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## Rumour about removal of Energy Minister

Star Report

Strong rumour about changing the portfolio of Energy Minister Lt Gen (ret'd) Noor Uddin Khan became a hot topic of discussion in the city yesterday.

Rumour spread that Noor Uddin Khan was removed from the Energy Ministry and given the charge of the Works Ministry, while Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim has been given the Energy Ministry as an additional charge. However, the rumour proved to be without any substance.

From morning yesterday, this rumour was discussed in the offices of the Secretariat, the Press Club, different business centres and other private and public offices.

The rumour was at first believed by even the top-ranking officials of the Energy Ministry. The Energy Minister himself came to know about the rumour, apparently, when he came to the office in the morning, sources close to the Energy Minister said.

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## Four BNP leaders held under SPA

By Staff Correspondent

In a pre-dawn police swoop yesterday, four top-ranking BNP leaders were picked up and given 30 days' detention under the Special Powers Act of 1974. The arrested are: BNP Joint Secretary General Dr Khandakar Mosharrar Hossain, MP; central leader Abdul Mannan, MP; Mirza Abbas and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, President and Secretary respectively of Jatiyatobadi Jubo Dal, party's youth wing. All the four were ministers in the previous BNP government.

A press release faxed from the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police last night acknowledged arrest of the four BNP leaders under the Special Powers Act of 1974.

"The arrested have been given one month's detention to restrain them from activities affecting law and order and

other harmful acts," the release added.

Later, an identical announcement was made through a government handout. BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia, at an independence day function in the city yesterday, alleged that the four leaders of her party were arrested without any specific charges.

"We know false charges will be brought against them," she said, adding the arrests were made as the government got frightened by the planned hartal on March 23.

The arrests, that sparked off stormy protests by BNP activists across the city, came ahead of the eight-hour country-wide hartal on March 23 at the call of the major opposition party. This will be the first such

programme against the nine-month-old government of Awami League that returned to power after 21 years.

Plainclothes policemen, backed by the uniformed ones, simultaneously conducted raids at the opposition leaders' city residences, police said.

A son of Dr Mosharrar, talking to The Daily Star over telephone yesterday afternoon said that plainclothes and uniformed police personnel came to their residence at around 5:00 am. They could not produce any warrant of arrest he said, adding that his father was asked to go to the police station.

From the residence of Mirza Abbas, it was alleged that truckloads of policemen came there at around 5:30 am. They jumped over the boundary wall and entered

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## Protesters damage vehicles, ransack shops: 11 held

By Staff Correspondent

At least 15 vehicles were damaged and more than a dozen shops were ransacked in Motijheel and Ramna thana areas when angry activists of BNP and its front organisations went on rampage to protest the arrest of four BNP leaders.

Police arrested 11 people during the sporadic violence near the Jatiya Press Club, Purana Paltan, Kakrail, Bijoynagar and adjoining areas during the day yesterday, police and witnesses said.

A group of people, reportedly Jubo Dal activists, first brought out a protest procession from Motijheel area as the news of arrest of the BNP leaders spread at about 11 am, witnesses said.

The processionists started pelting stones at two restaurants and shops on Tophkana Road near the Jatiya Press Club. Later, police resorted to lathi charge to disperse the crowd.

Later, in the afternoon another protest procession was brought out in front of the central office of the BNP at Kakrail

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## Gulf War returnees 4551 Bangladeshis to get compensation under Category-A

By Reaz Ahmad

An amount of 11,377,500 US dollars will be disbursed soon as compensation among 4,551 affected Bangladeshis who had fled from Kuwait and Iraq during the Gulf War, official sources said here yesterday.

The 4,551 Bangladeshis had claimed compensation under Category-A, providing for 2,500 to 5,000 US dollars to each claimant, the sources said.

The United Nations Compensation Council (UNCC), a Geneva-based organisation of the UN Security Council transferred the amount to the bank account of the Bangladesh mission in New York on Thursday last, the sources said. The UNCC has faxed a message to this effect to Dhaka, the sources said.

Disbursement will start as soon as the money is available, they

added. A total of 71,291 affected Bangladeshis, who had fled from Kuwait and Iraq had filed claims for compensation.

