



Prominent former students of Dhaka University (DU) gather on the campus among 1,500 others to attend Dhaka University Millennium Convention 2004, organised by the DU Alumni Association yesterday.

DU Millennium Convention

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka University Millennium Convention, organised by the DU Alumni Association, yesterday turned out as a great reunion of former students, who got a rare moment to reflect on their student years.

Over 1,500 former students, who passed out between 1927 and 2003, participated in the convention and reminisced about their joys and sorrows, hopes and despairs, happiness and dejection on the campus in yesteryears.

Alumni Association President AMA Muhit, Convention Organising Committee Chairman Syed Monjur Elahi and DU Vice-Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz opened the event at the DU playground hoisting the national, alumni association and DU flags.

Many leaders of professions were among the former students who converged on the colourful campus celebrating the arrival of spring.

Presided over by Syed Monjur Elahi, the inaugural function was addressed, among others, by former chief adviser to the caretaker government Justice Habibur R a h m a n .

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THE STRENGTH WITHIN

Weaving together life's strands

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

Monzu, a working mother from Bishnupur in Tangail was abandoned penniless with two children when her husband went abroad. Her in-laws drove her out and she was forced to find shelter in a basic cardboard shanty. Her children went days without food and clothing and the family's only income came in the form of Monzu's meagre wages from working as a loom labourer.

Now she owns looms and a large plot and both her children are attending school. In the late 1990s, the number of weavers of famous Tangail saris in Pathrail was dwindling after an exodus of Hindu weavers to India. The weaving community was only a pale shade of the past. A few high-profile weavers controlled weaving. Mohajans (loan sharks) were charging small weavers high interest on loans and high fees to market the saris in the capital. Microcredit lenders in the area spurred a new generation of weavers like Monzu from impoverished farm and loom labourers. Olowa-Borotia village in

Tangail Sadar upazila is such a case where villagers have switched to weaving as a profession instead of labouring for bigger merchants and working odd jobs that left them malnourished – without a stable income or savings. The merchants exploited a lot of loom labourers, who, despite weaving skills, were living on a pittance. Rahela, who used to work as a loom labourer and as maid during the weaving off-season, was short on confidence because of her inexperience. "My husband used to pull a rickshaw and our incomes were not enough to take care of ourselves and our children."

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Nipah-like virus claims 14 in Bangladesh, says WHO

AFP, Geneva

Fourteen people have died in Bangladesh from an outbreak of a viral infection which resembles the deadly Nipah virus, the World Health Organisation said yesterday. Tests by the US Centre for Disease Control have so far confirmed "Nipah-like virus" in nine of the 42 cases which were first reported on January 4, WHO said in a statement.

The infection was found in Manikganj and Rajbari and another 45 suspected cases are being investigated, it added.

Nipah, which induces flu-like symptoms that often lead to encephalitis and a coma, jumped the species barrier from fruit bats to pigs and then to humans in Malaysia in October 1998. Experts from the United States

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BHASANTEK HOUSING PROJECT Grabbers stand in way of slum dwellers' rehab

TAWFIQUE ALI

The slum land in Bhasantek was acquired around a decade ago to rehabilitate slum-dwellers, but the plan never gained ground due to legal tangles blocking eviction of encroachers.

"The lack of political will on part of both the present and past governments is responsible for such a long delay in the project implementation," said Kazi Faruq, president of Proshika, a non-governmental organisation involved in the welfare of slum-dwellers.

Sources said the land ministry recently assigned North South Property Development Limited, a private developer, to implement the Tk 347 crore Bhasantek Rehabilitation Project in five years

to rehabilitate around 15,000 slum-dwelling families of some 90,000 people.

"Our efforts to take control of the land have been thwarted by the encroachers including some real estate developers holding a stake in the land. It is difficult to evict these people, many of whom are influential. Consequently, the project is being delayed time and again," a land ministry source said on condition of anonymity.

He alleged that the Rupashi Bangla Bahumukhi Samabaya Samity, which has approval for 4.5 acres, is occupying 7.5 acres.

The Samity is developing the land and building brick structures on it adjacent to the government housing project.

No Samity official was available for comments.

"They (Samity people) occasionally come to the project site," said Shamim, member of an Ansar team deployed at the site.

There are many beneficiaries of the situation who collect fund for the slum from foreign donors, said the source in the land ministry.

He said the ministry was working to get the project plan approved by the housing ministry and the department of land survey so that no vested quarter could obstruct it.

The illegal occupants often file lawsuits against the ministry's eviction bids. They have lost the legal battle once, but have filed

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Gaibandha men didn't threaten Indian consulate, local police say

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Police investigations found two residents of Gaibandha, named as signatories to a recent letter to the Indian High Commission office in Rajshahi threatening bomb attack, not involved with the act.

The letter dated February 7 and bearing a Gaibandha address was posted from another town, which reached S Roy, assistant commissioner of Indian consulate in Rajshahi, the next day.

