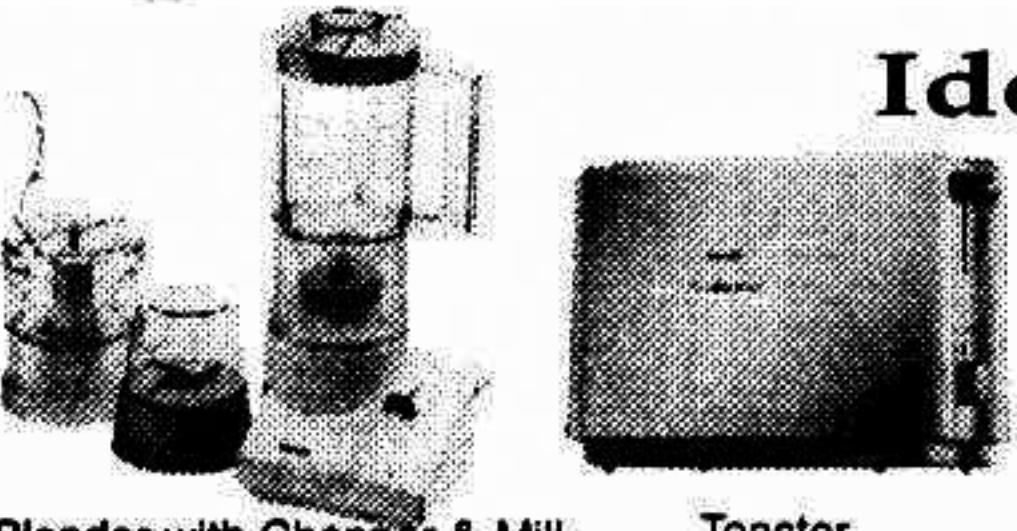


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Singing Tagore, living Tagore
Artists render a Tagore song at the inaugural ceremony of the 10th National Rabindra Sangeet Festival at the Shishu Academy auditorium yesterday. The festival ends on Saturday.

—Star photo

CPB seeks left alliance

By Staff Correspondent

A three-day 7th congress of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) begins in the city on March 7 with the objective of establishing 'a left leaning democratic alliance' to forge a new polarisation of the third force in the country's political arena, party leaders said yesterday.

CPB has taken up an elaborate programme to hold the congress which coincides with its golden jubilee celebration. The programme includes reception to veteran party leaders.

rally, seminar and cultural functions.

The fate of the people would not change until the prevailing imperialistic economic system is replaced. Now politics has become a culture of demoralisation and commercialisation.

President of the golden jubilee celebration committee Monjurul Ahsan Khan told a press conference at the party office yesterday.

Convenor of the committee M M Akash said "The ruling party is following an imperial-

Contempt case against PM disposed of

By Special Correspondent

The Supreme Court yesterday disposed of a petition seeking contempt proceedings against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her alleged remark against the judiciary for granting an en masse bail by a High Court Division in August last year.

President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Habibul Islam Bhuiya had filed the petition on February 1 seeking contempt proceedings for her alleged remarks made at a press conference on January 29.

Chief Justice A T M Afzal pronounced a brief judgement yesterday morning at a full bench of the Appellate Division with the remark: 'The application is disposed of with observation.'

Other judges of the Appellate Division, Justice Mustafa Kamal, Justice Latifur Rahman, Justice Bimalendu Bikash Roy Choudhury and Justice Mahmudur Rahman were present during delivery of the judgement.

Details of the judgement with the observation were not immediately available. The Chief Justice declined to receive journalists who wanted an audience after the judgement. Nor a copy of the Prime Minister's statement submitted to the court was available.

The Chief Justice, after hearing the petition on February 3 had ordered the Attorney General to submit a statement from the Prime Minister on her alleged remark.

The statement was not made public despite demand from a senior counsel, Mahbubuddin Ahmed, assisting the petitioner.

Only the petitioner was given a copy by the Chief Justice for 'transparency' when it was submitted on February 17. After perusing it, he returned the copy to the Chief Justice.

Habibul Islam Bhuiya filed the petition seeking contempt proceeding against the Prime Minister alleging that her remarks were against the judiciary.

The PM reportedly said that the High Court Division had granted bail to 1200 people in two days, on August 25 and 26.

But Bhuiya said the High Court had granted bail to only 367 people before it went on vacation.

Habibul Islam Bhuiya appeared in person while Attorney General Mahmudul Islam appeared for the Prime Minister.

