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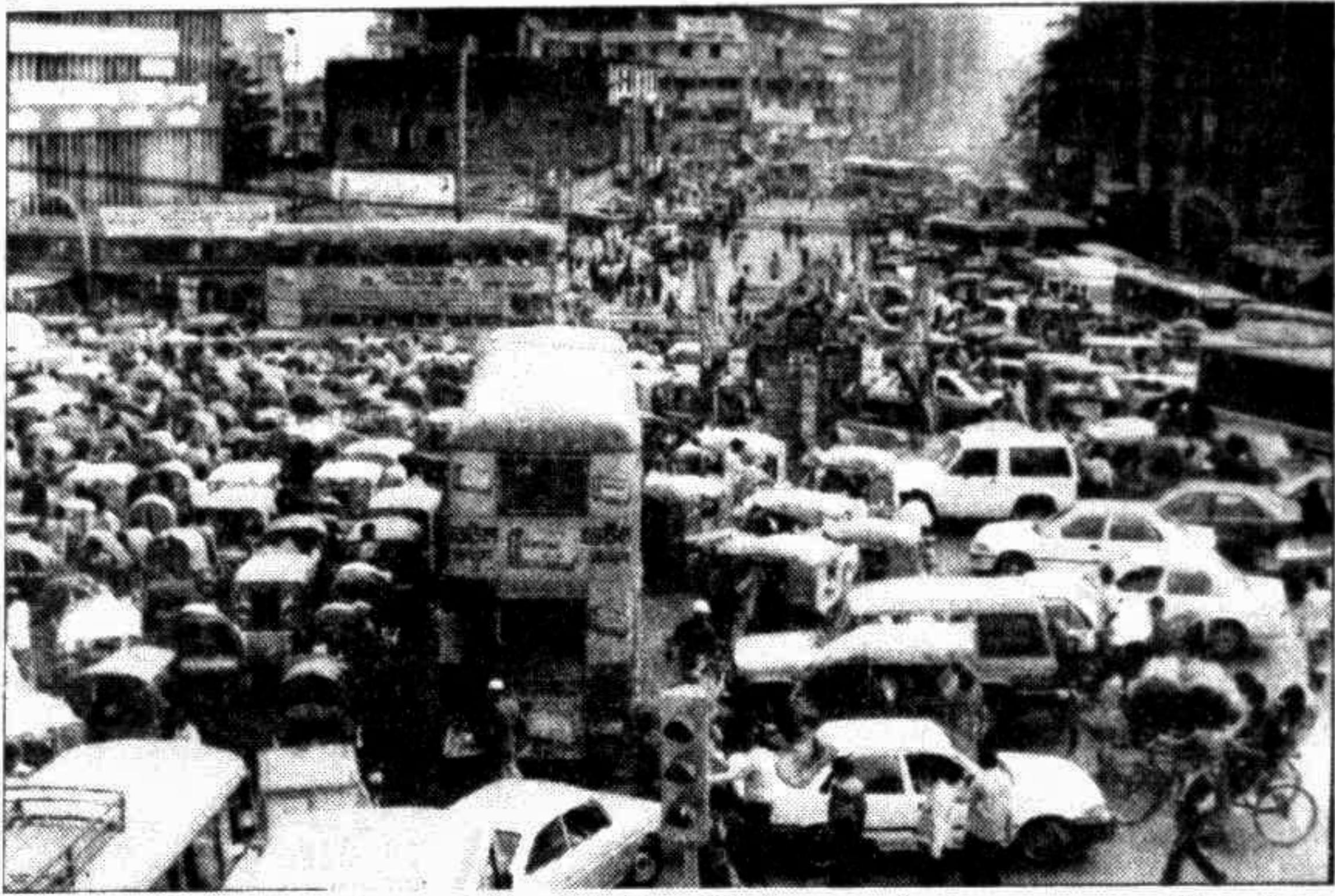
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Heavy traffic jam in and around the city's Zero Point area yesterday.

— Star photo

Short film festival

From Page 1

its literature, culture and state of education. But for the last 21 years, education, culture and literature were subjected to distortion of history, she added.

"Liberation War is the most glorious chapter in our history. But whenever our artists and literateurs tried to draw the subject for their creative work from liberation, they were instantly and very harshly repressed by military and autocratic governments."

Earlier, the international short film festival was inaugurated amid fanfare with the release of balloons and pigeon and lighting the lamps.

