

## Illegal Senakalyan structure stays on Buriganga

### Cabinet body rules out taskforce suggestion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet committee on the river Buriganga has brushed aside a taskforce recommendation to evict the Senakalyan Sangstha's 2.15 acre encroachment and decided to offer it a "reasonable time" to remove the structures.

The cabinet committee did not also accept the recommendation of the task force to hand over the responsibility of the land along the river Buriganga to the BIWTA, saying the land-related issues must be handled by the deputy commissioner's office.

The decisions were read out yesterday by the chairman of the 12-member task force, Colonel (ret) Akbar Hossain, the minister for shipping, at its fifth meeting. The task force was formed in November last to chalk out plans to save the river Buriganga, with top government officials, environmentalists and eminent citizens as its members.

The decisions have surprised observers and environmentalists. They said a "reasonable time" did not signify anything. The Senakalyan Sangstha ignored all previous attempts to remove the structures.

Most of the encroachments on the

river Buriganga were "systematically legalised" by some unscrupulous officials of the DC's office. Environmentalists said that entrusting the same organisation with the same responsibilities did not guarantee that the river could be saved.

At the meeting yesterday, only six out of twelve members were present. Colonel (ret) Akbar said that the cabinet committee had extended the tenure of the task force. The task force has been assigned the job of preventing environmental degradation of rivers like Balu and Sitalakhya.

To implement the recommendations of the task force, an implemen-

tion committee would be formed with the shipping minister as its chairman. The environment minister, the minister and state minister for housing, and the law minister would be the members of the implementation committee.

The cabinet committee has asked the task force to make sure that the deputy commissioner's office immediately stops all official procedures to acquire 27.03 acres of land at Ali Bahar Char. It may be mentioned that the armed forces have set up their barracks at Ali Bahar Char.

## Gram Sarkar bill passed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad passed the Gram Sarkar Bill, 2003 last night amidst a walkout by the main opposition Awami League (AL).

The law replaces almost a similar provision passed by the immediate past AL government.

Under the new law, the 23-year-old Gram Sarkar system introduced by late president Ziaur Rahman would be revived for grassroots development.

The House passed the bill by voice vote at 9:10pm.

The AL lawmakers staged a walkout after the House rejected proposals for sending the bill to the select committee and seeking public opinion.

The opposition lawmakers observed that the bill would give birth to confrontation at the grass

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## Kiwis see off Tigers

AL-AMIN, Kimberley

Mohammad Ashraful inspired Bangladesh to their best score in the World Cup but it was not good enough to prevent a seven-wicket defeat against New Zealand in a pool B match.

Ashraful top-scored with 56 as Bangladesh made 198-7. The Kiwis raced to victory at De Beers Diamond Oval in 33.3 overs. Bangladesh's score was also their highest score against New Zealand, surpassing the previous best of 177 at Sharjah in the Australasia Cup in 1990.

A consecutive third win put New Zealand into positive run rate territory and in third place on the table.

Opener Craig McMillan smashed 75, before some heavy hitting from Chris Cairns and Scott Styris guided New Zealand home.

Their emphatic win could not take away from the plucky display by their opponents earlier in the day.

The Black Caps struggled to restrict the Tigers, who won the toss.

The 18-year-old Ashraful's maiden one-day international fifty laid the foundation of a fighting total after coming to the crease at 37-3. The right-hander played with common sense during his stylish 82-ball knock that featured six fours and a hooked six off fast bowler Shane Bond.

New Zealand did finish off their chase in quick time but not before Bangladesh's new ball pair of Monjurul Islam and Taposih Baisya gave them some anxious moments.

The match could have been more interesting from a Bangladeshi

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PHOTO: AFP  
 Mohammed Rafique whacks one for six yesterday during Bangladesh's World Cup match against New Zealand at the Kimberley Cricket Grounds in South Africa. Bangladesh lost the match by seven wickets.

## SC Bar claims govt ditched 6 candidates of chief justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury has recommended confirmation of service of eight additional judges but the government confirmed only two of them.

President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Ozaer Faruk yesterday told journalists that the chief justice said this to a dozen senior lawyers on February 21 soon after the government enraged lawyers by not confirming the services of six judges.

