



CRUYFF PASSES AWAY

A legend in the footballing world, Johan Cruyff loses battle against cancer at 68

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BOSNIA WAR CRIMES

Radovan Karadzic gets 40 years in jail for genocide in the 1992-95 war

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WITH TODAY'S ISSUE



Free healthcare for the poor

One lakh brought under pilot project; scheme to cover all in phases by 2032

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday formally launched the country's first-ever health protection scheme to ensure healthcare for the poor.

Under the pilot project titled Shasthyo Suroksha Karmashuchi (SSK), the government will provide health cards to one lakh extreme poor households in Kalihati, Madhupur and Ghatail upazilas of Tangail.

With the out-of-pocket health expenses in Bangladesh standing at 63 percent, the SSK aims to protect the poor from catastrophic consequences of diseases, health ministry officials said.

Around 64 lakh people in the country get poorer every year due to high medical costs, according to a 2010 research by the icddr, b.

Health Minister Mohammed Nasim inaugurated the SSK yesterday by distributing health cards among some poor households in Kalihati.

"We are implementing the new initiative so that the poor are not deprived of healthcare services for any illness," he said

at the inaugural programme. "The number of elderly people is increasing, complicated diseases are emerging and consequently, treatment costs are rising. Addressing this issue is one of the main objectives of the SSK," the minister elaborated.

The SSK, which was scheduled to be launched in mid-2014, began its journey in January this year.

One lakh households below the poverty line, with less than \$1.9 daily income, have been registered under the pilot project, and each household will get one health card.

The cardholders and their family members can avail free-of-cost healthcare for 50 diseases -- including fever, cold, cough, fractured bones, appendicitis, hernia and complicated heart, kidney and gallbladder ailments -- at the upazila- and district-level public hospitals, according to a health ministry statement.

The government will pay Tk 1,000 as the annual premium for each household that can avail healthcare services costing up to Tk 50,000 per year.

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Hasina 10th greatest world leader

Says Fortune magazine

STAR REPORT

Business magazine Fortune has named Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as one of the greatest leaders of the world.

Hasina has ranked 10th among 50 leaders who "are transforming the world and inspiring others to do the same," the internationally acclaimed magazine said.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos tops the list, published online yesterday, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the second spot. Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi takes the

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bangabandhu raises the flag of independent Bangladesh before a jubilant crowd at the gate of his Dhanmondi-32 home on March 23, 1971, the Republic Day in Pakistan.

'I have no way of going anywhere'

Bangabandhu's last words to party leaders asking them to go into hiding minutes before genocide began

INAM AHMED and SHAKHAWAT LITON

March 23, 1971 was an extraordinary day.

It had always been observed as Pakistan's Republic Day. And yet this time in 1971, something different happened. Instead of the green and white flags with a crescent and a star of Pakistan, green flags with a red disc with the map of East Pakistan in golden colour superimposed, fluttered atop all buildings in Dhaka.

On the streets, hawkers were selling this new flag.

Dr Kamal Hossain came out of his

house at 6 in the morning and was immediately floored by this extraordinary

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The Black Night that still haunts the nation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation today recalls the Black Night of March 25.

On this fateful night in 1971, the Pakistan military junta launched the "Operation Searchlight" and mercilessly murdered the Bangalee members of the East Pakistan Rifles and police, students and teachers as well as thousands of common people in Dhaka.

Jagannath Hall, a non-Muslim dormitory of Dhaka University, and Iqbal Hall, now Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall, Pilkhana, Rajarbagh Police Lines, and Hindu-dominated areas of Old Dhaka were the main targets of the operation.

Armed with heavy weapons such as tanks, automatic rifles, rocket launchers, heavy mortars and light machine guns, Pakistani soldiers encircled Dhaka University from east, south and north.

The first target of Operation Searchlight was Zahurul Haq Hall as the then Non-cooperation Movement was organised under the banner of "Independent Bangladesh Students Movement Council" from that dormitory.

By March 25, all leaders of Chhatra League had left the hall.

After midnight, the army attacked Jagannath Hall with shelling of mortar and nonstop gun firing.

