

# A rare marvel of nature

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed, back from Hiron Point

Officially, the celestial spectacle lasted for a full minute. To those witnessing this astronomical marvel at Hiron Point, where the Sunderbans meet the Bay of Bengal, it seemed to have majestically rushed by in only a few seconds; such was the excitement and effect on the psyche of those who beheld the total eclipse of the sun on the morning of October 24.

"If only it had remained a little longer", lamented many in the group of about 200 persons who travelled all the way from Sadarghat, Dhaka to Hiron Point on board the MV *Machranga*. For the fabled "Diamond Ring" hung jewelled in the sky for barely a few seconds before being engulfed first by the moon and after the total eclipse by the solar fireball.

Organised jointly by the Bangladesh Astronomical Association (BAA), Anushand-hisshu Chakra, *Bigyan Sangskriti Parishad*, the adventurous group included architects, businessmen, doctors, government officers, house-wives, journalists, scientists, students of all levels and a nine-month old infant. On board the *Machranga* which was their home for about 110 hours beginning October 21 were a separate body of cooks, armed ansars and the vessel's own crew.

The expedition was suitably titled "Solar Eclipse Observation and Science Workshop". But due to the mixed nature of its membership, ages varying from infancy to the vicinity of 70s, the workshop part never really got off. With regard to solar eclipse observation, the effort was a total success.

Most of those who made the journey camped on the lower and upper decks with a couple of bed sheets spread on the metal floor of the medium-sized launch being their home for five days.

There was no question of privacy, toilet facilities were pathetic, muddy river water was a constant reminder of WASA's good deeds back home; but what pulled the group through without a single hitch worth mentioning was the united sense of purpose of witnessing a rare miracle of nature. But for the heavy downpour prior to the start of the journey, the weather was dry, bright and sunny throughout. The nights were cool and breezy. The setting was perfect for the last total solar eclipse to be seen from Bangladesh this century. A tiny dark intrusion at the top (West) of the sun's bowl, as seen through specially-made goggles or dark glasses, signalled the beginning of the eclipse at three minutes past eight. The air was tingling with excitement. There was a buzz all around. The ambience was electrifying.

The BAA scientists, led by Dr AR Khan of Dhaka University, mounted their 8-inch diameter telescopes and 800 and 900 mm telephoto lens cameras on the roof of the three storied Pilot House of the Port Authority, for the

height clearance and stability. The image of the moon crossing the sun was projected on a white sheet for observation by bare eyes. Volunteers distributed *tehart*, biscuits and other edibles to the exhilarated observers to negate superstitions against eating during eclipses.

A group of students from the Department of Architecture of BUET positioned themselves on the roof of *Machranga* because from there they would witness the eclipse in relation to the sea, the forest and the horizon. A small band of observers

enly phenomenon. Volunteers were at the ready to observe any change in air temperature. Timekeepers kept themselves busy to monitor every second in the life of this eclipse.

Meanwhile the devouring of the sun continued and the crescent of the sun became thinner by the minute. The air was getting cooler although the shadows remained sharp. It was as if evening was drawing near. The sea appeared to be greying. A large falcon swooped low to prey on the riverine fish that seemed to have come close to the surface; the high tide was higher than usual. The air temperature was fast falling from 32 degrees Celsius at the beginning of the eclipse.

The neighbouring boatsmen sat idly or continued with their chores. Some of the natives admitted to the observers that they have come to know of the impending eclipse only after the arrival of the *Machranga*.

