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3 envoys meet CEC, discuss Tangail polls

Ambassadors of the United States, the Netherlands and High Commissioner of the United Kingdom had a meeting with Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena at his office yesterday, reports UNB.

Asked if the Tangail by-election was discussed, Dutch ambassador DCB Den Haas told UNB: "That is the subject we talked about with the Chief Election Commissioner, but we've agreed not to make any comment to the press."

Highly placed sources confirmed that the envoys — John C. Holzman, Den Haas and David C. Walker, had parleys with the CEC for more than one hour from 12 pm over the November 15 by-election in Tangail-8 parliamentary constituency.

The envoys informed Abu Hena about the reports prepared by their representatives after monitoring the voting.

Apart from USA, the Netherlands and UK, the by-polls was also observed by the representatives from Japan, the largest donor country for Bangladesh. However, none was present from the Japanese embassy during the meeting.

PM performs Umrah, returns home today

MAKKAH, Nov 18: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina performed 'Umrah' at Holy Kaaba Sharif this evening at the end of her visit to Saudi Arabia, reports UNB.

Her sister Sheikh Rehana, niece Ms Ajmina Siddique, Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and members of her entourage also performed Umrah.

Earlier, the Prime Minister flew in Jeddah from Medina by a special Saudi Aircraft at 11:15 am local time and drove to the holy place of Muslim pilgrimage.

Hasina came to Saudi Arabia from Durban on November 16 on a 3-day visit at the invitation of the Saudi King. She offered 'Ziarat' at Masjid-e-Nabawi in Medina Wednesday night.

Before leaving Medina this morning, she visited Masjid-e-Ghuba and offered prayers there.

The Prime Minister said her Asr, Magrib and Esha prayers at Masjid-ul-Haram (Kaaba Sharif) before performing Umrah.

She is expected to leave Jeddah for Dhaka tonight.

Kader Siddique plans to form political party

Bangabir Kader Siddique yesterday told Jatiya Party Chairman H M Ershad that he would form a political party, reports UNB.

Expressing full support to Siddique's plan for launching a separate party, Ershad said, "I believe this will help expedite the current out-government movement."

The JP Chairman said Siddique was defeated in Tangail bypolls according to a government 'blueprint'. He alleged that the government resorted to massive vote rigging and shamelessly used the administration in this election.

Siddique met the JP leader at his Gulshan residence. JP president member Begum Rawshan Ershad MP was present, said a party press release.

Ershad said the Tangail by-election has once again proved that free, fair and impartial elections cannot be held under the Awami League government. "This has exposed the government's ugly character," he added.

Govt to arrange trial of killers of Zia, Manzoor

The government will arrange trial of the killers of former president General Ziaur Rahman, reports BSS.

It will also try the killers of General Manzoor who tried to save himself from standing trial for killing General Zia. Home Minister Mohammad Nasim said this while briefing newsmen at his office in the city yesterday.

He said the BNP-led opposition is trying to create unrest and anarchy in the country to save the killers of Bangladesh.

Nasim said the opposition is calling frequent hartals to achieve their evil designs. He said the defeated forces of 1971, 1990 and 1996 have started their undemocratic movements to save the self-confessed killers of '75.

Nasim said the other objectives of the opposition are to help the killers of democracy to

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Sharif's trial may begin today



KARACHI, Nov 18: Security was tight today outside a special anti-terrorist court where deposed premier Nawaz Sharif was to have appeared to be formally charged with treason and hijacking, reports AP.

Sharif now is expected to appear tomorrow when the charges will be read out. The authorities earlier refused to say when Sharif, who has not been seen in public since his government was overthrown by the army on Oct. 12, would appear in court.

Outside the courthouse, located in a congested southern district of Karachi, police with automatic weapons stood guard as women fingering prayer beads recited verses from the Koran.

The army lodged an official police complaint — the first step in Pakistan's legal process — nearly two weeks ago accusing Sharif and seven others of hijacking and treason.

The charges against Sharif stem from an Oct. 12 incident in which a passenger aircraft returning Army Chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf to Pakistan was denied permission to land in Karachi.

