

AEI

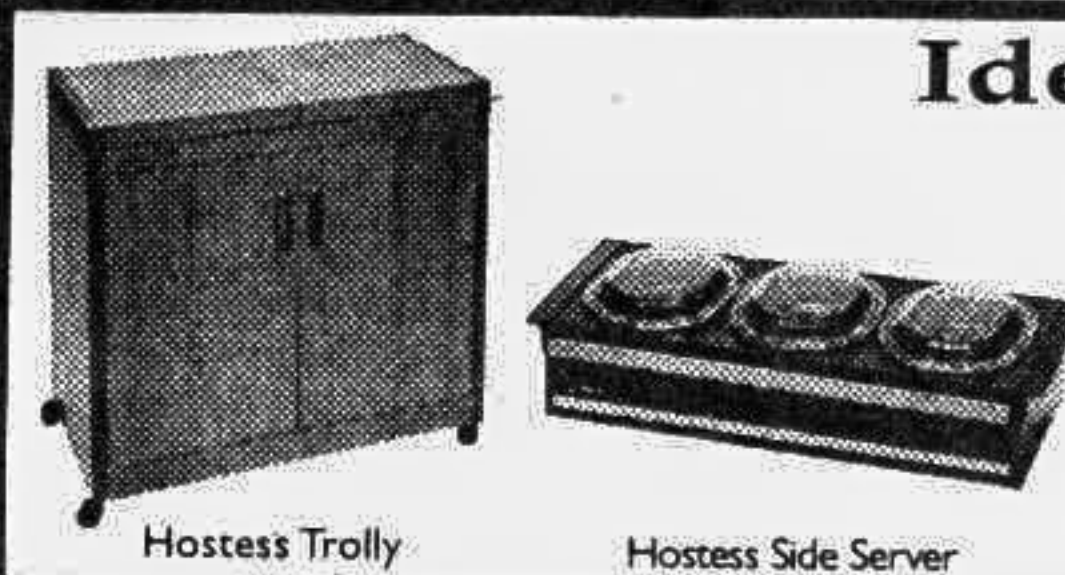
Bangladesh Air Express International Limited

Quality Worldwide Logistics

PLEASE CONTACT:

Head Office Tel: 9565114, Logistics Office Tel: 9884851, Fax: (880-2) 9886531, E-mail: dac@aelogis.com
Chittagong Office Tel: (031) 721085, Fax: (880-31) 710106, Internet: fedcgp@spcnet.com.smt.p.

Air and Ocean-Forwarding • Customs Brokerage • Warehousing and Distribution • Express • NVOCC



Ideal gift for any occasion.

Instalment facility available
only for purchases above Tk. 7,500Transcom Electronics Limited
Official licensee of Philips Electronics N.V. for lighting products, radio and TV sets.

Let's make things better

Dhaka: 815307-10 Ctg.: 716353, 723578 Khulna: 720304 Bogra: 6215
Visit your nearest Philips Display Centre today

PHILIPS

Midnight's children

Hartal or not, O Level candidates brave the night

By Navine Murshid

While most people were preparing for a good night's sleep, there were quite a few, preparing to get into action. Not the city muggers and thieves, nor the shoemaker's little helpers, but this year's O level candidates on January 26, 1999.

Human Biology at 1.30 a.m. and Pure mathematics at 4.30 a.m., the candidates could hardly imagine what befell upon them. Giving exams in the middle of the night or during hartal is not a new phenomenon in the Bangladesh context. But this time it came as a shock because of its suddenness.

No one was prepared for this. But some students could certainly find comic relief even in the midst of tension.

"We did not expect it. We never imagined that we had to do maths at four o'clock in the morning. And this is an exam; in fact, it is our first serious exam. If there is any truth about morning showing the day, I don't think we can look forward to a very bright academic future!" said a bubbly Maksuma Khatun, a private candidate.

Such dislocations have place once before, in January 1996. But when those exams were conducted during hartal or at midnight, the students were prepared for it. They had the opportunity to practice sitting for exams during the night. This time they were hardly prepared. They learnt only the previous day that their exams had been rescheduled for the next night.

