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# Bangladesh cuts population growth rate by half in 25 years

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh achieved remarkable progress in containing high growth of population over the last two and a half decades, with the growth rate coming down to 1.6 per cent from three per cent.

The current population in the country is estimated to be 126 million with an annual growth rate of 1.6 per cent while in 1973 it was only 74 million with a three per cent growth rate according to the annual report of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The population report, which was released yesterday at a press conference in the capital, said the world population will reach six billion this October. The UNFPA will formally observe October 12 as the day of 6 billion throughout the world.

Presenting the report at the press briefing at Jatiya Press Club, the UNFPA country representative in Bangladesh Shuyun Xu said although Bangladesh successfully curbed higher population growth rate over the years, its population is unlikely to be stabilised before the middle of next century.

"The population of Bangladesh could reach between 200 and 250 million and stabilise sometime around the middle of the next century," he said.

Four new-born children are being added to the Bangladesh population every minute, the UNFPA representative said responding to a query. "Out of four one is born in very poor condition with severe malnutrition."

According to the report HIV and AIDS became the fourth most common cause of death worldwide. It is now the leading cause of death in Africa. As many as 11 persons are being infected with the diseases in every minute. Over half of those infected are young below the age of 24.

Other sexually transmitted diseases are also disproportionately found in younger men and women, making a serious public health problem.

Xu said that the main objective of observing "the day of 6 billion" was to create awareness among all and remind them of future responsibilities.

Reaching the six billion mark is a milestone for drawing attention of the world, he said.

"Because of this significance the UNFPA annual report was titled, 'Six billion -- A time for Choices,'" he said.

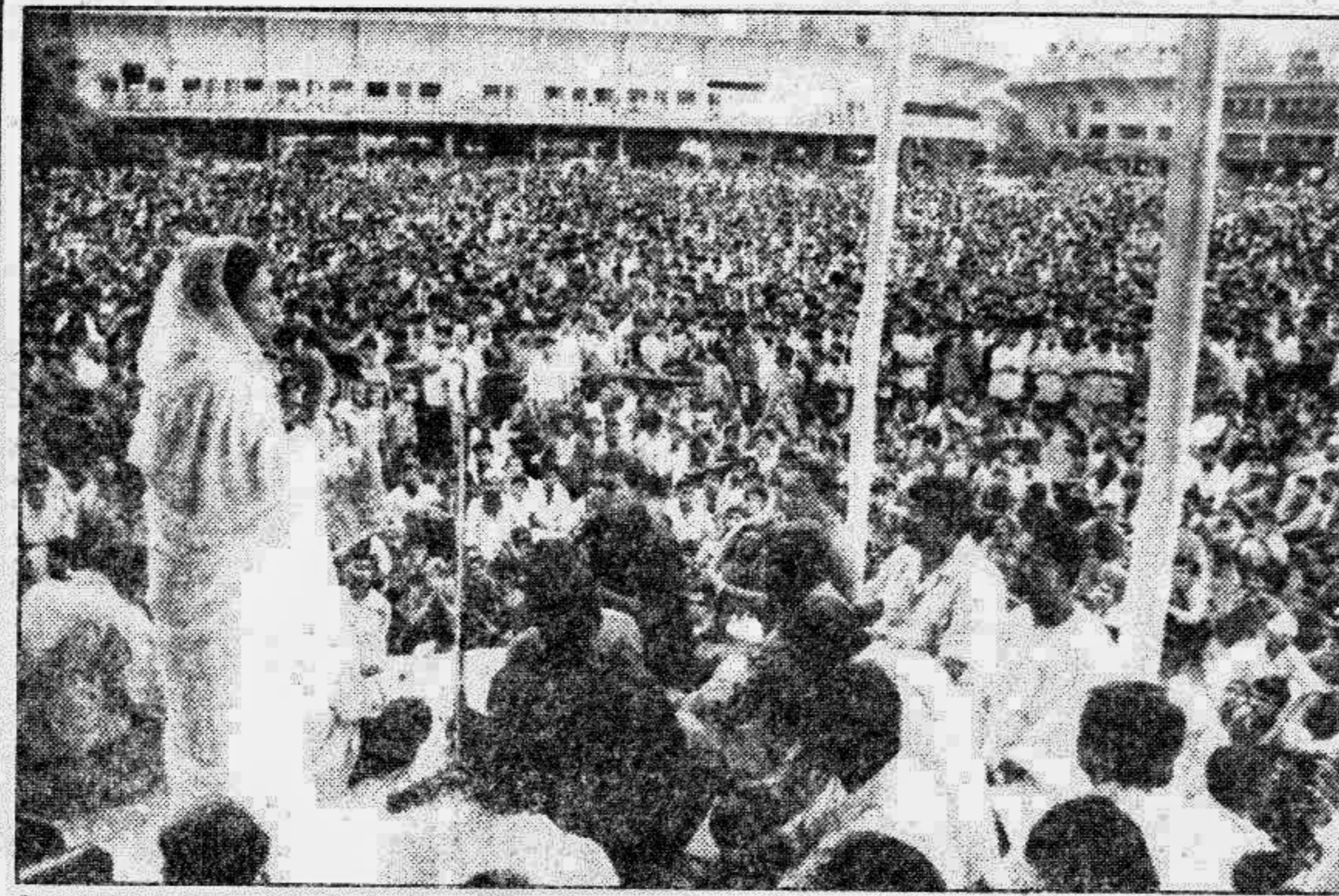
But Xu said reaching the six billion mark has both positive and negative aspects. Among the negative aspects are highest population growth rates in the poorest countries, having over 40 per cent of under-age people in 62 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and prevailing highest rates of maternal mortality.

