

FOCUS

JAIL KILLING DAY

In Memoriam

Abominable Act

Tajuddin — the Man with a Golden Heart

by M Matiul Islam

Tajuddin was out and out a politician but distanced himself from politics when it came to administrative decisions...The Finance Minister's task was made more difficult by the fact that he held concurrent charge of both Finance and Planning — the two ministries which did not see eye to eye on certain policy and administrative issues ... Tajuddin struck a balance between his two roles and, often, between the two divergent views.

TAJUDDIN Ahmed took over as the Finance and Planning Minister in the Bangabandhu's first Cabinet sworn in on January 11, 1972 and on the morning of January 12, I received an urgent summons from the Prime Minister to meet him when he conveyed his decision to appoint me as the Finance Secretary.

Prior to that I did not have any occasion to meet Tajuddin or get acquainted with him and it was apparent that the Prime Minister had no time to consult his Finance Minister on my appointment. My civil service experience taught me that no secretary can function effectively unless he receives close cooperation and active support of his minister and carries with him the minister's full trust and confidence. It was specially true during that period of Bangladesh with its financial sector in total disarray due to liberation war and the consequent dismemberment of Pakistan. It would call for effective and quick policy and administrative decisions almost on a day to day basis to put the devastated financial sector back to the rails.

The Government coffers were empty, the foreign exchange reserve was zero (except for US\$ 5 million deposited by the Govt. of India with their reserve Bank in Bombay in the name of the Bangladesh Government) and all foreign exchange earnings arising out of exports from the then East Pakistan until 16 December, 1971 were pre-empted by the Government of Pakistan. Imports of essential consumer goods and industrial raw materials had to be resumed without delay before acute shortage developed and industries shut their doors. The cost of running the Government had to be met without the benefit of a budget, new departments and ministries created, foreign missions opened and preparation taken in hand for the building up of the budgetary proposals for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1972. With all these and many other problems looming large in the horizon, my first task was to establish my credentials with the minister and then meet the challenge head on.

On January 17 before taking over my new assignment, I called on the finance minister at his Hare Road residence. There were dozens of visitors waiting to see him. As he came down the stairs, I introduced myself and explained that I had come to seek his guidance and advice on some of the urgent problems which needed his attention. No sooner we started, than a lady came crying and wailing and entreated the Finance Minister to save and rescue her husband who had been mistakenly picked up by the Mukti Bahini as a collaborator. Tajuddin was visibly moved and immediately called the IG of police to instruct him to rescue the unfortunate victim. Realising that this was no time to discuss any important financial matter, I hurriedly left deciding to meet the minister when he settled down in his office.

Thus began two years of my close association with a man who led the war of liberation in the name of Bangabandhu who he was languishing in Lyallpur central Jail facing trial on charges of treason and for waging a war against an established Government. Tajuddin was out and out a politician but distanced himself from politics when it came to administrative decisions. He gave his officers, specially me, a large measure of freedom of action, but was quick to react and rescind any order if he considered it inexpedient and inappropriate. He had a touch of quick temper and could point blank reprimand an officer, but would make immediate amends if he thought that would harm the officer in anyway. During the two years that I was with him, there were ups and downs in our relationships, but finally when I left the ministry for my own reasons, I departed with highest regard and respect for the man who truly had a golden heart.

My style of work was that I personally took important files and cases to the minister, explain the cases to him and obtain his decisions. In some cases the minister would record his order and in others, I would record his decision and issue the order. One such case was the appointment of an administrator of the Industrial Development Bank before it was re-structured as BSB. The Finance Minister read through the file, saw my recommendation and asked me whether I had checked on the credential of the officer — if he was a collaborator or not. My immediate response was that my recommendation was based on his qualification and experience as a development banker and that his political credentials — whether a collaborator or not — is beyond my jurisdiction and that the finance minister should verify from his own intelligence sources about the political background of the candidate. If that was considered important, the Finance Minister, without any further hesitation, approved the appointment.

Tajuddin Saheb wrote excellent Bengali and had a beautiful handwriting. The Prime Minister had decided that all the files in Secretariat should be written in Bengali and this provided an opportunity to the Finance Minister to display his mastery of the language. But for me it was the opposite. First, my Bengali handwriting was awful and unreadable. Secondly, it took a long time for me to identify the correct and appropriate Bengali words to express my thoughts clearly and forcefully. I therefore sought permission from the Finance Minister and Prime Minister to write my notes in English in the interest of quick disposal of files and cases. The permission was quickly granted and during my two years in the ministry I continued writing my notes in English and the Finance Minister, in Bengali.

