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VOL. VIII NO. 238 REGD. NO. DA 781 INTERNET: <http://www.dailystarnews.com> AASHIN 7,1405 BS DHAKA TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 22, 1998 JAMADIUL AWAL 30, 1419 HIJRI 16 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 6.00

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Aman rice, paddy procurement prices up

The cabinet yesterday approved the policy of domestic procurement of Aman and wheat with price incentives for the next crops, reports APB.

The approval was given in a meeting of the Cabinet held at the Prime Minister's Office with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The price of each kilogram of Aman rice has been refixed at Tk 12, up by Tk 1 from the earlier purchase rate.

Aman paddy prices will be Tk 7.60 per kg which was about Tk 6 during the previous procurement drive.

The price of every kg of wheat will remain same at Tk 8.80, according to meeting sources.

Officials said the government raised the Aman prices in order to give some incentives to the farmers hit hard by the flood.

"Although no specific schedule has been fixed for starting the procurement drive," said an official, the government would try to start foodgrain procurement by December this year."

The Cabinet also approved, in principle, a proposal for restructuring the Forest Department to implement the Forest policy and the Forest Master-plan.

FAO to provide 25 MT vegetable seeds

By Staff Correspondent

The Food and Agriculture Organisation will give 25 MT of improved varieties of vegetable seeds worth 250,000 US dollars for distribution among flood affected farmers free of cost.

At least 100,000 farmers will benefit from the emergency assistance programme, FAO representative in Dhaka Hiroyuki Konuma said at a press conference at its office yesterday.

Seeds of 14 varieties of vegetables including radish, tomato, cabbage and spinach will be procured through local suppliers and distributed from mid-October through flood rehabilitation committees at thana and union levels, he said.

Under the programme, FAO will also provide technical assistance.

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Employment Bank starts operation today

The Employment Bank (Karma Sangsthan Bank) goes into operation today, reports UNB.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will declare open the bank, the first of its kind in the country, at a function in Osmani Memorial Hall at 4:30 pm.

After formal launching, the Prime Minister will distribute some approval letters to the borrowers of the new bank.

With an initial paid up capital of Taka one billion, the bank will give loan to unemployed youths without any collateral, but a guarantor for repayment of loan would be required.

Of the paid up capital, the government will provide Tk 750 crore.

HSC results on Sept 24

By Staff Correspondent

Results of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations held this year under all the five education boards will be published simultaneously on September 24, said a press release yesterday.

Heads of the colleges and the examinees have been advised to collect results at 4 pm from officials-in-charge of their examination centres.

The results will not be available at the education boards, education ministry or newspaper offices, the release added.

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GDP growth may fall to 4pc, experts fear

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi and Govinda Shil

The prolonged flooding this year will make a huge dent in economic growth, with the estimates of damage running as high as two percentage points. The government's top economic planner has admitted that the GDP growth will slow down by at least one per cent, while others are calculating the erosion much higher.

The minister for planning spoke yesterday of revising the target to five per cent from the

previously estimated six, but a number of top economists said the GDP growth could remain well below that level. One economist said the rate might be as low as four per cent.

Billed as the worst calamity Bangladesh has faced in this century, the flooding, which lasted for more than two months before it began to recede early last week, stopped most economic activity in as many as 52 administrative districts

out of 64. Still, the government remains optimistic about reaching the five-point mark, hoping to cash in on largely unaffected service sectors and a likely bumper output of boro in areas not hit by the floods.

The state minister for planning, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, is also arguing that exports have escaped the onslaught of the deluge to a large extent so far.

"We are hopeful that we'll achieve a five per cent GDP growth," says Alamgir, busy estimating damages to the economy as croplands and homes of millions have begun to emerge from under the flood water.

Alamgir points to the composition of the GDP, which is dominated by service sector contributing more than 48 per cent, followed by agriculture (29 per cent) and industry (12 per cent).