"The poorest countries also have the worst reproductive health and lowest rates of family planning use," he noted.

Among the positive aspects, the UNFPA representative noted that health care and education system in Asian, African and Latin American countries have improved a lot.

The fertility rate of those countries has fallen by half since 1983. The rate of having children by a woman declined to below three from almost six.

Assistant representatives of UNFPA in Bangladesh, Tabara Ahmed and Nurul Islam were also present at the conference.



BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia addressing a rally at Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday. -- Star photo

# Growth zone needed to increase trade, investment

## Two-day international dialogue concludes

By Staff Correspondent

Political, academic and regional business leaders at an international dialogue yesterday concluded that a growth zone was necessary to increase trade and investment.

Representatives of ESCAP, ADB, delegates from Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar and business persons from the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia participated at the two-day dialogue on "Growth Zones in South Asia: What Can We Learn from South East Asia" held at the city's CIRDP Auditorium.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised the dialogue in association with ESCAP.

Speaking at the concluding session as the chief guest, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofiqul Alam said, "If we go for the proposed growth zone, every country will benefit from that."

"If we look into the matter economically, not politically, Bangladesh will appear to be in an advantageous position and we would derive benefits from the proposed growth zone," he said.

He pointed out that the member SAARC countries could not derive maximum benefit from the zone. He said that before the zone is set up, the SAARC leaders should first agree to a high level of free trade. "If we do not do this, the zone will not work," he said.

He also said that SAARC members are now seriously thinking about bilateral negotiations.

He pointed out that Bangladesh and Nepal were going to sit soon for further tariff cut.

CPD Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan said that east-ern regions of South Asia preside over a collective potential whose full realisation will only be accessible through co-operation with the framework of a growth zone in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar and Nepal region.

In his paper on "Growth Zones in South Asia: Potential and Feasibility" Prof Rehman said that the possibility for transforming the economic fortunes of the eastern region of South Asia were no pipe dream but drew its inspiration from the integrating influence of geography which had invested this region with a wealth of natural resources locked up in the waters of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) basin and the mineral and agricultural wealth of the area which served both to unify this area and to provide its resource base.

Pointing to the transhipment issue, he emphasised on reaching consensus about it and initiating intellectual debate on the issue.

Commerce Secretary Syed Alamgir Faruq Chowdhury said, for developing regional cooperation different issues like water resources and roads should be brought under one ministry so that things could proceed smoothly.

