

Govt bodies owe  
T&T Board  
Tk 223.52 cr

Post and Telecommunications and Home Minister Mohammad Nasim told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday that the government organisations owe the T and T Board a sum of Tk 223,52,180 in unpaid telephone bills till March, 1999. reports BSS.

Replying to a question from Zafur Islam Chowdhury (BNP-Chittagong), he detailed the steps taken to realise the bills.

He said a ministry-wise list of arrear bills has been sent to the Post and Telecommunications Ministry and the ministry has requested the concerned ministries to pay off the arrear bills.

He said that T and T Board has set up a task force to realise arrear bills of the government telephones. The members of the task force are visiting each of the ministries and making arrangements to realise the arrears through personal contacts.

Nasim said that some government residential telephones have been brought under the ambit of temporary disconnection.

## Setting up of environment courts vital to conserve nature

Concerned policy-makers and environment groups feel that laws and rules are there in abundance in Bangladesh but not enough care is taken to enforce them to conserve the nature and check environmental deterioration, reports BSS.

So, why should we not have Special Environment Courts? they asked.

Due to unplanned and uncaring human activities, Bangladesh is now one of the most vulnerable countries in the globe in terms of climatic changes and disaster-prone ness, air pollution and arsenic contamination.

Environment and Forest Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury recently said Bangladesh is at the top of the table of most disaster-prone countries, especially in terms of the frequency of floods, cyclones and tidal surges.

She quoted a recent study conducted in 54 Commonwealth countries as saying that Bangladesh ranks second in terms of vulnerability but the

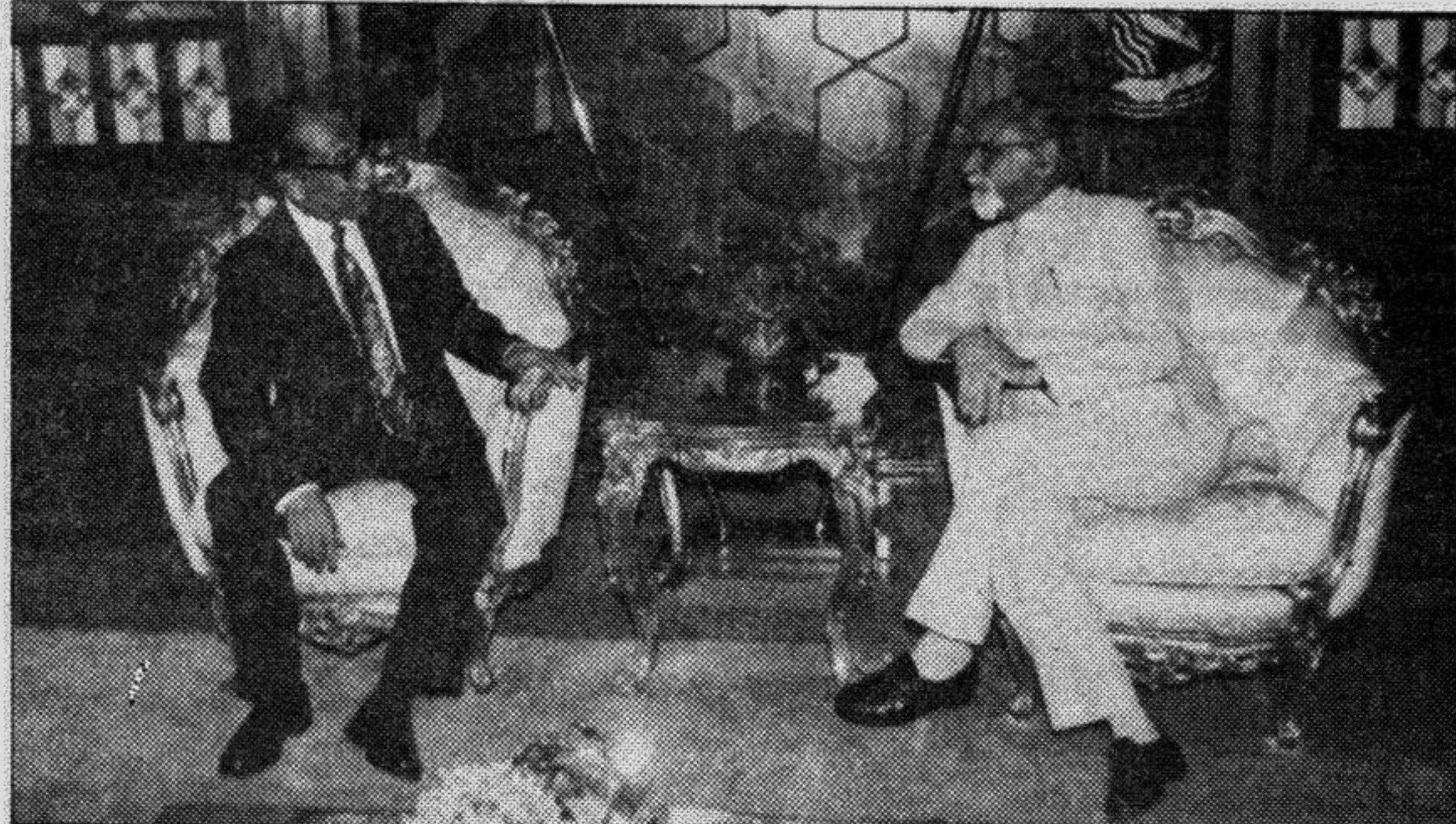
country tops the list of most natural disaster-prone countries.

