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They came to speak, not to listen

Star Report

The ministers came, spoke and left the meeting without hearing the participants and thought it was a consultation.

This was exactly what happened in the so-called pre-Paris consultation with the civil society held in the city yesterday, organised jointly by the Economic Relations Division (ERD) and the World Bank. This is the first time such an initiative was taken to hear the voice of the civil society.

But it remained unrealised because of the indifference of policy makers.

The civil society and the donors were visibly frustrated as it turned out to be more of a dialogue among the civil society rather than between them and the government.

Both the donors and the civil society had hoped that the policy makers and politicians would listen to them and interact on the important issues of poverty alleviation and accountability.

But it turned out that the designated ministers came, delivered their speeches and then left the meeting without hearing the open discussion.

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Opposing views on industrial growth

By Staff Correspondent

Finance Minister S A M S Kibria and a top business leader of the country yesterday expressed opposing views over growth of the industrial sector and availability of bank financing for the private sector.

"Prevailing macro-economic situation provides no immediate cause for major concern. However, the relative weakness of the manufacturing sector and shortfall in revenue earnings are somewhat disconcerting," said Latifur Rahman, President of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (MCCI).

But the Finance Minister said that the national economy was doing well and industrial production also rose by about six per cent during July-December 1999 compared to that in the corresponding period of 1998.

The MCCI members, at a meeting with the minister at the chamber building, expressed concern over the declining trend in manufacturing sector which continues to be the weak point of the economy.

Quoting the latest available data from Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the MCCI President said.

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Our new numbers

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Mar	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
29	-	6-14 pm
30	5-53 am	-

Prayer Timings		
March 29		
Fajr	5:00	5:30
Zohr	1:00	1:30
Asr	4:45	5:00
Maghrib	6:15	6:20
Esha	8:00	8:30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Devise policy instruments to curb corruption

Kibria's call to civil society

Finance Minister S A M S Kibria has admitted there is corruption in governance, but discouraged flowery speeches about the peril that put Bangladesh among the world's most corrupt nations, reports UNB.

Policy instruments, not rhetoric, will help tame corruption, the minister told the civil society members who attended a donor-sponsored consultation yesterday. The meeting focused on poverty, corruption and governance, ahead of the April 13-14 meeting of the Bangladesh Development Forum in Paris.

"... the menace is there. And we'll have to devise policy instruments," said Kibria. "Rhetoric is not the solution of corruption. What is needed is to create a strong public opinion."

People, often vocal against corruption, are sometimes found among those indulging in the practice, he said.

Kibria discussed the government's strong commitment to curbing corruption and mentioned some of its measures to reduce the chance of under-

handed dealings in tax collection and customs, which he himself identified as areas where "corruption has a long tradition."

The introduction of self-assessment and pre-shipment inspections and the removal of the discretionary power of officials were among measures aimed at reducing the opportunity for corruption in revenue collection, he said.

He added that openings for corruption in the banking sector have also been reduced. Getting easy money by defaulting has stopped following some specific measures.

Kibria cited the success of agriculture loan disbursement and said effective vigilance, specific action and policy measures can be effective.

The World Bank's Dhaka Office convened the meeting, which included economists, government officials, bankers, journalists, NGOs, donor representatives and foreign diplomats.

Economists Dr Wahiduddin

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Reopen all varsities, Humayun urges president

By Staff Correspondent

Noted novelist Humayun Ahmed has urged Chancellor of Universities President Shahabuddin Ahmed to reopen all universities now closed to ensure students' right to education.

"You are the Chancellor. A great and holy responsibility is vested upon you. Ensure the students' right to education. Do not disappoint us. May Allah bless you," he said in a statement yesterday.

Humayun, along with his family members, intellectuals, cultural activists and noted personalities observed a day-long hunger strike on Sunday at the main gate of Sylhet Shahjalal Science and Technology University protesting the

stalemate over naming the residential halls and some buildings of the university.

Humayun said he will meet the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and request them to reopen the universities soon and then resolve the issue.

He also heartily thanked those who joined him, and the people of Sylhet and the local administration for ensuring security during the hunger strike.

The noted writer also thanked the government for allowing him to exercise the right to express his opinion despite its "unclear activities" regarding Shahjalal University.

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Speaker's call for dialogue

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad went into its 17th session yesterday morning with lawmakers of main opposition BNP and its allies continuing their abstention from the House.

Chairing the opening sitting, Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury offered his good offices to facilitate a dialogue between the government and the Opposition to break the nine-month-old stalemate caused by Opposition's boycott of parliament since June last year.

In his introductory remarks, the Speaker called for resolving the parliamentary impasse through discussion.

"It is the responsibility of both the government and the Opposition to make parliament effective," he said. Ensuring the

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Going gets tough for Dhaka

Two more candidates for the post of OIC secretary-general

By M Anwarul Haq

Dhaka's chances of winning the post of secretary general of the Organisation of the Islamic Countries (OIC) have become bleak as its official nominee is now likely to battle it out with three candidates.

