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Tofail tries to set LDC tone at Seattle talks

Ensuring duty-free market access to LDCs products will be the only way to integrate their economies with multilateral trading system, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed said in Seattle on Wednesday, reports UNB.

He was speaking at a working group discussion on non-agriculture market access as hectic parleys went on the second day of the WTO Ministerial Meeting at its Convention Centre in Seattle, according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

Bangladesh delegation attended all the group meetings that discussed various subjects to make decisions on different issues relating to agriculture, implementation of WTO agreements and rules and non-agricultural market access.

The Singapore agenda which includes investment competition, trade facilitation, transparency in government procurement was also discussed in different

working groups. "Market access is a subject of critical interest to Bangladesh as well as all LDCs," Tofail said adding that currently LDC exports were being restricted through tariff and non-tariff measures by developed countries.

He said the average tariff rate remains at 12 per cent for textiles and clothing in those developed countries and for some products it is as high as 26 per cent.

"Even if access is given to all our products, it will not include more than 20 items," he said adding that it would have no impact on the developed countries. But the LDCs will get a scope to stand on their own feet for better integration with the global trading system.

The minister said opening up markets of developed countries are not enough for LDCs. "There should be capacity building measures to enable us to take advantage of such ac-

cess," he said. "We will require technical assistance, technology transfer and debt relief."

Tofail appreciated USA, EU and other countries for granting preferential market access to LDC exports. "But we want immediate implementation of the commitments," he said. "We have further been marginalised due to globalisation and liberalisation and thus we have been awarded by a flurry of commitments for compensations without implementation."

"This time it would be most unfair to expect us to accept anything less than duty free market access to all products of LDCs," he added. The EU supported the Bangladesh proposal, saying "EU has already decided to provide zero tariff market access for essentially all items. Japan has joined it. The EU hoped that USA and Canada would also join."

(More stories on back page)

Clinton due in Dhaka early Feb

By M Anwarul Haq

US President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton are expected to visit Bangladesh between February 6 and 12, according to highly placed sources.

Clinton's visit to Bangladesh will be a part of his trip to South Asia.

The US President is likely to pay a one-day trip to Dhaka. The exact date will be announced after the White House finalises his entire tour programme, the sources added.

Two advance teams are expected to arrive in the city shortly in connection with the preparations of the visit. One team will work out the itinerary of the visit while the other will look after the security aspects.

Bill Richardson, a close friend of the US President and now the Energy Secretary had said in Dhaka, when he came on a trip here last year, that the US President would like to visit Bangladesh because "this is a country that is making progress. It is a country where tremendous strides have been made in matters of elimination of child labour and some excellent work on micro-credit by the NGOs like Grameen Bank."

"He will particularly like to come to Bangladesh because of the warm reception given to the First Lady Hillary Clinton."

The US President had expressed his desire to visit Bangladesh much earlier but had later postponed the tour.

BNP calls hartal on Dec 5,6

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance has called countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on Sunday and Monday to press its demand for immediate resignation of the Awami League government.

The programme was announced by the alliance components - BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) - at separate public meetings in the city yesterday.

The meetings were held as part of the alliance's countrywide Demonstration Day programme. BNP held its meeting at the Paltan Maidan, JP at Muklangan, Jamaat at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram and IOJ at Purana Paltan. The parties also brought out separate processions after the meetings.

Announcing the hartal programme BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan urged the AL government to resign immediately as people do not

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'Holiday' again

By Staff Correspondent

There had been another exodus of people from the city yesterday evening, availing another opportunity of a four day 'holiday' due to weekend followed by hartals on Sunday and Monday.

Heavy rush of people was seen at the rail stations and bus and launch terminals.

Six hartals, one public holiday and eight weekly holidays had left only 15 working days in 30 days of November.