Sarifur Islam and Shahinul Islam of V-Aid Road, Gaibandha were named among the senders who claimed to be members of Harkatul Jihad, an extremist Islamist group. The letter reportedly threatened to blow up Roy's office unless he paid Tk5 crore.

Receiving message from Rajshahi, local police carried out

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Once driven out of home by her in-laws, a woman runs a shuttle on her own loom in Bishnupur in Tangail in her struggle to break out of poverty.

PHOTO: STAR

Maid found dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The body of a 19-year-old maidservant was found hanging at her employer's house in the city's Motijheel area yesterday.

Lovely, the deceased, who some locals said died from torture by her employer Ahmed Rizvi and his family members, had bruises on her neck and shoulder.

Rizvi told police that Lovely was beaten for the theft of a 2-tola gold ornament on February 2, hence the bruises.

Local people also alleged that police are trying to portray the

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WMD would never be found in Iraq

Secret US study said before invasion

AFP, Washington

A classified US intelligence study done three months before the invasion of Iraq predicted that weapons of mass destruction might never be found there, the USA Today newspaper said yesterday.

The newspaper said the study by a team of US intelligence analysts, military officers and Pentagon civilians warned that US tactics, guerrilla warfare, looting and lying by Iraqi officials would undermine the search for banned Iraqi weapons.

The document was described to the daily by three high-ranking US intelligence officials. USA Today said it had also obtained portions of the study.

"Locating a programme that... has been driven by denial and deception imperatives is no small task," the paper quotes the December 2002 report as saying. "Prolonged insecurity with fac-

tional violence and guerilla forces still at large would be the worst outcome for finding Saddam's WMD arsenal."

Officials said the report went to the National Security Council but was not specifically shown to President George W. Bush, the paper said.

The findings diverge from pre-war statements by US officials saying that caches of banned weapons would be found in Iraq.

Another report says, President Bush is losing ground to Democratic frontrunner John Kerry, as a majority of Americans now believes he either lied or deliberately exaggerated evidence that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll published yesterday.

Only 52 percent of those sur

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Road accidents kill 12 in N'ganj, Feni

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twelve people were killed and 34 others injured in road accidents in Narayanganj and Feni yesterday.

Seven were killed in Narayanganj while the rest in Feni.

Our Narayanganj correspondent reported that seven people were killed and 29 others injured in two road accidents in Arahazar and Bandar upazila of the district.

The first accident took place on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway at Purinda Bazar under Arahazar upazila when a truck hit a Narsingdi-bound taxicab from behind, killing four of a family on the spot.

The dead are Abdul Hamid Bishu, 55, his son Awlad Hossain, 25, son-in-law Mizan, 24, and brother-in-law Ali Ullah, 45. The seriously injured cab driver, Sujon, was admitted to Narayanganj hospital.

In Malibagh area under Bandar upazila, three people were killed and 29 others injured when a Dhaka-bound passenger bus fell

into a roadside ditch at noon. Survivors said the driver lost control over the vehicle as one of its front wheels burst.

Identity of the dead could not be known. The injured were admitted to different hospitals and clinics at Narayanganj.

In Feni, five members of a family were killed and five others injured when a Chiora bound autorickshaw collided head-on with a Feni bound bus at Mohipal on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway in the afternoon, according to BSS.

The dead are Nipa Akhtar, 7, Halima Khatun, 60, Mafia Khatun, 70, and Masuma Khatun, 50, and Zakia Akhtar.

Police said the dead were the passengers of the autorickshaw and hailed from Dumurgaon village under Senbagh upazila of Noakhali.

The injured, identified as Sabuj, 8, Rupashi Akhtar, 6, Shohag, 7, Jalal Uddin, 28, and Kamal Uddin, 28, driver of the autorickshaw -- were admitted to Feni Sadar Hospital.

Prayer Timings		
February 14		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-59	6-05
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

'Healthcare system hardly benefits the vulnerable'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable in the city yesterday called for building a citizen's movement to press the government so that improved healthcare services for all is ensured.

The existing healthcare delivery system is far from a proper one as it hardly benefits the vulnerable section of the society, especially women and children, they said.

The roundtable on 'healthcare, expectations, reality and way out' was organised by Health and Hope,

a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

The participants demanded strict control of the health ministry on all private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres as also on private practice of medicals.

They also demanded modernisation of medical education.

In the absence of proper planning based on assessment of needs, a lot of fund is misused in the health sector. Expensive medical equipment and apparatus lie unused in many hospitals, the speakers mentioned.

The government constructed hundreds of community clinics (CCs) for healthcare delivery at grassroots level but most of the CCs are lying unutilised, they pointed out.

One speaker alleged about 30 per cent of drugs meant for distribution among patients at the medical college hospitals are misappropriated. Besides, patients have to make illegal payments for healthcare services at hospitals and

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