The plane was eventually allowed to land — with just seven minutes' worth of fuel to spare — after army soldiers took over the Karachi Airport control tower, removed two fire engines that were

blocking the runway and switched on the runway lights.

At the time, the army accused Sharif of trying to kill Musharraf and the nearly 200 passengers and crew members on board the aircraft by preventing it from landing.

Sharif was deposed and taken into military custody, and since then his whereabouts have been unknown. Musharraf became Pakistan's new leader.

Today in the federal capital of Islamabad, Mohammad Sarwar, a British parliament member who visited Sharif earlier this week, said the deposed prime minister seemed "depressed."

"This was not an easy meeting for me... the last time I met Nawaz Sharif he was prime minister and this time he was in detention," Sarwar told reporters. "He said he was being treated well, but he seemed worried and depressed."

Army officials said Sharif was flown to Karachi in a special Boeing 737 aircraft that arrived in the port city shortly before midnight Wednesday. They said he was being held at a police station in Karachi pending his court appearance.

If Sharif is found guilty of treason or kidnapping he could face

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Indo-Pak border talks resume

WAGHA, (India), Nov 18: With a band, a chorus and a red carpet, Pakistan's border security forces welcomed high-ranking Indian border officials today for the first talks between the two groups since both countries went on a war footing last May, reports AP.

Bringing gifts, high-ranking officers of the border forces from four Indian states crossed into Pakistan as guests of the Pakistan Rangers, who handle

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32 Shibir activists held from RU halls

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Nov 18: Police arrested 32 leaders and workers of Islami Chhatra Shibir from five residential halls of the Rajshahi University on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Police raided the halls following a violent clash between the activists of Shibir and BCL on the campus on Tuesday. At least 25 students were injured in the clash.

The Shibir activists ransacked about 40 rooms in five dormitories and ousted the BCL activists.

Meanwhile, an emergency meeting of RU Syndicate was held last night with Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Wazed Ali in the chair.

The meeting urged the police to arrest those involved in Tuesday's incident.

Campus sources said, Ajoy Kumar Sarkar, Vice President of Rajshahi University Unit filed a case with Motihar thana accusing 105 Shibir leaders and workers of attacking the students' five dormitories.

The BCL leaders and workers who were ousted from different halls by the Shibir activists on Tuesday night, are trying to recapture the halls.

Meanwhile, the Proctor of Rajshahi University Professor Mokhesur Rahman today submitted his resignation letter to the acting vice-chancellor Prof. Wazed Ali protesting the incident.

Ahad murder Zakir says he had seven accomplices

By Court Correspondent

'Kangal' Zakir, prime accused in Sergeant Ahamd Parvez murder case, yesterday said in a confessional statement to a metropolitan magistrate that he along with seven others had killed the police sergeant.

Sergeant Ahamd was killed by a gang of muggers while on duty at the Shapla Chatter (square) in Motijheel in the night of October 28.

Zakir along with seven others were produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka after the end of a five-day remand. He was arrested from an abandoned garage at Gulshan on November 10.

The seven others — Reaz, Shah Alam, Faruk, Alamgir, Nasir, Rafikul and Jewel — who were produced in the court on same count — were taken on a fresh remand for three days, police said.

3 accomplices of Shikdar held from Bhola

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Nov 18: Khulna metropolitan police arrested three accomplices of Ershad Shikdar from Bhola town at midnight on Wednesday.

The arrested are Sultan Mahmud Shikdar, Abdul Wadud and Mizanur Rahman. Sultan Mahmud Shikdar was the manager of ice factory at Skid Ghat where some people were brutally killed.

Sultan is one of the eye-witnesses of those murders, police said.

He fled Skid Ghat area soon after Ershad was arrested on August 11.

Police said the arrested are among the FIR-named accused in several murder cases.

They actively helped Ershad dump dead bodies into the river along fish landing ghat at Skid Ghat after committing murders. They will be brought to Khulna tomorrow, police said.

Jewel murder Procession at Mugdapara

By Staff Correspondent

Residents of Mugdapara brought out a procession yesterday on the Bishwa Road to protest the killing of Jewel, 22, who drowned in South Kamalpur Lake when chased by police Monday night.

