

# Indonesia Faces an Uncertain Future

by Dr. A. R. Chowdhury

*There are several scenarios that may work out in the coming weeks. One possibility is that a faction of the army would be encouraging chaos — either to see Suharto replaced quickly, or to create a pretext to justify martial law. A more likely scenario is that Suharto would drag on his grip on power for some time, trying to consolidate the economic empire built by his children.*

EMBATTLLED President Suharto has finally read the writings on the wall. In an uncharacteristically candid speech, he announced that he would call new general elections as soon as possible but would not be a candidate in them, ending a thirty-two-year rule. His announcement means that he would not complete his current five-year term. Although he didn't say how long the transitional process would take, but it would start almost immediately.

The dramatic events leading to Suharto's announcement started with the collapse of his inner circle of advisors. On Monday, the powerful Speaker of the nation's Parliament, the third-highest ranking official in the country, called for Suharto to step down. Although his demand was later contradicted by senior Army officers who threw the military's weight behind Suharto, the clear division among Suharto's ardent supporters became clear. The country's governing elite seemed irreparably divided and possibly heading for a confrontation, thereby rapidly eroding the political ground beneath Suharto.

Suharto had been under immense pressure to step down as the country was sliding steadily toward a political, economic, and social chaos. He faced the worst economic and political crisis since he took office three decades ago during a period of unrest when anti-communist student demonstrations helped carry him to power. Bloodshed and riots in the streets of the main cities during the last few days had fueled a growing belief that things could implode rather quickly. Ingredients for a full scale civil upheaval were in place. The threshold of tolerance among the common mass seemed to have been broken.

Suharto tried to simultaneously suppress any further demonstration and appease the protesters, ordering fresh troops to the demonstrators and withdrawing some of the government-ordered price increases. But it was too little too late. The crisis intensified with the World Bank and IMF's decision to withhold the previously announced release of US \$1 billion in standby credit.

Last week, students demonstrated in several campuses across the country calling for a reform of the political system, which was viewed as an emasculated bureaucracy that reacts to the wishes of Suharto. The campus protests have persisted for months, with students demanding political and economic reform. The latest round of demonstrations followed a steep increase in the prices of fuel, transportation and electricity as part of a subsidising measure included in the US \$43 billion IMF bailout package. Ordinary citizens were hit hard particularly by the increase in fuel prices. Petrol prices rose by about 70 per cent, diesel by 40 per cent, and kerosene, commonly used in cooking, soared by 25 per cent. The price increase paved the way for the release of additional IMF standby credit.

However, the objective of these demonstrations went beyond the austerity measures required by the IMF. More and more students were increasingly demanding that Suharto step down and that the people be given a voice in government for

the first time in three decades. The flash of violence earlier last week outside a university in Jakarta, where several students were shot dead by security forces, could be seen as a turning point that reshaped the country's political calculus and brought into question the legitimacy of Suharto's rule. It raised the political temperature, drawing out people from all walks of life and creating doubts about the government's ability to control the discontent.

Unrest among the students had been steadily mounting since rupiah, the Indonesian currency, collapsed late last year. The currency collapse led to a deep economic crisis and a tentative bailout package from the IMF. While there was widespread discontent among the general population because of the effects of the economic crisis, the weak and divided opposition political parties made no attempt to mobilise mass demonstration against the Suharto administration. Unlike the national political leaders, the student demonstrators became increasingly bold. They enjoyed widespread sympathy from the public. Although there was no formal coordination to their actions, high-tech gadgets, such as cellular phones, pagers, personal computers, and Web sites were used to build information networks among students and organise dissent. Since television and print media are censored, although less so than before,

these Web sites and Internet discussion groups tended to be the only independent sources of information. The students' demonstration got a boost when Amien Rais, a prominent opposition leader called on Suharto to step down. Separately, a group of retired generals and cabinet ministers also asked the Parliament that named Suharto to a seventh five-year term in March to revoke the appointment. Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of Sukarno, spoke forcefully against the regime. Everyone appeared in a mood to join the bandwagon calling for political and economic reforms. Despite Suharto's effort to revitalise the economy and carry out economic reforms as part of the IMF bailout package, calls for political change had outpaced popular demands for economic recovery. An increasing number of common people now believe that the situation will not improve until Suharto goes.

