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## Commercial import of methanol banned

By Shaikh Nazrul Islam  
The government has banned the commercial import of methanol in an effort to stop a wave of alcohol poisonings sweeping the country.  
In the last two years, over 200 people have died in Bangladesh after drinking alcohol products tainted with methanol.  
Officials at the home ministry said unscrupulous businessmen mix methanol, which costs just Tk 26 per litre, with "safe" but more expensive ethyl alcohol products, such as brandy, vodka, and whiskey, in order to maximise their profits.  
The ministry, in conjunction with the Department of Narcotics Control, requested the ban to stop such practices, sources said.  
Businesses can still import methanol for industrial purposes. However, they must apply for permission from the ministries of industry, commerce and home affairs. The application must state the amount of methanol required and how it will be used.  
A special dye will be added to industrial methanol to distinguish it from commercial varieties, sources said.  
Officials said the ban on commercial methanol imports would be effective since the poisonous product is not manufactured in Bangladesh.

## Gas goes to western region today

Gas goes to the energy-starved western region today amid high hopes that it would bring the area into the mainstream economic activity of the country, reports UNB.  
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to switch on the gas supply to the zone at a ceremonial inauguration.  
With this, this newly formed Western Region Gas Company Ltd will start operations formally.  
"It will fulfil the dream of the people living on the other side of the mighty long cherished Jamuna," said State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Prof Rafiqul Islam.  
"Availability of natural gas in the western zone would be instrumental in speeding up economic development of the region, which so far could not be brought to the mainstream economic activities for lack of energy resources," he added.  
The Tk 217 crore project with a foreign exchange component of Tk 142 crore has connected the northwestern region with the main pipeline of the country's natural gas network.

## JU classes to resume Dec 5

From JU Correspondent  
Classes of the Jahangirnagar University will resume on December 5 while all the dormitories will open on December 4.  
It was decided at a meeting of the Syndicate yesterday with acting Vice Chancellor Prof Abdul Bays in the chair.  
The university was closed for indefinite period on September 30 following a student movement.

## Inside Today

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## Prayer Timings

November 30		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:15	5:45
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	3:42	4:00
Maghrib	5:20	5:25
Esha	7:00	7:30

