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WB to explore new areas of cooperation in Bangladesh

The visiting World Bank vice-president Meiko Nishimizu yesterday said the Bank would provide continued support to Bangladesh for its infrastructural development, reports UNB.

Nishimizu said this when she called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her parliament chamber yesterday.

She appreciated the government steps in implementing WB assisted programmes and said that newer areas of cooperation would be explored.

The World Bank officials hailed the signing of the Indo-Bangla water sharing treaty signed in New Delhi last month. She expressed the view that it will help widen the areas of cooperation in the region.

She said the World Bank President will make a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during her forthcoming visit to the USA, which will provide an opportunity for them to exchange ideas on different issues.

ECNEC approves 4 projects worth Tk 395.34 cr

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) yesterday approved four development projects amounting to Tk 395 crore 34 lakh including Tk 253 crore 13 lakh as project aid, reports BSS.

The approval was given at a meeting yesterday in the cabinet conference room of the Bangladesh Secretariat, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The approved projects include ADB assisted second health and family planning services project at a cost of Tk 261 crore nine lakh including Tk 188 crore 40 lakh as project aid, development of 18 district hospitals at a cost of Tk 72 crore 77 lakh including Tk 31 crore 49 lakh as project aid, further improvement of medical colleges at a cost of Tk 40 crore 85 lakh including Tk 32 crore 24 lakh as project aid and integrated jute production and marketing project at a cost of Tk 20 crore and 63 lakh.

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Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Jan	Sehri	Iftar
19	29	—	5:47
20	30	5:18	5:47
21	31	5:18	5:48

Indemnity (Repeal) Act a valid law, declares HC

By Staff Correspondent

The High Court, in a landmark judgment yesterday, upheld the Indemnity (Repeal) Act, 1996, passed by Parliament in November 12 last year, as a valid law.

After 13 days of hearing, in which a Division Bench of the High Court sought opinions from six senior lawyers, Justice Mohammad Mozammel Hoque and Justice Abdul Matin gave their verdict before a packed court, pronouncing the Indemnity Ordinance No. 50 of 1975, void since it is repugnant to the Constitution.

Lawyers, journalists and people from other professions thronged the court to hear the judgment which took nearly two hours to be delivered amid hushed silence.

Extra police force was de-

ployed around the High Court building to maintain law and order.

Complex constitutional issues came up during the hearing as two writs were filed on December 1 last year on behalf of the two accused in the Bangabandhu murder case, seeking immunity under the nullified ordinance.

The Division Bench, discharging the rules issued earlier upon petitions on behalf of the two accused, permitted their counsel to appeal against the judgment.

The petitions were filed by Mahmuda Rahman, mother of Col. (ret'd) Syed Faruqur Rahman and Col. (ret'd) Shahriar Rashid Khan, praying for declaring the Bangabandhu murder case filed with Dhan-

mondi police station and the jail killing case filed with Lal-bagh thana, in the city, illegal under the Indemnity Ordinance of 1975, which was incorporated in the Constitution through the Fifth Amendment.

Pending the appeal, the verdict paved the way for trial of the accused in the Bangabandhu murder case and the jail killing case.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members were killed on August 15, 1975 at their Dhanmondi residence. Four national leaders — Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam, Mansur Ali and Kamruzzaman were killed inside the Dhaka Central Jail on November 3, 1975.

Barrister Korban Ali, counsel for the two accused, was

granted the certificate for appeal.

Attorney General KS Nabi, however, opposed the petition for appeal.

Granting the certificate for appeal, the court observed, "since several questions of law as to the interpretation of several provisions of the Constitution are involved in the instant cases, the certificate prayed for is granted."

The Indemnity Ordinance was proclaimed on August 27, 1975 by the then government headed by Khandaker Mush-taque Ahmed, validating all actions taken during the August 15 killings of Bangabandhu and his family, indemnifying the killers from all legal proceedings.