He says massive programmes have been planned to rehabilitate agriculture to minimise the flood damages. In unaffected areas, he said, "we will have a bumper boro and potato harvest."

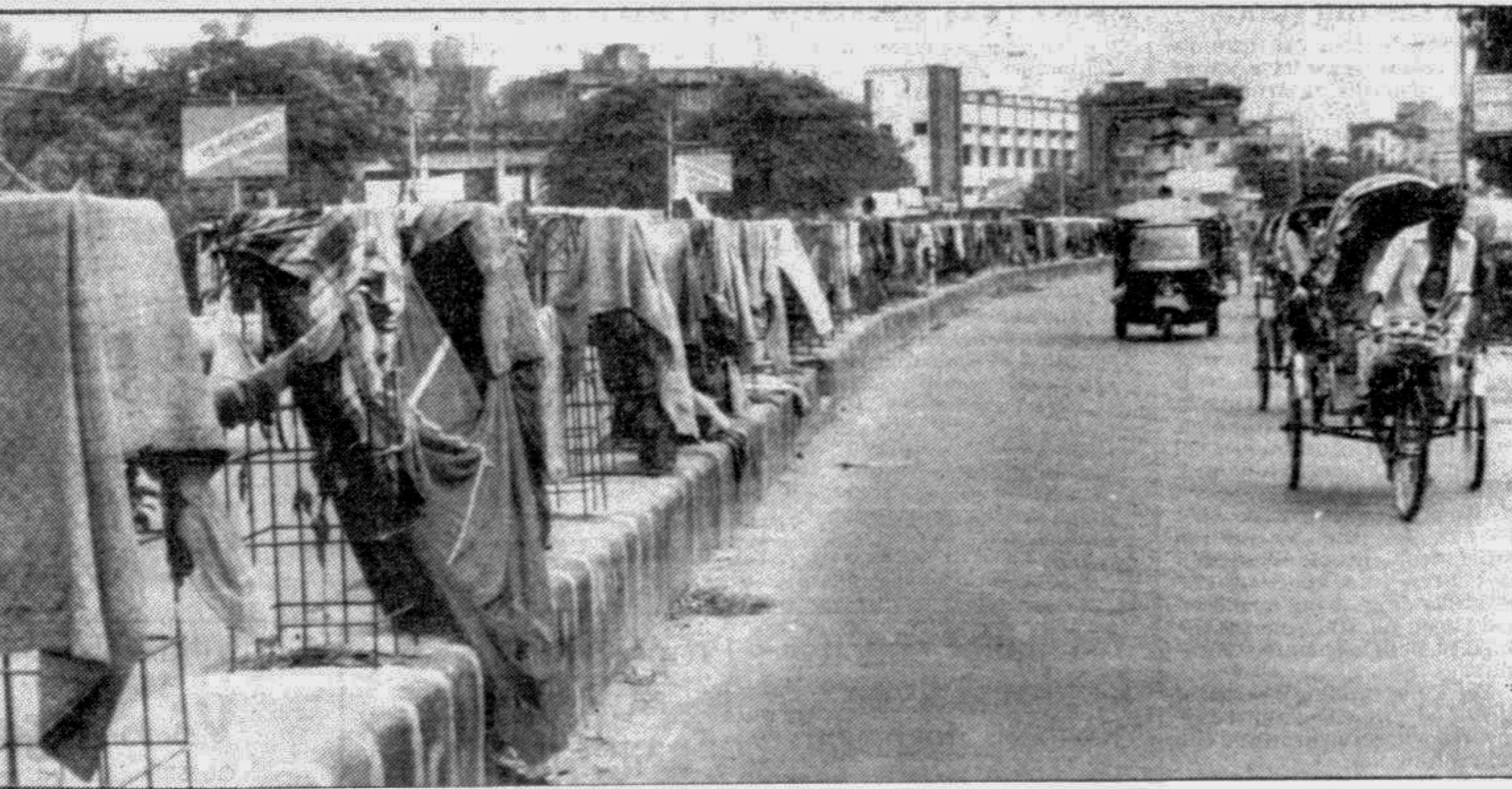
In addition, according to the minister, "service sector more or less remain unaffected and that exports are going alright so far."

