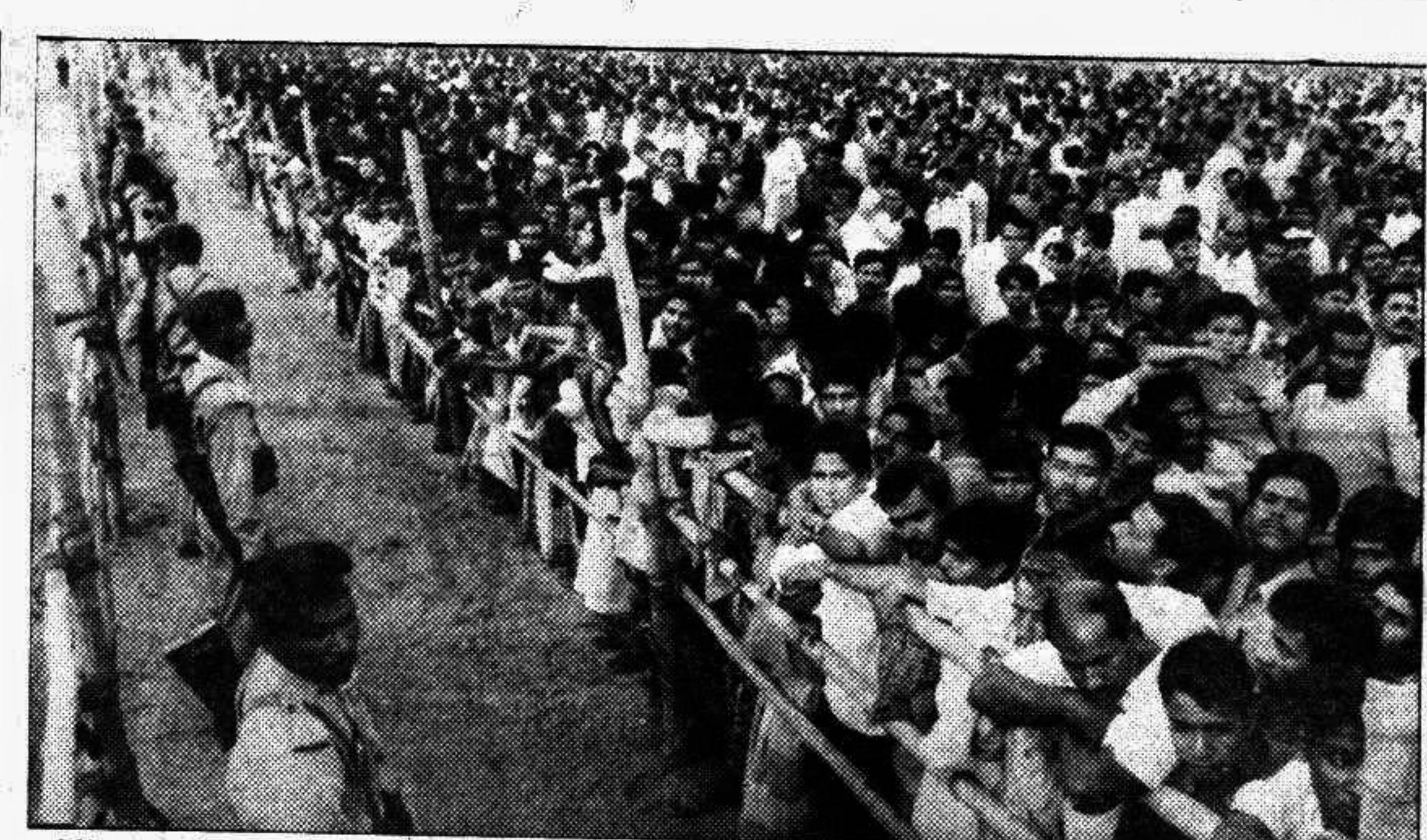


Comptroller and Auditor General M Hafizuddin Khan submitted the Annual Audit Report '97 to President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday. —PID photo



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (left) waving to the crowd at a public meeting at Armanitola Maidan in the city yesterday.