It was like hell breaking loose for these people.

"I had such good preparations for Pure Maths, if I do badly..." trailed off Anami Kamun of Scholastica.

Somaiya Shamem of South Breeze School was one of those ill-fated students who had to sit for four exams within the space of 20 hours. She had Human Biology, Pure Maths and then later Physics at three in the afternoon and Pure Maths II from 6.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. After her exams were done with, she could hardly believe it.

"I was either in the car or trying to revise drowsily for the next exam or in the examination hall for the last 20 hours! I still can't imagine that the nightmare is over. I've been wide-awake from midnight. Now I can't sleep even if I



Unfazed by the night

While anxious mothers shiver in the dark, an O Level exam candidate laughs all the way to her ordeal

—Star Photo: Zahedul I Khan

wanted to!" Somaiya said as she completed her marathon exam session on Wednesday.

By rule, the exams have to be held on the same day around the world for security reasons. There is usually a time-gap between exams held in different countries but these do not cause any problem, exam officials told the Daily Star.

"There really is not much scope for questions to get out, because the time gap after the exams is negligible. There is not really enough time to leak questions," said Saidur Rahman, the examination services manager of the British Council. "Moreover, the question papers are not given to the students af-

ter the exams," he said. Rahman said University of London rules require that exams be held within 24 hours of the scheduled time. This was the reason why Tuesday's exams had to be held at such odd hours.

The hartal affair hardly seemed to affect the turnout of students. There were 119 students for Human Biology and 329 students for Pure Mathematics. Those who did not come would not have appeared anyway because this was the second paper and they had not appeared for their first paper.

Therefore, according to Saidur Rahman, the hartal had no effect on the number of students who appeared for their exams.

Waiting outside the British Council in Fuller road, most wore the expression of tension and frustration. Nervousness made them feel colder than it really was. Some of them stood in groups, huddling against one another trying to get warmer while some others went to their mothers for warmth and comfort. Unlike previous occasions where only mothers accompanied their children, fathers came along too.

"It was like a nightmare for the whole family," commented one father. But, it hardly seemed like night. With the lights gleaming across ends and the mad rush of people, it was like a midnight festival. Only no one was having fun, except perhaps the little 'tokais' who were having a ball collecting money in return for 'prayers'.

There were many students bad-mouthing Bangladesh politics, with the word 'fai-zami' being very popular to describe the opposition 'agitation programmes'. Most had taken up an anti-politics stand and even suggested that the country be ruled by the military.

It was quite apparent that these 'aspiring' voters are most unlikely to vote for our dear opposition leader in the next elections.

"They have no consideration for anybody except themselves. I don't see the point of all these hartals, except that they are messing up the economy and making it worse than it is," Katrina Chowdhury from South Breeze School cried out in frustration.

However, the parents seemed more tense than the students themselves did and many were seen trying to console their parents. As the students huddled in through the gates of the British

ter the exams," he said.

Rahman said University of London rules require that exams be held within 24 hours of the scheduled time. This was the reason why Tuesday's exams had to be held at such odd hours.

The hartal affair hardly seemed to affect the turnout of students. There were 119 students for Human Biology and 329 students for Pure Mathematics. Those who did not come would not have appeared anyway because this was the second paper and they had not appeared for their first paper.

Therefore, according to Saidur Rahman, the hartal had no effect on the number of students who appeared for their exams.

Waiting outside the British Council in Fuller road, most wore the expression of tension and frustration. Nervousness made them feel colder than it really was. Some of them stood in groups, huddling against one another trying to get warmer while some others went to their mothers for warmth and comfort. Unlike previous occasions where only mothers accompanied their children, fathers came along too.

"It was like a nightmare for the whole family," commented one father. But, it hardly seemed like night. With the lights gleaming across ends and the mad rush of people, it was like a midnight festival. Only no one was having fun, except perhaps the little 'tokais' who were having a ball collecting money in return for 'prayers'.