The other suggestions to be implemented to get the next tranche of the credits are setting up a regulatory agency and financing the Load Dispatch Centre (LDC), Transmission System and Rural Electrification.

During the subsequent sub-loans under the lending programme, the government will have to privatise the distribution companies and generation companies.

The overhaul package also includes strengthening the Power Grid Company of Bangladesh that has been set up for ceding the distribution system from the Bangladesh Power Development Board.

The Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) and the Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO) will have to be readied for divesting during the same period.

The other suggestions to be implemented to get the next tranche of the credits are setting up a regulatory agency and financing the Load Dispatch Centre (LDC), Transmission System and Rural Electrification.

According to Economic Relations Division sources, the Adaptable Programme Lending has been proposed by the WB for funding the long-term reform action plan proposed by the Bank.

Any future World Bank lending will depend on implementation of the action plan," an ERD official said.

Meanwhile, a high official of the Energy Ministry who is sceptic about future World Bank lending in the sector said total privatisation of power generation is impossible.

"We have ensured private sector's participation in generation and distribution ... that is what we can."

However, he said, the government recognises that major reforms, including private participation, is imperative to mobilise investments to cope with the challenge of providing adequate and reliable power supply to the consumers at reasonable rates.

By Staff Correspondent

A tempo driver, who sustained critical burn injuries during a fire at February 23, succumbed at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday.

Under VGR programme, be-

Ray of hope for acid survivors

By Sabir Mustafa

The science of plastic surgery may have reached an exalted height in Europe, but a Dutch surgical team which gave voluntary service in Dhaka came across patients whose injuries and courage both shocked and elated them.

The Dutch team yesterday completed six days of voluntary work at the Monowara Hospital, during which they operated on 24 victims of acid burns. After nearly 60 hours of surgery on some of the most critically burnt patients they had ever come across, the team were overwhelmed.

"The state of the patients is dreadful, the amount of destruction we've seen is incredible," said Prof P H Robinson, head of the department of plastic surgery at the Medical University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

Robinson's sentiments were echoed by Alice Hoefsloot, a senior nurse on the surgical team which arrived in Dhaka Feb 26 to perform surgeries at the Monowara Hospital. But

Hoefsloot was moved by the courage and determination shown by the patients many of whom were aged below 18.

The patients were really strong and brave, some of them had anger in their eyes, but all seemed happy that someone was there to help them", Hoefsloot said.

The Dutch team came to Dhaka at the invitation of Monowara Hospital which has been providing free reconstructive surgery to acid victims for the past two years. Since 1997, a local surgical team led by Dr Shafquat Khundkar has operated on 14 acid victims at Monowara.

Each patient requires six to seven operations, involving 25 to 30 hours of surgery spread over 12 to 18 months. The costs are high, said Mir Iman Hosain Jahangir, director of Monowara, but the hospital provides all surgical facilities free of cost to acid victims who are mostly from poor rural families.

The current programme has

registered 30 acid victims through newspaper advertisements. For full treatment of all the patients, Jahangir said, the total cost would exceed 60 lakh taka.

"Surgical facilities are provided free for all the patients, but five or six among the 30 new patients are able to pay for the medicines. The rest are being subsidised totally", Jahangir said.

The Anaesthesia Department of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital extended anaesthetic services free of cost, he informed the Daily Star.

The Dutch team worked alongside local surgeons and anaesthetists, and both groups provided their precious time at the operating theatre free of charge. Robinson's team's travel expenses were borne by a Dutch national who preferred to remain anonymous.

Among the 30, there are 12 male patients most of whom are victims of acid attacks made during dispute over land. Jahangir related the story of one man who had acid poured over his face by his in-laws.

In another incident, a mother feared her young daughter might be attacked, and went to bed dressed up in the girl's clothes. The assailants came in the dark and poured a bucket full of sulphuric acid on the mother, mistaking her to be the daughter. The woman's face and the right side of her chest was severely burnt.

After the initial operations by Robinson and his team, further surgeries would be conducted by local surgeons who were described by the Dutch as "excellent".

The local surgeons are excellent, and they are perfectly capable of handling this problem on their own", Robinson said, but added that assistance from experienced foreign plastic surgeons would also be useful.

Robinson said the Dutch and local surgeons worked as a team and the co-operation between the two sides was excellent.

lent. He said all cases were discussed between the two groups before each operation.

The surgeons said they wanted to operate on as many patients as possible in the short time available. They said they tried to allocate two to two and half hours to each patient, but some needed three hours or more. In the end, they concentrated on the most important part in each case, such as around the eyes, the mouth, the throat.

