

Overcoming the Faults in Democratic Exercises

by K M Idriss Ali

To avoid fundamental faults as well as to enrich the democratic process, many countries like New Zealand, Turkey, some CIS members have adopted a policy to accept voting results on Proportion Vote Securing Basis. That is, a party, not the individual candidate, has the right to claim, gain and possess the number of MPs on the basis of the total votes cast in favour of that party.

DEMOCRACY teaches us to accept verdict and thus, rule of the majority. This means that consensus of the majority's opinion prevails in the exercise of the democracy to decide on any issue of national and international importance. At the demise of the communist power, democratic process is in vogue in most of the countries throughout the world. Yet, the normal process of democratisation is tempered in many countries by the muscle power of some vested individuals. The weaker section of the population cannot express their opinion freely as it ought to be under democratic system and instead, are compelled to cast their opinion against their very own will and in favour of others, simply being under the duress of the muscle power. This practice is prevailing in most of the Third World countries. However, it can be overcome with the improvement of national socio-economic structure and level of literacy in the country, as is evidenced in USA and Europe.

The major fault in democratisation process currently practised in most of the countries, particularly in the third world, appears to be completely different from the very concept of democratic lesson. It is learnt from the democratic concept that the verdict of the majority will be implemented; but is it really happening? Let us discuss what has been happening in Bangladesh, particularly in the parliamentary elections. In the last national election of 1996, Awami League secured about 37 per cent of the total national votes cast in its favour and 63 per cent voters cast their votes against Awami League; but Awami League is ruling the country against the very will of the majority of the population.

Similarly, BNP secured about 31 per cent of the total votes cast in the national election of 1991 and 69 per cent votes were gained by other parties against BNP; but BNP formed the government and ruled the country. In both these occasions, the very lesson of democracy that the majority's opinion must prevail is utterly ignored and the very concept of democracy, the "golden deer" of the modern age, is humiliated and put into trash. Similar phenomena are also prevalent in many other countries and in many institutions and organisations that boast of practising the so-called democracy in their affairs. Thus, the presently practised democratic process has enormous loopholes and thus demerits; some of them can be cited as follows:

1. The very concept and lesson of democracy that the opinion and verdict of the majority are to be followed and implemented are not at all maintained. This has been clarified above in the case of national election that the party securing less than 50 per cent of the total national votes cast rules the country.

2. Under the present prevailing system, the ruling party is tempted to behave autocratically. We have been observing it for the last few electoral terms, though some party is more autocratic than the others.

3. The presently democratic system tends to compel the ruling party to allure parliamentarians of other parties like "horse trading" to secure vote casting in its favour to attain 'majority's support' on any issue. And this is mostly out of egoism than on national interest. This breeds autocratic temperament in the ruling party.

4. In the present system, members of parliament are tempted to accumulate more

wealth by any means to spend it during the next election and secure votes under bribe or duress exerted by the hired musclemen.

5. To remain in power, the ruling party becomes dependent on muscle power to subjugate the opposing force. This induces a tendency for dependence more on muscle strength than on intellectual strength.

To avoid the fundamental fault and abnormal situation as well as to enrich the democratic process, many countries like New Zealand, Turkey, some of CIS members have adopted a policy to accept the voting results of national and organisational institutions on "Proportion Vote Securing Basis". This means that the party, not the individual candidate, will have the right to claim, gain and possess the number of Parliament Members on the basis of the total vote cast by the voters in favour of that party during the national election. Under this system of selecting number of parliamentarians, the party or parties possessing more than 50 per cent of national votes cast will have the privilege of forming the government to rule the country for the specified period; for Bangladesh, this period is five years. Any party defecting from the ruling cluster will automatically enrich the other party or parties to rule the country for the remainder of the specified five years. Since there is no scope of floor crossing in the existing law of Bangladesh, there will be no possibility of

