



VOL. IX NO. 48 REGD. NO. DA 781 INTERNET: http://www.dailystarnews.com

FALGOON 23, 1405 BS

DHAKA SUNDAY MARCH 7, 1999

ZILQUAD 18, 1419 HIJRI

16 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 6.00

Historic
March 7
today

By Staff Correspondent

The nation observes the historic March 7 today.

On this day in 1971, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave a call for independence in a historic speech before a mammoth public rally at the then Rannina Race Course Maidan (now Suhrawardy Udyan) in the city.

"Ebarer sangram, amader mukti sangram, ebarer sangram swadhinatar sangram (This struggle is for our freedom, this struggle is for our independence)," thundered Sheikh Mujib, calling upon the people to be ready for independence struggle.

The March 7 speech is considered as a classic oratory which galvanised and inspired the entire nation of then 75 million people.

The nation started non-cooperation with the then Pakistan regime following the speech by Sheikh Mujib, who had emerged as the unchallenged leader of 75 million Bengalis following the general elections of 1970.

Then military-civil-bureaucratic clique of Pakistan refused to accept the people's verdict and pushed then East Pak.

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Khaleda concerned
over 'entry of
illegal arms'

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed grave concern over the reported entry of illegal arms from across the border, reports UNB.

"Terrorism, extortion and abduction are going on unabated engulfing the entire nation," she noted with regret while exchanging views with the newly elected office-bearers of Dhaka Bar Association. President Advocate Abdur Rezzak Khan led the team to the official residence of the Opposition leader.

Begum Zia said huge arms were coming from across the border.

She called upon all nationalist forces to unite and launch an oust government movement for the sake of country's independence and sovereignty.

Meanwhile, newly elected president of the Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association (JUTA) Prof. Abu Syed along with 18 teachers of the University called on Begum Zia at her residence.

Convenor of the University Teachers' Association (UTA) was also present.

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Prayer Timings

March 7

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	5-35
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Ast	4-30	4-35
Maghrib	6-10	6-13
Esha	7-25	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

The Daily Star

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RANGS GROUP

More women MPs in JS demanded

The Daily Star Roundtable

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a roundtable conference yesterday said that woman representation in Parliament should be increased to 64 seats from the 30 seats that are currently reserved for them.

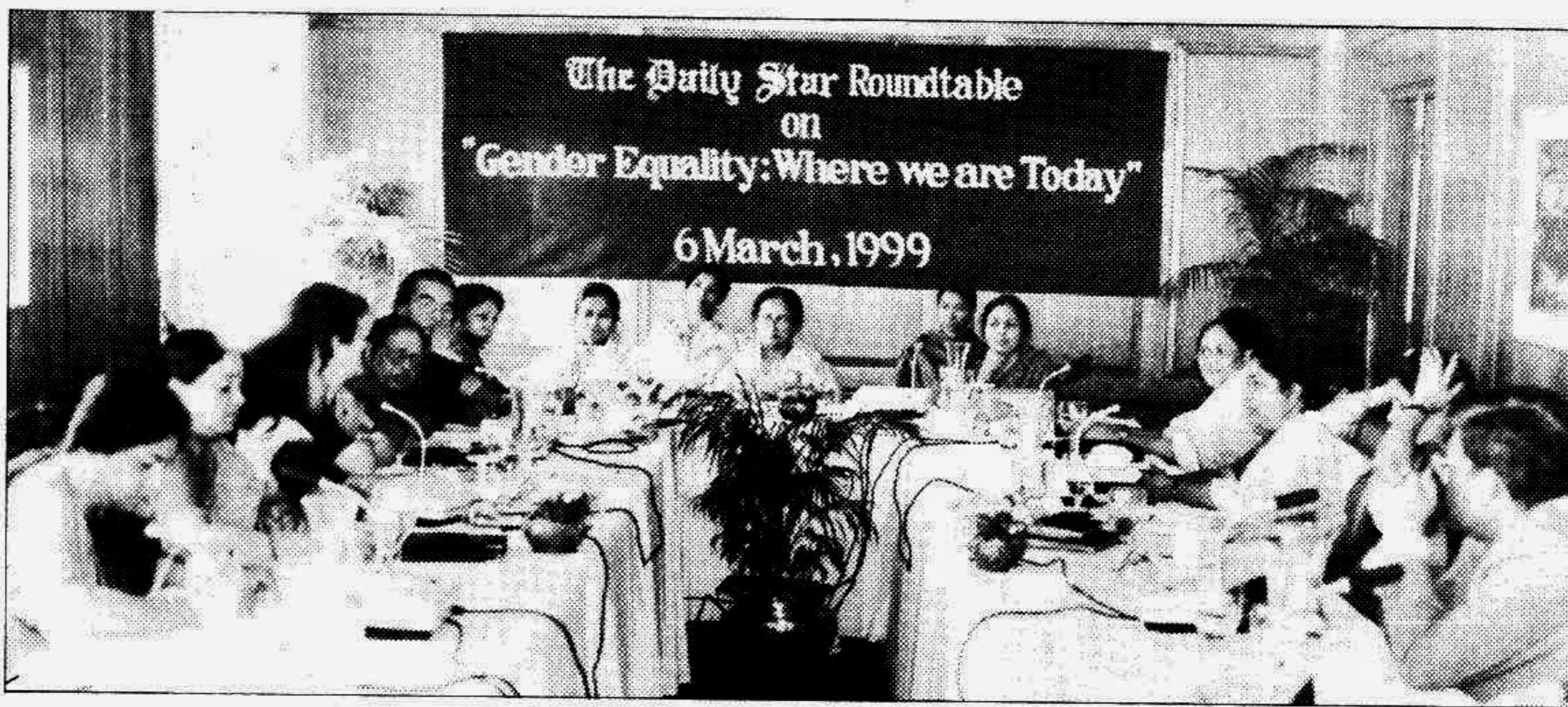
Some speakers felt that all women should be directly elected, while some others argued that reserved seats should continue for a few more years.

