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## JS debate on proposed budget

# 5.2pc growth absurd: Opposition Aimed at self-reliance: AL

By Staff Correspondent

The opposition MPs yesterday found the proposed budget for 1999-2000 fiscal non-transparent and accused the finance minister of concealing information about the real state of the economy.

The ruling party MPs, on the other hand, claimed that the proposed budget has given a clear sense of direction for economic self-reliance to the nation. They also blamed the opposition for making misleading statements about the budget.

The accusations and counter accusations were evident during the general debate on the proposed budget in yesterday's sitting of Jatiya Sangsad. A total of 14 legislators belonging to the Treasury and Opposition benches took part in the debate.

"The budget seriously lacks transparency, while the document is full of distorted facts and figures," BNP legislator M K Aitar told the House. "The government has done this to cover up its failure in different social and economic sectors."

Challenging the agricultural growth figure projected in the budget, the BNP lawmaker said that the rate is actually much lower. Referring to the observations made by the country's eminent economists, Anwar said the government's claim of achieving 5.2 per cent overall growth is "simply absurd".

Anwar also rejected the claim of 2.3 per cent industrial growth saying in real term, the industrial growth rate would be about one per cent.

Analysing various figures concerned, the BNP legislators said that the government claim of three per cent growth in the export sector was also baseless. "The real growth in this sector hardly exceeds one per cent."

Anwar strongly blasted the idea of "collecting income tax in advance, even before the investment". "Such steps would definitely discourage all kinds of investments," he warned.

Ruling party MP Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim criticised the opposition for "failing to notice the budgetary allocation of more than Tk 8000 crore for poverty alleviation".

Listing various proposals made to combat rural poverty, Selim said that the budget had offered a clear direction on how to make the country self-reliant in different sectors.

The AL legislator also thanked the finance minister as he has not proposed any fresh tax in the new budget'.

Civil Aviation Minister Mosharraf Hossain lauded the finance minister for a presenting a pro-people budget, the announcement of which "did not cause price hike".

Hossain told the House that corrupt practices during the previous governments had hit the financial health of his ministry hard. "I am trying to restructure various departments concerned with our national carrier Biman to make it a profitable concern."

Turning to the politics, the minister said it was Major Zia who announced independence first. "It was M A Hamed of Awami League who made the announcement on behalf of Bangabandhu on March 26 1971."

Delwar Hossain Saidee of Jamaat-e-Islami refuted the government claim that it had not imposed any fresh tax. He contended that the government had proposed new taxes amounting to Tk 1050 crore.

"Most of the additional amount would come from the pockets of the poor, making them poorer in a year."

Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid who presided over yesterday's session adjourned the House at 1:45 pm to resume its sitting at 9:30 this morning.

## JS tidbits

# Diversify exports

From Page 1

By Nazmul Ashraf  
Awami League MP Marian Begum came up with a unique tax proposal while discussing the proposed budget for 1999-2000 fiscal in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

Speaking about the country's population growth, she requested Finance Minister SAMS Kibria to impose tax on those who would give birth to more than one children. The ruling party lawmaker also suggested that the one-child family be given allowance to encourage birth control.

Marian, however, did not elaborate on the rate of tax or allowance.

★ ★ ★

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury perhaps liked AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim's comment about egg production in the country as he reportedly owns a poultry farm.

"The BNP government failed to implement its commitment to ensure *daal-bhat* for all. But we, the AL government, promise to make available *daal-bhat, machch-bhat, moorgi-bhat, mangsha-bhat, dim-bhat* and even *dudh-bhat* to all," Selim announced amid laughter in the House.

A happy Speaker appreciated the AL legislator's saying so. "I liked your comment, especially on egg."

★ ★ ★

Influential BNP lawmaker MK Anwar sought protection of the Speaker from Agriculture Minister Matia Choudhury while discussing on the new budget.

He did so when Matia was shouting at him, challenging his statistics on the growth in the agriculture sector. The BNP MP tried to disprove the agriculture growth, quoting economists.

"This is not my statistics, but of the noted economists. Don't shout at me. You'll also be allowed to defend yourself."

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**Khulna citizens' body threatens to top paying tax**