"horse trading" in the determination of gaining majority in the assembly, because it is not the individual member of the parliament, but the party as a whole which is to decide whether to secede or to remain with the ruling cluster. The lawmakers may formulate the terms and conditions of the "operandi" of the proposed "Proportion Vote Securing Basis", for example, the party or parties securing less than the specific percentage (say 5 or 10 per cent) of the total national votes cast, may not claim or may not be eligible for any membership in the Parliament. The party will have the privilege and option to nominate and select the best possible parliamentarians based on their individual character, honesty, conduct, crime, national feeling, integrity and so on and not on their muscle power. In fact, the merits are more than the demerits in the proposed process; some of which are highlighted below:

1. The parties securing less than the specific vote (5 or 10 per cent) of the total votes cast will eventually form a group by compromising ideas and ideals among themselves in the interest of the nation and their own and will then prepare themselves to do better in the next election. Thus, a snow-ball effect among the political parties will come into effect and will eventually eliminate the smaller parties which contribute virtually nothing but chaos to the normal democratic process, and rather hamper the overall development in the country.

2. This process will grow idealism in the party system and will eventually eliminate the need of muscle power, begetting peaceful situation in the society. This may be the best achievement of the proposed system.

3. The expenses of the electioneering will understandably, be minimised.

4. The voters will feel free to cast their vote without any fear of terrorism.

5. This will also help musclemen to change their attitude towards humbleness and welfare activities from terrorism and evil acts, if they wish to secure party affiliation.

6. This process will bring the elite, honest, humble, intelligent, efficient and active people of the constituencies to the Parliament; in fact the cream of the society will come to the Parliament.

7. Thus, the Parliament will be enriched with people of quality and idealism in place of those many of whom even understand very little about the constituent assembly.

8. Then democracy will, in real sense, have firm footing in place of lip-serving.

9. This system will cultivate tolerance and tendency to accommodate and incorporate better ideas and suggestions of other collaborative parties and individuals.

10. The formation of government by the parties securing more than 50 per cent of the total votes cast is, in effect, the formation of the government on consensus, which the present government is claiming to be and, in fact, preaching.

11. Since the political parties are required under the proposed system to achieve the highest level of performance to attract popular confidence, they cannot afford to depend on muscle strength but excellence in all activities. There will be no need of occupying residential halls of students and educational institutions. This will free our students from the curses in which they are now. The people will have the best opportunity

to have their children well-educated within the prescribed period without any session jam.

There are so many positive factors which can be put forward in favour of the proposed "Proportion Vote Securing Basis" system, where the voters cast their votes in favour of a party instead of a candidate or person of the constituency. The enormous demerits encountered in the presently exercised system, some of which elaborated above, are not applicable to and prevalent in the proposed "Proportion Vote Securing Basis", because it is the party and not the individual candidate will receive the vote. So, if the goodwill of the party flourishes, the party will receive more confidence of voters. In fact, it is a clear choice between all the positive characters of a party and all the negative odds of muscle power. People are generally good. But they are made corrupt by the negative process of forcefully securing of votes either by bribe or under duress.

This article is written in a time when the national interest is at risks in all spheres, whether it is humanism, cultural national identity and national survival or personal security. According to recent reports published in many local daily newspapers, on an average 4

persons are killed, one woman is raped, 2 hijackings occur each day. There are many such incidents which are happening every day but remain unreported. On the other day, the honourable Communication Minister expressed grave concern about the chaos and indiscipline prevailing among many officials, employees and workers in many offices recent press reports also indicate that such situation of indiscipline also exist in the secretariat and other institutions. All these evils are occurring definitely as a result of the faulty exercise of democratic systems in the name 'true' democracy.

Moreover, once the ruling party shows tendency to depend on muscle power to contain any abnormal situation and then if the muscle power is, somehow or other, let loose for any reason, the situation goes out of control. This is the dark side of the faulty democratic exercises. It is, therefore, the time that the conscious people rise and do something to save the nation and the institution as well as the next generation.