Four Daily Star phones go dead

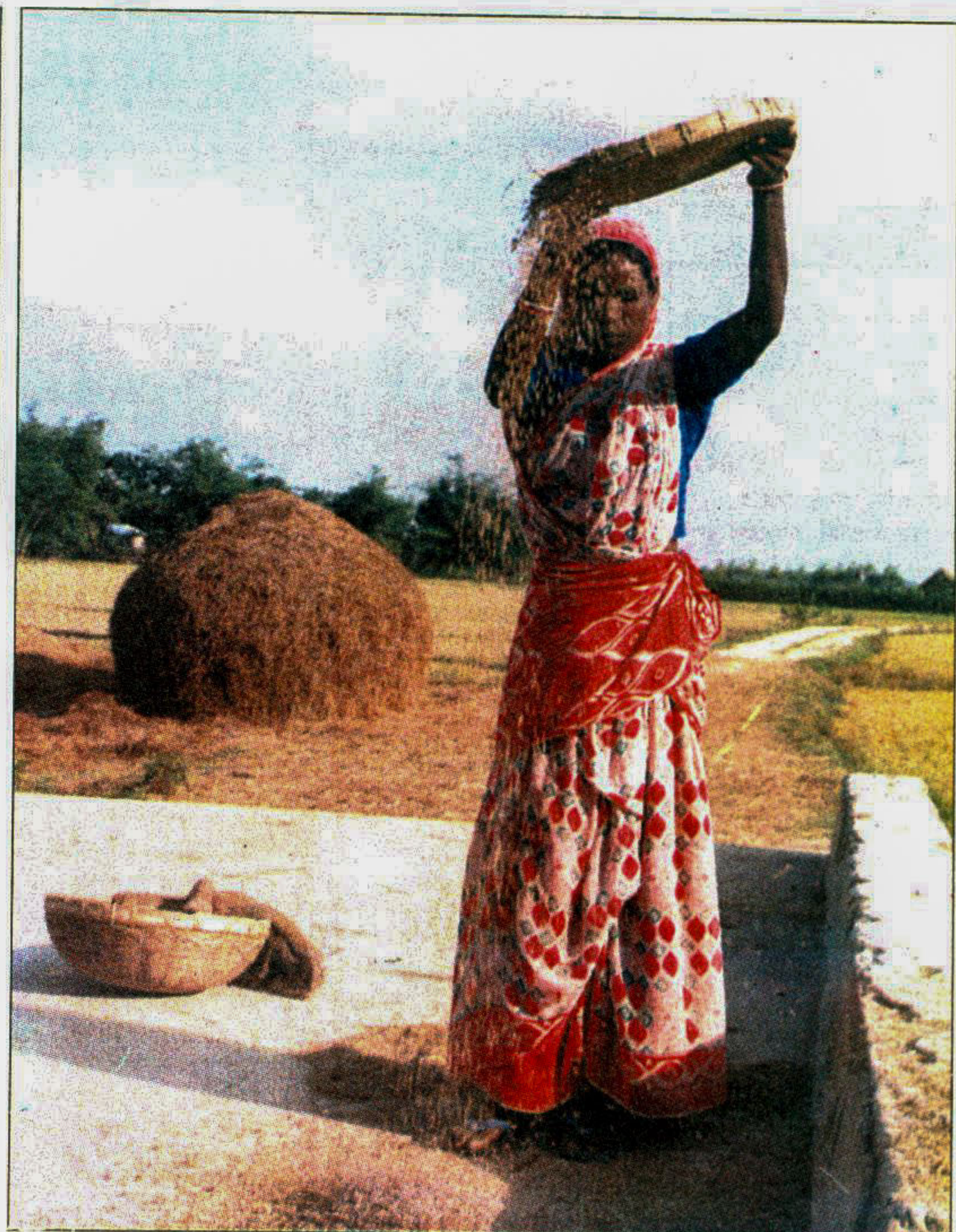
By Staff Correspondent

Four out of the six telephones of The Daily Star went out of order yesterday evening.

First to go were the two numbers— 8616771 and 8616773 at 6:30pm. Another phone, 8616774, went dead at 7:15pm and finally 86164670 at 10pm.

When contacted, one Majed of the nearest telephone camp office of BTB at Dhanmondi Road No. 4 said, their emergency crew had gone on leave. After completing their jobs at 6 p.m., the duty personnel had left for their home, he said at 7 p.m.

But he could not say when the telephones would become active, nor could he give any reason for the breakdown. The Switch Room reported that the telephones were "okay" at their end, but there was trouble on the line, which only the personnel of the camp could fix.



Nabanna in the city

The metropolis will trace its roots today as the country celebrates the advent of the harvesting season at the national level for the first time in history.

—Star photo: A K M Mohsin

Getting back to roots Nabanna Utsab in town

City-dwellers will join the rural folks as the country for the first time celebrates Nabanna Utsab at a national level.

A 31-member Jatiya Nabanna Utsab Uddipan Prishad, comprising noted intellectuals, artists, literateurs, teachers and students, has been formed in this regard. This was disclosed a press conference in the capital yesterday.

Rural people celebrate Nabanna to mark harvesting of paddy in the Bengali month of Hemanta (autumn). Villages across the country wear a festive look. This time around, the cities will join the band wagon, too.

