

What's on today....

Discussion & cultural programme: Sam-milita Sangskritik Jote has organised a discussion and cultural function in observance of Independence Day. Venue: Central Shaheed Minar. Time: 4:30 pm.

Film show: Chitra Nadir Pare' by Tanvir Mokammel will be screened on the occasion of Independence Day. Venue: Public Library auditorium. Time: 3 pm, 5 pm and 7 pm.

Orientation: The University of Asia Pacific (UAP) will hold the orientation programme of its spring 2000 semester. Venue: UAP premises, House No 71, Rd No 5A, Dhanmondi R/A. Time: 9:30 am.

National seminar: The School of Environmental Science and Management, Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) is organising a national seminar 'Contamination of Ground Water by Arsenic in Bangladesh: Speciation, Source and Mitigation.' Venue: IUB campus, Bashundhara. Time: 10 am.

..... and tomorrow

Film show: Chitra Nadir Pare' by Tanvir Mokammel will be screened on the occasion of Independence Day. Venue: Public Library auditorium. Time: 10 am, 12 noon, 3 pm, 5 pm and 7 pm.

Weather

Temperature may rise

Weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country during the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Slight rise in day temperature is expected across the country during the period, Met Office said.

The country's highest temperature was 36.0 degree Celsius recorded yesterday at Chittagong and the lowest was 13.4 degree Celsius recorded at Dinajpur.

The sun sets in the capital today at 6.12 pm and rises tomorrow at 5.57 am.

Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in Percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	31.6	20.5	51	30
Chittagong	36.0	19.4	59	58
Rajshahi	31.7	19.0	75	50
Khulna	33.0	17.6	49	65
Barisal	32.8	18.8	55	61
Sylhet	32.0	18.5	61	54
Cox's Bazar	35.8	20.4	51	55

Clinton's encounter with Bengal tiger

JAIPUR, India, Mar 24: US President Bill Clinton danced with women in a rural village Thursday and lucked out on a safari when he saw a Bengal tiger come close to pouncing on a deer. Now he concludes a five-day trip to India by visiting a high-tech centre and the country's financial capital, reports AP.

The President said that at the request of wildlife experts, he will issue a plea for preservation of India's endangered tigers against continuing poaching. Twenty of the animals were lost last year, he said.

The president leaves India with at least one regret: He followed the advice of White House advisers who, fearing embarrassing pictures, persuaded him not to ride on a painted elephant. The elephant also happens to be the symbol of the US Republican Party. "I desperately wanted to ride on an elephant's back," Clinton lamented later. "I've always wanted to do it."

Clinton avoided a run-in with frisky monkeys by surrendering the lei he was wearing around his neck. "I don't mind these monkeys liking me but I don't want to get 4,700 shots if they had bit me," Clinton laughed.

Clinton's final day in India on Friday opens in Hyderabad, a hub of India's emerging high-tech industry with offices of Microsoft, Oracle, GE Capital and other American firms.

He ends the day in Bombay, India's business centre, his last stop before visiting Pakistan on Saturday.

On Thursday, Clinton went to the rural village of Nayla and heard stories of women battling for higher wages, education for girls, better social conditions and against forced marriages.

"Awake, women of my land. It's time we empowered ourselves," they sang in Hindi.

"There was an edge to those women today," Clinton said admiringly later. They had something it was special. They knew they'd done something that mattered."

In the courtyard outside a community centre, the president joined the women in a traditional folk dance. They showed Clinton with yellow and red flower petals that stuck in

Man who found missing Oscars gets \$50,000

LOS ANGELES, Mar 24: The scrap metal dealer who found 52 of 55 stolen Oscars while on a scavenger hunt behind a cheap supermarket was given a \$50,000 reward on Thursday and said his story should serve as a lesson that honesty pays, reports Reuters.

Willie Fulgear, who found the boxed statuettes near a trash bin behind a discount grocery store and alerted authorities, was awarded the money by Roadway Express Co, one of whose employees had been charged with stealing them.

Fulgear, who currently lives in a one-room apartment in Los Angeles, said he will use the money to buy a home in his native Mississippi.



Norm Martin, President, Mardel Group of Hospitals of USA, Dr Hebab A Quazi, President, Martech International of USA and Dr ASM Badruddoza, Managing Director, Akashdeep Health Care Limited, signed an MOU at a ceremony in Hotel Sonargaon on Monday for establishing an international standard hospital in the city. M Mokammel Haque, Executive Chairman, Board of Investment, was present as chief guest on the occasion.