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BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of Fourth Prosecution Witness

Cross-examination of Mohammad Qudus Sikder, a retired havildar and fourth prosecution witness in Bangabandhu murder case, began after he completed his deposition to the court July 28 (Monday). Excerpts from cross-examination of the witness by advocate Mohammad Hanif, state defence for absconding accused Abul Hashem Mridha:

Q: When have received promotion as havildar?
A: In January, 1975.
Q: Where was your posting then?
A: One Field Artillery at Comilla.
Q: Where were you first posted after coming to Dhaka in 75?
A: First at Ganabhaban.
Q: Who was your officer-in-command and Two-I-C (second in command) at Bangabhaban?
A: Capt. Abul Bashar was the officer and there was no Two-I-C.
Q: Who was the havildar major?
A: There was no havildar major.
Q: On which date you were posted at the No 32 residence of Bangabandhu?
A: I don't remember the date.
Q: On which date you performed your first duty at the Bangabandhu's house?
A: August 2, 1975.
Q: Where did you change duty on August 14?
A: At the house of Bangabandhu.
Q: Whom did you hand over the duty?
A: To Havildar Abdul Ghani.

Q: Do you carry arms and ammunition when you perform your duties?
A: We carry arms.
Q: Where was your guard-room?
A: Beside the lake, south of the road situated on the southern side of the Bangabandhu's house.
Q: Where you used to reside?
A: At the house of Ehsanuddin at road number 31.
Q: What's the distance of that house from Bangabandhu's house?
A: Approximately 300 yards.
Q: What was there south of the Bangabandhu's house?
A: Boundary wall of the house, road, lake etc.
Q: What weapon you carried when you were on duty at the house of Bangabandhu?
A: SLR.
Q: How many jaws were there with you?
A: Eight, including me.
Q: What did they carry?
A: SLR.
Q: Did you come to duty again on August 15?
A: Yes.
Q: Where did you meet havildar Abdul Ghani?
A: On the road, in front of Bangabandhu's house.
Q: Where did you receive the charge from him?
A: I hoisted the flag before receiving the charge.
Q: What was the time then?
A: The time was 5 O'clock.
Q: Where was Havildar Abdul Ghani at that time?
A: He was in the guardroom.
Q: You did not receive the

charge.
A: I could not receive the charge.
Q: Where did you take the line position?
A: Beside the boundary wall, south of the house.
Q: Was the main gate open at that time?
A: Yes, it was open.
Q: What did the others in the house do after you went to the line position?
A: The policemen went to their posts.
Q: Did you then notice Muhit-ul-Islam there?
A: Yes, I saw him in the reception room.
Q: Did you go to that room of Muhitul at that time?
A: I did not go to then, I went later.
Q: You did not mention Muhitul's name in your statement.
A: I didn't mention the name in the statement as I couldn't remember it.
Q: How far was the reception room from where you took the line position?
A: At a distance of four to five yards.
Q: Could you visualise the direction from where the firing came?
A: Yes, from the south side of the lake.
Q: What was on the south of the guardroom?
A: Lake.
Q: How wide is the lake?
A: I can't say.
Q: From where the firing was done — from upon the lake or from its bank?
A: From the bank.

Q: How far is the house of Bangabandhu from the bank of the lake?
A: Approximately 40 yards towards the north.
Q: How long the firing continued?
A: Five to 10 minutes.
Q: Can you say the range of rifle-shots?
A: Yes, effective for 300 yards and maximum range one mile.
Q: How long after the incident have you come to give witness?
A: About 21/22 years.
Q: How did you know that you have to give witness in the case?
A: I was summoned.
Q: When did you give statement to the IO?
A: 4/11/1996.
Q: Where did you give the statement?
A: To IO Abdul Kahhar Akanda on the third floor of the CID office at Malibagh.
Q: You yourself were involved with this killing.
A: This is not true.
Q: You were reliable and for this you were given the charge to look after the bodies and the house of Bangabandhu after the incident.
A: This is not true.
Q: You made false deposition as a tutored witness.
A: This is not true.