There were many students bad-mouthing Bangladesh politics, with the word 'fai-zami' being very popular to describe the opposition 'agitation programmes'. Most had taken up an anti-politics stand and even suggested that the country be ruled by the military.

It was quite apparent that these 'aspiring' voters are most unlikely to vote for our dear opposition leader in the next elections.

"They have no consideration for anybody except themselves. I don't see the point of all these hartals, except that they are messing up the economy and making it worse than it is," Katrina Chowdhury from South Breeze School cried out in frustration.

However, the parents seemed more tense than the students themselves did and many were seen trying to console their parents. As the students huddled in through the gates of the British

ter the exams," he said.

Rahman said University of London rules require that exams be held within 24 hours of the scheduled time. This was the reason why Tuesday's exams had to be held at such odd hours.

The hartal affair hardly seemed to affect the turnout of students. There were 119 students for Human Biology and 329 students for Pure Mathematics. Those who did not come would not have appeared anyway because this was the second paper and they had not appeared for their first paper.

Therefore, according to Saidur Rahman, the hartal had no effect on the number of students who appeared for their exams.

Waiting outside the British Council in Fuller road, most wore the expression of tension and frustration. Nervousness made them feel colder than it really was. Some of them stood in groups, huddling against one another trying to get warmer while some others went to their mothers for warmth and comfort. Unlike previous occasions where only mothers accompanied their children, fathers came along too.

"It was like a nightmare for the whole family," commented one father. But, it hardly seemed like night. With the lights gleaming across ends and the mad rush of people, it was like a midnight festival. Only no one was having fun, except perhaps the little 'tokais' who were having a ball collecting money in return for 'prayers'.

There were many students bad-mouthing Bangladesh politics, with the word 'fai-zami' being very popular to describe the opposition 'agitation programmes'. Most had taken up an anti-politics stand and even suggested that the country be ruled by the military.

It was quite apparent that these 'aspiring' voters are most unlikely to vote for our dear opposition leader in the next elections.

"They have no consideration for anybody except themselves. I don't see the point of all these hartals, except that they are messing up the economy and making it worse than it is," Katrina Chowdhury from South Breeze School cried out in frustration.

However, the parents seemed more tense than the students themselves did and many were seen trying to console their parents. As the students huddled in through the gates of the British

ter the exams," he said.

Rahman said University of London rules require that exams be held within 24 hours of the scheduled time. This was the reason why Tuesday's exams had to be held at such odd hours.

The hartal affair hardly seemed to affect the turnout of students. There were 119 students for Human Biology and 329 students for Pure Mathematics. Those who did not come would not have appeared anyway because this was the second paper and they had not appeared for their first paper.

Basu laments bus delay

CALCUTTA, Jan 28: West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu today lamented the delay in opening bus service between Dhaka and Calcutta despite the earnestness and initiative taken by the West Bengal government several years ago, reports UNB.

He pointed to the commencement of bus service between Lahore and Delhi and said, "I wonder why the bus service between Calcutta and Dhaka is delayed."

He pleaded his ignorance of the reasons for the delay, while talking to Bangladesh newsman at his Writer's Building office.

The Chief Minister preferred rail link between the two countries. Rail link, he said, would greatly ease communication of the two peoples.

Commenting on the establishment of direct road communication, Basu said the delay was caused by the central government of India.

Yet another child raped

By Staff Correspondent

A 10-year-old maid, who sustained injuries when she was allegedly raped by her master's brother at the city's Kafilul Alam Monday, was rescued by police from a private clinic in the city yesterday.

She was later admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

According to the FIR, the minor girl was working as a maid at the residence of one Mohar Ali at East Shewrapara under Kafilul Alam, police said.

Rokon alias Roka, the brother of the master, allegedly raped her inside the house on Monday evening. His family admitted her to a Dhanmondi clinic without disclosing the incident of sexual torture on her, police added.

Kafilul police lodged a case in this regard Wednesday.

All set for bus link to Calcutta

By M Anwarul Haq

The much-awaited direct bus service between Dhaka and Calcutta is likely to be launched early next month, when officials from Bangladesh and India meet in New Delhi to sign an agreement.

