

DOWN TO EARTH

City's Kindergartens and Coaching Centres

By A S M Nurunnabi

The city has been witnessing a boom of kindergartens almost all over but mainly in its posh areas. They are set up under private initiatives with the character of quasi-business entities for earning fabulous incomes from the parents of their pupils.

Indubitably the motive behind these schools are purely commercial. An utter chaos prevails in their educational programmes. In these institutions the syllabi and the method of teaching are followed in an arbitrary manner according to the sweet will of their organisers. The cause of education served by these institutions seems to be largely incidental. There are many instances where an individual or a group of persons have set up more than one kindergarten depending on the business success of their first initiatives.

At these institutions the children are taught to recite parrot-like such verses as "Humpty Dumpty, Jack and Jill or Ba Ba Black Sheep" which have no relation with their environmental situation. They thus grow up from the very beginning in a different world where pictures of life in America and Europe are presented much more than their national ethos. This leads to the growth of a different outlook, ambitions and perspective on life.

The organisers of kindergartens adopt arbitrary policy in fixing tuition fees and other school dues. Some of them demand donation of substantial amounts as a condition for admission. The fees are increased almost every year. Since the parents who come from fairly well-off sections of society, are keen to arrange good education for their children, many school authorities tend to exploit this sentiment and regularly set school fees at unreasonably high levels. As there is no government control, these institutions seem to function like business enterprises in a free-market environment and engage themselves without any regulatory restraint in wildest racketeering of fees.

In the arena of education, honesty and self-restraint are expected to govern the operation of these institutions. But in the fierce competition to earn as much profit as possible, these notions are thrown to the winds.

When it was expected that by doing away with the chaotic situation prevailing in the kindergartens, by introducing a well-coordinated national curriculum for all, it was disheartening to find certain quarters giving a fillip to the establishment of English-medium schools. True, lately stress has been laid on the importance of English in our education system from the early stage. In this context, some observers pose the question if it is the objective that English should be taught well, then how is it that efforts are not made to ensure this in all other general schools. It seems to be discriminatory that some children will go to the English-medium schools which wear an artificial garb as progressive vehicles for imparting alien notions to the youngsters in matters of life and living, while others will attend the general Bengali-medium schools. This dual policy seems to have no rationale.

Similar free-style situation prevails in the field of city's coaching centres. It is widely held that they are the natural outcome of a general fall in the standard of education imparted in our educational institutions. The new development poses a number of issues, viz, whether the coaching centres are really needed in the context of the present quality of education; whether there is scope for malpractice in this field and whether the students attending such centres get real benefit or do they attend them just out of a current craze for them.

On account of the high growth of the student population, it has become extremely competitive to get admission in the limited number of good institutions. The coaching centres claim to offer guidelines for doing well in the competitive tests for admission. Most of the coaching centres are manned by teachers of government and private schools and colleges where, it is generally held, they fail to do justice to their duties in the manner expected of them. In some coaching centres, the pressure of students is so heavy that the frequency of the coaching sessions has to be increased to cope with the situation. On this account, it is alleged that some centres resort to im-

