

Finalists named in race for 'best job in the world'

AFP, Sydney

The competition for "the best job in the world" has been narrowed to a shortlist of 16 finalists all hoping to become caretaker of a tropical island paradise off Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

The candidates, including journalists, students, a teacher and an actress, come from 15 countries, and include a "wildcard" Taiwanese woman chosen by the public.

Tourism Queensland selected them from a global field of 50 -- winnowed from a total of 34,684 applicants -- for the six-month job of highly paid caretaker of Hamilton Island, off Australia's far northern coast.

Peter Lawlor, Queensland state's tourism minister, said the top 50 were so impressive that officials had upped the number of finalists to 15 from a planned 10.

"The final shortlisted applicants come from 15 countries, range in age from 20 to 38, comprise 10 men and six women, and include students, journalists, TV presenters, photographers, a receptionist, radio DJ, teacher, charity event manager and an actress," said Lawlor.

"From organising stunts like scuba-diving in a tank in Amsterdam, dressing up as a mermaid in downtown Singapore and spruiking at a London pub, to conducting hundreds of media interviews, the top 50 have shown an incredible amount of ingenuity and passion," he said.

Singapore urges caution on cervical cancer shots

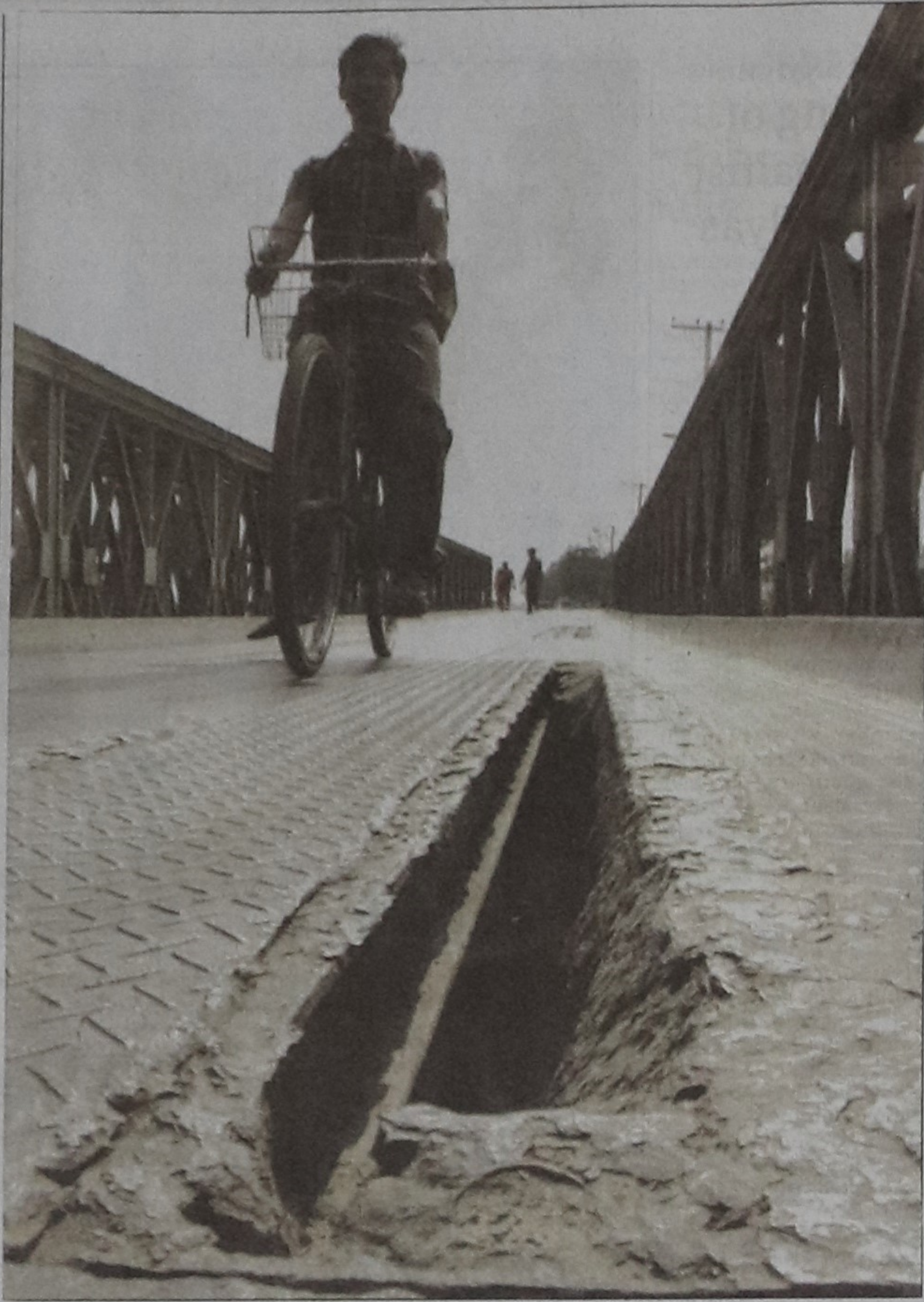
AFP, Singapore

Singapore yesterday called for caution on carrying out mass immunisation of girls as young as nine years old against cervical cancer, saying the vaccine's effects must be studied further.

Balaji Sadasivan, senior minister of state for foreign affairs, said the vaccine against the human papillomavirus (HPV) which causes cervical cancer was already available in the city-state.

Parents can decide whether they want to vaccinate their daughters but the government "should be more circumspect about recommending the vaccination for inclusion into the childhood immunisation programme," he said.

Sadasivan, a surgeon and former senior minister of state for health, told a meeting of cancer specialists there were concerns from clinical as well as ethical standpoints.



The Bailey bridge on the Airport Road in Chittagong has been in dilapidated condition for long, causing frequent road accidents, but the authorities concerned appear to be indifferent. The picture was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

SCARCITY OF RAW MATERIALS