Creating a working session, Former Finance Minister M Syedurrahman said congenial trade regime, linkage of infrastructure of the participating countries were important for developing a growth zone.

BNP advisor Rezaul Karim suggested that as China had common border it should be included to bring balance in the proposed growth zone.

"Common goal of the zone is to economic prosperity of the people of the region and India has very significant role to play," he added.

George Verghese, Advisor of Centre for Policy Research, India, underscored the need for better usage of water resources of the region to help derive maximum benefits and having common approach.

"We also need to think of a world class port. Then you need a world class investment there. Otherwise, potential of the region cannot be used."

He identified some other areas for cooperation including hydro-electricity generation, transport, navigation and agriculture.

Prof Mozfar Ahmed of Institute of Business Administration said, "We have to go across the political boundary to find economic rationality."

Citing example of International Jute Organisation (IJO), he said politicians of the region could not solve a problem of a small sector.

Hasanul Haque inu at Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) said, "If you believe in globalisation, you will have growth zone and regionalism."

He urged all to think about the possibility of regional security arrangements so that drugs and arms could not flow freely.

Quazi Akhtuzzaman, Chairman of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, said that a policy framework was needed for establishing the growth zone.

"We need to standardise the norms and practices, harmonise"

# Death toll crosses 2000

## Strong quakes rock Taiwan again

TAIPEI, Sept 22: Two strong earthquakes struck Taiwan early today as teams struggled to rescue victims of an even more powerful tremor that killed more than 2000 people on the island the day before, reports AP.

A new temblor rocked Taiwan at 8:14 am local time, its epicenter near that of Tuesday's killer quake in mountains 200 kilometres south of the capital, Taipei. The Central Weather Bureau said. A less powerful one followed about half an hour later.

The fresh quakes triggered massive mudslides and cracked one of Taiwan's largest reservoirs. Residents in both areas were urged to evacuate their homes.

Today's quakes also were felt in Taipei, shaking buildings and sending many frightened citizens out of their homes and into the streets again.

The quakes, with magnitudes of 6.8 and 6.1, were among the more than 2,000 aftershocks from Tuesday's 7.6 temblor, which left people reeling and rescuers working around the clock to save buried victims.

The teams were finding more bodies than survivors as they bored into collapsed houses and high-rise apartment complexes across central Taiwan.

Rescue crews from many countries, including the United States, Israel, Singapore, Japan, Turkey and Russia, were arriving to help.

Most of the island's 22 million people were asleep when the quake struck in the wee hours Tuesday, forcing people in just their underwear or pajamas out of homes that were smashed or left tilting wildly.

Most of the deaths occurred in Nantou County, where 770 people were killed, and neighbouring Taichung County where more than 700 people died.

Most buildings in the hard-hit counties were left standing, although those that collapsed were mainly new high-rises.

A report from Los Angeles adds: Engineers and seismologists from around the world are flying to Taiwan to find out why some buildings failed while others survived Tuesday's earthquake.

Like other deadly quakes in recent years, the Taiwan disaster will be studied with an eye toward revising existing building codes so that future construction and retrofits better withstand jolts, experts said.

In civil engineering, the field is our laboratory—and every earthquake is our laboratory," said Les Youd, a professor at Brigham Young University. "My guess is we're going to learn some very important lessons from these quakes."

Though the scope of the devastation in Taiwan is not fully known, experts believe it will not approach that of the Aug 17 quake in Turkey, where both countries have modern building codes similar to those in California, Japan and other quake-prone regions. But the Turkey disaster showed that the best codes in the world are worthless unless inspectors enforce them.

Shoddy construction and design were quickly blamed in Turkey and could have played a role in Taiwan. In an earthquake, a mistake like mixing too much water in cement before it is poured can have catastrophic consequences.

# BCL activists ransack hotel at Bakshi Bazar

By Staff Correspondent

A group of BCL activists of Alya Madrasah ransacked a hotel and took away Tk ten thousand from its cash box at Bakshi Bazar in the city's Lalbagh area yesterday afternoon.