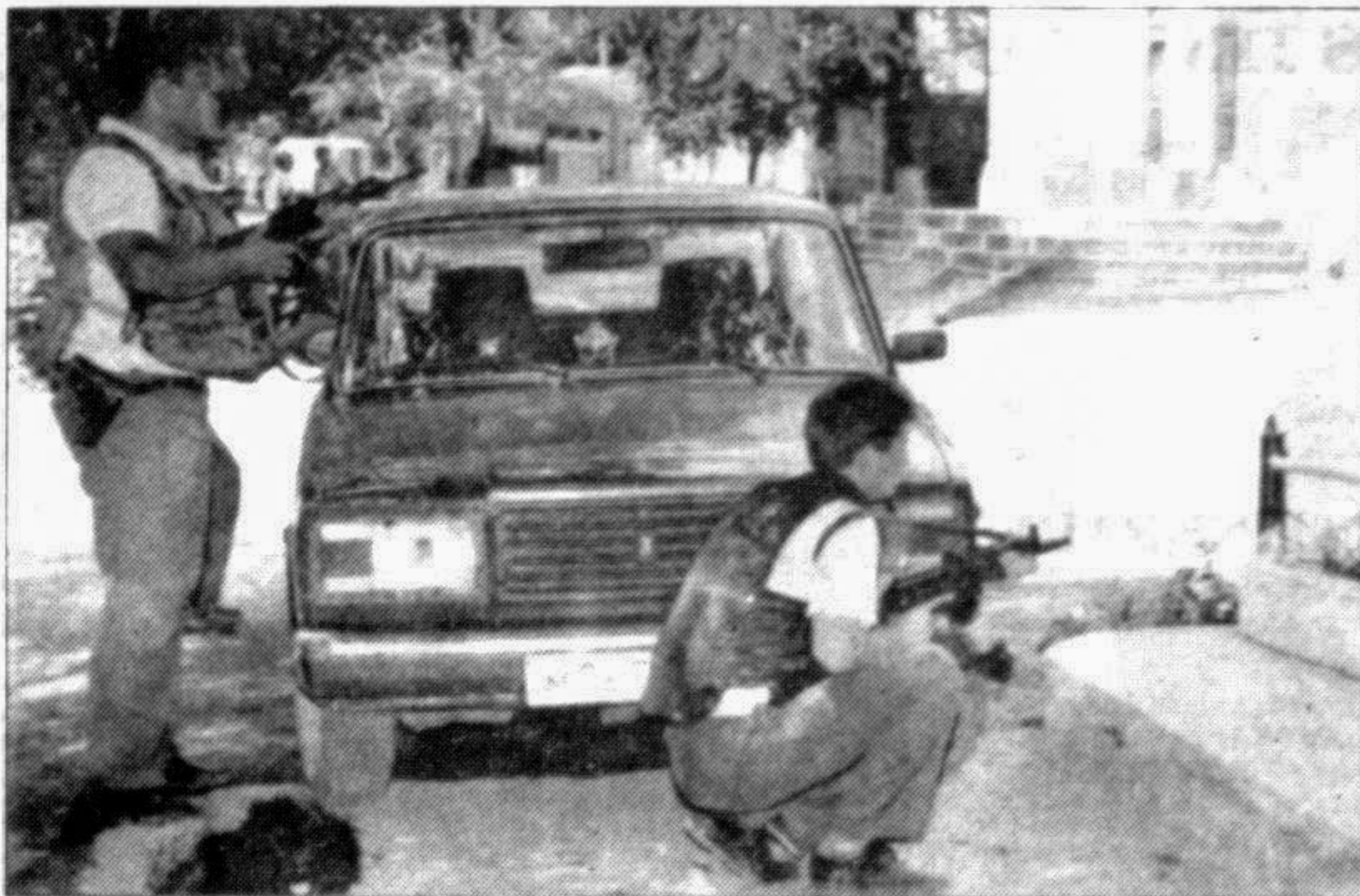
provision of easy ways, such as distribution of photo copies of readymade notes and answers. Some go to the length of recording the teacher's lectures on the tape recorder and playing them back to the students as and when necessary.

One of the strong points of objection relating to the coaching centres is that a student's initiative and individual efforts are likely to be eroded when in most cases his problems are solved in a ready-made manner by coaching centres. Whatever be the drawbacks, the system is catching on. Students, by and large, seem to harbour the feeling that if they do not attend coaching classes, their objective of doing well in examinations will not be attained.

There are other coaching centres dealing with post-HSC and post-graduate students. Their courses mainly put emphasis on various disciplines such as medicine, engineering, architecture, etc. Some of the coaching centres at this level enjoy popularity among the students from which it seems that the students find them useful.

To a certain degree, there is a consensus among educationists and guardians that there is some need for the coaching centres in view of the present deplorable situation in the regular educational institutions. However, what they do not look upon with favour is their mushroom growth which sometimes allow existence of coaching centres of questionable quality. In this context, it is felt that the education authorities, should consider the question of regulation of their activities, particularly on such aspects as qualification of teaching staff, number of students in a class room and fees to be charged by them.

In this connection, some observers raise the question that since the kindergartens and coaching centres are run from commercial motives, there may be justifications if organisers of these institutions are asked by government to pay taxes. It may be in the fitness of things if fiscal and other regulatory measures as in any other business concerns are put into action to bring discipline at the operational levels of these bodies.



Soldiers of Russian special forces yesterday took position in front of the hospital of Budenovsk where Chechen terrorists holding more than 1500 hostages. — AFP photo

CPA for withdrawal of congestion surcharge

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, June 16: The Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) has called for withdrawal of the decision taken by shipping lines to impose 'port congestion surcharge' on containers as the situation created recently has now eased substantially.