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Govt to import power on three conditions

By Staff Correspondent

Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Lt Gen (Ret'd) Mohammad Nooruddin Khan told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday that the government was considering import of two to three hundred megawatt power on certain conditions.

The conditions are availability during the peak hour, acceptable tariff and other technicalities and supply within a short period, the minister said replying to a question from Mirza Azam of Awami League.

Nooruddin Khan answered a volley of questions relating to power import, generation transmission, system loss and load shedding.

Replying to a supplementary question from Opposition Chief Whip Khondokar Delwar Hossain, the Energy Minister admitted that there was power shortage

in West Bengal of India during the peak hour. If power has to be imported from India, it must be channelled from her national grid, he said.

He informed the House that two delegations — one sent by the present government and the other during BNP government — to see the prospect of power import from that country. "Now, we are considering the report placed before us by the delegation that visited India sometime back," said the minister.

Nooruddin Khan said, a local private company, Rural Power Company Limited, will start generating 60 MW power in Mymensingh from 1998 with ADB funding. Its capacity will be increased to 180 MG gradually. He also said that government has authorised the private

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Financial Loan Court Act amended

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday adopted an amendment to the Artha Rin Adalat (Financial Loan Court) Act by voice vote.

The amendment will help the government to deal with the loan defaulters more effectively, said Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria.

Piloting the amendment bill, the finance minister told the House that, if adopted by the House, the amendment would reduce complexities of the loan realisation process of various banks and financial institutions.

The bill was promulgated earlier by the president as an ordinance.

Before passage of the bill, Shaikh Razzak Ali, former Speaker and a BNP legislator, strongly supported the "apparent motive" of enacting the law.

He, however, argued that the proposed amendment would

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Tremendous scope for investment: Uk team

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of visiting British trade delegation, Sir Martin Laing, hoped that foreign investment would subsequently increase in Bangladesh if political stability and economic reform programmes continue and transparency in government's decisions attained.

He also stressed on development of infrastructure and minimisation of 'bureaucratic tangle' in government offices.

"Tremendous opportunities exist here for investment and people are very capable," he said addressing a press conference at a local hotel yesterday on conclusion of their three day visit.

Martin Laing, chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board, termed the visit "very fruitful" and hoped that the members of his delegation would benefit from it.

During the three-day visit, the high-powered British trade delegation held discussions with the leaders of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) and met a number of ministers including those of energy and power, communication and foreign affairs.

An agreement between the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) and Bangladesh government to increase CDC's operation in the country was also signed during the visit.

Coming of trade delegations

one after another from his country demonstrate Britain's keen interest in developing business with Bangladesh, Martin pointed out. More visits including one in February and two later this year will follow, he mentioned.

"My personal views regarding Bangladesh has changed after coming here and I will tell our entrepreneurs, if you can go to India or Pakistan for investment why not to Bangladesh?"

"The main responsibility for improving your poor image abroad lies with your foreign

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And now ghost telex bills...