The Prime Minister inaugurated the festival by releasing balloons carrying a festoon inscribed with the slogan of the festival — Celebrating 100 years of cinema and 25 years of independence of Bangladesh.

She also hoisted the national flag while the National anthem was played.

Festival flag was hoisted by renowned film artiste Abul Khaire, pigeons were released by litterateur Shawkat Osman and educationist Dr Nafeesa Ibrahim lit the festival lamps.

Some 20 filmmakers and a number of delegates from different countries, including France, Mauritius, Austria and India, arrived in the city. Internationally reputed filmmaker Mrinal Sen also came here to join the festival.

About 100 films of 27 countries, including host Bangladesh, will be screened in the nine-day film festival at the Public Library auditorium.

Addressing the function, the Prime Minister said a new vista has been started in the cultural arena in line with the spirit of liberation which initiated the movement of short film in the country.

Today's advancement is the continuation of that beginning: short films have played a sig-

SEC for lock-in

From Page 1

Nagar University Prof Amirul Islam, meets for the first time Saturday which will, among other things, burrow deeper into alleged manipulations by companies and off-loading of sponsor shares.

The five-member committee included Muniruddin Ahmed, Chairman of the BJMC, who is a Chartered Accountant by profession. One member from the FBCCI is yet to be named. The other two members are: Prof ATM Zahurul Huq of Economics Department of Dhaka University and retired law secretary Mirza Asaduzzaman Al-Faruq.

The committee is expected to work out its strategy at the meeting and proceed with its assigned task, which included probing the affairs of SEC itself, sources concerned said.

Meanwhile, SEC yesterday packed off its executive director Nawshir Ali to the Ministry of Establishment for reassessment after questions were raised about his role in the Commission, a SEC source said.

But the contractual appointment of two members of the SEC is yet to be cancelled as their files are yet to be processed by the higher authorities, it is gathered.

Certain quarters, who include a highly influential business conglomerate, are alleged to have been lobbying for retaining the services of the two members. They are reported to have family ties and links with the owners of two securities companies. One of them is related to be owner of a securities company, operating since mid-1995, which released five IPOs out of 18 floated last year.

"There are now three IPOs in the final stage of getting permission of the SEC," said a source, "Of these three IPOs, two are being managed by the same company. It leads to suspicion about foul play in giving permission to new companies, the source said.

Another company, alleged to have links with them, has so far managed issuance of two IPOs. Another IPO managed by the same company is in the pipeline, the source said.

Shanties

From Page 1

Two children received injuries in the incident.

State Minister for Labour and Manpower M A Mannan and Chittagong City Corporation Mayor Alhaj A B M Mohiuddin Chowdhury visited the devastated slums and assured the affected people of relief and succour.

Our Prime Minister is considering Bangladesh's request to legalise its illegal workers," said second secretary of the mission Dzulkefey Bin Abdullah.

The official particularly mentioned Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad's meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed in New Delhi last month when the Bangladeshi leader took up the issue.

Malaysia

From Page 1

available jobs in the plantation and construction industries and service sector.

The 150,000 foreign maids are paid between \$140 and \$240 a month, while construction and factory workers receive as much as \$20 to \$30 a day depending on their skills.

The amnesty and crackdown resulted in part from complaints by Malaysians that illegal workers were fighting with local youths, marrying local women and trying to stay permanently. They also have been suspected of molesting or disturbing local women and engaging in crime.

"If we are too lenient, illegal settlements will mushroom and there will be a rise in squatter problems, contagious diseases, criminal activities and other social ills," Ong said.

Father-in-law of Benazir arrested

KARACHI, Jan 2: Pakistan police have detained Hakim Ali Zardari, father-in-law of deposed Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, as part of a corruption inquiry, officials said Thursday.

The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) detained Hakim Ali Zardari, 69, late Wednesday at his seaside residence in Karachi. Officials said Zardari faced corruption charges.

Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari has already been arrested in connection with the murder of Murtaza Bhutto, brother of Benazir Bhutto.

Noted journalist and Festival Committee Chairman Obaidul Huq presided on the occasion.

Fishing trawler hijacked in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Jan 2: A gang of pirates hijacked a fishing trawler and threw two fishermen into the river at the Beltai ferry ghat near the Barisal town last night.