In a letter issued on Wednesday the CPA requested the Bangladesh Steamer Agents Association to prevail upon the concerned shipping lines through their organisation the IPB (India Pakistan-Bangladesh) Conference to do away with the penal section of 'congestion surcharge,' port sources said today. The decision is not 'justified' because congestion has eased remarkably and berthing position improved.

The CPA claimed that there is no congestion at the

outer anchorage now as four berths have been kept reserved for container ships.

In support of its claim the CPA also furnished in the letter a favourable comparative statement about container vessels' turn-round period particularly in the months of January and June this year.

The CPA's request has been communicated to the shipping lines but there was no reply till yesterday, the Association said.

The IPB Conference earlier took the decision to impose congestion surcharge of 100 dollars for a 40 feet container and 50 dollars for a 20 feet container.

A senior port official talking to this correspondent said there was a 'temporary dislocation' due to arrival of more foodgrain carrying ships but it is now over.

Birendra's decision challenged in court

KATHMANDU, June 16: Two prominent Nepali Congress leaders on Friday filed petitions in a court challenging the King's decision to dissolve parliament and hold fresh elections, reports AP.

They said the minority Marxist government wanted to escape a no-confidence motion in parliament and instead asked the constitutional monarch to dissolve the House. That prevented an alternative government being set up.

Leader of the main opposition, Sher Bahadur Deuba and his colleague, Chiranjeebi Wagle, filed separate petitions in the Supreme Court. The court has set June 21 for the hearing.

The 205-member House of Representatives was dissolved Tuesday after the government said opposition parties had reneged on their promise to support the Marxist party.

Businessmen, economists on budget

From Page 1

MCCI

President of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) M Anis Ud Dowlah said the new budget is a bold step towards removing the prevailing mismatch between macro-economic stability and comparative stagnation at micro level.

"The budget is clearly addressed to accelerating the rate of country's economic growth and improving administration," the MCCI president said in a press statement yesterday. Low tariff like that on agriculture machinery shows that the government is keen to provide fiscal support to productive economic activities. This will boost investment.

But the disappointing aspect is the conspicuous absence of any measure to reduce the losses in the public sector enterprises, he said.

DCCI

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) hailed continuation of tax holiday for a period of 5 to 7 years, mobilisation of more domestic resources for the Annual Development Programme and significant increase in the allocation for transport and communication sector.

A meeting of DCCI's directors and members yesterday expressed satisfaction at the higher allocation up to 26 per cent for the physical infrastructure sector which include road, water resource, irrigation and telecommunication.

Reduction of corporate tax by 2.5 per cent is an encouraging step for investment and rapid industrialisation but reduction of bonded warehouse facilities from existing two years to one year will cause enormous loss to the export sector specially readymade garments as it is very difficult to complete necessary formalities in such a short time, the DCCI observed.

It demanded reduction of VAT to 10 per cent from 15 per cent and regretted that there was no directive to revive the genuinely sick industries.

DSE

Honorary Secretary of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) A H Howlader appreciated the budget proposal to raise the deduction limit of income tax on dividend at source for resident assesses to Tk 10000 from Tk 5000. "Small traders will be directly bene-

fited from this," he said.

Deduction of corporate tax will also greatly benefit the companies which are offering dividends, Howlader said.

But regarding waiving of tax on capital gains in transfer of shares except bonus shares, Howlader said, "similar provision was made in the last budget. But it turned out at the end of the fiscal that it was applicable for primary market only, for which it made no impact. This time, if it is applicable for all forms of investment, it would be good for all."

BTMA

Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) has described the national budget for 1995-96 as balanced, objective and production oriented.

It praised the proposal for anti-dumping measures to protect the local industries against dumping. The budget proposal for withdrawing the duties on air-conditioning, humidifier and testing equipment will develop this sector and make it competitive.

Jute Spinners

Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association (BJSa) said the budget is "realistic and timely" in the context of free market economy. But the budget gave no direction for infrastructure development to increase export. Special incentive is needed for the export oriented jute industries, he suggested. He regretted that the jute yarn industries are excluded from the government's reform programme for jute sector. This will not benefit the entire jute sector, he said.

Computer Samity

Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS) president Sazzad Hossain demanded withdrawal of duty and VAT from computers so that children of low-income middle class families can afford those. This should be done as duty on colour TV, fridge etc has been reduced, he said.

Economists

M Syeduzzaman, a former finance minister, said the budget is not as politically motivated in its fiscal aspects as some people had apprehended.