Source: Islamic Foundation

## Two massive gas layers discovered in Salda

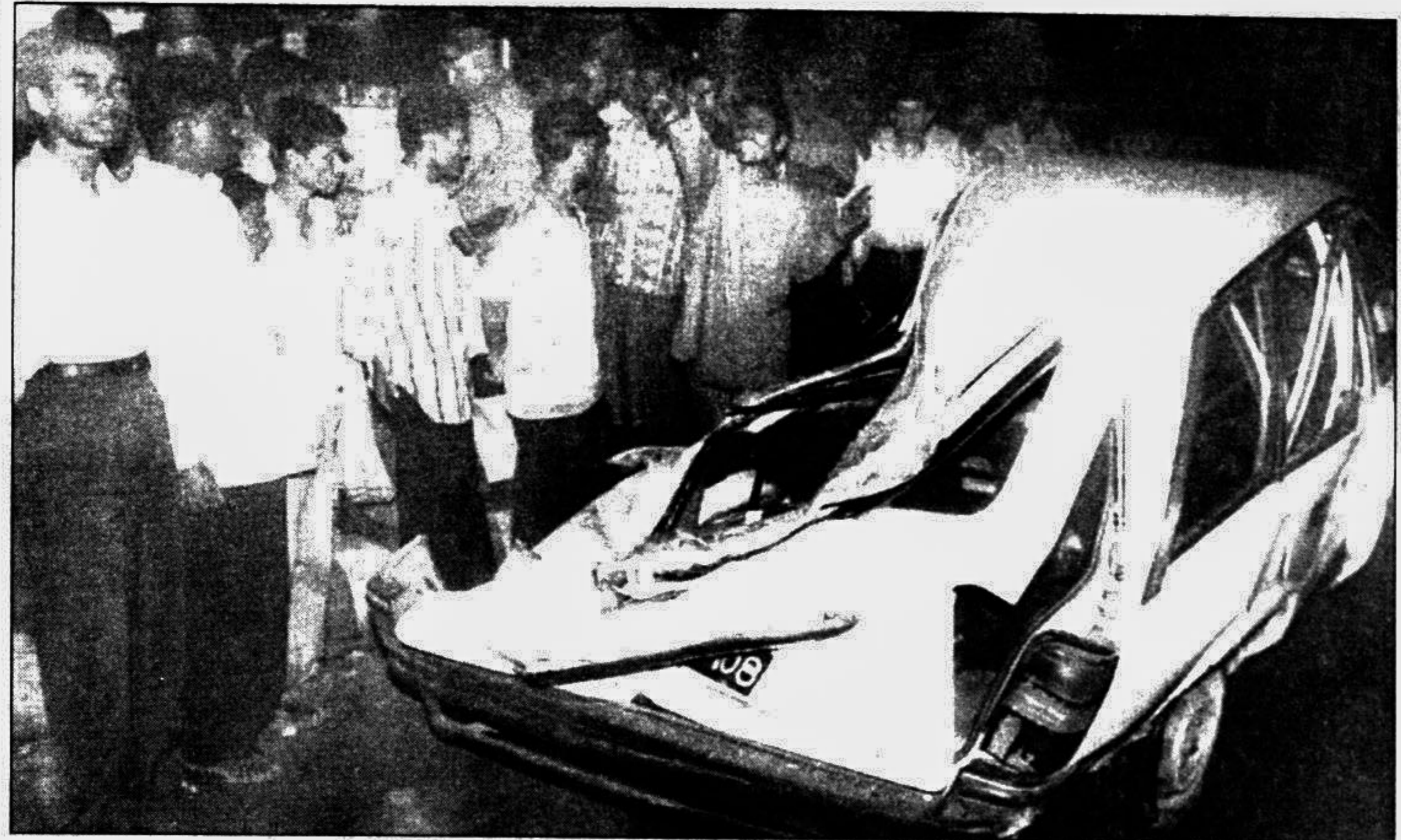
By Sharier Khan

Gas reserve in the Salda gasfield may be much more than originally thought as BAPEX has discovered two new massive layers there containing gas.  
Sources concerned said Salda deserves immediate attention of the government as the prospect there is "much brighter than thought earlier".  
Considering various technicalities and financial implications of this gasfield, the government should immediately consider drilling two more wells, installing a gas processing plant and laying a gas pipeline system in addition to the existing one, they said.  
The Salda gasfield, located near Bangladesh's border with India in Brahmanbaria district, shares a geological structure which lies in both the countries. Expert say, whoever drills the gas first, will gain the most.  
The new gas layers are as thick as 60 to 70 meters. Normally, gas fields in Bangladesh have gas layers 20 to 30 meters thick.  
BAPEX recently completed

drilling and testing of a new well there and is now supplying 15 to 25 million cubic feet of gas per day (mmcf) from this well alone. It discovered the gas field in early 1996 and had been extracting 15 mmcf of gas from the first exploratory well.  
It was earlier believed that the Salda gas field had a moderate reserve of 200 billion cubic feet. "Now, it seems the reserve will be much higher," one source said without specifying what the reserve might be.  
"Based on the data obtained from the first exploratory well, we thought that we could get a gas flow of 15 mmcf from the second well. But when we completed the drilling there, the gas flow turned out to be as high as 25 mmcf," the source pointed out.  
The existing 10-inch diameter pipeline that connects the Salda field with the National Grid allows a maximum flow of 25 mmcf. But with the first and the second wells, the field can now supply 40 mmcf.  
"We think a new 16-inch pipeline should be installed

there and extended up to the Ashuganj-Bakhrabad Pipeline," he added.  
The government should consider a composite project which can be implemented at a very low cost. "The Bakhrabad gas field is rapidly depleting and three gas processing units out of four in the plant are idle. We can mobilise these three units to Salda and get a gas processing system without virtually spending anything," he said.  
BAPEX has already placed a proposal for setting up a processing plant but the government is paying little attention regarding Salda and activities of BAPEX.  
BAPEX is being run without a Managing Director for over six months now while 'negative trade unionism' has crippled its day to day work, sources there said.  
In recent months, working atmosphere in BAPEX became "intolerable as an unscrupulous section of politically backed trade unionists are staging demonstration everyday de-

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One of the two cars rammed by an express train at Mahakhali rail crossing in the city last night.