At one point, I decided that the time was now ripe to regulate travels to India through the introduction of "P" form which was essential for travelling to other countries. I instructed the Bangladesh Bank to issue the necessary orders which was promptly done. I did not fully gauge the political backlash that this would cause in Bangladesh as well as in India. The matter was promptly brought to the notice of the Finance Minister and his reaction to this order, as he told me, was: Mr Islam, this order was going to drive a wedge between the relationship of India and Bangladesh. This was too premature and should be withdrawn forthwith. The order was withdrawn immediately, but when reintroduced in a few months, there was no ripple of protest from either side of the border and the Finance Minister also did not object.

Tajuddin was also an artist of sorts. He took great interest in the design of the Bangladeshi currency notes and took pains to improve on the design of each and every currency note printed during that period. The taka symbol of "T" was his work of art. The Finance Minister's task was made more difficult by the fact that he held concurrent charge of both Finance & Planning — the two ministries which did not see eye to eye on certain policy and administrative issues, notably, role of private sector in industry, restructuring of the public enterprises, staffing of Planning Commission etc. The Finance Minister had to strike a balance between his two roles and, often, between the two divergent views. It was a simple matter for the Finance Minister to overrule the views of the Finance Secretary and bring the dispute to an end. But he scrupulously avoided that situation and came to terms with the fact that the Finance Ministry should be allowed to express its views freely and openly even if it ran counter to his own views as a Planning Minister. In one case, in a Cabinet meeting, I had almost succeeded in blocking the passage of a recommendation made by the Planning Commission with the approval of the Planning Minister to break up EPIDC and convert it into ten corporate bodies. Tajuddin was far from a hardliner when it came to seeking development assistance from the West, as some people depicted him to be. Immediately after McNamara's whirlwind half-day trip to Bangladesh in January 1972, the Finance Minister instructed me to process our application for the membership of IMF and World Bank. It was a long drawn procedure which called for membership of IMF first before one could apply for membership of the Bank. Many a time, he made anxious inquiries about the progress of work and as soon as the membership of IMF and World Bank came through in June or July 1972, he was nominated by the Prime Minister as the Governor of IMF for Bangladesh, which was in time for him to attend the Annual Meeting of the World Bank and the IMF in Washington in September 1972. The Bank-Fund annual meet was preceded by the meeting of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers held in Marlborough house in London, which we all attended.



Tajuddin Ahmed addressing a public meeting in Dhaka (early 1971).

In Washington, the high point of the visit by the Finance Minister was his meeting with McNamara who had some misgivings about Tajuddin's attitude towards World Bank's assistance. The open and pragmatic approach of Tajuddin took McNamara by surprise and one could not but notice the joy in McNamara's face that his first encounter with Tajuddin went off very well.

By the time we went to Washington in September 1972, our foreign exchange reserve had soared to around US\$ 400 million from zero in January of the same year. With dollar dominating the world currency market, it was considered a princely sum and a comfortable reserve. We were, therefore, debating whether to accept IMF offer to extend to Bangladesh export short-fall adjustment credit (or perhaps it had a different name) routinely given to a newly emerging developing country to tide over the initial shortfall in its export earnings. Tajuddin quickly ended the debate by deciding to accept the IMF offer which had no strings

attached. What endeared him most to us was his human quality. During our stay in London in connection with the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting, the Managing Director of Janata Bank, Khairul Kabir, approached me with a request to allow Janata Bank to undertake a study of the problem and the prospects of remittances by the Bangladeshis in UK, which was a good source of foreign exchange earning for Bangladesh. Simultaneously, he proposed the name of Mumtaz Iqbal, chief of ICB, for the job. I knew Iqbal was at that time in London in connection with the medical treatment of his wife. I gave my assent to the proposal on condition that the Finance Minister also approved it.

As we all assembled at the Peacock Lounge of the London Airport for our trip to Washington on conclusion of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting and were preparing to board the PANAM all-first-class passenger flight, Khairul Kabir hurriedly came to me asking for my approval on an application he prepared proposing appointment of Iqbal for undertaking the study. On being assured that he had taken Tajuddin's verbal approval, I, in my usual fashion, wrote on the margin of the application: Discussed with the Finance Minister. As decided by him, £ 500 was sanctioned for the study by Mumtaz Iqbal. In the plane I mentioned this to the Minister and he nodded his head in agreement.