He referred to a statement the Law Minister Moudud Ahmed made in the parliament on Tuesday that no-one, excepting those concerned, knew what the chief justice had recommended about the additional judges.

"The chief justice clearly told us that after consulting all six judges of the Appellate Division he had rec-

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## Commentary

# Mockery of a law brings shame on the nation

MAHFUZ ANAM

The passage of the indemnity bill is the one of the greatest insult that one could bring on a democratic society. By this single action we have eroded our credibility as a democratic nation, called into question our respect for law and made a mockery of our justice system. Seldom in the history of modern-day parliament has such a shameful, outrageous, disreputable and unethical law been passed in peacetime and non-emergency situation.

The very spirit of law making, the ethos of jurisprudence, the dignity of legislature and the soul of the parliament stand disgraced by this self-serving action of a ruling party, drunk with the power of its two-thirds majority. It boggles the mind to think that those who are supposed to

legislate to make us a modern and progressive nation sat together and passed a law that put the most pernicious type of lawlessness -- like cold blooded maiming, meaningless and unnecessary killing and calculated torture -- beyond the reach of law.

Yes, the Constitution says that the majority members of the parliament can make any law. But does that really mean that ANY law can be passed -- even a law that legitimises lawlessness? Why not then pass a law that everything that this government does is legal even if it breaks the most rudimentary laws of the land. Why not a law that says that everything the head of government does is the LAW? Better still amend the Constitution and pass a law giving this government lifetime tenure.

If making a 'law' means breaking all legal traditions and ethical

norms, then how can we expect people to have respect for law and obey them voluntarily? Have we forgotten how people laughed when Sheikh Hasina's government passed a law making it a crime to show disrespect to Bangabandhu's portrait or another law allocating the Gonobhabon to herself and a house in Dhanmondi to her sister? Did those laws have any moral standing though they were duly passed in the parliament?

If those laws were abuse of power, then the indemnity law is negation of law itself. Just as people never respected those so-called laws, similarly they will never give moral credence to this shameful display of self-serving use of parliamentary majority.

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## Drowns while being chased by police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

One man drowned in a pond, allegedly after being chased by police in Chashara area in the town yesterday.

The victim was identified as Shah Alam, 35, son of Sadek Ali Mondol of Chashara.

According to sources, police raided a drug den at Chashara Balurmath on Wednesday at around 1.00pm. Shah Alam was taking heroin in front of a drug store at that time. As police chased him, he jumped into a pond. Police did not follow the drug addict and left the place.

Later, the locals informed the police of the incident but it was too late to rescue him. At around 3.00pm, police recovered the dead body of Shah Alam from the pond with the help of the local people.

The autopsy of the dead body was done in Narayanganj General Hospital morgue.

The OC of the Narayanganj thana, Mizanur Rahman, said that Shah Alam was a drug dealer. "When police raided the area he jumped into the pond to escape arrest."

Police recovered 19 bottles of phensidyl from the place.

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## Main suspect in 7-murder case arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested Abdul Aziz, the main suspect in the January 31 seven-murder case that occurred at Nawabganj in the city's Laibagh area on 1994.

A team of the CID arrested Aziz from Rampura area on Tuesday morning. Aziz was produced before the court and sent to the Dhaka Central Jail.

Aziz and his gang had allegedly opened gunshots on a victory procession after losing the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) commissioner election in 1994.

Seven people were killed and 35 others injured during the attack. The incident took place when the then opposition Awami League backed wining ward commissioner Humayun Kabir brought out the procession near Nawabganj park.

## Enam granted ad-interim bail

UNB, Dhaka

Reuters stringer Enamul Huq Chowdhury was granted ad interim bail by the High Court yesterday in Ajanta cinema blast case.

The court also issued rule upon the government to show cause why Enam should not be granted regular bail.

The order came upon a petition filed on behalf of Enam.

On January 26, Enam was granted ad interim bail by the same court in another case of bomb blast at Mymensingh. But he was not released as police shown him as an arrestee in Ajanta blast case.

Enam was taken into custody on December 12 on charge of filing "false and misleading" reports linking al-Qaeda elements with the December 7 bomb blasts in four movie houses in Mymensingh town.

Dr Kamal Hossain appeared for Enam.

## Dravid to India's rescue

AFP, Durban

Rahul Dravid's 62 got India up to a competitive 250 for nine from 50 overs in their World Cup clash against England yesterday.