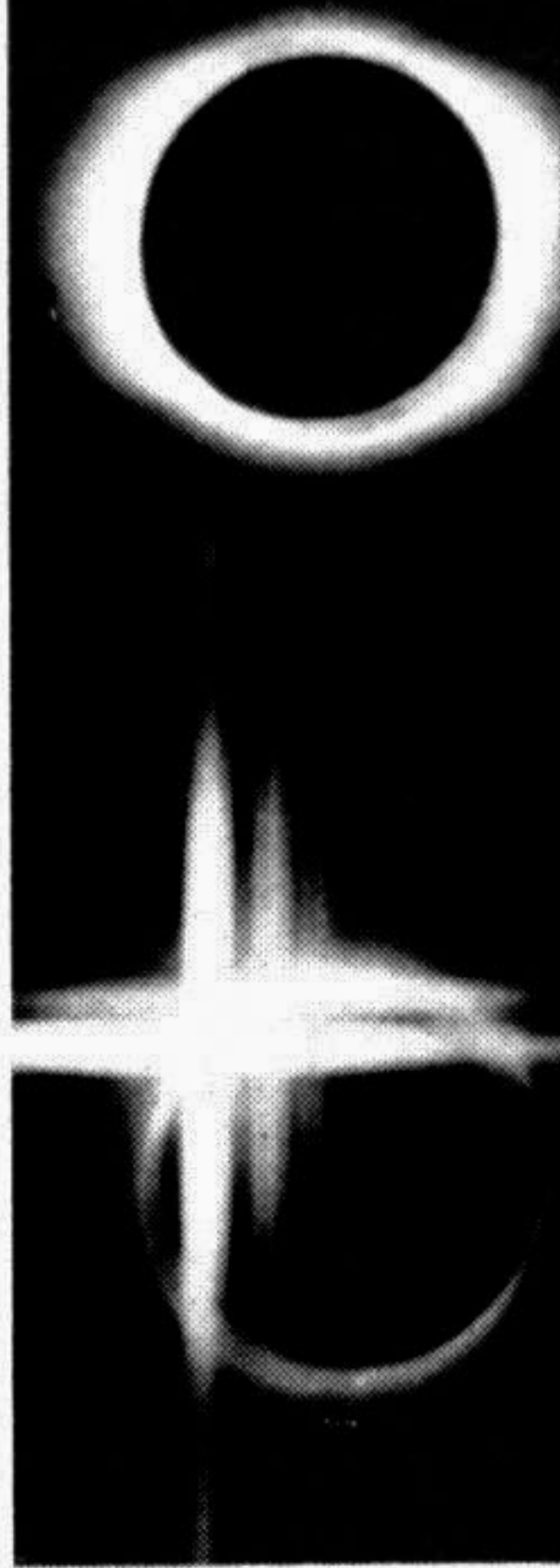
There was a hush in the air as the total eclipse approached. Everyone held their breath. The first ring with the diamond at direction 5 o'clock passed unnoticed by many because, emerging in the lighted sky, it was not clearly discernible. Then came the total eclipse, the amber corona of the sun akin to dancing candlelight visible behind the dark disc of the moon. The time was 9:21:45. There was a yell of disbelief from the crowd as the surroundings were submerged in darkness.

Everyone looked with bare eyes as the moon for a few seconds lined up between the sun and the earth. The temperature was around 26 degrees Celsius. Due to the sun's ring of light, objects were casting multiple shadows. There was an aura of deep violet topped by a rosy glow all around the horizon, unlike the directionality of the colours that appear only in the East before sunrise and only in the West after sunset. And, back in the sky, planet Mercury appeared like a glowing star above the moon and a brighter Venus below. So much was happening that surely not every observer saw everything.

A minute later emerged the proof of exhibitionist nature's display of arrogance, a bestowal of a lifetime — the diamond ring. After the darkness of the total eclipse, the sparkling ring appeared in its perfect proportions, bedecked with a glittering diamond at direction 11 o'clock, crafted no doubt by the Supreme artist.

The rest was an anti-climax. The moon gradually moved across the lower ridge of the sun. The untimely twilight on earth cleared. The sun regained its status as the source of earth's energy. The members of the expedition heaved a sigh of relief. Only their eyes twinkled for having witnessed a miracle.

The *Machranga* returned to Dhaka on yesterday morning.



Total eclipse (top) and 'diamond ring' viewed at Hiron Point Tuesday. — Photo by Bangladesh Astronomical Association

boarded a power-boat and ventured deep into the Sunderbans to encounter the experience of a lifetime. Environmentalist Dr Noazish Ahmed kept watch over a begonia flower, his camera finger ready to expose the celluloid to the effects of a heav-

## One stabbed to death in Pabna

From Our Correspondent PABNA, Oct 26: One person was killed by some unidentified men at Zahirpur in the town today.

Mahabul Pramanik, 35, a former worker of the Calico Cotton Mills, was waylaid by them when he was passing through the area by a rickshaw at 11 am.

They stabbed him indiscriminately. Later, the Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal brought out a procession carrying the body and demanded arrest and punishment of the killers.