Amid ever-increasing emission of noxious smoke from mechanised vehicles and industrial plants in and around the cities and towns, encroachment of water bodies and deforestation across the country, Sajeda Chowdhury declared she would clamp down on polluting vehicles, encroachers and loggers.

It is absolutely necessary, chairperson of Coalition of Environmental NGOs Khushi Kabir said, as the situation is deteriorating alarmingly. Director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association Syed Rizwana Hasan echoed her but said finding laws and rules are not at all a problem but their enforcement is a matter of great challenge.

Sajeda Chowdhury said after due scrutiny by the Law Ministry, Environment Court Bill, 1999, will be placed before the Jatiya Sangsad to deal with environment-related cases. She said the cabinet had already approved the draft bill to set up six environmental courts in six divisional headquarters soon.

Founding member of the Forum of Environment Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB) Shahabuddin Ahmed Nafa, describing subterfuge activities of the land-grabbers, poachers, alleged that many unscrupulous



Former Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday.

—PID photo



Recipients of the National Personality Awards at the World Bengali Personality conference held at the National Museum auditorium in the city yesterday.

—Star photo

### Dr M R Chowdhury passes away

Renowned physician Major General (retd) M R Chowdhury died of heart attack yesterday. He was 71, reports BSS.

Official sources said, Chowdhury fell severe chest pain and fainted while he was taking part at a meeting of WHO on HIV/AIDS at the Health Ministry conference room. He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the attending doctors declared him dead.

Chowdhury, who was also the president of the National AIDS Technical Committee, left behind his wife, three sons and one daughter to mourn his death.

Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf and State Minister for Health Dr M Amanullah condoled the death of Mr Chowdhury and prayed for the peace of the departed soul.

**DUJ condemns harassment of journalists**

Dhaka Union of Journalists' has condemned the harassment of journalists in BEXIMCO Media-run daily Muktakanta and news agency APB as well as another agency BNS, reports UNB.

A meeting of the DUJ at Jatiya Press Club yesterday also demanded restoration of jobs of the journalists who were dismissed from Muktakanta and BNS.

The meeting with DUJ President Altaf Mahmud in the chair expressed concern over dismissal of journalists from different newspapers and non-implementation of the 5th Wage Board.

Meanwhile, a release of the DUJ said a unit of the union has been formed at the news agency Associated Press of Bangladesh (APB).

The unit was formed at a meeting at APB newsroom on Wednesday with elderly journalist Sheikh Rakib Uddin in the chair. DUJ President Altaf Mahmud was present.