He lists food processing, small and cottage industries

and some import-substitution industries as the most-affected sectors, which would receive generous government support. "We have already given a moratorium on repayment of industrial loans and are planning to create an Industrial Credit Fund" to boost the economic life, he said.

"Winter is our best time for economic activities," the minister said, trying to instill confidence.

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It is not an expo of stinky blankets. The island of Biswa Road is being used to dry blankets of neighbourhood dwellers. This practice is creating traffic hazard. — Star photo

675 leaks detected in city gas lines

By Staff Correspondent

As many as 675 leaks have been detected in the distribution pipeline of Titas Gas in Dhaka city, particularly in the flood affected areas, a senior official admitted but claimed these damages did not pose any safety threat.

The distribution company will soon start fixing the dents, said managing director M Mukhtar Ali, "as soon as the flood water recedes".

"I do not think the leaks pose any danger to the dwellers unless the leaked gas was inflamed from some other sources," he said.

The company is running a campaign through the state-run electronic media seeking cooperation from people in this regard.

Experts however said the leaks should not have occurred at all. "Gas pipeline is supposed to be laid with utmost care and

sufficient protective measures for all kinds of weather," said one pipeline expert, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Gas is considered as one of the most hazardous substances, they pointed out while referring to the unfortunate incident on Saturday. Four persons were killed and six others injured following explosion of an underground gas pipeline that also destroyed a one-storey building at flood-hit West Jurain.

Titas officials claimed an illegal act by the owner of the house was responsible for the incident.

"The owner of that house illegally shifted the riser of gas pipeline of Titas," said an official. "The extended portion was not welded with the main pipeline."

"As the extended portion was not welded, the main pipeline

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25pc of EU aid goes to NGOs

By M Anwarul Haq, back from Brussels

The European Union is giving increasing emphasis on delivery of goods and services to the grassroots level in developing countries through the NGOs, specially in Bangladesh, aimed at poverty alleviation.

The amount of EU's assistance channelised through the Bangladesh NGOs is indeed significant. Twentyfive per cent of the EU's present development assistance or financial support is directly provided to the NGOs.

This was disclosed to a team of journalists who visited Maastricht, Starsbourg and Brussels recently to familiarise themselves with EU activities.

"We are mainly focusing on community development and social programmes intended for poverty alleviation. The EU

also expects to provide a greater impetus to building a food security system in Bangladesh to act as a safety reserve for meeting challenges from natural disasters. Over two thirds of projects presently conducted in Bangladesh have a specific poverty alleviation objective. In all these activities, the non-governmental organisations could have a major participatory role," said Ruth Albuquerque, Head of Unit of External Relations overseeing EU activities in Bangladesh. Her unit also looks after Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Maldives.

Albuquerque said NGOs in Bangladesh can rely on European Union's increasing financial and technical support in taking up programmes related

to agriculture, education, poverty alleviation, income generation schemes and other social development sectors. They are also expected to receive large amounts of assistance for taking up post flood rehabilitation projects and for rural development activities.

Faced with a barrage of questions as to why such generosity was being shown to the NGOs, Albuquerque fired back: "We can only say that it is not generosity but credibility that makes the NGOs attract resources. It only speaks highly of the efficiency of Bangladesh NGOs and their success in reaching the poorest of the poor."

When asked if it reflects a lack of confidence in the gov-

ernment machinery, she said, "Definitely not." But she added quickly, "If the government becomes more operational and effective in its delivery system, we would be too happy to expand work and assistance through the Bangladesh government."

Albuquerque felt that for bureaucratic reasons working with the government "is enormously difficult" while working with the NGOs is normally "faster and simpler".

