

BNP, Jamaat may attend JS session today

By Staff Correspondent
The Jatiya Sangsad went into its budget session yesterday with the lawmakers of opposition BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami remaining absent from the House.

The Opposition lawmakers were on a long march towards the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) demanding scrapping of the CHT accord and the laws passed in the last session of the parliament for its implementation.

However, they are expected to attend the session today when the budget for 1998-99 financial year is scheduled to be placed.

Yesterday's sitting began at 10:20, 20 minutes behind schedule with Speaker Humayun Rashid Choudhury in the chair.

Indian cyclone death toll rises to 415

AHMEDABAD, June 10: The death toll in a ravaging cyclone that hit coastal regions of the western Indian state of Gujarat has climbed to 415, state officials said today, reports Reuters.

The toll from Tuesday's storm, the worst to hit India in 25 years, could rise, as many people remain missing and relief workers have yet to reach some remote villages.

The death toll was highest in Kutch district, where a 12-foot tidal wave flooded low-lying areas near Kandla port, 330 miles northwest of Bombay.

Star MAG TOMORROW

To celebrate the SWM's second anniversary we have created an assorted hamper of stories for our readers giving you a glimpse of the flip side of journalism — the crazy, incredulous behind the scenes anecdotes that have never been revealed before.

Announcement

The Daily Star has launched a 4-page special on 'World Cup '98' in its 16-page issue. The 4-page special will continue through July 15.

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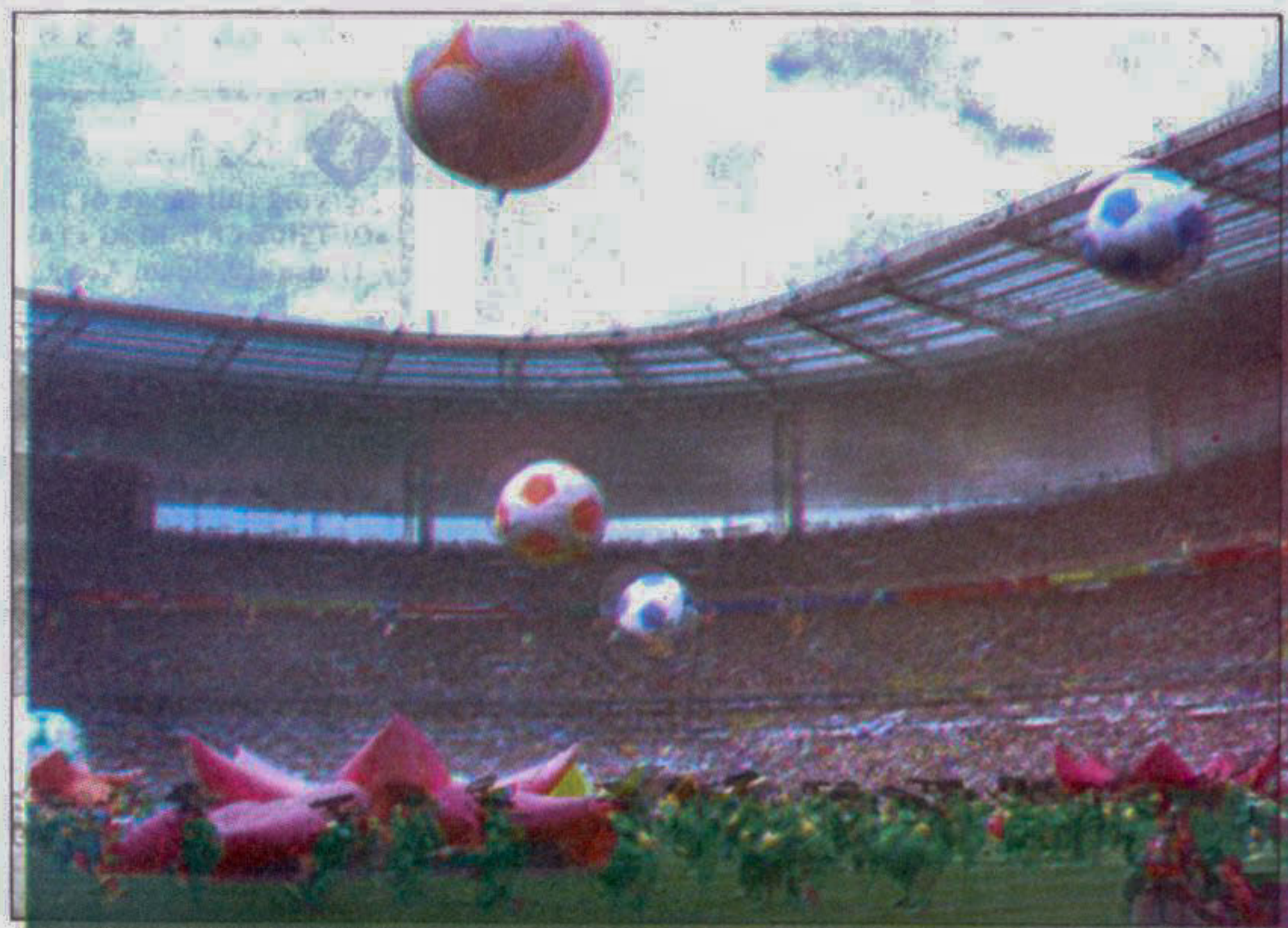
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Grand opening of greatest show



