

Comptroller and Auditor General M Hafizuddin Khan submitted the Annual Audit Report '97 to President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday. —PID 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 Bangladesh 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," Bangladesh 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 Demirel 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 enshrining the pledges of the participating nations before the

Summit end.

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 hotel 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 lighted 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 Muhiuddin.



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

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 hour 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.

"What type of politics is it? Put an end to this politics. People will not tolerate it," she said amidst cheers and slogans.

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 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.

"This is a sheer double standard to bluff the people," Hasina told the rally.

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 farical boycott are nothing but a ploy to oust the Awami League government and protect the killers of Bangladesh."

Ridiculing the Khaleda-Ershad alliance, Hasina wondered how 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-

point demand that envisaged the resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner, she said: "Why BNP didn't seek his resignation during the by-election to Manikganj and Barisal where they had won?"

"Why they raised the demand only after their defeat in Pabna by-election where people voted Awami League candidate?"

Responding to Begum Zia's remark that Awami League won't return to power in next 50 years, Hasina said Awami League was never unseated through ballot. It was removed from power by staging a cruel massacre on August 15, 1975.

She reminded that it was Begum Zia and Ershad, who had been pulled down from power by the people in 1996 and 1990 on charge of vote theft.

About the trial of the Bangladeshis' killers, the Prime Minister said the Judiciary is independent and law will take its own course. The verdict given against the killers must be executed in this soil despite all conspiracies.

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 Sangsad 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 Shams 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 "Giti," was also published on the occasion.

Top gear

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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 her MPs to go to their respective constituencies and declare hartal-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.

Municipalities to enjoy holiday on election days

The government declared general holiday for February 23-25 will be effective for the day of election in the respective municipal area, reports UNB.

Municipalities where holiday will be on February 23 are: Modhupur, Ghatail and Dhanbari of Tangail, Nandail, Gouripur, and Ishoreganj of Mymensingh, Mohonganj of Netrokona, Baitpur of Kishoreganj, Jamalpur sadar, Sherpur sadar, Munshiganj sadar, Pangsang of Rajbari, Kalkini of Madaripur, Gopalganj sadar and Naria of Shariatpur in Dhaka division.

In Chittagong division — Brahmanbaria sadar, Barura of Comilla, Laxmipur sadar, Koirakh and Bosurhat of Noakhali and Bandarban sadar.

Sunamganj sadar, Habiganj, Shayestaganj and Moulvibazar sadar of Sylhet division.

Panchagarh sadar, Thakurgaon sadar, Dinajpur sadar, Nilphamari sadar, Rangpur and Ulupur of Rangpur, Gobindganj of Gaibandha, Joypurhat sadar, Bogra sadar, Nawabganj sadar, Godagari and Tanore of Rajshahi, Natore sadar, Sirajganj sadar, Bera, Faridpur and Sathia of Pabna district.

In Khulna division — Kustia sadar, Alandanga of Chuadanga, Kotchandpur of Mohepur of Jhenidha, Jessore sadar, Narail sadar and Bagerhat sadar.

In Barisal division — Patharghata of Barguna, Mothbaria of Pirojpur, Banaripara of Barisal, Jhalakati sadar, Charfason of Bhola.

The municipalities where holiday will be on February 24 are:

Birampur and Fulbari of Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat sadar, Shantahar of Bogra, Shahjapur of Sirajganj and Chhatmahar and Ishurdi of Pabna district in Rajshahi division.

In Khulna division — Mirpur and Bheramara of Kustia, Jhenidha sadar, Nawapara of Jessore and Sathkira sadar.

Patuakhali sadar, Gouranadi of Barisal, Doulatkhan and Borhanuddin of Bhola in Barisal division.

In Dhaka division — Gopalpur and Bhuapur of Tangail, Muktagacha, Trisal and Valuka of Mymensingh, Netrokona sadar, Kishoreganj sadar, Mirakdim of Munshiganj.

Pirganj of Thakurgaon, Setabganj and Parbatipur of Dinajpur, Syedpur of Nilphamari, Haragacha of Rangpur, Kuriganj sadar, Gaibandha sadar, Panchbibi of Joypurhat, Sherpur of Bogra, Naogaon sadar, Rahanpur of Nawabganj, Charchang of Rajshahi, Gurudaspur of Natore, Ullahpara of Sirajganj and Pabna sadar in Rajshahi division.

