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In the darkness of the shine

INAM AHMED

The BMW SUV makes no jerks even on the potholed Dhaka streets. The silence of the interior, the cool of the air-conditioner and the richness of the woofers streaming Sagar Sen singing Tagore songs drape us with a feeling of assurance.

The dashboard panel shows a fascinating array of instruments—a large LCD screen constantly shows the mileage and a professional navigation system shows maps of cities. At Tejgaon, the roads are cluttered with walking women figures, returning home after their shifts at garment factories. The man behind the steering wheel himself owns several garment factories in Dhaka City. He talks of his next venture in a composite textile mill.

Inside one of these 'garment'

women's 'home', Farida cooks. A 10 feet by 12 feet room that she shares with three other women in the semi-slum area of West Raza Bazar. In one corner some gaudy, hair clips and combs, and a framed photograph taken in a studio where Farida is seen in a sari.

"I want to buy a cassette player soon," she says with a smile.

From the BMW owner to Farida, everybody is pursuing a dream; a dream for upward mobility. Only that they are branching off fast with a widening gap makes Bangladesh yet another showcase for rich-poor inequality. A quite balanced society some 30 years ago, Bangladesh now ranks as a moderately unbalanced

society where despite growth in GDP, reduction in poverty -- only 0.5 percent a year which is far short of the government's claim of 1 percent -- and advancements in some social indicators -- lowered child mortality rate, higher use of contraceptives, immunisation and narrowing gender gap in schooling, incomes of the rich and poor are increasing disproportionately.

The genie coefficient -- a measurement of income inequality -- clearly shows the deepening rich-poor gap. On a scale of 0-1, the coefficient was 0.259 in 1991-92 and it reached 0.306 in 2000.

This is also evident in the income gap between the rich and the poor. Between 1999 and 2004, the poor's income increased by 4.8 percent, while it increased by 19.4 percent for the non-poor, the preliminary report of the Poverty Monitoring Survey 2004 shows.

The rural poor are even worse off, with their income increasing by only 0.54 percent against the urban people's 7.97 percent.

"The widening income disparity in Bangladesh is explained most convincingly when we compare the income shares of top and bottom quintiles of the population," a CPD report says. "Between 1999 and 2004, national income attributable to the poorest 10 percent of Bangladesh population declined from the minuscule proportion of 1.7 percent to 1.5 percent. Conversely, the control on the national income by the richest 10 percent of the population increased from 33.9 percent in 1999 to 36.5 percent in 2004." In other words, the income difference between the poorest and the richest increased from 20 times in 1999 to 24.5 times in 2004. Not only this,

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Extremism shadows Bangladesh democracy

US senator says

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Dick Lugar said that Bangladesh's traditional commitment to democracy, religious pluralism, and women's empowerment is now being challenged by extremists who want to establish Islamic rule in the country.

In his opening statement for hearing of nomination of Richard A. Boucher, to be assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian Affairs, Senator Lugar made the remark in Washington DC on February 16.

While describing the state of

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CJ decries political leaders' impatience

Says it makes it difficult to strengthen democracy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassir Husain yesterday said the political leaders' impatience and disrespect to the opinion of others have made it difficult to strengthen the democracy and promote the rule of law.

"Unfortunately, in recent years, in our political field our leaders are becoming more and more impatient and disrespectful to the opinion of others. Consequently, the efforts for carrying through the democratic process have been stumbling down on the way time and again," he said.

Justice Mudassir was speaking as the chief guest at the meeting of stakeholders of the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) at LGRD Bhaban in Agargaon in the capital.

A meaningful independence of judiciary is sine qua non to secure the promotion and protection of human rights, Justice Mudassir said, adding that outcry for the independent judiciary is as old as the legal system, which is the legacy of colonial rule.

As a democratic state, Bangladesh has committed to the ideals and principles for ensuring an exploitation-free society with

independent judiciary, he added.

He urged the national leaders to work for a policy and legislative development of human rights and set an action plan envisaging the process for promotion and protection of human rights.

"I think that establishment of the rule of law is the main prerequisite for any national human rights protection system," the chief justice said.

