourgeoisie. Such reform programme has not been able to create the much publicised growth before equity nor has there been any visible vibrant private investor class not having the stigma of violating the banking rules in the country. It has neglected the rural area. Eccentric benefits in a few hands in a few areas has resulted in sacrifice of the common man's welfare. We need an indigenous reform agenda in order to get the right direction. The dishonest businessmen, the money hungry consulting class of intellectuals as well as the bureaucrats are obstructing the identification of the right agenda. As a result, the WB-IMP conceived export of capitalist ideology, in a semi-feudal society, and policy has not gained the desired pace.

DS: In brief, what, in your opinion, are the specific problems in the agriculture, industrial and financial sectors?

MA : In agriculture, we have not been able to provide appropriate incentives to the majority of the farmers for adopting available sustainable technology. In industry, we have not provided appropriate technological assistance to small and medium scale industries to help them generate an endogenous movement towards higher productivity. In the financial sector, we have allowed a few to control and misuse assets of many, leading to default, disparity and social distance.

## No seat-sharing with any party in polls : Jamaat

CHITTAGONG, June 9: Jamaat Ameer Golan Azam yesterday said his party will not go for any understanding with any party on mere seat-sharing in the coming parliamentary elections, reports UNB.

On the present political situation, Golan Azam said a congenial political environment is absent to express one's free political opinion. Parliament was dissolved in 1986 after the resignation of 10 Jamaat MPs, but this time one-party parliament is kept running despite resignation by 147 MPs.

"This is a unique situation. The country is witnessing one-party autocratic rule," he added.

"The sharing of seat could be possible with the like-minded parties but the Jamaat will not give up its ideology and election symbol in any case," he told an exclusive meeting of ex-leaders of the Islami Chhatra Shibir at the Chawkbazar Haji Mohammad Mohsin Govt College ground.

The Jamaat-e-Islami had reportedly entered into an understanding with the BNP in last parliamentary elections

## Manzur murder

From Page 1  
chargesheet by the end of this month," one CID official said on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, CID investigators also interrogated deposed president H M Ershad, who is now in jail, in connection with the murder of Manzur.

Ershad reportedly told CID officials that the then acting president handled the situation following the May 30, 1981, abortive coup in which President Ziaur Rahman was assassinated.

Ershad was Army chief at that time and Gen Manzur was commander of Chittagong garrison.

The alternative is having