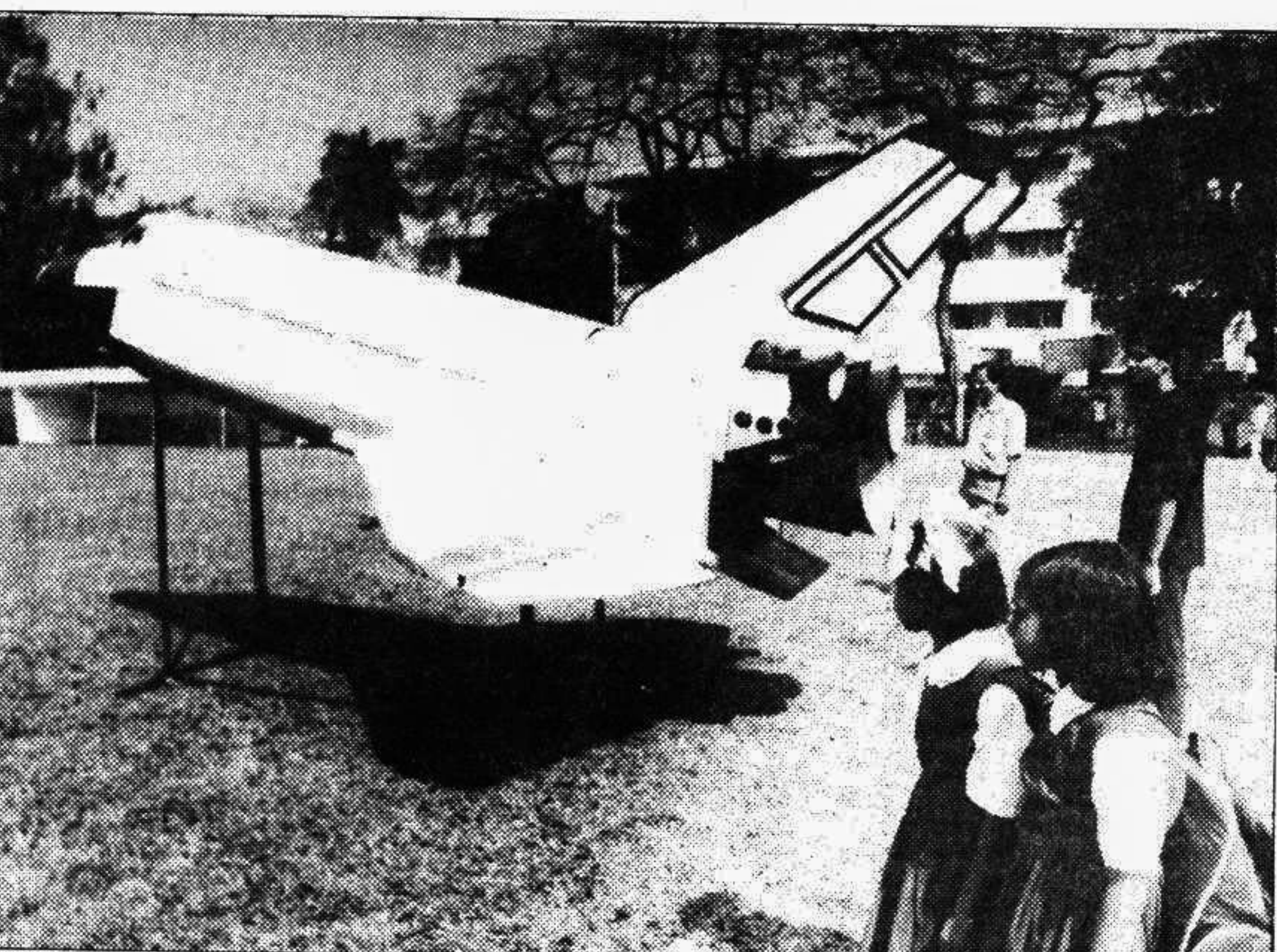
Kumarkhali of Kustia, Jibannagar of Chuadanga, Meherpur sadar, Kaliganj of Jhenidha, Monirampur of Jessore, Kalia of Narail, Monglaopur of Bagerhat, Pikegachha of Khulna in Khulna division.

Barguna sadar, Pirojpur sadar, Bakherganj of Barisal, Nalchiti of Jhalakati of Barisal division.

Tangail sadar, Mymensingh sadar, Durgapur of Netrokona, Bhoirab of Kishoreganj, Jalitabari of Sherpur, Narsingdi sadar, Faridpur sadar, Madaripur sadar, Tongipara and Kotlipara of Gopalganj of Dhaka division.