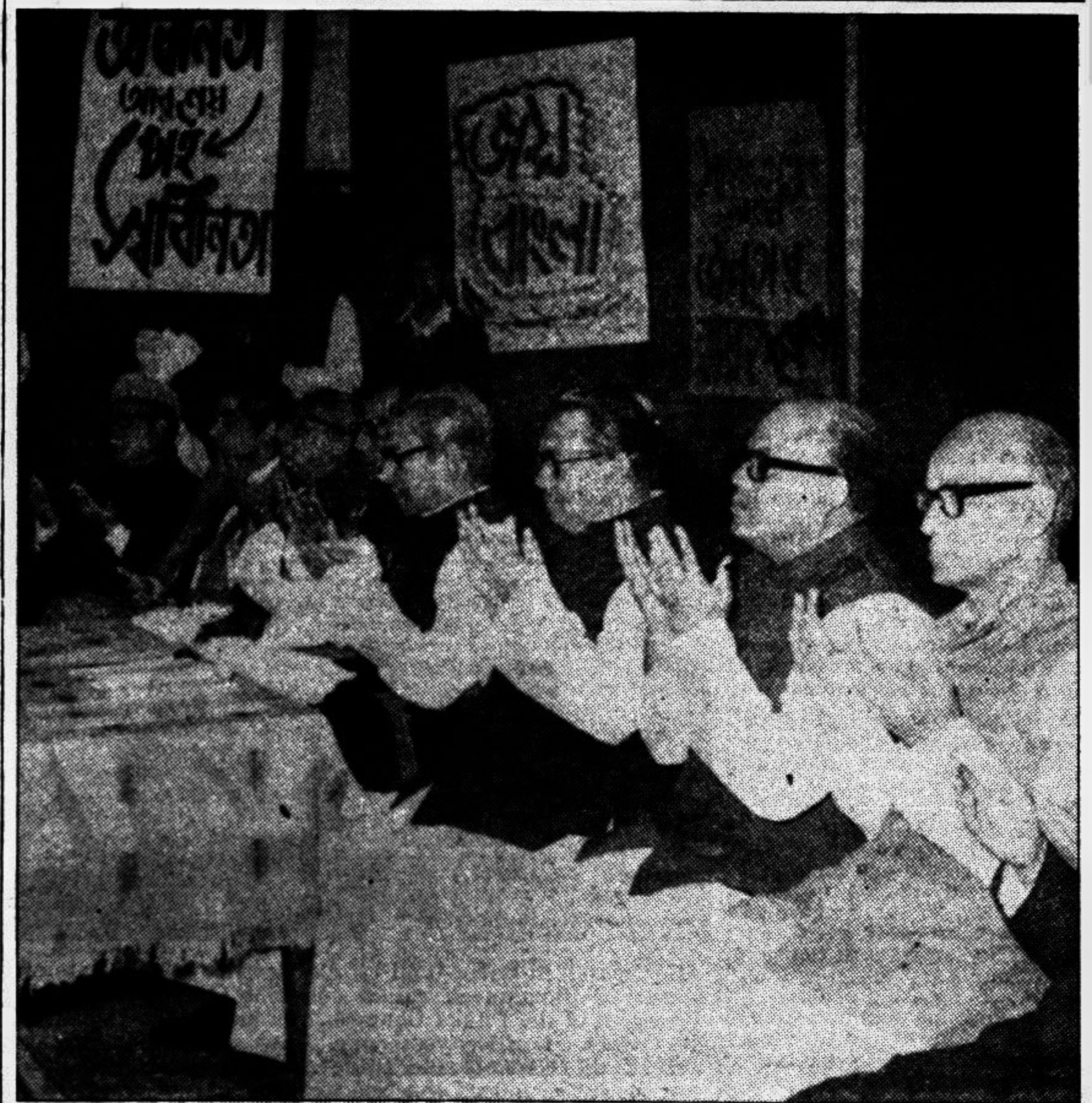
Two years later, in 1974, when Tajuddin went to Washington to attend his last Bank-Fund Annual Meet, I was posted in the World Bank. In his hotel suite he greeted me with his usual warmth and suddenly, out of context, said that in Dhaka, which I left a year ago, I must have left behind a number of good friends. I could not understand this oblique reference, but what followed was beyond belief. He said that the same piece of paper on which I had approved appointment of Iqbal on a remuneration of £ 500 for undertaking a study of remittances from UK and about which I took his approval on the plane journey to Washington was brought in by the chief of the Anti-corruption Dept in Dhaka seeking the Minister's permission to prosecute me on the ground that I made a false statement therein invoking Finance Minister's name to benefit a friend.

The writer is a former Finance Secretary.

Unheard of in History

by Saiful Alam Lytton

As November 3 is a sequel to August 15 incidence, the ulterior motive might be to create a vacuum of leadership so that the course of history could be reversed.