The agreement, expected to be signed on Feb 4, would bring months of speculation to an end, as it is likely to be accompanied by announcement of a firm date for the beginning of the service.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced in Calcutta Wednesday that the two countries have agreed in principle to start the bus operations.

Foreign ministry officials yesterday said that Delhi has already okayed the draft of the transport agreement, which was earlier sent by Dhaka.

The agreement now awaits formalisation at the Delhi meet where a delegation from the Commerce Ministry will meet their counterparts in India's Surface Communication Ministry.

The delegation leaves for Delhi on February 2.

The Communications Ministry expects over half a million passengers from Bangladesh to use the bus service in the first year.

The route would enable around 1,50,000 students, 2,00,000 patients, 2,00,000 pilgrims and 50,000 tourists to visit India. According to projections, there would be a 30 per cent increase in the number of tourists within the next two years.

Once initiated, the agreement will be known as 'The Regulation of Motor Vehicle

Passenger Traffic between India and Bangladesh" and would enable the free movement of passenger buses between the two countries. But the agreement would in effect limit the operational route between Dhaka and Calcutta only.

Earlier, the Indian side had insisted on signing a comprehensive Umbrella Motor Vehicle Agreement for transit and passage of all types of vehicles between the two countries and on several routes. India had laid particular emphasis on movement of cargo trucks between the two countries and opening of transit routes through Agartala, Shillong and Darjeeling.

But Dhaka all along insisted on narrowing down the transport agreement to a single route through Benapole on the Bangladesh side and Petrapole on the Indian side. Bangladesh also insisted on limiting the cross-border movement of traffic to only one mode of vehicle, i.e. passenger buses.

A separate committee would be set up later to fix the fare and the operational details. But it has now been decided to fix the one way Dhaka-Calcutta fare at around 400 taka per passenger, reducing it from the previous ceiling of 550 taka.

This would mean roughly one taka for every kilometre — the distance between the two cities being around 350 kilometres. Another Taka 50 would be included in the ticket cost per head for covering the Aricha-Daulatdia ferry crossing.

The bus operators would be required to provide air-conditioned buses, which are not

more than four-years old.

The buses would have to be equipped with a mini toilet and the capacity to accommodate 25 kg of baggage per passenger. Fifty-seater buses will be allowed to ply with a passenger complement of 42.

The cost of the fare would also include a full meal and two snacks. It is expected that it would take a maximum of nine hours to cover the Dhaka-Calcutta road route.

Dhaka has already asked for special booths to be set up in no-man's land to facilitate and complete customs and immigration. It has suggested that these formalities be completed, preferably with passengers sitting in the bus and relevant officers doing the paper work inside the bus.

The bus passengers will not be subject to any sort of travel tax.

Concerned officials said that as soon as the route becomes operational, 50 buses from Bangladesh side, 45 of them belonging to the private sector and 5 to the BRTC will start carrying the inter-country passengers. Several leading bus companies have already applied for permission to operate on this route.

It is likely that Bangladesh will ask the Indian authorities to improve condition of the road on their side, particularly from Petrapole to Calcutta, which is in a bad state and requires widening. Road conditions on the entire stretch of the Bangladesh side is comparatively in a more 'operational state', officials in Dhaka said.

Devotees descend on Ijtima site

By Staff Correspondent

Thousands of devotees from home and abroad have already arrived at Tongi to attend the Biswa Ijtima, beginning tomorrow on the eastern bank of river Turag, about 15 kms from the capital.

All preparations by the organisers and the government have been completed for the three-day Ijtima, considered the second biggest congregation of Muslims after the Hajj. Local hospitals, the administration, police and other service organisations have made special arrangements for providing necessary facilities and meeting emergency needs of the devotees.

This will be the 33rd Biswa Ijtima, organised by Tablig Jamaat since 1967.