The UNCC began work in December 1993 to resolve the worldwide compensation claims by persons affected by the Gulf War. It had approved the compensation claims by 4,551 Bangladeshis in its October 20, 1994 meeting but the money could not be disbursed due to non-availability of fund, the sources said.

Later, on March 23, 1995, the UNCC also approved claims of more 13,269 Bangladeshis. But the compensation money is yet to be channelled due to shortage of fund.

The UNCC earlier channelled

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## Cargo handling resumes at Ctg port

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 20: Cargo handling resumed in full-swing at Chittagong port from today following the end of a five-day strike enforced by port workers and port users.

The strike was called off with the signing of a tripartite agreement among the port authority, port users and the Mayor of Chittagong City Corporation Mohiuddin Chowdhury, official sources said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina earlier sent Saber Hossain Chowdhury, MP, with the task of finding an amicable settlement acceptable to all. Last night he met all the parties concerned at the city corporation office where the agreement was signed.

Under the agreement the organisations which were earlier given permission by the port authority to use private equipment will refrain from using them till April 5 pending a government decision.

## Govt determined to implement women dev policies: PM

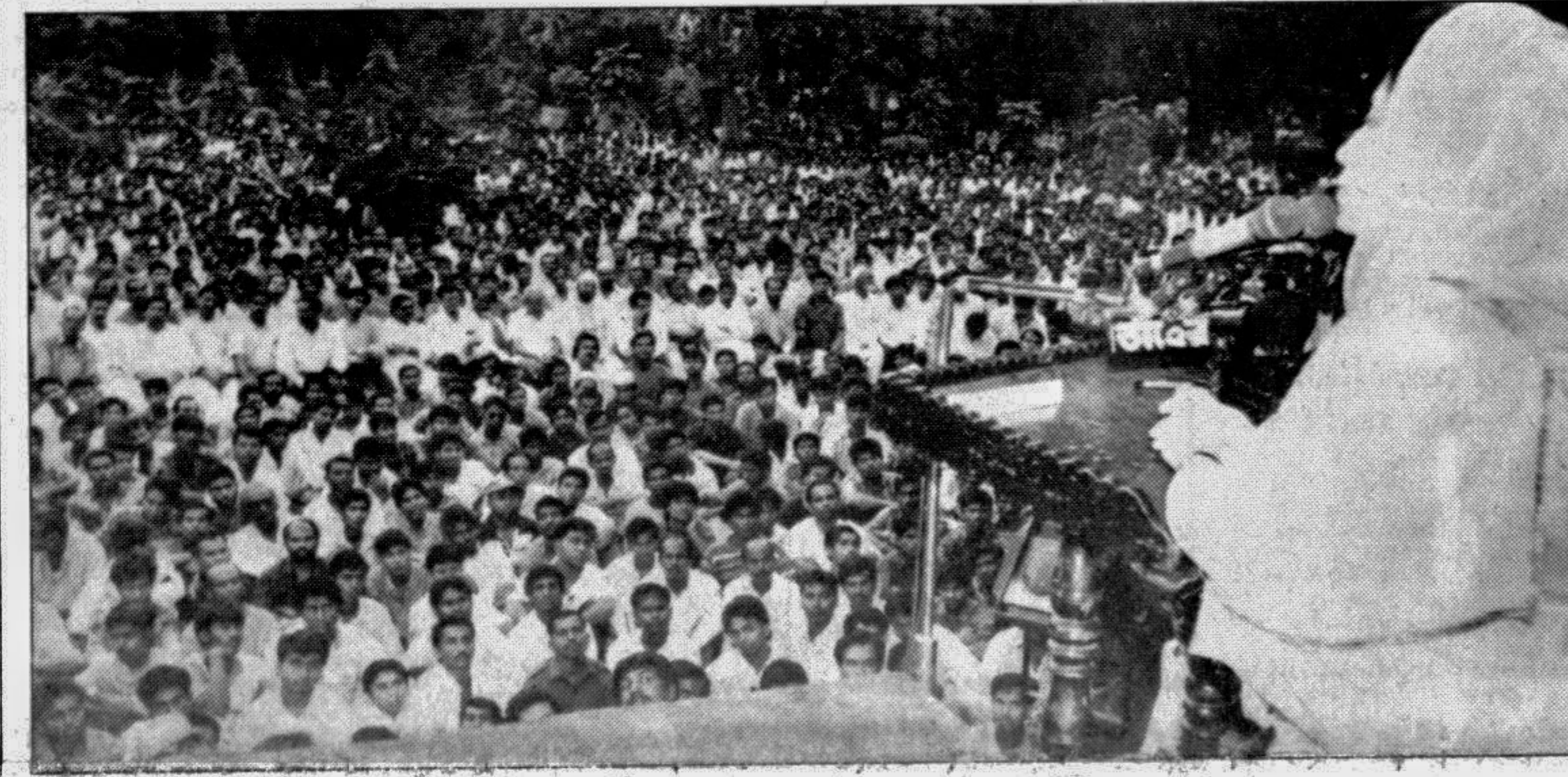
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the womenfolk of the country to participate in the economic activities for ensuring economic progress of the nation, reports UNB.

