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STOCK MARKET
 DSE Index 760.49 (+0.16%)
 Market capitalization Tk 45.04 billion
 Transactions in volume 65050
 Transactions in value Tk 17.88 million

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NEWS BRIEFS

**Chirac declared
 French president**
 PARIS, May 17: Gaullist
 Jacques Chirac was declared
 French President today at an
 Elysee Palace ceremony usher-
 ing in a new era of right-wing
 power. Sixty-two year old
 Chirac, who is taking over
 from Socialist Francois Mitter-
 rand, was declared president
 by constitutional council
 chairman Roland Dumas, who
 read out presidential election
 results giving Chirac 52.6 per
 cent of the May 7 vote, reports
 AP.

**Plot to kill Bal
 Thackeray: 6 held**
 NEW DELHI, May 17: Six
 people were arrested in the
 western port city of Bombay on
 charges of plotting to kill a
 firebrand Hindu leader whose
 party rules India's financial
 capital. The Press Trust of
 India said Tuesday. Bombay's
 joint police commissioner R S
 Sharma told the news agency
 Tuesday that the six, including
 a Muslim named Fazal, had
 been arrested on charges of
 planning the assassination of
 Bal Thackeray, reports AFP.

**Lankan local
 polls postponed**
 COLOMBO, May 17: The
 government today postponed
 local elections by a year with-
 out assigning any reasons. The
 voting for 237-village, town
 and municipal councils in June
 would have been the first test
 of popularity for the People's
 Alliance government.

Soldier killed
 KARACHI, May 17: Gunmen
 attacked an army vehicle
 Wednesday, killing one soldier
 and wounding another, police
 said. No one immediately
 claimed responsibility for the
 killing and police refused to
 speculate. More than 400 have
 died violently this year in
 Karachi, reports AP.

BNP trying to confuse people: Zillur AL rules out dialogue

Awami League General Secretary Zillur Rahman yesterday ruled out any dialogue with the ruling party until it gives a declaration accepting in principle the Opposition demand for immediate elections under a neutral caretaker government, reports UNB.

BNP Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukdar's proposal for dialogue is but a mere drama and abortive bid to confuse the people, Rahman said in a statement.

He issued the statement to protest Talukdar's Tuesday's press statement branding the Awami League as an Indian agent and making some "indecorous" remarks about Sheikh Hasina.

Salam Talukdar's statement was not only untrue, distorted and indecorous but also a "delirious utterance of a helpless politician", said the AL General Secretary.

Rahman said the BNP Secretary General issued his statement just a day after he had offered a dialogue. His indecorous words like "acting", "past misdeeds" about Sheikh Hasina are designed to vitiate a pre-dialogue atmosphere in a subtle way.

The AL leader recalled that Talukdar had made similar comments about Sheikh Hasina, the Awami League and its leaders at the BNP conference in Chittagong a day after he had telephonic conversation with him about dialogue on April 17.

If any one has anything to say against any remarks made at any public meeting that can be said from his party's public meeting, Rahman said. But Salam Talukdar's statement reacting to Sheikh Hasina's reported remarks at Barguna public meeting is "motivated and ill-designed."

Refuting Talukdar's claim that the BNP will protect independence and sovereignty of Bangladesh, Rahman said it is ludicrous and farce when the BNP had made anti-liberation elements president, prime minister and minister and formed government with the direct support from anti-liberation forces.

The AL General Secretary said Salam Talukdar should know that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had sent the Indian troops back within one and a half months and consolidated the country's independence and sovereignty.

It was Bangabandhu who had brought 44,000 cusec Ganges water through Farakka by means of an accord with India. But despite visits to India twice, Prime Minister Begum Zia failed to reach any agreement with India on sharing and ill-designed."

BGMEA decides total elimination of child labour by Oct 31

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday rejected signing of a proposed memorandum of understanding with some international organisations and NGOs for the phased elimination of child labour from the garment factories.

Instead, in an extraordinary general meeting, the members of the association passed a resolution seeking complete elimination of child labour by October 31 next.

Following threadbare discussions, the majority of the general members voted against the conclusion of the proposed MOU and agreed upon BGMEA to make an unilateral declaration for the total elimination of child labour by 31 October 1995, Redwan Ahmed, MP, president of the association, told newsmen at a press briefing.

