

## Ekushey tradition broken

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

In a deviation from traditional Amar Ekushey programmes at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital, recitation from the Quran was played over microphones from a makeshift podium at the venue.

The recitation was played intermittently from the night of February 19 till the afternoon of next day.

Dhaka University (DU) authorities, which coordinate the programmes, however said recitation from the Quran was played only for a few minutes for microphone testing instead of using English word 'hello'.

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# BIWTA limps with two age-old salvage ships

## 201 sunken vessels pose threat to navigation

ASHIQUR RAHMAN

At least 201 vessels lie submerged on different riverbeds making waterways across the country potentially hazardous as BIWTA with only two salvage ships faces an uphill task to refloat the wrecks.

It will never be possible to lift the wrecks, if the government does not import more salvage vessels with higher lifting capacity, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) officials said. The authorities should immediately procure at least two salvage ships with not less than 300 tonnes of lifting capacity, they added.

The BIWTA officials said that at present there are only two rescue vessels named MV Rustam and MV

Hamza. But with lifting capacity of only 60 tonnes they have become obsolete, as most of the vessels these days weigh between 800 and 1000 tonnes.

"Considering the long list of ferry disasters, it is believed that about 200 wrecks remain stuck underwater making different water routes dangerous for plying vessels," said Emdadul Haque, BIWTA Joint Director (Marine), Conservancy and Pilotage Department.

For instance he said that a sand-laden ship had dashed against a submerged vessel at Katpotti point of the Meghna in Munshiganj in January this year.

Haque said that at least 10 wrecks lie aground in Chandpur alone.

"These make a huge silt deposit on the river beds causing a number of navigational hazards including ships going aground. Especially the whirls they create in the river water pose a serious threat to vessels' movement," he explained.

Against this backdrop, he stressed the importance of immediate import of salvage vessels with higher lifting power.

"Rustam and Hamza that were imported in 1963 and 1983 have become useless as most of the vessels now weigh above 500 tonnes."

He said the government is trying to import two salvage vessels of 250 tonnes lifting capacity from South

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PHOTO: STAR

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina places wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar Monday while party leaders look on.

# Planning asks for report on elevated expressway

RAFIQ HASAN

The Planning Commission has asked the Ministry of Communications to submit a consensus report of the joint task force of Bangladesh and Thailand on the proposed 13 kilometre long elevated express highway in Dhaka city.

The consensus report is required before giving final approval to such a project involving two governments, the Planning Commission observed.

Meanwhile, the ministry of communications through the foreign ministry requested the Thai members in the task force to come to Dhaka for finalising the project plan, sources said.

"We expect the Thai members of the task force will come to Dhaka in the middle of next month for discussing the subject," said a high

official, adding that they expect the project will get new momentum following Thaksin Shinawatra-led government's winning in the recent general election in Thailand.

Bangladesh and Thailand joint task force was formed following the decision to construct the 13 kilometre long expressway in Dhaka with Thai technical and financial assistance.

The decision was taken during Thai Premier Thaksin Shinawatra's visit to Bangladesh in August 2002. The matter was also discussed during Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to Thailand last year.

The Thai embassy in Dhaka through a letter on October 31, 2003, informed the communications ministry that the Thai cabinet discussed the matter and is committed to provide all necessary assistance for implementing the

project.

The Thai government sees the project as a symbol of friendship between two friendly nations, the letter read.

Out of Tk 1218 crore estimated cost of the project, the Thai Exim Bank will provide 60 per cent as loan while the Thai government will bear 20 per cent cost as technical support. Bangladesh government will provide the rest.

The proposed expressway will start from Gulistan and connect with the recently built Mohakhali flyover. It will have at least six exit points at Golapshah mazar, New Market, Sonargaon crossing, Rang's crossing and Kemal Ataturk Avenue.

The proposed expressway with provision for around 30,000 vehicles to ply on at a time will help to reduce the existing traffic congestion on roads.

## Dhaka to consider mission in Baghdad

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh will consider reopening its mission in Baghdad and joining the reconstruction work with the installation of a new government in Iraq and full security assurance from them.

The Bangladesh mission was temporarily shut down after the war on Iraq got off to a blitzkrieg start in March 2003. Since then, diplomatic functions have been conducted from neighbouring Jordan.

"We're watching the developments following the elections in Iraq. If we are welcomed by the new Iraqi government and given full security assurance—which is important for us—we will consider reopening our mission," Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan told the news agency yesterday.

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## Singapore best Asian city, Dhaka worst States survey

AFP, Singapore

Singapore has edged out Tokyo and Hong Kong as the best city in Asia for expatriates to live, according to a survey by a human resource group released yesterday, while Dhaka is the worst.

Singapore's wide use of English was one key factor for the tropical city-state's top billing, ECA International, a global membership organisation for human resources professionals, said after releasing its survey.