However, he said "the zeal of pushing policy reforms is absent, compared to some of the earlier budgets of Finance Minister Saifur Rahman."

Referring to the dependence on foreign aid in percentage terms, he said "it will

go up next year", adding that "this is certainly a backtracking."

Terming the budget surplus figures "incomplete," he said "It has been mentioned in the minister's speech but not quantified."

Pointing to sources of growth, Zaman said "unless there is dramatic change in capital-output ratio, one per cent increase in investment is highly unlikely to give one percentage point increase in GDP growth rate. This is ambitious and unrealistic, unless the minister has other secrets."

"The very large lump provision in the ADP raises questions about the principle of transparency and keeps room for discretionary patronage during implementation," he observed.

On poverty, Syeduzzaman said "we do not see a coherent pattern in resource allocation for this as recent studies indicate a deterioration of the poverty situation, if nutritional level is taken as a proxy."

Dr Debapriya Bhat-tachariya, General Secretary of the Bangladesh Economic Association giving his reaction, told The Daily Star "the budget did not totally succumb to economic populism, rather, indicated the limits of policy formulation of the reform package."

"The budget promises a growth rate of beyond five per cent which was not realised earlier," he added.

No attempt has been made to identify the factors impeding private investment in the economy and apart from tax measures, no other fiscal arrangement has been formulated, he said.

He said that the issue of improved quality of investment leading to more efficient allocation of resources has also been backed up by empirical illustrations.

Referring to the measures relating to food management and reduction of prices of irrigation equipment, he said nothing substantial has been offered to prop up the agriculture sector.

Pointing to the lack of any reference to the perspective plan, he said "the budget comes at the last year of the Fourth Five Year Plan period but makes no reference of it indicating that the budget is essentially a routine exercise deprived of long term perspective."

The Midnight File

Heat wave claims 340 in India

NEW DELHI, June 16: A fiery heat wave burning 11 of India's 25 states has left 340 people dead, while the onset of monsoons over the country's east triggered flash floods and disrupted normal life, officials said today. Officials said the highest toll of 135 heat-related deaths have been reported from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, reports AFP.

Budget : Pros and cons

From Page 1

the foreign exchange ceiling which an incoming passenger can bring in without declaration is being raised to 5,000 dollars.

The budget proposes to increase the foreign exchange retention quota for exporters to 25 per cent of the earnings. But the exporters are reluctant to welcome this move as they are not being allowed to keep the money in interest bearing foreign exchange accounts.

The importers and producers of import-substituting goods are also being allowed a foreign exchange travel quota.

Reduction of duties on a number of consumer goods, including white paper, some vehicles, refrigerators and colour-TV sets have also been proposed. But consumers will not benefit unless it is ensured that the reductions are reflected in the local market price.

Now, the negative aspects. The fiscal deficit has increased in amount from Tk 8,869 crore in the revised 1994-95 budget to Tk 9,257 crore in the proposed budget.

Another alarming point is that the finance minister, while highlighting the successes of the last four years, acknowledged that the domestic debt doubled to Tk 12,000 crore over the same period.

The GDP growth rate projection of six per cent in 1995-96 and in excess of five per cent in the current fiscal, is more vague than concrete. It was further complicated with the finance minister saying that the national accounts fails to adequately register the growth rate. But he did not suggest any solution to the problem.

It is also not clear how the

NBR will make up for the Tk 350 crore in tax and duty cuts and the Tk 1,000 crore increase in revenue collection target. The finance minister only said it will be recouped by 'administrative measures'.

Although the finance minister reiterated the government's commitment to the ongoing economic reform and adjustment programmes, but, perhaps because of political compulsions, he failed to provide any time-frame to expedite the stalled reform process.

While he acknowledged the need for private sector participation in the telecommunication and energy sectors, which will require an estimated three billion dollars investment in the short-term, Saifur Rahman was not forthcoming with any solutions on how or when to involve the private sector.

The staggering losses of the public sector enterprises were mentioned in his speech, but the minister was unable to provide any concrete suggestions to, at least, slow down this massive waste of scarce resources.

He also seemed to have paid only lip-service when he emphasised the need for bringing about legal and administrative reforms, without providing any clues about the government's plans on these difficult issues.

Finally, speaking from his 10-year experience in economic management of the country, the finance minister identified political instability as the biggest hindrance to development.

Saifur Rahman hit the bulls eye on that count, no doubt. But certainly nobody was expecting any solution from him on this vexing issue.