In order to pacify the demonstrators last week, Suharto indicated that he was willing to reform election laws, allowing more than the three sectional parties to take part and introduce district voting system. He was in favour of introducing minor political reforms but ruled out the discussion of sweeping changes until legislative elections in 2002 or after his term expired in 2003. But the pledges of reform came too little too late and did not appease campus protesters. Recent disappearances of Suharto's political opponents also fueled their scepticism.

For the last several months, the international community had been eagerly waiting to see if Suharto can implement key economic reforms, seen as essential in restoring confidence to the country's beleaguered economy. But last two weeks' violent demonstrations and the resulting riots shifted the eyes of the international community on the political crisis. International leaders called for Suharto to step down. Even Indonesia's neighbours, especially Singapore and Malaysia, were concerned that social chaos might spill over the border.

Suharto had long perpetuated his regime by indulging competing factions and interests in Indonesia against one another — thereby eliminating potential rivals and promoting unquestioned loyalty. This resulted in a political lull which allowed economic development to proceed during his rule. But the last couple of months had seen Suharto drag his feet on promised economic reforms.

When Indonesia signed a bailout package with the IMF, Suharto agreed to break up monopolies of key industries held by his family and their friends. That agreement included cutting off subsidies to a car company owned by one of his sons, dissolution of the clove monopoly owned by that son and cancellation of two power plant projects in which another son had a stake.

Given that Suharto had translated his absolute political power into a massive family fortune during his reign (according to various estimates, the Suharto family is worth anywhere from US\$16 to \$33 billion), many Suharto-watchers were sceptical about the reform. Their scepticism turned out to be real as the reforms have not taken place, despite the IMF deal being renegotiated twice.

Political pundits gradually began to ask what even a year ago would have been considered an unthinkable question. What would happen if the student protests trigger a change of government, as it did in the 1960s when Suharto seized the opportunity created by violent student demonstrations to gain power? They were beginning to wonder how far the opposition parties would go to challenge Suharto's government, and how far the military would be willing to go to protect his regime.

Even though student protests have earned their short-term goal in forcing Suharto to announce general elections where he will not be a candidate, they have so far failed to form an alliance with any opposition party in order to give long-term credence to their challenge. While a popular consensus has formed around the students' demand for political reform, few have anything more than a vague conception of what form any new political order should take.

There are several scenarios that may work out in the coming weeks. One possibility is that a faction of the army would be encouraging chaos — either to see Suharto replaced quickly, or to create a pretext to justify martial law. A more likely scenario is that Suharto would drag on his grip on power for some time, trying to consolidate the economic empire built by his children. But, in the process, lead the country through more economic and political turmoil.

Whatever lies in the future for Indonesia, one thing has become crystal clear — the picture of Suharto as a shrewd manipulator has given way to the image of an aging dictator who has not kept pace with the changing world. His long-time image of invulnerability has eroded as the country endures its worst economic and political crisis in recent memory.

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# HEALTH Abuse of Antibiotics Hazards of Resistance

by Dr Md Habibur Rahman

*We have to bear always in our mind that antibiotics do not give any psychological benefits. Therefore, utmost care and caution should be taken during their use.*

ABUSE of antibiotics is common in Bangladesh. Thousands of doses of all kinds of antibiotics, mostly unnecessary, are dispensed each day by the ignorant, gullible practitioners whose knowledge of pharmacology is gathered from bits of information doled out by unscrupulous salesmen of national and multi-national companies. Unfortunately, in our country many persons unfamiliar with the basics of microbiology and pharmacology prescribe antibiotics. These include many doctors, quacks, chemists, shop dispensers and friends/family of the patient.

