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# The Daily Star

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## No exaggeration in Human Rights Report, says US embassy

**By Staff Correspondent**  
The US embassy in Dhaka yesterday said that there was no exaggeration in the contents of the Human Rights Report on Bangladesh and said it was based on a wide variety of sources.

The government in an unprecedented move reacted sharply to the report Wednesday by summoning the US ambassador in Dhaka John C Holzman to the Foreign Ministry and handing over an aide memoire. It also bitterly denounced the report by stating that it contained "inaccuracies, half-truths and unsubstantiated allegations."

A spokesman of the US embassy, when asked to comment on the government reaction, said, "In preparing the annual human rights report, the US State Department seeks to be thorough, fair and objective. The report is based on the information from a wide variety of sources."

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## Large-scale exodus of experts from Petrobangla Monitoring of foreign oil cos comes to virtual halt

**By Sharier Khan**  
The government's system for monitoring the activities of foreign oil and gas companies working in Bangladesh has virtually come to a halt due to shortage of adequate manpower following large-scale exodus of Petrobangla experts to foreign companies.

The collapse of an efficient monitoring system would put Petrobangla in a terribly disadvantageous position, threatening the exploration and development of gas and oil and turning it into a losing concern for the country, energy experts and Petrobangla officials said.

A large number of expert-level officials of Petrobangla's spearhead, the Petroleum Concession Division (PCD), and geologists from BAPEX have left their jobs in the last one year.

Last year, some 15 geologists out of total 25 in BAPEX took four to five years' lien to work for foreign companies abroad.

The PCD, which deals with foreign oil companies, lost two high officials last year and one Director and one Deputy General Manager last month. Of them, three joined oil companies working in Bangladesh and one left for USA.

Only one person was taken in after the four officials left the PCD.

"We are afraid that more officials will go in near future," said a Petrobangla official. "Dissatisfaction of officials here has reached its peak."

The PCD, which should have at least 60 expert-level officials to deal with the existing six Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) with four oil companies, is now being run with only 13 officials.

"We are aware of the situation in PCD, and we want to recruit officials," Energy Minister

Noor Uddin Khan told The Daily Star recently. "But there are not many qualified manpower in the country to fill the vacancies."

He added that Petrobangla would soon recruit some foreign consultants to help monitor the work of foreign companies, among other jobs.

But Petrobangla sources and energy experts say there are enough qualified manpower in the country but the government lack any initiative to make fresh recruitment in Petrobangla or BAPEX.

They said that recruitment of foreign consultants would only increase the frustration of Petrobangla officials who would continue to over-work without any kind of recognition from the government. "Foreign consultants can not be any substitute for recruitment of officials."

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## US report reveals only part of HR abuses: BNP

**By Staff Correspondent**  
The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) yesterday defended the recent US human rights report on Bangladesh saying that it had reflected "only a portion of the worse human rights situation in the country."

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement said: "The US report on Human Rights situation in Bangladesh has reflected only a small portion of the human rights abuses resulting from the government sponsored killings, harassments, persecution and oppression against political opponents, and extreme deterioration of law and order in the country."

Referring to the government's reaction to the report, expressed by the Foreign Secretary, the statement said that the Foreign Secretary had only tried to justify the government's position, basing on lies. "It was politically motivated."

The Foreign Secretary told US Ambassador John E Holzman on Wednesday that the US report contained "inaccuracies, See Page 12 Col 3

## PM renews call to Opposition Come back to JS, raise whatever issue you like

**SAVAR, Feb 5:** Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today renewed her call to the opposition to return to parliament and discuss all issues on the floor of the House in the greater interest of the nation, reports UNB.

"Come back to parliament and raise whatever issue you like. Do not add to the sufferings of the people by boycotting the parliament continuously," she said at a huge public meeting at Savar College ground in the afternoon.

People of the country want peace and stability for which the government is striving hard, Hasina said, adding that the opposition is trying to make the parliament ineffective and inoperative.

"We don't know on what issue they have boycotted the parliament, we have allowed the opposition to talk on any issue inside the Parliament," said the Leader of the House.

Opposition BNP abstained from joining the parliament from August 30, 1997.

The opposition is boycotting the parliament without any issue and causing sufferings to the people without any reason, she said. "They are trying to confuse the people by spreading falsehood."

"We will allow them to talk on any issue if they join the House, they can ask any question, even to me directly," she added.

The Prime Minister said the proceedings of the parliament is being broadcast and telecast by radio and television. "We want to reach their statements directly to the people through the electronic media as we believe in accountability and transparency."