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Verbatim texts of further cross examinations shall be published as and when we receive them.

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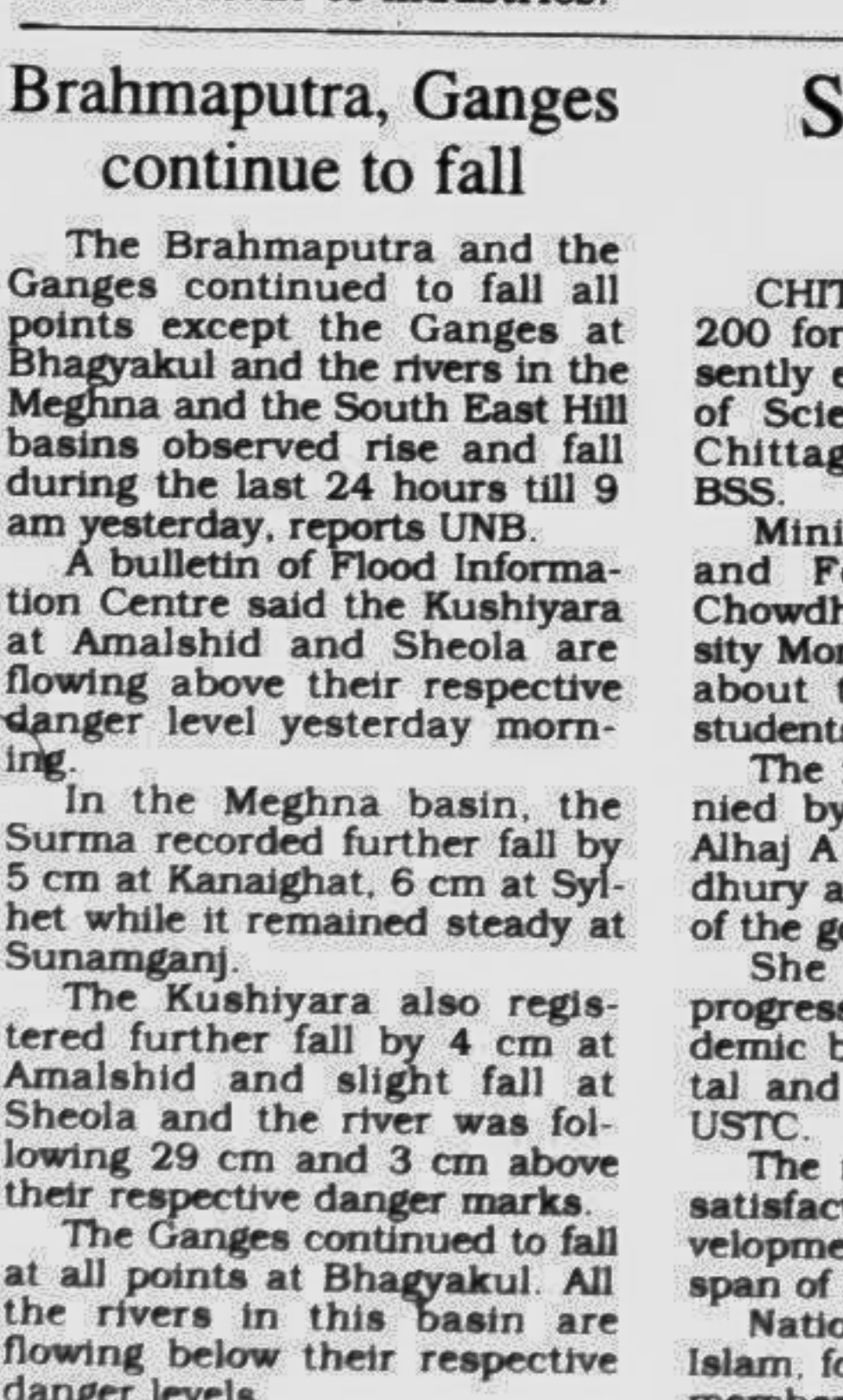
IAN FLEMING'S James Bond



