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PM distributes Independence Award '96

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday renewed the government's commitment for planned use of the natural and human resources to attain economic progress and build up a dignified, self-reliant nation, reports UNB.

"We will utilise our natural and human resources to achieve the target of a strong economy to face the challenges of 21st century with honour and dignity," she said after distributing the Independence Day Award '96 at the Osmani Memorial Hall in the morning.

The Independence Day Award, highest state level recognition, was introduced in 1977 for distinguished contribution in various sectors of national life as well as in national

Independence Award '97

The government will give Independence Award 1997 to 10 luminous personalities of the country in recognition of their contributions in different fields of national life, reports BSS.

Those who have been selected for the award are: Dr Munshi Siddique Ahmed (Science and Technology), Prof Nurul Islam (Medical Science), Prof Kabir Chowdhury (Education), Prof Abdul Matin Chowdhury (Education, post-humous), Poet Sufia Kamal (Literature), Shawkat Osman (Literature), Al-udum Alm (Fine Arts, Music, post-humous), Begum Jahara Imam (Social Service, post-humous), Justice Syed Mohammad Hossain (Social Service, post-humous), and Dharendra Nath Dutta (special contribution to language movement and freedom struggle, post-humous).

Each award consists of a gold medal, Taka 25 thousand and a certificate.

26 get honorary commission

Seven honorary lieutenants and 19 junior commissioned officers (subedar majors) have been granted honorary commission in the rank of honorary captain and honorary lieutenant respectively in the active list of Bangladesh army on the occasion of the Independence Day, an ISPR press release said yesterday, reports BSS.

Those granted honorary commission in the rank of honorary captain are: Abdul Majid Khan, Artillery, Bepari Magbul Hossain, artillery, Md Abdul Basad, engineers, Md Shirajul Islam Chowdhury, east bengal, Abdul Jalil Howlader, east bengal, Abul Kashem, ASC, and Md Kamal Uddin, ordnance.

The 19 recipients of honorary commission in the rank of honorary lieutenant include Md Sarwar Hossain, artillery, Md Younus Khan, artillery, Md

HOLIDAY
The offices of The Daily Star will remain closed today on account of Independence and National Day.
Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper tomorrow.

AN APOLOGY
Due to limitations of our Printing Press and time constraints we are unable to maintain proper interleaving of our issue today. We deeply regret the inconvenience to our valued readers, patrons and well-wishers and seek their indulgence in this regard. — Management

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by Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

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Silver Jubilee of Independence

By Staff Correspondent

The nation celebrates the Silver Jubilee of Independence today with the party that had led the War of Liberation now in power after 21 years.

After midnight of March 25, 1971, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had proclaimed the country's independence in the wake of a crackdown by the Pakistani troops on unarmed civilians in Dhaka and other parts of the then East Pakistan.

Following a nine-month bloody war that claimed three million lives, Bangladesh was liberated on December 16.

State functions for the Silver Jubilee of Independence begins today at 11 am at the Suhrawardi Udyan, where Bangabandhu had delivered his historic speech on March 7, 1971, calling upon the people to prepare for an all out struggle and Pakistani soldiers had surrendered to the combined forces of the freedom fighters and the Indian troops the same year.

Presidents Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Turkish President Suleyman Demirel who arrived in the city yesterday, to attend the Silver Jubilee celebrations, are sche-

duled to address the Suhrawardi Udyan state function along with President Shahabuddin Ahmed.

At the function, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will take back the 'Swadhinotar Shikha Anirban' (eternal flame of the independence), which returns to the capital today after a cross-country tour. She will also address the nation from there. Bangladesh television will telecast the programme live.

The PM had torched the Shikha Anirban at the same place on March 7 last.

Last post were played for five minutes at different points of the capital at 12 midnight last night by huge parties of Army, BDR, Police and Ansars, to mark the 'black night' of March 25, 1971 when the Pakistani army began crackdown on the unarmed Bengalees.

Railway engines, buses, trucks, ships and launches also blew horns and whistles all over the country to reinvoke the dreadful atmosphere of the 'black night'.

Besides, a sequence was created with light and sound at Peelkhan, Rajarbagh police lines, Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall and Jagannath Hall in the

city and other parts of the country.

Awami League, main opposition BNP and other political parties and their front organisations as well as socio-cultural organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes to celebrate the Independence Day.

The day's programmes will begin with a 31 gun salute.

The national flag will be hoisted atop all public and private buildings while the main roads and road islands in the capital city decorated with flags and lightings.

The day is a public holiday. President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will place wreaths at the national memorial at Savar to pay respect to the martyrs of the war.

The Presidents of South Africa, Turkey and Palestine will also lay wreaths at the memorial early in the morning.

In separate messages on the day, the President and the Prime Minister called for taking fresh vow to build a happy, self-reliant and prosperous Bangladesh for the future generation.