Even with good sterilisation, disinfection and antiseptic facilities in many hospitals, not less than 3rd or 2nd generation cephalosporins are prescribed for all minor and major surgical procedures like hernia repair, thyroidectomy, appendectomy, laparotomy, proctectomy etc. There is no detailed guidelines in respect of use of antibiotics in all surgical procedures. Antibiotics are being abused by some doctors and it is more so by those working in the peripheral hospitals. Most of the surgeons who use too much antibiotics justify their use by saying that they are not sure about the sterilisation in their operation theaters and about the cleanliness prevalent in their wards. Often surgeons make such excuses to use antibiotics.

1. There is improper sterilisation in operation theater;  
2. Aseptic measures are poor;  
3. Nurses and paramedical staff are not properly trained;  
4. Wards are dirty, patients are unhealthy;

5. Environment is unclean and dust, dirt, garbage, flies and cockroaches are everywhere. None of these excuses justify the use of antibiotics indiscriminately for as we all know: "Antibiotics are not a substitute for sound surgical technique and proper aseptic measures."

However, in some potentially contaminated cases, prophylactic use of antibiotics is encouraged. These selected antibiotics are used preoperatively and post-operatively i.e. one dose just before operation or at the most for 48 hours. Further, the antibiotics selected must be active against the most likely contaminated microorganism. It need not necessarily include antibiotics that are active against every potential pathogen. Majority of infection in surgery in the clean and contaminated groups can be controlled by the narrow spec-

trum antibiotics. There is no doubt, broad spectrum antibiotics do have very important role as life saving drugs in serious mixed infection or septicemia. But giving broad spectrum antibiotics for prolonged period in minor infections and clean cases is simply illogical. It is like trying to kill a tiny innocent bird with a cannon ball. The urge to treat what is infected, a laboratory test should be warranted. Many clinicians become unmoved by laboratory reports on microbes (especially those with unfamiliar names) and turn immediately to antibiotic treatment. Such a practice may actually do more harm. Most antibiotics are given for too long, the length of treatment required for the majority of infections is unknown, and many estimates of treatment are based on anecdote. Use of broad spectrum combination of two, three or even more antibiotics should seldom be necessary for more than a few days. Prolonged courses of combinations of antibiotics have become too commonplace. Such a practice is seldom justified.

## Hazards of Antibiotic Abuse

There are several dangers and health hazards of antibiotic abuse.

1. Antibiotic abuse in surgery may lead to the development of drug resistance. Bacterial resistance may cause break-down of suture lines, collection of pus, and even death from septicemia, thus increasing both morbidity and mortality.  
2. Continued use of antibiotics may change in normal flora of body leading to super infection due to over growth of drug resistant organisms.

3. Antibiotic abuse may cause masking of serious infections without eradicating them.  
4. Continued use of an antibiotic can itself be the cause of fever.  
5. Widespread sensitization of population may lead to hypersensitivity, anaphylaxis, rashes, blood dyscrasias, cholestatic hepatitis etc.

6. Minor side effects like diarrhoea, vomiting, skin rashes may also result.

7. Serious toxic effects due to drugs like aplastic anaemia with chloramphenicol, ototoxicity and nephrotoxicity with aminoglycosides, pseudomembranous colitis with lincosamines, blood dyscrasias with cotrimoxazole, pancytopenia due to cephalosporins may also take place.