Giant balloons fly over the Stade de France during the opening ceremony of the 1998 Soccer World Cup in Saint-Denis yesterday.

— AFP photo

PARIS, June 10: A vibrant opening ceremony highlighted by a death-defying acrobatic stunt heralded the start of the World Cup finals in front of an estimated global audience of two billion people today, reports Reuters.

The 25-minute ceremony at the Stade de France provided a light touch of artistic creativity in contrast to the ponderous festival of football when giant cartoon characters lumbered through the streets of Paris on Tuesday night.

There were gasps of astonishment from the capacity crowd of 80,000 when 32 acrobats dressed in the colours of the competing teams were suspended from the roof of the stadium and began performing tricks in mid-air, supported by a single rope each.

The support's airs, as they were dubbed, were professional trapeze artists from a Parisian circus school and they brought the short show to an impressive climax after descending 43 metres from the rim of the stadium roof, the height of a 12-storey building.

As they returned to the roof at the end of the show they trailed huge banners of the finalists, providing a memorable

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Brazil triumph at Scotland's cost



PARIS, June 10: An own goal by defender Tommy Boyd gave champions Brazil a 2-1 win over underdogs Scotland in the World Cup's opening game today, reports Reuters.

Scotland appeared to be heading for a surprise 1-1 draw against the flamboyant but often erratic South Americans in a Thrilling Group A match at the Stade de France.

But Boyd was helpless in the 73rd minute when Cafu's shot was parried onto his body by Scottish goalkeeper Jim Leighton. The ball rolled agonisingly into the net to extinguish Scottish resistance.

Midfielder Cesar Sampaio had given Brazil a dream start when he rose between two Scottish defenders to head his team in front from a corner in the fourth minute.

But the same player gave away a penalty in the 38th

minute when he was judged to have pushed Kevin Gallacher as the two went up for the ball. Midfielder John Collins coolly converted the penalty.

In a lively 20 minutes following the Brazil goal, it appeared to be a case of how many the South Americans could

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Today's matches
Group B:
Italy vs Chile 9:30 pm BST
Group B:
Cameroon vs Austria 1 am

Hasina to visit India, Pakistan this month

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be visiting both India and Pakistan within next two weeks.

Foreign Secretary Mustafizur Rahman told BSS last night that Sheikh Hasina had a telephone conversation with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday evening. She will visit Pakistan on June 24.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also had a telephone talk with her Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee Tuesday evening. Her visit to New Delhi is taking place on June 16, Rahman said.

Both the visits will be brief and the Prime Minister will return on the same days.

The foreign secretary said that the PM's visit to Pakistan is being delayed because Nawaz Sharif himself will be on a visit abroad from June 13 to 20.

Earlier, Sheikh Hasina had expressed her willingness to visit India and Pakistan in separate letters addressed to Sharif and Vajpayee in the wake of nuclear tests conducted by both the countries.

In her letters, Hasina wished to talk to them on matters of mutual interest and other issues.

The letters were handed over to the high commissioners of the two countries few days ago.

Khaleda at Khagrachhari rally Accord won't bring peace, rather widen rift

KHAGRACHHARI, June 10: Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia today said the CHT laws were enacted neither in the interest of the tribals nor the Bengali speaking people, but in the interest of the ruling party, reports UNB.

"The CHT agreement will not bring peace in the region, it has rather widened the trend of division," she told a huge public meeting at Khagrachhari Stadium, marking the end of the long march toward CHT she had led from Dhaka.

The long march that began from Paltan Maidan in Dhaka on Tuesday morning remained stranded for nine hours being obstructed allegedly by ruling party activists near Kanchpur bridge, 10 kilometres off the capital.

Hundreds of buses, trucks and cars carrying thousands of marchers finally moved for Chittagong in the evening after police cleared the obstruction.