BNP Chairperson and Leader

Exclusive interview with The Daily Star No peace till status of Jerusalem remains unresolved: Arafat

By Mahfuz Anam and Anwarul Haq

"Jerusalem is not only a Palestinian cause, but is also an Arab cause, an Islamic cause and an international cause. There can be no permanent peace in the Middle East as long as the problem of Jerusalem remains unresolved," asserted President Yasser Arafat.

"There is a conspiracy to destroy the peace process. But Israel must realise that there can be no durable peace unless the agreement reached between us is implemented in full." "We are not asking for the moon, but only for what has been already agreed upon," said a visibly angry Arafat.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star at his Sheraton Hotel suite yesterday, the 68-year old legendary leader of the Palestinian people expressed his deep regret at the role of the United States in the recent UN Security Council debate during which the US twice vetoed resolutions supported by all other members of the Council. The UN resolutions condemned the planned Israeli settlement in east Jerusalem.

Arafat expressed his belief that US President Bill Clinton personally understood the Palestinian position but that his administration was not

supporting him fully. "The Jewish lobby is working very hard to jeopardise the process," he said.

The Palestinian leader said Japan, Russia, China, the European Union and all other Western powers were unequivocal in their support for the Palestinian resolution in the UN Security Council. It is only the US that had opposed, he pointed out.

The international community must be made to understand that the present crisis is a very serious one and it would have its ramifications globally if it was not resolved immediately.

"It is the most serious crisis facing the Palestinian people in the recent past," said Arafat, adding that Israel must be pressured into opening of airlinks agreement which was signed in the presence of President Clinton.

In response to a question as to what Bangladesh could do to support the Palestinian cause, he said, "It is most important to implement the OIC resolution adopted at the Islamabad special summit on March 23."

(Details of the interview will be published later.)



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat

Warm reception to 3 world leaders



South African President Nelson Mandela (Top left), Palestinian President Yasser Arafat (Top right) and Turkish President Suleyman Demirel (Bottom) being received on their arrival at the Zia International Airport yesterday. — Star photo

'Bangladesh made a breakthrough in eliminating child labour'

By Staff Correspondent

The visiting head of the Child Labour Coalition of USA, Pharis J Harvey, has praised the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) for its 'successful' handling of the child labour issue in the country.

He said Bangladesh has achieved commendable progress in elimination of child labour from its garments sector. "It has already cleared 88 per cent of child workers from garments industries."

Addressing a reception hosted by the BGMEA in his honour at a city hotel yesterday, the leader of the CLC said that he was pleased to see the smiling faces of children while visiting a number of schools set up by the BGMEA.

It is very enthusiastic that the children who were re-trenched from hundreds of garments factories are now 'learning and trying to be real human beings,' he noted.

Harvey said that the MOU which was signed in 1995 for elimination of child labour made a breakthrough in this regard and it has been proved that the child labour is not necessary to run the factories.

He said that he would report to the US government on the progress achieved by Bangladesh and start a cam-

paign in this regard.

He however said there are still some big companies, specially large chain stores in the USA which maintain a negative attitude regarding Bangladeshi products. The situation will improve after the campaign, he added.

Welcoming the guest, Mostafa Golam Qudus said that the garments factories in Bangladesh has been freed from child labour since November 1996 as per the MOU.

He said that following the introduction of the Harkin Bill in the US Congress in 1994, a systematic campaign was launched against Bangladeshi garments products.

Due to 'premature and harsh decision' of the CLC, the member factories of BGMEA suffered about 300 million dollars in addition to cancellation of orders amounting to another 300 million dollars since then, the BGMEA president noted. Besides, about 200 factories were closed, he said.

He said that about 8,078 children, who used to work in

the garment factories in Bangladesh, were freed from child labour since November 1996 as per the MOU.

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Two accords with Turkey, one with SA signed

By Staff Correspondent

The Presidents of Turkey, South Africa and Palestine praised the people of Bangladesh for their struggle for freedom role against exploitation and the efforts being made at taking the country into the 21st century.

The sentiments of the three dignitaries, now in Bangladesh to attend the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Independence, were conveyed to the Bangladesh side during separate bilateral talks held yesterday evening at the International Conference Centre here.

In a major gesture, Turkey offered warehousing facilities at its ports for storage of Bangladeshi goods for exports to Europe and the Central Asian Republics and signed two accords.

South Africa and the Bangladesh signed a Declaration of Intent to strengthen co-

operation at all levels.

The talks commenced with the Turkish delegation, followed by the South African and the Palestinian delegations.

President Suleyman Demirel led the Turkish side, President Nelson Mandela led the South African team and President Yasser Arafat led the Palestinian side at the talks. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina led the Bangladesh side. She was assisted by Foreign Minister Abul Samad Azad and Foreign Secretary Feroz Sobhan while different ministers from the Bangladesh side sat with their respective counterparts from the visiting teams.

