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Lack of quorum in JS becomes 'chronic'

By Staff Correspondent

Delayed start of the Jatiya Sangsad sitting due to lack of quorum has become a chronic problem now-a-days in the House.

The House never had a quorum -- presence of 60 out of 330 members -- at 4 pm, the scheduled time for starting the day's sitting since the current 11th session of parliament began on November 5. The delay ranged from 30 minutes to an hour on all but a few working days. On *hartal* days, the sitting started with an average delay of 15 minutes.

Yesterday's sitting began at 5.04 pm, 64 minutes behind schedule, with a Panel member, Col. (Retd) Shaikat Ali, in the chair. A member of the Panel chairs the session in the absence of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker.

On the day, 10 MP of opposition BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami turned up till 4.38 pm. Only 31 MPs of ruling

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Report on UZ Parishad Bill '98 placed in JS

A parliamentary committee report on the Upazila Parishad Bill 1998 was submitted to the House last night with note of dissent by BNP and Jatiya Party members, reports UNB.

Abdul Mannan, chairman of the standing committee on LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry, introduced the report presented by Barrister Nazmul Huda, Helaluzzaman Talukdar, Lalul and Mohammad Shahjahan of BNP and Dr Rustom Ali Farazi of JP.

In the report on the Bill, the House committee recommended that an MP would be adviser of the proposed Upazila Parishad and the local government body would go by his counsel.

The BNP members on the standing committee in their note of dissent proposed that "Upazila Parishad" should be renamed "Thana Parishad". They suggested that election to the Upazila Parishad should be held simultaneously with

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Bad day for a minister

By Staff Correspondent

Dr. Mozammel Hossain who is in charge of two ministries -- Social Welfare, and Women and Children Affairs -- had to swallow his words on the floor of the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

State Minister Dr. Hossain blasted the opposition BNP members who pointed out that a social welfare organisation in Pirojpur named *Estro Shukhi Samaj Gohri* received Tk three lakh from his ministry in 1997-98 financial year.

"It's nowhere in the list. Where did you get it from? It's untrue, totally untrue," shouted the angry physician-turned-politician, questioning the BNP MPs' "knowledge of arithmetic."

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Import duty on onion withdrawn

The government has withdrawn import duties on onion to ensure its smooth supply at lower price in view of the forthcoming holy Ramadan, reports APB.

The importers, however, will have to pay the advance income tax.

The withdrawal, which came into effect yesterday, would remain valid till January 31, said an NBR press release. Earlier on November 1, the government had reduced the import duty on onion to 7.5 per cent from 30 per cent.

Cyclone turns into land depression

Sigh of relief

By Staff Correspondent

People in the coastal areas heaved a sigh of relief as the severe cyclonic storm weakened and turned into a land depression yesterday evening.

The storm crossed the Sundarbans coast near the Raimongal river at 6 pm without causing any major damage, but triggering downpour in coastal and central districts.

There was no report of human casualty from any area till midnight last night. However, officials at district headquarters reported gusty to squally wind up to 60-80 km per hour during the storm.

However, a hundred of thatched houses and standing crops on a vast area of land were damaged by the winds and tidal surges.

Under the influence of the

land depression, the regions of Barisal, Patuakhali, Noakhali, Comilla, Faridpur, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Fapna, Chittagong and Sylhet experienced moderately heavy rain.

The life in the capital was virtually paralysed yesterday due to day-long drizzling under the influence of the cyclonic storm.

Motorised vehicles were mostly kept indoors while autorickshaws and rickshaws demanded excess fare due to the inclement weather. Attendance in government offices, private establishments and educational institutions was thin. Many shops were closed.

Our Barisal correspondent quoting officials adds: The coastal areas in Bhola were hit by tidal surge. Char Zahirud-

din, Char Motahar, Dalchar, Char Kukrimukri, Char Patila, Char Kajhama, Kachuakhali and Naldubi-Baikantapur were submerged by 5-6 feet tidal surge, above normal astronomical tide, under the influence of the storm.

