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by Waliur Rahman
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STOCK MARKET

DSE Index	792.44 (-0.05%)
Market capitalisation Tk	43.77 billion
Turnover in volume	86738
Turnover in value Tk	22.64 million

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NEWS BRIEFS

**CIDA chief
meets Hasina**

The visiting President of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Madame Huguette Labelle, made a courtesy call on Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina at her Dhamondi residence yesterday. During the meeting, Hasina recalled with gratitude the CIDA's contributions to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of post-independent Bangladesh in 1972, reports UNB.

**Storm hits
Lalmonirhat**

LALMONIRHAT, Mar 27: At least 250 kutcha houses were damaged and trees uprooted when a storm swept the district tonight. The affected areas are mainly in Sadar and Aditmari thanas. The storm which lasted for about 30 minutes from 8:30 pm also hit Hatibandhi, Patgram and Kaliganj thanas. Reports of any damage to life and crops were not immediately available, reports UNB.

**Wheat procurement
begins**

The countrywide internal wheat procurement drive with an initial target of 50,000 tonnes fixed by the government for this year was launched yesterday, reports BSS.

Divisional Commissioner of the Rajshahi division Alhaj A M Aminul Islam formally inaugurated the drive at the local food godown of Natore, an official handout said in Dhaka.

The wheat is being purchased at Taka 7.00 (seven) only per kilogram directly from growers at all food godowns of the Food Directorate, the handout added.



**Lankan President
arrives today**

The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Baudanaik Kumaratunga, arrives here this afternoon on a two-day official visit to Bangladesh, reports BSS.

The Sri Lankan President will pay the visit at the invitation of the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

Briefing newsmen on the visit the Foreign Secretary, Farooq Sobhan, said it would further strengthen the excellent and increasingly warm and friendly relations between the two South Asian countries.

He said that the visit by the Sri Lankan leader would provide an opportunity to continue the dialogue between her and Begum Zia initiated when the latter visited Sri Lanka in January for a faster develop-

ment of bilateral relations in different spheres including trade, investment and economy.

The two leaders at their formal talks, to be held at the International Conference Centre Wednesday, are expected

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to focus on intensification of bilateral political relations, expansion and diversification of bilateral trade, economic cooperation and other issues of common interest, the Foreign Secretary said.

The two leaders are expected to review the progress achieved by SAARC in core areas of regional cooperation and matters relating to the upcoming eighth SAARC summit to

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**Opposition's
'Dhaka siege'
today**

By Staff Correspondent

The mainstream opposition political parties prepare for a siege around the capital today amid a 24-hour police ban on agitations in some areas in the city.

The Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami called for the siege, scheduled to begin at 10 am, to protest short supply of fertiliser and price hike of rice and to press the demand for early elections under a caretaker government.

The identical programmes were announced by the three parties as part of their fortnight-long programmes announced from separate rallies in the city on March 13.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has clamped a 24-hour ban on processions, rallies and all kinds of demonstration at 12 points in the capital from midnight last night.

It has also prohibited carry-

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**Join today's
siege to oust
govt: Hasina**

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina has called upon the people to join the 'Dhaka Siege' programme today to force the government to step down for elections under a caretaker government, reports UNB.

"Build resistance wherever you face obstacle," she told a rally of industrial workers at Postogola in the city yesterday.

In a scathing criticism, Hasina blamed the BNP government for the present crises in political and economic fronts. "This corrupt, liar and killer regime," she said, has no right to stay in power.

Hasina said the country has plunged into chaos and unrest because of the "BNP's inefficiency, corruption and politicisation" for last four years.

She blamed the government

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**WB still unhappy over system
loss, theft in power sector**

By Staff Correspondent

The World Bank is still unwilling to re-start financing any power sector projects because of the government's failure to initiate adequate reforms and the continuing high rate of system loss in the sector, said Pierre Landell-Mills, chief of the Resident Mission of the Bank, yesterday.

Leaving aside the technical system loss, the remaining portion is "essentially" theft by a "small number of people," Landell-Mills pointed out.

If the situation does not improve, we are not willing to invest in the power sector nor are we willing to encourage other donors to invest in the sector," he added, while addressing a discussion meeting with members of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI).

He was responding to concerns raised by MCCI president M Anis Ud Dowla about the impact on industry of the growing shortage of electricity and gas.

The Bank had earlier suspended all loan operations to the power sector some three years ago, seeking reform and lowering of high system loss — at over 40 per cent — in the sector. The current rate of system loss stands at 35 per cent.