ECA's Hong Kong general manager, Lee Quane, said high quality transport, communications and health facilities, low health risks and low crime rates were other factors that made Singapore most attractive to foreigners.

"Although it boasts an excellent infrastructure, the

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## WB to provide \$200m for health sector

NAIMUL HAQ

The World Bank's soft loan wing the International Development Association (IDA) has agreed to give US\$200 million for the Health Nutrition and Population Sector Programme (HNPPSP).

A five-day negotiation meeting between a Bangladesh delegation and the IDA officials for the proposed credit ended on February 18 in Washington DC.

The Bank official said the documents of the agreement will now be presented to the World Bank board by March 31, 2005, for final approval.

The main purpose of the HNPPSP is to reach healthcare to the poorest of the poor. It also focuses on certain vital areas to increase availability and utilisation of user-friendly, effective, efficient, equitable, affordable and accessible quality healthcare services, be it essential services delivery, improved hospital services, nutritional services or other selected services.

For nutrition services, a large number of private and NGOs will be engaged to enhance utilisation and awareness about nutrition.

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PHOTO: AFP

A man wails as he talks on a mobile phone to his relative Sunday after finding the body of his dear one, who is among 120 dead in a launch capsized on Saturday night.

## Sangsad session resumes today with signs of quorum crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliament session, after a four-day recess, resumes today amid strong signs of an acute quorum crisis as the ruling party lawmakers have apparently lost their interest in attending the House.

The four-party alliance led by BNP has not taken any steps yet to ensure the presence of its lawmakers in the House on time, and the absence of the main opposition Awami League (AL) in parliament only makes the quorum situation worse, said a whip of the ruling BNP.

The AL has yet to fix a date for its parliamentary party meeting, which is to decide on joining the current session. "The date of the parliamentary party meeting will be fixed in a couple of days," Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star yesterday.

The 15th session, which began on January 31 and was boycotted by AL, failed to start on time because 60 lawmakers could not be convened in the House. The ruling alliance has

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## Hasina terms PM's Bangla Bhai arrest order a hoax

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the directive of the prime minister to arrest the so-called Bangla Bhai was a hoax.

"In the one hand, the government does not find him out, on the other he (Bangla Bhai), along with his cadres, is killing people," said Hasina, also president of the Awami League (AL).

The former prime minister made the observations when the family members of slain AL leader Yasin Ali, killed allegedly by the cadres of Bangla Bhai, met her at Sudha Sadan.

She listened to victim's father Ismail Hossain Mridha, who described how Yasin was caught by the Bangla Bhai cadres and killed.

"The government is killing the AL leaders and activists by engaging

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## DU student commits suicide

DU CORRESPONDENT

A student of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday committed suicide jumping from the roof of six-storey Surya Sen Hall.

Humayun Kabir was a resident of room No. 406 of the hall and third-batch MBA student of marketing department.

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Prayer Timing		
February 22		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-20	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-03	6-07
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

# UN declares level 1 warning in Dhaka

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The United Nations (UN) has announced a level-1 security warning in Bangladesh for its officials asking them to inform the Dhaka office before making a visit to the country, said UN officials.

The phase-1 security warning has been issued amidst a level-2 warning already imposed for Cox's Bazar since October 28 last year.

UN officials said the latest security warning was issued after a meeting of the UN organisations in Dhaka on Sunday that took stock of the security situation in the country.

"Phase-1 warning means a precautionary measure. Our officials who will come to Bangladesh from outside will have to take prior clearance from a designated officer for UN security in Dhaka," said a senior

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# 150 feared dead in Indonesia landslide

AFP, Jakarta

Almost 150 people were believed to have died under hundreds of tonnes of garbage and earth on Indonesia's main island yesterday when heavy seasonal rain unleashed a massive landslide, police said.

The landslide struck in the early hours when people were asleep and flattened up to 70 homes built in the shadow of a dumpsite at Cimahi, near Bandung, around 200km southeast of Jakarta.

Television footage showed whole houses buried under tonnes of earth and rubbish, with splintered rafters and smashed roof tiles littering the area.

Scores of rescuers and search teams from the military, police and local residents were desperately

scouring the site in the forlorn hope of rescuing some of those missing.

Police Commissioner Susiyanti told AFP that 17 bodies had so far been pulled from the rubble and that a further 129 were missing and believed buried under the mountain of garbage.

"It appears that all of them are buried and it is very likely that they are all dead," she said.

Of those bodies already recovered, she said, "some of them are badly disfigured, some aren't. We will continue rescue efforts until sun down" and resume in the morning.

"The situation is still grave but we will continue rescue efforts while the weather still allows us to do so," she said, adding that while the rain had stopped for the moment, dark

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