Low-lying areas of coastal and char areas in Noakhali submerged during the high tide. The high tide that began at 5 pm whipped up waters four to five feet higher than the normal time.

Our Satkhira correspondent reported that an embankment of the Water Development Board at Gabura collapsed in heavy rains. Two of the three trawlers sunk at Sundarbans. A number of boats laden with woods from the forest also cap-

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36 cyclones in 38 yrs killed 7 lakh people

CHITTAGONG, Nov 22: At least 36 cyclones left some seven lakh people killed and property worth crores of taka destroyed in the country's coastal areas and off-shore islands and chars in the last 38 years, reports UNB.

But proper and adequate infrastructures are still a far cry to face the cyclones, tidal surge and other natural calamities in the vulnerable coastal areas.

A master plan of Tk 2,000 crore was prepared in 1986 to face the natural calamities in coastal areas, but it was shelved.

According to available information, 12,049 square km in 49 coastal and island thanas are vulnerable to natural calamities.

Of the area, 9,962 square km in 237 unions of 46 thanas are most risky for cyclone and tidal surge.

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'Signal drama' sparks panic in port city

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Nov 22: Chittagong saw hectic evacuation measures following what has been widely described as a 'signal drama' staged by the Met office here today.

The drama began when the Met Office suddenly announced signal 9 at 1 p.m., triggering panic in the city and the adjoining coastal areas forcing the authorities and Red Crescent to start immediate evacuation.

Chittagong City Corporation rushed 70 trucks and its personnel to the low-lying areas of Patenga in the city to carry people to cyclone shelters, its control room said. "We are very busy now with evacuation measures," said an official.

Red Crescent sources said its volunteers already deployed in the coastal belt were asked to expedite evacuation measures amid loud publicity over mega-

phones.

A Red Crescent official said that about 20,000 people were evacuated from coastal thanas of Banskhali, Anwara and Sandwip on a short notice. "But we suddenly had to order our volunteers after 2 pm through VHF sets to stop evacuation and advised people to go back home as the signal was downed to 6 from 9, surprising many."

A senior port official said, "We suffered from a communication gap as we had to do a lot of things on a short notice. Within a very short time, we had to force out two more ships to outer anchorage and mobilise our personnel at different places as the message reached us very late."

"However, we heaved a sigh of relief when we received the message at around 3 pm that the

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LESSER TROUBLE: It did put brakes on the normal life in the city as well as in other parts of the country yesterday but given the potent threat the hurricane posed in the coastal regions, the rain was nothing to grumble over. — Star photo

Holzman explains his purpose of meeting leaders

The US Ambassador in Dhaka has said he occasionally meets government and opposition leaders with message that political stability and uninterrupted peace are indispensable for economic development, reports UNB.

John C Holzman stated 'the motto' of his meeting with the Bangladesh leaders to President Shahabuddin Ahmed when he made a courtesy call on the latter at Bangabhaban yesterday.

Holzman referred to the "excellent" relationship between Dhaka and Washington and said that he attaches great importance to the programme for economic development of the people of Bangladesh.

A communique from the President's house said the American Ambassador expressed the view that "political stability and uninterrupted peace are indispensably necessary for economic development, and with this view in mind I occasionally meet leaders of the government and the opposition."

The US envoy highly appreciated the President's straightforward views on this and other issues on different occasions.

President Shahabuddin thanked the ambassador for his interest in the economic development of Bangladesh in various fields and reciprocated that the relationship between the two countries is excellent.

Keep hospitals clean: PM's directive

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the officials of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to speedily implement various post-flood rehabilitation projects undertaken by the government, reports agencies.

She was presiding over a high-level meeting of the ministry to review the post-flood rehabilitation activities at the Bangladesh Secretariat in the afternoon.

The Prime Minister lauded the role of the ministry in tackling the devastating floods. She asked them to gear up activities in the health and family welfare sector. She also asked them to remove any bottlenecks regarding funding of the projects.

Referring to the cleanliness of hospital, she directed all to maintain a clean and hygienic environment in all hospitals of the country.