Saying that the Rural Electrification Board (REB) has "virtually no system loss," he

**Tk 5.2 cr earmarked
for railway line
on Jamuna bridge**

A sum of 1.3 million US dollars equivalent to Tk 5.2 crore has been earmarked to install railway line on Jamuna Bridge, reports BSS.

The Hyundai joint venture of South Korea will very soon be awarded the contract in this regard so that the multi-purpose bridge can have railway tracks from the very first day of its opening to traffic.

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insisted that lowering the PDB system loss could be done, as has been demonstrated by the REB, which is involved in the distribution of electricity in the rural areas.

He suggested rationalisation of power distribution and said that more of the distribution networks should be handed over to the REB because it is more efficient.

The World Bank official also agreed that the gas price for PDB and private sector electricity generators should be uniform.

Referring to growing load-shedding of electricity, the MCCI president called for a reduction of the import duty on generators from 7.5 to 2.5 per cent and full exemption from VAT.

Held at the Chamber's boardroom, the meeting was also attended by the representative of the International Finance Corporation, other Bank officials and executive committee members of the

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**Renewed pledge to uphold
spirit of Liberation War**

By Staff Correspondent

The 25th Independence and National Day was celebrated throughout the country on Sunday with a renewed pledge to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War and protect the sovereignty and consolidate democracy in the country.

In the capital, the day was heralded with a 31-gun salute.

Thousands of people from all walks of life went to the Jatiya Smriti Soudha (national memorial) at Savar in the morning to pay their homage to the martyrs of the Liberation War by laying wreaths there.

Elaborate programmes were drawn up by the government as well as by different political parties and socio-cultural organisations to mark the nation's stepping into the 25th year of its independence.

Hundreds of people witnessed the ceremonial Independence and National Day parade at the National Square in the morning.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas, who is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, took salute and inspected the colourful parade.

Smartly turned out contingents of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, BDR, BNCC, Ansar and VDP took part in the march past. Mechanised columns of the Army, Navy and Air Force also took part in the marchpast.

The 2-hour long ceremony was also marked by jumping of paratroopers from an altitude of 8,000 feet and rope landing from helicopters. There was fly past by Air Force aircraft. Air Force jets also flew low over the dais showing respect to the guests.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, ministers, MPs, the Chiefs of Three Services, diplomats, high civil and military officials and elites of the city were present.

President and Begum

Biswas hosted a reception at Bangabhaban in the afternoon.

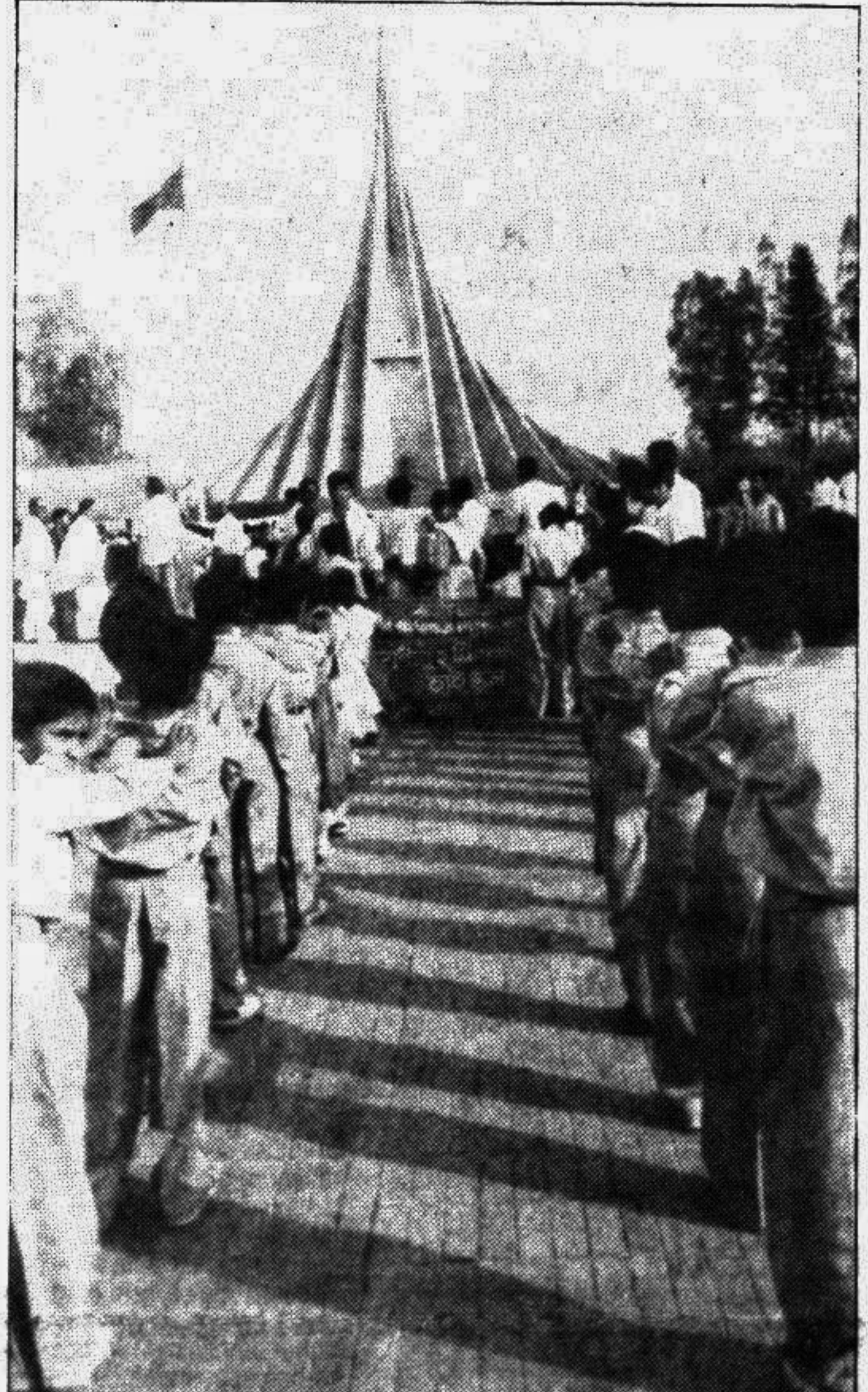
The Prime Minister, ministers, members of Parliament, diplomats, high civil and military officials, freedom fighters,

