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BNP, allies to stage hunger strike tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

BNP and its allies are set to stage an eight-hour hunger strike in the city tomorrow to protest what they said government repression and price hike of essentials, among other issues.

Leader of the Opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will lead the fasting due to start at 9 am at the city's Paltan Maidan. She is also scheduled to address the gathering at the end of hunger strike.

Other components in the BNP led seven party alliance — Jatiya Party (ZM), Jagpa, NDA, Democratic League and PNP — are also due to participate in the hunger strike while Jamaat-e-Islami has decided not to take part in it. But the party will visit Paltan Maidan to express its solidarity with the strikers there after holding a public rally at the Purana Paltan crossing.

To drum up support for the hunger strike, BNP has planned processions at all the 90 wards of the Dhaka City Corporation today.

A joint meeting of city units of BNP and its front organisations will be held at 6 this evening at the party's Naya Paltan central office to discuss preparations for the fasting.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, MP, in a statement last night called upon the party workers and its front organisations to participate in tomorrow's hunger strike.

Hurricane may hit southern coasts

By Special Correspondent

Authorities evacuated thousands of people yesterday in the southern coastal districts ahead of a severe cyclone, likely to strike sometime today.

The storm, with the core of a hurricane roaring from the Bay of Bengal, is may lash the coast packing winds upto 140-km an hour, whipping up tidal surge up to 8 feet.

The Sundarbans is likely to bear the brunt of the storm, meteorological Department said at mid-night.

Its peripheral winds already started probing the shore at 9:30 p.m. last night with gusty winds blowing over the Heron point on the tip of the Sundarbans skirting the Bay, officials said.

Our Khulna correspondent quoting Mongla port authority control room said at 11:15 p.m. that high winds reaching upto 30-km an hour whipping surges have started blowing over the Heron point.

Low lying areas of Bhola and surrounding islands and chars have already gone under 2.5 feet water, he said.

UNB reported at 10:25 p.m. that low lying areas in Barguna

district have also gone under water with the high winds and choppy seas making it difficult for a number of fishing boats anchoring at shore.

Our correspondents in Chittagong, Khulna and Satkhira said the authorities earlier alerted the Army and Naval

personnel, shut cargo handling at Chittagong and Mongla ports and ordered evacuation of people at about 4 p.m. when it appeared that the cyclonic storm was gathering strength.

By 9 p.m. the severe storm intensified with the core of a hurricane, turning the Bay rough with its peripheral winds probing the coasts after 10 p.m.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna said that drizzles and howling winds emptied the city streets by late evening, shops were shuttered and people rushed home. Memories of a similar storm on November 29, 1988 that swept over the Sun-

darbans and inundated the coastal areas causing heavy damages flashed into their minds.

The authorities at Shironkhola, Mongla, Moregan and Rampal thanas started evacuating people to cyclone shelters at 4 p.m., announcing

the impending danger from the Bay over loud hollers and public address systems.

Medical and rescue teams were put on high alert along with Army and Navy teams to join the rescue operations. Sixteen ships at Mongla port were asked to anchor safely and

caargo handling were closed as precautionary measures as great Danger Signal number 8 was hoisted.

Red Crescent volunteers were also put on alert to face the emergency.

Similar measures were taken by the administration in

the neighbouring Bagerhat and Satkhira districts.

But people in the shrimp belts are apprehending trouble in their farms as tidal surges could wash away the shrimps.

Our Correspondent from Satkhira said that the administration alerted people in the coastal areas to move to safer places and shelters. A total of 20 cyclone shelters, schools and colleges have been readied to receive the evacuees.

The administration also prepared to meet the emergency, readying rescue and medical teams.

In Dhaka city, the sky re-

mained overcast without winds. There were drizzles in the evening falling to cool the heat.

Our Staff Correspondent from Chittagong says: Massive preparedness programmes have been taken here after hoisting of signal no 6 following the cyclonic storm heading towards the coastal areas, official sources said.

Army personnel have been kept ready to tackle the situation whenever called by civil administration, security

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PM's directive to remain alert

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has asked the administration in coastal districts to remain alert in view of the severe cyclonic storm which is likely to cross the Sundarbans coast early today, reports UNB.

The Prime Minister also directed the authorities concerned to take all precautionary measures to protect life and property from the impending storm.