Before the talks, the three presidents had separate exclusive meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Briefing newsmen at the end of three sessions of official talks, Foreign Secretary Fa-

rooz Sobhan said that all the three leaders held the people of Bangladesh in high esteem for their glorious role in the freedom struggle.

Two accords were signed between Turkey and Bangladesh following the talks. One agreement seeks opening of airlinks between the two countries while the other is on Scientific and Cultural Exchange for three years.

The Turkish side offered Bangladesh the use of its ports for storage of goods for export to European and Central Asian states.

The Turkish side also asked Bangladesh to take advantage of its strategic location for bolstering exports since it is a bridge between Europe and Asia.

Turkey also hoped that bilateral cooperation will further

PM's directive to Energy Ministry Take allout steps to reduce power deficit

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the Ministry of Energy to obviate the power deficit in the country taking steps as and when necessary on 'war-footing,' reports UNB.

The Prime Minister asked the authorities concerned to temporarily direct the gas supply to nearby gas-based power generating projects suffering from paucity of gas. Meanwhile, the fertiliser factories could go for schedule overhauling, she said.

The directive came in a briefing session held at the control room of the Prime Minister's office, where latest state of power generation, transmission and distribution were thoroughly reviewed and discussed.

The meeting was also attended by Energy Minister M Noor Uddin Khan and other senior officials.

Earlier, Major General Harun-Or-Rashid, PSO of the Armed Forces Division, presented the survey report of the combined committee on the subject.

The committee is composed of senior civil and military officials and experts of the power sector to apprise the government of the updated situation in the field of power generation and distribution.

The high-level meeting was apprised that the present debacle in the power sector was the cumulative outcome of the series of failures in decision making.

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BNP team meets President, seeks release of leaders

A three-member delegation of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by former minister M K Anwar MP met President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban last night, reports UNB.

During nearly half an hour meeting they informed the President about the arrest of four BNP leaders, Bangabhaban and BNP sources said.

They apprehended that the leaders were arrested only because the BNP had called an 8-hour hartal on March 23 in protest against some measures taken by the government recently.

They denied the allegation that those leaders including former Dhaka City Mayor Mirza Abbas had been engaged in any anti-state or subversive activities as no specific case had been lodged against them.

The BNP delegation sought

Oil and gas exploration 30 cos join pre-bid meeting in London

Thirty international oil companies from 12 countries attended the opening of a pre-bid meeting in London for oil and gas concessions in Bangladesh, according to official information received in Dhaka yesterday, reports BSS.

An official delegation of representatives of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and Petrobangla, explained the open bidding concept, including maximum flexibility with regard to cost recovery and profit sharing.

"We have structured a production sharing contract which gives full consideration both to our own need for accelerated exploration as well as to an attractive return on investment to the oil industry," stated Dr Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, secretary of the ministry.

The bids for 15 large concession areas are due on July 15 this year. When oil or gas is discovered, Petrobangla promises a rich market in a country which experiences almost daily brown-outs.

"Talks on the concept of sub-regional cooperation with India, Nepal and Bhutan are going on," according to A H Mahmood Ali, high commissioner of Bangladesh in the United Kingdom.

The climate of Bangladesh's immediate neighbourhood is, therefore, one of friendship, cooperation and trust for common benefit."

Hartal not for regaining power, says Khaleda

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday said a resistance programme would be announced if the ruling party failed to fulfil its election pledges, reports UNB.

"The half-day hartal was not for BNP... it was for protecting the interest of the people," the Leader of the Opposition, said regarding the March 23 shutdown.

Hailing the newly elected office bearers of the EUCSU, she Day, called upon the student community to remain vigilant against the 'conspiracy to sell out' country's independence and sovereignty.

The Jatityabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) swept the Engineering University Central Students Union (EUCSU) election on Monday and met the BNP Chairperson at her official residence at Minto Road last night.

The former prime minister told the spontaneous gathering that her party is above mere party interest and she did not call the hartal for assuming power again.

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ICC TROPHY



Another victory for Bangladesh

Bangladesh registered their second consecutive victory in the ICC Trophy trouncing West Africa by nine wickets at the PKNS Club ground in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, reports UNB.

Put in to bat, the West Africans were shot out for 82 in 39.1 overs.

Former national skipper Minhazul Abedin Nannu was adjudged man-of-the-match with figures of 5-2-8-3.

Breakdown of power towers: 2 arrested

PABNA, Mar 25: Police arrested two people from a village in Sadar thana in connection with the breakdown of two electricity transmission towers near Ishurdur earlier in the month, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip-off, CID police raided a house at Baikunthapur village and arrested Ramzan Ali, 30, a blacksmith, and his associate Hasmat Ali, 27.

They also recovered a hacksaw blade and a drill machine from the house.