Naser Ahmed was elected unit chief while Nazrul Islam Mithu, deputy unit chief, said the release.

### Clarification

Marubeni Corporation involved in Greater Dhaka Telecommunications Network Improvement Project has sent a clarification to the photo caption printed in the June 23 issue of The Daily Star.

The clarification is as follows:

"Our attention has been drawn to a picture caption printed in your esteemed daily on Wednesday stating that digging work began in old part of Dhaka to lay telephone lines in November. Actually, as contractors for the said work, we would like to state that work began recently. The old part of the city is very crowded and in commercial areas having high traffic volume, road surface is very hard and thick, and other utilities are also installed in haphazard way, which create a great hindrance in our progress. Our work is related with the main lane and by-lane. However, we are making prompt progress and we hope to complete installation work in Chalk Bazar exchange area within July. After completion of the Network, it will meet up the crying demand and the subscribers will get a modern Telecommunication system, which was urgent for the old part of the city. We regret the inconvenience caused to the city dwellers and users of the roads."

### What's on today....

**Film show:** Three French movies *Ascenseur pour l'echafaud* (Lift to the Scaffold), *Tous les matins du monde* and *La maître de musique* (The music master) will be screened. Venue: Auditorium of Alliance Francaise de Dhaka. Time: 11.00 am, 4.00 pm and 6.00 pm respectively.

**Music Day:** Alliance Francaise de Dhaka will celebrate La Fete de la Musique. Music Day participants include Laloni Geeti exponent Farida Parveen. Venue: Alliance Francaise de Dhaka. Time: 3.00 pm to 7.00 pm.

**Cultural show:** Bangladesh Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi Sangstha will present a cultural programme to mark the birth centenary of Poet Nazrul. Venue: Kabi Bhaban auditorium (Nazrul Institute), House No 330/B, Rd No 28, Dhanmondi R/A. Time: 7.00 pm respectively.

**Musical evening:** Nascafe will present an evening of music titled 'Classics Unplugged'. Venue: BCIC auditorium, BCIC Bhaban, Dilkusha. Time: 6.00 pm.