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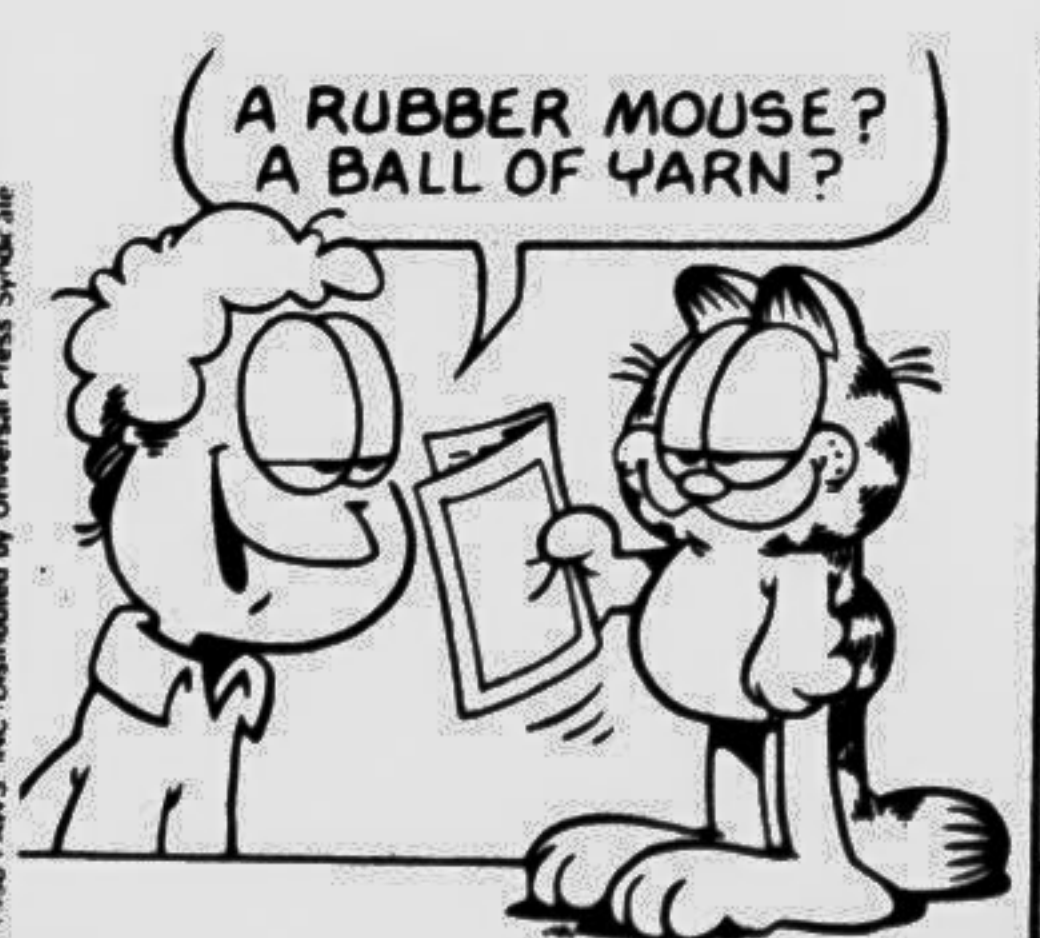


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by Jim Davis



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by Jim Davis



JIM DAVIS 2-26



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HERE and THERE

OCAB

The half yearly general meeting of the Overseas Correspondents Association Bangladesh (OCAB) was held at the National Press Club yesterday with its president Zahiduzzaman Faruque in the chair, reports BSS.