They entered the dormitory through north and south gates and killed students indiscriminately in each room. Around 34 students were killed. Some students of Jagannath Hall were resident of Ramna Kali Bari.

It was one of the very few military operations in the post-World War-II history, planned against civilians, just to kill a smart percentage of them and to scare the survivors.

American journalist Robert Payne wrote about the night that at least 7,000

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Had no option

Says BGB chief on opening fire in Mathbaria; 1,300 sued for violence

STAR REPORT

Border Guard Bangladesh personnel had no choice but to open fire to protect election officials and prevent unruly mobs from snatching ballot boxes during Tuesday's Union Parishad polls in Pirojpur and Cox's Bazar, the BGB chief said yesterday.

"We went there to provide security to presiding officers and guard the ballot boxes... The security force followed all the procedures while discharging duties," BGB Director General Maj Gen Aziz Ahmed said at a programme at the Pilkhana headquarters.

His comments came a day after five people were killed in Mathbaria upazila of Pirojpur and three in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar in two incidents of firing by BGB men and police during the polls.

In the first phase of UP elections on Tuesday, several hundred supporters of a candidate tried to snatch ballot boxes from election officials and law enforcers, as the presiding officer of Safa Degree College centre in Dhanisafa UP declared void more than 700 ballots, all of which reportedly had stamps on Awami League's 'boat' symbol.

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NEWS ANALYSIS

POLLS IRREGULARITIES

EC's denial won't bring remedy

SHAKHAWAT LITON

It does not matter much to the Election Commission whether or not the polling is mired in widespread violence and irregularities. It has got some canned words for the nation at the end of polling. And it has kept defending the flawed elections in the same old way for the last two years.

This time too it made no exception. Despite widespread irregularities--like capturing of polling centres and stuffing ballot boxes and violence in the opening of the Union Parishad election on Tuesday, its chief Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad claimed that there were "some sporadic incidents of violence" and "the voting was peaceful in most of the centres."

Do people believe what the EC claimed? Does the EC itself now believe the claim after the CEC and other election commissioners watched reports broadcast by TV channels

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The day after the debacle

AL-AMIN from Kollata

What was the common syndrome that almost every Bangladeshi experienced during the long night after that heart-breaking one-run defeat suffered by the Tigers at the hands of India at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Wednesday? Apart from a few exceptions everybody had a sleepless night reflecting on those three deliveries in the pulsating ICC World T20 game.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hasan Papon, who was the first to arrive at the ITC Sonar, the temporary abode for the Bangladesh cricket team ahead of their final group league game against New Zealand, said that he had not felt so devastated as he did on Wednesday night.

"How do you expect to sleep after such a devastating defeat? I think the whole country could not sleep last night. The players were in a state of coma. I have not seen coach Chandika [Hathurusingha] so emotionally drained

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The construction work of the country's first-ever elevated expressway to connect the capital's north with the south started on a limited scale. Once completed, the expressway is expected to ease traffic in the city significantly. The photo was taken in Kaula Railgate area near Airport Railway Station on March 17.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

ELEVATED EXPRESSWAY By 2021 maybe

Finally, hope for getting fund next month; government to sign revised deal in May

AT A GLANCE

Deal signed in Jan 2011
PM laid foundation stone in Apr 2011
Project revised in Dec 2013, a year before it was supposed to be completed
Deadline for starting construction missed thrice

HASAN JAHID TUSHER and M ABUL KALAM AZAD

Under the original plan, the country's first-ever elevated expressway to connect the capital's north with the south was to complete in 2014. But the deadline was stretched time and again as the construction company failed to arrange funds for the Tk 8,940-crore project.

Some of the piling works are underway, and the construction of the main expressway is likely to begin after May 26, when the government is planning to sign a revised deal with the construction firm, Ital-Thai Development Public Construction Limited.

The company is expecting to get the fund next month to start the main work, an official of the road transport and bridges ministry told The Daily Star last night.

Officials of the company were not available for confirmation.

Once the fund is arranged and a revised deal is signed, the construction of the expressway would go on in full swing, said officials involved in the project.

However, the project might take at least five years to complete, they added.

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