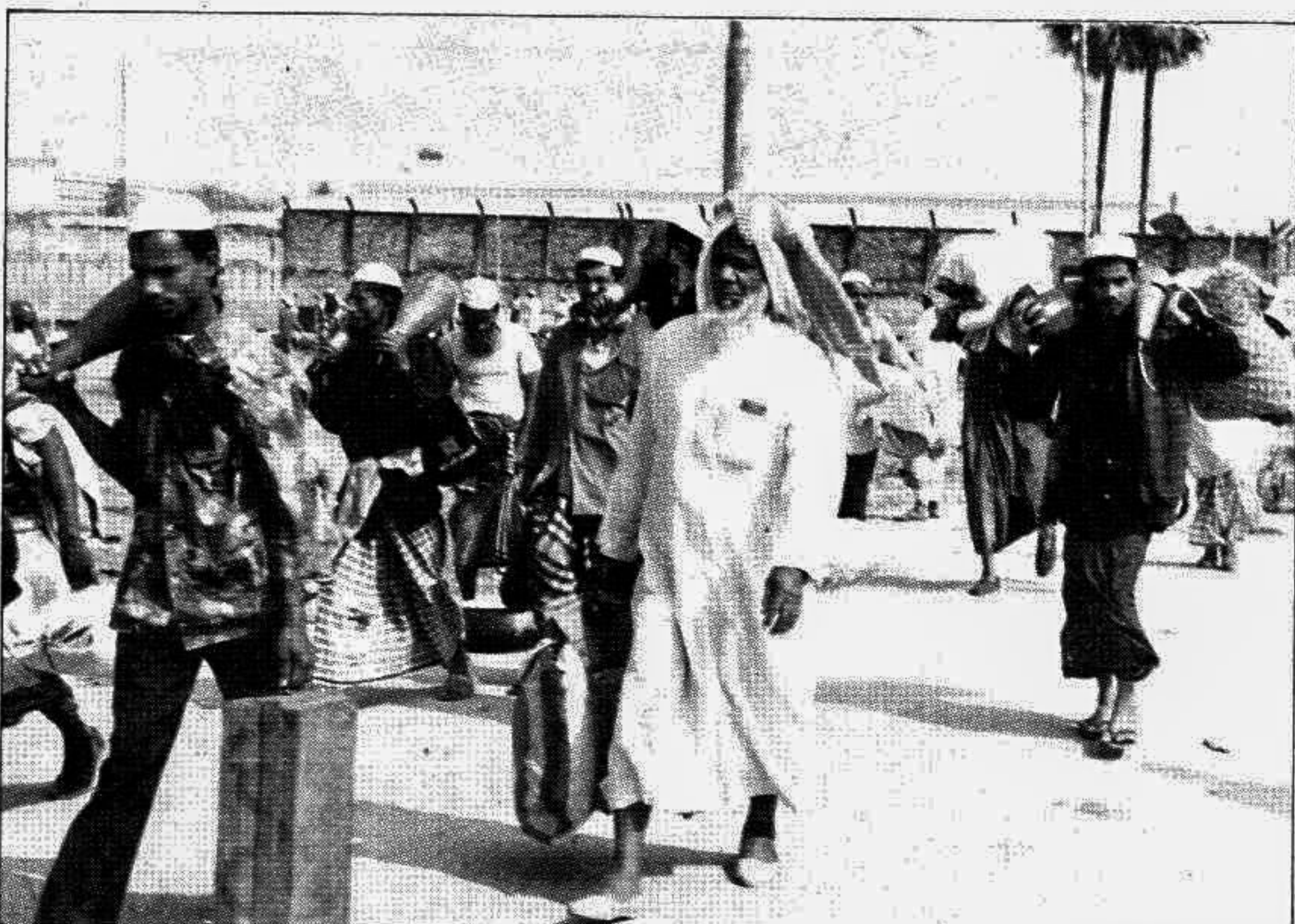
Devotees from all parts of the country are coming to the Ijtima venue with whatever means of transport available. The government has arranged special trains from different areas of the country.

Organisers are expecting devotees from around 70 countries this year. Last year, devotees from 67 countries attended the congregation.