"People will be able to enjoy fruits of economic development and democracy if we can involve the women in development activities ensuring their social status," she said at a reception accorded to her at Women's Sports Complex in the city yesterday.

Mohila Muktiyoddha Sangsad accorded the reception to the Prime Minister on her being honoured the "Doctor of Law" by the University of Boston, USA.

The Prime Minister said it would be difficult for the nation to face the challenges of 21st century "development" if women cannot be ensured in political, economical and social sectors.

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BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia addressing the inaugural ceremony of the party's week-long Independence Day programmes at Ramna Batmul in the city yesterday. — Star photo

## Arrests can't halt BNP movement: Khaleda

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad and BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia warned yesterday that a greater movement would be launched to oust the government if it failed to run the country democratically.

"People don't want to see you (AL) in power. Annul the accord selling out the country, abandon plans of giving transit and forming sub-regional grouping, only then we can extend our cooperation", Begum Zia said.

The BNP chief was addressing the inaugural function of a week-long programme of her party in celebration of the Independence Day '97 at the Ramna Park in the city.

Convener of the Independence Day Celebration Committee, 1997, Mir Shawkat Ali chaired the function, that turned into a protest rally as the speakers strongly protested the arrest of four BNP leaders

yesterday morning. Referring to the arrest of BNP leaders Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Abdul Mannan, Mirza Abbas and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, the BNP chairperson told the gathering that they were arrested without any charges. "But we know it very well that now false cases will be filed against them."

Reiterating the hartal call that she had announced on Wednesday, Begum Zia said that "our movement cannot be halted by arresting the party leaders."

Speaking at the function, BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan also said that the four BNP leaders were arrested without any charges against them and the arrests were made without any warrant. "The 2 pm today, no cases were lodged against them."

BNP leaders Oh Ahmed, Ab-

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## Business leaders urge shifting of weekly holiday to Sunday

By Staff Correspondent

A group of top business leaders have urged the government to shift the weekly holiday from Friday to Sunday for the greater interest of trade and industry.

Country's exporters and importers are losing business transaction with foreign countries for two days in a week because of the weekly holiday on Friday, the business leaders said in joint statement yesterday.

In this regard, they mentioned that the weekly holiday was shifted from Sunday to Friday in September 1982 by the then government without any consultation with the leaders of trade and industry.

Since then the change has cost the country's economy very dearly as the main trading

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## 'Sub-regional grouping doesn't mean separate body' Govt only agreed to implement two accords signed in '80 & '93: FM

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad yesterday said the government has agreed to implement the 1980 Indo-Bangladesh trade agreement and 1993 SAPTA accord envisaging transit facilities for India, reports UNB.

"We have just reaffirmed our commitment to these agreements and agreed to take appropriate measures towards further fulfilment of these agreements," he told a crowded press conference at the Foreign Office in the city.

The Foreign Minister read out the relevant parts of the two previous agreements from the agreed minutes of the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) signed by him and his Indian counterpart I K Gujral in New Delhi on March 12.

The 1980 Indo-Bangladesh bilateral agreement signed during late President Ziaur Rahman's term provides for "mutually beneficial arrangements for the use of their waterways, roadways and railways for commerce between the two countries and for passage of goods between two places in one country through the territory of the other."

The 1993 SAPTA agreement signed during former Prime

Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's government provides for "developing and improving communication system, transport infrastructure and transit facilities for accelerating the growth of trade within the region."

"It's not the Awami League government... You know who was the President in 1980 and who was the Prime Minister in 1993," Azad told a questioner.

