

Anti-graft debate camp ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-day debate camp on anti-corruption ended yesterday at Koitta of Manikganj with the vow to prevent corruption in the country.

Some 50 debaters from different colleges and universities across the country participated in the camp organised by Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB).

Robayet Ferdous and SM Shamim Reza from Dhaka University (DU), Tureen Afroz from BRU University, and AA Munir Hasan, deputy leader of International Math Olympiad attended the workshop as trainers.



Amena Begum, who lost all her belongings in a fire at a slum in Mohakhali in the city yesterday, breaks down in tears. Fire Service officials said the fire, which gutted at least 20 houses, originated from a kitchen burner in the slum around 11:40pm. They doused the flame after one hour of their efforts.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Events on 'black night' sketched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different organisations have outlined elaborate programmes to observe the historic March 25 tonight, the moment when Pakistani forces launched a wild crackdown on unarmed Bangladeshis in 1971.

Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, a forum for secular Bangladesh, will arrange a candlelight procession tonight from the Central Shaheed Minar to the killing field of Jagannath Hall, Dhaka University (DU).

The procession will be preceded by a discussion on the Shaheed Minar premises, to be participated by political leaders, freedom fighters, and family members of the martyrs.

Build Bangla, an event management firm, will observe a one-minute silence on the Shaheed Minar premises in the evening today commemorating the "black night" of 1971.

An art competition for children will also be held at the Central Shaheed Minar today. National Child Parliament of Bangladesh Foundation will organise the event.

Bangla Academy and DU's music and drama department have planned separate cultural programmes.

BNP protests

FROM PAGE 20 responsible for killing 30 thousand political activists, including Siraj Sikdar, after the country's independence should be brought under trial posthumously.

While addressing the rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club, several speakers criticised grand alliance leaders Hasanul Haque Inu, Rashed Khan Menon and Mainuddin Khan Badol for their comments on Zia in the parliament.

The rally was organised as part of the party's country-wide demonstration protesting the government's 'propaganda' against Ziaur Rahman and his family.

Awami League is spreading falsehoods about Zia as they are afraid of him, said Khandaker Mosharrat Hossain adding, they won't be able to destroy the nationalistic forces as the people love him.

Sadeque Hossain Khoka pleaded the ruling party leaders not to divide the nation by making derogatory remarks about late president Ziaur Rahman.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the government won't be able to erase the name of Zia from people's heart. He urged the party activists to get ready for an anti-government movement to force the rulers to declare midterm elections.

Chaired by Vice-chairman Abdullah Al Noman, the meeting was also addressed by party standing committee members Rafiqul Islam Mia and Nazrul Islam Khan and senior leader Moazzem Hossain Alal.

The rally was shifted to the main road in front of the press club as the authorities refused permission for using Mukhtangan.

Flights inadequate Pak army launched genocide

FROM PAGE 1 Algeria and other places to cover during this crisis; so there is no possibility of increasing the number of flights for the Bangladeshis in Choucha," he said.

The IOM is now chartering, on an average a flight a day, and a single Biman aircraft has been deployed for every other day to take home about 290 people at a time.

"By the time we are able to send back 500 people, another 500 arrive crossing the border; so if the authorities do not deploy more aircraft, we are talking about a prolonged crisis for the Bangladeshis," said an aid worker yesterday.

Within the last two days (Wednesday and Thursday) about 500 Bangladeshis, including six families having about 25 members, entered Tunisia from Libya. The number of Bangladeshi camp dwellers has increased within this time.

For the few thousand stranded Bangladeshi life in Choucha camp is unbearable.

able. They wake up early to queue for water, use the toilet in the bitter desert cold and then wait in long queues for food. Many of the displaced African migrant workers, who are also in this camp, pounce on the timid working men from Bangladesh and shove them off the queue, many Bangladeshis complained.