Witnesses said, armed pirates numbering ten to twelve swooped on the trawler FB Dolphin and the fishermen on board in the Kirtan Khola river. They beat the fishermen mercilessly and threw two of them — Jalil and Rahman — into the river.

They took the trawler with them including fish, fishing nets and about Tk one lakh.

— AFP/UNB photo

Deposed Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari (R) was taken away from the court in Karachi yesterday by paramilitary Rangers and police personnel in bullet-proof jackets. The security intensified after a rumour spread that Zardari's life was in danger in jail.

The present government has revived its fascist and autocratic character by unleashing torture and arrest on BNP leaders and workers and filing false cases against them. Even BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia was not spared," the meeting said in another resolution.

It called upon party activists of all units to make BNP's January 5-7 agitation programme a success.

The main opposition party will stage demonstration and hold rallies at thana level on January 5, at district headquarters on January 6 and at Manik Miah Avenue in the capital on January 7.

The meeting was also addressed by Abdulla Al-Noman, Shahjahan Siraj, Selima Rahman, Nazrul Islam Khan, Sadeq Hossain Khoka MP, Gayeswar Chandra Roy, Fazlur Rahman Patal MP, Shamsuzzaman Dudu MP, Amanullah Aman MP, Alamgir Kabir MP, Redwan Ahmed, Abdul Alim Mridha, Rezabuddoula Chowdhury, Kazi Abu Bashir and Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anney.

The south Asian countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan required to sign several international conventions to agree on a common road traffic signs and system, customs rules, usage of sealed containers etc. Pending signature in international conventions, such agreements could be signed bilaterally, Dr Rahmatullah said.

"Current facilities like customs at the entry points in these countries are zero. They need to be improved," he said.

"International facilitation measures" are not in place in certain countries like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan and these are required to be undertaken to make the Asian Highway operational in this part of the region.

The concept of the Asian Highway incorporates links among capitals of the countries, main industrial centres and major inland container depots.

Huge amounts of surcharge by way of passage money and tolls could be collected by the countries allowing the use of their portion of the Asian Highway. The amount of levy that will be imposed could be decided through mutual and multilateral negotiations in which ESCAP could participate, Dr Rahmatullah said.

He noted that the Asia and Pacific region, which had been a high performer in the world economic scene for over a decade, had got strong impetus for trade among the countries in the region itself.

Today the Asian Highway is actively operational in South Asia linking the ASEAN countries after creation of the Central Asian Republics. Iran took the initiative to connect the states through rail network.

Nearly two million tons of foreign cargo is passing through Iran, China and Vietnam which fought several wars have reopened rail routes, and Vietnam has allowed the use of its ports for the passage of Chinese goods.

A convoy of nearly 100 trucks from the Central Asian states are regularly ferrying goods to the Karachi Port, according to an ESCAP report.

According to the current map, the Asian Highway extends up to 40,000 km in 25 countries, from Singapore to Turkey. "The outlook and prospects of the Asian Highway it remains hinged to the highway actively, the ESCAP director said.

But as China joined the Asian Highway in 1988 and Myanmar in 1989, and seven central Asian countries in 1996, the prospect of the Asian

highway is now alive and kicking in different regions and is now linking up countries in the region to facilitate the wheels of trade and transport pass through one corner of the region to another to make the Asian region the focal point of world economy in the new century," Dr Rahmatullah said.

"But to establish the Trans

The Daily Star

United efforts must to fight poverty: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon all irrespective of party affiliation and opinion to unitedly fight against poverty and hunger, reports UNB.

United efforts of all are needed to establish a long-cherished society free from poverty and hunger, she said at a grand conference of the representatives of social organisations and social workers at Agargaon in the morning.

The Prime Minister said if the vast majority of the people are denied rights and privileges, the society and the country would also lag far behind.

"There is no alternative to people's spontaneous support and cooperation in taking steps towards national development. So, to create Sonar Bangla, the dream of Bangabandhu, we shall forge greater unity."

On the question of development of the country, she said, "we do not make discrimination. We believe, despite differences in respect of ideas, faith and views, we belong to all and all belong to us."

The Prime Minister urged the affluent society to come forward to help the poor.

"If the poorer section is deprived of their just right, this society will not be able to protect the affluent section. You rich people will have to help the neglected in your own interest," said the Prime Minister.