Mentioning the signing of the CHT peace accord the Prime Minister said the opposition are criticising the activities of the government for the sake of opposition. "They (opposition) have said that a part of the country from Feni to the Hill Tracts will be a part of India after the signing of the CHT peace accord. This is a lie. We will not allow them to talk on any issue if they join the House, they can ask any question, even to me directly," she added.

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## Political cases BNP's no response to AL proposal for committee meet

**By Staff Correspondent**  
BNP is yet to respond to the Awami League proposal for holding a meeting of the five-member committee formed earlier to examine political cases against BNP leaders.

As part of the on-going negotiation between the two parties, AL leader and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim yesterday proposed to BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan for a meeting of the committee at his Jatya Sangsad chamber at 4 pm today.

Nasim, also head of the committee, had made the proposal to Mannan Bhuiyan over telephone yesterday afternoon. In reply, Mannan had said he would let Nasim know his party's decision by last night.

"Mannan Bhuiyan did not communicate with me," Nasim told The Daily Star around midnight last night.

Mannan Bhuiyan was not available for comment last night.

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## Biswa Ijtema begins Feb 14

**GAZIPUR, Feb 5:** A three-day 32nd Biswa Ijtema will begin at Tongi on bank of the river Turag on February 14, reports BSS.

The second biggest Muslim congregation after the holy Hajj is being held at the place since 1966. Thousands of devotees from almost all Muslim countries are expected to participate in the Biswa Ijtema.

A preparatory meeting was held at Tongi pourashava auditorium recently. The meeting was presided over by Ahasan Ullah Master, MP, Deputy Commissioner of Gazipur Nazrul Islam, Tongi Pourashava Chairman Azmat Ullah Khan and other officials attended the meeting.

## Economy going thru' recession, says official Industrial output falls by 10pc in first half of '97-98

Production in the major sectors of country's economy has declined by around 10 per cent during the first half of the current fiscal year, reports UNB.

"The trend is likely to continue in the second half of the year if corrective measures are not taken to arrest the fall," said a senior official of the Finance Ministry.

"The economy is now passing through a recession with decline in the major sectors," said the official, requesting anonymity.

He estimated the fall in industrial production at 9.25 per cent during July-October, 1997. The performance was no better during the last three months, he added without mentioning the figures.

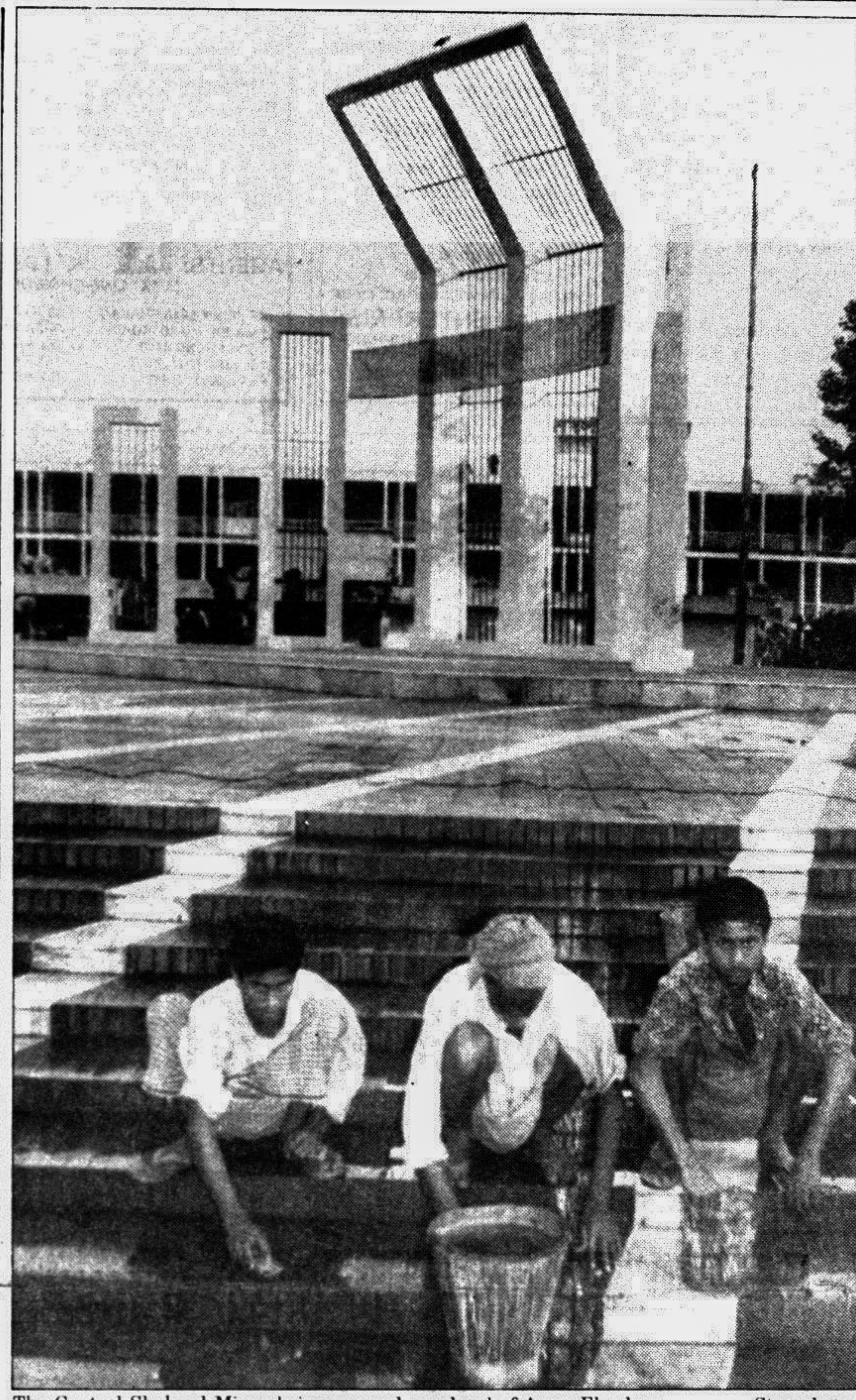
The major fall of 24.75 per cent in industrial production during the first four months of 1997-98 was shown in fabricated metal products. This was followed by 18.26 per cent in cotton weaving and leather sector, 13 per cent in non-metallic products and 7 per cent in food, beverage and tobacco sector.