The MOU was initiated to stave off adverse effect of the introduction of "Child Labour Deterrance Act" in the US Congress seeking to stop the import of goods made by using

child labour, on the country's garment exports. The US is the single largest export market for Bangladesh ready-made garments.

The draft of the MOU was prepared after prolonged negotiations with the US Ambassador in Bangladesh and other US officials. The MOU was to be signed by BGMEA, the Asian-American Free Labour Institute (AAFLI), a US-based organisation particularly active in pushing the MOU; UNICEF, the Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh (CRDB) and the American-Bangladesh Economic Forum (ABEF).

It contained comprehensive provisions for survey, education and monitoring programmes for the phased elimination of child labour from the garment sector in Bangladesh by September 1, 1997.

Among the 352 members of the association present at the meeting, 311 voted against concluding the MOU while only 41 voted in favour, Redwan Ahmed said.

Many of the BGMEA mem-

bers at the meeting were particularly critical about allowing NGOs to interfere in the matter. "We won't accept any interference of any NGO. If the international organisations like UNICEF and ILO and the US embassy were involved then we would have no objections," he quoted some members as having said.

Many of the members also questioned whether signing of the MOU would in any way help the exports of Bangladesh to the US and Canadian markets, when the practice of verification on the use of child labour by the agents of the importers already exists and compulsory certification is required, Redwan Ahmed added.

He further said that the members, however, unanimously agreed for total elimination of the use of child labour from the garment sector. The majority of the general members felt that there was already adequate machinery to monitor compliance with the country's labour laws, which provide clear deter-

First phase of ZIA runway project over

By Reaz Ahmad

The first phase of the Taka 32-crore Runway Overlay Project (ROP) at Zia International Airport (ZIA) is over and the first ever recarpeting of the ZIA gateway would be completed by early July.

Sources in the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) told The Daily Star that the major task of crack repairing has already been completed.

The 10,500-foot ZIA runway, constructed in the late 60's, was opened for regular flight operation on December 28, 1979. Since then, it was never carpeted and over the years many big potholes developed on the gangway. The ROP would give an eight-inch new layer on the runway.

The recarpeting project is also aimed at upgrading the ZIA from a 'Category-1' airport to a 'Category-3' one.

CAAB sources said the work will be completed by July.

Tidal waters recede as depression weakens

By Staff Correspondent

The land depression over Khulna, Jessore and Faridpur regions weakened yesterday and moved north-east in the direction of Indian state of Tripura last night.

At least 45 people, mostly children, were missing in Sandwip island and Chokoria under Cox's Bazar district as high tides and storms struck the entire coastal belt of the country late Monday and Tuesday.

The tidal waters, meanwhile, began receding yesterday.

Met Office, however, forecast heavy rainfall, accompanied by gusty to squally wind with a speed of 50 to 60 km per hour over Chittagong Division today.

Maritime ports of Mongla and Chittagong have been advised to keep hoisted a cautionary signal number three, while all fishing boats and trawlers over north Bay

are to remain in shelter till further information.

All flights from Chittagong Air Port were cancelled till yesterday evening due to inclement weather and inundation of the runway, airport sources said. In Chittagong Port, loading and unloading of ships could not be held.

Meanwhile, our correspondent from Barguna reports that the missing passenger launch, carrying an estimated 200 people, was found safe with all on board in a canal in the district yesterday. The launch had drifted off course in the storm.

Our Cox's Bazar correspondent says: Road communication between Chittagong and Cox's Bazar was cut off at three different places due to onrush of water from the hills.

Over 40,000 people in five thanas were marooned due to the sudden surge of sea water

Drug addiction destroying youths: Khaleda

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the affluent section of the society to come forward in aid of the suffering humanity, reports UNB.

"The government alone cannot remove the sufferings of 12 crore people... An affluent man can bring about change in the life of a poor man," she said.

The Prime Minister was inaugurating the 8th annual convention of the Lions Club International District-315A at the city's Sonargaon Club in the morning.