Officials of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police said four police constables were 'closed' immediately after preliminary investigation.

DMP Commissioner AKM Samsuddin said police were carrying out a 'detailed investigation' into the incident.

Residents of Mugdapara who brought out the procession claimed that the victim died due to police assault. They demanded exemplary punishment of the culprits.

Irregularities in frigate purchase alleged

By Nurul Kabir

Opposition members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence Ministry believe that there were certain irregularities in purchase of a frigate for the Navy from a Korean company.

They have demanded formation of a parliamentary probe body to investigate the alleged irregularities.

The ruling Awami League members of the Standing Committee also found some 'minor' irregularities. But they believe that 'things are not so serious that formation of a probe body is essential right at the moment'.

"We are convinced that some sort of irregularities were there in the initial process of the tender for the purchase. But we still think that there was no gross irregularity," said ruling party legislator and chairman of the parliamentary body Maj. Gen. (Retd) K M Shafiqullah. "The

Committee is still discussing the issue. If we find gross irregularities, we will not hesitate to officially probe the matter."

Such difference of opinion on the controversial purchase has been surfacing at meetings of the parliamentary body. The last meeting was held on Wednesday.

The DG of Defence Purchase had floated a 'single envelope' international tender in May 1998. Twenty-five companies including Daewoo of South Korea responded.

The authorities concerned eventually negotiated with Daewoo, the fourth lowest bidder, in May last year to purchase the 103 metre long frigate at a cost of Tk 99.97 million US dollars. According to the original proposal of the company, the cost of the frigate was 93.72 million US dollars.

The authorities concerned later added some extra attach-

ment to the specification of the frigate, and the cost rose to 99.97 million dollars," KM Shafiqullah told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to the agreement, the company will hand over the frigate in June 2001. The government has to make the payment in six instalments. Five instalments, covering about 80 per cent of the price, have already been paid. But the company so far completed 58 per cent work in building the frigate.

Besides, the first instalment — 9.97 million dollars — was paid when Daewoo just produced its export licence on June 16 last year. The second instalment — 19.994 million dollars — was paid on June 25 last year, only eight days after payment of the first instalment.

However, BNP legislator Maj. (Retd) Akhtaruzzaman

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Meeting of 4-party chiefs 'Joint declaration' being drafted

By Rezaul Karim

The Liaison Committee of the BNP-led opposition alliance is preparing the draft of the 'joint declaration' to be announced after the proposed meeting of chiefs of the four component parties.

The draft will be placed before the parties' policy makers soon for approval, sources in the Committee said.

Hectic preparations are on for the proposed meeting of the four party chiefs.

As per Wednesday's decision of the BNP Standing Committee, party Chairperson Khaleda Zia will decide the time and venue of her meeting with Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Golam Azam and Islami Oikya Jote chief Azizul Haq, the sources said.

But policy makers in the party 'still prefer to go slow to complete necessary groundwork' although the other parties

are 'eager to hold it immediately', one source said.

"There is also an enthusiastic section in BNP which echo JP and Jamaat".

The 'joint declaration' will dwell on all important national issues including CHT agreement, Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, deteriorating law and order, deaths in police custody, government's alleged failure in fulfilling its electoral pledges and demands of government employees, farmers, students and professionals.

There will be commitments in the declaration that the Opposition, if voted to power, will fulfil those demands in phases.

The declaration will also promise to cancel 'anti-people and anti-state' provisions in the agreements and the treaty signed by the AL government, and to hold trial for all political murders, killings and corrup-

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BMA polls held, rigging alleged

By staff correspondent

Allegations of vote rigging marred the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) elections Thursday, but otherwise the contest for key positions remained peaceful.

The ballot pitted the pro-government panel, Dr. Rahsid-e-Mahbub and Dr. Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, against Dr. MA Majed and Dr. Abdul Hadi's pro-BNP ticket. The winners became the association's new president and secretary general, respectively.

Complete election results aren't expected until Saturday. Early figures suggested 67 per cent of Dhaka's 5,850 eligible voters cast ballots. There are 16,000 eligible voters nationwide.