Elaborate programmes, including folk songs, recitation of poems, staging of dramas and dance, have been chalked out to observe the festival in a befitting manner.

Eminent cultural personality Kalim Sharafi and adviser of the Parishad will inaugurate the festival on December 3 at the Institute of Fine Arts of the Dhaka University campus at 3:30 pm.

A colourful procession will also be brought out from the Institute premises at 3 pm which will parade campus.

Renowned cultural groups and noted vocalists of the country will take part in the Utsab at the Bakultala of the institute till late night on the day.

Different local food items including Mury, Chira, Khat and various kind of Pitha (cake) and payes will be displayed at the Utsab venue.

Chairperson of the Parishad and eminent artist Laila Hasan addressing the press conference said that they would celebrate the Utsab with a view to uphold the folk tradition and familiarise it to the urban people, particularly among members of the new generation.

Judges' plea for better pay endorsed SC tends to disagree with HC rule on separation of judiciary

By SC Correspondent

The Supreme Court yesterday partly allowed the government's appeal against the High Court judgment that had said separation of the judiciary from the executive does not call for constitutional amendment.

However, the SC upheld the directive of the HC regarding payment of enhanced salary and other benefits to the judges of the lower courts.

The SC judgment said, "The appeal is partly allowed without any order as to cost. The directive of the High Court Division with regard to payment of salary and other benefits will continue."

A total of 441 judges of different Civil Courts in the coun-

try from Assistant Judge up to District and Sessions Judges had filed a writ petition before the HC.

A Division Bench of the HC, comprising Justice Mohammad Mozammel Hoque and Justice Md Hassan Ameen, heard the writ and gave the judgment.

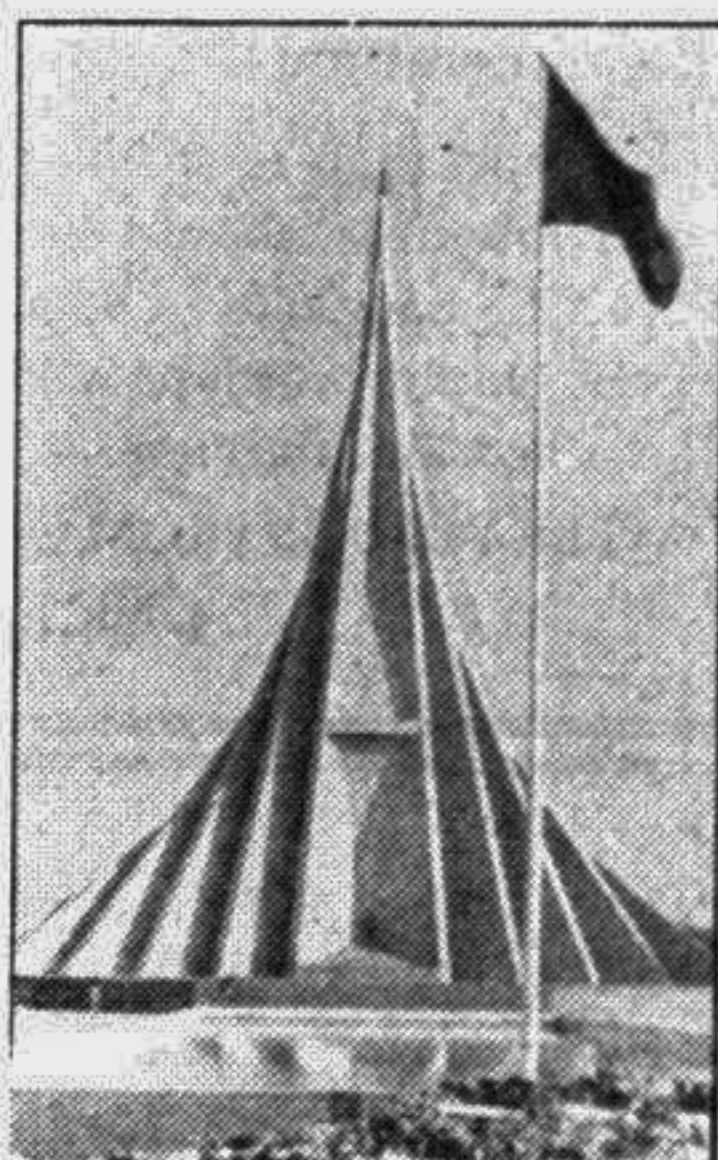
The HC declared that in order to give effect, carry out and implement fully separation of the judiciary from the executive organ of the state, no constitutional amendment is necessary as the provisions for such separation are there in the constitution itself.