National Garments Workers' Federation organised a 'human chain' programme in front of the National Press Club yesterday demanding holiday on Friday.

Arsenic victims in Gulbahar see ray of hope

US expert begins research

By Asad-uz Zaman, back from Kachua, Chandpur

In a remote village of Kachua thana under Chandpur district, the members of some six families are no longer afraid of the arsenic contaminated tubewell waters as they now have a 'simple' and 'cheap' technology for removing arsenic from the contaminated waters.

The villagers of Gulbahar, about 96 kilometres from Dhaka city, enthused over the new technology.

Dr Xiaoguan Meng, a researcher of USA and co-inventor of the technology, has provided some chemicals and equipment, which are available in the local markets, to the families as part of his final-stage research.

0.8 PPM in the water before filtering. Replying to a question, he said that if a family wants to use 40 liters of arsenic free water in a day, they have to spend only about five US dollars a year for purchase of the chemicals and equipment needed.

While demonstrating the process of arsenic removal from contaminated tubewell water to journalists and other guests, including the state minister for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Meng used a very small packed of chemicals and a filter made of plastic buckets and sand.

He said apart from the six



State Minister for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir drinking a glass of purified water after it was made arsenic-free using relatively cheap chemical procedure. — Star photo

Meng, an associated professor of the Stevens Institute of Technology of USA, has conducted such types of research in Kishoregonj and Munshiganj in collaboration with the NGO Earth Identity Project.

Describing various aspects of the technology to a group of journalists, he said it is possible to remove arsenic easily from the badly contaminated waters by using simple and cheap chemicals and equipment.

He also said that not only the arsenic, but other heavy metals found in water including mercury, lead, iron, pesticides can be removed by use of correct technology.

Mentioning the permissible limit of arsenic in waters in the US as 0.05 PPM, the researcher claimed that the level of arsenic were 0.006 to 0.007 PPM in the tubewell waters of Gulbahar village after filtering. The level of arsenic was 0.1 to

families, other villagers of Gulbahar are also enthusiastic to procure the chemical and equipment to clean their drinking waters.

He began his 3-week long research in Gulbahar on Thursday and the result will be further analysed in the USA to give it a final shape.

After the final results of the research, the technology would be made available for the people of Bangladesh, he said.

Nasrine N Karim, director general of NGO Earth Identity Project, said that the technology for removing arsenic would be transferred to the local people after the final research results.

The researchers will train local people to make them familiar with the equipment and a chemical plant might be set up in Bangladesh for commercial production after the final results of the research are out, she added.

Taiwan's 'Mr Democracy' departs political life

TAIPEI, Mar 24: Taiwan's Lee Teng-hui, once dubbed 'Mr Democracy' for his crusading presidency, today made a bitter departure from political life that may overshadow his significant legacy to the island, reports AFP.

Lee, 77, stepped down from his powerful role as chairman of the Kuomintang (KMT), taking full responsibility for the party's disastrous defeat in Saturday's election.

He urged members to face the "cruel reality" of handing over power to the opposition for the first time since 1949, when the nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek fled China after losing a civil war to Mao Zedong's communists.

Under the 12 years of the so-called Lee Teng-hui era, Taiwan ushered in democracy, transformed an agrarian economy into an industrial powerhouse and elevated its international profile despite Beijing's diplomatic blockade.

But like so many other political strongmen, at the end Lee was deaf to demands for further reforms.

He is credited with guiding Taiwan away from authoritarianism in a "peaceful revolution" but at the same time established a dictatorship within the KMT.

The foreign media honoured him with the nickname "Mr Democracy" for his early reforms, but disgruntled party members dubbed him the "KMT terminator" for widening internal rifts and forcing out reform-minded leaders.

President-elect Chen Shui-bian captured 39.3 per cent of the vote Saturday, rallying 4.9 million people in support of his fight against the corruption, influence-peddling, political privileges and inefficiency that were trademarks of the KMT.

Lee was born in Taiwan in 1923, which was then under a 50-year Japanese occupation.

Obituary

NEW DELHI, Mar 24: Karimul Hoque Chowdhury, a Bangladeshi banker, died at the Escorts Hospital here yesterday. He was 51, reports BSS.

Earlier, Chowdhury, Deputy General Manager of Rupali Bank (Cantonment Branch), underwent bypass surgery at the same hospital.