300 re-rolling mills on verge of closure

UNB, Narayanganj

Around 300 re-rolling mills of the country are on the verge of closure due to scarcity of raw materials.

Although price of steel scraps is declining in the international market because of global recession, but price of MS Rod has been rising in the country due to shortage of scraps.

The crisis of scraps, the main raw material for the re-rolling mills, has been created for various reasons including scarcity of oxygen used in ship-breaking yards.

General Secretary of Bangladesh Re-rolling Mills Association Abu Bakar Siddique said if the problems are not

resolved soon, the re-rolling mills of Narayanganj, Ruppang, Shyampur, Savar, Manikganj, Gazipur and Chittagong might have to be closed down.

Such massive closure of the re-rolling mills, he said, would render jobless some one crore people who are directly or indirectly involved with the industry.

Siddique said ship-breaking yards are the key suppliers of scraps, but recently the High Court has directed the government to stop in two weeks the operation of ship-breaking yards which run without environmental clearance.

Steel re-rolling mills produce mild steel (MS) Rod used mainly in the construction industry to

re-enforce concrete. Mill owners said the price of MM Rod would increase more for the short supply of scrap.

At present, a ton of scrap is selling at Tk 33,000-35,000 and MS Rod at Tk 45,000-48,000.

Vice-president of Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association M Mohsin said he is not aware of any government ban on ship breaking, but he admitted that scrap supply is quite insufficient against the demand.

He said scarcity of oxygen in the ship-breaking yards as well as power and gas crisis have been hampering ship-breaking work, which resulted in short supply of scraps.

Australia endorses UN declaration on indigenous rights

AFP, Sydney

Australia formally adopted the United Nations' declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples yesterday, calling it an important symbolic step in healing past hurts.

The move reversed a refusal by the previous conservative government to sign the declaration, and reflected a new era of good faith, goodwill and mutual respect, said Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin.

"On 17 September 2007, 143 nations voted in support of the declaration. Australia was one of four countries that voted against the declaration," she told a ceremony at Parliament House.

"Today, Australia changes its position.