—Star photo

## CEC goes on a month's leave on 'health ground' today

Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena goes on a month's leave today on health ground, an official announcement said yesterday, reports UNB.  
Election Commissioner Mushaque Ahmed Chowdhury will act as Chief Election Commissioner.  
The CEC's sick leave happens to be in a critical time because of pending and upcoming by-election affairs. The November 15 Tangail bypoll disputes slipped into a deadlock while by-elections to Rajshahi, Sirajganj and Kishoreganj seats of parliament are scheduled for December 8.  
An election commission source told UNB that Abu Hena, who had been working with fever for last few days, would get admitted to Dhaka Community Hospital for a checkup.  
"Very often he has been suffering from fever," the source



said, adding that doctors have advised him to undergo physical checkup.  
The CEC is a member of the advisory board of the Dhaka Community Hospital.

## Today's meeting: Ruling party sees crisis in opposition camp

Leaders of the ruling Awami League and its allies have given their reaction to the meeting of chiefs of four opposition parties to be held today.  
Awami League president Suranjit Sengupta MP said the planned meeting is nothing but a manifestation of crisis in the opposition camp.  
"This shows that they are in real crisis," he told UNB, commenting on the meeting of chiefs of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ).  
"Rebutting the opposition move to unseat the government, Suranjit said there is a constitutional way to pull down an elected government by moving a no-confidence motion in Parliament. But the opposition is fleeing parliament and taking recourse to violence, anarchy and hartal."  
He said by holding the meeting, BNP is going to identify itself with "unrepentant

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## Four opposition party chiefs meet today

By Rezaul Karim

The much talked about meeting of the chiefs of four opposition parties of the opposition alliance takes place today following their united movement for about a year for dislodging the Awami League government to pave the way for early general elections.  
The high profile meeting of the four party chiefs — Khaleda Zia of BNP, H M Ershad of Jatiya Party, Golam Azam of Jamaat-e-Islami and Azizul Haq of IOJ — will be the first since the movement was launched on January 6 this year.  
The four top leaders will meet at the official residence of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia at six pm. They will finalise the joint declaration prepared by the Liaison Committee and senior leaders of the alliance.  
The joint declaration will be

issued after the meeting.  
Sources concerned said the main objectives of the meeting are to further consolidate the unity of the alliance and intensify the on-going movement to compel the government of Sheikh Hasina to step down.  
The liaison body will meet

## Declaration finalised

By Mizan Ali

The four-party opposition alliance finalised a declaration Sunday outlining its plans to break the Awami League's stranglehold on power and form the country's next "patriotic government."  
"A patriotic government will have to be formed on the basis of the optimum unity of the people to face the challenges of

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this morning to work out some formalities regarding the meeting and the press briefing later. It is yet to be decided whether the party chiefs or their representatives will meet the press.  
Senior leaders of the parties said the meeting will discuss a wide range of issues including strategies of the united movement, possibility of a single platform to contest the next general elections and formation of a coalition government.  
A BNP leader said the joint declaration will highlight "failures" of the AL government, explain justification of the one-point out-governance movement, and contain some pledges.  
Leaders who prepared the declaration said it will also highlight politicisation and nepotism by this government, its failure to meet election

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## Train rams cars: Six injured

By Staff Correspondent  
An express train rammed two private cars and a BRTC bus at Mahakhali rail crossing last night, injuring at least six people, three of them seriously.  
The southern gate at the crossing was open causing the accident at 9:15 pm, police and witnesses said.  
The Noakhali-bound train hit a car coming from the Mahakhali direction as it almost crossed the track. The car then rammed another car coming from the Farmgate direction.  
The bus just behind the car from Mahakhali direction then hit the rail engine.  
Both private cars were badly damaged, witnesses said.  
The railway authorities, launching an inquiry into the incident, stopped the train at Tongi and spoke to the locomotive officials said.  
The injured were sent to a nearby hospital and later