In Sylhet division — Chhatak of Sunamganj, Madhabpur of Habiganj, Srimongal and Kulaura of Moulvibazar and Daudkandi of Comilla, Hajiganj and Kachua of Chandpur, Roypur of Laxmipur, Noakhali sadar and Chhatkhil of Noakhali, Patia of Chittagong, Khagrachhari and Rangamati sadar of Chittagong division.

Addressing a news conference in the city yesterday, Country Director and Chairperson of USC Canada-Bangladesh MA Zaman said that USC-B in collaboration with ADF-B and other partners have been working at grass roots level for the socio-economic development of the poor.



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

Discussion on Syed Nazrul Islam, Capt Mansur Ali

'Bangabandhu O Jatiya Char

Neta Parishad' yesterday organised a discussion in observance of the birth anniversary of former acting president Syed Nazrul Islam and former prime minister Captain M Mansur Ali who were brutally killed along with their two other political comrades inside Dhaka Central Jail on November 3 in 1975.

Awami League Presidium Member Amir Hussain Amu addressed the discussion as the chief guest.

Amu said if Bangladesh and four national leaders were not born, our sovereign and independent country would not have emerged. The four national leaders led our independence struggle when Bangladesh was detained in Pak prison during the Independence War," he said.

Among others, Ward Commissioner Ismail Hussain Bera, youth organiser Al Amin Siddiq and journalist Nazrul Islam spoke on the occasion.

Textbook Board clarification

Bangladesh National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has sent a clarification to the news item 'Textbook Board may incur Tk 20 cr Loss' published in The Daily Star on February 14.

"It is not based on facts that six lakh books are now deposited in the NCTB godown. It is also not true that price of six lakh books is Tk 20 crore. At present, a few books of the buffer stock are deposited in its godown," the clarification said.

Referring to the 'buffer stock' created in 1996, NCTB said creation of the stock was not illegal as it was done according to an Education Ministry instruction.

Our Reply: The Daily Star story mentioned three reasons why the NCTB faces a loss of Tk 20 crore. These are 1) Books remained unsold; 2) Government is deprived of huge revenue as pirated books flooded markets; and 3) The excessive production cost of books of the buffer stock. And the three reasons are supported by a comment from a leader of the Press Owners' Association that huge taka could be saved if the books were not printed at that time at a higher production cost as production cost has remarkably decreased in recent times. Also, formation of the probe body to investigate the creation of the buffer stock is enough to point to the alleged irregularities. Though our report mentioned the probe body, the clarification did not say anything about it.

The NCTB version contradicted the number of books in its buffer stock mentioned in our report but it did not give the exact number of books in its buffer stock.

Obituary

By Staff Correspondent

An elderly politician of Habiganj and an organiser of the Liberation War Abdur Rashid Chowdhury (Sabu Mia) died at around 1.15 am on February 14. He was 77, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, four sons, three daughters, a number of grandsons and granddaughters and a host of relatives and admirers. He was buried at his family graveyard.

A veteran freedom fighter, Abdur Rashid also took part in the anti-British, and anti-Aiyub movements. A close aide of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Sabu Mia was the founder president of Chunarughat thana Awami League.

He also made significant contributions to the development of various social and educational institutions in Sylhet including Usmanpur Government Primary School.

Obituary

By Staff Correspondent

Syed Mantazuddin Ahmed (Shahjahan) of Gachhua Mia Bari under Hizla thana of Barisal died of liver diseases in Velore of India on February 16, says a press release. He was 68.

A former high official of Concord Company, Syed Mantazuddin left behind his wife, a son, two daughters, two brothers, two sisters and a host of admirers to mourn his death.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held at the Baitul Mamur Masjid near Science Laboratory after Jumma prayers today.

He will be buried at the Azimpur graveyard today.

Singer holds business review meeting

The business review meeting of Singer Bangladesh Management was held at the Company's Conference Room at IDB Bhaban yesterday, says a press release.

It was attended by the company's Sales Manager, Area Managers and District Managers.

Chairman and Managing Director of Singer Bangladesh Limited Mahbub Jamil formally inaugurated the meeting. Management Committee Members were also present.

Area Managers from four areas presented their report on Sales activities during 1998. The reports were reviewed elaborately in the meeting.

The meeting also reviewed the sales activities of 1998 and took decisive steps towards realizing the business target of 1999.

Later, seven Area & District Managers, were rewarded for achieving success in the sales activities during the year 1998.