However, production in chemical, petroleum and rubber sector recorded an increase of 6.36 per cent while basic metal products and wood products furniture sectors 3.06 per cent each.

The official did not say anything about the food production which has reportedly declined due to 'hidden drought' during August-November last year.

The officials attributed smuggling as the main reason for industrial recessions. "Am-

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The Central Shaheed Minar being spruced up ahead of Amar Ekushey. — Star photo

## Cases filed against 16 BB employees

**By Court Correspondent**  
Bangladesh Bank yesterday filed a case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court against 16 suspended employees of the Bank who were allegedly involved in the recent incident of violence at the Bank.

Md Shamsuddin, GM (Engineering), filed the petition case against the 16 suspended staffs of Bangladesh Bank allegedly involved in the January 19 incident.

In the petition, he mentioned that on that day Md Ahsanul Habib and the 15 accused persons along with another 40-50 people went to his office on the 4th floor of the head office of Bangladesh Bank and used abusive language and destroyed the articles in the room which are punishable under sections 571(a) and 571(b) of the Bank Companies Act 1991.

Metropolitan Magistrate A S M Monayem heard the petition and said he will pass the order on Sunday.

## 20 hurt as workers clash at Sadarghat launch terminal

**By Staff Correspondent**  
At least 20 people were injured as two rival groups clashed at Sadarghat launch terminal in the city early yesterday morning.

The feuding groups, reportedly led by two factions of ghat workers blasted more than one hundred crackers in and around the terminal.

Police said the workers fought each other for about four hours from 3 am to gain control of the terminal. They chased each other and damaged a union office of the workers, creating a panic in the area.

Of the injured, seven were taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) with bomb injuries. Two of them identified as Monir, 18, and Siraj, 25, were under treatment at the hospital till last night, DMCH sources said.

The fighting started centering over an open bidding to lease out the terminal. The bidding was scheduled to be held later in the morning.

The feuding parties clashed in a bid to stop each other from

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## One killed as dacoits fire on villagers in Ctg

**From Staff Correspondent**  
CHITTAGONG, Feb 5: One person was killed when a group of alleged dacoits opened fire on villagers at West Barai village under Patiya thana last night, police said.

The dead was identified as Ratan Shil, police said.

The incident occurred when the villagers started chasing the alleged dacoits who decamped with valuables worth about Taka 29,000/- from the house of one Asutosh Chowdhury at 2 am last night.

A case was filed with Patiya thana in this connection. None was arrested so far.

## Narigrantha resents Pak minister's statement

**By Staff Correspondent**  
Narigrantha Probartana has expressed its resentment at the comment by the Pakistan Deputy Foreign Minister Siddique Khan Kanju regarding Pakistan's unwillingness to apologise for the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh, said a press release yesterday.