— Star photo



## Sheraton prepares for D-8 summit

By Staff Correspondent

All necessary preparations have been taken by Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, the official venue for the forthcoming summit of the Development Eight, popularly known as the D-8, said San Amalan, General Manager of the hotel.

"As Bangladesh takes extensive preparations for hosting the Summit of the D-8, we at the Dhaka Sheraton are also taking all necessary measures to ensure that the great leaders of the Muslim fraternity are in no dearth of Bangladeshi hospitality," Amalan told reporters at a news briefing yesterday.

He said: With the second phase of the renovation of rooms almost complete, the hotel's preparation for this mega event is almost near completion. In order to provide top class service to the visiting dignitaries, we have incorporated a special training for our staff and believe that this will give us a chance to excel in our part of the demanding job.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the conference at newly constructed Winter Garden, Sheraton's new multi-purpose

function facility while the concluding session of the summit will take place at the Sheraton Grand Ballroom on the March 2.

"All members of the forum earlier have expressed their willingness to participate in the forthcoming summit on March 1-2," Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad earlier told reporters at a weekly news briefing.

"Five leaders have so far confirmed their participation at the summit," the minister said.

They are President B J Habibie of Indonesia, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, President Suleyman Demerit of Turkey, President Mohammad Khatami of Iran and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan.

Egypt will send a high-level delegation while Nigeria, which is going for general elections on February 25, is also expected to be represented by a high-ranking leader.

The summit is scheduled to adopt Dhaka Declaration enshrinement of the pledges of the participating nations before the

Summit ends.

The leaders would be accompanied by large contingent of foreign ministers and other high officials, one foreign ministry official said.

The D-8 groups comprises — Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Turkey and Bangladesh.

As the hotel will be taken over by the government security agencies from the afternoon of February 25 till the evening of March 3, the guests and health club members of the hotel will not be able to enjoy Sheraton's service.

Earlier, the hotel management has issued letters to its tenants at the main hotel building to work with minimal staffs to help the security personnel.

The hotel will decorate its lobby and corridors with Ikebana floral decoration and welcome banners.

A separate media centre will be set up at the hotel, operated by government officials, to facilitate media people.

The press conference was also addressed by Sheraton's Public Relations Director Rashida Muhuiddin.

## PM urges Opposition to shun street politics, resolve disputes in JS

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the Opposition to shun street politics and resolve political disputes, if any, in Parliament, reports UNB.

"Stop politics of violence and killing in the name of hartal ... Practise healthy politics," she told a huge public meeting at Armanitola Maidan in old Dhaka in the afternoon.

Hasina's call came in an

of the mainline Opposition's declaration of a staggering 60-hour shutdown to thwart the municipal elections scheduled for February 23-25.

"But what the people would get in exchange of this hartal, other than misery?" the Prime Minister asked her opponents.

Pointing her finger to deaths and destruction during the hartal, Hasina mentioned a savage incident of burning alive a rickshawpuller for plying on a city street recently.

She said 62 candidates of BNP, 37 of Jatiya Party and three of Jamaat are contesting in the elections for chairman posts. Besides, many BNP, JP and Jamaat candidates are contesting independently.

About the Opposition's boycott of the municipal elections, the Prime Minister said it is a non-party election being held under the High Court's order.

After this election, city corporation and upazila elections would be held to strengthen the local government institutions.

But BNP is opposing the election to slow down the development process.

"We want powerful government body with elected representatives to speed up development process and improve people's economic condition."

Questioning the futility of the Opposition's threat against municipal polls, Hasina said on one hand BNP and its allies are boycotting the polls, on other a good number of their candidates are in the race under their respective party banners.

She said: "This conspiracy, hartal and farcical boycott are nothing but a ploy to oust the Awami League government and protect the killers of Bangabandhu."

Sharply reacting to hartal and agitation, Hasina asked the people to remain alert against "conspiracy" to snatch away their voting rights.

She said: "This conspiracy, hartal and farcical boycott are nothing but a ploy to oust the Awami League government and protect the killers of Bangabandhu."

Ridiculing the Khaleda-Ershad alliance, Hasina wondered where Begum Zia, who once publicly branded Ershad as the killer of her husband Ziaur Rahman, could now hobnob with him.

