



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited the Oxford Centre, a Bangladesh Festival venue, in the United Kingdom on Tuesday. — PID photo

36 projects for dev of cultural infrastructure undertaken

The government has undertaken 36 projects for the development of cultural infrastructure in the country, reports UNB.

Various departments under the Cultural Affairs Ministry are implementing these projects.

A review meeting on these development projects was held yesterday at the conference room of the ministry with State Minister of Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader in the chair.

The Minister expressed satisfaction over the progress of the implementation work.

The meeting was informed that the construction works of national music and dance centre and national drama centre are going on.

Besides, the implementation of the projects are going on regarding setting up of a museum at Mymensingh to preserve the works of Shilpakalpa Jyoti Abidin and a centre at Nabakumar Institute in Dhaka to preserve the memories of martyr Matur Rahman.

Works are also going on at Tungipara to construct a complex at the mazar of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, another complex at Mujibnagar to preserve the memories of the liberation war and a memorial centre at Pabna to preserve the memories of Begum Rokeya.

Secretary-in-charge of the ministry, Director General of Bangla Academy, National Museum, Shilpakalpa Academy and concerned high officials were present at the review meeting.

Make hartal a success: JCD reject it: BCL

By DU Correspondent

BNP backed student organisation Jatayatadhi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and ruling party's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) yesterday brought out pro-hartal and anti-hartal processions respectively on the Dhaka University campus yesterday.

In support of today's opposition sponsored dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country, JCD also held a rally in front of the DUCSU building at noon.

Addressing the rally, JCD leaders protested the proposed National Budget for 1999-2000 fiscal year and said that the government have placed an 'anti-people' budget.

They urged the country-men and all JCD activists to resist the budget by making the hartal a success.

They also condemned the robbery in the house of Dr Ershadul Bari, Dean of Law Faculty of the Dhaka University, on Tuesday small hours.

Presided over by Manir Hossain, the rally was addressed among others by Monjur Elahi, Nuruzzaman, Sultan Salauddin Tuku and Asaduzzaman Asad.

Beside protesting the hartal, BCL held a rally at the Aparajito Bangla on the campus at noon.

At the rally BCL leaders blamed the opposition for creating unrest in the country in the name of hartals and democratic rights.

DU MA students ransack dean's office

By DU Correspondent

A section of masters final year examinees of the Dhaka University yesterday ransacked the window panes and flower tubs of the Dean's office at the Arts Faculty, demanding rescheduling of their examinations.

The students, under the banner of Sadharan Chhatra-Chhatra Brindha (Igeneral students) gathered in front of the dean office at around 12 noon and went on rampage as the university authorities did not give any decision in their favour.

The masters final examination is scheduled to begin from early next month.

The students demanded rescheduling of the examinations by at least one month so that they can prepare properly. The students have been demonstrating in support of their demand for the last few days.

Ctg hartal

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All kinds of vehicle except rickshaws were off the roads during the hartal.

City's road links with rest of the country was snapped, but Train service and flight operation were as usual, officials concerned said.

Most of the shops and offices remained closed.

Activities at the Chittagong port were also hampered due to hartal, port sources said.

Hundreds of BCL activists staged demonstrations in the city and rallies held in Arderkilla-crossing, New Market crossing and Probartak areas.

At the rallies, the hartal supporters demanded immediate release of Nasir.

Otherwise, they threatened to go for a massive agitation programme soon.

Gangrape

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Local people rescued the victim from the slum and sent her to the hospital yesterday morning. Doctors said her condition was improving.

The sources quoting the victim said that she had lost her parents during the 1988 floods. She was living with one Alaudin at Joydevpur, but she was forced to leave the house.

Later, she started living with Ziaul at Ramna Park Staff Quarters. Ziaul takes care of her at Rajarbagh Police Lines.

When contacted, Khilgaon thana duty officer said last night that they had not heard about the incident while Ramna thana police said that an officer had gone to the place of occurrence.

None was arrested till filing of this report late last night.

Kibria

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measures. But, he said the government would reach some sort of understanding with them.

Road links between the capital and several northern districts remained cut late Wednesday because of a transport strike against the tax measures.

The minister justified tax measures by saying the budget was prepared under the 'shadow' of last year's floods, the worst in a century, and there was a need for raising revenue collection.