- Massive evacuation in Mongla, Khulna, Satkhira, Bagerhat and adjoining coastal areas
- Civil, military rescue teams on high alert • Chittagong, Mongla ports closed

Hasina breaks silence, says 'thank-you' to Khaleda

Breaking a 15-minute silence, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina thanked Begum Khaleda Zia for attending the Armed Forces Day reception at Senakunja in Cantonment yesterday evening, reports UNB.

"I am happy that you have come, thank you," Hasina told Begum Zia with a broad smile as she (PM) came out of the VIP shed at the reception mall at about 7:15 pm.

Apparently there was no response from Khaleda Zia to the Prime Minister's good gesture. Both the leaders sat for some time on sofas divided by a tea table.

Begum Zia's silence attracted attention of the guests around.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who is in charge of the Defence Ministry, hosted the reception attended by dignitaries, politicians, diplomats, military and civil officials.

'Expired' saline kills seven at RMCH

RANGPUR, Nov 21: Seven patients, including a minor boy, died at Rangpur Medical College Hospital Friday night after the physicians pushed them date-expired intravenous saline, reports UNB.

The victims were identified as Ashadul, 5, Rafiqul, 30, Khulujkan, 60, Mokbul Hossain, 35, Mashuiddin, 45, Radhika, 22, and Safaruddin, 75.

The authorities of the hospital, however, denied any casualty due to injecting the patients saline IV Dextrose but admitted the incidents of 'reaction' among two patients.

Hospital sources said that a number of patients were given the saline, reportedly manufactured back in 1982. Their conditions are now critical.

Following the reports of reaction due to the saline, which were brought from Dhaka a few days ago, the authorities withdrew these from the hospital.

Cry for jobs in northern Bangladesh

By Reaz Ahmad

The flood affected people of the rural areas have been exposed to serious unemployment problems as the government is yet to take any "special" measures to create job opportunities by expanding its programmes like Food for Work.

As there is no such post-flood allocation to inject money into the rural economy — other than the usual, pre-flood budgetary allocation for Test Relief (TR) and FFW programmes — the poor people especially those living in the acute poverty-prone northern Bangladesh are reportedly reel-

ing under ravaged rural economy, a fallout of the century's worst deluge.

Most pathetic cases are the poor who have no land of their own and do not fall in the category of those eligible for agricultural loans but are still uncovered by the VGF programme. They are reportedly desperate to get jobs for two square meals a day. Reports say, they are now forced to sell labour at a rate as low as Tk 25 a day.

Aware of the situation, the relief ministry had asked for some four lakh tonnes of additional foodgrain 'long time

ago.

"Allocation of the additional amount of food grains would have helped create scopes for labour-intensive activities in the rural areas, expanding the 'Food For Works' type of programmes," a top official of the ministry said.

"But we are yet to get any positive response in this direction. The proposal for additional sanction is still lying with the finance ministry."

However, small schemes under TR have already been commissioned in a meager way in different districts with an in-

total allotment of only 50,000 tonnes of wheat.

But, the programme is too little to address the need of the time. There is a pre-flood budgetary allocation of 240,000 tonnes of wheat for FFW purpose, but government could not start the programme as yet.

Uncomfortable with the slow pace of food aid shipment, the government is concerned about the rate of stock depletion in silos, especially in terms of food disbursement against VGF card holders, government sources said.

Against this backdrop, the

country's development partners, specially those promising food aid, have recently expressed their willingness to discuss the issue with the government on an emergency basis.

Confirming this, the sources said that a meeting would be held at Economic Relations Division (ERD) on Tuesday. "They are expected to brief the government about the latest position of their shipment of food grain at the Tuesday's meeting," diplomatic sources said.

With two lakh tonnes of wheat already procured by the government and with the ex-

pected shipment of more food aid this month, the stock situation would improve, said a relief ministry official. "There is every possibility that something positive would come out from Tuesday's meeting."

"If the government decides for more allocation and go for FFW programme without further delay, the efforts would definitely have a positive impact on rural economy. Besides, with harvesting period of Aman has already started and some job opportunities have been created for the rural labourers," said another official.

Strike at Ctg Port deferred

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Nov 21: The 24-hour strike, called by 22 trade union bodies at Chittagong port on November 23, has been shifted to November 30, union leaders said.