OCAB general secretary Farid Hossain presented a brief report on the activities of the organisation during the last six months and suggested activities for the next six months of the year.

Former OCAB presidents Hasan Sayeed and Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury and executive committee member Ataur Rahman discussed the general secretary's report.

The meeting decided to organise a seminar on "25 years of journalism in Bangladesh" in the later part of the year.

BOU

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) has signed a consultancy package agreement with a British consultancy firm involving Taka three and half crore, reports BSS.

The 34 man-month consultancy package programme will be financed by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and becomes effective from first of August.

As per the agreement, consultancy services will be given on academic programmes of schools, media production, information technology, printing, student support services, examination system and audit management.

BOU Vice Chancellor Prof M Aminul Islam and the resident representative of the consultancy firm, Cambridge Education Consultants Limited Martin Pitter Gilham signed the agreement Monday on behalf of their respective sides.

The signing ceremony was attended, among others, by ADB project officer Jamal Mahmud, representative of the consultancy firm Jake Ross and some senior officials of the university.

Banglacraft

A one-day mini workshop on implementation and Management of a Common Facility Centre was held at the auditorium of Bishwa Sahitya Kendra on Monday.

It was organised by Banglacraft with co-operation and support of German Federation of Small Business (ZDH) Partnership Programme, says a press release.

Selima Ahmad, chairman, ZDH Standing Committee, presented keynote paper. Among others Alauddin, chief designer of BSCIC, Nizamul Alam, Director (Commodity) of EPB, Al-haj Kazi Md Saiful Islam, vice-president of FBCCI addressed the workshop.

Jakarta keen to improve trade ties with Dhaka

Indonesia is keen to improve trade relations with Bangladesh, Executive Chairman of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Muchrim Hakim said yesterday, reports BSS.

Hakim, who is now on a three-day visit to Bangladesh, said Indonesia is always eager to expand bilateral trade with Bangladesh and the Indonesian chamber would extend all-out cooperation in this regard.

He said Indonesia will organise the 12th national Merchandise and Commodity Show in Jakarta from October 21 to 26.

Nearly 650 selected Indonesian manufacturers and exporters are expected to take part in the national exhibition.

The Indonesian chamber chief said Bangladeshi business community would be benefited by bilateral trade and joint ventures from the exhibition as it would be held after the forthcoming visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Indonesia.

The Prime Minister will be accompanied by a business group from Bangladesh.

Oil refinery

Dhaka, Tehran agree to carry out feasibility study

Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Lt Gen (ret'd) Muhammad Noor Uddin Khan yesterday said that setting up of a refinery in the country and other matters related to petroleum sector was discussed during his recent visit to Iran, reports UNB.

He returned home Monday night from Singapore where he spent one week on personal ground after completing his three-day visit to Iran.

Noor Uddin Khan said the progress of setting up of a refinery was reviewed at the formal talks with his Iranian counterpart.

Regarding the setting up of the proposed oil refinery, both sides agreed that a detailed feasibility study (DFS) be carried out by an independent consultant and on the basis of the report of the DFS both sides will take further necessary steps.

Khan further said that it was discussed that the refinery will be established with the assistance of government and private sectors of both the countries.

The matter of inclusion a third party or country into the project was also discussed. The minister said that the issue of financing would be resolved when the report of DFS will be available.

The minister said that the Iranian side had agreed to supply the remaining portion of the 70,000 tons of bitumen as was contracted earlier.

Bangladesh side opted for importing the remaining 52,000 tons of bitumen on C&F basis. Iran also agreed to supply 5000 tons of liquid petroleum gas (LPG) monthly on FOB basis.

However, Bangladesh will approach for the delivery of LPG when the necessary facilities for taking delivery of the LPG will be developed at Chittagong port.

Crafts Artisan Village Dev Project: advisory body formed

A five-member advisory committee was formed yesterday for the implementation of the Crafts Artisan Village Development Project of Bangladesh Folk Art and Crafts Foundation, reports UNB.