She also asked the officials to ensure pure drinking water for the rural people and maintain a pond in every arsenic-prone area for using its waters for drinking after purification.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Salah Uddin Yusuf said over 4700 medical teams worked across the country during the floods and for taking special care the number of deaths was nominal from water-borne diseases.

"Only a little over one thousand people died of diarrhoea while 793,417 were affected," he informed the meeting.

Body to probe deaths in RMCH

RANGPUR, Nov 22: A three-member enquiry committee was formed today to investigate the deaths of eight patients at the Rangpur Medical College Hospital, reports APB.

The committee, headed by Prof Abdus Salam of Surgery Department of RMCH, will submit its report to RMCH director Dr Mazharul Hannan within 24 hours.

The other members of the committee are: Prof Abdul Latif and Dr Gias Uddin.

Shazneen Murder Case

Father starts giving statement in court

By Staff Correspondent

Latifur Rahman, father of murdered teenager Shazneen, started deposing his "examination-in-chief" (testimony) in the court of Sixth Additional District and Session Judge, Dhaka yesterday.

The testimony was deposited from 4:00 pm and continued till 4:45 pm before judge AK Roy who adjourned the court till November 24.

Latifur Rahman is the informant in the murder case.

All the seven accused in the case -- domestic help Shahidul Islam, contractor Hasan, guard Humayun, supervisor Badal, carpenter Shahi Ram and two maids Parvin and Minu -- were brought to the court during the proceeding.

Latifur Rahman pointing his finger at Shahid, who was then standing at the dock along with six other accused, said "Shahid had killed my daughter in collusion with others."

On behalf of the government, Public Prosecutor Kamrul Islam and on behalf of the informant Senior Advocate Ramzan Ali Khan, advocates Saima Khanam, Mahbub Hossain, Tajuddin Ahmed, Istiaq Ahmed Khan and Mahmuda were pre-



Shazneen

sent at the court.

Meanwhile, among the defence lawyers, Khandakar Bashir Ahmed, lawyer of Hasan, and Awlad Hossain, lawyer of the maids - Minu and Parvin -- were present.

In his testimony, Latifur Rahman reiterated the points he had made in the FIR. Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, was murdered at their Gulshan residence on the night of April 23. Shazneen was a student of class IX in Scholastic

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Non-farm khas land on sale

By Staff Correspondent

The government has decided to sell off all the non-agricultural khas lands (public lands) in the urban areas that are not used by schools, colleges and for different public welfare activities.

State Minister for Land Rashed Mosharrif said this at a press conference at his Secretariat office yesterday.

The government decision is aimed at ensuring best use of public lands and earning of due revenues that can be used for development programmes, he said.

But about 90 per cent of these lands are under illegal occupation, some sources noted.

The state minister said, "A lot of these lands have been illegally used for a long time. We will sell these lands through open tender in whatever condition those are."

When told that many of the illegal occupiers have built multi-storey structures on the khas lands, he said in such cases, the lands will be sold along with the structures and the occupiers could participate in the bids.

Asked about khas lands on the banks of the river Buriganga with hundreds of illegal structures on those choking its course, Mosharrif said a survey will be conducted to identify those structures.

He said there are 363.64 acres of khas lands in the capi-

tal alone and this could fetch the government over Tk 300 crore.

In the divisional cities, the khas lands would be sold through a seven-member committee headed by the respective divisional commissioners. In the district towns and other urban areas, the lands would be sold through a seven-member committee headed by the respective deputy commissioners, he said.

7-party's mass hunger strike postponed

By Staff Correspondent

The Seven Party Alliance has postponed today's mass hunger strike in view of "people's sufferings due to cyclone and tidal surge in the coastal regions", said a press release issued by BNP yesterday.

The day-long hunger strike scheduled to be held at Paltan Maidan was called to "protest price hike of essentials, and gas and electricity, deterioration of law and order, imposition of inflated taxes, rape of students by Chhatra League terrorists at Jahangirnagar University, repression on the opposition and taking away of democratic rights," the release added.

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Shantu Larma launches party activities today

KHAGRACHHARI, Nov 22: PCJSS chief Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma will launch organisational activities with a visit to Rangamati tomorrow, reports UNB.