The decision was taken today against the backdrop of the possible cyclonic storm, they said.

The strike was called to press home the demands of the trade union bodies that included cancellation of the permission for installing private terminal by American company SSA, procurement of equipment for Chittagong Port and setting up container terminals by the government in New Mooring area of the port to raise its efficiency, union leaders said.

Chittagong Port authority today held a meeting with leaders of the 22 trade union bodies to force them withdraw the strike, port sources said.

But the meeting ended inconclusively, sources said.

Eight held while trying to enter Sajeda Chy's house

Police arrested eight people from Minto Road area when they tried to force their way into the official residence of the Forest and Environment Minister yesterday, reports APB.

Police said all the eight appeared in front of the official residence of Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and attempted to enter the house compound. The on-duty sentry refused them entry as they didn't have any prior permission.

Being refused, they started abusing the police sentry and the minister's private assistant in filthy language at the top of their voices.

On being informed, Ramna police rushed to the spot and picked them up at about 9 am.

Police identified the arrested persons as: Rafiqul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Aslam Khan, Mirza Mujibur Rahman, Abul Bashar, Jalilur Rahman, Nurul Islam and Dildar Hossain.

Unocal's WRIP may get the go ahead soon

Foreign consultants likely to study technical aspects

By Sharier Khan

The government is likely to appoint a foreign consultant soon to scrutinise various technical aspects of the Western Region Integrated Project (WRIP) in Bhola, pursued by American oil company Unocal.

Sources said that negotiations for signing the WRIP are now at "final" stage and the government may move files in favour of Unocal by the end of this month.

Unocal has been pursuing the WRIP since late 1996 on the basis of "unsolicited negotiation."

The WRIP aims at developing the Shahbazpur Gas Field in Bhola, setting up an inter-regional pipeline up to Kushtia and a series of power plant in the power hungry western region. The project involves an investment of around US\$700 million. Unocal intends to in-

vest around 400 million in the first phase.

Despite "hammering" from the government's top level for signing of the WRIP agreement on an "urgent" basis, negotiations have been slow due to a critical stance taken by Petrobangla experts on various components of WRIP and its financial implications, the sources said. Negotiations have

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Now comes the satellite phone

Govt considers US company's proposal

Star Report

The government is considering a proposal from a multinational company to introduce satellite telephone service in the country to modernise the telecommunication system, official sources said.

A "provisional permission" may be given to Iridium, a US company to introduce the system, telecommunication ministry sources said.

"Satellite technology will allow the user to make call from any part of the world — on land, air or sea. The subscriber will just open his hand-held phone set and dial his desired number. It will even allow users

to sent fax and e-mail. It will virtually throw-away the barriers of existing telephone system," a high official of the ministry said.

A telephone call through satellite will cost about 30 percent more than the present rate, an official of Motorola Inc BD, which works for Iridium in Bangladesh, said.

Bangladesh now uses some satellite technology side by side land-based stations and marine cables. But Iridium satellite system will provide for personal booking of satellite, sources said. Usually, satellite service is used by government

or institutions, not individuals.

The government is considering the service to help the business community exchange information with the outside world quickly as Bangladesh is looking for more foreign direct investment (FDI) in the coming years. It will also boost the government's revenue earning," the official said.

Telecommunication is the third major field which received US \$231 million in FDI in 1997.

"We are opening the door to modern technology so that Bangladesh can also avail the

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Politics plays prank with the poor

By Gobinda Bar back from Madaripur

Widespread irregularities have been alleged in distribution of VGF cards in Kadambari union under Rajoir thana in Madaripur district.

Distribution of cards depend on the liking of the chairman and members of the Union Parishad (UP). The criterion is voting in last year's local body election. The fortunate card holders now are those who voted for them, local people alleged.

Former chairman of Kadambari union Nami Gopal Bar alleged "people who did not support the present chairman in the last election were not is-

sued cards". He also quoted the UP chairman as saying, "Why should I give cards to people who did not for vote me? I do not care whether he or she is in need or not."

A former member of ward No 3 in Kadambari union said, "Nepotism is a usual practice in distributing cards. In many cases the real poor are deprived of cards because of nepotism, their political identities, village disputes and previous electoral polarisation."