Voting started at 9 a.m. in 67 centres across the country, including at the BMA headquarters on Topkhana Road in Dhaka. The polls closed at 6 p.m. after a peaceful day.

However, the election commission received three written complaints alleging the vote was rigged.

Dr. AZM Zahid Hossain, a member of the pro BNP panel,

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Students of Fine Arts Institute celebrating UNESCO's declaration of February 21 as International Mother Language Day by forming Ekush (21) with candles last night. — Star photo

Declaration of Mother Language Day Elation & jubilation all over

By Staff Correspondent

There have been elation and jubilation in different strata of the society over UNESCO's proclamation of February 21 as International Mother Language Day.

Leading intellectuals, academics, Language Movement veterans and various organisations expressed happiness over the proclamation which, they felt, was a recognition of Bangla language and the nation's struggle for promoting it in the international arena.

It was a tribute to the martyrs and all others involved in the historic Language Movement of 1952, they said.

The uniqueness of the UNESCO declaration, they noted, lay in the fact that from now on countries the world over would observe Mother Language Day on February 21, which is our national language day.

Justice Habibur Rahman, former Chief Adviser in the caretaker government, told The Daily Star. "The recognition of Ekushey February (February 21) as International Mother Language Day is the recognition

of our Ekushey."

"It is a matter of great happiness that the world has recognised our Ekushey as International Mother Language Day," he said.

Director General of Bangla Academy Dr. Anwar Hussain said, "We have conquered the whole world in a big battle without firing a single shot."

Language Movement veteran Gazilul Huq, who is also President of Language Activists and Political Prisoners Council, and its General Secretary Mustafa Sarwar, in a joint statement, congratulated UNESCO for the decision.

"Ekushey February will now be observed not only in Bangladesh but also across the world, like May Day. Through the observance of the Day, the world will know about the Bengalee nation, Bengali language and the honour and prestige of Bangladesh will be enhanced in the eyes of the world," they said.

BSS adds: Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof AK Azad Chowdhury said "UNESCO

should get our warm and heartiest congratulations as it has recognised our mother tongue in international arena."

Prof. Chowdhury observed that UNESCO has showed its respect not only to the martyrs of historic Language Movement of 1952 but also to all Bangla speaking people.

