



Children light up hundreds of candles symbolising enlightenment from books at a prize giving ceremony organised by Biswasahitya Kendra in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



### Japanese cult guru to die for sarin gas attack

REUTERS, Tokyo

A former Japanese cult guru was sentenced to hang yesterday for masterminding a sarin nerve gas attack on Tokyo subway trains in 1995 that killed 12, sickened thousands and shattered Japan's myth of public safety.

Shoko Asahara, 48, who led the Aum Shinri Kyo (Supreme Truth Sect), was found guilty at Tokyo District Court of 13 charges including responsibility for the subway attack and a series of other crimes that killed another 15 people.

"His crimes did not stop at  
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### Bhupen Hazarika joins BJP

PTI, New Delhi

After roping in an array of tinsel town stars, the BJP yesterday paraded another "prize" catch--this time singer, lyricist, music director and writer--all rolled into one--Bhupen Hazarika who joined the party and may contest the Lok Sabha polls.

In a departure from the standard practice of being showered with a volley of questions, he was asked to first render a song.

On his joining politics, he said "the field of art should be used as a means for social change".

Hazarika who is not new to politics having been an independent MLA in Assam between 1967 and 1972 said "this is the first time in my life I have become member of a political party."

Asked whether he would contest coming Lok Sabha elections, Hazarika felt slightly flustered and turned to Swaraj asking "Can I say so," and after a slight hesitation he said, "Now I have given Rs five for party membership and whatever Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani and Sushma Swaraj and the party headquarters tell me, I will do so."

Prayer Timings		
February 28		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-07	6-12
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

### POVERTY-FREE SOUTH ASIA BY 2010

## 'Better governance, steps to root out corruption preconditions'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (Isacpa) has set a target to halve poverty by 2010 in the region and urged the political leadership to take effective steps to improve governance and law and order and fight corruption.

"A poverty-free South Asia is not an impossible dream," according to the executive summary of a com-

mission report discussed at a seminar at Brac Centre yesterday.

"Such a dream has already found roots in millions of hearts in the villages and in the towns, in the fields and in the factories, in offices and in homes across ... South Asia."

The South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (Saceps) and the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), a civil society think-tank, co-organised the discussion with economists, experts and other civil society members of

South Asia to highlight the commission's target five years ahead of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal to halve poverty by 2015.

Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, speaking as the chief guest, said the commission identified problems facing governance, transparency and accountability as common obstacles to cutting poverty.

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PHOTO: STAR

Armed undercover policemen take away two Awami League activists after arrest in a pre-hartal raid on a procession in Mymensingh yesterday.

## Devise software, interfaces to computerise Bangla

### Experts at seminar urge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday underscored the need for developing effective interfaces and software for computer processing of Bangla to enable about 250 million Bangla-speaking people use their mother tongue in computation and computerised communications.

The experts also called for extensive research to solve a multitude of problems related to Bangla compound alphabets and coding in Bangla font as well as to develop suitable keyboard arrangement, method for sorting and searching of Bangla characters and Bangla

software.

School of Communication of Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) organised the event on the occasion of International Mother Language Day on its Baridhara campus, attended by academicians and experts in computer and information and communication technology.

At the inaugural session of the national seminar, M Abdul Mottalib, head of Department of Computer Science and Information Technology, Islamic University of Technology (IUT), presented the keynote paper, titled "A Review on Computer-Based Bangla

Processing." As many as 24 other papers on various aspects of computer processing of Bangla were presented at three subsequent technical sessions.

IUB Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury chaired the inaugural session where IUB University Relations Vice President Abul Ahsan was present as the guest of honour.

In his paper, Mottalib observed that most of the research works in computer-based Bangla processing were in Bangla-recognition area, leaving rest of the fields virtually ignored.

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### 20 AL workers in Bhola injured by BNP men

Administration says attack on Hasina's motorcade stray incident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least 20 people were injured in incidents of violence in Bhola in the wake of Thursday's attack on the motorcade of Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina in Barisal, local AL leaders said yesterday.

Hasina was on the last leg of her three-day tour of Barisal and Bhola when alleged BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) activists damaged a vehicle at the tail of the motorcade at Charkawa ferry ghat.

In Daulat Khan, alleged BNP cadres injured at least eight AL activists Thursday night. Four of the injured, including critically wounded Anwar with broken limbs, were rushed to Bhola Hospital.

The same night, 12 others were injured after alleged BNP cadres attacked the Bhola AL office in the town at about 7:15pm. They hurled bombs and looted valuables after breaking into the office, sources said.

The attackers set all furniture on fire after dragging them out on the office premises. Locals extinguished the fire and police recovered two fresh bombs from near the spot.