The government spent 16.6 billion taka (332 million dollars) in deficit financing during the last fiscal year because of the flood and if that is criticised, do you mean to say that we let people go hungry?

Defending the recent purchase of Mig-29s, he said: If one does not want to have an air force, army or navy then I don't agree with them.

He brushed aside any lack of transparency in the deal.

Kibria said the Mig purchase will not strain ties with the United States despite Washington's criticism of the deal.

Dhaka and Washington will not be strained by the purchase of the Migs, he assured.

"In fact I had long talks with US ambassador John C Holman this week and the topic never came up," he said.

Hasina says Irish problem to be resolved soon under Blair's leadership

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed her firm optimism that the peace process in Ireland initiated by British Prime Minister Tony Blair would be successful, according to a message received here, reports BSS.

Sheikh Hasina, who came to Oxford from London to address a function at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies on 'Bangladesh looks to the 1st century' was replying to questions after the speech. She invited questions from among the audience to which the crowd responded spontaneously.

The Prime Minister was asked whether Bangladesh could play a role in the Irish crisis, in the backdrop of her efforts to solve the long-standing CHT problem in Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina said the nature of problem varied from place to place. She said her government took up the CHT problem very seriously.

Even when we were in the opposition, we formed a separate cell to deal with the problem, she said, adding she had always felt that CHT was a political problem. She said her government earned the trust of the tribal leaders and the solution was found.

Sheikh Hasina showered praises on the leadership of Tony Blair and said the Irish problem would find a solution soon under his dynamic leadership. She, however, noted that the problem lasting over decades cannot be solved overnight.

Asked how could she solve the problem of large-scale brain drain from Bangladesh as many talented students had left the country for higher studies and never returned. She said

the solution lay with the students if they want to take part in the nation-building task after completion of their studies. She said the government is considering to give them some incentives to return.

She said the country had been under a dictatorship and autocracy for a long time but a stable condition has to be attained in society.

On population explosion, she said the government has been able to reduce the birth rate from 2.8 per cent to 1.8 per cent. She said 'We want to bring down the figure to 1.3 per cent.'

She called for spreading education across the country and make the people aware of the menace of population boom.

She said the literacy rate now stood at 56 per cent from 47. 'Now we can say that more than fifty per cent of our population are literate.'

The function was also addressed by Andrew Smith, Minister for Education and Employment and Director of the Centre Dr Farhan Nizami.

Welcoming the Bangladesh leader, Dr Nizami explained the activities of the Centre. He said students from 12 different countries have been studying in the centre.

Andrew Smith wished that Bangladesh would be able to march ahead on the path of progress and prosperity under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. He hoped that Bangladesh would be able to meet the challenges of the new century.

The Prime Minister later went around the Centre and signed the visitor's book. She also attended a dinner hosted by the Oxford Centre for Islamic studies.



Rickshaw Sramik League brought out an anti-hartal procession in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Ctg customs earn record revenue of Tk 1286 cr

CHITTAGONG, July 7: Customs, Excise and VAT Commissionerate of Chittagong earned an all time record revenue of Taka 1286.49 crore during the last fiscal (1998-1999), reports BSS.

The Commissionerate earned the revenue out of its internal resources (VAT, excise duty, supplementary duty surcharge and turn over tax) with a surplus of Tk 3.99 crore during the fiscal against the targeted amount. The earnings was Tk 93.08 crore higher than that of the corresponding period of the previous fiscal (1997-1998), said Commissioner of Chittagong Customs Mohammad Shakhawat Hossain at a crowded press conference in the Commissionerate's Conference Room here this afternoon.

The commissioner said in the fiscal 1996-97 and 1997-98 revenue collection from the above sources was Tk 1173.36 crore and Tk 1193.41 crore respectively. Against the target amount of Tk 1171.03 crore and 1373.30 crore with a growth rate of 10.82 per cent and 1.71 per cent respectively.

But in the last fiscal the target was enhanced by Tk 89.09 crore than that of the previous year's actual collection with a growth rate of 7.47 per cent, he said.

In spite of the various adverse situations like devastat-

ing flood of the century, erratic power failure and meagre supply of gas, the Commissionerate has achieved the target set for it with additional revenue of Tk 3.99 crore with collective efforts of all officers and staff concerned, he added.