A local Awami League leader, speaking on condition of anonymity, alleged that seven families out of 18 "in one

bar" were given VGF cards as they were the people of a man very close to the UP chairman.

When asked local UP chairman Shahjahan Sikder denied the allegations but said he was not sure about the activities of UP members. "I am not sure what the members do. They may have committed some malpractices," he said.

"I have distributed 1250 VGF cards among the UP members according to population and needs of different wards and they have distributed the cards in accordance with the lists prepared by themselves," he said.

Rupayan Dewan tells seminar in city

We can't take responsibility of non-tribals

By Special Correspondent

Old adversaries and some leaders of people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts gathered at a workshop in the city yesterday to review the progress of the CHT peace accord, calling for "transparent and more sincere efforts" by the government to implement it through a national consensus.

In a day-long workshop organised by 'Odhikar', a coalition of human rights organisa-

tions, former Shantibahini leaders, academics, NGO representatives, leaders of tribals and settlers felt that the that two sides in the CHT agreement should initiate a process to earn confidence of tribals and Bangalees in the hills.

"The government should be more transparent, sincere and take quick steps to implement the accord," a recommendation adopted at the day-long work-

shop said.

It also recommended that the "misunderstanding" between the government and the Parbatya Chhattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) should be removed, Land Commission should be formed immediately to conduct land survey and prepare records.

Recommendations were also made for preparing a list of the

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Only darkness inside the tunnel

By Morshed Ali Khan

The DCC Kawran Bazar pedestrian underpass at Airport Road has been in darkness for over a week now as the authorities have failed to ensure light inside the tunnel.

The pedestrians are forced to use the tunnel to cross this road as DCC has enacted fences around the road to prevent haphazard crossing of the busy road.

Hundreds of pedestrians, mostly female garment workers, were seen yesterday evening crossing the underpass in total darkness. A group of young girls cried out for help in the darkness when some boys swooped on them taking advantage of the darkness. The girls were returning home after work at a nearby garment factory.

When several men lit up matches to see why the girls were screaming, two boys were seen running away towards the western exit. For security men sitting on a bench at the exit kept quiet.

When the crowd approached them the men from the Group-4 said that the tunnel had been in darkness for over one week.

"We have informed our bosses, we also notified the DCC about lack of lights and the risks here but nobody has fixed the lights so far," said a 13-year-old girl. "The guards had bought candles out of their own pocket."

"Now we are in fear that the public may turn on us anytime for frequent incidents of crime that occur in the tunnel and beat us up," the guard added.

Several pedestrians gave the guards money to buy candles immediately to light up the pitch-dark tunnel.

One of the young girls was seen weeping as she was led away by her friends.

Killing of 2 concert goers: 6 arrested

Police yesterday arrested six persons in connection with the killing of two youths outside the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla Stadium on Friday, reports BSS.

Police press release said six persons were arrested following a raid jointly conducted by Mirpur thana police and detective police in accordance with the FIR (First Information Report) lodged by father of Akhter Hossain, one of the victims of the incident.

The arrested were identified as Waliurzaman alias Masud, Nuruzzaman, Arifur Rahman, Saiful Islam, Sheikh Tarek and Al Amin.