The Bhola AL held a press conference yesterday morning and blamed ruling party activists for the violence and plunder. President of district AL Mofazzel Hossain Shahin, Secretary Fazlul Kader Majnu Molla and Member Abdul Momin Tulu spoke at the press briefing.

The AL leaders said they would lodge court cases within a day or two against the terrorist activities of ruling party cadres.

Police are patrolling the town where tension is running high, sources said. Mallick Fakrul Islam, Bhola superintendent of police (SP), said the situation is under control.

Sheikh Hasina left Barisal for  
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### CCCI urges PM for 3rd Karnaphuli bridge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) in a letter to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday asked for construction of a bridge over the Karnaphuli river.

In a fax message, the CCCI also put forward the Dutch and Swedish governments' proposal for setting up the bridge over the river for consideration.

The letter signed by CCCI President Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury said as the other two bridges -- about century-old Kalurghat and Shah Amanat -- of the district require repair works and are not sufficient for communications with rest of the country, the region needs a third one.

The CCCI had information that the Dutch and Swedish governments approved grant and soft loan for the construction of the bridge that is likely to bring down financial involvement of Bangladesh to only 10.5 percent, the letter said.

### Kashmir CM escapes grenade attack

PTI, Beerwah

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed yesterday escaped a bid on his life as terrorists fired two rifle grenades at his rally in Beerwah, killing one person and injuring two others, official sources said.

The grenades landed about 300 metres away from the venue of the rally which was also attended by some of Sayeed's cabinet colleagues, the sources said.

Three persons, two women and a CRPF jawan, were wounded in the blasts. The woman later succumbed to her injuries, they added.

The Chief Minister was immediately whisked away by security personnel. A few minutes later he, however, returned to complete his address.

### THE STRENGTH WITHIN



PHOTO: STAR

Kanchan, a boy from a disadvantaged sweeper family, stands in front of his Ideal Primary School in Tangail. The school that teaches students like Kanchan for free has blossomed hopes in the minds of otherwise helpless children.

## Beyond the years of neglect

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

Kanchan's hands do not show the hazards of his father's profession - no rough and callused hands from years of cleaning sewers and sweeping the streets of Tangail. The hands hold pens and pencils instead. His eyes beam the hope of a community's dream for respectable and comfortable standards of living.

Kanchan like many children of the 127 families that comprise the minority communities of the Horijon, Rabidas and Chauhan in Horijonpolli in Tangail sees his dreams come true, as he attends

the Ideal Primary School.

The school was established in 1997 as a place where the socio-economically disadvantaged children from the locality could receive free education. With 185 students from playgroup to class 5 enrolled, it is attended by children largely from the three castes of the locality alongside disadvantaged children from adjacent areas.

The idea to set up the school was born when social workers ventured into the forgotten community and found the children's circumstances reflected a widespread problem faced by impoverished children across Bangladesh

-- the children were taken to assist their parents at work not only because the parents earned a meagre Tk 700 a month, but because the parents did not value school education.

Especially for the community, attempts to participate in society, culture or politics were limited because of the stigma attached to them due to their profession and because the community was Hindu and largely spoke Hindi.

"Society neglected us because we were mere sweepers and we couldn't present ourselves because we could neither write

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### CHILDHOOD CANCER PATIENTS Adequate funds for treatment demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 80 per cent of childhood cancer can be cured if diagnosed early but nearly two thirds of the affected children do not have access to treatment just because of costly drugs and other expenses, experts said.

Against this backdrop, participants at a roundtable in the capital yesterday demanded allocation of adequate funds and necessary steps for treatment, care and support of childhood cancer patients.

The speakers, who were from

home and abroad, stressed a social campaign to raise awareness about survival rate of childhood cancer victims. They called for more private sector initiatives to help support the suffering children.

The roundtable on the role of society in childhood cancer treatment was held on the occasion of the 3rd International Society of Paediatric Oncology (SIOP) conference taking place in Dhaka. It was organised by the SIOP and jointly

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### 30 killed as train, truck collide in West Bengal

AFP, Kolkata

An Indian passenger train collided yesterday with a vehicle travelling to a wedding in India's West Bengal state, killing 30 people, a railways spokesman said.

"Thirty people have died," spokesman M.Y. Siddiquie said. "A marriage procession was travelling in a truck. The main casualties are in the truck."

The Kanchenjunga Express hit the vehicle at an unmanned railway crossing near New Jalpaiguri, 600 km north of the state capital Kolkata.

Railway officials said the train engine was damaged in the smash but that casualties in the train had still to be determined.

The train was travelling between the West Bengal towns of Sealdah and New Jalpaiguri when the accident happened, the official said.