Former chief architect of the government Shah Alam Jahiruddin will head the committee which includes Dr Ashraf Siddique, Dr Wakil Ahmed, noted painter Quam Chowdhury and architect Rabiul Hossain.

The committee was formed at the 74th meeting of 15-member Board of Trustee of the Foundation held at Sonargaon in Narayanganj yesterday with State Minister for Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader in the chair.

The project is one of the five components of "Rupashi Bangladesh Programme" of the Foundation, turning its area into a mini-Bangladesh at a cost of Tk 65 crore.

The meeting also decided to introduce light and sound system in the Sonargaon Folk Art Museum.

Prof Rezaul Karim MP and secretary-in-charge of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs Syed Yusuf Hossain also attended the meeting.

BJMC to purchase 35-40 lakh maunds of jute this fiscal

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) will purchase 35-40 lakh maunds of raw jute through 157 centres of 32 jute mills in the current fiscal, reports BSS.

The jute would be bought to ensure a fair price for the jute growers.

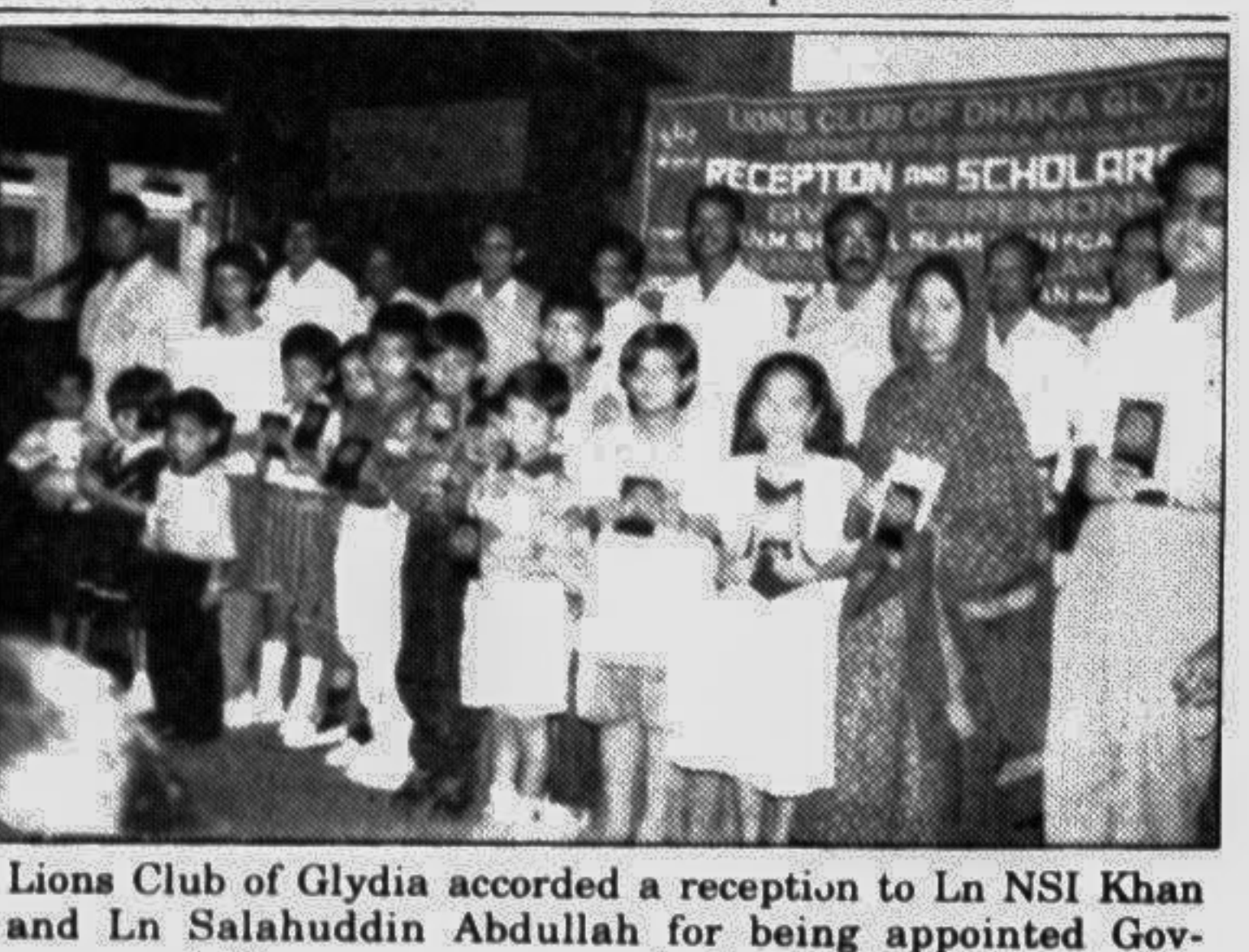
Jute Ministry Secretary M Abdul Hannan yesterday inaugurated a jute purchasing centre of Latif Bawani Jute Mills at Jamurik in Tangail district, the centre will buy jute at Taka 251 per maund.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by BJMC director (production, jute and research) M Mazirul Islam and general manager of the mill Syed Nasiruddin Ahmed.