"We must understand the very definition and implications of the rule of law. It is not merely compilation of some formal rules, rather it underpins some ideal values forming part of our everyday reality."

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Govt must carry out proposed electoral reforms

Says Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the main opposition, Sheikh Hasina, yesterday said the government must place a bill in the parliament to implement the oppositions' proposed reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission (EC).

"The government must make it clear to the nation whether they will execute our reform proposal or not," Hasina, also the president of Awami League (AL), said while addressing the National Representatives Council of Bangladesh Secondary Teachers' Association in the auditorium of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital.

The AL chief, who placed the reform proposals in the parliament on February 12, said the four-party

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ELECTORAL REFORMS

BNP may assign seniors to talk with opposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP may commission one or two of its senior leaders to discuss with the opposition alliance their proposals for reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems.

The announcement to this effect is likely to come up in the prime minister's speech wrapping up the current session of parliament.

A number of government policymakers said they are considering forming a committee and assign it the job to broker an understanding with the opposition about the demand for reforms.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed

yesterday told The Daily Star, "We have not yet taken any decision about it. Currently, we are examining the opposition's proposals."

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina on February 12 placed in parliament a 23-point proposal including the ones for reforms in the caretaker government and Election Commission (EC). Hasina, also president of Awami League (AL), tabled the proposals on behalf of the 14-party alliance.

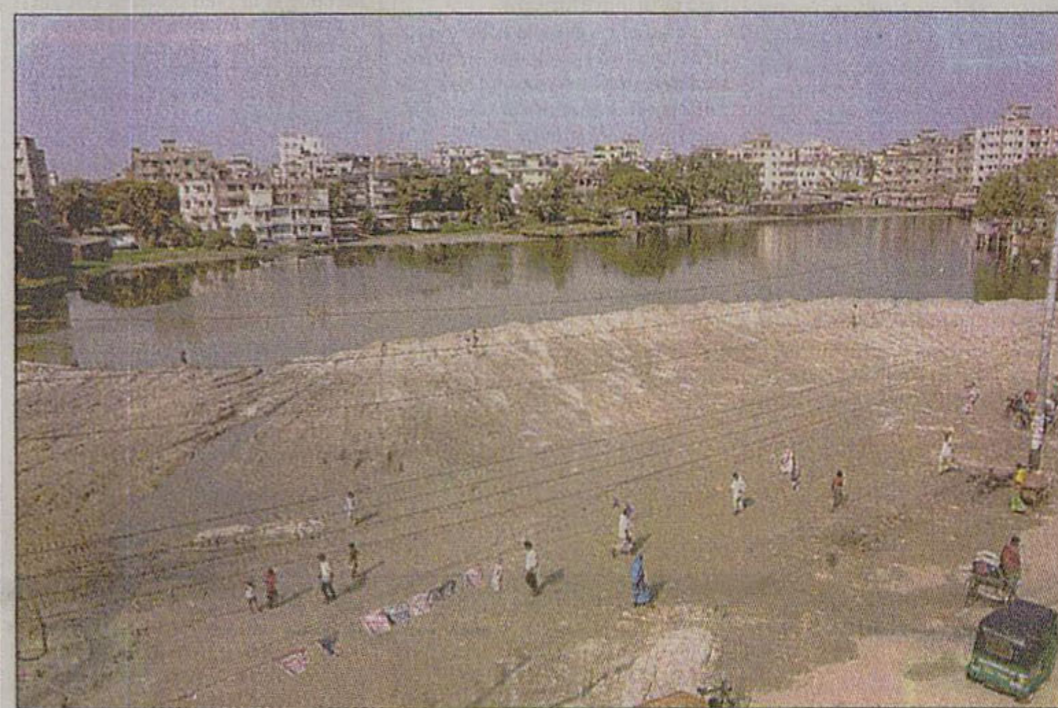
The issue, however, is unlikely to be discussed in the House. The government side appears to be willing to discuss it in parliament while the opposition prefers sitting outside, as it does not have the strength to see the proposals

through, noted some political observers.