Police and witnesses said Monir Hossain, general secretary of BCL, Alya Madrasah and went to hotel Meyuri for some. Monir had an altercation with Wajed Ali, manager of the hotel on payment of bill.

# Rebels kill 5 soldiers in Tripura

By Staff Correspondent

AGARTALA, India, Sept 22: Suspected separatist guerrillas shot dead five paramilitary soldiers in India's remote northeastern state of Tripura today ahead of parliamentary elections in the region, defence officials said.

# Strike continues at JU, students' rally today

By Staff Correspondent

SAVAR, Sept 22: All activities of Jahangirnagar University remained stopped for the fourth consecutive day today due to strike enforced by the students demanding withdrawal of enhanced admission fee, reports UNB.

No classes or examinations were held, and the Administration Building was put under lock and key.

The varsity vehicles remained on the roads, bringing carrying of students from outside the campus due to the strike called by Enhanced Fee Withdrawal Council.

A torch procession was brought out on the campus and a students' rally will be held in front of the VC office tomorrow to realise the demand.

# 15 body asks NBR to Remove corruption, irregularities from tax admin

By Staff Correspondent

A parliamentary body yesterday directed the National Board of Revenue to remove irregularities and corruption from the tax administration, reports UNB.

The Parliamentary Taxing Committee of the Jatiya Sangsad issued the order after receiving allegations from the public about the irregularities in the tax administration.

The parliamentary watchdog on finance at its meeting yesterday stressed the need for expanding the tax base, bringing reforms in tax.

# Rain delays anti-mosquito drive

By Special Correspondent

Torrential rains kept the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) away from carrying out a drive against a suspected hideout of the Dengue fever germ bearing Aedes mosquitoes in Elephant Road area yesterday.

Three children from the area were tested positive, prompting the corporation to launch a combing operation for eliminating the mosquitoes.

Dr Ashrafuddin, Chief Medical Officer of DCC, said that workers had been despatched to the Elephant Road area to search for the larvae, notwithstanding the rains.

"If fair weather prevails, we would launch the drive at Elephant Road today," he said.

Apart from that, the scheduled citywide anti-mosquito drive would also be launched today.

# Barricade on Chandpur-Comilia highway

By Staff Correspondent

CHANDPUR, Sept 22: A group of Jatiya Sangsad members today put up a barricade on Chandpur-Comilia highway, disrupting the road traffic, reports UNB.

They put-up barricade at about 11:30 am demanding schedule for election to the Chandpur Government University College Students Union.

# BSF kills two BDR jawans

From page 1

posed a flag meeting, but BSF did not give any reply at that time.

Later, a meeting was held between 34 Rifle Battalion Commander Lt Col Maksudul Haq and 69 BSF Battalion Commander SS Mukant. The bodies and the injured BDR men were returned after the meeting.

Director General of Bangladesh Rifles Major General Azizur Rahman visited the Zahurpatek BOP at about 1 pm today and was appraised of the situation.

BSS adds: Bangladesh today lodged a strong protest for the killing of two BDR jawans.

The government also express the hope that India would issue urgent instructions to BSF to cease activities that goes against the friendly relations between the two countries.

With the latest casualties, a total of 22 people including three BDR jawans were killed in BSF firing this year. BDR sources said yesterday. Besides, 34 others including three BDR men were injured. BDR lost its first jawan in BSF firing a few weeks ago at Jamalpur Border outpost (BOP).

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Deb Mukharjee was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) this afternoon and handed over a note of protest.

This is the second time in four days that the Indian High Commissioner was summoned to the Foreign Office.

The Indian envoy was earlier summoned on September 19 to protest the killing of two civilians along the border in Thakurgaon.

The Indian High Commissioner told acting foreign secretary Mohiuddin Ahmed that he would immediately convey the contents of the protest note to his government. He also expressed his firm desire to maintain friendly ties with Bangladesh.

Early this month representatives of the Indian High Commission in the city were summoned to the Foreign Office to lodge protest over Muhurr Char and other border incidents.

# Fresh argument in Humayun Zahir Murder Case on Oct 3

By Court Correspondent

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday fixed October 3 for fresh argument in the sensational Humayun Zahir murder case.