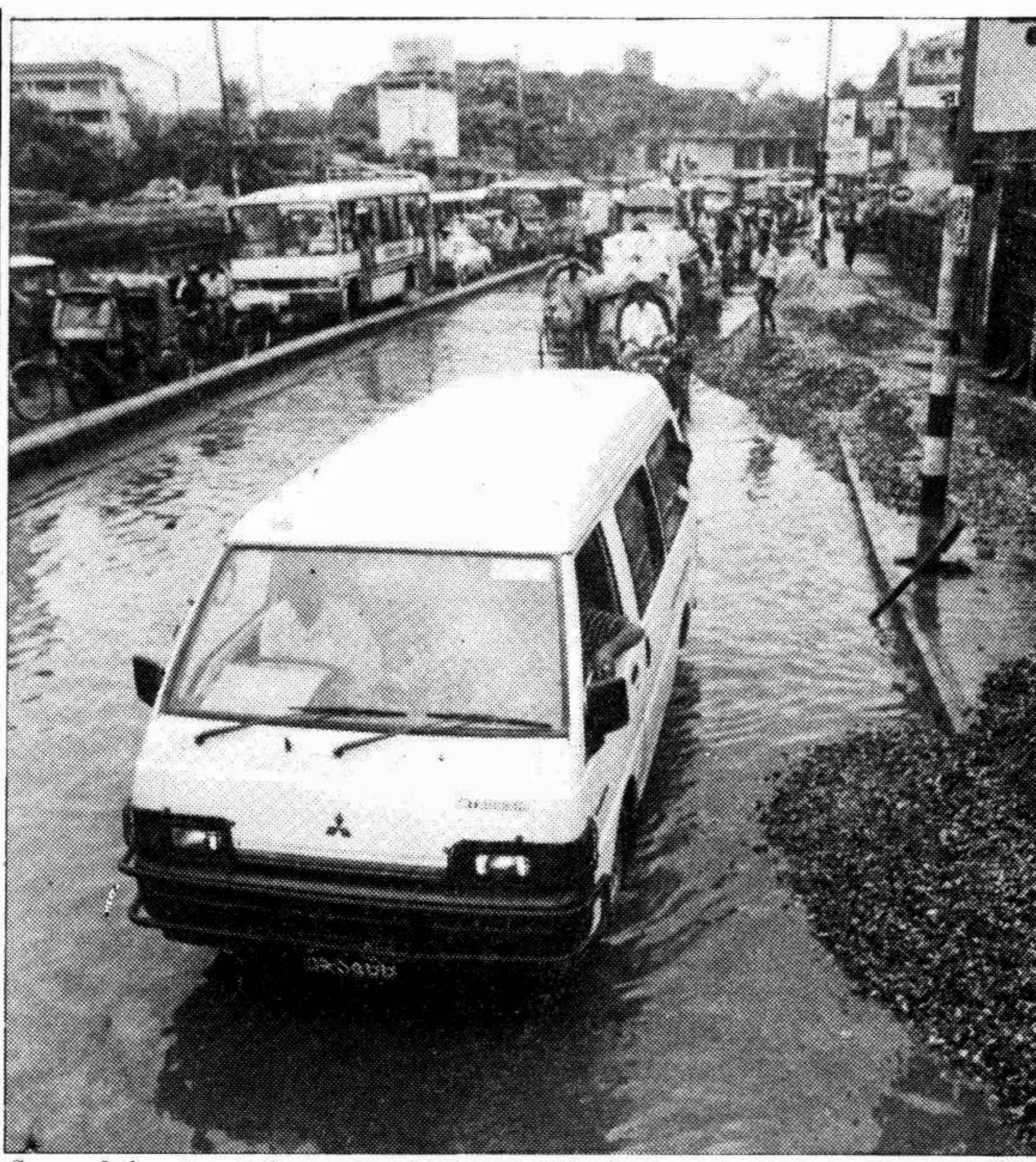
From Staff Correspondent

**KHULNA**, June 23: Khulna citizens' committee has threatened to stop paying taxes to the government as part of its ongoing movement demanding increased allocation in the national budget for construction of Rupsa Bridge.

In a rally followed by two-hour token hunger strike at Shahid Hadis Park on Tuesday morning, leaders of the citizens' committee called upon the people of Khulna to gearup movement for realising Taka 600 crore as recommended in the report of JICA for construction of the bridge.

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Some of the city roads went under knee-deep water due to incessant rain yesterday causing traffic congestion. This picture was taken from a road near Rajdhani Super Market.

— Star photo

## SSC top position holders allege

# Political parties fuel campus violence

By Abul Kalam Azad

Political parties are responsible for campus violence.

This view was expressed by some students who secured top positions in merit lists in the SSC examinations this year.

He stressed diversification of exports to increase the earning.

Akbar Ali Khan said export promotion efforts have to be geared up.

M K Anwar said that only a few export items got the attention of this government but those did not contribute much to export earning.

"Unless we reduce business cost in the country, nothing will improve," he said, adding that the government had a role to play in this regard through fiscal measures.

He wanted to know why the PSL was introduced again after withdrawing the system a few years back.

A K M Shamsuddin criticised the proposed supplementary tax in various sectors saying this would raise prices of many items.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman in his paper on "Bangladesh External Sector: Changes and Challenges" said export diversification, technological upgradation and enhancement of local value addition appear to be the three strategic choices where Bangladesh would need to put its full policy thrust if it is to overcome the current challenges emerging in the global market.

In the global market, the unit value of most of the major exportables from Bangladesh had gone down between 5 per cent and 40 per cent, he said.

The quantum increase in exports was unable to compensate for this decline, and excepting leather, fertilizer and knit-RMG exports, quantum and price index declined in tandem in case of all other commodities which were exported during July 98 to March 99.