Lawyer shot dead at Kushtia

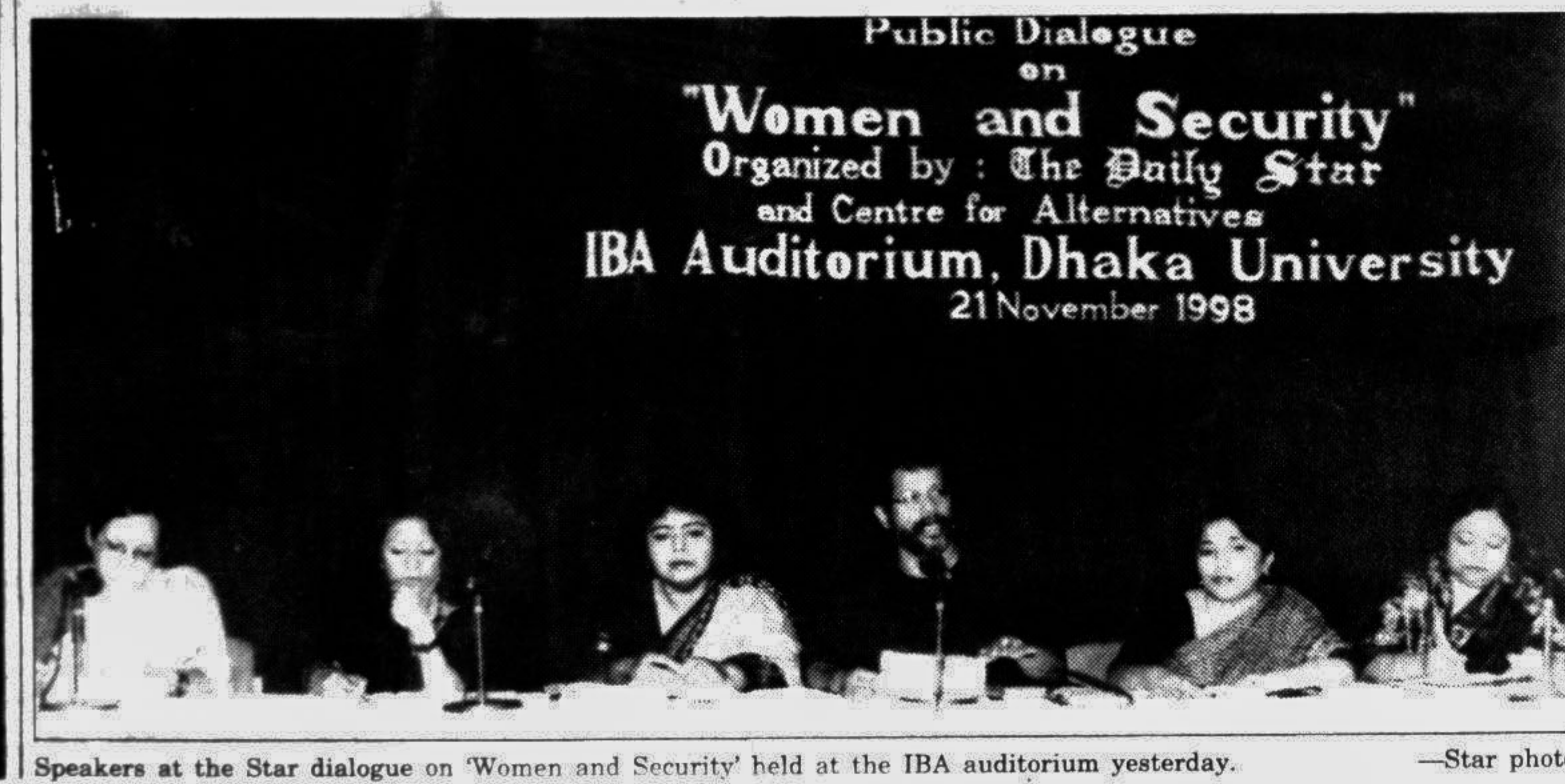
From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Nov 21: A lawyer was shot dead by unknown assailants here this evening.

Discard old ways, leading women tell Star dialogue

By Staff Correspondent

Public Dialogue on **"Women and Security"** Organized by: **The Daily Star** and Centre for Alternatives IBA Auditorium, Dhaka University 21 November 1998



Speakers at a Public Dialogue yesterday called for launching an integrated social movement to eliminate violence against women.

Stressing on discarding traditional views on women, they said that a social revolution was must to get rid of age-old patriarchal values.

nothing but a form of oppression. "If a woman becomes a victim of violence, instead of helping her people still ask whether she followed the so-called societal code of conduct. Our speakers gave their own views on the problem, Prof Nazmunnessa Mahtab of Dhaka University related personal experiences of violence in the family atmosphere and discrimination between boys and girls at home.

Dr Niaz Zaman of Dhaka University said she felt insecure as a woman even in a place like Dhaka University. "Our society thinks women are weak and if someone is with her, she is better secured." Underscoring the need of women's self-reliance, she said that they also suffer because of lack of 'personal space' in family and society.

Initiating the discussion, Prof Meghna Guhathakurata of Dhaka University said the so-called security offered by the society to the women was

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Speakers at the Star dialogue on 'Women and Security' held at the IBA auditorium yesterday. —Star photo