They also observed that the ministry of women and children's affairs should act as watchdog to monitor activities rather than involve itself in implementing projects.

They were speaking at The Daily Star organised roundtable on "Gender Equality: Where we are today", held at Hotel Sheraton. Editor Mahfuz Anam moderated the conference.

The participants called for a

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The Roundtable in progress yesterday.

Star photo

Petrobangla okays, ministry intervenes

Okland's bid to transfer 80pc concerns to Tullow

By Sharier Khan

Okland, a low profile American oil company working in blocks 17 and 18, has finally revealed its true colour by applying for transfer of 80 per cent of its concerns in Bangladesh to a small Irish company, Tullow Oil, sources

said. Director of Petrobangla, who is apparently "pursuing" the matter, tried to argue that clearance was given "quickly" because otherwise, Okland's activities would slow down. The argument was however brushed aside, the sources said.

In case of Shell-Cairn's share transfer, Petrobangla held talks, sent documents to the Energy Ministry and sought the government's opinion. One such case still remains un-

solved with the Law Ministry as the PSC does not have provisions for such transfer of share," said a source expressing his surprise at the development. "But share transfer of Okland at such remarkable pace is absolutely suspicious.

It has been rumoured for more than a year now that Okland secretly transferred operational rights in most of the two blocks to Tullow, which stirred many controversies by getting maximum favour from the government in the Second Round Block Bidding.

Okland has finally applied for government permission for transfer of more than three

blocks to Tullow. Asked what is the reason for the transfer, a source said, "We are ready to discuss the forthcoming Upazila Parishad, City Corporation, Zilla Parishad and Gram Parishad elections as

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AL offers dialogue with BNP

The general secretary of ruling Awami League, Zillur Rahman, has made a fresh offer for "open dialogue" with the opposition BNP to resolve the current political problem.

I convey through you our good intention to sit with BNP with open mind at any place, at any time," he told the UNB yesterday.

He categorically said the just-concluded municipal election, which was free, fair and peaceful, cannot be a subject of negotiation.

"Results of municipal election where voters cast their ballots spontaneously and elected their representatives can never be cancelled, as being insisted by the opposition," the LGRD Minister said.

He, however, said: "We are ready to discuss the forthcoming Upazila Parishad, City Corporation, Zilla Parishad and Gram Parishad elections as

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Dry spell threatens next rice crops

By Shehab Ahmed

After a virtually bone dry December-February, meteorologists and agriculturists are now watching the weather warily, looking for the elusive rain-bearing clouds to break the long dry spell, preceded by the worst flood in decades.

Unless the north-westerly dry winds in the upper atmosphere is overwhelmed by southerly /south-easterly wind, it is a bad news," a senior meteorologist watching the situation told The Daily Star yesterday.

Like the weatherman, administrators and farmers alike are watching the weather. If it does not rain soon, rice crops will be affected, agriculture experts said.

There was only two millimetre rainfall in the last three months. The last rainfall was recorded in late November in

the wake of a cyclonic storm. Since then, there was one millimetre rainfall each in Mongla and Rangpur and traces in some places during the last three months, raising fear of a long dry spell as temperature started soaring from this week, the meteorologist said.

The normal average of rainfall is 7.1 mm in December, 9.5 mm in January and 15.3 mm in February.

Asked what has gone wrong, another senior meteorologist said, until last week the north-westerly dry wind in the upper atmosphere up to 10,000 feet was holding the clouds back.

"But we noticed a slight change since yesterday. The southerly / south-easterly winds are being felt a little. If it continues in the next few days and the influence of the winds

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Crucial meeting on Kafco today

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed sits with the Kafco's shareholders and lenders today amid renewed pressure from foreign shareholders' lobby, which is insisting that the government accept the commercial settlement proposed by the defaulting general contractor.

Two Japanese companies, Chiyoda and Marubeni, were awarded the job of general contractor without any bidding, allegedly at an inflated price. Originally valued at roughly US\$ 300 million, the contract eventually went up to about US\$ 425 million, excluding taxes and other substantial items.