He said the FY 2000 budget has proposed a number of measures which are expected to have positive impact on the external sector performance of Bangladesh.

Prof Rahman further said fiscal proposals need to be consolidated and further deepened with measures to promote technological upgradation in the export-oriented sector to improve the quality of overall governance of the external sector and to augment domestic capacity to design and implement appropriate policy responses for coping with the changing dynamics of the global market.

"Overall governance in the external sector continues to remain weak which results in cost escalation for the Bangladeshi exporters," he noted.

Dr Quazi Shahabuddin presented his paper on "1998 Floods, Post-Flood Agriculture Rehabilitation Programme and the Annual Budget, 1999-2000".

"No significant impact on rice prices following the boro harvest has been observed. The price of rice prior to boro harvest was around Tk 14 per kg which came down to about Tk 12 per kg in May and remained more or less stable around that level since then."

She hoped the opening of the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service would bring the Bangla-speaking people across the border closer. She sought Hasina's cooperation in removing some technical problems in the way of better communication.

The leaders were Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, Shamsul Haq, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, AHM Quamruzzaman, Capt. Mansur Ali, Abdul Malek Ukil, Abdur Rab Serniabat and Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni. Besides, Hasina's portrait was also there.

The opening ceremony was marked by hoisting of the national and the AL flag, release of pigeons, presentation of dance and song on the theme of the party's golden jubilee. Verses from the Quran, Geeta, Bible and Tripitaka were recited.

Hasina announced the formal opening of the three-day programme at 3:45pm. Amir Hossain Amu, chief of AL Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee, chaired the ceremony.

Speaking on the occasion, Gujral said the people of Bangladesh had every reason to be proud of their national history created by the great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib.

The main contention of government's case before the Appellate Division is that without amending the Constitution the judiciary cannot be constituted.

Attorney General Mahmudul Islam assisted by AAG Bazlur Rahman moved for the government, while Barrister Syed Ishtique Ahmed with Barrister M Amirul Islam represented the writ petitioners respondents.

The former Indian premier particularly stressed on better

ties among Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, saying that people across the world were now getting closer for development.

"Bangladesh exists in the centre of South Asia, hence it has an important role to play."

He hoped that the Chittagong Hill Tracts will become the Hong Kong of the future.

Lokendra Bahadur Chand hoped Hasina's political agenda would lead her country and the region to prosperity.

Paying tribute to Sheikh Mujib, he said the great leader would remain as a source of inspiration for democratic struggle, liberation and nationalism in the years to come.

Bangladesh has achieved what many countries can only dream of, the Nepalese leader said while praising the development under the Hasina government.

India's Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee hoped better Bangladesh-India relations will make the two countries a stronger force in the re-

"They are not only influencing our economy, but also politics in the name of a new world order."

India's Rajya Shava member Debabrata Biswas said Sheikh Mujib's political struggle crossed the national boundary. In this context, he mentioned

## Leave to appeal

From Page 1

1980 was challenged.

In the writ petition the petitioners also challenged the re-fixation of pays and allowances by Services (Pays and Allowances) Order, 1991.

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## Rashidpur Gasfield

# Drilling ends: 4 gas sand zones struck

From Iqbal Siddique

SYLHET, June 23: Drilling of well number 7 at Rashidpur Gasfield in Habiganj district has been completed successfully, according to an official.

"We have struck four prospective gas sand zones within a depth of 9200 feet. The zones were struck at 9000 metres, 9200 metres, 2200 and 2600 metres, the official said, preferring anonymity. The target depth of drilling was around 9500 feet, he said.

Two gas sand zones were struck in the well number 5 which was drilled in January-March in the same gasfield under a contract signed on May 27 last year. Japan Oil Engineering Company Limited is working as consultant for the project.

Under the project, drilling of three exploration wells will include a foreign component of Tk 83.4 crore. On completion of drilling these wells, about 90 MMCFD of gas, 72 barrels of motor spirit and condensate will be produced per day.

After processing, the dry gas will be supplied to the national grid, the official said.

Drilling of the well began April 22 and was scheduled to be completed in 90 days. But it had been completed earlier. A German firm, Schenberger, had been engaged for logging. The officials are now engaged in DST (Drill Steam Testing) of the well which will take a week. Production testing of the well then be done, the official said.

The location of well number 7 is about 13 kilometres off well number 5. The drilling rig used in well number 5 will also be used in the new location which is to select for the next well (well number 6). If everything goes well, drilling will begin there around the third week of the month, the official informed.

After completion of drilling in the well number 7, drilling of

the well number 6 will be started at a location which is about six kilometres off the well number 5.

The project is being implemented by the Sylhet Gas Fields Limited (SGFL), a subsidiary of Petrobangla Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) of India has been given the task of drilling these wells under a contract signed on May 27 last year. Japan Oil Engineering Company Limited is working as consultant for the project.