The day for a Bangladeshi stranded man starts with wrapping his belonging tightly. He then walks to the IOM office by the main road and waits there for hours for the officials to call the names. By noon they know how many people would be going to Djerba airport but they have no idea who would be the lucky ones. When the calls are made through a loudspeaker, every Bangladeshi of Choucha camp is there listening. When someone's name is called he shouts at the height of his voice and grabs the travel document.

He then runs to the clinic where a doctor declares him

fit to fly. Then he runs to his tent, his passport in hand. At the tent he has no time to say goodbye to his friends left behind. He grabs his belongings, which he had already wrapped up in the morning, and runs towards the main road to stand on a long queue under the open sky and bitter cold and wait for the bus to Djerba airport. This final queue at the Choucha camp sometimes takes as many as 12 hours to clear but nobody tries to find a shelter for the night. They wear all their warm clothes and wrap themselves up with the blankets they had received from the generous Tunisians. They do not leave the queue.

Once in the airport, the ultimate waiting starts. It might take up to 24 hours to board a plane. Here, the stranded man from Choucha does not have time to think what awaits him at home.

FROM PAGE 1 the other leading figures of the Awami League knew that time was running out, that unless a proclamation came from President Yahya Khan chaos would descend on East Bengal and indeed on Pakistan as a whole. Of course, the junta thought otherwise. Throughout the day, senior military commanders helicoptered throughout the province to make sure the plans for a military strike against the democratic movement were in place.

General Tikka Khan told General Yahya Khan that the army should be ready to hit the Bengalis that very night. Tikka passed on the message to his formation commanders all over the province. As dusk fell, President Yahya Khan, in the strictest secrecy, boarded a Pakistan International Airlines plane for the long journey back to Rawalpindi. It was not long before Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would know of his departure. Even so, he continued to believe that the negotiations would lead to some positive results. Kamal Hossain recalls that as he bade goodbye to Mujib at around 10 pm on March 25, the Awami League chief asked him if he had received any phone call from the regime. Hossain replied in the negative.

As soon as twilight descended on Dhaka, the students of Dhaka University as well as citizens in other parts of the city set up an assortment of barriers

--- trees, bricks, stones, etc --- to thwart the movements of the army. With a deepening of the evening, reports began increasingly to circulate of the military's readiness to strike at any moment. The strike came between 11 and 11.30 pm. Tanks, armoured cars and truckloads of soldiers of the Pakistan army fanned out in different directions. Soon the police headquarters at Rajarbagh was under attack by the army and so was the Peelkhana headquarters of the East Pakistan Rifles. The soldiers rushed to the Central Shaheed Minar, which they blew up in minutes. At the same time, they destroyed the well-known

Kalibari in the centre of the Race Course (today's Suhrawardy Udyan). But it was at Dhaka University where the soldiers' ferocity came into full, macabre display. They went around shooting anyone on sight, broke into academics' homes and shot them dead. Their ire was particularly reserved for Jagannath Hall, where hundreds of students were killed and their bodies dumped into a mass grave in the hall compound. Bulldozers were then used to level the mass grave. On the streets, the soldiers shot anyone in their sights. Pedestrians, sleeping rickshaw pullers and others were killed without mercy.

From his suite at Hotel Intercontinental (today's Sheraton), Zulfikar Ali Bhutto watched the flames engulf Dhaka. The offices of The People, a newspaper whose militant stridency in favour of the Bangalee nationalist movement could not have been missed by the army, was set on fire by the soldiers. All night long, the sounds of rocket and machinegun fire and the sight of tracer fire kept the citizens of Dhaka awake in a state of fear.

It was a night when evil and horror, symbolised by the Pakistan army, were let loose. Operation Searchlight had been unleashed. The murder of a nation was underway.