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## Jubo League leader shot dead

By Staff Correspondent  
Acting secretary of Tongi thana unit of Jubo League Monir Hossain, 35, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen yesterday evening.  
Hossain was shot near Station road crossing at Tongi while returning from a public meeting.  
He was rushed to Dhaka medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead at about 8:30 pm. He also had stab injuries in his chest, hospital sources said.  
Secretary of Tongi thana unit of Awami League Rajab Ali who was accompanying the victim when the incident took place escaped unhurt. Local MP Ahsanullah Master told this correspondent over telephone.  
Asked if Ali could recognise the killers, the MP said, "He is not in a state of mind to say anything."  
When contacted, the SP of Gazipur confirmed the incident.  
None was arrested till the filing of this report last night.

## Kandiganon murder Cop files case accusing victim's brothers

From Staff Correspondent  
SYLHET, Nov 29: A policeman charged with killing a villager in Kandiganon last week filed a counter suit today, accusing the dead man's brothers of attempted murder and robbery.  
Havildar Abdul Jabbar, the former head of Barsala police camp on Airport Road, said Abdul Ali, 3, omor Ali, Abdul Malek and four other men attacked his squad and stole over Tk 2 lakh in money and smuggled goods sized earlier that day.  
Somor Ali died after he was shot during a dispute with the police over money. The killing sparked widespread protests in Sylhet.  
A mob barricaded the suspects in a nearby shop, but released them eight hours later after civic and police officials assured the crowd they would press charges against the police involved in the killing.  
Police charged Jabbar and four constables with murder four days later.  
Mokul Hossain, the Sylhet cognizance court magistrate, asked the officer-in-charge of Kotwali thana to investigate the allegations and report back to the court.

## Mahathir's party leading



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad casts his vote at a polling station near his residence in his home state of Kedah, Malaysia yesterday. —AFP photo

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 29: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's ruling coalition today took an early lead in Malaysia's bitterly contested general election, but the Islamic opposition made inroads into the Malay heartland, reports Reuters.  
Mahathir's 14-party Barisan Nasional coalition won 56 of the first 65 races, all in the prime minister's stronghold states of Sabah and Sarawak on Borneo island, the Election Commission said.  
The 73-year-old Mahathir, Asia's longest serving elected leader, was expected to retain a majority and win an unprecedented fifth term as prime minister.  
At least 97 seats are needed to win a majority in the 193-member lower house of parliament.  
But the four-party opposition coalition, united behind Mahathir's jailed former deputy Anwar Ibrahim, was hoping to deny the ruling coalition a two-thirds majority, needed to amend the Constitution, for the first time in three decades.  
Small parties in Mahathir's multi-ethnic coalition accounted for most of his alliance's early victories in Sabah and Sarawak, where the Barisan Nasional controlled 38 of 48 seats in the outgoing federal parliament.  
Three government ministers — agriculture, energy and science — won re-election.  
The opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) won the

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## Enforcing hartal is a sin!

Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon condemned calling hartal and enforcing it with vendetta as a "sin", reports UNB.  
"We don't support hartal as Hazrat Hafezi Hujur (R) had considered the forcible stoppage of income as a sin," Khelafat Ameer Shariat Shah Ahmadullah and Secretary General Maulana Muhammad Zafrullah Khan said in a statement yesterday.  
Terminating hartal anti-Islamic and inhuman they urged all concerned to shun the path of vendetta and find alternatives.  
"An alternative is needed so that repressive measures are not encouraged in staging protest against repression," the Khelafat leaders said mentioning the killing and injuring of innocent people during last hartals.