The NGOs' fine work in the areas of micro-credit assistance and rural development is being highly applauded by EU officials.

"Micro-credit schemes in Bangladesh have been one of

redmark at other points, including Hardinge Bridge. The Mahananda at Chapainawabganj and the Meghna at Bhairab Bazar were flowing above danger mark.

However, the Korotoa at Panchagarh and the Gumti at Comilla registered sharp rise yesterday.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief yesterday said the death toll from diarrhoea, house collapse, snake bite and other flood-related reasons rose to 884 across the country.

Out of the 52 districts gripped by the floods, the statement said situation in 30 districts became normal while it was gradually improving in

Buriganga falls below danger mark

Flood water receded from more areas in the capital with the Buriganga falling below danger mark and other surrounding rivers declining rapidly, report agencies.

Flood forecasters yesterday said the Shitalakha and the Turag will fall below danger level within next three or four days.

"The rivers will recede more rapidly from today at the end of the gravitational effects in the Bay of Bengal," they said.

Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) recorded only six out of 46 river points flowing above danger mark yesterday.

The Padma was only three cm above danger level at Pankha while it went below

redmark at other points, including Hardinge Bridge.

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Haphazard waste disposal DCC to fine for the nuisance, at last

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is finally going to fine any one for haphazard disposal of garbage.

"We're compelled to go for punitive measures as our repeated appeals to dispose of garbage at the right place at the right time have been futile," DCC Mayor Mohammad Hanif told a press conference at the Nagar Bhavan yesterday.

Under the municipal ordinance, one may be fined of a maximum of Tk 200 for a single instance of creating public nuisance by disposing of garbage indiscriminately. But the corporation seldom punishes such offenders.

An additional 20 mobile courts will join the existing three in the drive for cleaning the garbage, piled up during the floods, scheduled to start today, Hanif said.

The mayor further said the

mobile courts would also take legal action against those illegally occupying the city streets by piling up construction materials. In some posh city areas such as Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara, he said, such practices are rampant.

The DCC is giving 'top priority' to the cleaning drive, the mayor said and sought cooperation of all the political parties, NGOs and socio-cultural organisations. "Members of the political parties' youth and student fronts are welcome to participate in the drive," he said. He would write to all the parties seeking their help.

Replying to a question, Hanif said the DCC was also planning to introduce the "wheat for poly bag" system, already started in the city's Motijheel-Sabujbagh area by local MP and Deputy Minister

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Downpour adds to miseries of flood-hit people

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka city and many other places across the country experienced moderate to heavy rain yesterday, increasing the miseries of the flood-hit people.

The Met office recorded 44 mm rainfall in the city. The highest rainfall of 64 mm was recorded in Ishwardi. There was mild to moderate rain in many places in some other districts including Tangail, Barisal, Noakhali, Patuakhali, Bhola, Khulna and Rajshahi. The Met office recorded 28 mm rainfall in Rajshahi city.

Life in Dhaka city was disrupted as the rain continued on and off most of the day, temporarily inundating some roads and adding to the waters in areas still reeling under flood. Heavy downpour began in the city at around 10.30 am and it continued for about an hour. The rain started again at around 1 pm and continued for another hour. Drizzles continued till 4.30 pm.

The rain worsened the situation in areas including Shantipur.

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Flo-Jo dead

LOS ANGELES, Sept 21: Florence Griffith Joyner, the American sprinter who set women's 100-and 200-metre world records in 1988, has died at the age of 39 due to a seizure, reports AFP.

USA Track and Field spokesman Pete Cava confirmed the death of the sprinter who won three gold medals at the 1988 Seoul Olympics in the 100m, 200m and 4 x 100m relay.

Griffith Joyner, known for her self-designed fancy running uniforms and long fingernails, also won a 1984 Olympic silver medal in the heptathlon and 1992 bronze medal in the long jump.