Guests inaugurate "Swadhinata Utsab", organised by Sammito Sangskritik Jote, by releasing balloons at the Central Shaheed Minar premises in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

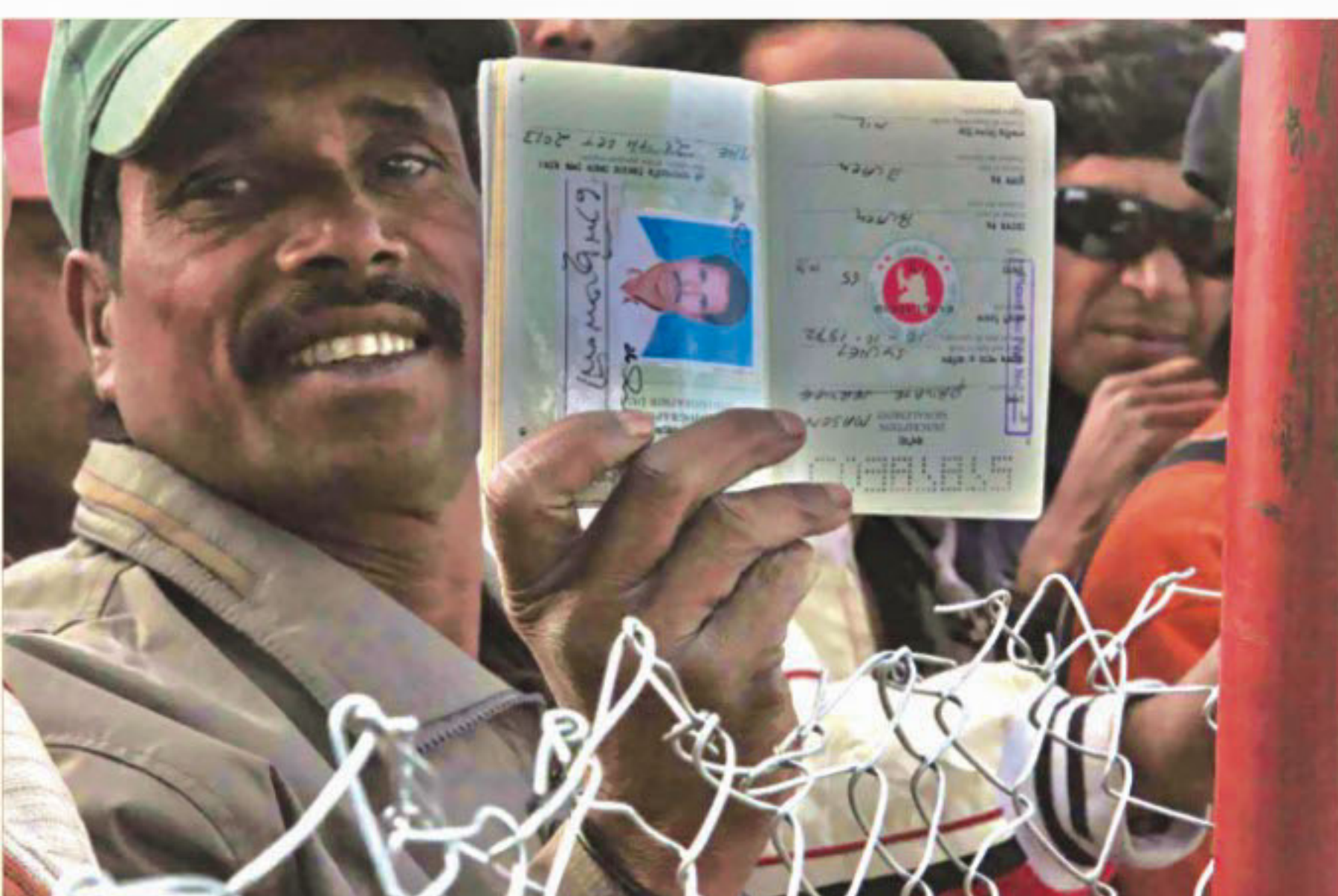


PHOTO: MORSHED ALI KHAN

The smile says it all...how happy a Bangladeshi worker becomes getting his passport at Choucha camp on the Tunisia-Libya border ensuring his passage home.



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