

The Daily Star

on Friday

Your 20-page
weekend
paper

VOL. IX NO. 184 REGD. NO. DA 781

INTERNET: <http://www.dailystarnews.com>

SRABAN 15 1406 BS

DHAKA FRIDAY JULY 30, 1999

RABIUS SAANI 16, 1420 HIJRI

20 PAGES PLUS MAGAZINE: PRICE TAKA 9.00

Transshipment plan prompts 30-hour hartal

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance yesterday called a 30-hour countrywide hartal from 6 am Monday protesting government's decision to examine the proposal for transshipment of Indian goods through Bangladesh's land routes.

The alliance components will also stage separate demonstrations and bring out torch processions on Sunday, and hold public meetings Tuesday afternoon when fresh programmes will be announced.

The programmes were taken at a hurriedly called meeting of

Ahmed and ABM Golam Mostafa, Jamaat-e-Islami leaders, Mohammad Kamaruzzaman, Abdul Kader Mollah and ATM Azharul Islam, and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) leaders Fazlul Haq Amin and ARM Abdul Matin.

Source said the hour-long meeting that began at 7 pm also decided that tougher action programmes will be announced if the government does not withdraw its decision immediately.

A member of the liaison body told The Daily Star over phone last night that the al-

Monday morning to Tuesday noon

liance took the government decision "very seriously" because "providing transit to India will put the integrity of Bangladesh at stake".

"The 30-hour hartal is an initial reaction to the government decision and tougher programmes will be announced if the government does not withdraw its decision immediately. The government must pay a lot for its anti-national decision," he said.

Another leader said fresh programme to protest the government decision will be announced simultaneously at public meetings on Tuesday. A senior BNP leader said the party is determined to force the government to withdraw its "suicidal decision of providing transit facility to India". If necessary, programmes will be announced "to halt everything".

Presided over by BNP Vice-chairman M Shamsul Islam MP, the meeting was attended by BNP leaders Anwar Zahid and Sadek Hossain Khoka, Jatiya Party leaders Kazi Zafar

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Swap transit

Business wants exchange of benefits

Star Report

The business community yesterday generally welcomed the government decision to give transit to India saying that this would help the country develop its transport and infrastructure sector. But some people are sceptical and feel that this is a premature decision that would seal Bangladesh's prospect to explore the north-east Indian market.

However, most of them feel that Bangladesh should swap some benefit for the transit facility to India. They said zero access of selected Bangladeshi goods to Indian market should be the best thing to exchange.

"Transit is provided in SAPTA and also in the Joint Economic Commission agreement between India and Bangladesh," said a MCCI spokesman. "The successive JEC meetings also endorsed transit facility. From that point of view, there can not be any inconsistency in principle for the government to provide

transit facility."