By Staff Correspondent

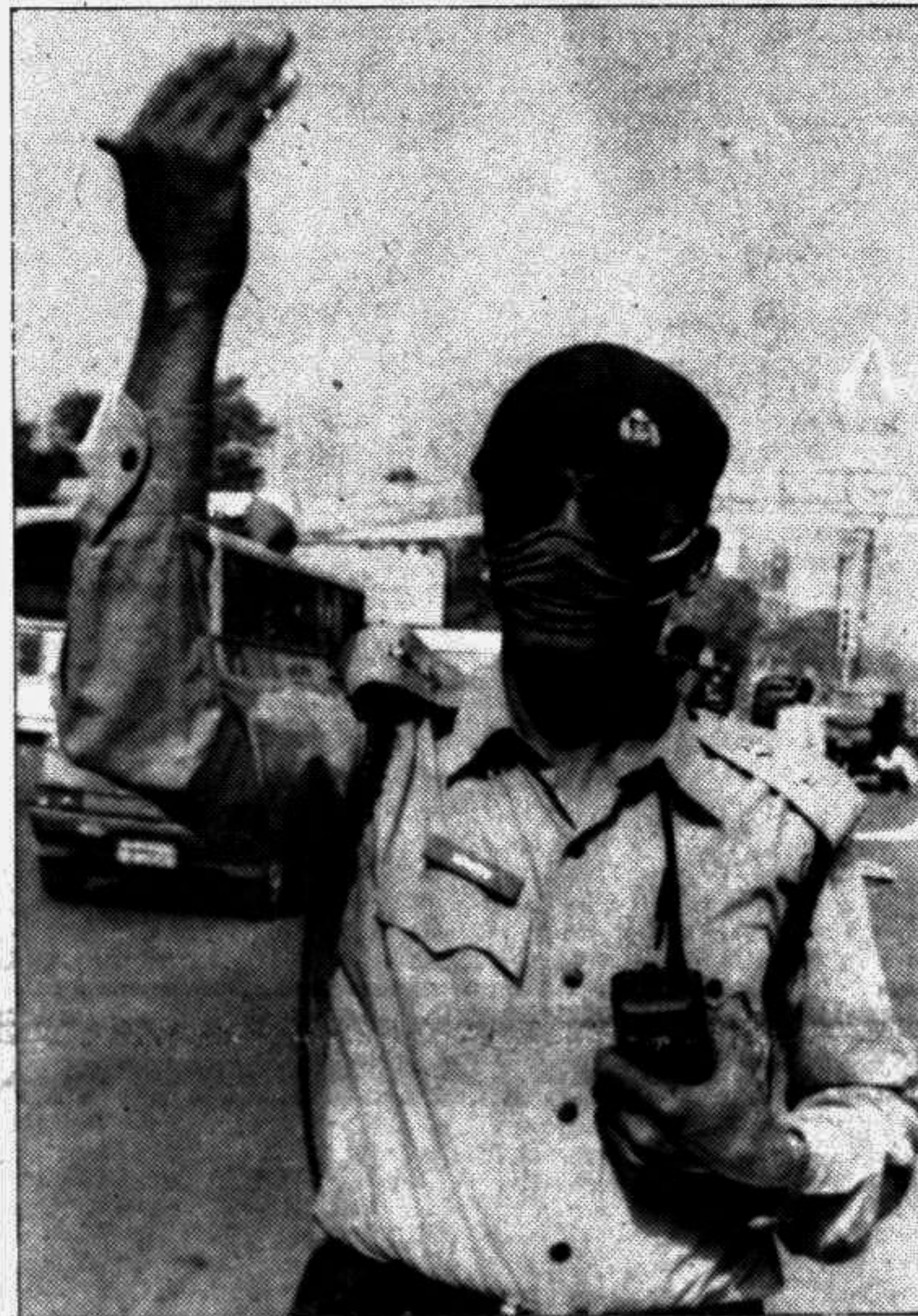
After 'ghost' telephone bills, the T&T Board is now issuing 'ghost' telex bills to corporate houses, businessmen alleged.

In October last year, a board meeting of the T&T Board had "mysteriously" decided that calls recorded against telex no. 632199 had 'actually' been made from telex no. 642429.

Accordingly, it sent two bills of Tk 4260.75 and Tk 776.25 to the business house having telex no. 642429 and asked for payment of the bills.

But this letter of T&T Board

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NOBODY IS IMMUNE FROM POLLUTION: A traffic sergeant, donned in a 'gauge mask', directing traffic on a city street. He is trying to save himself from the increasing lead and sulphur dioxide in the air, emitted by 65 per cent of vehicles plying daily on the capital's streets. The deadly smoke is responsible for an upsurge in asthma, chest and lung diseases. — Star photo

US not opposed to any regional cooperation for mutual benefit

By Staff Correspondent



Robin Raphael addressing a press conference yesterday.