Customs officials including Helaluddin Feroz Shah Alam, Saifur Rahman Patwari, Wahidul Islam and Shahidul Islam replied to queries of the journalists.

The Commissionerate earned a total of Tk 180.48 crore as customs revenue during the fiscal 1998-99 against the targeted amount of Tk 210.00 crore, the customs officials said.

In reply to a question, the commissioner of the customs said the revenue collection from the customs sources is entirely dependent on the quantum of imports and clearance of dutiable goods.

During the current fiscal year, the quantum of the imports and clearances of goods through the letter of credit stations and the bonded ware houses decreased significantly, the commissioner said adding that the imports and clearances of the dutiable goods during the 1997-98 fiscal year was 507.60 crore whereas the same in the just concluded fiscal was Tk 402.32 crore.

NGFF

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urea, they said.

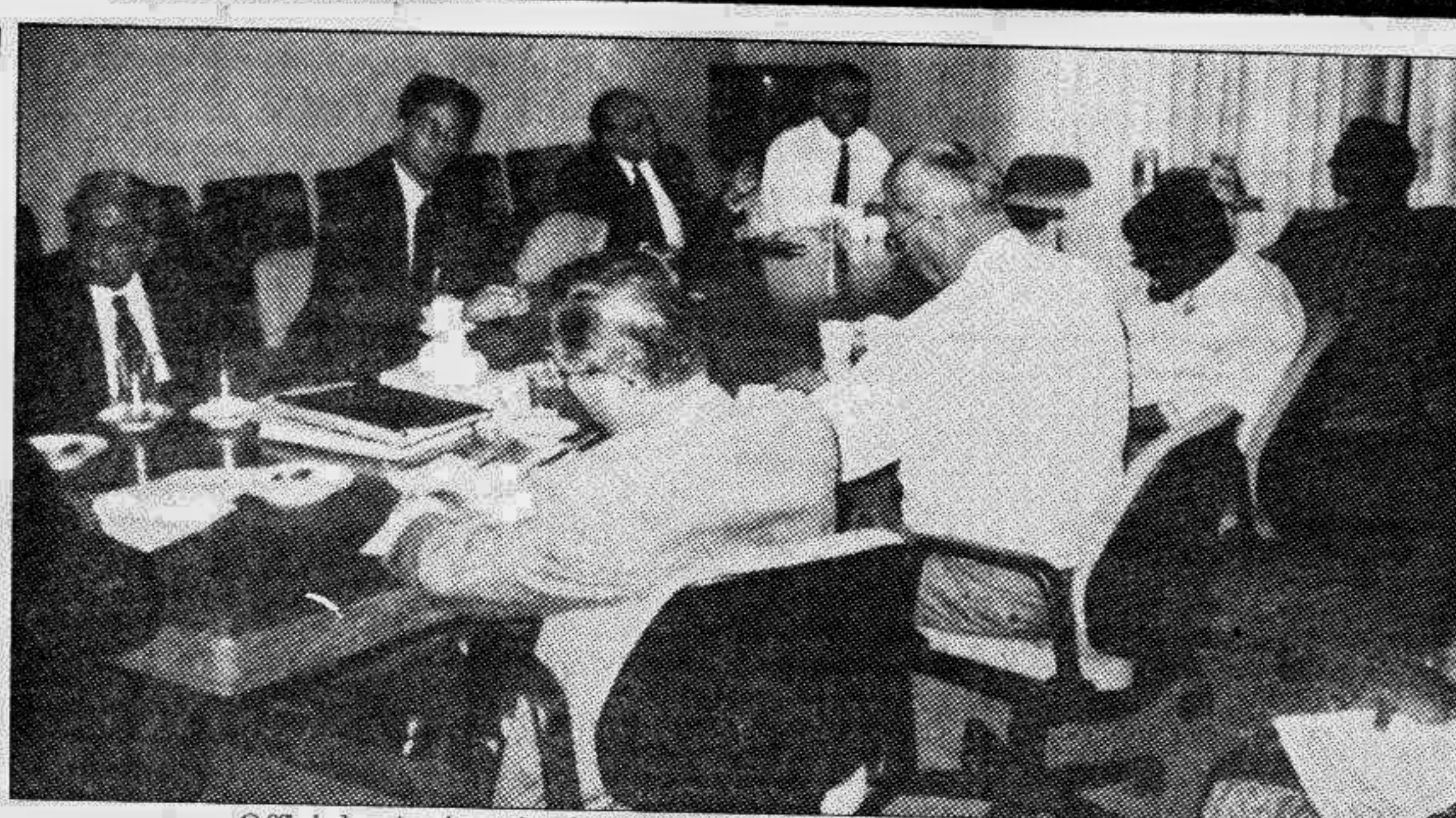
The factory is also facing acute space problem in its godown due to stockpiling of the unsold fertilizers. The total storage capacity of NGFF is only 30,000 metric tonnes. The factory has 22,000 metric tonnes of fertilizer in its 11 rented godowns in northern and southern districts, stored under buffer stock programme.