Health Minister Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain told the Daily Star yesterday that the government sincerely wants to discuss the proposals, but the opposition has yet to bring forward those in accordance with the rules of procedure of parliament.

"We expected the opposition would raise the subject following the parliamentary procedure, but they did not do it. Still, the government will take the initiative to resolve the issue, as BNP wants to have a fruitful understanding with the opposition for the sake of a free and fair election," observed

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A large part of Mugdapara Lake in the capital is being filled up with the authorities turning a blind eye to the violation of law.

Scholastica's rejoinder

In a rejoinder to The Daily Star report published yesterday with the headline 'Addiction grips women more and more', authorities of Scholastica Pvt Limited stated that singling out the name of the institution in the report without any substantiation has tarnished the image of the reputed school.

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Hope for a cheap ride ends in death

JU CORRESPONDENT

Unable to afford bus fares, the poverty-stricken homebound day labourers and rickshaw-pullers got on a truck so that they could save a few bucks for their families. But the risk they had taken was not worthwhile, as reckless driving robbed

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Baby trade booms at DMCH

SHARIFUL ISLAM AND SHAHEEN MOLLAH

One can easily buy a newborn babe for a few thousand taka, to keep or abuse as one wishes, at no other place than the downtown Dhaka Medical College Hospital and some clinics in its vicinity.

Every month, some two dozen infants change hands at the country's largest public hospital and the so-called clinics, sources said, adding the buyers in most cases are child-less couples.

The price range, however, is higher for boys than girls, the sources said. Depending on the identity of the parents, and the baby's look and complexion, the price of a girl child varies between Tk 9,000 and Tk 15,000 while that of a male child between Tk 12,000 and Tk 20,000.

Over a hundred DMCH birth attendants and other employees in collusion with some of

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SLEEP IN FEAR... A mother holds her baby even in sleep at the DMCH yesterday in the wake of abduction of several infants from the hospital.

BIMAN'S SCHEDULE CHAOS

Caab grounds plane for inadequate safety

REAZ AHMAD

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) has disallowed Biman Bangladesh Airlines to fly one of its Airbus because of its non-compliance to safety procedures.

The latest regulatory slap on the craft-crunched national flag carrier came at a time when it has totally failed to maintain its flight schedules due to temporary grounding of four out of its five DC-10s. Biman is also counting a huge loss due to extra spending on food and lodging for several hundred stranded passengers.

While Biman pinned its hope on

possible resumption of flights by two of its four grounded DC-10s by today, Caab's objection to one of its four Airbus made things further difficult for it.

Official sources said Caab has disallowed Biman's plea to operate the Airbus due to its failure to comply with an earlier Caab instruction to bring in necessary gadgets and make the craft fool-proof in safety.

The Airbus is now lying idle inside the hanger at Zia International Airport while Biman had to reschedule time and again as many as 17 of its international flights in two days due to craft crisis.

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12 killed as truck falls into ditch

2 schoolteachers die in another accident

STAR REPORT

At least 12 people were killed and 30 others injured, 13 of them critically, in a road accident on Dhaka-Tangail Highway in Mirzapur in the early hours yesterday.

Meanwhile, two schoolteachers died in another road crash in front of Bhawal Bodre Alam College in Gazipur yesterday, reports A Correspondent in Gazipur.

Police said the first accident occurred when a Gaibandha-bound truck from Dhaka lost control due to dense fog and fell into a ditch at

Zamurki around 4:00am, reports Our Tangail Correspondent.

The dead, who were killed on the spot, and the injured were travelling on the cement-laden truck.

Locals and Highway Police rushed to the scene and started rescue operation. They sent the injured to Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital and Mirzapur Upazila Health Complex.

Nine of the dead are Mohammad Abdul Awal, 25, and Bhola Miah, 30, of Gobindaganj in

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Bangladesh vs. Sri Lanka

United We Win Cricket

Celebrate Bangladesh vs. Sri Lanka ODI and Test Series with united hope, enjoyment and a spirit of warm brotherhood. Let's win over Cricket and wish its success all the way to drive away all violence and distances between the nations.



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