During the visit, he will exchange views with political leaders, professionals and social workers at Barkal, Suvo-long, Naniarchar, Baradam, Kowkhali and Raikhali, PCJSS sources said.

Naranganj BNP leader arrested

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Nov 22: Narayanganj town BNP convenor Advocate Taimur Alam Khondaker was arrested from the capital today.

Narayanganj police and a special team of DB police arrested the BNP leader from the High Court area in the city at around 9:30 a.m. today.

The BNP leader was arrested for allegedly firing shots and hurling bombs at Narayanganj town Awami League leader Wazed Ali Khokon near Mukti-joddha auditorium at around 8:30 p.m. on Saturday.

Taimur was sent to jail custody after his bail petition was rejected.

Taslima gets bail: Rule nisi on govt

By Special Correspondent

Controversial feminist writer Taslima Nasreen emerged from hiding and appeared before a Division Bench of the High Court which granted her *ad-interim* bail yesterday.

The bench comprising Justice Kazi Ebadul Huq and Justice Awlad Ali also issued a rule nisi asking the government to explain in four weeks why she would not be enlarged on permanent bail.

They also asked the government to present all documents at the lower court within four weeks and permitted her to be represented by a lawyer.

Her face partially veiled by a *urna* (scarf), Nasreen arrived at the court flanked by close relations and two men who appeared to be security personnel through a side door unannounced at 11-15 a.m. She had been in hiding since September 27 when she returned home ending her four years in exile.

She left the country in August 1994 and was granted asylum in Sweden.

She lived in Germany and United States after obtaining bail in a case for alleged remarks against the Quran in an

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CMSD buying drugs violating rules

By Naimul Haq

The Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD) is violating government rules by purchasing drugs having less than two years' shelf-life from local importers.

As per rules, drugs should have shelf-life not less than two years at the time of procurement by the Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD), the only government agency which purchases drugs and supplies those to government hospitals.

According to sources, the CMSD has received at least six drugs having less than 24 months' life. The drugs are mostly used for sedating (anaesthesia) and treatment of cancer.

The drugs are: injection Heparin (300 ampoule), received on 5.6.98 (its life expires on March 1999); injection Dobutamine HCL 250mg (7000 vials), received on 23.11.97 (its life expires on September 1999); injection Vincristin 2 mg (3250 vials), received on 31.5.98 (its life expires on January 2000); injection Cardioplegia solution 20 ml (600 vial), received on 6.1.98 (its life expires on July 1999); injection

Atracurium Besilate 25 mg (3000 vial) received on 9.9.97 (its life expires on April 1999) and injection carboplatin 50 mg (3000 vial) received on 9.9.97 (its life expires on November 1998).

It is learnt that the less the life of a drug, the less is its price. Local importers who purchase drugs from foreign pharmaceutical companies can procure those at almost half or one-fourth of the original price because their expiry dates draw nearer, the sources claimed.

A section of CMSD officials contacted, CMSD Director Brigadier Zahiruddin refused to talk to the Daily Star. After several attempts, Deputy Director Dr Anwarul Haque could be reached who said, "Although I myself is one of the members of

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Pabna-2 bypolls

BNP may start campaign Nov 30

BNP is likely to start its election campaign for the December 10 by-election in Pabna-2 constituency from November 30, reports UNB.

Party sources said a group of central leaders of BNP and its front organisations, particularly of the northern region, will begin the formal campaign.

BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia discussed preparatory measures for the by-election with front-ranking and mid-level leaders of her party and its front organisations at 29 Minto Road yesterday evening.

She is expected to address projection meetings in the constituency on December 7 or 8, the sources said.

Selim Reza Habib has been nominated as the BNP candidate for the by-election of Sunjagar-Bera parliamentary seat that fell vacant following the death of Awami League MP Ahmed Tafazzul Master.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Khandakar Mosharrif Hossain, Moudud Ahmed, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Shamsul Islam MP, Nazmul Huda MP, Tariqueul Islam, Ashraf Hossain, Mirza Abbas, Sadek Hossain Khoka, Khurshid Jahan Huq MP and Amanullah Aman MP, were present in the meeting.