At an Awami League working committee meeting, 1971 (before 25th March): From right—Mansur Ali, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed and Sheikh Mujib.

TWENTY-TWO years ago, on November 3, 1975, the bravest sons of the soil were brutally killed in supposedly safe custody of Dhaka Central Jail. They did not know what their offences were. No charges were brought against them. They were not even found guilty by any tribunal. They were not produced before any court for justice. Yet they were mercilessly slaughtered at the darkest hour behind the secured bars of Dhaka Central Jail. The entire nation was in deep sleep when this heinous crime was being committed. It is unheard of in the world history — such abominable killings.

The insurmountable task of the four assassinated national leaders was undoubtedly their organizing the national independence struggle and, in particular, steering the liberation war in the absence of the father of the nation. They did their avowed job honestly, sincerely, dedicatedly and above all successfully. It was possible as they had cent per cent confidence in the leadership of Bangabandhu (also murdered months back) and his ideals. In the absence of Bangabandhu (taken prisoner by the Pakistanis) the entire struggle against the Pakistani Military Junta came for a moment to a standstill. The bottomline was who would lead the nation to its ultimate objective. But their concerns diminished in another moment with the news of forming Mujibnagar Govt under the leadership of

Bangabandhu. In his absence Syed Nazrul Islam was made Acting President. Tajuddin Ahmed was made Prime Minister with M Monsoor Ali and A H M Kamruzzaman as influential members of the cabinet. In the absence of Bangabandhu, the significance of the formation of Mujibnagar Govt was very crucial.

During the nine-month long bloody war of liberation the successes and failures of the Govt-in-exile need no elaborate discussion. Suffice it to say that successes surpassed failures in terms of victory. However, all were not quite on the north-eastern front. Conspiracies cropped up but nipped in the bud due to timely interference of the ever alert anchors of that government. The political acumen, far-sightedness, organizing capability and, above all, sagacity of the four national leaders acted as catalyst to any dispute. Their integrity to the leadership of the father of the nation and war of liberation was beyond question. They had to fight on two fronts. One in spearheading the war inside Bangladesh and another in trying to mitigate sufferings of nearly one crore refugees who took shelter in the neighbouring country.

One may be surprised to think how it was possible for that government to successfully lead a gigantic mission like the liberation war as its anchors neither had any military training nor were revolutionaries in real terms with adequate prac-

tical experiences of guerilla warfare. Rather they were nationalists in their words and deeds. Arguably though they were literally not experts on military or guerilla warfare yet they had the guidelines of those war strategies before them. Their leader enunciated to them publicly in his historic March 7, 1971 speech how to combat enemies if he was not available to instruct them. They followed the instructions of their leader in toto and snatched away victory.

Despite such remarkable contributions in building a nation-state these leaders were not spared by the killers. Who should be held responsible for this barbaric atrocity? Obviously those self-confessed killers and their patronizers of August 15, 1975 occurrence. As November 3 is a sequel to August 15 incidence, the ulterior motive of which might be to create a vacuum of leadership so that the course of history could be reversed. But they could not be successful in their attempts. After nearly 21 years' relentless struggle against autocratic and pseudo-democratic forces the main force of independence and liberation war could come to power in a free and fair election held in 1996.

The main responsibility now fully lies with this government to unearth the real design behind these killings and bring the culprits to book — so that none in future dares commit such crime.

Metropolitan

BSP hails abolition of press trust

Bangladesh Sangbadpatrika Parishad (BSP) yesterday felicitated the government for abolishing the 'press trust', in view of the demand of the organisation, reports BSS.

President of the organisation Kazi Shahed Ahmed said that the press trust took Taka 14 crore bank loan and received the lions share of government advertisement amounting to Taka 19 crore during the former BNP government. It said one of the election commitments of the present government has been fulfilled through the abolition of the press trust papers.

The BSP thanked the government for providing Tk 26 crore towards payment of dues and compensation to the journalists, employees and press workers of the trust owned newspapers.

The BSP said that a delegation of the organisation met the Prime Minister on June 25 and discussed with her problems in the newspaper industry. The main five demands of the BSP included abolition of the press trust, distribution of advertisement on the basis of audit bureau of circulation (ABC), a minimum allocation of Tk fifty crore advertisement, minimum cut insertions of each advertisement and increase in the rate of government advertisement.



The first interschool quiz contest organised by The Gregorian Association was held Friday at the school premises in the city. Faezul Huq, State Minister for Jute and Textiles, distributed prizes among the winners. St. Joseph's High School was the champion and St. Gregory's runner-up.