The NGFF authorities recently took a number of steps to sell fertilizer in the northern and southern districts. But due to high transportation cost the factory is incurring a loss of Tk 400 on one ton of fertilizer, said a factory official. At present, Tk 900 is being spent for transporting one ton of fertilizer to those areas.

But only Tk 500 is charged from the dealers. Thus the factory is incurring an annual loss of about Tk 1.5 crore on this account only.

The demand for fertilizer in Sylhet region rises to over 10,000 tonnes per month during the peak season but it comes down to 2,000 during the lean period.

Previously, sugar mills, Tea Research Institute, Bara Project and Rice Research Institute used to buy huge quantities of fertilizer from this factory. But now they have stopped buying fertilizer, the official informed.



Officials signing the loan documents at the ADB office yesterday.

Weather Temperature may rise

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely to occur at many places over Khulna, Barisal and Chittagong divisions and at a few places over Dhaka, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions with moderately heavy falls at places over Barisal and Chittagong divisions till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Met office said day temperature may rise slightly over the country during the period.

The country's highest temperature 33.2 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Bogra and the lowest 23.9 degrees at Sandwip.

The sun sets in the city today at 6:50 pm and rises tomorrow at 5:17 am.

Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius	Humidity in percentage
Dhaka	Max 30.3, Min 26.4	Morning 86, Evening 77
Chittagong	30.0, 24.5	87, 76
Rajshahi	32.8, 26.1	81, 80
Khulna	31.0, 24.6	90, 86
Barisal	30.5, 24.4	92, 85
Sylhet	29.7, 25.8	84, 86
Cox's Bazar	29.0, 24.5	100, 85

DCC to begin campaign for birth registration

Mayor of Dhaka Mohammad Hanif yesterday said the City Corporation will begin a campaign for birth registration from next month, reports BSS.

Addressing a Birth Registration Advocacy Meeting at DCC auditorium as the chief guest, he said besides the representatives of government, non-government and the city corporation, about 3000 volunteers will make house-to-house visits in the third week of August to make the campaign a success.

The Mayor thanked the UNICEF for extending financial and other assistance for implementing the programme.

He said since the birth registration is a fundamental right of every child, the city corporation will make regular follow-ups of the programme.

Presided over by the Chief Executive Officer of DCC Mohammad Shahidul Alam, the meeting was addressed by Secretary of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs Dr Tahmina Hussain and Country Representative of UNICEF Ms Shahida Azfar as special guests.

Chief Health Officer of DCC Dr Mohammad Ashrafuddin, chief of urban section of UNICEF Selim Ahmed and Dr Halima Huq of DCC Standing Committee on Health also spoke on the occasion.

The city mayor urged all

government and non-government organisations, as well as educational institutions and places of religious worship of the city to help make the campaign a success.

Prof Tahmina Hussain said the government, as one of the first signatories to the Convention on Right of Children, is aware of the importance of registration.

She said to implement child rights the government has announced the National Child Policy and observes the child right week every year.

The Prime Minister has herself announced that the Union Parishad or Pourashava registering the highest number of child births will be awarded at the next child rights week, she said.

Shahida Azfar said with the successful implementation of the nation wide child birth registration programme Bangladesh could become a model in Asia in this regard.

She thanked the DCC for planning to launch the registration programme and urged all concerned to cooperate.

The UNICEF representative said the country could best commemorate the Convention on Right of Children through a successful child birth registration drive.