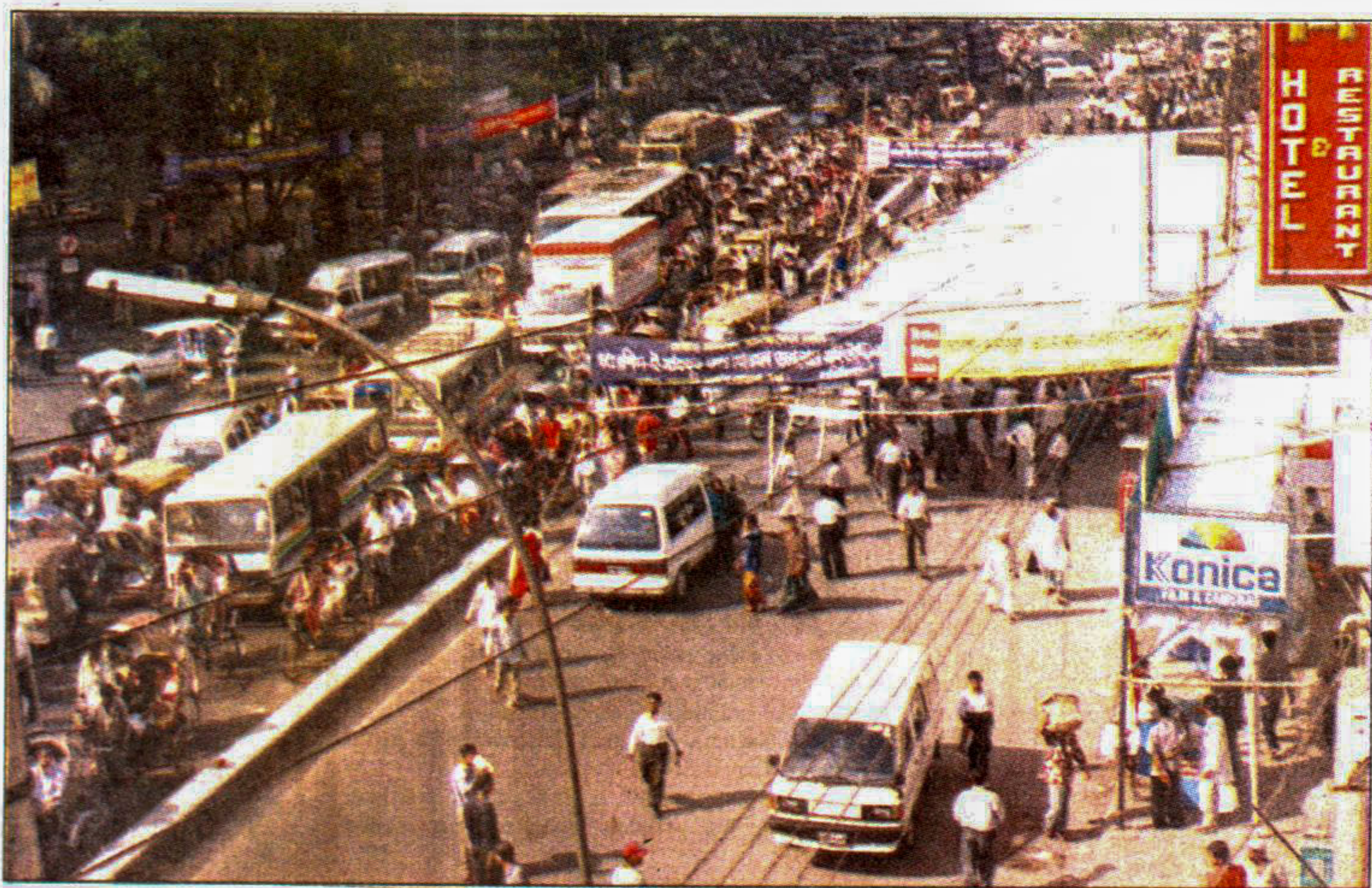
Prof. Anisuzzaman, Chairman of Bangla Academy, described the UNESCO decision as a great achievement for Bangladesh.

"In 1952, we theoretically used to say that every language has equal dignity. The UNESCO formally established the truth by taking the decision of observing International Mother Language Day," he said.

Vice Chancellor of the National University Prof Aminul Islam in a statement said it is a matter of pride for all of us as the next February 21 will be observed in 188 states of the world.

President of Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation Sara Zaker said everyone should feel

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A makeshift camp set up on Topkhana Road in front of the Jatiya Press Club in connection with BMA polls yesterday created traffic jam. — Star photo

Strengthening human rights More effective role of police, lawyers & courts stressed

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a discussion in the city yesterday identified lack of public awareness, ignorance about relevant laws, and corruption and harassment by police as the main reasons behind increased incidents of human rights violation in the country.

Bangladesh Bar Council organised the discussion at its conference room to seek suggestions from the press in its move to prepare recommendations for checking incidents of human rights violation.

Some leaders of the journalists' community and representatives from different national dailies and news agencies spoke on the occasion. Top leaders of the Bar Council shared views with the media men.

The Bar Council has set up cells with district lawyers' associations to monitor incidents of human rights violation, especially crimes against women and children. Vice-Chairman of the Council M Amir-ul-Islam said.

"We will submit to the government our recommendations which are expected to be finalised after the November 26, 27 national conference on human rights, to be held in Cox's Bazar," he said.

Quoting reports from the monitoring cells, he said incidents of crime against women and child are rising alarmingly.

The journalists suggested that the Bar Council set up a centre to receive complaints about human rights violation from people and provide the victims with legal counsel.

They observed that press reports on violation of human rights were not enough to create awareness among people. A massive campaign through short-films, leaflets and posters should be launched.

The media representatives laid special emphasis on a more effective role of police, lawyers and courts in addressing the human rights issues. They ex-

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