The services of the judicial officers and the magistrates performing judicial functions

shall be known as 'Judicial Service of Bangladesh' under the direct control and supervision of the Supreme Court, the HC judgment said.

The HC also directed the government to take immediate steps to make necessary Rules under Article 115 of the Constitution to ensure separation of the Judiciary from the executive organ of the state.

Attorney General Mahmudul Islam with newly appointed Deputy Attorney General Bazlur Rahman Chhana moved the appeal, while Barrister Syed Istiaque Ahmed, Dr Kamal Hossain and Barrister M Amirul Islam opposed it.



December is a month of joy and sorrow

By Staff Correspondent

December is a month of sorrow and joy. This month inspires the nation with the memories of victory and gaining freedom from the clutches of Pakistani aggressors. At the

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The fraudulent fence

Cast iron bars block access to a public walkway beside Dhanmondi lake

By Staff Correspondent

A man encroaching on land around Dhanmondi lake used his influence to alter a lake project's design, allowing him to erect a cast iron fence that blocks access to the public walkway.

All this was done using the project's funds, and with active support of higher ups in the Dhaka City Corporation Chief Engineer's office, sources alleged.

The influential resident, popularly known as Sher-e-Khawja, is a so called peer (religious preacher) whose followers (murid) include top bureaucrats, ministers, businessmen and political leaders.

The Public Works Department (PWD) identified him as an encroacher of the lake area and sent him several notices. However, the authorities could not recover the three kathas of public land from him. He built his house beside the lake with a concrete embankment that runs into the water.

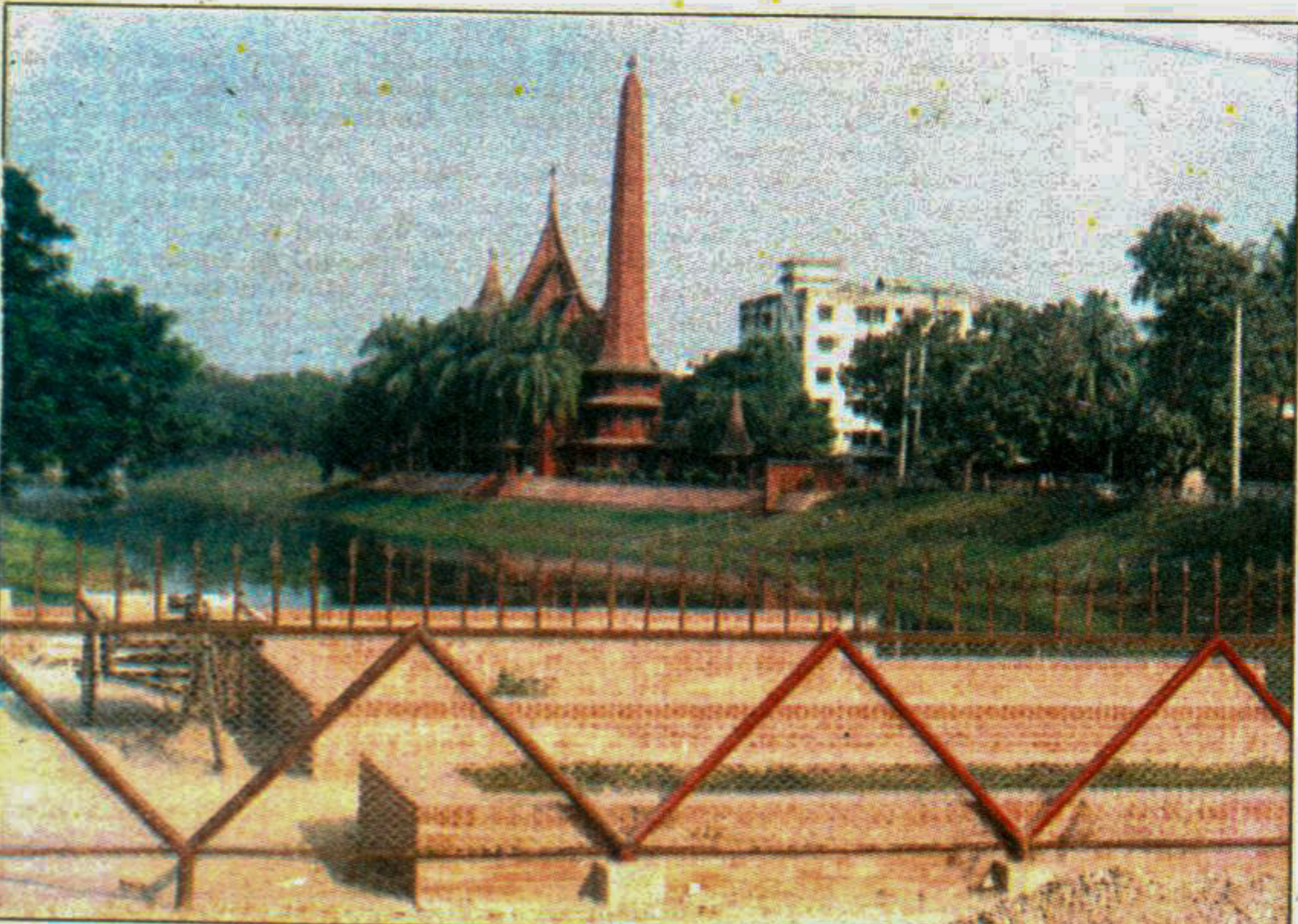
The move to block access to the walkway angered the area's residents. They have appealed to the government to take action against the DCC and the resident.