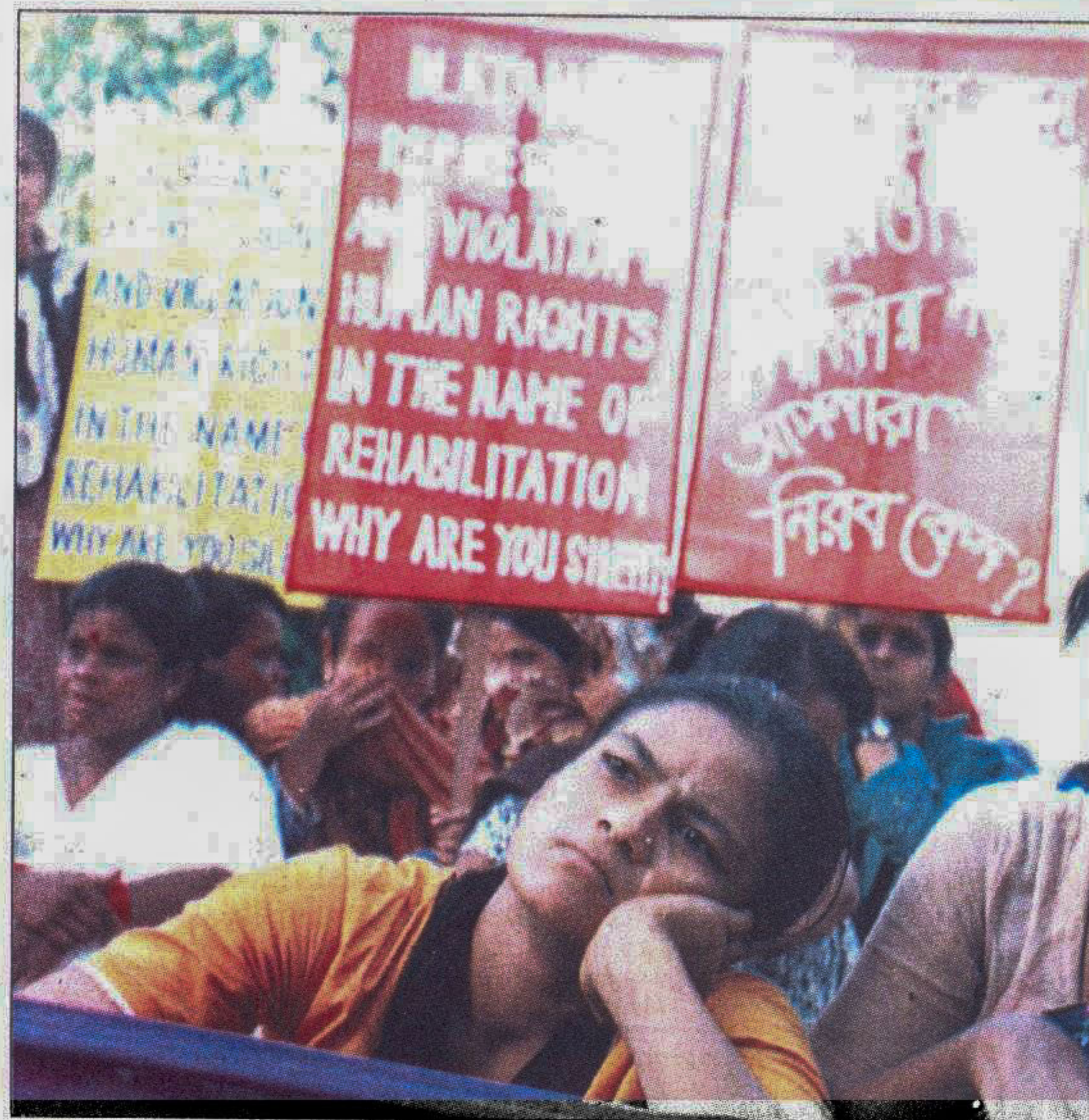
In fact, MCCI found that this will yield benefit to the national economy and it carried out a study by an expert which showed that the country will gain from the facilities. The benefits will come in terms of employment generation in transport sector, port revenue, river dredging and road improvement.

"But what is required is to use it as a leverage for getting access to the 25 identified Bangladeshi products into the Indian market at zero tariff," said the spokesman.

The MCCI also feels that since this is a politically sensitive issue, the matter may be referred to relevant parliamentary sub-committee for political consensus. The experts as well as the trade and industrial bodies may be invited to give their views as about, ways to protect national interest.

However, one industrial as-

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Destination unknown

A sex worker, one of those evicted from Tanbazar, stares blankly at her future as she joins others at a sit-in demonstration in front of the UNDP office in the city yesterday.

Star photo: Sk Enamul Huq

Khaleda terms transshipment anti-state act

"We'll rather give our lives than corridor to India"

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia called an "all-out resistance" against government's bid to give transit to India that she termed an anti-state act, reports UNB.

"The people won't accept this destructive decision. We'll give our lives, not corridor," she declared.

She made a call for nationalist, patriotic and Islamic forces to join the resistance movement against transit.

"In the name of giving transit, the government virtually has taken the decision of giving corridor to India," the BNP chief said in a statement last night.

She said national independence earned at the cost of bloods of 30 million martyrs cannot be sacrificed to "expansionist" India.

"This decision of the Awami League government runs counter to independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bangladesh."

The opposition leader alleged after assuming power, the

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Anachronistic academies

A madrassah boy gets 69% more than a secondary student

By Gobinda Bar

The government spent Tk 980 for a secondary school student and Tk 1652 for a madrassah student in the last financial year.

The expenditure for a madrassah student was 69 per cent higher than that for a secondary school student, according to an estimate made by the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS).

Government expenditure for a madrassah student shot up by over 68 per cent between 1994-95 and 1998-99 financial years. The expenditure for a secondary school student increased by 42 per cent over the period, the estimate said.

In 1994-95, government spent Tk 980 for a madrassah student, which rose to Tk 1652 in 1998-99.

On the contrary, government spent Tk 690 for a secondary school student in 1994-95, which rose to Tk 980 in 1998-99.

The estimate covers non-government high schools, junior high schools, non-government high schools, non-government madrasahs and government madrasahs.

In fiscal 1998-99, the government spent Tk 623.59 crore for 63,63,868 students of 13,019 schools. Tk 329.01 crore for 19,91,470 students of 6,132 madrasahs and Tk 217.07 crore for 11,52,351 students of 15,27 higher secondary colleges.

The total allocations for schools was Tk 352.73 crore in 1994-95, Tk 409.24 crore in 1995-96, Tk 409.74 crore in 1996-97, Tk 525.50 crore in 1997-98 and Tk 619.75 crore in 1998-99.