"Every citizen of Bangladesh wants congenial relation with Pakistan. All the people in Bangladesh irrationally demand that Pakistan should apologise to Bangladesh for creating a congenial relationship between the two countries,"

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## Inside Today Article

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## Business

**Khulna jute mill workers launch movement today demanding resumption of private jute mills' operation**  
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## Tk 218cr project to remove city waterlogging likely

The government is contemplating to take up a new development project, involving Tk 218 crore, aimed at removing the waterlogging problem in the Dhaka city, reports UNB.

Some 150-kilometre new drainage line would be constructed in various parts of the city under the project titled "Waterlogging Removal Project of Dhaka Metropolitan Area."

This was disclosed at a high-level meeting on development of infrastructure of Dhaka Metropolitan area held at the LGRD Ministry yesterday. LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zilur Rahman presided.

The meeting reviewed different development programmes undertaken for removing water stagnation from different parts of the city and the progress of the development work of Dhanmondi Lake.

The meeting was told that measures to increase the capacity of underground drainage

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## City BNP emergency meet today

An emergency meeting of the city unit of opposition BNP will be held at the party's central office at 4 pm today, reports UNB.

City convenor Sadek Hossain Khoka, MP, will chair the meeting, said a press release yesterday.

Another meeting of the party's special committee on CHT will be held tomorrow at 7:00 pm at the official residence of leader of the Opposition at 29 Mint Road.

Committee convenor Lt Gen (ret'd) Mir Shawkat Ali will preside over the meeting.

## Police suspect gunshot at PMO was planned to intimidate

**By Staff Correspondent**  
Investigators suspect that the gunshot at a window of the office of Prime Minister's Political Advisor was planned to intimidate him on January 28.

But the joint investigation of the CID, Special Branch and Tejgaon police could not ascertain the real motive behind the shooting till yesterday.

Police sources said they were taking several reasons into consideration that might have led some people to threaten the Advisor, Dr S A Malek.

"The firing was not planned to kill Dr Malek," suspected a senior police official while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

The gunshot pierced a window of the PMO on Jan 28.

## Ekushey Book Fair begins tomorrow Govt urged to fix permanent venue

**By DU Correspondent**  
The Director General of Bangla Academy Prof Syed Anwar Hossain urged the government to fix a permanent venue for the Ekushey Book Fair.

He suggested Suhrawardy Uddayan adjacent to the Bangla Academy as the venue which he said would also fall in the proposed 'cultural circle' (Sangskritik Bolej).

Prof Anwar Hossain was addressing a press conference in the city yesterday on the occasion of Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela.

Pointing at the awkward situation regarding the venue crisis while organising the Dhaka Book Fair, he said that it was a disgrace that there was no permanent venue for holding a book fair.

The Ekushey Book Fair, a yearly event in February, will begin tomorrow. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the fair on the day. The fair will continue till February 28.

The Prime Minister is also scheduled to lay the foundation of Ekushey Bhaban to be built inside the academy premises, the DG of Bangla Academy said.

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The gunshot pierced a window of the PMO on Jan 28.

## Army to bear Tk 300cr liability of BMTF

**By Rafiq Hasan**  
A consensus was reached to this effect at a meeting among senior officials of the PB, Army, and ministries of defense, finance and industry on Wednesday last.

According to preliminary estimate, the factory's liabilities are more than Tk 300 crore.

The meeting also formed a committee headed by a member of the PB to make a final assessment.

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## People resisting construction of road near Choto Sona Masjid

**By Morshed Ali Khan and Mahbubur Rahman in Chapainawabganj**  
The people living near the historic Choto Sona Masjid at Gour in Chapainawabganj have resisted the construction of a World Bank financed highway, claiming that the vibration from the heavy cross-border traffic would damage the stone structure.

The highway passes within meters of the historic mosque which was built during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Hossain Shah between 1493 and 1519. The mosque is protected as a historic archaeological site.

Local people are demanding that a diversion road be immediately constructed to protect the age-old structure. An official of the Icon International Limited, the road developer, said they had attempted several times to complete the road but had to withdraw in the face of resistance from the local people.

"Everything looks uncertain because no decision has been made yet," the official said.

When our Chapainawabganj correspondent visited the site, he found that the construction of the highway had come to a halt with half the work finished. On the completed half of the road, trucks, buses and private cars were plying.