Humayun Zahir, a leading businessman and Chairman of United Commercial Bank Limited (UCBL) was murdered by a group of miscreants at his Dharmoudi residence on April 8, 1998.

Father-in-law of Humayun Zahir filed a case with Dharmoudi police on the same day, accusing seven persons including Aktheruzzaman Chowdhury Babu. Police submitted charge sheet against the seven persons after investigation.

Of the seven chargesheeted accused, Babu and Matin, who were released on bail, appeared before the court. The rest three -- Tanmoy, Alam and Kawser -- are in custody, were pre-trial before the court.

Earlier, at the stage of delivery of judgement, the then Additional District and Sessions Judge Shahed Nuruddin sent the case to the High Court, seeking its opinion. The entire proceedings in this case were performed in the Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court.

The High Court directed the Metropolitan Sessions Judge, Dhaka to take up the case from Nuruddin's Court and dispose it as per law and procedure.

# 18 get life term for murder in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Sept 22: The First Additional District Judge, Barisal today sentenced 18 people to life imprisonment for killing one person and fined Tk 5000 each in default, to suffer rigorous imprisonment for two years more.

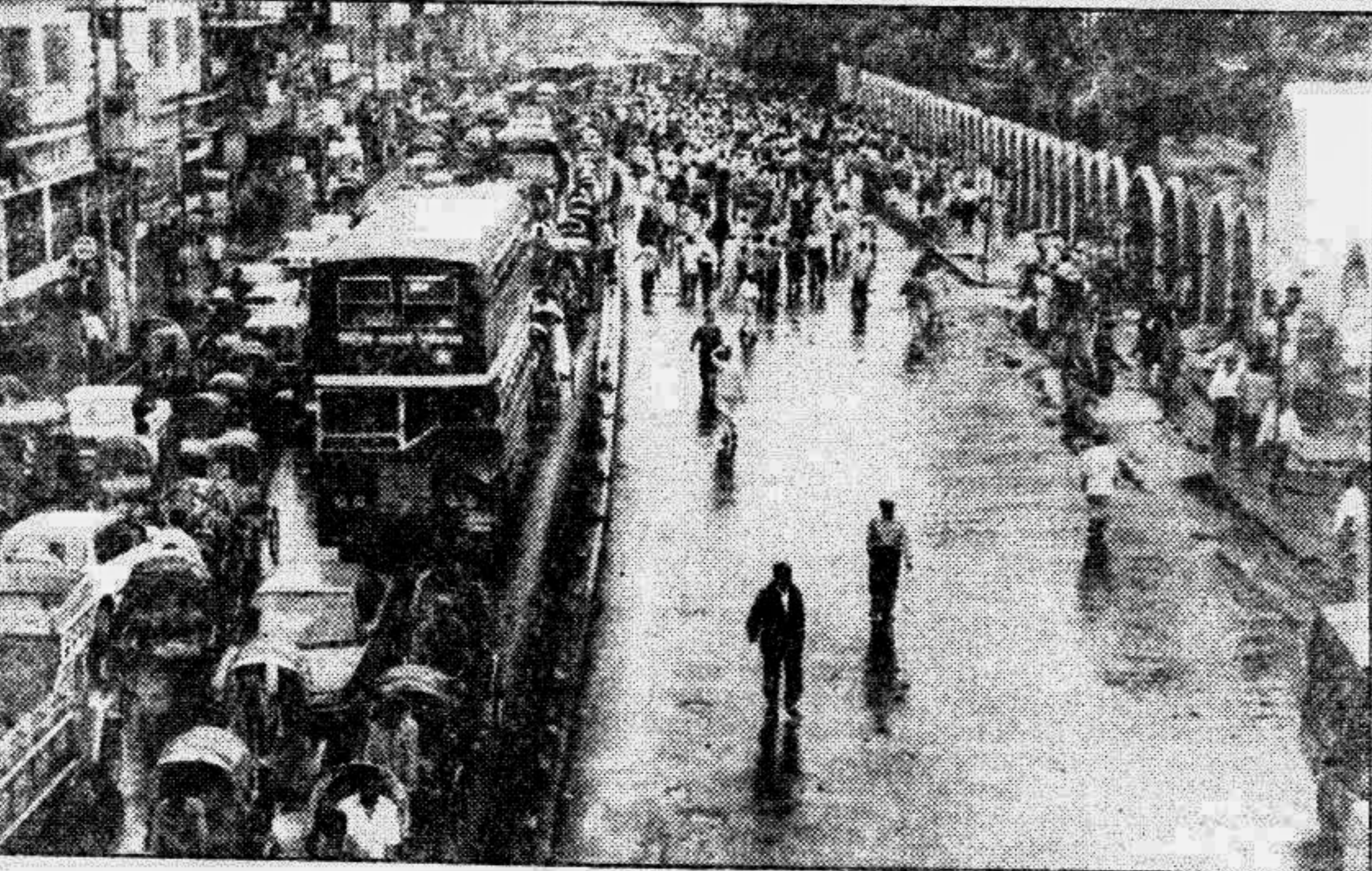
The accused are: Azhar Talukder, Rashid Talukder, Monir Talukder, Alam Talukder, Manik Talukder, Abul Talukder, Soharab, Nantu, Youssuf, Jaimal, Zakir, Abdur Razzak, Kalam, Howlader, Arif, Jamal, Youssuf, Babul Howlader and Jafar Sarder. All belong to the same family.