The Sher-e-Bangla Smriti Sangsad placing wreaths at the mazar of Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq in the city on his 122nd birth anniversary yesterday. — Star photo

## BNP activities

From Page 1 observing a 'Public Relations Week' from October 22 by holding public rallies in the capital and elsewhere in the country. This will be followed by public meetings at the district headquarters on October 29-30 and public rallies to be organised simultaneously in all the wards of Dhaka city on November 5. Ministers, MPs and other leaders of the party are addressing the rallies in the city and they are likely to attend similar programmes outside the capital.

BNP sources said the fresh programme may include a grand rally in the capital in mid-November and it is likely to be announced on completion of the current programmes on November 5. The new programmes would be decided at a meeting of senior party leaders shortly, they added.

When asked, Office Secretary of the ruling party Nazrul Islam Khan told this correspondent that their fresh

programmes would continue up to the elections. He, however, did not elaborate.

Other sources in the BNP said that until the long-drawn political crisis over the Opposition demand for holding of next general elections under a caretaker government was resolved, the party would prefer to continue street programmes to mobilise public support for it. According to them, the party would continue its efforts to resolve the crisis through negotiations with the agitating opposition parties and would also exchange views with smaller opposition parties.

Meanwhile, the acting Secretary General of the BNP had talks with Workers' Party leader Rashed Khan Menon and Ganu Forum leader Pankaj Bhattacharyya at his official residence.

Responding to some other questions, Mannan Bhuiyan said he would soon brief the press on the party's latest position.

## Fashion show to raise funds for artisans

By Staff Correspondent

A glitzy fashion parade was held in city yesterday for the artisans who are no longer able to work.

Some four hundred people from different section of the society gathered at Hotel Sonargaon to witness the BRAC-sponsored Fashion Show titled 'future '96 Fashion Collections'.

The show organised by Aarong, was divided into two segments with 10 themes and a total of 18 models catwalked on the stage made with bamboo. At least 15 sessions of parade were performed on the stage by the models.

The show was choreographed by Bandwagon, a Dhaka-based company, and the costumes were designed by Maheem Khan, Aarong's Chief Designer. In addition to the fund-raising, the show was also a preparation of Eid collection, said MS Khan.

## Election monitoring

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ministry or a government department."

Even the Election Commission does not have the power to announce results of any elections until the concerned returning officer came up with it, he said. "The EC just acts as a post office."

Though the EC Bill of 1994 provided the EC with the controlling power over the administrative staff during election time, it has no control over police. He suggested enactment of law to establish EC's control over the law enforcement agencies engaged in securing the electoral process.

Terming the Thana Nirbahi Officers (TNOs) and Officer-in-Charge (OCs) as "mischievous" persons in the administration, he alleged that they were yet to be cultured for holding free and fair elections.

Describing fair elections as heart and soul of any democratic society, he said observation of election are now recognised throughout the world. It has, by this time, become a culture universally, he added.

About voters' list, he said there was no perfect voters' list in the country. The number of voters was over 62 million as against an estimated 52 million over 18 population before the present enrollment process started.

The EC, however, informed the group of five eminent citizens, during a recent meeting that the number of voters dropped to 56 million while the number of over 18 population is 57 million. It may be called a credible voters' list, he opined.

Prof Rehman Sobhan lauded the efforts of FEMA for monitoring elections at a time when apprehension about free and fair elections surfaced. He urged FEMA to monitor the voter registration process and find out whether any eligible voter was excluded from the electoral roll.

"But, FEMA is not a substitute to the Election Commission. It is only playing as the eyes and ears of the civic society and the ordinary voters," he said.

Prof Muhammad Shamsul Huq, a former foreign minister, expressed his concern over the deepening political crisis created by both ruling party and the opposition saying that lack of national consensus has placed democracy in jeopardy.

He hoped that the mission of the five prominent citizens to end the political impasse, would succeed so that the hard-earned democracy could follow its normal course and the next general elections could be free and fair.

party and the Opposition. The Opposition further undermined the parliament by demonstrating continuous walkout which ultimately led to en-masse resignation, he added.

The government also deepened the crisis by referring the absence issue to the Supreme Court rather than going to the people or calling general elections. He also criticised the parties for not holding elections in the party posts.

Reazuddin Ahmed, chief editor of the Financial Express and president of Jatiya Press Club, said election watch could help keep the government machineries credible during the election period. He suggested quick remedies of election frauds.