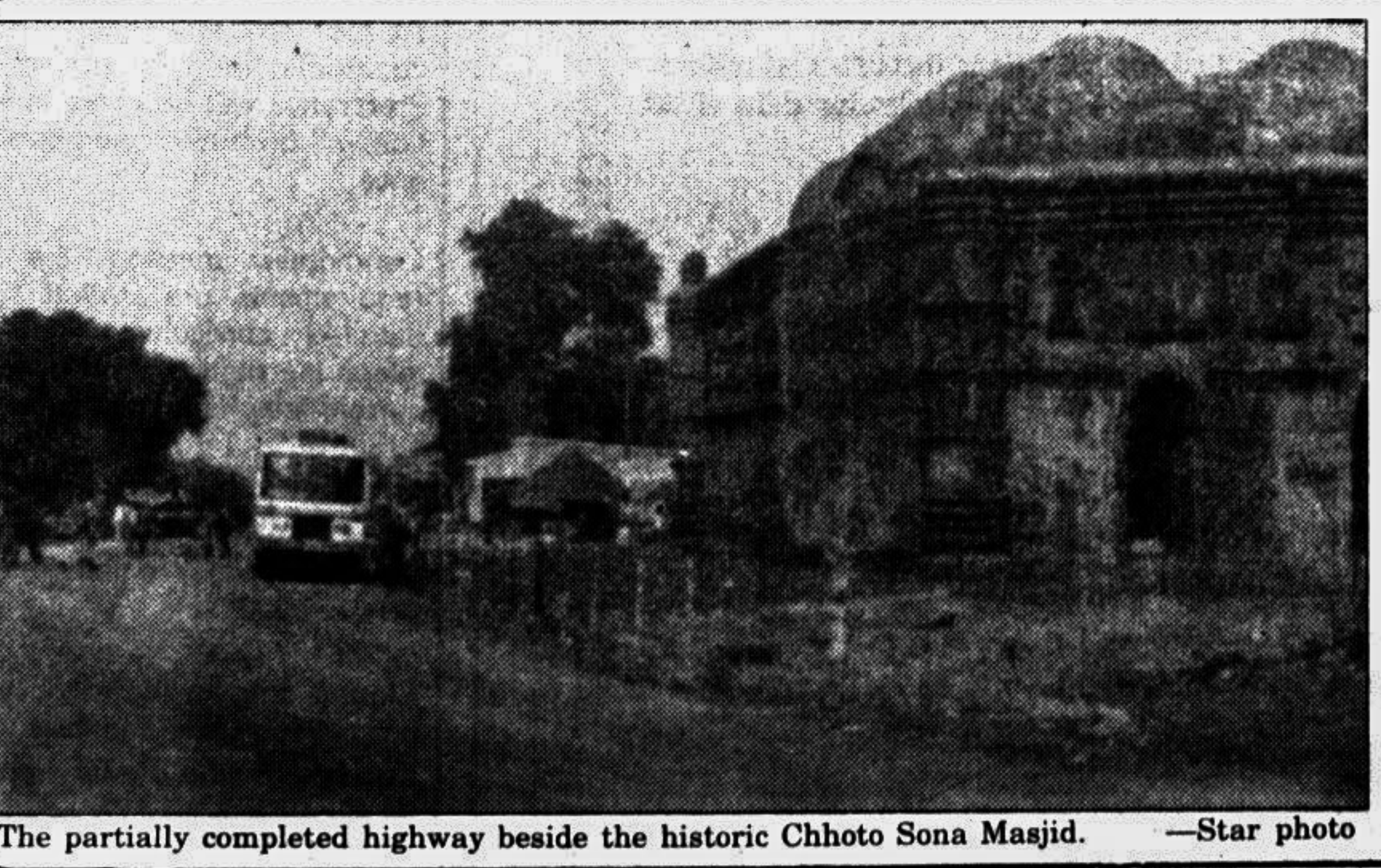
Local people protested saying that the mosque had a religious, historical and archaeological value. "We cannot let them destroy the mosque. We demand a diversion at a safe distance from the structure," said one villager.

"We wonder how planners could miss such a historic site while laying the plans," said another villager.

After the completion of the Bangabandhu Bridge over the river Jamuna, the Sona Masjid land customs stands a bright prospect to become an important land port. Local people said once the area opens up as an important land port, traffic, especially those of heavy goods, will increase manifold.

"The old mosque cannot be destroyed," said another villager.

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The partially completed highway beside the historic Choto Sona Masjid. —Star photo

## BSEHR's help for Chetia's legal defence sought

**By Staff Correspondent**  
The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) has 'authorised' the Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights to provide legal assistance to Anup Chetia, now detained in Dhaka Central Jail, said a BSEHR press release last night.

Anup Chetia is said to be the General Secretary of ULFA.

The press release said ULFA Chairman Arabindha Rajkhowa in a letter to the BSEHR authorised it to act on behalf of Chetia.

Chetia was arrested along with two others from a flat in the city's Mohammadpur area on December 21, 1997 under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). He faces three specific cases of illegal en-

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