The BNP Chairperson said the CHT agreement has violated the Constitution on one hand and snatched the fundamental and citizenship rights of the people of this region on the other.

Begum Zia said this agreement is in no way 'acceptable' as it had also snatched the land and voting rights of the people.

BNP calls countrywide hartal June 18

KHAGRACHHARI, June 10: The main opposition BNP has called for a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on June 18 and announced on June 22, reports UNB.

The programme was announced by BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia at a public meeting here this afternoon before terminating the long march.

People have rejected this pact, she added.

"We want peace and development of this area without taking recourse to any discrimination," she said, adding that the discriminatory laws will not be able to bring peace in the CHT region.

She said they were staging demonstration to "protest the discrimination done by the agreement."

"We want an agreement that would ensure equal rights and dignity of all. We wanted to make a law which would establish permanent peace in the region," she said.

"All of us want to live as Bangladeshi citizens, let us all coexist peacefully here," she told the gathering.

The opposition leader announced a dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country on June 18 to protest obstruction to and firing on the long march, price hike of essentials, economic

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Motorcade reached Khagrachhari after 22 hrs

From Shehab Ahmed
KHAGRACHHARI, June 10: The long march led by BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia arrived here at about 3 pm today, some 22 hours after the motorcade rolled out of Dhaka Tuesday.

After a bumpy ride and a 'barricade' at Simrail near Dhaka, she led her motorised column rolling non-stop down the highway to Chittagong.

The motorcade arrived at Chittagong at 6 am today. She addressed 27 wayside meetings.

Seven explosions of homemade bombs took place at Mohal in Feni. There was no fire.

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Long march motorcade on way to city

By Staff Correspondent
The long march motorcade led by the BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia was on its way to back the capital and was due to reach the city in the early hours of today.

Starting at 5:30 pm from Khagrachhari town, the motorcade

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PCJSS declines to comment

By Staff Correspondent
Parbattya Chattagram Jana Shanghati Samity (PCJSS) has 'no reaction' to the long march by BNP, some top leaders of the organisation told The Daily Star yesterday.

PCJSS Chairman Jyotindriya Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma could not be contacted in Khagrachhari yesterday over telephone as he was indisposed.

One of his associates and a top leader of PCJSS, however, said, "We have no reaction to this long march."

Gautam Kumar Chakma, another central leaders of the organisation, told this correspondent, "For the time being, we are not looking into it". He answered in the negative when asked whether any meeting of the organisation was held in this connection.

Asked if there was any communication between them and the authorities in Dhaka regarding the long march, he said, "no".

Prime Minister tells ALPP meeting Long march has proved sovereignty unaffected

By Staff Correspondent
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the opposition to take part in the budget session of the Jatiya Sangsad and contribute to the business of the House.

The Leader of the House and Awami League chief was addressing a meeting of AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) at the Sangsad Bhaban yesterday morning, just before the budget session began.

Referring to the BNP-led opposition alliance's long march, Hasina said march of the opposition leaders and workers up to Khagrachhari proved that Chittagong Hill Tracts very much remained part of Bangladesh and disproved the Opposition claim that national integrity and sovereignty were

compromised through the signing of the CHT peace accord, meeting sources said last night.

The AL chief also informed party legislators that there would be discussion on national budget for 40 hours in the current session and unlike previous sessions, there would be business on Saturdays also. Besides, Thursdays would not be considered as private members' day till June 30.

Responding to lawmakers' concern over the power crisis in the country, the Prime Minister said the crisis would end in a year.

She also asked State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Rafiqul Islam to speak briefly on the current power situation.

Reiterating that the previous BNP government was responsible for the power shortage, she said that no new power plant was set up nor the existing ones were properly maintained during that period.

The prime minister mentioned that overhaul and BMRE of power plants were underway and prompt actions were also taken for setting up of new plants to enhance power generation to match the ever growing demand for power. She also referred to private sector initiatives to install power plants including barge-mounted plants.

Rafiqul Islam informed the ALPP meeting that with the restoration of power generation at a plant at Ashuganj and re-

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Flood engulfs fresh areas in Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, June 10: The flood situation in some areas has deteriorated while it remained static in others during the last 24 hours.

According to district administration officials, onrush of water from the upper catchment continued. Water level in the main rivers — Surma and Kushiara — marked a rise today. The Surma in Sylhet town was flowing 43 centimetres above the danger-level and it was 169 centimetres above danger-level at Kanaighat thana headquarters.