He also urged FEMA to check as to whether every voter has been enlisted in the electoral roll as there is allegation by the Opposition leader against the new voters list.

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, said the formula proposed by Barrister Ishtiaq provided both the ruling party and the Opposition with an opportunity to accommodate each others' stand. And an ample scope has surfaced as the Prime Minister expressed her willingness to form a government with five members from ruling party and five others from the Opposition, he added.

But they are suspicious of each other, he said, and added that defending the Constitution and holding of free and fair elections are not the sole responsibilities of either the government or the Opposition.

Dr Qazi Faruque Ahmed described aims and objectives of FEMA, a coalition of some 130 national and local level organisations. The FEMA will deploy its observers at some 32,000 centres, at least one at each centre.

The speakers criticised the government for not allowing FEMA to go ahead with its work of election monitoring, saying credibility and transparency are the key word in democracy.

FEMA should be allowed to work and if it is not permitted to do that, the government must make it public as to why it is not being given permission, they said, adding that side by side the FEMA also must be credible and transparent in its work.

Earlier, Feroz M Hassan read out a paper on "public confidence in the electoral process is critical to free and fair elections."

US Ambassador David N Merrill, British High Commissioner Petr J Fowler, Canadian High Commissioner Jon J Scott and representatives of Japan, Sweden, Norway, New Zealand and Asia Foundation were also present on the occasion.

# The Midnight File

## Heavy fighting in Somalia: 8 killed

MOGADISHU, Oct 26: At least eight people have died in heavy fighting between militia loyal to Somalia warlord General Mohammed Farah Aided and forces of the rival Faharwein resistance army (RRA) near the southwestern town of Baidoa, according to reports received in Mogadishu today, reports AFP.

## Prokrichi 25 injured in Faridpur clash

From Page 1 He also said that the next course of action programme would paralyse the activities in hospitals, power, gas, post and telecommunication sectors.

Criticising the government for allowing mass promotion in the Administrative Cadre he said, the government has become hostage in the hands of members of a specific cadre.

In this regard, he referred to their meeting with the Prime Minister on October 1 where they were assured that "no mass promotion" would be made and all promotions would be on the basis of merit and competence.

However, even after the assurance of the PM 201 members of BCS (admn) cadre had been promoted on Oct 9 by passing the rules and regulations.

## Indian move

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border pillars number 1274 and 1275 Wednesday morning.

The BDR protested the move, both verbally and in writing immediately, as such construction within 150 yards of the border is strictly prohibited as per the international convention.

The first flag meeting was held at 12 noon today between Major Jaill, Battalion Commander of BDR and S Pandey, Battalion Commander of BSF. A second round of meeting was held at 5 pm. Customs officials of both sides also took part in the second meeting.

## Taka devalued

From Page 1

Thursday, there was a panic situation in the market since afternoon another banker said, requesting anonymity. "The market witnessed a dollar buying spree".

India had devalued its rupee by about 14 per cent while Pakistan had devalued its currency by Rs 0.09.

Finance ministry sources said the import situation and forex reserve of the country had also spurred the move taken by the central bank.

The move was also interpreted by banking circles as away to combat inflation and excessive imports.

The surge in imports, had shrunk the country's forex reserve to 2.6 billion dollars early this month from a peak of 3.5 billion dollars in April. The current reserve is equivalent to four and a half month's import bills.

The earlier devaluation was announced on September 30.

## Hasina

From Page 1

An eager Prime Minister, who heard about the child-birth during stopover in New Delhi on her way back from America, entered the cabin at 7 pm and came out at about 9:10 pm smiling. She also exchanged greetings with relatives, doctors and visitors.

Begum Zia flew back into the Zia International Airport at 7:15 am yesterday.

## PM returns

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Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Region Rabin Raphel and other senior US officials.

Besides, Begum Zia held meetings with a number of world leaders including UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the presidents of South Africa, South Korea, The Maldives, Mongolia, Bosnia and Sri Lanka, the prime ministers of Nepal, Denmark and Norway, the executive directors of UNICEF and UNHCR and the UNDP administrator.