In a volley of queries, she asked: "Why Begum Zia did not try the killers of her husband during her five-year rule? Why BNP workers don't ask their leader to explain this? What led Begum Zia to join hands with Ershad?"

About the Opposition's four-

## Star roundtable on SMEs

From Page 1

has been in operation for more than a year. The second is the credit information bureau (CIB) of the central bank.

Mahfuz Anam termed development of SMEs very important and crucial, which needed policy support.

The other key speakers were Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, former finance minister M Sayeduzzaman, Chairman of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad Qazi Kholluzzaman Ahmad, Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank Khondaker Ibrahim Khaled and BIDS senior research fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya.

Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, President of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), said problems with credit access, utilities, governance and transaction costs are not borne equally by the small and big enterprises. "Illegal toll collection and extortion under political patronage is also not borne evenly by them," he said.

"So we need to create a level playing ground."

If there is no duty draw back or bonded warehouse facilities, SMEs cannot become competitive, he said stressing the need for cash incentives for the prospective SMEs.

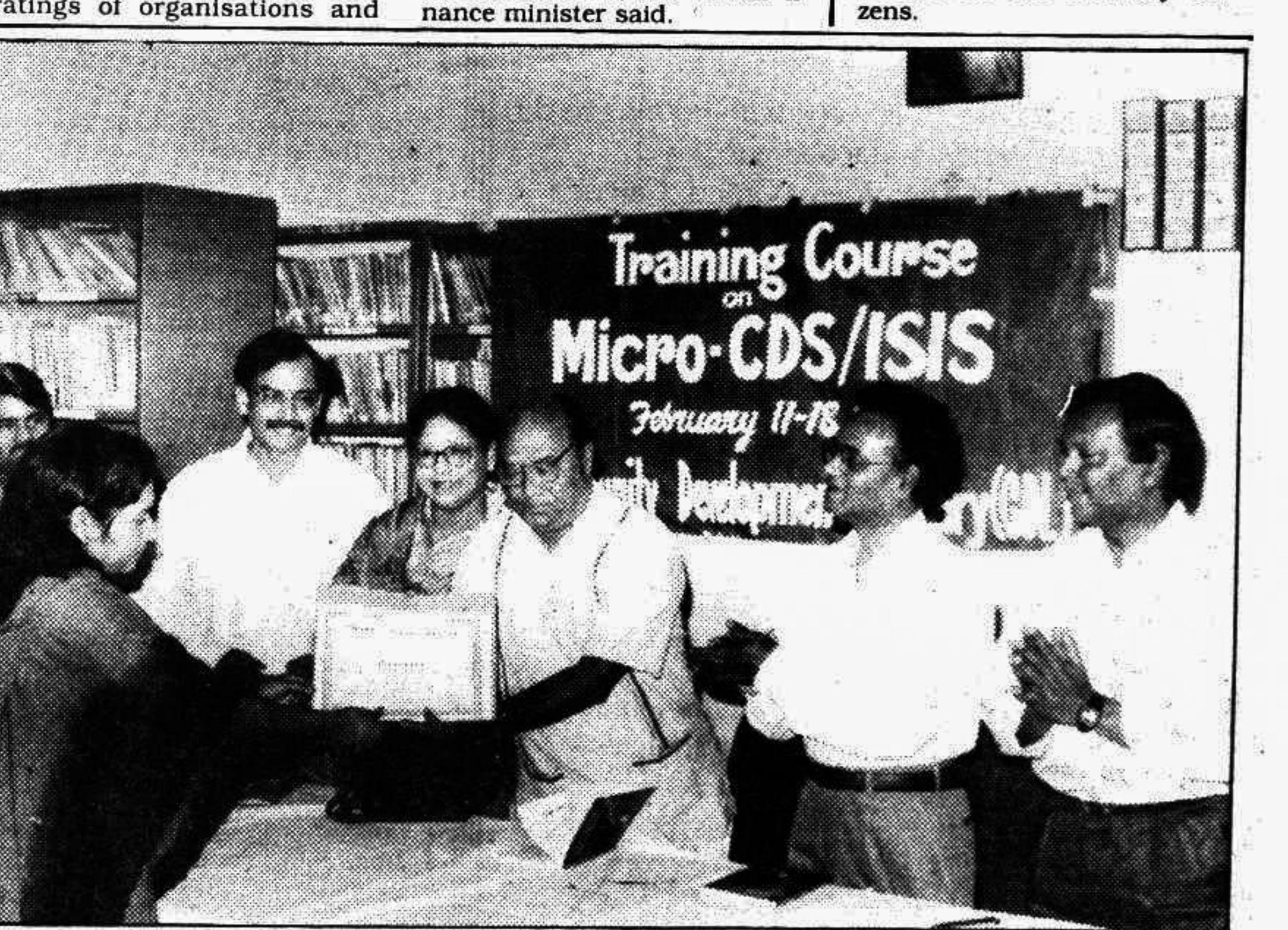
The professor said if there is a 50 per cent duty protection on inputs and 50 per cent protection on finished products, it will not ultimately give adequate protection to the SMEs.