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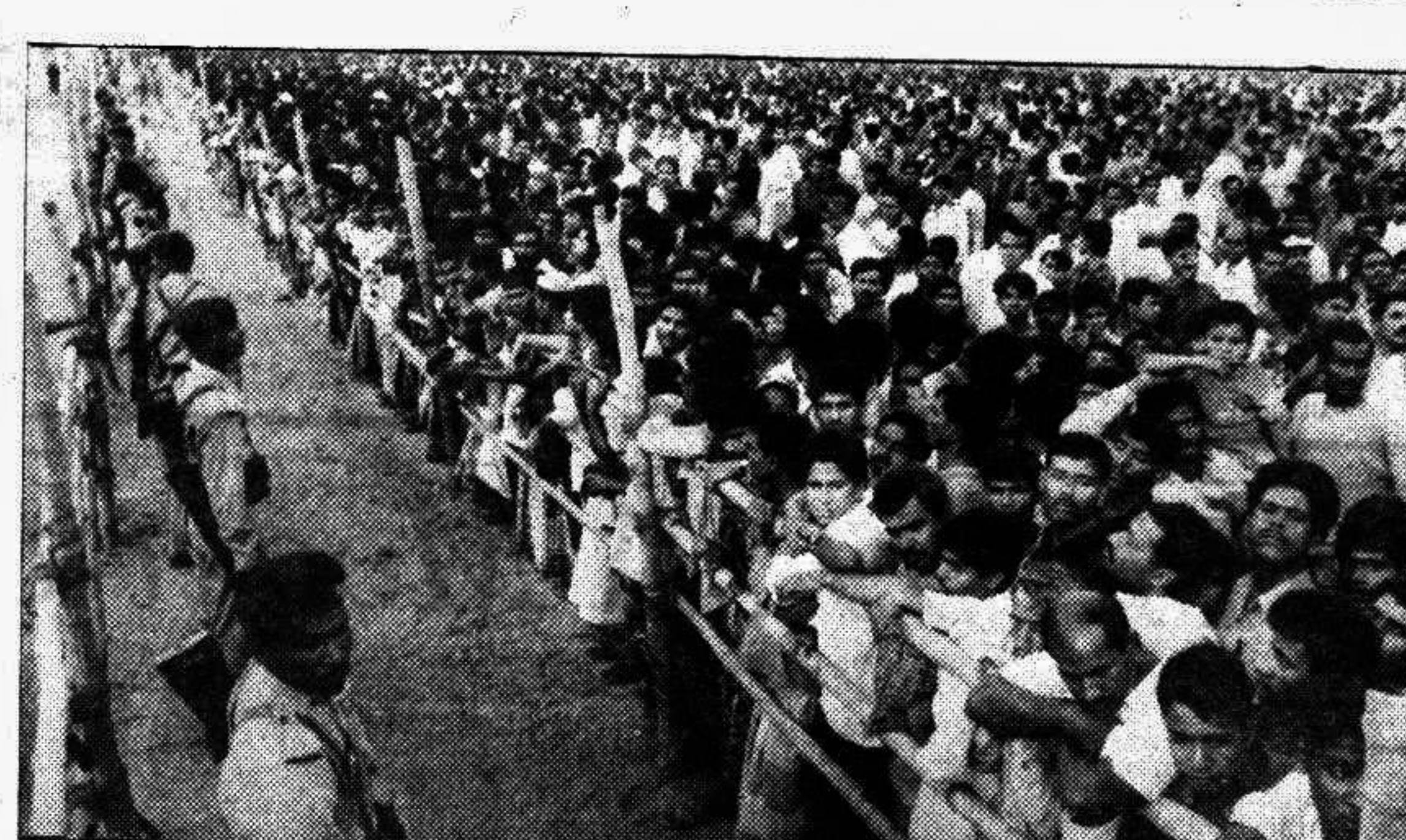
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—Star photo

Star roundtable on SMEs

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by which the secured creditor may take control of the collateral and dispose of it to satisfy the secured debt. Most legal systems require judicial sale of collateral after default. Judicial sale is expensive, taking long time and the outcome is sometimes uncertain. If a debtor defers on the obligation, or surrenders the collateral to the court for disposition. And if absolutely necessary, the secured party may proceed by judicial action."

Forrest Cookson, president of American Chamber, gave the background presentation on Credit Information in Bangladesh Financial System.

He said that the recovery facilities were strongly affected by the ability of the borrower to realise the value of the goods and services that are sold.

"In Bangladesh, it is a far greater problem than it is in many countries and the difficulties in obtaining payment for goods and services sold on credit is a considerable factor for small enterprises in meeting repayment obligations. In our terminology, such repayment failures do not render the credit facility ineffective. The failure is a systematic one and cannot be resolved at the level of the individual credit transaction."

"Credit is based on evaluation of five aspects of the applicant's proposal: the analysis of the uses for which the credit is to be put, the past repayment record of the company, the assets available for collateral, the character of the persons involved and the likelihood of collecting the sales made."