**BANGLADESH GARMENT MANUFACTURERS AND EXPORTERS ASSOCIATION**  
BTMC BHABAN  
7-9 KAWRAN BAZAR, DHAKA-1215

**ATTENTION BGMEA MEMBERS**

Consequent upon meeting of the representatives of BGMEA with the Hon'ble State Minister, Ministry of Shipping and other concerned agencies the following steps have been taken to ease the congestion in Chittagong and Benapole Ports:

- a. Operations in Chittagong Port and Benapole Land Port will henceforth go on round the clock.
- b. All the Offices of Customs, Banks and other related agencies would remain open until 10:00 P.M. Every day.
- c. All these offices will remain open also friday (27-10-95).

The member units of BGMEA are not reportedly availing of the above facilities still. Respected Members of BGMEA are requested to apprise their respective C & F Agents and to take full advantage of the above facilities.

**Secretary  
BGMEA**

**সি আই এস ক্রেডিট লাইনের অধীনে রাশিয়া ও কাজাখস্তানে রপ্তানী সংক্রান্ত বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

**সি আই এস**

সি আই এস তুর্ক দেশসমূহে বাংলাদেশী পণ্য রপ্তানী বৃদ্ধির লক্ষ্যে গণ-প্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার কর্তৃক সৃষ্ট ক্রেডিট লাইনের আওতায় সোনালী ব্যাংক (১) রাশিয়ার এন, বি, ই, আর ব্যাংক এবং কাজাখস্তানের তুরান ব্যাংকের সাথে আন্তর্জাতিক চুক্তি সম্পাদন করেছে এবং (২) রাশিয়ার এন, জি, এস ব্যাংক ও ইনকম ব্যাংকের সাথে আন্তর্জাতিক চুক্তি সম্পাদনের বিষয়টি চূড়ান্ত পর্যায়ে আছে।

এই আন্তর্জাতিক চুক্তির আওতায় রাশিয়া ও কাজাখস্তানের আমদানীকারকগণ অগ্রতাহারযোগ্য স্বপ্নপত্রের অধীনে নিম্নে বর্ণিত সময়সূচী মোতাবেক বিলম্বে মূল্য পরিশোধের শর্তে বাংলাদেশ হতে রপ্তানীযোগ্য বিভিন্ন পণ্য আমদানী করতে পারবেঃ-

ক) সাধারণ পণ্যের ক্ষেত্রে	১২০ দিন বিলম্বে মূল্য পরিশোধ।
খ) তৈরী পোশাকের ক্ষেত্রে	১৮০ দিন বিলম্বে মূল্য পরিশোধ।

বিদ্যুতি সময়ের (Usance Period) জন্য আমদানীকারক/আমদানীকারকের ব্যাংক কর্তৃক প্রদেয় সুদের হার LIBOR +1%। তবে বাংলাদেশের রপ্তানীকারকগণ স্বপ্নপত্রের বিপরীতে পণ্য জাহাজীকরণের পর স্বপ্ন পত্রের শর্তাবলী প্রতিপালন সাপেক্ষে রপ্তানী দলিল সোনালী ব্যাংকের স্থানীয় কার্যালয় (মোনোনীত ব্যাংক শাখা) এ দাখিল করলে, ব্যাংক রপ্তানী বিল ক্রয়/নেগোশিয়েশনের মাধ্যমে রপ্তানীকারকগণকে তাৎক্ষণিকভাবে বিলের মূল্য পরিশোধ করবে।

আমদানী বাংলাদেশী রপ্তানীকারকগণ রাশিয়া ও কাজাখস্তানের আমদানীকারকদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করে উল্লিখিত ব্যাংকসমূহের মাধ্যমে ক্রেডিট লাইনের অধীনে স্বপ্নপত্র খোলার পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ করতে পারেন।

ক্রেডিট লাইন সম্পর্কে বিস্তারিত জানতে আমদানী রপ্তানীকারকগণকে নিম্নোক্ত ঠিকানায় যোগাযোগ করতে অনুরোধ জানানো যাচ্ছে।

ক। সৈয়দ মকবুলুন নবী উপ-মহাব্যবস্থাপক	সোনালী ব্যাংক আন্তর্জাতিক বিভাগ-২ প্রধান কার্যালয়, ঢাকা। ফোনঃ ২৩ ২০ ০৭
খ। জনাব মোঃ মতিউর রহমান সহকারী মহাব্যবস্থাপক	

**সোনালী ব্যাংক**