The election to the important position of the 55-member organisation is due to take place at the 27th meeting of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) scheduled to be held in Malaysia on June 23.

Bangladesh officially nominated 73-year old Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, Speaker of the Parliament, as its candidate.

Humayun Rashid was seemingly poised for a straight fight with the candidate from Turkey. However, it is now clear that either the incumbent OIC

secretary general who hails from Morocco would seek a second term or his country could put a fresh nominee.

In another major development, Indonesian president informed at a meeting of envoys in Jakarta that his country will have a go at the position. However, it is yet to be known who Indonesia will field although there was indication that internationally known diplomat and former foreign minister Ali Alatas would be the likely contender.

Diplomats familiar with the scenario of the Muslim world feel the participation of Indonesia in the OIC race will make going really tough for the Bangladesh nominee.

Morocco's Foreign Minister Mohammad Benaissa while on

a visit to Dhaka in February carried a letter to the Bangladesh prime minister from the King. Although the contents could not be known, it was learnt that the special envoy had said that if Morocco did not contest, it will support Bangladesh's bid.

Morocco's Azzeddine Laraki who is the incumbent secretary general has not said if he will he will run again for the top OIC post although Morocco now has indicated that it will be in the contest, sources said.

Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, a former foreign secretary who served as foreign minister under former President H. M. Ershad, was ambassador to Riyadh for some time and has received the Saudi support. However, Dhaka needs more

vocal Saudi endorsement if it is to win votes of the countries close to Riyadh.

As yet Humayun Rashid Chowdhury's candidature has not received official support from all the Gulf states which are normally close to Saudi Arabia in diplomatic terms.

Observers also feel that Dhaka's candidate will have to garner support from African members of the OIC whose number is around 20 if it is to see its candidate sail through. The official backing of Iran is also crucial since Tehran wields considerable influence in the central Asian countries.

With both Turkey and Indonesia in the election fray, besides Morocco who holds the

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BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia expressed solidarity with JCD during a token mass hunger strike at Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Neither the countrymen, nor foreigners believe this govt'

Khaleda at JCD's hunger strike

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said incompetence of the Awami League government was once again proved when it failed to take the US President to the National Memorial during his March 20 visit.

Bill Clinton could not pay respect to the martyrs of the great Liberation War as the government failed to ensure security, she said.

The US President did not visit any government project because it has no people-oriented programme which can attract any foreign dignity, she said while addressing leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations during a "students' mass hunger strike" at Paltan Maidan in the city.

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, student s' wing of BNP, organised the hunger strike demanding release of all student leaders including JCD President Habibur Nabi Khan Sohel and General Secretary Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and resignation of the government. JCD organised similar programmes for hunger strike in all district headquarters simultaneously.

"The government is solely responsible for this unpardonable failure. The nation will never forgive the Awami League for this," she said. "The month of March is the month of our national independence, but the government ignored the significance of this month."

The former prime minister said the government published and supplied two "objectionable" books during

Clinton's visit and destroyed the image of the country.

"This suicidal act will discourage foreigners, foreign investors and others to visit Bangladesh," she said.

The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament said the AL government has lost its credibility and acceptability to the countrymen and also to foreign states because of its "misdeeds and suicidal activities" in its nearly four years' rule.

"Neither the countrymen nor foreigners believe this government," she added.

To cover up its failure, the government has resorted to repression on the Opposition, she alleged. Fifty to sixty false cases each have been filed against

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Hope for revival of a third force

Joint meeting by 4 former Indian premiers

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Mar 28: The joint meeting of India's four former prime ministers here yesterday — the second such exercise in less than a month — has set the political grapevine buzzing with speculation about revival of a third force apart from the country's ruling BJP and main opposition Congress led by Sonia Gandhi.

On the face of it, the meeting of Chandrababu Naidu, V P Singh, H D Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral does not have much political significance because two of them (Chandrababu Naidu and Deve Gowda) are heading parties by and large marginalised in Indian politics, the third (VP Singh) claims

he does not belong to any political party and the fourth (Gujral) could not even find a parliamentary constituency to contest the 1999 general elections.

And yet political observers here are not entirely willing to shrug off the importance of the meeting because of the issues which were on its agenda: "adverse" fall outs of economic policies of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government, specially the hike in prices of rice sold through ration shops and urea and "politicisation" of institutions.

It is precisely these issues which have raised the eyebrow of observers who wonder if they could form the nucleus for the

re-emergence of the Third Front which has been reduced to shreds after 1998 general elections.

The Third Front had comprised the leftist, centrist and left-of-centre groups which, backed by Congress, had ruled India between June 1996 and mid 1998 under the leadership of Gowda and Gujral, thanks to fractured electoral verdict. In fact, some of the erstwhile Third Front constituents Front like DMK and TDP are now allies of BJP.