M Sayeduzzaman said proposed proposal should be carefully analysed to stop or minimise the level of default.

Possibility of expansion of SMEs through non-government organisations (NGOs) should be considered, he said adding that the government-subsidised credit programmes should be withdrawn as it is not conducive for the growth of SMEs.

He said that ideal policy environment and zoning of SMEs in the urban and semi-urban areas outside metropolitan cities should be created with adequate infrastructure support so that they could be out of the political trouble.

Supervisory and co-ordinating bodies need to initiate dialogue between the interested players to bring about the needed reforms, the former finance minister said.



AKM Abdun Noor distributing certificates at the closing ceremony of CDS/ISIS workshop in Dhaka yesterday as chief guest. Special guests Suraiya Begum (2nd from left) and Dr SM Mannan (extreme right) and CDL Director Harun-ur-Rashid (extreme left) are also seen.

## Donation to PM's Relief Fund

Russia-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries yesterday donated Taka 2 lakh to the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund, reports BSS.

Mohammad Ali Chowdhury and Gaus-uz-Zaman on behalf of the Moscow-based Chamber called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her Sangsab Bhaban office yesterday and handed over the cheque.

## Siddheswari Girls College science fair begins

By Staff Correspondent

A three-day annual science fair and handicrafts exhibition of Siddheswari Girls College began in the city on Wednesday.

Principal of the college Syeda Shamse Ara Hossain inaugurated the science fair in a colourful ceremony.

The principal called upon the students to be science-minded to face the challenges of the coming millennium.

Students of different classes presented a total of 36 innovative projects on air pollution, indicative calling bell, power supply at a lower price, and usage of waste paper.

The students also displayed several of their handmade items in the handicrafts stalls.

A local NGO working on environmental issues made an audio-visual presentation of different environment-related issues to create awareness among the students.

A science magazine, named "Goti" was also published on the occasion.

## Top gear

From Page 1

trate the Election Commission, determined to hold "peaceful elections".

On the other hand, the governing Awami League has also spoken out its mind on the issue very loudly. Ignoring the opposition views, government leaders have told the EC and the people as well that they are not ready to compromise on holding of the elections in accordance with the already announced schedule.

Out to combat the possible opposition attempts to resist the polls, the ruling party chief has already advised his MPs to go to their respective constituencies and declare hartals free zones. Understandably, police would back up the ruling party leaders and activists.

Meanwhile, media reports say identified goons are being hired by the conflicting political camps, raising fears of violence.

Under such circumstances, the general people of different municipal areas remain apprehensive. This was revealed during a visit to a municipal area in Narshingdi, by a Daily Star team on Wednesday.

However, the political parties are not going to spare people in the divisional headquarters where there are no municipalities.

When the opposition yesterday announced that they would enforce its next 60-hour shutdown across the country, the ruling party did not take time to make its announcement, saying that the opposition would not be allowed to enforce hartals anywhere.

The message for the people is clear: militants of both the sides will in action everywhere, leaving the streets and lanes unsafe for the ordinary citizens.



Visitors at the Second Dhaka Space Festival that began at the BUET playground yesterday. The four-day event, Spacefest '99, is organised by Bangladesh Astronomical Association.

— Star photo