The two companies, along with the Japanese aid giving arm, are also shareholders of

the US\$ 600 million joint venture and have lent money to the project. One of them, Marubeni, has an exclusive sales agreement with Kafco for ammonia, one of its two products. The other offtake deal, for urea, went to American-owned Transammonia Ltd at the behest of Marubeni.

The minister said he had called the meeting to try and find a solution to the project's multifaceted problems "once and for all" but stopped short of saying that he was expecting it by today.

Tofail Ahmed has already said the government, being the largest shareholder of Kafco and guarantor of Kafco's loans, does not find the settlement acceptable. "If we accept the plant, and if it does not operate properly, then who's going to compensate," the minister said, speaking to The Daily Star yesterday.

Just ahead of the crucial meeting, Japan's Export Import Bank (Eximbank), a governmental agency which leads a syndicate of Japanese banks with US\$ 150 million in outstanding loans to Kafco, sent a strongly-worded note to the company and all its shareholders, calling the commercial settlement the "most probable and appropriate solution".

The minister said he is ready to discuss the forthcoming Upazila Parishad, City Corporation, Zilla Parishad and Gram Parishad elections as

the settlement, which include the commercial settlement that may be the most probable and appropriate solution we suppose."

The settlement, as proposed by the general contractor, calls for plant acceptance with all its faults which have forced the Chittagong-based factory to shut down as many as 37 times since it went into production in December 1994. The settlement will also give immunity to the contractors from Kafco's compensation demands in return for only US\$ 16 million, a figure well below the US\$ 25 million performance bond.

The minister said the company has lost as much as US\$ 120 million in lost production

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SNS to take to streets if its demands ignored

By Staff Correspondent

Sammilito Nari Samaj (SNS) yesterday threatened that all women's organisations in the country will take to streets if the proposed women and child repression prevention law is enacted ignoring suggestions of women's rights bodies.

The SNS in a statement said the Cabinet has made a mockery of democracy by approving the proposed law incorporating in it all the clauses of the Women and Child Repression Prevention Act (WCRPA), excluding only the one dealing

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with the rights of women.

The SNS said the proposed law is a mockery of democracy by approving the proposed law incorporating in it all the clauses of the Women and Child Repression Prevention Act (WCRPA), excluding only the one dealing

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Bahrain's Emir dead, son assumes power



File photo of Sheikh Issa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the new Emir of Bahrain.

MANAMA, Mar 6: The Emir of Bahrain, a key Western ally who struggled to subdue unrest from the Persian Gulf island's Shi'ite Muslim majority, died today after suffering a heart attack in his palace, reports AP.

Sheikh Issa bin Salman Al Khalifa, 65, collapsed shortly after a morning meeting with visiting US Defense Secretary William Cohen, said an Information Ministry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Emir did not show any signs of ill health earlier today, said the official, who added, "He was perfectly normal."

The official Gulf News Agency quoted a palace statement as saying that the Emir, who ascended the throne in 1961, died of a heart attack. Sheikh Issa's son, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, quickly assumed the throne.

"I am assuming the rule of Bahrain, relying on God, exerting all the efforts possible to serve our country and our people," Sheikh Hamad, 49, said in a statement released by the news agency. He noted he would continue his father's policies.

Thousands of people gathered along streets, waiting to see the ambulance carrying Sheikh Isa's body pass en route to the royal cemetery in Riffa, 20 kilometers south of Manama, the capital.

Cars carrying dignitaries streamed into Riffa, where sobbing men and women scattered flowers on the streets in a traditional Islamic funeral custom. About 10,000 people attended the burial, which lasted

less than half an hour.

Members of the royal family and ordinary Bahrainis helped carry the wooden stretcher from the ambulance to the grave, with mourners pushing their way toward the body, wrapped in a gray-blue cloth. Sheikh Hamad and Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa attended the funeral.

Flags at government buildings were flying at half-staff as an official mourning period — three months for the government sector, five days for the private sector — began.

The transition of power was expected to be smooth because

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4 policemen hurt in gunfight with 'terrorists' in Ctg: 3 held

CHITTAGONG, Mar 6: Four policemen were injured in a gunfight with 'terrorists' at Tufalai in the city early this morning, reports UNB.

ASP of Panchalish Zone Obidur Rahman, SI Golapur Rahman, constables Noor Hossain and Mustafa Kamal were admitted to the police hospital with bullet wounds.

Police said the gunfight ensued when 'terrorists' suspected to be members of a BCL faction, opened fire at the police who came to round up an accused in the Kader killing case. Kader was shot dead in factional feud recently in CHT Polytechnic Institute.

Police, however, arrested Sayem, Rana and Khokon Uddin from the spot. They are identified as terrorists and accused in several killing cases, police said.

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Meanwhile, owners of some 600 petrol pumps in the city went on a 24-hour strike protesting Thursday's looting of a petrol pump and killing of Abu Khalil Bhulu at Love Lane in the city.

Petroleum Distributors' Samity demanded immediate arrest of the killers and recovery of the rifle and money.

Another source said over 100 business houses in the city are jointly preparing a list of the terrorists for submission to the government.