Gano sangeet festival in Sept

Sammito Sangskritik Jote will hold a national festival of gano sangeet (mass song) in the city in September, reports BSS.

A festival celebration committee was formed yesterday with Ramendu Majumder and Golam Qudus as president and member-secretary respectively, said a press release.



Lions Club of Glydia accorded a reception to Ln NSI Khan and Ln Salahuddin Abdullah for being appointed Governor and Vice-governor respectively of Dist 315-B2.

Brahmaputra, Ganges continue to fall

The Brahmaputra and the Ganges continued to fall all points except the Ganges at Bhagyal and the rivers in the Meghna and the South East Hill basins observed rise and fall during the last 24 hours till 9 am yesterday, reports UNB.

A bulletin of Flood Information Centre said the Kushiyara at Amalshid and Sheola are flowing above their respective danger level yesterday morning.

In the Meghna basin, the Surma recorded further fall by 5 cm at Kanaighat, 6 cm at Sylhet while it remained steady at Sunamganj.

The Kushiyara also registered further fall by 4 cm at Amalshid and slight fall at Sheola and the river was following 29 cm and 3 cm above their respective danger marks.

The Ganges continued to fall at all points at Bhagyal. All the rivers in this basin are flowing below their respective danger levels.

Sajeda visits USTC

CHITTAGONG, July 29: Over 200 foreign students are presently enrolled with University of Science and Technology, Chittagong (USTC), reports BSS.

Minister for Environment and Forest Begum Sajeda Chowdhury visited the university Monday when she was told about the number of foreign students studying there.

The minister was accompanied by Mayor of Chittagong Alhaj A B M Mohiuddin Chowdhury and some senior officials of the government.

She was informed of the progress of construction of academic block, university hospital and the central library of USTC.

The minister expressed her satisfaction at the pace of development work within a short span of time.

National Professor Dr Nurul Islam, founder-president USTC, members of academic council,

JS body on Public Undertaking meet held

A meeting of the Public Undertaking Committee of the Jatiya Sangsad was held at Sangsad Bhavan yesterday, reports UNB.

The meeting held discussion on making necessary suggestions towards removing internal irregularities in different government offices and making those organisations free from corruption.

Presided over by the committee president, Whip Prof Rafiqul Islam, the meeting decided that the committee will hold meeting on 1st and 3rd week of every month.

It was also attended by Imran Ahmed, Advocate Fazle Rabbi, AKM Mosharrar Hossain, Abul Kalam Azad, M Dabirul Islam, Kazi Shamsur Rahman, Shah Mohammad Abul Hossain and Farook Khan.