Referring to drug addiction increasing afflicting the youths, she said, "Addiction of drugs is pushing the new generation on the verge of destruction."

She stressed the need for creating mass awareness and urged members of the Lions Club to resist the drug menace. She termed the slogan of the

Hasina visits storm-hit people at Barisal

BARISAL, May 17: Awami League president Sheikh Hasina today visited two temporary relief camps in the town and directed her party leaders and workers to stand by the people affected by the tidal surge and storm, reports UNB.

The camps were set up at Enayetullah Government Primary School and Daliluddin Primary School. Some 500 to 600 people from nearby Palashpur and adjoining areas located on the bank of Kirtankhola river took shelter in the schools after being rendered homeless.

The camp authorities, however, said every hour new people were coming from the nearby submerged areas for shelter in the camps.

Early on, talking to reporters at the Barisal Circuit House this morning, Hasina said people of the southern parts were neglected. No development works were carried out in this area although the government is claiming "waves of development" in the country for four years.

The Prime Minister and



Many areas in the city were inundated due to the incessant rain for the last two days. This picture was taken from the Secretariat area yesterday. — Star photo

Mostafiz briefs EU envoys on important issues

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman yesterday briefed ambassadors of the European Union on important multilateral and bilateral issues, reports UNB.

During the meeting at the Foreign Ministry, he mentioned the recent SAARC Summit in New Delhi and specially referred to the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) and the Inter-Ministerial Cooperation Agreement between European Commission and SAARC.

He also told the Dhaka-based EU envoys that the Chairman of the SAARC Council of Ministers would meet the troika of European Union in New York during early UNGA session, said a Foreign Office press release.

Agriculture sector stagnant ADP allocation now below 5pc

The agriculture sector has become stagnant over the last few years due to lack of proper management of soil, poor irrigation, decline in the use of High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds and droughts, Agriculture Secretary Akhtar Ali said yesterday.

He also referred to the recent inefficient distribution of fertiliser.

"ADP allocation for agriculture is declining since 1990. Now it is below five per cent," he said at a dialogue on the agriculture sector of the Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), initiated by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Referring to studies by agriculture scientists the secretary said the recent fertiliser crisis and drought have resulted in a shortfall of three million tonnes of rice.

"The country will have to import rice worth US dollars 800 million for this shortfall,"

he pointed out.

He informed the session that agriculture research units would be put under the revenue budget from the next fiscal to improve their fund positions and systems.

The session chaired by Prof Rehman Sobhan was also addressed by, among others, Dr K A S Murshid of BIDS, Matia Choudhury of Awami League, Maudood Ahmed of Jatiya Party, Rashed Khan Menon of Workers' Party, former agriculture secretary M A Syed, Dr Hasanuzzaman of Planning Commission, Dr Nuimuddin Chowdhury and others.

A draft agriculture policy with strategies for the next 20 to 25 years has already been prepared by a task force of scientists, Akhtar Ali pointed out.

He said that to overcome price hike of fertiliser, the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) was planning to introduce seasonal

Imran weds Jemima

LONDON, May 17: Former Pakistan cricket captain Imran Khan and his British heiress fiancée have gone through a Muslim marriage ceremony in Paris, British newspapers reported today, says AP.

The Daily Telegraph said the quiet family ceremony, conducted by an Imam from a Paris mosque, took just two minutes.

The tabloid Daily Mail carried a picture of Imran and 21-year-old Jemima Goldsmith, both clad in marriage robes traditional in Pakistan, outside the Paris home of the bride's father, British financier Sir James Goldsmith.

We have had an Islamic wedding, the newspaper quoted Imran as saying, while Ms Goldsmith, wearing a mustard robe over floral trousers, added, "It has taken place — now can we have a nice holiday on our own please?"

The Daily Express, another tabloid, quoted the bride's mother, Lady Annabel Goldsmith, as saying the couple will still go through with a civil ceremony in Britain in June.

Pakistan can settle 25000 more families at Mianwali : SPGRC

Thousands of stranded Pakistanis living in different camps in Bangladesh, awaiting repatriation, can be accommodated at Mianwali of Pakistan's Punjab province where the Afghan refugees were sheltered.