Thousands of participants from countries including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, USA, UK, and China have already arrived and as many are on way, the organisers said.

A huge pandal, covering about three square kilometre area has been erected with bamboo, metal pipes and hesian. Several hundred tube wells have been sunk at different corners of the field to provide for ablution and drinking water to the participants.

The Army Engineering Core has set up three Bailey bridges over the river Turag for connecting the Ijtima venue with the western side of the river and



The path of devotion

Carrying essential belongings including freshly grown bottle-gourds, devotees begin arriving on the bank of the river Turag for Saturday's Biswa Ijtima

—Star Photo: Sheikh Enamul Haque

Tongi-Ashulia road.

A stage has been set up at the middle of the ground, from where religious speeches and recitation from the Holy Quran will be made.

A big tin shed pandal has been erected on the northern side of the venue for foreign participants.

Several hundred temporary toilets have been set up on the western side of the Ijtima venue.

Besides regular prayers, the Ijtima programme includes speeches and discussions on is-

lam and recitation from the Holy Quran and the Hadith. Though the Ijtima is yet to begin, the devotees who have arrived are taking part in the programmes.

The organisers said preparation for the Ijtima started about 4 months ago and hundreds of volunteers are working day and night.

The Ijtima venue has been expanded a lot this year. Vast low lying areas along the bank of Turag and on the northern side of the Telephone Shilpa Sangstha Bhaban have been de-

veloped by earth-filling.

A number of new roads and a new over bridge have been constructed near the Tongi crossing for maintaining traffic during the Ijtima. Traffic police have made special arrangements and some parking areas have been selected near Tongi and Uttara for parking vehicles.

An akheri monajat is likely to be offered Monday morning at the end of the three-day congregation. It has not yet been determined who will lead the akheri monajat, an organiser said.

Stalled power deal picks up steam

By Sharier Khan

After nearly one year of stagnation, "technical negotiation" with British company Midland Power for setting up of a gas-based 100 MW power plant at Baghabari will begin soon, sources said.

The negotiation for the combined cycle power plant will be held at the Power Cell of the Energy Ministry. This negotiation was supposed to take place seven-eight months back.

The 200 million dollar private sector project became unviable in April last year when the Power Development Board refused to provide it the project site, promised earlier.

The PDB offered Midland Power a different site one kilo-

metres away from the original site on the premises of state-owned Baghabari Power Plant, saying that it itself would develop a power plant there.

Midland then said that the new site did not have the necessary infrastructure ready for a new power plant. It told the government that change of site would result in change in the overall project plan and lead to cost escalation.

Later, the government decided to provide a different land, owned by BIWTA at Baghabari. As per law, the BIWTA must first transfer the land to the Land Ministry which would give it to Midland Power for development and setting up

of a power plant.

Due to bureaucratic bottlenecks in the Shipping Ministry, the three-acre land is yet to be cleared for hand-over to the Land Ministry for transfer to Midland Power.

"The BIWTA has agreed to give this unused land to Midland, but the Shipping Ministry is delaying the hand-over on different pretexts," a source said.

The Baghabari combined cycle gas-based power plant is the third private sector scheme pursued by the government. The two other projects are Haripur 360 MW plant and Meghnaghat 450 MW plant.

The financial offer for

Baghabari plant was opened in January last and the Power Cell had selected Midland Power for offering US 4.35 cents (Tk 2) per unit of power (average for 22 years).

This tariff is higher than those offered in case of Haripur and Meghnaghat power projects but lower than PDB's own power tariff of Tk 2.3 per unit.

When the financial offer was opened, the Power Cell had said that the project could be completed by the end of 1999. However, it now seems that the project would not be completed before 2000 even if the government signs the final agreement with Midland soon.

Clinton ordeal nearing end

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: The US Senate will continue its quest today for a bipartisan blueprint to hasten the end of President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial after two key votes showed there were not enough votes to convict him, reports Reuters.

The trial will resume at 1 pm (1800 GMT) today, but Senators in both parties are scrambling behind the scenes to negotiate procedures and a timetable for the trial — only the second presidential impeachment trial in US history.