She said the government wants to ensure proper distribution of wealth among all to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor which, she said, was widened sharply in last 21

years. Despite various handicaps, multifarious demands and limitation of resources, the government is striving hard to improve the lot of the distressed people, she said.

Appreciating the contribution of voluntary organisations and social workers to overall development activities, the Prime Minister called for combined efforts of the government, voluntary organisations and social workers to lay a foundation for a happy and prosperous country.

She stressed the need for giving proper emphasis on policies and planning to offset problems and bottlenecks.

Earlier, the Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of the Social Welfare Complex near the national parade square at Agargaon.

At the conference, she distributed "Samaj Seba Padak" among seven social workers in recognition of their social welfare activities.

The recipients are Prof Abdus Samad from Dhaka Division, Fazle Karim Dara from Rajshahi division, late Abu Taleb Md Emdadul Islam from Khulna division, Dr Jobaida Hannan from Chittagong division, Abdus Salam Talukder from Barisal Division, Dr Shah Nurul Islam from Sylhet Division and Alhaj Prof Shamim Misir from Dhaka Metropolitan city.

Later, the Prime Minister opened an exhibition of social welfare activities.



Asian Highway project

From Page 1

the Tamabil point in Sylhet, the Asian Highway links Myanmar through India through the Bangladeshi point, the highway links Nepal through India and through Bengal, it is linked with India again.

Dr Rahmatullah said approval of these routes were communicated to ESCAP by the Ministry of Communications on August 15, 1995. It mentions about Bangladesh's approval of the Jessore-Benapole-Hatirnagar route of the length of 206 km, Sylhet-Tamabil route of 56 km and Chittagong-Cox-Bazar route.

The Chittagong route has been recognised by ESCAP as an extended regional route, he pointed out.

The ESCAP director notes, it will not take any extra fund for Bangladesh to allow international traffic through the Asian Highway since the existing routes have already been identified and agreed upon.

The Bangladeshi portion of the Asian highway has been identified as of Class II and Class III standard. However, in time, the routes might be improved as per necessity or economic returns, he said.

Conceived by 15 countries under the ESCAP in 1959, the Asian Highway now conceptually links 25 countries.

Bangladesh joined the Asian Highway plan when it was originally conceived in 1959 with the then Pakistan government consenting to the plan. China, Myanmar and Mongolia which had at a later stage joined the Asian Highway plan requiring revision in the original Asian Highway plan. In 1976, the route map of the Asian Highway showing Bangladesh was first published, he recalled.

Different countries had built their portions of the Asian Highway till the mid-70s. But due to reluctance of Myanmar to allow international traffic, the highway which began from Singapore, remained in use only up to Thailand. In the sub-continental region, international traffic could not start due to disagreements between the countries. However, in the western part, covering some Middle-Eastern countries up to Turkey, the route map of the Asian Highway is now alive and kicking in different regions and is now linking up countries in the region to facilitate the wheels of trade and transport pass through one corner of the region to another to make the Asian region the focal point of world economy in the new century," Dr Rahmatullah said.

"If Bangladesh does not take this opportunity, it might be bypassed by other countries who feel it necessary to boost Asian trade by utilising the Asian highway," Dr Rahmatullah noted.

"If we are too lenient, illegal settlements will mushroom and there will be a rise in squatter problems, contagious diseases, criminal activities and other social ills," Ong said.

"But to establish the Trans

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LNG, crude export

From Page 1

FBCCI President Yusuf Abdullah Harun will head the committee. Other members are AKM Rahmatullah MP, chairman of the National Board of Revenue, vice-chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau, joint secretary (export) of the commerce ministry and Bazlur Rahman, the owner of a tannery.

Out of the total output of the country's tannery industry, mainly located at Hazaribagh in the capital, about 75 per cent is crust leather and 25 per cent is leather.

Police said the trouble began between the Rezaul group and Moktar group of BCL over organising freshers' reception at Barapuk High School.

Local Awami League leaders were holding a meeting at a bazar hotel to settle the matter but supporters of one group suddenly started pelting stones, ransacked nearby shops and fought with the supporters of the rival faction injuring about eight from both sides.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Meanwhile, local administration imposed restriction on holding the freshers' reception for avoiding further trouble.

BNP

From Page 1

fascist behaviour of the present government," said a resolution of the meeting.

Country's overall political, economic and law and order situation was discussed at the meeting.

The meeting observed that the politics of revenge and malice