The Kushiara was flowing 172 centimetres above danger-level at Amolshid of Jakiganj thana while at Sheola of Beanibazar thana it was flowing 64 centimetres above the danger mark today, said Water Development Board officials this afternoon.

The WDB official also informed that breaches had developed in at least 14 points of the Surma Dyke in Jakiganj, Beanibazar, Golapganj and Sylhet sadar thana areas.

It has caused inundation of a vast and fresh areas. Erosion on the bank of the rivers had also been reported.

In Beanibazar thana, villages in 11 unions have been inundated.

The situation in Kanaighat, Gowainghat and Jaintapur thanas marked no improvement while it had deteriorated in Jakiganj and Balaganj thanas with inundation of new areas.

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Budget to be placed today

Last chance for tough decisions

By Inam Ahmed and Toufique Imrose Khalidi

When Finance Minister SAMS Kibria will walk into the Jatiya Sangsad today to present the budget for 1998-99, it may well be his last chance to take tough decisions on many fronts.

Unpopular and politically risky issues such as fighting corruption, trimming the government, reducing public expenditure, tax reforms and privatisation have remained mostly untouched by the Awami League government, which steps into its third year

in power. Political expediency has unfortunately played a critical part in most decisions by the ruling party, which is, in many ways, explained by its long absence from power.

But the business community, one of worst sufferers of the 'economic stagnation' that has marked most of its days so far, is far from being convinced.

A tightened fiscal and monetary policy does not seem to have worked much to the gov-

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An Earnest Appeal to Honourable Prime Minister to save the Palli Bidyut Samities (PBSs) from Ruination

Honourable Prime Minister

You must have been aware of the fact that there are 62 Palli Bidyut Samities in Bangladesh engaged in the distribution of electricity to rural consumers. Out of those 54 Palli Bidyut Samities are at present serving electricity to 2 (two) million different types of consumers located in 22 thousand villages. Among them are about 65 thousand irrigation pumps and about 40 thousand small and large industries. Since the PBSs have no source of generation, they are fully dependent on BPDB and DESA for bulk supply of electricity.

Honourable Prime Minister
The role that are being played in the economic development specially in the food production of Bangladesh by this Rural Electrification Program has been lauded at home and abroad. But due to inadequate supply of electricity by BPDB and DESA in the last few months the very existence of PBSs stands at stake. There are instances where a PBS has suffered from load shedding for 22 hours a day. As a result of this the daily life has been subject to extreme sufferings, farmer's financial condition has been shattered, production in the rural industries have come to almost stand still, commodities/grains in the cold storage are perishing. Unemployment on farms and industries has reached new peak. Thus the very back-bone of the rural economy is on the verge of break down.

Honourable Prime Minister
May we inform you of the fact that the PBSs across the country are the best pay masters of electric bills of BPDB and DESA. They not only pay monthly bills of bulk purchase on time, but also pay in advance at times. Since the PBSs receive power from the BPDB/DESA grid (sub) station their system loss for the entire quantum of power purchased by the PBSs is zero. But we are sorry to tell you honour that in spite of clear instruction from the government that the electricity produced in the country should be shared proportionately, the PBSs have always been the victim of disparity.

Honourable Prime Minister
From the very inception the Palli Bidyut Samities are managed democratically by the consumers representatives elected by their votes and accountable to the consumers. But the extent of recent load shedding and the unequal distribution of electricity produced in the country has reached to such an extent that we, as elected representatives, are not being able to provide minimum customer service. On the other hand, elected representatives and employees are being subject to assault by furious consumers. PBS installations and offices are being attacked, enclosed, set on fire and damaged. As a result in one hand destruction of assets are taking place, on the other hand bill collection is falling down at an alarming rate. In addition to that due to inadequate supply system loss is soaring high and tendency to commit crimes including stealing of electricity is increasing. It is worth mentioning that the rate of bill collection of PBSs is about 98 percent and system loss is only about 15 percent. But if the present situation goes unabated, it is apprehended that things may go beyond control very soon.

Honourable Prime Minister
You are aware of the fact that the whole nation is eagerly awaiting to watch the World-Cup foot-ball matches scheduled to be telecast by BTV. But due to excess load shedding in the PBS areas compared to PDB/DESA, outburst of accumulated anguish of deprived consumers is also apprehended.

Honourable Prime Minister
To save the PBSs from ruination due to serious load shedding, we earnestly appeal to your honour to use your good office to ensure proportionate power supply to the PBSs in accordance with the earlier government decision.

On behalf of two million member-consumers
**Presidents
Palli Bidyut Samities**

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The road link of the district headquarters with Gowainghat, Companyganj and Kanaighat thanas remained snapped till today.

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