The two parties traded proposals throughout the day on Wednesday and planned to meet in separate party caucuses this morning to iron out a deal that could end the trial by February 12.

Texas Republican Sen Phil Gramm said the two sides were narrowing their differences on a schedule for the trial and the procedures that would be followed.

"We're not very far apart," Gramm told reporters. "We're trying to put together a proposal that would go the distance to the final vote."

Senators on Wednesday refused to dismiss charges that Clinton lied under oath and obstructed justice to hide his af-

fair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, and ordered three witnesses — including Lewinsky, Clinton friend Vernon Jordan and White House aide Sidney Blumenthal — to give closed-door testimony in the case.

The back-to-back, nearly party-line 56-44 votes were the first direct indication the Senate does not have the 67 votes needed to convict Clinton and remove him from office.

At least 12 Democrats would have to break with Clinton if he is to be convicted on two articles of impeachment. Only one Democrat, Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, voted with Republicans.

Democrats immediately declared the trial's outcome a proceeding, which have failed to garner much public support, or even interest.

The president will not be removed from office," Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle told reporters. "For the good of the country, and in keeping with the constitution, it is now time to end this trial."

But Republicans insisted on the need to finish the trial, saying it was their constitutional duty.

Both Republican leader Trent Lott of Mississippi and

Daschle of South Dakota said they expected to reach agreement soon on a plan that could see the trial wrapped up by Feb 12.

"I believe certainly, barring some bolt of lightning discovery that we don't see, we would be through with it before the Lincoln Day recess," Lott said, referring to a previously scheduled Congressional recess that begins Feb 12.

Once an agreement is reached, Lott said, "the subpoenas will go out and the depositions would begin over the weekend and would continue on Monday. Votes on whether to call the witnesses to testify in person could take place on Tuesday."

White House lawyers, who had warned that calling witnesses could force them to assume legal rights that could drag out the trial indefinitely, were closely monitoring the Senate negotiations.

One adviser close to Clinton's legal team said it was too soon to say whether the White House would seek to call its own witnesses in the trial, noting that much depended on the process established by the Senate and further actions by the House of Representatives lawmakers prosecuting the case.

The White House was keeping all its options open and intended to do everything necessary to defend the president, the adviser said, acknowledging that a quick end to the trial also remained a top priority for Clinton's legal team.

Sexual harassment DU students announce fresh programme

By DU Correspondent

The students protesting sexual harassment of some female students of Dhaka University have threatened to continue movement until their demands are met.

The students under the banner of 'Students-Protecting Sexual Harassment' (SPSH), at a press conference at the Madhu's Canteen yesterday announced fresh programme to press home their six-point demand.

The programme includes a rally in front of the Aparajeyo Bangla on January 31 and a sit-in demonstration in front of the Vice Chancellor's office on February 7.

They also demanded introduction of a 'code of conduct' and setting up of a 'cell' to receive complaints regarding sexual harassment.

Arrested 2 produced in court

From Our Correspondent

COX'S BAZAR, Jan 28: Two persons, arrested here on Wednesday, were produced before the first class magistrate's court here today.

Police said the arrested persons denied allegations of their links with Taliban, Harkat-ul-Jihad and the RSO during interrogation.

Rice price still a headache

By Reaz Ahmad and Rafiq Hasan

Prices of rice remained high in the country despite import of huge quantities of foodgrains by both the public and private sectors over the last few months.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Food Ministry earlier this month advised the authorities concerned to start Open Market Sale (OMS) of rice at unit level. OMS sale of rice is however continuing in Dhaka city at twenty points.

Official sources said the government is also contemplating starting OMS at union level but no decision has yet been taken.

Government will soon introduce sale of rice in the city and divisional headquarters at fair price through cards to contain the prices, official sources said. The programme will be started with two lakh cards which will be raised to six lakh, they said.

Aman harvest could not reduce the prices "as market ar-

ivals from domestic production were significantly less than normal this year" due to after-effects of the century's worst flood last year, the Food Situation Report of the Food Ministry said recently.