The prosecution in brief: the accused brutally killed one Abdul Mannan of Khodabakhshkathi village in Bakerganj thana of the district on August 5, 1996 as a sequel to previous enmity over a land dispute.

Abdus Sobhan, brother of Abdul Mannan, filed a murder case with the Bakerganj thana accusing 18 people.

Police after proper investigation submitted chargesheet against them.

The judge after examining the witnesses and records pronounced the verdict.



Jamaat-e-Islami held a rally on the street along the Purana Paltan-Dainik Bangla stretch in the city yesterday, causing a terrible traffic chaos in the area. -- Star photo

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জিটিসিআর-২১/৯৯  
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**No hope for Cong in West Bengal polls**

# Battle to be limited between LF and TC-BJP combine

CALCUTTA, Sept 22: The electoral battle in West Bengal is likely to be limited between CPI-M-led Left Front and the Trinamool Congress-BJP combine despite the presence of Congress candidates in all 42 Lok Sabha seats of the state, reports PTI.

With the emergence of TC-BJP alliance last year the political polarisation in the red bastion has sharply changed and the vote share of Congress which had gone over 40 per cent in 1996 election, had come down to just 15.20 in 1998 with a massive negative swing of 24.93 per cent against it.

There was a marginal negative swing of about two per cent against the Left Front too last year.

Election analysts say that the TC-BJP combine had benefited most from it.

Statistics indicated that contesting the polls for the first time in 1998, TC had secured 24.43 per cent votes while its electoral ally BJP had gained percentage but the party's vote percentage had increased to 10.20 from 6.05 per cent in 1997.

They say that unlike 1998 when TC and BJP even fought a friendly contest in one constituency failing to resolve their differences over seat sharing, this time the combine, despite initial hiccups, has a comparatively smooth going.

TC fielded candidates in 28 constituencies and extended support to expelled CPI-M leader Natabar Bagdi, contesting as an independent from Bankura and left the remaining 13 seats to BJP.

Another factor, they say, which might help the combine is its decision to hold joint campaign which was largely absent in the last election.

BJP leaders including Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Sushma Swara) were slated to campaign for Trinamool Congress candidates. Settling aside her initial reservation, TC leader Mamata Banerjee also agreed to hold a few meetings in constituencies where BJP candidates are in the fray.

Banerjee, who repeatedly pronounced her party's support to Vajpayee as its prime ministerial candidate, is defending him against the charge of communalism brought by the Marxists and Congress.

Analysts say that the Congress' fortunes may further decline with the desertion of a number of prominent party leaders who joined the Trinamool camp. At least four Congress MLAs including senior party leader Subrata

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