professionals, elites and senior journalists attended the reception.

The day was a public holiday.

The National flag was

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These schoolboys were among a cross-section of people who visited the Jatiya Smriti Soudha in Savar on Independence and National Day Sunday. — Star photo



**S M Ali
honoured**

By Staff Correspondent

Late S M Ali, the founder-editor of The Daily Star, has been posthumously awarded the Independence Day Award-1995 for his outstanding contribution in the field of journalism.

The names of the recipients — seven distinguished individuals — were announced by the government late in the night on March 25. The formal presentation of the awards, which carry a citation and cash, will be made on the eve of the Independence and National Day next year.

In a career spanning nearly

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**Myanmar closes
transit route**

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 27: Myanmar has unilaterally closed the transit route through the Teknaf border, an official source said.

As a result, no Bangladeshi transit passengers were allowed to enter Mongdow of Arakan province since March 24.

Myanmar's action came after the arrest of eight Burmese nationals by BDR on charges of spying.

These Myanmar citizens, who carried some documents

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**Rohingyas to go
home within
a few months**

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh expects to complete the process of repatriation of Rohingya refugees "within the next few months."

This was stated by Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan at his first press briefing yesterday.

Sobhan said, the repatriation process was moving smoothly and he hoped the Myanmar refugees would be back home within a few months.

According to available statistics, a total of 1,80,473 Rohingyas refugees had returned to their homes, including a batch of 1080 repatriated yesterday. Another 70,404 Rohingyas living in 12 camps in Cox's Bazar are now waiting to go back to their homeland.

**Foreign Secy says
Dhaka striving to
solve Ganges
issue with Delhi**

By Staff Correspondent

Newly appointed Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan yesterday said that Bangladesh was "relentlessly pursuing India" for arriving at a durable and acceptable solution to the outstanding Ganges water sharing issue.

Responding to newsmen's questions at his first press briefing yesterday, the foreign secretary refuted allegations that Bangladesh was neglecting the issue and said, "Water is our legitimate right and the government would like to

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**Hillary Clinton's
visit: Advance
team in city**

By Staff Correspondent

The advance team which arrived in the capital to finalise the details of Hillary Clinton's forthcoming visit to Bangladesh had meetings with the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other agencies yesterday.

The team will fly to Jessore today where the US first lady would visit to see some Food for Work Programmes and social service projects.

Hillary Clinton is scheduled to fly to Dhaka from Kathmandu on April 2. Her entourage of around 50 members include a 16-member media team.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia exchanging greetings with crippled freedom fighters at a reception at Bangabhaban on Independence and National Day Sunday. — PID photo



Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina and senior party colleagues placing wreath at the Jatiya Smriti Soudha in Savar on Independence and National Day Sunday. — Star photo