"We do this in the spirit of resetting the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and building trust."

Australia's original inhabitants, Aborigines are believed to have numbered around a million at the time of white settlement but there are now just 470,000 out of a population of 21 million.

Ancient and modern worlds meet at Rome art exhibition

AFP, Rome

This ancient Italian city bowed to the 21st century on Thursday, kicking off a three-day show of modern and sometimes unsettling art in some of its most celebrated palazzos.

A total of 60 galleries from around the world are presenting their collections in this second edition of "The Road to Contemporary Art," taking place in Rome from April 2-5.

Some of the more astonishing works can be found in the 15th century Palazzo Venezia, famous for its balcony where fascist leader Benito Mussolini once harangued crowds gathered below.

The Palazzo now hosts through Saturday a collection that includes a couple of skeletons making love on the floor and a glass ball encasing a pope surrounded by nude creatures.

Works of American photographer David LaChapelle, including one depicting a wall of bloody hearts, are also on display along with those of other artists.

For its part, the Tempio di Adriano showcases life-size statues of women in ceramic, leather and studded metal while the Palazzo delle Esposizioni offer portraits of Hitler spitting on both a swastika and a Christian cross.



An exhibition of thematic wood engravings by Naresh Kumar Sutradhar, a village carpenter, began at Nalini Kanta Bhattashali Gallery of National Museum in Dhaka yesterday. Sudha organised the seven-day exhibition.

PHOTO: STAR

Arctic may be ice-free in 30 years: Study

AFP, Washington

Some 80 percent of Arctic ice may disappear in 30 years, not 90 as scientists had previously estimated, according to a new study on the impact of global warming.

"The amount of the Arctic Ocean covered by ice at the end of summer by then could be only about 1 million square kilometres, or about 620,000 square miles," said US researchers who authored the study published Thursday.

"That's compared to today's ice extent of 4.6 million square kilometres, or 2.8 million square miles," they added, warning the development "raises the question of ecosystem upheaval."

The scientists made their projections based on models that took account of changes in Arctic ice, which saw "dramatic declines" at the end of summer in 2007 and 2008, when the ice surface dropped to 4.3 and 4.6 million square kilometres (1.7 and 1.8

million square miles), respectively.

The models pointed to a "nearly ice-free" Arctic in just 32 years, with some of the models making the same prediction for 11 years from now.

"In recent years, the combination of unusual warm temperatures from natural causes and the global warming signal have worked together to provide an earlier summer sea-ice loss than was predicted," said James Overland of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Overland and co-author Muyn Wang of the University of Washington said earlier models had predicted the event would not take place before the end of the 21st century.

Maps illustrating Overland and Wang's models showed a nearly ice-free Arctic Ocean, although some ice would remain along northern Canada and Greenland, where powerful winds make for very thick layers of ice.

The researchers noted one benefit of less ice in the Arctic: "a boon for shipping and for extracting minerals and oil from the seabed."



Dhaka Club hosted a Sea Food Festival on the club premises in the city on Thursday. Peninsula Sea Food Ltd. sponsored the event as part of its awareness programme about health benefits of seafood.

PHOTO: STAR

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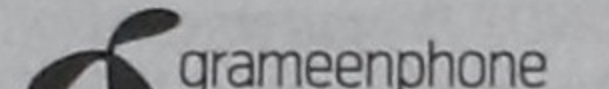
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US asks EU to take in former Guantanamo detainees

AFP, Brussels

The United States has "formally" asked the European Union to accept ex-detainees of the US military prison at Guantanamo and has promised to provide all necessary

information, the EU commission said yesterday.

Despite a great deal of reticence, the European Union has indicated that some member states would be ready to accept former prisoners on a case-by-case basis.

The EU has stressed that the decision to do so remained with Europe's national governments and that

Washington must provide all information on the prisoners to assess their security risk and their claim for European entry.

EU Immigration Commissioner Jacques Barrot and Czech Interior Minister Ivan Langer, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, travelled to Washington last month to seek more detailed information from the US authorities.

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