The issues of increase in prices of rice and urea and moves to "politicise" institutions have found an echo not only among opposition parties

but among some constituents of BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

It may be recalled that BJP allies, as also the entire opposition, have demanded rollback of prices hike of rice and urea and had strongly opposed Gujral government's decision to lift the ban on its employees joining the RSS activities.

The decision was revoked by Gujral government, particularly in view of strong pressure from BJP allies.

Political observers point out that what appears to have prompted the talk about resurrection of a Third Front is the unimpressive performance of

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40 killed, 45 kidnapped in CHT since peace accord

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Mar 28: Violence left 40 people including eight Bangladeshi settlers killed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts areas since the signing of peace accord on December, 1997, police and other sources said.

Besides, 45 people including 27 tribals were abducted in the CHT region during the period. In most of the cases, the abductors realised ransom for release of the victims.

Police and security sources said incidents of violence took place frequently in the past two years in the CHT. Factional clashes broke out between pro-peace accord and anti-peace accord groups of tribals.

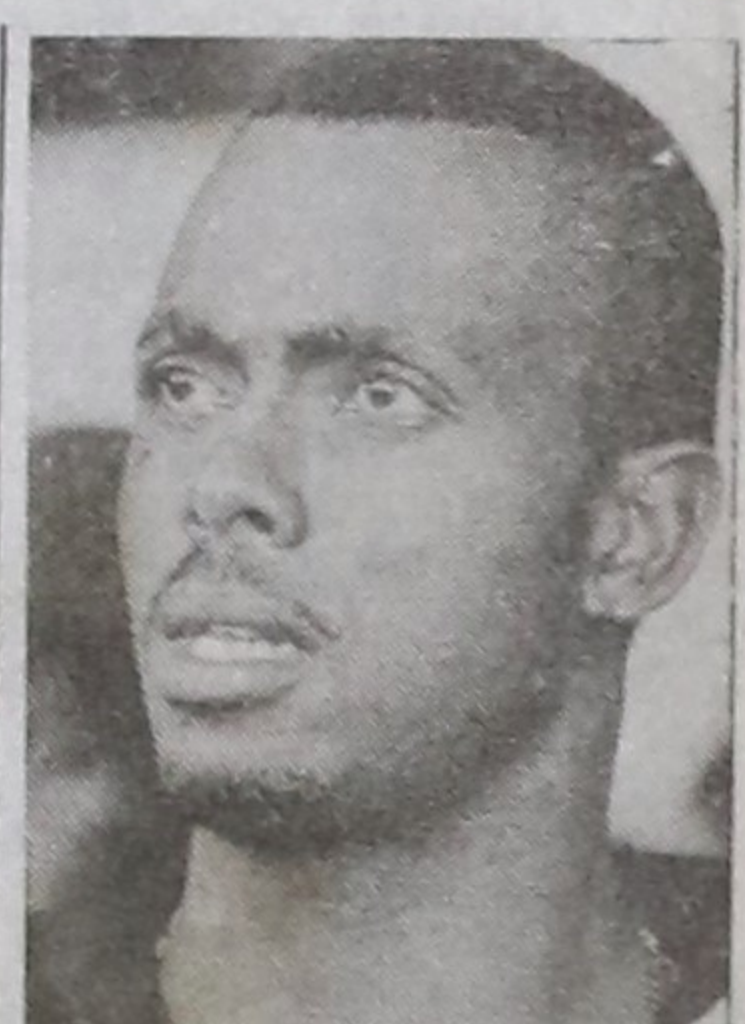
In the latest incident of violence, two tribal youths belonging to an anti-peace accord

group — Pahari Chhatra Parishad backed by newly formed United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) — were killed in a sniper attack in Puj-gao area under Khagrachhari district on March 8, police said.

UPDF blamed Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) for the attack. PCJSS denied the allegation.

Chairman of tribal Refugee Welfare Association Upendra Lal Chakma told this correspondent that intra-party feud of tribal groups led to clashes mostly in Khagrachhari and Rangamati districts. Rival factions were out to establish domination in the areas.

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Walsh 435 not out!

KINGSTON, Jamaica, Mar 28: Veteran West Indies fast bowler Courtney Walsh broke the world record for the number of Test wickets here on Monday, report Reuters, AP.

Walsh, 37, beat the previous best mark of 434 set by Kapil Dev of India, during the second Test against Zimbabwe.

He went into the match needing five victims to reach 435. Walsh took two wickets in the first innings and his three in the second innings made him the world's most successful bowler.

The wicket that took Walsh to the top of the list and sparked a huge celebration by teammates and the crowd at his home Sabina Park ground arrived late on the fourth day.

Wavell Hinds, fielding at short leg, snapped up Zimbabwe tail-ender Henry Olonga and Walsh promptly fell to the ground in relief as he realised he had achieved the target.

Long-time pace partner Curtly Ambrose was among the first to congratulate him.

A two for 46 return in the Zimbabwe first innings had kept him well on course for the record and the removal of opener Trevor Gripper and Grant Flower just after lunch on Monday equalled Kapil's

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