This was stated by Muhammad Nasim Khan, Chief Patron of the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC) talking to The Daily Star, he said that at least 25,000 families could be accommodated at the existing premises at Mianwali. He also said that 1000 flats constructed in Mianchunnu in Punjab, 130 miles from its capital Lahore, to house the repatriated Pakistanis remain empty because only 57 families have gone there since the repatriation move resumed in January, 1993 after long 19 years.

Pakistan will have to start taking back its stranded citizens wherever ethnic or financial difficulties it may face,

commented a senior diplomat at the Foreign Ministry.

Another senior official also said that every country has its share of ethnic and domestic problems and this should not deter taking back its own people. Besides, he added, funds would be forthcoming from the Rabat and other sources when a plan of action was taken.

The issue of repatriation had been taken up at almost every high-level meeting between leaders of Pakistan and Bangladesh, but had received a very lukewarm response from Islamabad. Even during the recent visit of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to Pakistan, the issue was raised. Her Pakistani counterpart Benazir Bhutto reportedly said she would look into the issue but no concrete moves are in sight. A special joint committee set up in this regard has also reportedly not met in the last two years.

Foreign Ministry officials

say they are wary of pushing the issue "too much, because it might put a strain on the existing friendly relations" between the two countries.

But observers noted that such a large number of refugees continued to be an enormous burden on the country's economy and might also create a new ethnic and economic problem if it was not resolved in the immediate future.

After the repatriation of only 325 stranded Pakistanis in 1993, an estimated 2,38,000 continue to live in some 60 camps in Bangladesh. In a way, a considerable number or a large segment of the able-bodied stranded Pakistanis, commonly known as Biharis, continued to mingle with the local population, and were actively involved in different fields or vocations.

The Biharis are having it both ways. They are enjoying our hospitality and also taking



About 200 shops in Mohammadia market, Mirpur-11 in the city, were gutted yesterday morning. — Star photo

200 shops gutted in Mirpur

By Staff Correspondent

A woman was injured and at least two hundred shops were gutted in a fire at Mirpur in the city yesterday morning.

One Monwara, 35, received burn injuries, medical source said.

The inferno originated from electric short circuit at Mohammadia market at Mirpur Section-11 at about 11 am. Pallabi police said.

The flame engulfed the tin-shed market and burnt 170 shops of cloths, stationary and garments.

The fire also spread to the adjacent Society Market where another 30 shops were gutted. Fire fighters took more than two hours to extinguish the blaze.

Protest in Kashmir continues India rules out third country mediation

NEW DELHI, May 17: India today ruled out third country mediation in Kashmir, where life was crippled for the seventh straight day with protests over the burning of a venerated Islamic shrine, reports AFP.

Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said New Delhi was committed to resolving all its disputes with Islamabad, including over Kashmir, bilaterally and peacefully. "There is no scope for any third country involvement," he told parliament here. "The Indian government has (taken) and will continue to take all steps to apprise the international community of the facts regarding (Kashmir)."

Pranab accused Pakistan, which disputes Kashmir's ownership, of aiding and abet-

ting a Muslim separatist campaign in the troubled state which has left more than 11,000 people dead since 1989.

Pakistan also constantly whipped up anti-India propaganda over Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, and tried to internationalise the issue, he added.

"These negative actions of Pakistan vitiate the atmosphere of bilateral relations and run counter to universally accepted norms of interstate relations," Pranab said.

Pranab's statement came as the Kashmir valley remained paralysed for the seventh straight day today with protests over last week's burning of a 15th century Islamic shrine in the Kashmir town of Charar.

Chinese citizen murdered in city hotel

By Staff Correspondent

A Chinese citizen was allegedly murdered in the old part of the city yesterday.

Police recovered the body of one Ling Jiang, 65, from in front of the Hotel Mustari at Nawabpur Road under Sutrapur thana at about 6 pm yesterday.

Police found injuries in his legs, sources in detective branch said.

Jiang had been staying at the hotel for last four years and worked in a tannery at Hazaribagh for long time, police source said.

The motive of the killing could not be known immediately.

A case under the Section 302/34 has been lodged with the Sutrapur thana in this regard.

The body was sent to the Mirfoid Hospital for autopsy.