Brahmaputra, Jamuna and Ganges swell further

With the monsoon remaining fairly active all over the country, the Brahmaputra and Jamuna swelled further at all points while the Ganges recorded rise at most points till 6 am yesterday, reports UNB.

While most rivers in the Meghna basin receded and the rivers in southeastern hill basin rose further, according to the Flood Information Centre.

In the Ganges basin, the Padma at Bhagyakul was flowing 9cm above its danger mark.

The Brahmaputra receded by 16cm at Noonkhawa and by 18cm at Chilmari while the Jamuna registered fall by 15cm at Bahadurabad, 13cm at Sirajganj and by 4cm at Aricha.

The Dharala receded further fall by 14cm at Kurigram while the Teesta recorded a slight rise at Dalia and receded 15cm at Kaunia. The Old Brahmaputra registered a slight fall at Jamalpur but it recorded a rise by 6cm at Mymensingh.

The Buriganga rose by 8cm at Dhaka while the Turag 5cm at Mirpur and 8cm at Tongi.

The Padma rose by 22cm at Pancha, 20cm at Rajshahi, 23cm at Hardinge Bridge and 3cm at Bhagyakul while it registered a fall by 4cm at Golaundo.

The Karatoa recorded a fall by 35cm at Panchagarh while the Panabhadra rose by 13cm at Dinajpur, but the Mohananda at Chapainawabganj recorded further rise by 18cm.

The Surma registered a fur-

ther fall by 12cm at Kanaighat, 13cm at Sylhet and 10cm at Sunamganj. The Kushiara registered a further fall by 7cm at Amalshid.

The Meghna at Bhairab Bazar rose further by 3cm while the Gumti receded further by 30cm at Comilla.

The Muhuri recorded a slight rise at Parsuram and the Sangu registered a further fall by 70cm at Bandarban.

JS rejects

proposal for free textbooks upto class X

Parliament yesterday rejected a resolution proposing free distribution of textbooks among students upto class X, reports UNB.

The resolution was moved by Adv. Goutam Chakravarty (BNP-Tangail). Several other BNP members spoke in favour of the proposal.

"I would have been pleased to do that, but it is not possible during this financial year," the Education Minister said.

The House rejected the resolution through a voice vote. In reply to another resolution moved by Chakravarty, Education Minister ASHK Sadeque categorically said that not a single Madrassah has been closed down.

The minister, however, said that government allowances of some Madrassah teachers were stopped and registration of certain madrassahs suspended on specific grounds.

Sadeque said that of the 6,132 MPO enlisted Madrassahs, registration of only 126 Madrassahs and some classes in 125 Madrassahs were suspended for certain irregularities.

He said there are 6,847 Madrassahs in the country with 1,26,058 teachers and employees. Of the total 1,24,447 MPO enlisted teachers and employees, allowances of only 1,047 were suspended, which is less than one per cent.

He said Tk 329 crore was spent on development of MPO listed madrassahs in the last fiscal year.

PM's tour

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that comes from poor people of the country. The big team looks more like a pleasure party," said Major Hafiz, who is also one of the whips of the opposition BNP.

He said there are persons in the entourage who are bank defaulters and own newspapers and news agencies but do not pay salaries to journalists and employees for several months.

These defaulters, who do not even repay the huge bank loan, have contributed a handsome amount of money to the "insignificant" Bangladesh Festival only to please the prime minister.

Hafiz claimed that the expatriate Bangladeshis do not have any involvement with this festival and instead the event has created a negative reaction among them.

The BNP lawmaker called such a "insignificant" visit not only a wastage of government money but it is also damaging the image of the country. "People cannot accept this type of picnic or attend any marriage ceremony of prime minister's close relation for which the poor people have to pay," he added.

Immediately after the statement, Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad stood up and took the floor, but the Chair did not allow him to speak.

Later, none from the ruling party sought the floor till adjournment of the House at 1:30 p.m. yesterday.

NGO network

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Later, during a session to work out a strategy for Bangladesh, NGO representatives narrated their experiences and revealed a number of startling facts.

Shamsul Islam Khan of CSI said the experience in Bangladesh differs from that in India but that can be used for solving many problems.