BNP factions clash

Traffic movement

disrupted at

Syedabad

By Staff Correspondent

A clash reportedly between two factions of the BNP caused panic and road blockade at the Syedabad bus terminal in the city yesterday morning. Traffic movement was disrupted for about three hours, from 11 am in the area, sources said several crackers were blasted at that time.

The trouble erupted from a meeting of the BNP at Shampur under Demra thana.

A case has been filed with the Demra thana.

Desertification

From Page 1

tive role with greater wisdom and farsightedness in combating desertification and resisting its adverse effects.

In a separate message, Prime Minister Begum Zia hoped that the World Desertification Day will succeed in attaining its objective to create awareness worldwide.

She expressed her firm belief that observance of the Day would inspire public representatives, administrators, scientists and planners in implementing their respective work plans to combat the desertification process.

In Rajshahi, the day's programme organised by the Environment and Forest Ministry includes a procession from Saheb Bazar at 7 in the morning.

A rally and discussion meeting will be held at Kakhonhat in Rajshahi at 3 pm on the day.

Fertiliser

From Page 1

urea requirement is 18 lakh MT in the country. A surplus of 3.85 lakh MT urea was produced in the last fiscal. The aggregate total of the peak production capacity of the six fertiliser factories is 21.91 lakh MT.

In spite of these favourable production figures, Letters of Credit worth 96.18 million US dollars were opened during the first 10 months of the current fiscal for importing 11.79 lakh MT of fertiliser to meet the fertiliser crisis during the last IRRI-Boro season.

Saifur : Nothing wrong

From Page 1

rately. He explained that the amount was kept as non-sectoral allocations for ministries and government departments which do not have any allocation from the development budget.

Responding to a question on how he is going to enhance revenue collection when the budget proposed a Tk 350 crore tax and duty cut and increased the collection target by Tk 1,000 crore, he said "I am convinced that we will be able to make it up with improvements in the economy."

Asked how the domestic debt increased to Tk 12,000 crore during the last four years, Rahman said that it was used to make-up for the losses of the public sector enterprises. Of the amount, the banks were provided with Tk 4,500 crore, for the on-performing loans owed by the public sector, to strengthen their capital base.

It involved Tk 2,900 crore for the outstanding loans of the Bangladesh Jute Corporation and the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation and another Tk 2,600 crore for the agricultural loan write-off by the government.

The finance minister was severely critical of the staggering losses incurred by the public sector enterprises, which, he said, has increased from Tk 2,000 to Tk 2,500 crore per year. The amount is almost two per cent of the

GDP and is slowing down the growth rate, he added.

He said the "haemorrhage" of resources by the public sector units must be stopped. "The sooner we give them away to the private sector, the better it is."

But he acknowledged that the privatisation initiative is faltering because of lack of consensus on the issue.

The minister also agreed with a questioner that the recent political problems have forced the government to slow down the economic reform process. "It is true that in recognition of the tension we have been facing for the last 18 months, we had to hold back on reforms."

Responding to another question, Rahman said he was confident that the growth rate of six per cent was achievable provided there was peace and stability in the country.

On the current political stalemate, the finance minister claimed that the ruling BNP has made every possible effort to resolve the political crisis. "It is not our fault as we went out of our way to resolve the problem."

The only solution to the present political stalemate would be based on the caretaker government formula agreed upon earlier by both the ruling party and the opposition parties, he said. "Any other way to resolve it will destabilise the democratic order in the country."

20 hurt in N'ganj

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, June 16: At least 20 people were injured in a clash between two rival groups at village Deurpara of Bandar thana here this afternoon.

The clash erupted when a group reportedly led by one Salahuddin raided the residence of one Salam, the leader of other group, said witnesses.

Floods

From Page 1

ter from the garo hill across the border triggered off flash flood in Durgapur thana of Netrakona district, official sources said today.

They said that many areas of Durgapur thana headquarters have been submerged by the flood water and the ground floor of Durgapur thana parishad office is now under tow to three feet water.

Health sector

From Page 1

government has set up a number of new medical colleges and private medical colleges for reaching the treatment facilities at the door step of every people.

She said a huge number of people go abroad every year for getting better treatment. Begum Zia urged the doctors to take necessary measures for ensuring treatment of complex diseases.

Deputy Leader of the House Prof A Q M Badrud-dozza Chowdhury, Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Prof Kamruzzaman MP, DAB president Prof Abdur Rashid, DAB secretary general A K M Azizul Huq and a number of doctors also spoke on the occasion.

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