With operations provided free of charge and foreign consultants conducting surgeries, Robinson learned that expectations among patients may be running high about "miracles". He warned that most patients seemed to be under the illusion that plastic surgery would restore their faces to their original state.

"No amount of plastic surgery can restore these unfortunate girls to their original beauty", Robinson said.

PM delights in Sharif's CHT trip

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina now found an occasion for showing the humour of the situation with her political rival as she wanted to know from Khaleda Zia whether Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif stayed overnight in Rangamati or any part of India, reports UNB.

Sharif, who had been here to attend the D-8 summit, went to the Sundarbans and Rangamati and spent a night in the hill district town Wednesday before his departure for Pakistan yesterday.

She confuted Khaleda Zia's repeated public remarks that the territory from the CHT to Feni would be ceded to India after the signing of peace accord with the tribal leaders.

"Today, it is possible for a foreign dignitary to visit and make night halt in Rangamati following the signing of the peace accord," the Prime Minister said at a public meeting in the city.

And Nawaz Sharif did it in peace. "As a matter of fact, Nawaz Sharif was in Bangladesh, not in India, and I saw him off this morning," she said.

Referring to Khaleda's home constituency in Feni, Hasina further said: "Does BNP chairman need Indian visa to visit Feni as she predicted that Feni will also be a part of India with the signing of the CHT peace accord?"

The Prime Minister said while in power BNP also had tried to strike peace deal with the PCJSS and formed a committee headed by former Communications Minister Col (Rtd) Oli Ahmad, "but failed."

"Khaleda failed to establish peace and that does not mean that others will not succeed."

Referring to Khaleda's election campaign that there would be no Azan from mosques if Awami League was voted to power, Hasina asked the people attending the rally whether they now hear prayer calls from the mosques.

"Yes, yes," shouted her audience responding to the Prime Minister's query.

Said Hasina: "It has become a habit of Khaleda to tell a lie."

Rubel murder

Top cop says sorry

Inspector general of police today suggested to raise the number of court with retired judges and legal experts for holding summary trial of special criminal cases, reports UNB.

He also suggested for enacting law to check illegal toll collection by musclemen as they easily secure release on bail due to loopholes in the existing law.

The suggestions from the head of the police force AYB Siddiqui at a meeting with the press before the police rally March 8-11.

"We are trying to keep the law and order situation despite our limitations," said the IGP. But the situation could be improved much had there system of quick trial of the criminals, he added.

