



GIFT GALORE

US state department reveals list of gifts Obama got in 2009

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BATH FITTINGS EVOLVE

Diverse products meet local demand

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MARIA'S PROGRESS

Sharapova enters the third round of Australian Open

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Stop scrapping ships

HC orders govt, asks port authorities to probe if any court guideline for safety violated

ASHUTOSH SARKAR and PINAKI ROY

The High Court yesterday issued a suo moto rule directing the government to stop all kinds of scrapping of ships in the country until further order.

The HC order came against the backdrop of another explosion on a ship at a ship-breaking yard in Sitakunda that killed four workers on Tuesday.

The HC bench also ordered the authorities concerned to move the unclean hazardous ship away from the beach until further order. It also issued a contempt of court rule against the owner of the yard Master Abul Kashem, and officials

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The campaign to ensure safety for workers at ship-breaking yards apparently had little impact. This photo taken in Chittagong yesterday shows workers doing the heavy lifting without even shoes.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Treated like slaves

Workers toil in ship-breaking hazards, hardly get compensated if accident strikes

MORSHED ALI KHAN

At exactly 9:00am yesterday, a day after deaths of four workers, the main gate of MAK Corporation ship-breaking yard in Sitakunda remained closed and strictly guarded. It took heavy persuasion with guards and officials to gain access to the yard that witnessed one of the loudest explosions in the history of the ship-breaking yards.

Despite deaths, injuries, miseries and orders from the High Court, the issues of workers' safety and environmental protection did not seem to be on the list at the yard.

On the vast yard two gigantic ships, including the fateful Pranam, were beached for dismantling. The waters of the Bay had receded with the low tide, exposing the beach further down. Water was littered with debris and patches of oil were visible.

Scores of bare-footed teenage workers, clad in lungi, toiled through the long sandy beach carrying heavy pieces of metal from the two ships. There were no traces of any safety gears for the workers, who, as they worked,

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Double blow for AL

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The ruling Awami League has suffered a double blow in the just concluded municipality polls: it has lost the battle of ballots to its archrival Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Even a greater loss has been the violence that marred the last day of the staggered polls.

The Election Commission, the administration and especially the ruling party won praises for making the first three days of elections peaceful and largely credible.

But the gains were lost on the fourth and last day of the voting when supporters of the AL-backed mayoral candidates snatched ballots, attacked polling stations and torched vehicles in Noakhali, Feni and Laxmipur districts. Authorities have been forced to suspend polling in many centres.

The Awami League-blessed candidates having 88 mayoral posts were behind the BNP-backed candidates who bagged 92 posts, according to election results of 236 municipalities.

The last day's violence has ruined what could have been a victory for the government and the ruling party even after its electoral loss. Making the elections peaceful all through could have been a rare trophy for the ruling party and the government.

The rampage also brought to public mind the bitter history of polls in Bangladesh.

Except a few instances, parliamentary or local government polls have never been free of manipulation by ruling party and interference by the government.

Remember the Magura by-polls in 1994?

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BNP upbeat, sets UP goal

RASHIDUL HASAN

Boosted by the just concluded municipal polls results, BNP policy makers are now working out the party's next course of action to get back its momentum cashing in on the "unexpected" success in the battle of ballots.

Struggling for the last two years since its debacle in the last parliamentary elections, the main opposition party seems to be upbeat after upsetting its archrival Awami League in the local government polls, only two years after it (AL) came to power with a landslide victory in the elections.

On the success in municipal polls, a number of BNP leaders said despite their party's weaknesses at grassroots level, ruling party lawmakers' misconduct, their involvement in corruption and price hike of essentials greatly contributed to their "unexpected victory" in the electoral race.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a number of top

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BNP-enforced hartal passes quietly in 3 districts

STAR REPORT

BNP yesterday observed hartal peacefully in Noakhali, Feni and Laxmipur demanding re-elections to a number of municipalities.

The party's district units enforced dawn-to-dusk hartal in Noakhali and Feni and a half-day hartal in Laxmipur alleging that the ruling Awami League candidates snatched ballot boxes, intimidated voters and assaulted election officials during Tuesday's polls.

Our Noakhali correspondent reports: local

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AL sees it as wakeup call

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The ruling Awami League plans to restore chain of command in the party, and correct its leaders' and activists' often discourteous behaviour with the public, to avert further slide in its popularity.

The plan came after BNP-backed candidates bagged more mayoral posts than the candidates backed by AL in the just concluded municipal polls.

AL policymakers primarily identified a breakdown of the chain of command, lack of coordination, internal feud, and inappropriate selection of candidates for backing, as major reasons for the party's lesser performance in the polls.

"Unacceptable activities" of its associated bodies like Bangladesh Chhatra League and front organisations like Awami Jubo League also had a negative impact on voters, a number of AL senior leaders observed.

"It's a wake up call for both the government and the party," AL Presidium Member Obaidul Quader told The Daily Star yesterday. "After evaluating the errors, we must

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No Mashrafe

Tigers' WC cricket squad named

BISHWAJIT ROY

Injured fast-bowler Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was left out in the cold when the national selectors yesterday announced a 15-member Bangladesh squad for the ICC World Cup next month.

Mashrafe, who only recently also lost the captaincy of the national side to Shakib al Hasan, failed to recover in time from a knee injury that he had sustained during a domestic game on December 21 last year. He was the only notable omission in the squad, as under-fire batsman Mohammad Ashraful sneaked in despite his recent poor form in international cricket.

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Southpaw opener Shahriar Nafees also made the cut, despite being overlooked for the Tigers' last international engagement against Zimbabwe. His inclusion came on the back of some solid displays against New Zealand and red-hot form in the league. For Nafees the call-up will cap a perfect comeback after he had found his international career jeopardised following his defection to the banned Indian Cricket League.

The focus of the day was, however, only on Mashrafe. But with wild rumours oscillating, chief selector Rafiqul Alam did nothing to quell any

10 killed in 2 road crashes

STAR REPORT

At least 10 people were killed and 12 others injured in road accidents in Bogra and Brahmanbaria yesterday.

In Bogra, a potato-laden truck from Joypurhat collided head-on with a shallow machine-run three-wheeler around 9:15pm near Gopinathpur Bus Stand, leaving six people dead on the spot, said

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Deal inked for Dhaka expressway

Cost Tk 8,703cr
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Construction of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway will begin within the next six months with a target to complete it within three and a half years, according to a concession agreement signed yesterday.

Bangladesh Bridges Authority (BBA) signed the agreement with Italian-Thailand Development Public Company Ltd

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REGULATORS PUT BRAKE ON SHARE SWINGS

Market shut, vehicles vandalised

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

Regulators yesterday introduced a share index breaker, halting trade on twin bourses one and a half hours after opening -- a quick and desperate measure that sent thousands of angry investors out on the streets in Motijheel.

The index circuit breaker, which put brakes on a big rise or fall, was introduced following an emergency meet-

ing among finance minister, Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) officials and central bank highups.

The meeting deferred trading on Dhaka and Chittagong stock exchanges by two hours to start at 1:00pm.

As per the circuit breaker, trading stops automatically for the day if the DSE General Index (DGEN) goes up or down by 225 or more points.

As for yesterday, the trading was

stopped after the DGEN lost 226 points around 2:30pm. The declining trend for the last five days had the market lose 757 points.

The investors, who were scared noticing no positive assurance from the government, demanded the market remain shut until the prime minister takes up the issue and comes up with a precise solution to

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MORE STORIES IN STAR BUSINESS



Rampaging investors in front of Dhaka Stock Exchange vandalise a car and try to force this bewildered driver out yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR