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All waste, but who cares?

Road divider on Airport Road dismantled only to be put back

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After taking apart the road dividers on a quarter-kilometre stretch of the Airport Road in September, the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) is now putting back the concrete shards to restore the dismantled structure.

RHD workers were seen putting the dividers back in place with a light crane on Tuesday.

The dismantling was stopped in mid-September at the prime minister's instruction following criticisms from public and government quarters.

Even Communication Minister Nazmul Huda was in the dark about the dividers' removal ordered by his ministry.

"We had to stop in the face of a public outcry following press

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Roads and Highways Department workers replace concrete blocks to reconstruct the road divider on Airport Road yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Dhakaites welcome New Year amid tight security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The annual New Year's Eve celebrations were held in the capital last night amidst fanfare and jubilation but accompanied by tight security to prevent any untoward incident.

As clock struck 12 midnight, thousands joined the celebrations to greet the year 2004.

Hotels and nightclubs arranged special New Year's celebrations for partygoers preparing to dance the night away.

Young men came out on the streets in hordes to have fun as they welcomed the New Year.

Thousands of police and paramilitary BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) patrolled the streets to watch over

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Announcement

Today's issue of The Daily Star carries a 12-page New Year special along with Rising Stars. The price remains unchanged.

Peacekeepers' bodies flown home

STAR DESK

The nation's 15 valiant army personnel for world peace returned home as martyrs in the sombre winter evening yesterday as Bangladesh mourned the tragedy that marked its biggest military loss in a single accident since independence.

The country paused in respect amid a melancholic strain, as a special United Nations (UN) aircraft flew in Zia International Airport at about 6:50pm, carrying the coffins of army officers killed in the December 25 air crash in the West African country of Benin, UNB reports.

Draped in national and UN flags, the bodies were carried off the plane the military way one after another.

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

The coffins of 15 army officers, draped in national and UN flags, lie in state after arrival from Benin at Zia International Airport last night.

Tigers kill 3 in the Sundarbans

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sakshira

Tigers killed two fishermen and a bawali (woodcutter) in the Sundarbans in the last two days.

A tiger attacked and killed Abu Daud, a woodcutter of village Kurikaunia in Assasuni upazila, when he and others were cutting trees in Kachikata area Tuesday morning, witnesses said.

Later, other bawalis recovered the body.

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A YEAR IN REFLECTION

A dismal walk and some hope

MAHFUZ ANAM

Today I want to tell our readers the story of our country through a walk around the heart of our city that we love but are destroying every day. I start from Poet Nazrul Islam's graveyard, located next to the Dhaka University Mosque.

As I sat in a corner of the mazaar (grave) I couldn't help but notice what a unique statement the whole place made about our national character—showing eulogy on the occasions of birth and death anniversaries of our heroes and then burying them in heaps of dirt, fallen leaves, untrimmed grass, animal waste and overall neglect for the rest of the year.

We call Nazrul our 'National Poet' (I have never understood what it really means), and yet we miss no chance to destroy the values he stood for and wrote about. What ever happened to his messages of justice and freedom? Bangladesh today is a land where justice is available, if at all, only to the rich, so said the sitting chief justice just the other day. *Ami gahi shanyer gaan?* (I sing the song of equality) was Nazrul's lifelong song and he would sing it with such passion. Today, Bangladesh has a greater gap between the rich and the poor and more unearned income and black money in the hands of a corrupt few than it was ever imaginable.

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The Daily Star wishes its readers, advertisers, patrons and well-wishers a Happy New Year.

PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Savings certificate interest rate cut

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has lowered interest rates on savings certificates by 1.5 percent in a bid to meet International Monetary Fund's (IMF) conditions.

The new rates apply to savings certificates purchased from today.

The government claimed the step would encourage more investment in the capital market, deposit in banks and reduce pressure on the

annual budget.

In a circular yesterday, the government however withdrew the existing 5 percent income tax at source on the profit of savings certificates.

The interest rates for savings certificates of a five-year term are 7.5 percent in the first year, 8.25 percent in the second, 9 percent in the third, 9.75 percent in the fourth and 11 percent in the fifth year.

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