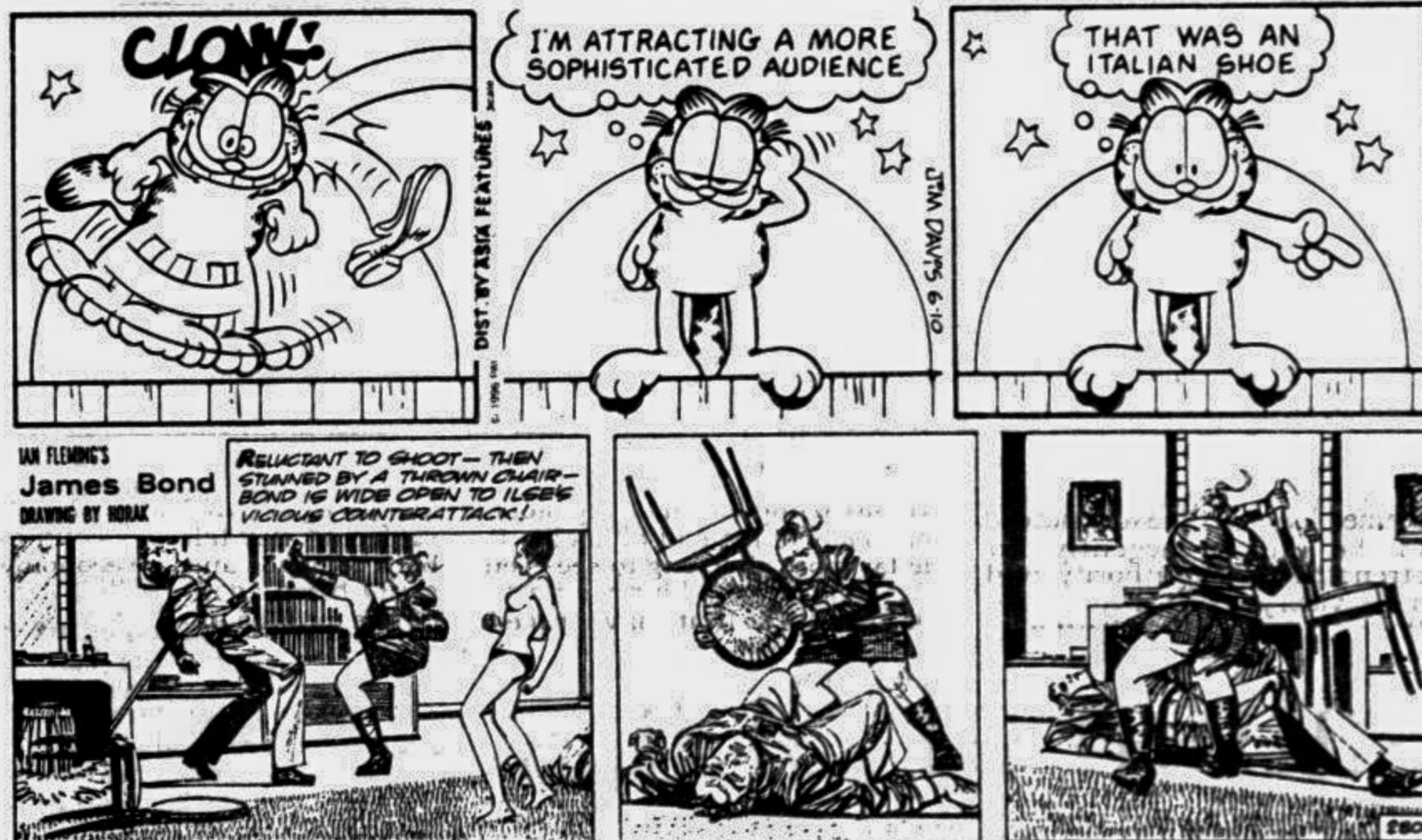
## New Antibiotics Resist Resistance

The problem of resistance to antibiotics demands that a renewed effort must be mounted to create products that will prevent or treat infections caused by antibiotic resistant pathogens. But the scale, complexity, cost, time required, and importance of this challenge "should not be underestimated". Many companies, together with academia, are working on existing antibiotics — "including the compounds that have been losing ground to the rising tide of drug resistance". New compounds are being produced by slightly changing the existing chemical structures so that bacterial defences cannot recognise them. Sometimes ways and means are developed to sabotage and weaken those defences. The increasing emergence of an acquired resistance to antibiotics over the last 40 years, now constitutes a threat to global public health, and is a growing problem in both hospital acquired and community acquired infections. The rise of such multi-drug-resistant bacteria has made vancomycin from Eli Lilly, Indianapolis, very important in the control of nosocomial infections and it is widely used as the last defence against methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* and beta-lactam-resistant enterococci. Unfortunately vancomycin-resistant enterococci have merged. Researchers at Eli Lilly are working on a new version of vancomycin, and reported a new compound which is very effective against vancomycin-resistant enterococci. More compounds are in development from other companies with Wyeth-Ayerst, Abbott Laboratories, Pfizer and Bristol-Myers Squibb to show activity against different resistant bacteria.