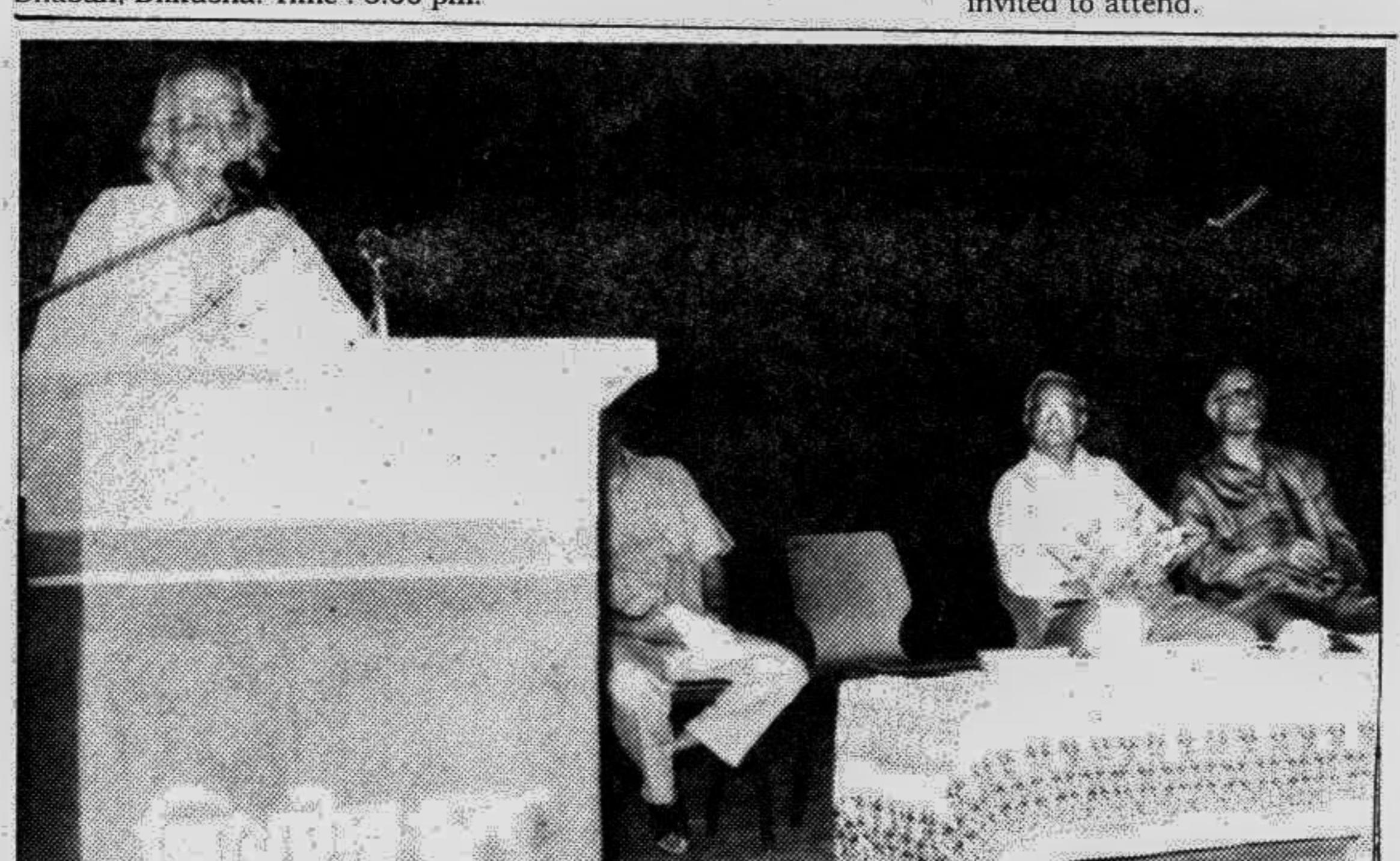
### Rotary News

#### Meeting date shifted

The joint board meeting of the Rotary Club of Dhaka North West will now be held on June 29 at 23 Green Road at 5.30 pm instead of June 30 at Dhaka Club. All board members have been requested to attend without fail, says a press release.

Also, the last regular weekly meeting of the club will be held on June 30, at 7.30 pm at 23 Green Road to be followed by dinner.

Spouses of the members of North West are also cordially invited to attend.



Prof Kabir Chowdhury speaking at the certificate distribution ceremony of the ninth one-year Course of Theatre School at the Mahila Samity auditorium yesterday.

—Star photo

### Growth rate meaningless

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the others which indicate tension in the fiscal measures."

After steady rise of inflation over 24 months, it started to come down in May and June, which is still over 8 per cent, he said.

"Unless institutional reforms are addressed, the potential of industrial growth will remain unrealised. The package provided for industrialisation is very little compensation and marginal, because cost of production goes up due to inadequate infrastructure facilities."

Former finance minister M Saiduzzaman said debate on the projected GDP growth rate in the budget proposal is meaningless, as it is a provisional figure."

"We should be patient and should wait for a few months for the final figure."

Focussing on the proposed budget, he said though import duty has been reduced but imposition of supplementary duty has counteracted it in many cases."

"There is room for improvement. But the criticism was not constructive which is really unfortunate."

"There are other issues including the cost and price of gas and power, the purchase of gas in foreign exchange and utilisation of foreign aid and its impact on ADP should have come up in the criticism," Saiduzzaman said.

Syed Manzur Elahi termed the budget as too revenue-oriented; it is not industry or investment-oriented.

The BSB, BSRS, Nationali-

sed Commercial Banks (NCBs) or private banks will not be helpful for industrialisation because they will not provide long-term loans, he observed.

He said trading would not create employment. "We need investment and industries for creation of employment. We need a very good bond market and a discount house for this to solve the problem."

Focussing on industrial sector, he said: "Instead of growth, we are going back in industry."

Budget is prepared by the NBR and because of political concentration, long-term issues have not been addressed in the budget, he said.