The Foreign Minister said it

PM leaves for Pakistan tomorrow

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will pay a three-day visit to Pakistan from March 22 at the invitation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to attend the extra-ordinary summit of the OIC, reports UNB.

The summit will coincide with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of independence of Pakistan.

The theme of Islamabad extra-ordinary OIC summit is preparing the Islamic world for the 21st century.

During her stay, Prime Minister

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is a must to go ahead with steps to expand trade between Bangladesh and countries in the region for the benefit of the country.

Asked whether giving transit to India is a must, he said "Everything is must... Whatever is needed, we will do for the economic benefit of the country."

Referring to border trade, the Foreign Minister said no decision has yet been taken to open border trade immediately.

At the JEC meeting, he said, the two sides agreed to set up a Group of Experts who would examine the matter and work out a practicable modality, after which such trade may open at a very limited scale, ensuring the interest of Bangladesh and its trade.

About railway, he said the two sides discussed the possibility of reopening the Petrapole-Benapole line as a viable alternative to avoid the bottleneck created by the heavy congestion of cargo traffic through the road link in the same area.

About the proposed sub-regional cooperation, grouping Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan within SAARC, the Foreign Minister said such co-

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## Commercial bank reform project to be implemented by December

The government has decided to implement the Commercial Banking Reform Project (CBRP) by December this year, Finance Ministry officials said in Dhaka yesterday.

The officials told BSS that Japan would provide the grant through World Bank to complete some 'unfinished reform' programmes in the areas like bank management, training and human resource development and technology development.

An inter-ministerial meeting held at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) early this month has empowered the concerned high officials of ERD or the embassy of Bangladesh in Washington to sign a contract

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## Khaleda addresses rally at Pabna today

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia will address a public meeting at Pabna Town Hall premises today, reports UNB.

The meeting has been organised by the district unit of BNP, said a press release.

## AL national council Preparatory body may be finalised today

Star Report

The Central Working Committee of the ruling Awami League meets this afternoon to review and expedite preparations for the party's belated national council billed for March 28-29.

The meeting of ALCWC, tenure of which expires on March 31, will be held at the Ganabhaban at 2 pm with

## Gold worth Tk 20.30 lakh seized at ZIA

By Staff Correspondent

A customs surveillance team seized gold bars and ornaments worth about Tk 20.30 lakh from a passenger at Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday morning.

Forty gold bars, weighing ten tolas each, and 200 grams of gold ornaments were recovered from one Khan Abdul Rahman who arrived in Dhaka from Dubai by an Emirates flight at about 9 am, airport sources said.

Abdur Rahman was charged

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## Investment of untaxed money No debate needed: Kibria

Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria yesterday said the government wants no debate on the morality of investment of untaxed money and urged such fund-holders to invest in the industrial sector, reports UNB.

"We could debate the morality of the investment of untaxed money, but we have to determine first which is important — debate on the issue or industrialisation of the country," he said.

"It is clear that we want investment for employment generation, economic growth and poverty alleviation... so those who have such untaxed money should come forward to invest shedding all hesitation," Kibria said.

The Finance Minister was addressing the 16th annual general meeting of the Bangladesh Tax Lawyers Association (BTLA) at the Jatiya Press Club auditorium in the afternoon.

Kibria informed the meeting that the modalities for the investment of untaxed money were fixed by the government

with suggestions from the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

The government recently relaxed laws for investment of untaxed money in the industrial sector, providing that sources of money will not be questioned if the money is invested in the industry.

The condition was that holders of untaxed money can invest in the industrial sector, but would not enjoy the tax-holiday facility, under which an industry is not levied tax for a certain period.

Kibria said the FBCCI proposed to the government to exempt investment given tax-holiday after levying a flat rate on the money to encourage them to invest in the industrial sector.

The government took the proposal and decided to provide all the normal facilities if the holders of untaxed money gave a 7.5 per cent tax on the money to be invested, the minister told the tax lawyers.

Kibria also pointed out that the government wants to in-

crease the quantum of portfolio investment and said the National Stock Exchange (NSE) would be established as soon as possible to encourage investors.

He said the government would have a portion of the ownership in the bourse in the initial period, but retire later from the ownership. Bank and financial institutions will be the owners of the bourse to ensure that there is no manipulation for personal interest.