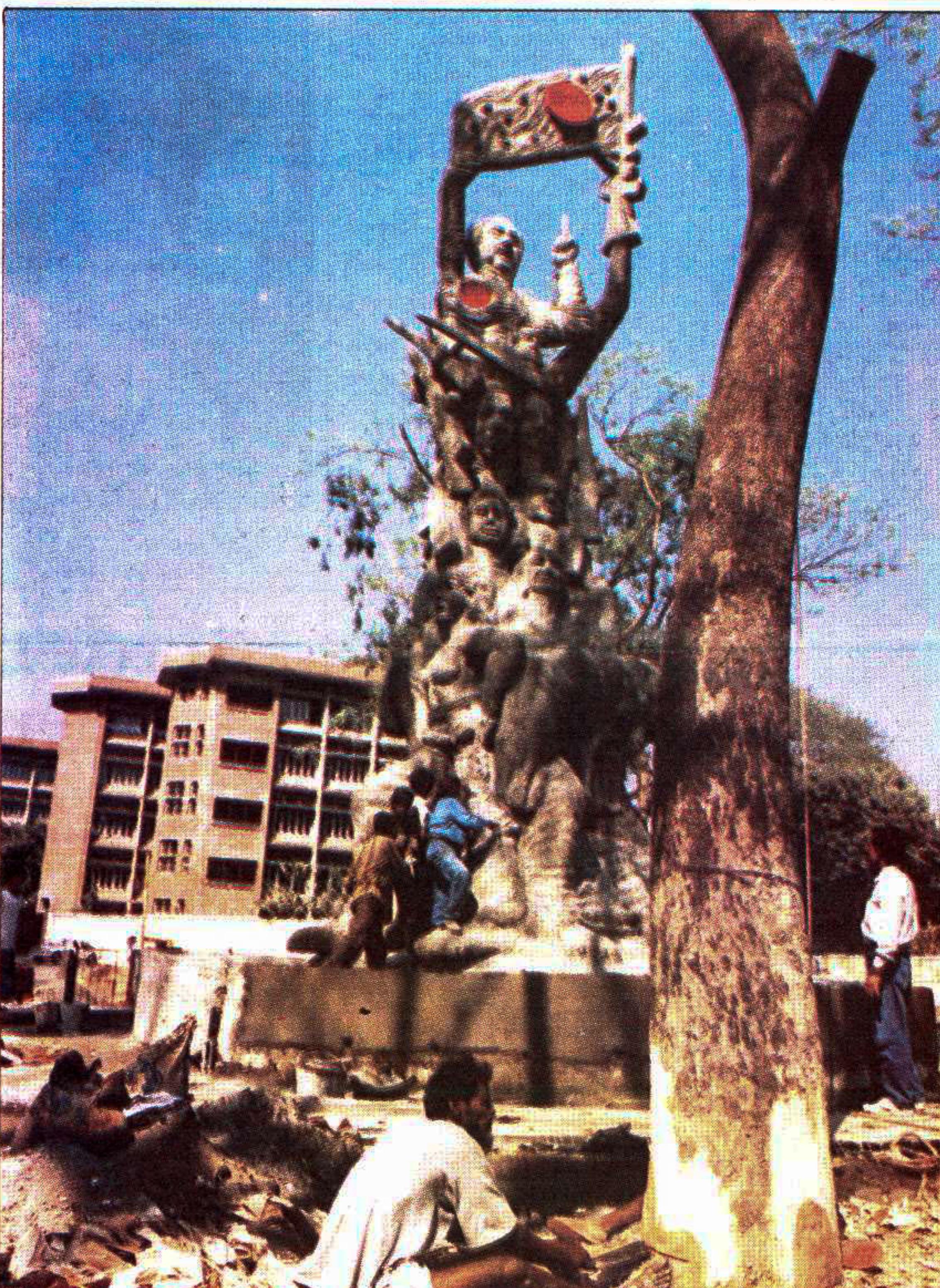
The IGP offered apology for the death of Rubel in police custody and harassment of innocent people including Nurul Absar.

He frankly admitted that there are lot of allegations against the police for indulging in excess. "We have taken some effective steps to improve our behaviour with the people to regain their confidence."

Prayer Timings

March 5		
Azan	Jamaat	
5:30	5:35	
Jumma	12:15	1:20
Asr	4:30	4:35
Maghrab	6:10	6:13
Esha	7:25	7:30

Source: Islamic Foundation



Monumental tribute

Workmen are busy chopping down a tree as sculptor Shamim Sikder puts the final touches to her 60-feet tall sculpture *Swadhinatar Sangram*. The monumental piece which took three months to sculpt and cost over one crore taka, depicts the nation's struggle for freedom from 1952, and the brutal killing of Bangabandhu in 1975. The sculpture, located on the Dhaka University campus, is expected to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Mar 7.

— Star Photo: AKM Mohsin

New feeding plan for the poorest

By Reaz Ahmad and Rafiq Hasan

The World Food Programme (WFP) wants to continue the ongoing VGF (vulnerable group feeding) programme in Bangladesh in a new form, targeting the 'poorest of the poor'.

WFP sources said they now plan to launch the VGR (vulnerable group rehabilitation) programme in collaboration with the government departments concerned.

The duration of VGF is linked with the 'lean period' that ends in April with the harvesting of Boro and other Rabi crops.

According to primary plan for VGR, some 74,000 poorest of the poor families would be chosen from 42 lakh families who have been provided with free food under VGF programme since September last year.

The government had earlier launched the VGF programme in September last year, providing 16 kg of free foodgrain to each of the 13 lakh cardholders.

The number of beneficiaries gradually rose to 42 lakh. Till December last year, WFP assisted the government programme with two lakh tonnes of foodgrain.

The government had a further reserve of 1,52,000 tonnes for this purpose.

Subsequently, the government halted the VGF programme and then restarted it in February with an increased quantity of 20 kg per head. The government requires another 2,52,000 tonnes of grain to continue the programme till April.

Under VGR programme, be-

2,450 expelled on first day of SSC Exams

Some 2,450 examinees were expelled for adopting unfair means on the first day yesterday of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examinations under five education boards, reports BSS.

No examinee was, however, expelled from the city centres, Dhaka Board sources said.

Dhaka Board sources said 1,037 examinees were expelled from 12 out of 18 districts under the board. Reports of the highest 298 expulsions came from Mymensingh district.

The district-wise figure of expelled students is: Narayanganj-31,