His body will be flown to Dhaka by British Airways on March 26, a Bangladesh High Commission source said.

Hundreds of Chinese boats intruding Taiwan waters

TAIPEI, Mar 24: Hundreds of Chinese fishing vessels intruded into the waters of a frontier Taiwanese island today in an apparently orchestrated intimidation gesture, a report said, reports AFP.

A Defense Ministry spokesman told AFP that the number of Chinese fishing boats sailing off Tungyin, one of several Taiwan-controlled islets near the mainland, has increased to about 240, the state-funded Central News Agency reported.

A Defense Ministry spokesman told AFP that the reports were being checked.

Dozens of Chinese fishing vessels were also seen in the area earlier this week after the election of pro-independence Chen Shui-bian as Taiwan's new president.

Political

From Page 1

and countering the Opposition agitation. The schedule for the tour, second of its kind in three months, is expected to be decided later this month, sources said.

A five-day tour of AL central leaders was taken up in January 19-19. But it failed to deliver the expected result as most of the leaders did not visit the areas they were assigned.

PM: US visit

From Page 1

The core entourage will comprise State Minister Abul Hasan Chowdhury and some senior officials.

Her next trip to Washington, DC is due to take place in October. This trip would be the first bilateral official trip at the invitation of US President Bill Clinton, who extended the invitation during his Bangladesh tour this month. The exact date for the state visit to the US capital will be mutually worked out and is likely to be preceded by a visit to the United Nations General Assembly, which she is expected to address.

Mob-BDR

From Page 1

admitted to local hospital.

Police and witnesses said BDR jawan Alauddin had an altercation with confectionery owner Shahidul Islam at 7 am over purchasing a coke. At one stage, Alauddin slapped Shahid, but local people then settled the matter.

Alauddin went back to his camp and returned to the area along with 25 to 30 BDR men equipped with sticks. They beat up the people standing on the road and damaged some houses, leaving 15 people injured.

After the incident, local people put up barricade at Gulshan crossing on Mangalbari road disrupting road communications for one and a half-hour.

The situation became normal after intervention by Joy-purhat Pourasava Chairman Khandakar Waliuzzaman Alam and district unit Awami League President Abdul Aziz Molla and ASP (Circle) Shahjahan Ali.

Commanding Officer of 5-Rifle battalion Lt Col Abdul Khaleque confirmed the incident. But it could not be known if any action was taken against the BDR men.

Opposition

From Page 1

Shamsul Islam in the chair. The meeting was held at 29 Minto Road, the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

Fresh action programmes, including hartal, will be announced at the meeting, sources said.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Golam Azam and Island Oikya Jote Chairman Azizul Haq will address the meeting from one platform.

The alliance held similar programme at Paltan Maidan in the capital on February 13.

Sources said the Liaison Committee will meet again soon to finalise fresh action programmes to be announced from Chittagong on April 4.

BNP leader Anwar Zahid, JP leader Kazi Firoz Rashid, Jamaat leaders Mohammad Kunnuzzaman and Abdul Qader Mollah and IOJ leader ARM Abdul Matin attended the meeting.

FBI agents in Chile seek evidence for possible Pinochet indictment

SANTIAGO, Mar 24: As a US FBI team arrived here to gather evidence on the 1976 murder in Washington of an exiled Chilean politician, the US Justice Department was reported Thursday to be aiming for a US indictment of former dictator Augusto Pinochet in connection with the killing, reports AFP.

The Chilean interior ministry confirmed Thursday that the Fy regime headed by Pinochet.

The Washington Post newspaper reported Thursday that the US Justice Department had reactivated a long-dormant grand jury investigation into the crime.

The department was acting under pressure from US-based human rights activists for actions carried out under his regime, these groups have pressured the US Justice Department to revive the investigation above all to determine whether final responsibility for Letelier's murder lay with Pinochet, it said.

If a US indictment does result, Pinochet would be unlikely to be extradited to stand trial in the United States, according to the Washington Post.

India arrests militant over Sikh massacre in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, March 24: Indian police have arrested a Muslim militant they said had confessed to helping two groups of foreign separatists suspected of massacring 36 Sikh villagers earlier this week, a top official said Friday, reports AFP.

The Kashmir police have arrested a local resident of Chatsinghpura, 24-year-old Mohammad Yaqoob Wagay, who participated in the carnage on Thursday, Kamal Pande, secretary in the home ministry, said.