The ownership, management and the brokers of the stock exchange would be separate which is absent now in the two bourses of the country, he said. "There is no such instance anywhere in the world and it is an illegal exception in our country."

He admitted that investors were affected because the brokers, management and owners were the same sets of people in the two bourses.

The finance minister said the government wanted to make the tax administration sound which will encourage invest-

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## Tk 5000 cr bank loans lying with 156 defaulters: BB Governor

Bangladesh Bank Governor Lutfur Rahman Sarker yesterday said Tk 5,000 crore outstanding bank loan was lying with only 156 defaulters, most of whom are industrialists, reports BSS.

He said 75 per cent of the total bank loan of over Tk 13,000 crore was held back by 1800 persons.

Addressing a discussion on "Combined efforts to implement government policies in industrialisation and investment" organised by Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI), the Bangladesh Bank Governor said the number of wilful defaulters was higher than the number of the people in real trouble.

At present, the country has four to five thousand sick industries, he said.

"A recent study revealed that most of the industries became sick due to inefficient management."

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## JP withdraws expulsion order on Kazi Zafar

By Staff Correspondent

Kazi Zafar Ahmed, former prime minister in Ershad regime and presidium member of Jatiya Party, who was expelled from the party on Tuesday, was reinstated yesterday.

The expulsion order was withdrawn within 36 hours of its issuance.

An announcement to this effect was made by Kazi Zafar in presence of newsmen at his residence yesterday afternoon. A copy of the order reinstating him in the party, cancelling the expulsion order was also shown to the journalists.

The reinstatement order issued by party Chairman HM Ershad was given immediate effect.

The scheduled press conference at the residence of Zafar yesterday afternoon was however, not held. Party colleagues crowded the residence. Prominent among them were Ismail Hossain Bengali, Sheikh Shahidul Islam and Razia Fayez.

The press conference is postponed," a smiling Zafar said, adding that the expulsion order was already withdrawn.

Sources concerned said that Anwar Hossain Manju, Secretary General of the party, went to the residence of Zafar yesterday morning.

Later both went together to the party chief's Gulshan residence.

Nazir Rahman, additional secretary general of the party, was already present there, as desired by Ershad.

Zafar in presence of Ershad and Manju for whatever had happened during the JP rally in the city on Tuesday.

Expulsion of Kazi Zafar from JP was announced shortly after the party rally at Manik Mia Avenue.

In his speech at the rally Zafar expressed his firm resolve to resist granting of transit to India, if necessary at the cost of life. This led to a scuffle with Nazir Rahman, who claimed Zafar was saying things that did not have approval of the party chief, according to reports.

Ershad had to intervene to restore order on the podium and also advise Zafar to cut short his speech.

## Velayati Hands over Rafsanjani's letters to President, PM

The visiting foreign minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr Ali Akbar Velayati called on President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday evening, reports BSS.

Dr Velayati handed over a letter of invitation of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed for attending the 8th OIC summit to be held in Tehran in December this year.

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## UNHCR office in Cox's Bazar gutted

COX'S BAZAR, Mar 20: An office of UNHCR engaged in repatriation of the Rohingya refugees was gutted in a fire today, reports UNB.

Furniture and documents of the office at Kutupalong Rohingya Repatriation Camp were burnt to ashes, police said.

Police, quoting FIR filed, by the UNHCR office in-charge, said it was an act of arson.

Deputy Commissioner, Police Super and high officials of UNHCR visited the spot.

Meanwhile, 34 refugees of seven families from Kutupalong and Nayapara camps returned today to their homeland.

## Police raid 2 DU halls: Arms seized

By DU Correspondent

Police recovered a sawed off rifle, 73 bullets and eight cock-tails from the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall of Dhaka University Wednesday night.

These were seized from a bathroom.

Police also recovered chappati from a bathroom of the Muktiyoddha Ziaur Rahman Hall during the raid.

The two halls are dominated by pro-BNP Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

## Bomb scare at city bank

By Staff Correspondent

A bomb threat at the IFIC Bank branch at FBCCI Bhaban at Motijheel commercial area created panic among its clients and officials yesterday.

An anonymous telephone caller told the bank officials in the afternoon that a timing device would go off in 20 minutes. But it turned out to be a hoax affair.

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