Two abducted in city yet to be rescued

By Staff Correspondent

Two persons, including a businessman, were abducted for ransom in separate incidents in the city on Friday and Sunday, police said last night.

None of the victims could be rescued or their abductors arrested.

Kazi Sahabuddin, 22, a resident of North Sahjahanpur, was abducted on Friday and Omar Faruk, 45, a businessman was abducted from Fakirerpool area on Sunday. The abductors demanded Tk 2.42 lakh from the family members of Sahabuddin and Tk one lakh from those of Faruk. Motijheel police said.

A previously known person of Sahabuddin and two others were in his residence Friday morning, gossipped with him

and his family members for some time and then left the house with Sahabuddin saying that they were going to Brahmanbaria, police said.

On Sunday, relatives of Sahabuddin received a faxed message demanding the ransom. The kidnappers threatened that Sahabuddin would be killed if police is informed.

Faruk had gone to Fakirerpool at about 3 pm on Sunday for some business purpose. All of a sudden, a gang dragged him inside an ally and abducted him. The kidnappers later contacted Faruk's family members and demanded the ransom.

Two cases were filed with Motijheel thana on Sunday in connection with the abductions.

Tk 150cr IDA loan to fight arsenic problem

The International Development Association (IDA) will provide Bangladesh with 32.40 million US dollar equivalent to Tk 150.12 crore, for dealing with the arsenic problem in the country, reports UNB.

An agreement to this effect was signed at the conference room of ERD in the city yesterday.

Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria and the World Bank's Country Director Pierre Landell-Mills signed the agreement on behalf of the government and IDA respectively.

The credit, to be used for the Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply project, is repayable in 40 years with 10 years moratorium at a concessionary rate of 0.75 per cent.

Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) will implement the project aimed at site mitigation, improved understanding of the arsenic problem and strengthening of implementation capacity.

Speaking on the occasion, the Finance Minister expressed gratitude to the World Bank for its positive response to mitigate the unexpected arsenic problem in Bangladesh. He hoped that smooth implementation of the project in arsenic-prone area would benefit the people.

The World Bank country director hoped that the project would provide much needed help to the people who are fighting the silent killer.

ERD Secretary Dr Mashiur See page 11

Videotape of Clinton's testimony released

WASHINGTON, Sept 21: Televised broadcast began today of US President Bill Clinton's testimony to a grand jury in an investigation that could result in his removal from office, reports APB.

The testimony videotaped at the White House August 17 was released by Congress at around 9:15 am (1315 GMT) and posted on the Internet.

Congress also released thousands of copies of some 2,800 pages of supplementary material from Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's report to Congress accusing Clinton of 11 impeachable acts including perjury.

Four national television networks — CNN, MSNBC, FOX See Page 12 Col 2

Rape incidents Probe body submits report to JU VC

By JU Correspondent

The Fact-finding Committee formed to investigate rape incidents at Jahangirnagar University (JU) submitted its report to the Vice-Chancellor yesterday.

The seven-member committee headed by Prof Anwarul Haq Sharif, prepared the report after talking to a number of female students, reported victims and some ruling party-backed Chhatra League leaders who had been accused of the rapes.

The probe body also examined secret letters and various other documents to identify the rapists.

When contacted, JU VC Prof Alauddin Ahmed said the report was submitted to him in a sealed packet and it would be placed before the Syndicate at 11 am today for deciding the next course of action.

Asked to comment on the authorities' probable stance on the matter, the Vice-Chancellor said actions would be taken against the offenders as per the Syndicate decision.

Matia clarifies

Begum Matia Chowdhury, Minister for Agriculture and Food and Minister in-charge of Sherpur district yesterday sent a clarification to a news item printed in yesterday's issue of The Daily Star headlined, "Relief Quota, Matia influencing district administration."

The report of The Daily Star was based on a press conference addressed by Abdul Bari, AL MP from Sherpur-3 constituency. The press conference was held at Sherpur circuit house on Sunday.

Following is the text of Matia's clarification.

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