1997-98 and Tk 619.75 crore in 1998-99.

The number of secondary school students also rose from 51,15,461 in 1995 to 55,85,806 in 1996, 61,24,325 in 1997 and 69,15,280 in 1998. The number of schools also increased from 11,027 in 1994-95 to 13,019 in 1995-96, 11,805 in 1996-97, 12,309 in 1997-98 and 13,019 in 1998-99, the estimate said.

On the other hand, government expenditure for madrasahs was Tk180.13 crore in 1994-95, Tk 204.48 crore in 1995-96, Tk 206.28 crore in 1996-97, Tk 268.58 crore in 1997-98 and Tk 329.01 crore in 1998-99.

Under the MPO, there were 5,605 madrasahs in 1994-95, which rose to 5,785 in 1995-96, 5,841 in 1996-97, 5,972 in 1997-98 and 6,132 in 1998-99.

Year	Number of Schools	Number of Madrasah	Total Secondary School Students	Total Madrasah Students	Government Expenditure for Schools (In Crore Taka)	Government Expenditure for Madrasahs (In Crore Taka)
1994-95	11,027	5,605	51,15,461	18,37,013	352.73	180.13
1995-96	11,370	5,785	55,85,806	20,20,040	409.24	204.48
1996-97	11,805	5,841	61,24,325	21,09,761	409.74	206.28
1997-98	12,309	5,972	69,15,280	22,06,810	525.50	268.58
1998-99	13,019	6,132	63,63,868	19,91,470	619.75	329.01

Shrinking cropland

Ensuring food for a growing population could be tough in future

By Reaz Ahmad

The fast diminishing croplands pose a serious threat to the country's efforts for meeting food needs of its ever-increasing population.

Agricultural experts say the country is losing cultivable lands at a "terrifying rate" of one million hectares per decade but 25 million mouths are added during the period.

According to official statistics, from mid 1960s to mid 1980s, the area of cropland was "more or less static" at around nine million hectares. But in the last one decade, over one million hectares of cropland "disappeared".

"This was due to creation of infrastructures for the ever-increasing population and erosion by rivers."

Zahirul Islam, a scientist at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) considers this situation "alarming".

"We have to produce more food from less land. If rice lands continue to disappear, the challenge of rice production for the future generation will be extremely difficult, if not impossible."

Bangladesh will need to produce additional eight and a half million tonnes of rice by 2020. The current production is around 19 million tonnes.

Citing examples, they said irrigated agri-lands under the DND Project in Dhaka and many other fertile croplands around the city were taken away for dwelling purposes over the last two decades.

With the loss of one million hectares of cultivable land, the average size of farm has also decreased to 0.61 hectare now from 0.81 hectare a decade back.

Dr MA Sattar Mandal, who teaches agricultural economics at Bangladesh Agricultural University, says timely supply of agricultural inputs, credit and extension services to millions of farmers has become more and more difficult for the government because of fragmentation of land and decrease in average farm size.

The pressure on cropland was evident during the last Boro season. Out of additional six lakh hectares of land for Boro in the season, three lakh hectares were taken away from jute and Aus lands, official sources said.

Experts note that with the pressing needs for urbanisation and infrastructure development, more agricultural land will have to be sacrificed in the years to come.

Pressure on cropland will force the country to go for expansion of irrigation, further replacement of traditional varieties by HYVs, increase in fertiliser and pesticide use, introduction of hybrid rice, 'super rice' and transgenic rice and reduction of bio-diversity.

Such changes, scientists fear, will cause reduction of bio-diversity and increase problems from pest and weeds.

To face the challenge of producing more grains on less land to feed the growing population, the Agriculture Ministry is pursuing cropping intensity.

The cropping intensity in Bangladesh is 175 per cent now, the highest in the world. Bangladesh now aspires to go for 300 per cent, which means raising three crops a year from every piece of available land.

But experts say further cropping intensity will tax the "soil health". Over 60 per cent of the croplands are already suffering from deficiency in soil nutrient.

However, over one million hectares of salinity-prone cropland in the coastal regions are still "less-explored". Scientists hope that development of salinity-tolerant varieties would make a breakthrough.

Chhatak blast

Ruling party MP, 5 others charged

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, July 29: CID today submitted chargesheet against ruling party MP Muhibur Rahman Manik and five others for their alleged involvement in bomb explosions at Manik's house at Chhatak thana headquarters on March 15.

Two people were killed and another was injured in the explosions. The chargesheet was submitted to the thana Magistrate court, Chhatak.

The accused are, Muhibur Rahman Manik MP, Abul Lais Chowdhury, and Biplab Bhuiyan. Both are cousins of the MP. Billal Ahmed, Jakaria Chowdhury and Gopal Chandra Das.

Lais is now in the jail, while three others got bail from the court. Another accused Gopal has been absconding since the incident.