## Prof Razzak laid to rest

By DU Correspondent  
National Professor Abdur Razzak was laid to eternal rest at the Intellectuals' Graveyard in Mirpur with due solemnity yesterday.  
The body of Prof Razzak was taken to the Intellectuals' Graveyard yesterday afternoon after his *namaj-e-janaja* in front of the Central Mosque of Dhaka University after Zohr prayer.  
The quikhwani of the late

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## PM opens Trust Bank 'None has right to play foul with people's money'

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said her government restored discipline in the banking sector by taking steps against loan defaulters and removing irregularities from the financial sector, reports UNB.  
"Loan default culture is a big problem...And we had to work hard to eradicate corruption and indiscipline to ensure transparency in the sector," she said inaugurating a new bank, The Trust Bank Limited, at Senakunja in Dhaka Cantonment yesterday.  
The Bank, sponsored by the Army Welfare Trust (AWT), is first of its kind in the country. Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Mustafizur Rahman is its chairman.  
Although the bank, 22nd in the private sector, has been sponsored by the AWT, its services will also be extended to the general public.  
The authorised capital of the bank is Tk 100 crore. The Army Welfare Trust Fund has provided Tk 20 crore while another Tk 20 crore will be raised through public offering within four years.  
The prime minister said the

establishment of this bank proves that the armed forces are able to contribute to the national economy alongside safeguarding the country and combating calamities.  
"I firmly believe The Trust Bank Ltd would open up a new chapter in the economic development of Bangladesh," she said.  
Referring to the country's state of economy, Hasina said after assuming power her government inherited a limping economy thanks to 'corruption and plundering of money by the past regimes'.  
"...But we took initiative for improving the legal framework to end anarchy, corruption and irregularities practiced the past."  
She said the government amended the Bankruptcy Act and restructured the Artha Rin Adalat (financial loan court) to bring discipline in the banking arena. As a result, the recovery of the bad loan is much higher than any time in the past.  
Hasina urged the new bank management to shun bank default culture and be careful at

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## Sharif banned from making political statements

KARACHI, Nov 29: An anti-terrorism court has banned deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif and fellow defendants in a treason trial from making political statements during his treason trial, court officials said today.  
Raja Qureshi, chief prosecutor told AFP the prosecution had moved an application requesting the court direct the accused not to issue political statements within and outside the court premises.  
The court has allowed the application under an agreement between the prosecution and the defence which restrains both sides from making such statements, he added.  
Court officials said the four-point agreement says:

"No speculative statement should be issued to the press by either side regarding the result of any issue pending before the court."  
"No statement as to the character and conduct of the parties should be made by both sides which does not concern the trial."  
"No statement as to the fairness or otherwise of the trial is to be made unless such a grievance is legally raised before the same forum."  
"No political statement is issued by either of the parties while in court premises and outside the court premises."  
Sharif, his brother Shahbaz Sharif and five other senior officials are accused of treason, conspiracy to murder and hi-

acking a plane.  
If convicted they could face the death penalty.  
Sharif, ousted by General Pervez Musharraf in an army coup on October 12, has denied the charges.  
"We are innocent. General Pervez Musharraf has made this a personal vendetta against us. All the guns have been turned towards my family," Sharif who appeared before the court on Friday told reporters before the hearing began.  
Qureshi said the anti-terrorism court judge Rehmat Hussain Jafri had also accepted Sharif's application for better jail conditions.  
The deposed premier on Friday complained that he had been locked in a small room in

Karachi's Landhi jail and the prison authorities had deprived him of newspapers and television.  
He requested that he should be provided the facilities according to his status, his lawyers said.  
Qureshi said the court agreed both Sharif and his former advisor on Sindh affairs Syed Ghaus Ali Shah be given better conditions.  
Sharif and six co-accused appeared before a judicial magistrate Monday to hear witness statements against them in the conspiracy to murder case.  
The magistrate adjourned the court without proceedings until Tuesday following an objection from the defence lawyer, court officials said.



Witnesses said all accused were brought to the court in armoured vehicles as hundreds of paramilitary troops and policemen armed with automatic weapons stood on guard inside and outside the building.  
They left the court after a brief session as Nihal Hashmi, lawyer of a co-accused Khagan Abbasi, complained that he had not received copies of the statements, the sources said.  
Some 50 supporters of Sharif demonstrated peacefully outside the court, carrying portraits of the ousted premier and chanting slogans in his support.  
Sharif and the other accused are due to be charged by prosecutors on Saturday at the anti-terrorism court.