When contacted, an official of the Vitti Sthapati Brindo, the project's consultant, admitted someone modified the lake

project's original design, changing areas near the Khawja's residence. However, he said the consultant didn't know the changes were made until much later. He refused to comment on whether the consultant has contacted the authorities about the matter.

Sources in the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) said a State Minister, a mural, made the request for the unofficial changes.

However, the State Minister categorically denied any involvement in the decision. Sher-e-Khawja could not be reached for comment.



A lake looted

The peership seems to have his ways with the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), wishing for changes in Dhanmondi Lake Development Project and getting it.

—Star photo: A K M Mohsin

Belfast begins self rule

BELFAST, Dec 2: Northern Ireland began an unprecedented era of self-rule Thursday at the stroke of midnight as Britain ended 25 years of direct administration over the troubled province, reports AFP.

As the hour chimed, London devolved power to the new cross-party government in Belfast, as part of a 1998 peace accord aimed at ending three decades of sectarian strife.

For the first time, this power-sharing government represents all shades of Protestant and Roman Catholic opinion, including the paramilitary IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein.

Continuing what has been a bewildering pace of change, the new government was to meet Thursday to begin running the province's affairs again.

The Irish Republican Army was also expected Thursday to name a go-between to an international body set up to oversee paramilitary decommissioning of weapons.

And in Dublin, the Irish government was to modify the country's constitution to delete those sections making a territo-

rial claim over Northern Ireland.

Queen Elizabeth II gave royal assent to the devolution act on Wednesday.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair told parliament in London on Wednesday that "one huge, giant step forward has been taken."

In Belfast, the Protestant David Trimble, who is First Minister of the new government and leader of the key Ulster Unionist party, said the sectarian wrangling would be put aside.

"We are going to have an institution with responsibilities... that is going to change the climate in Northern Ireland," he said.

Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon, of the moderate Catholic SDLP, warned of "great difficulties" ahead, but said there was "no other option."

In Dublin, Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern vowed his government was determined to ensure dissidents would be disarmed and disarmed.

A British-Irish agreement to be signed Thursday was to open the way for the establishment of

cross-border bodies on areas of mutual interest to north and south.

The changes falling into place this week after 30 years of sectarian violence were foreseen in the historic Good Friday peace accord of April 1998.

This accord had until last Saturday remained largely the result of an impasse over the timing of devolution and paramilitary disarmament.

The logjam was broken when the Unionists, the province's largest Protestant party, voted on Saturday to let Sinn Fein into government without a prior IRA weapons handover.

On Monday, a 10-strong executive was voted in, containing three ministers each of the Unionists and SDLP and two each from Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionists (DUP).

"It is up to (the executive) to prove they can move beyond the politics of posture and get on with the harder, more mundane business of devolved government," Britain's left-leaning Guardian newspaper commented in an editorial.

Northern Ireland has been ruled directly from Westminster since 1974, when an earlier attempt at power-sharing was scuppered by Protestant hardliners -- including, ironically, some of those now prepared to sit with Sinn Fein.

The IRA has fought for the reunification of Ireland since the country was partitioned in 1921, when 26 counties in the south broke free from London but six in the north remained under British rule.

Many Protestants remain deeply sceptical about allowing its political wing an unprecedented role in government, and Unionists have threatened to scupper the whole arrangement if no weapons have been given up by late January.

The IRA denounced the Unionist move, but confirmed in a statement Tuesday that it would appoint a go-between.

In its editorial, the Guardian noted that "both sides need to make the new settlement work so well that republicanism's shift from violence to democracy is thoroughly vindicated."