Weather

Dry weather forecast

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry across the country in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Met Office says night temperature may remain nearly unchanged throughout the country.

Country's highest temperature 33.1 degree Celsius was recorded at Chittagong and the lowest 17.0 degrees at Srirangal.

The sun sets today at 5:18 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:06 am.

Maximum and minimum temperatures and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	31.5	19.0	63	62
Chittagong	33.1	22.0	77	70
Rajshahi	30.2	19.6		80

Training workshop on financial reporting opens

A 10-day training workshop on financial reporting, jointly organised by the Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA) and the Financial Times of London, began in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

Sixteen journalists — 10 from Dhaka-based newspapers and news agencies and six from Chittagong, Khulna, Sylhet, Barisal and Bogra — are participating in the workshop.

Martin Mulligan of the Financial Times, who is the course director, opened the training programme at the National Press Club.

Presided over by Hassan Shahriar, president of the CJA Bangladesh chapter, the inaugural session was also addressed by its Secretary General Farid Hossain.

College girl kidnapped in Khulna

By Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Nov 2: Shilpi Roy, 16, a student of class twelve of Khagendra Nath College at Bataghata thana was abducted by three youngmen at arms point on Tuesday.

The incident occurred while she was returning home from college. Police could not rescue the girl, daughter of a farmer of Boyardanga village, till this evening.

Results of 100 taka prize bond

The ninth draw of the 100 taka prize bond was held in the city yesterday with Mollah Golam Sarwar, Additional Divisional Commissioner of Dhaka in the chair, says a press release.

Following are the results of the draw.

১ম পুরস্কার টকা ১,০০,০০০/-	০৪৯১৪৪
২য় পুরস্কার " ১,২৫,০০০/-	০৪৯১৪৪
৩য় পুরস্কার " ১,০০,০০০/-	০৪৯১৪৪
৪য় পুরস্কার " ৫০,০০০/-	০৪৯১৪৪
৫য় পুরস্কার " ১০,০০০/-	০৪৯১৪৪
৬য় পুরস্কার " ৫,০০০/-	০৪৯১৪৪
৭য় পুরস্কার " ২,৫০০/-	০৪৯১৪৪
৮য় পুরস্কার " ১,২৫০/-	০৪৯১৪৪
৯য় পুরস্কার " ৬২৫/-	০৪৯১৪৪
১০য় পুরস্কার " ৩১২.৫০/-	০৪৯১৪৪



Hugh Tweed, Managing Director, Bangladesh Tobacco Company Ltd, opening the commercial operation of the Gravure Printing Project of Mast Packaging & Paper Converting Ltd. Communications Minister Anwar Hossain, Tasmina Hossain MP, Mast Director Zakir Hossain Nezum and BTC production director Saiful Islam also seen in the picture.

CCC to hold rally at Time-Bangla premises today

The Central Co-ordination Committee (CCC) of four bodies of newspaper industry will hold a demonstration at Times-Bangla premises today in support of its demands to resolve present stalemate in Times-Bangla Trust owned newspapers and implement the 5th Wage Board Award, reports UNB.

The CCC leaders urged the authorities concerned to maintain stability in the Trust-owned newspapers and pay the five-month arrear salary of the journalists and employees of the Dainik Bangla.

BIA offering 'actuarial science' course

Bangladesh Insurance Academy (BIA) is offering 'Actuarial Science' course for the first time in Bangladesh. Entrance examination for enrollment of the first batch will be held today and tomorrow at the Academy Bhaban at 53 Mahakhal in association with Actuarial Society of India, says a press release.

Admit cards have already been sent to the candidates for Oct '97 session. Minimum qualification for entry to the course is HSC pass with good record in Mathematics and English.



'Muktir Gaan' gets special jury prize

'Muktir Gaan', the acclaimed documentary on the Liberation War, was awarded a Special Jury Prize at the first South Asian Documentary Film Festival recently, held in Kathmandu, says a press release.

The festival, organised by the South Asian Journal, Himal, was held Oct 25-28. The Best Film award went to the Nepali film, 'The Spirit Doesn't Come Anymore'. Fifty-two films from five countries of the sub-continent were selected for the competition, judged by a three-member Jury Board representing Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India.

In addition to 'Muktir Gaan', two other films were selected for the competition from Bangladesh 'Achin Pakhi' by Tanvir Mukammel and 'Voices of Children' by Tareque and Catherine Masud.

The makers of 'Muktir Gaan', Tareque and Catherine Masud, were present at the Festival to receive the award.