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'DIRTY' ELECTION

Mahathir cries foul as Malaysia's PM Najib dissolves parliament for early polls

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4-LANE DHAKA-CTG HIGHWAY Up for mending all too soon

Authorities blame overloaded vehicles for damage; ministry seeking Tk 900cr for maintenance in next 5yrs

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

Mohammad Bachchu was intensely looking at the milling machine cutting ruts on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Nooritola of Chandina on Tuesday afternoon. This way, the highway is being made usable somehow.

"I never thought we would require cutting the road surface so soon," said Bachchu, who was involved in the original expansion work of the highway. The project cost the taxpayers Tk 3,600 crore.

An employee of the project's Chinese contractor Sino-Hydro that expanded 140km of the 192km highway, Bachchu was hired by the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) to supervise the rut-cutting job.

Expansion project launched in 2006

Physical work began in 2010

Final project cost Tk 3,600cr

Project completed in Dec 2016

Ruts developed within months of completion

The RHD also hired two milling machines from Sino-Hydro for the job.

The rut cutting began much earlier though. As the long, deep track made by the repeated passage of vehicles began to develop within months after the expansion work ended in December 2016, Sino-Hydro itself cut them from several kilometers of the road.

The company left in June 2017 on expiry of the defect-liability period.

The road transport and bridges ministry is now seeking Tk 900 crore for maintenance in the next five years, ministry officials said.

For now, the RHD is fixing the damage temporarily, which will require Tk 10 crore. The RHD began the mending job in

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Workers and a road milling machine have been deployed to smooth down the Dhaka-Chittagong highway after the surface became uneven because of "overloading". The photo was taken at Dhamoti in Cumilla on Wednesday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

GAZIPUR, KHULNA

CITY POLLS

Tough race for AL candidacy

Party has multiple options in Gazipur, two in Khulna

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The ruling Awami League is facing two crucial problems in picking mayoral candidates in Khulna and Gazipur city polls, slated for May 15.

In Khulna, the party is struggling to find a "popular and acceptable" candidate for voters. But in Gazipur, the AL is finding it difficult to choose its nominee as both the nomination frontrunners are "popular and influential" leaders, party insiders said.

Against this backdrop, the AL Local Government Nomination Board is set to meet at the Gono Bhaban tomorrow evening to pick its two mayor candidates. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the AL president, will preside over the meeting.

The AL is very careful about picking its candidates as it sees the city corporation elections as a test for the party's

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Last date of nomination paper submission
APRIL 12

Withdrawal of candidacy
APRIL 23

VOTING MAY 15

NUMBER OF VOTERS

Gazipur

11.64 lakh

Khulna

4.93 lakh

NUMBER OF WARDS

Gazipur 57

Khulna 31

BNP may pick 'tested' leaders

Wants to field candidates who won last elections

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP is likely to give the party ticket to the two current mayors of the Gazipur and Khulna city corporations for contesting the upcoming polls, considering their proven loyalty to the party.

It, however, is also keeping other options open.

Gazipur city Mayor MA Mannan will get the party blessings if he remains physically fit, while Khulna city Mayor Moniruzzaman Moni is at the top of the list of three prospective party candidates, said BNP insiders.

Both the mayors were suspended by the government after they got elected around five years back, and this helped them gain public sympathy, they mentioned.

Mannan defeated Awami League-backed candidate Ajmat Ullah Khan by around 1.5 lakh votes in Gazipur city polls on July 6, 2013, while Moniruzzaman beat AL leader

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Treatment cost too high to bear

Experts say treatment of chronic diseases linked to financial hardship of households

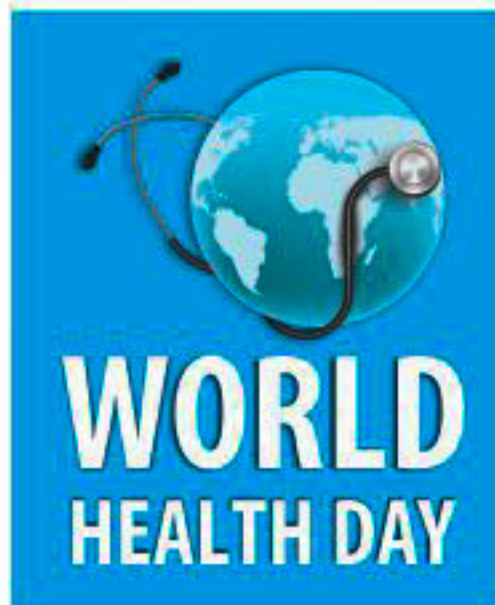
PORIMOL PALMA and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Hasna Begum used to dream that one day her children would have higher education and do decent jobs. Her rickshaw puller husband toiled hard for the dream to come true.

But fate had other plans.

She was diagnosed with breast cancer around two years ago. Since then, the only concern for her family has been the money for the treatment.

"Our worlds have been turned upside down by my disease. Most of the money earned by my husband is being spent after me," said Hasna, 35, sitting outside the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital (NICRH) in the capital's



Mohakhali.

Every 21 days, she needs to have chemotherapy, tests and checkups at the hospital. It takes days and during that period, she, like many other such patients, stays just outside the hospital as she does not have to be admitted and also can't afford to rent rooms outside.

Immediately after learning about the disease at a clinic in Pabna's Bera upazila, Hasna came to the capital's Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. She returned home to her husband and their children -- two daughters and a son -- five months later, having spent over Tk 1 lakh that the family got selling their only piece of land and in donations.

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Khaleda needs treatment immediately

Says Fakhrul after meeting her in prison

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said even though Khaleda Zia's physical condition was not good, she was mentally strong.

"Madam's [Khaleda] personal physicians should be allowed to see her immediately because she is really ill... Madam's physical condition is not good. We have been concerned about her health from the beginning [of her imprisonment]. Her health issues have become complicated," he told reporters after visiting the BNP chairperson inside the old central jail in the capital's Nazimuddin Road.

Fakhrul added that Khaleda was having difficulties in walking and she had some neurological problems that needed immediate treatment.

"Although some specialists have seen her and suggested some tests, we

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As bikers won't stop using footpaths as seen on the inset photo, the authorities have to do something about it. To block them, bamboo poles have been set up on a footpath on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in the capital. The photos were taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Help repatriate Rohingyas

PM urges UN as Guterres calls her, praises Dhaka's humanitarian gesture

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday invited UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to visit Bangladesh to see for himself the plight of Rohingyas who have taken shelter here amid persecution in Myanmar.

She made the invitation when the UN chief phoned her at night.

During their conversation, Hasina also sought UN cooperation in implementing the agreement signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar over the Rohingya repatriation, said PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim.

He said the UN chief highly appreciated Bangladesh for its steps over the Rohingya issue.

Karim said the UN secretary general phoned the PM at 9:25pm and talked to her for nearly 12 minutes. The PM thanked Guterres for taking the Rohingya issue to the UN Security Council.

Hasina invited Guterres to visit Bangladesh for seeing the condition of the Rohingyas. She told the UN secretary general that her government has taken initiatives to relocate at least one lakh Rohingyas to Bhashan Char Island in the coming monsoon.

Over 7 lakh Rohingyas have fled persecution in their homeland Rakhine State since August 25 last year and crossed over to Cox's Bazar.