But it will be a long time before these new drugs are brought to the clinic or market. Health officials are calling on companies to develop narrower spectrum antibiotics that target just one organism instead of whole classes. We have to wait for the new drugs. But at the same time we have to bear this thing always in our mind that antibiotics do not give any psychological benefits. Therefore, utmost care and caution should be taken during their use.

The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacy, Dhaka University, and General Secretary, Bangladesh Pharmaceutical Society

## Garfield®



by Jim Davis

## Metropolitan

### New curriculum soon Need to upgrade quality of medical edn stressed

Speakers at a seminar in the city yesterday were highly critical of the professors of medical colleges who spend much of their time for private practice, reports BSS.

The speakers observed that there should be a change in the attitude of the professors who are mostly engaged in private practice leaving little time for teaching and research.

The two-day seminar on "Undergraduate Medical Education: Present and Future" held at the ICDDR, B auditorium at Mohakhali is being participated by directors, principals and professors of different medical colleges. State Minister for Health and Family Welfare Prof M Amanullah was the chief guest at the inaugural session of the seminar. Organised by Further Improvement of Medical College (FIMC) project, the inaugural session was also addressed by the director general of health services Prof A K M Nurul Anwar, Director of Medical Education Prof Shah Monir Hossain, Health and Population Advisor of DFID (renamed British ODA) Dr Mehtabunnisa Curry, FIMC project director Prof M Muzaherul Huq, and project manager Dr Colin Bullough. Additional Secretary of Health and Family Welfare Ministry Md Mahfuz Subhan presided.

State Minister for Health Prof Amanullah said a total commitment for teaching by the senior teachers is urgently needed. He urged them to devote full time to their profession.

Referring to the negative attitude of the medical graduates coming at the thana health centres, the state minister sought suggestions from the participants in changing this attitude. Director general of health services Prof Nurul Anwar said a committee under the Directorate of medical education is reviewing the existing medical curriculum and a new curriculum will be available by the end of July next. He said in the new curriculum involvement of the community in medical education will be given importance and the students will be introduced to the community from the first year of their academic calendar.

He said a political commitment is needed to contain a section of the medical students

who create disturbances in academic atmosphere. He said such change should be institutionalised with a total commitment from the teachers.

Additional Health secretary Mahfuz Subhan said due to lack of quality health service a large number of patients are going to India, Thailand and Malaysia every year for treatment, draining out huge amount of foreign exchange. He said this money could be utilised for development of medical colleges here.

### Khaleda condoles BNP leader's death

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has expressed deep shock at the death of Kafiluddin Ahmed, founder president of Narsingdi district BNP, reports UNB.

In a condolence message yesterday, she prayed for eternal peace on the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members.

### Female students demand arrest of terrorists from DU campus

By DU Correspondent

A section of female students of the Dhaka University under the banner of 'general students brought out a procession on the Dhaka University campus yesterday demanding arrest of the identified terrorists and restoration of congenial academic atmosphere at the university.

The female students paraded different areas of the campus carrying placards and later submitted a memorandum to the Vice-Chancellor of the university.

In the memorandum the students urged the VC to consult all quarters to root out terrorism from the campus in stead of so-called consensus among the feuding student organisations. The Vice-Chancellor received the memorandum and assured the students of placing the issue in the Syndicate.



Nari Mukti Sangsad brought out a procession in the city yesterday condemning repression on women. — Star photo

### 2,62,000 families engaged in different forestry programmes: Sajeda

Environment and Forest Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury said yesterday the government has so far engaged 2,62,000 families in different forestry programmes as beneficiaries, reports BSS.

Besides, 90,900 persons have been imparted training on social forestry which has resulted in the setting up of 5,000 nurseries at private level, she added. The minister was speaking as the chief guest at a two-day seminar on a forestry sector project, involving Taka 400 crore.