"It is a major breakthrough as Wagay disclosed that the carnage was perpetrated by a joint group, predominantly consisting of foreign mercenaries."

The killings took place in Chatsinghpura village, some 70 kilometers south of Srinagar on the eve of US President Bill Clinton's five-day trip on Monday.

No one has claimed responsibility for the killings, the first major violence against Sikhs in Kashmir since the Muslim insurgency began in 1989, but India has blamed Pakistan-backed Muslim separatists.

"The group was jointly led by one Abu Mahaj of the Lashkar-e-Toiba outfit and Saifullah of the Hizbul Mujahideen," Pande said.

Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Hizbul Mujahideen are two of the main Muslim separatist groups in the troubled state.

"The terrorists were wearing military uniforms, Saifullah and Abu Mahaj who led the groups told that orders had been received to carry out the killing of the Sikhs of the village," Pande said.

"They (Sikhs) were collected on the pretext that a crackdown was being conducted by the (Indian) army. Wagay was along with them when they were shot dead. He was well known in the village."

"Some of the members of the group used to visit the village on earlier occasions and Wagay organised their meals and provided logistic support," he said, adding that Wagay was identified by some of the villagers.

He said investigations were continuing and Wagay had disclosed some of the names of other militants who were involved in the massacre.

"They picked the soft targets. The idea was to create mayhem," Pande said.

"American Beauty" edges ahead in run-up to Oscars

LOS ANGELES, March 24: It was a long time coming, but "American Beauty" emerged Friday as a slim favorite in what has been an unusually unpredictable contest for best picture in this year's Academy Awards, reports AFP.

"American Beauty" is the dominant movie this year, and it happens to think that it's going to sweep," entertainment columnist Barry Koltow told AFP, days before the ceremony.

Jonathan Taylor, an executive editor at Daily Variety, agreed, but warned that the race for the coveted Oscar statuette was not over yet.

"This is an unusually wide-open year for the Oscars," Taylor told AFP. "Most years, there's a clear front-runner. With movies like 'Schindler's List,' 'Driving Miss Daisy,' 'Forrest Gump,' you knew (who would win) by January."

"By now, there's a sort of consensus that it will probably be 'American Beauty,'" he said.

The movie, a satire of suburban America directed by Briton Sam Mendes, garnered eight nominations and has won other prizes, including a Golden Globe for best director and an award from the Directors Guild of America.

"I don't think anybody will be surprised if The Cider House Rules" pulls a punch, Taylor added, referring to the film based on the John Irving novel and directed by Lasse Hallstrom of Sweden.

The neck-and-neck nature of the contest makes it all but impossible to pick a winner, said Las Vegas oddsmaker Lenny del Genio.

"The Cider House Rules" and "American Beauty" were both at even money in del Genio's book until Thursday, when an increase in money on "American Beauty" saw the film edge ahead at six to five.

Three other films are also in the running: "The Insider," based on the story of the tobacco industry's first whistleblower; "The Green Mile," a prison drama starring Tom Hanks; and "The Sixth Sense," a psycho-thriller whose child star Haley Joel Osment is nominated for best supporting actor.

Tom Cruise is the only sure bet, del Genio said. Cruise is nominated for best supporting actor for his role as Frank T.J. Mackey, a macho self-help sex guru, in the offbeat, emotional saga "Magnolia."

There could be some surprises in other categories, Koltow added.

"Denzel (Washington) could be one," he said. Washington nabbed the best actor nomination for his role as the American boxing champ Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, who spent 19 years in prison under a wrongful murder conviction, in "The Hurricane."

Although Washington won critical kudos for his portrayal, critics lambasted the film for allegedly stretching the truth in its dramatization of the non-fictional tale.

"Washington certainly deserves to win," Koltow added. "But the controversy killed the movie."

All the bet-hedging in the world cannot change the verdict of the Academy, a body restricted to 5,600 individuals who have achieved distinction in movie-making.