The United States supports the idea of greater co-operation among regional countries for economic development and it was not opposed to the concept of sub-regional co-operation if it enabled taking up 'sensible projects'.

This was stated by visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Robin Raphael while addressing a press briefing yesterday prior to the completion of her six-day working visit to Bangladesh.

Responding to a question if the US supported the idea of sub-regional co-operation among Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the north-eastern states of India, Raphael replied, "the US was not opposed to the concept of co-operation, sub-regional or otherwise, if it enabled taking up of economic projects that were sensible."

She said, "The concept of co-operation strikes to be a very positive step. Of course, I do not know the details, I do not know much meat is there in it."

Raphael added that more co-

operation among Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the North-eastern states of India, might help in harnessing the huge water resources for mutual benefit of the region.

The US Assistant Secretary of State said that the US welcomed the water accord signed between Bangladesh and India.

At the outset of the briefing, she said that there were two reasons for her current trip to Bangladesh, which was her fourth.

The first was to attend the regional conference of US envoys to the region and the second was to hold bilateral talks with Bangladesh leaders.

Raphael said, with the exception of Afghanistan, all the South Asian countries were now striving to strengthen their democracies.

She said that Dhaka was chosen for holding the US regional meet because, not only the timing suited, but the Dhaka was increasing its focus in the arena of international

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Microcredit summit hopes to raise \$ 8b for the poor

From A Correspondent

NEW YORK, Jan 28: The microcredit summit, to be held next week in Washington, will have at its centre a powerful advocate whose charisma may be waning among her very own but who is still a popular voice on the global scale. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, who has long been known for her interest in promoting the cause of women and children, will be chairwoman of the summit. A White House spokesperson has confirmed that Mrs Clinton is taking the summit "very seriously."

The meeting will also give Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a rare opportunity to take the centre stage, showcasing the success of her

own country in extending microcredit to the rural poor, especially landless women. Bangladesh's Grameen Bank has already established itself as the premier microcredit organisation, setting a model for many countries, including the USA, to follow.

Describing Grameen Bank as the world's best-known microcredit institution, the New York Times reported on Sunday that the Bank has already lent one billion dollar to two million poor women and seen 97 per cent of its loans repaid. This "suggests that its clients are growing prosperous," it wrote. The Washington Post, which described Muhammad Yunus, Managing Director of the Bank,

as the "godfather of the (microcredit) movement," also ran a similar story.

The organisers of the meeting, which include several non-government organisations and the United Nations, are expecting the attendance of four heads of state or government, including Queen Sofia of Belgium. President Clinton is also expected to show up, probably as a spectator, during one of the sessions. Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to chair one such session. When asked, a White House spokeswoman refused to speculate on President Clinton's role at the summit. "We are obviously attaching great importance to the meeting, as evident

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Khaleda tells Raphael BNP to uphold parliamentary democracy

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday said her party is committed to upholding parliamentary democracy under any circumstances, reports UNB.

The opposition leader was talking to US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Robin Raphael who met her at her cantonment residence in the morning.

Party sources said they had a wide ranging discussion covering

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Steps to recover arrears of land development tax

A high-level official meeting yesterday decided to prepare a list of government and semi-government organisations and corporate bodies for recovering arrear land development taxes, reports UNB.

The coordination meeting of the Divisional Commissioners also decided to take serious steps against them who failed to repay the arrear land development taxes timely.

Land Secretary Syed Margub Murshed presided over the meeting attended by Divisional Commissioners of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet.

It also decided to complete the process of inter-district boundary demarcation line in the current dry season.