At present, he said, there were two organisations providing credit information. One is a private company that makes ratings of organisations and

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 Gazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank Khondakar Ibrahim Khaled and BIDS senior research fellow Debapriya Bhattacharyya.

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 drawback or bonded warehouse facilities, SMEs cannot become competitive, he said stressing the need for cash incentives for the prospective SMEs.

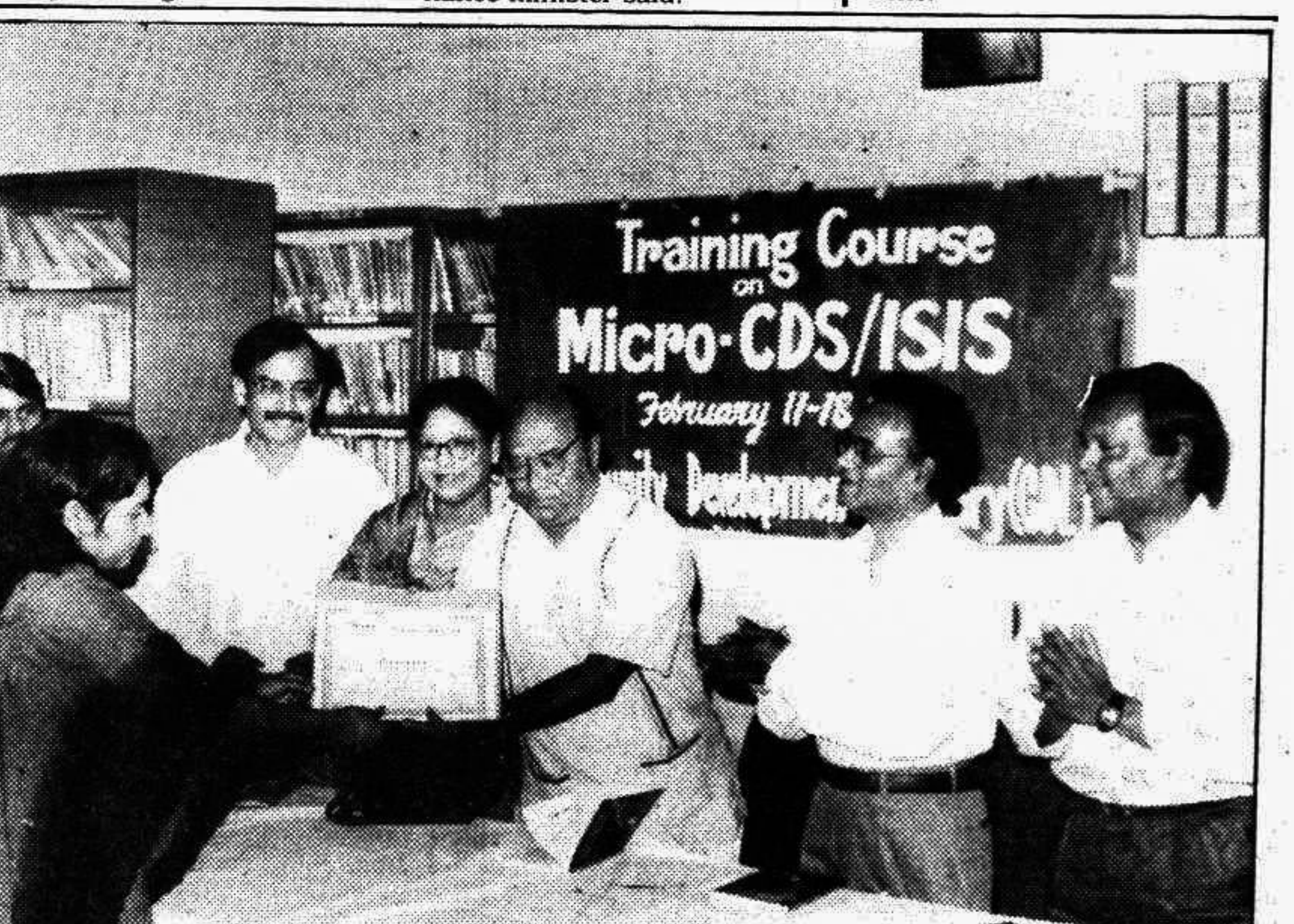
The professor said if there is a 50 per cent duty protection on inputs and 50 per cent protection on finished products, it will not ultimately give adequate protection to the SMEs.

M Sayeduzzaman said project 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 tangle.

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. —Star photo