Prof Anu Muhammad said allocation for poverty alleviation increased by 600 per cent over the past few years but it has reduced only 2 per cent. Only an investment-oriented budget can reduce poverty.

Smuggling and underground economy dominates our economy, which is trading based, and has little production base, he added.

The finance minister did not address many issues in his budget speech, he said referring to pressure on foreign exchange reserve because of gas and power purchase with foreign exchange.

Budget did not focus anything on gas sector which will create a problem for the nation in near future, he observed.

Dr Binayak Sen said crop diversification did not take place over the years, which is essential for further growth. "Local government should be empowered for real development."

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### Motorcycle stolen

By Staff Correspondent  
A motorcycle was stolen from a journalist's house at East Nakhal Para under Tejgaon thana in the city on Wednesday.

Some unidentified miscreants broke open the gate of the house and took away the motorcycle from the garage at about 1 am.

The two-wheeled blue vehicle (Yamaha, RX-100, engine and chassis no 631343) belongs to Mahbub Zaman Nahid, Dhaka University correspondent of the Daily Star.

A case has been lodged with Tejgaon thana in this connection.

**One arrested on rape charge**

By Staff Correspondent

Police arrested one person from Hasan Nagar area under Kamrangir Char on Wednesday on charge of raping a garments worker.

Jahangir, 25, was arrested after the victim filed a case against four people.

Quoting the FIR, police said that a gang about four, including Jahangir, stormed into her house in a shanty at Kamrangir Char at about 10:30 pm on Monday. The 24-year-old victim is a mother of two.

The four dragged her to a nearby place where they raped her one after another.

CMM's Court sent Jahangir to Dhaka Central Jail after police produced him before the court yesterday.

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The section VIII of the rule 270 has instructed the members of parliament 'not to refer dismally to another member in a debate'. On the other hand, it has given the Chair the authority 'not to permit any expression' -

used by any MP - which is 'un-parliamentary in nature'. Besides, it is the discretion of the Chair to decide which expression is parliamentary and which one is not.

However, Razak Ali then urged the Chair to 'switch off the microphone of anyone using abusive, offensive or dismally words while speaking in the House'. "Please, save the image and prestige of this august House. I am sure, the Treasury Bench would also welcome such a move from you."

Another BNP legislator Major (retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed made a brief but similar appeal to the Chair on the other day. He had requested the Deputy Speaker to 'switch off the microphone whenever an MP, belonging to whatever benches, starts using nasty language'. The appeal, perhaps, went unnoticed.

But Razak Ali succeeded to touch the heart of the Chair.

Visibly moved by his predecessor, Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury said: "I fully support your spirit. When we all want the democracy to be institutionalised, we all need to try consciously to make the parliament effective and its proceedings lively. In that case, I

**Gas sector**

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For this and for developing the local energy market, the government was now taking help from the US Department of Energy and other authorities, he pointed out.

We are also getting cooperation from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank to set up some regulatory bodies and frame laws," the secretary said.

A Gas Regulatory Act is now being framed for upgrading all existing gas related laws in a comprehensive manner. Besides, a National Energy Regulatory Authority would be set up to implement this Act.

The government is also considering framing of similar laws and establishment of a similar authority for power sector.

"We would soon finalise block negotiations and sign agreements with various oil companies under the Second Round Bid. And we'd like to speed up implementation of the new PSCs," Elahi said.

The energy secretary mentioned that the oil companies had to comply with various relevant laws and seek permission from different authorities to undertake their tasks. Such procedures often took more time than was expected before the signing of PSCs. To reduce the time, the government is thinking of a 'One Stop Service Centre' at Petrobangla, he said.

Besides, the government is thinking of ways to cut down gas exploration and production cost through technical and administrative measures.

"A critical issue we are dealing with is how the assessment of our hydro-carbon reserve. In this regard, we are taking World Bank assistance for a gas reservoir study, a USDA assistance for a gas resource utilisation study and an assessment from the US Geological Survey authority," Elahi said.

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