The project has been taken up by the government recently with the financial assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with the objective of socio-economic development and resource building through people participation.

Presided over by the Environment and Forest Secretary Ahab Ahmed, the inaugural session of the seminar was also addressed by the manager for forestry and natural resources division of the ADB, Toru Shibuchi and chief conservator of forests, SM Jalil.

About 150 field level forest officials and workers from all parts of the country and representatives of roads, highways,

rails and embankments are participating in the seminar.

The minister listed the forestry programmes like community forestry projects, forest extension and development programmes, thana afforestation and nursery development project and extended social forestry project. She said that these projects had already produced forest resources of around Taka 5,000 crore. Putting immense effect on environment and bio-diversity conservation, these projects have also generated employment opportunities for the rural poor, she added.

Explaining the salient features of the Taka 400 crore ADB financed forestry project, the minister said that this was the first step towards implementation of the forestry sector master plan to bring 20 per cent of the total land under forest cover within 2015 ad from the existing 10 per cent.

Creation and development of forest resources through active participation of people, sustainable forest management and conservation of forest and bio-diversity are the main objectives of the project, she pointed out.

All barren forest land, unclassified state forest, marginal lands of roads, embankments, railways and other feller lands will be brought under afforestation programme, Sajeda Chowdhury said.

Raising woodlot plantation on 20,786 hectare of degraded forest land, agroforestry plantation on 11,905 hectare, strip plantation on 25,000 KMU, charland afforestation on 7008 hectare are the major targets of the projects, the minister said.

Besides, provisions for jhoomia rehabilitation and enrichment plantation and afforestation and management of 40,000 hectare the project is aimed at bringing 43,400 hectare forest land under wild life conservation and national park management.

The minister said the present government under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was promised bound to make the afforestation a great success. Because, she added, successful implementation of such programmes would play a positive role in poverty alleviation and socio-economic development of the as well as improvement of environment and ecology.



Female students of Dhaka University handed over a memorandum to Vice-Chancellor Prof A K Azad Chowdhury yesterday in protest against acts of terrorism on the campus. — Star photo

### Training course on educational TV programme production begins

A six-week training course on "Educational Television Programme Production" began in the city on Monday under the auspices of Worldview International Foundation (WIF), reports UNB.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury inaugurated the training course for some 25 participants as chief guest at the WIF office.

UNB Chairman Amanullah Khan and Director General of the Department of Social Services Mir Shahabuddin were special guest and guest of honour respectively at the inaugural function, chaired by WIF Director Nazrul Islam.

The state minister in his address stressed the importance of training in the national development.

He added that the trained manpower constituted a most invaluable asset for the country that could help attract investment in projects and industries which in turn would lead to economic growth and poverty alleviation.

He cautioned that the programmes telecast by the satellite dish are not conducive for us and we should exercise our choice prudently. He appreciated the role of NGOs like WIF which have been actively engaged not only in social and

### NRBs remit Tk 642cr thru' Sonali Bank

The expatriate Bangladeshis remitted foreign exchange equivalent to Tk 641.81 crore through Sonali Bank in the first four months of the current year, says a press release.

The amount of remittances has increased by about 14 per cent against the corresponding period of the last year.

The expatriates who are working in 13 countries of the different regions of the World remitted this amount of foreign exchange through the bank's network at different levels.

The regions from where the expatriates remitted money include UAE, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq of the Middle East, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia of the Middle Asia, and UK, Germany and USA of West Europe.

Sonali Bank has taken a good number of measures including modernisation of the bank's overall network.

Meanwhile, permission has been obtained for opening one more booth at Misakawa of Florida. Effort is underway to open the booth soon.

In Jeddah, the bank has its own representative who looks after the issue of remittances of the expatriates.

### Phensidyl seized

By Staff Correspondent

The Detective Branch of police recovered 150 bottles of narcotic drug phensidyl from a canteen of the Chest Disease Hospital on Monday night.

Police said yesterday that a team of the DB in a special drive also arrested Kamal Uddin under raising the hospital area under Gulshan thana at about 11 pm.