Assault on student Showcause on DU JCD leader

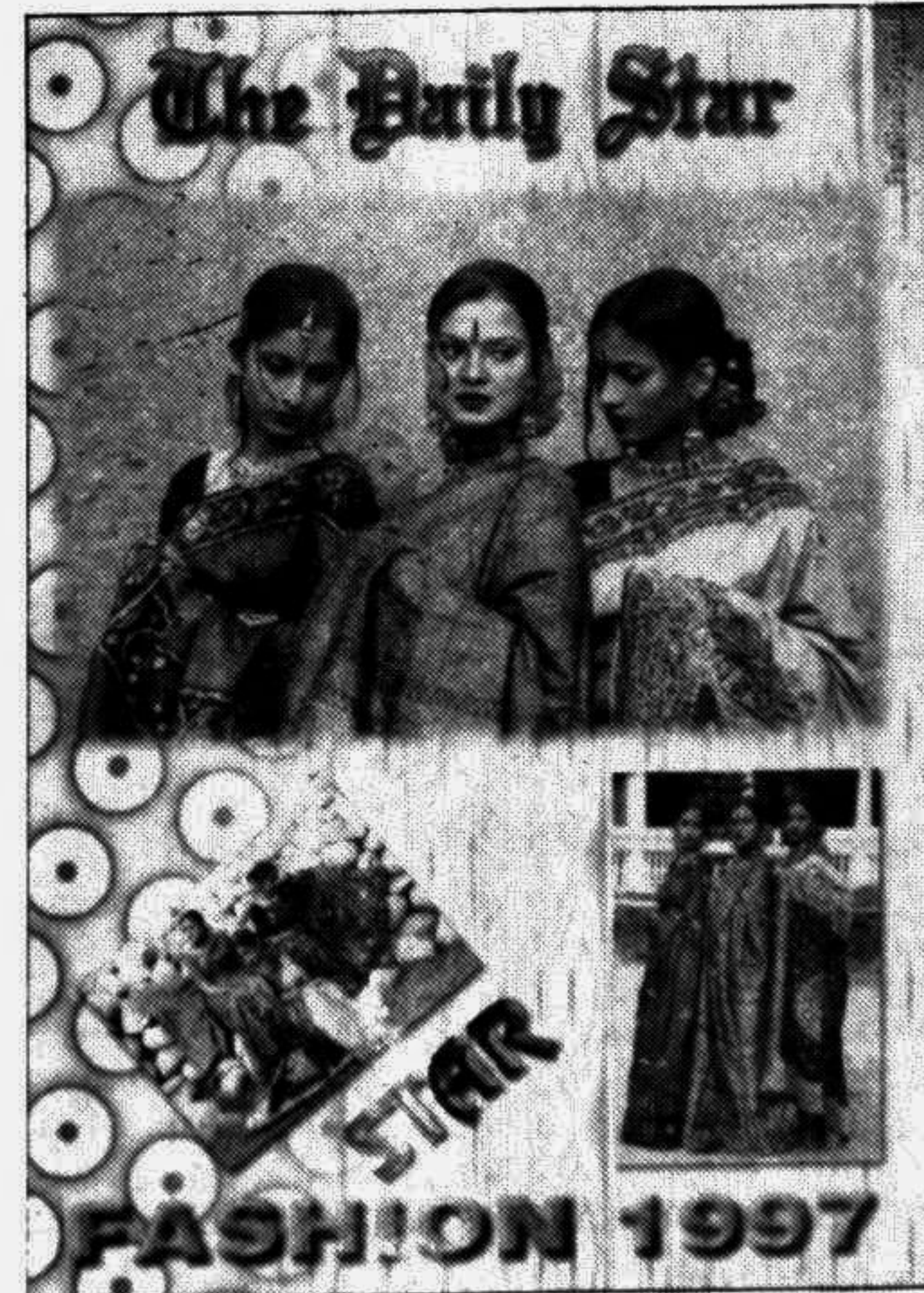
By DU Correspondent

The one-man enquiry committee, set up following the assault on a female student of Dhaka University last Wednesday has found Zakir Hossain, the JCD Zia hall unit president guilty, of the offence.

Zakir has been served with a showcause notice and asked to reply by February 3.

According to reports Zakir slapped a second year student of English department.

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