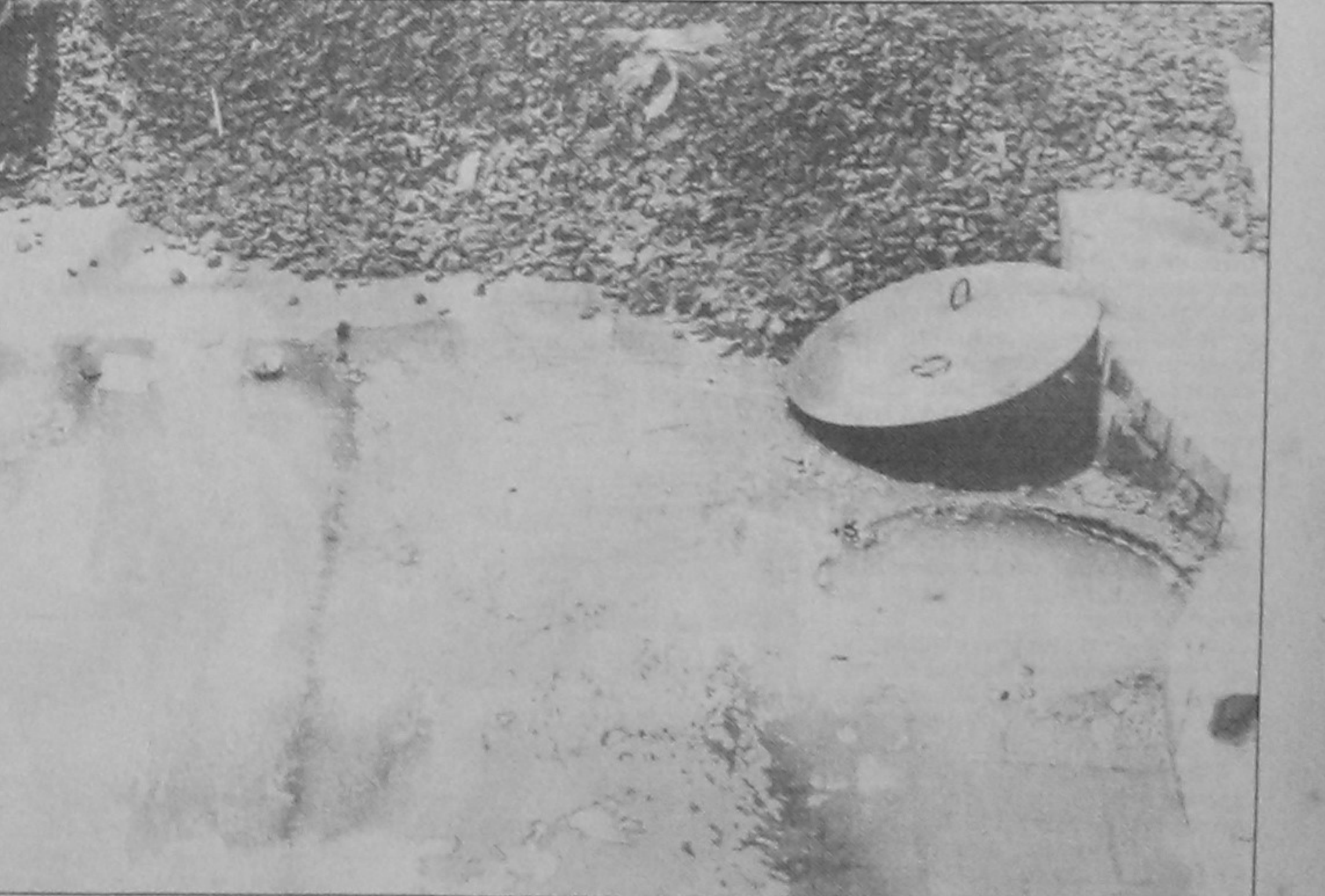
Their vote was final by the end of the day Thursday, when ballots were due at the offices of Pricewaterhouse, the Academy said in a statement.

Comedian Billy Crystal, a seasoned and beloved master of ceremonies at the Oscars, will present the awards Sunday in Los Angeles' Shrine Auditorium.

The voting deadline had been extended two days after hundreds of ballots disappeared in the mail -- in a mishap that was not the only one to plague this year's contest.



Traffic on the section of Mirpur Road leading from Science Laboratory to Nilkhet crossing plied one-way yesterday. This picture was taken in the afternoon yesterday and shows a remarkably congestion-free road in front of Gausia market. — Star photo



Dirty and stinking water overflows from a sewerage line at Karwan Bazar in front of The Daily Star office. Many a city sewerage pipeline lie overflowing or broken, but there is no attempt to repair these. The brunt is borne by those who use these roads (See editorial on page 4). — Star photo