He was supported by a young lawyer, Ashek Momen, who said that right to information could make the authorities of city corporations and utility services accountable to taxpayers and consumers.

Another NGO activist, Quamrul Huda, said officials and even school authorities are reluctant to provide details on dropouts. This makes it difficult to prepare a strategy to tackle the problem, he said. He was also critical of the practice to place the national budget in parliament without letting the people participate in a debate on it.

Tuhin Afroza, a lawyer, dwelt on consumer rights. She said the government has prepared a Consumer Protection Bill but people do not know about it. She feared it would protect producers' interest.

Abul Khair from Bogra narrated how his efforts to get information on arsenic in tube well water was frustrated by officials.

Another NGO worker from Khasan Trust described her difficulties in obtaining records on ghaz lands meant for distribution among landless people. Officially it costs only Tk 17 but people pay even Tk 70,000 because of corrupt officials.

Mashih Baroi from Jessore described his problems with a Kazi (marriage registrar) who was unwilling to provide details about marriages just because he (the kazi) does not register those to realise his share from the fees.

Gulam Mohamamd Mostafa from Mymensingh narrated how he landed in trouble with people of intelligence agencies who hounding him after he tried to obtain information on ghaz lands meant for the landless.

Khaleda Ferdousi, another NGO worker said, both the government and the NGOs are equally guilty of not disclosing facts. She cited the collapse of a stadium at Feni where hundreds of workers were working. But none was given any information about it. She also said local government officials were unwilling to provide details on VGF cards during the last floods. Her statement was supported by Mujibur, another NGO worker from Shariatpur.

Iqbal Kabir, another NGO activist, cited the problems in obtaining details on ghaz lands in Feni and said landless people will never get ghaz lands unless they know about land records.

Ms Sultana from Bogra described her experience with a father of a girl child when she tried to convince him to register the birth. The father told her straightway that he did not want to register because he would not be allowed to arrange his daughter's marriage until she turns 18. If her birth is not registered, her marriage could be arranged earlier showing her an adult.

N'ganj brothels

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workers go to the pockets of those house owners.

The confidential report was prepared by a government physician in view of a government plan for rehabilitation of the sex workers.

There was a rumour recently that the sex workers would be evicted from the brothels.

Some incidents of violence took place at the Tanbazar brothel recently in which one sex worker was murdered.

The other leading house owners and their income are: Firoz Mia Tk 8 lakh from two buildings housing 500 sex workers; Dawlat Khan Tk 15 lakh from 300 sex workers; Monir Khan Tk 3 lakh from 200; Khoka Tk 11 lakh from 200; Bari (known as Bari CID as he is a former CID Assistant Sub-inspector) Tk 15 lakh from 250; Almas Mia Tk 5 lakh from 200; Mamtaj Begum Tk 2 lakh from 1500; Kalamullah Tk 3 lakh from 500; Julhas Mia Tk 8 lakh from 100 and Mannaf Sharker Tk 2 lakh from 50 sex workers.

GrameenPhone signs agreement with IFC, ADB, CDC

GrameenPhone Limited, the largest mobile telephone operator in the country, has signed a 55 million US dollar financing package agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) yesterday in the city, says a press release.

This is one of the largest private sector loans made by these international financial institutions in Bangladesh and it is for the first time that they have invested in a project together in the country.

The loan and equity investments by these three international financial institutions will enable GrameenPhone to further expand its network in the country. The agreement provides for a 16.67 million dollar loan and an equity investment of 1.57 million dollar each from IFC, ADB and CDC.

The major shareholders of GrameenPhone are: Telenor, the Norwegian state-owned telephone operator; Grameen Telecom, an affiliate of Grameen Bank; Marubeni Corporation, one of Japan's largest trading companies; and Grameen Development Corporation, an investment firm based in New York.

The loan and equity agreements were signed at the ADB resident mission in Dhaka by Mohammad Tiplu Sultan of CDC Bangladesh, Geoffrey Hawkins of IFC, Phiphat Suphaphit, President representative of ADB, Knut Reed, Regional Director of Asia-Telone, Shahed Latif, Managing Director of Grameen Telecom, Tetsuya Yanagi, Deputy General Manager of Marubeni Corporation, Iqbal Quadir, Director of Gonofone, and Trond Moe, Managing Director of GrameenPhone.