Jagadish, Joint-Convenor of the Sylhet district unit of Awami Juba League and a Ward Commissioner of Sylhet Pourasava who was arrested by the CID police on May 9 in the case has been excluded from the chargesheet. He was released on bail last night.

The CID brought charge against the accused under section 3, 4 and 5 of the Explosives Act. As many as 41 people have been shown as witnesses in the case.

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SC rebuffs appeal on floor-crossing

Speaker directed to refer the issue to EC

The Supreme Court yesterday directed the Speaker to refer the issue to the Election Commission who crossed the floor and joined the government in February last year, reports UNB.

Upholding the verdict of the High Court, the full bench presided over by Chief Justice Mostafa Kamal directed the Speaker to refer the dispute to

EC within seven days.

The (government) appeal is dismissed," pronounced the Chief Justice soon after the full bench sat at 7 am. Details of the judgement will be available later.

The brief order further said: "Respondent No 1, Speaker... is directed to refer the dispute as to whether Md Hasibur Rahman Swapan and Dr Md Alauddin, Members of Parliament, should

vacate their seats in pursuant to Article 70 of the Constitution, to the Election Commission within seven days from the receipt of this order."

The dispute arose from the joining of Dr Mohammad Alauddin of Rajshahi as State Minister and Hasibur Rahman Swapan of Sirajganj as Deputy Minister in the Awami League government. Both of them had

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Two MPs stand to lose seats

But it could be long-drawn battle, say legal experts

By Nazmul Ashraf

Two BNP MPs who joined Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government of "national consensus" in early 1998 will have to vacate their seats in the Parliament, but after a lengthy legal process, according to experts.

The Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad has no option but to go by the Supreme Court directive as regards the dispute centring the two opposition lawmakers

joining the Council of Ministers, they said.

The SC yesterday directed the Speaker "to refer the dispute as to whether Md Hasibur Rahman Swapan and Dr Md Alauddin, Members of Parliament, should vacate their seats in pursuant to Article 70 (floor crossing) of the Constitution, to the Election Commission within seven days from the receipt of this order."

Earlier, responding to BNP's appeal to refer the issue of "floor-crossing" by two of its MPs to the Election Commission, the Speaker ruled that Article 70 (floor crossing) of the Constitution was not applicable in the matter as JS membership of the two was not forfeited through their joining the Council of Ministers.

Senior constitutional expert Ishfaq Ahmed said the SC order is binding on the Speaker.

"The Speaker must accept the order and accordingly refer the dispute to the Election Commission (for settlement of the same)... It will be deemed as contempt of court on the part of the Speaker if he does not go by the SC order."

But the veteran lawyer refused to accept that Speaker's non-compliance with the court order would lead to a conflict between the judiciary and the legislature. "If contempt of court by an ordinary citizen does not result in a conflict, then why such an act by the Speaker will be so?" he asked.

Asked by the BBC last night why the SC itself did not pronounce any decision on the dispute, he said the court has no jurisdiction to do so on such a matter. Quoting from the Constitution, he added, the Speaker shall refer to the EC for settlement through hearing if any controversy arises on someone's membership of Parliament. "EC's verdict on such a matter will be final."

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Tofail invokes 1980 accord

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed yesterday said that the government didn't agree to give transit to India, reports UNB.

"It just agreed to examine transshipment of Indian goods from one point to another point of India through Bangladesh by Bangladesh exports," he told a group of journalists at his Commerce Ministry office.

He said it was the BNP government of President Ziaur Rahman, which first signed an agreement with India allowing use of Bangladesh territory for passage of Indian goods from one point of India to its another point.

The agreement signed in Dhaka in 1980 was initiated by Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiky, the then State Minister

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Darkness at noon!

500 MW shortage of power predicted

The country, except Chittagong region, may experience highest 500 mw loadshedding this evening due to suspension of power generation at Ghoshal Power Plant, reports UNB.

Electricity production in all units of the Power Plant was suspended last night for connecting a newly installed 1000 PSI-pipeline with RMS of the plant.

Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Co Ltd needs 24 hours to connect the PSI-pipeline with the plant's RMS.

The areas, under DESA, may experience loadshedding, said a PDB press release yesterday.

IT SEMINAR

The Daily Star and **APTECH** Computer Education are jointly organizing a seminar titled

"Moving Forward with Information Technology"

OBJECTIVES

- Govt has declared IT as thrust sector - what has been done so far.
- Identify steps to be taken both by the govt and the private sector.
- To give a road map & vision to people who aspire a career in IT

Date: July 31, 1999 **Time:** 04.00 p.m.

Venue: Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, Ramna, Dhaka

Participants: Those who aspire a career/business in IT

Speakers: Opinion-leaders and policy-makers from government and private sector.

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