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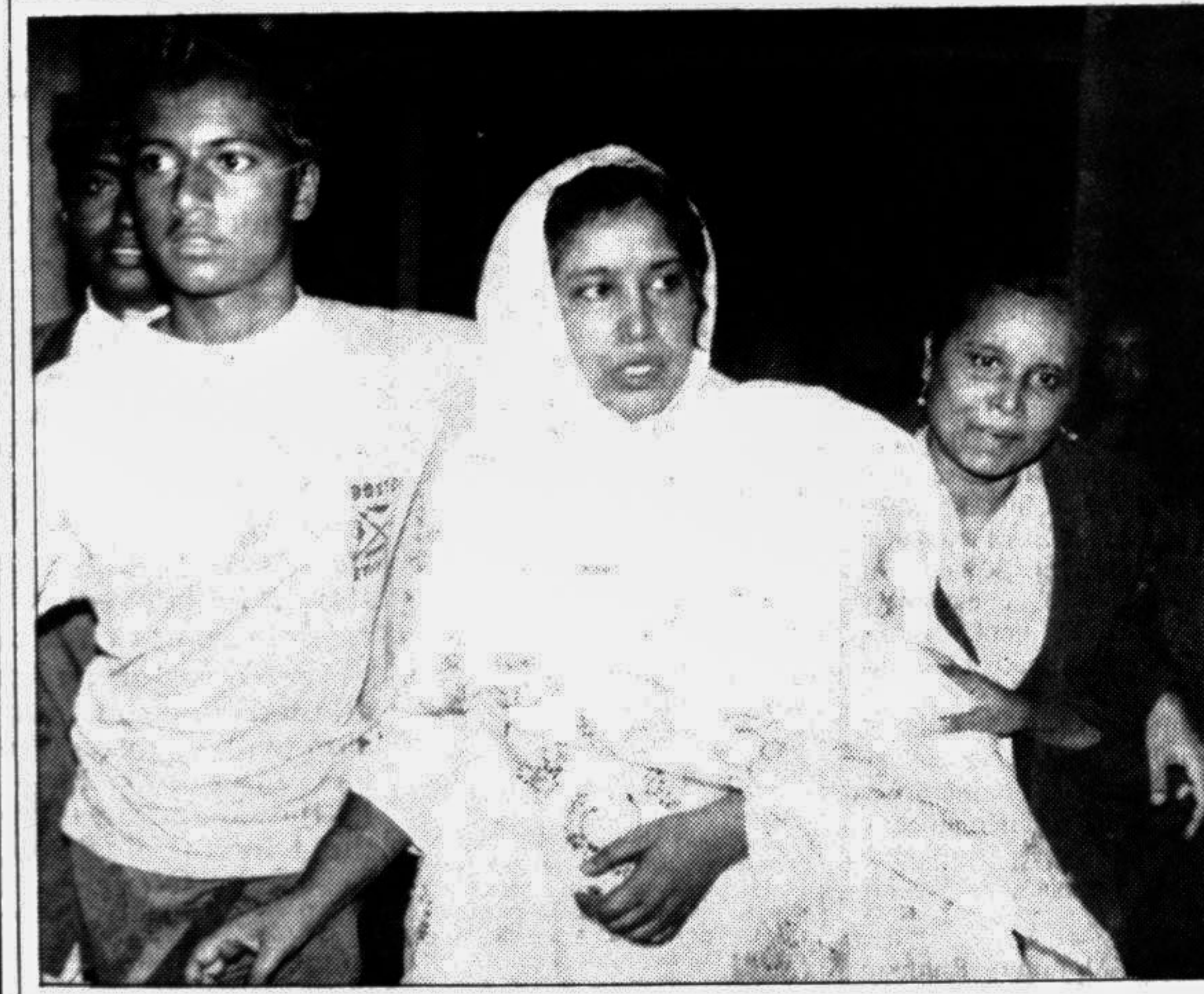
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Taslima Nasreen walks into the High Court yesterday. — Star photo