Dravid, who found runs hard to come by for much of his innings, reached fifty with a six off James Anderson before he was eventually out in the last over, caught at long-on by Paul Collingwood off Andrew Caddick.

That was the start of a mini-collapse that saw India lose four wickets off the last four balls of the

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# Euro parliament team blasts indemnity law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A European Parliament delegation yesterday expressed serious concern at the recent custodial deaths in Bangladesh and the subsequent passage of a bill indemnifying the joint forces for their actions during a countrywide anti-crime drive.

"We have serious reservations about the indemnity. Nowhere in the world, forget about the western countries, can deaths in custody be tolerated," British parliamentarian Robert JE Evans, a member of the visiting European Parliamentary Delegation for Relations with South Asia and SAARC, told journalists.

He made the observation after a meeting with the Leader of the Opposition in parliament and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina at her office in the Sangsad Bhaban.

Evans said they do not understand why the government went for the indemnification.

Expressing concerns also at the alleged persecution of the minority community, the seven-member European parliamentary delegation felt that there should be independent probes into these incidents. It also stressed setting up of an independent human rights commission in Bangladesh.

Led by First Vice Chairman Thomas Mann of Germany, the delegation is scheduled to meet Leader of the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia today. It is also scheduled to hold a news conference in the city later on the day.

The other members of the delegation are Neena Gill, Benedetto Della Vedova, Jean Francois Vallin, Thierry Jacob and Claudia Schwendenwein.

The delegation referred to the November 21, 2002 resolution of the European Parliament on "seri-

ous human rights violation" in Bangladesh. It noted that although the government criticised the resolution, various quarters approved of it.

"We did not adopt a wrong resolution," Evans said, adding that they would raise some critical questions about the overall situation in Bangladesh during the meeting with the prime minister.

In its November 21 resolution, the European Parliament strongly criticised the Operation Clean Heart by Bangladesh armed forces and expressed its serious concern over 25 deaths in the first 25 days of the anticrime drive.

Speaking about minority situation, Evans noted that there was no human rights commission here to look into the circumstances that are creating controversies.

The delegation raised question about non-formation of parliamentary standing committees and pointed at the fact that the parliament was passing bills without any discussion by the committees.

The delegation members were surprised when a reporter pointed out that TV camera, still camera and

even audio-cassette recorder were not allowed inside the parliament building to cover news.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jaill later told newsmen that they told the delegation that the government had made the parliament ineffective and not formed parliamentary committees in the last 18 months.

Jaill said the AL dubbed the 'Joint Drive Indemnity Act, 2003' as anti-human and anti-constitution that has deprived relatives of 58 victims who died in custody from seeking justice.

The party also stressed the need for fair polls in future for the sake of democracy and good governance, Jaill added.



PHOTO: STAR

Leaders of the Sammilita Sangskritik Jote set pigeons free yesterday at the Central Shaheed Minar calling for peace in the wake of US preparations for a war on Iraq.

## Charmonai bombs were 'powerful': One arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Army experts examined the bombs found at the Charmonai mehfil (religious gathering) and said that they were made of powerful explosives.

They further said that loss of lives would have been colossal, had the bombs exploded.

Police arrested one Sudhir alias Sujon Halder, 24, in connection with the incident. A joint interrogation cell will interrogate him.

According to the police, army and eyewitness sources, 16 bottles of petrol were placed at four different points close to the main stage on the day bombs were found at the mehfil site.

All the instruments for exploding bombs, except the detonating

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# Police play a 'mysterious' role over Islamic militant

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Police are dragging their feet over charging the Islamic militant group, Shahadat-E Al-Hiqma, with sedition although they have enough evidence to prove the group's involvement in anti-state activities.

Police also mysteriously overlooked the group even after it held a press conference on February 8 and described its plan to go for armed struggle to turn Bangladesh into an Islamic state. The home ministry banned the organisation on February 9.

Detectives are now hunting for the main leader of the militants, Syed Kawsar Hussain. But Kawsar along with two other militants -- Rabiul Islam and Shamim Uddin -- were arrested on April 23 last year with documents indicating their terrorism plans.

They were freed on bail on July 30 the same year following a writ petition with the High Court.

"Our preparation for filing sedition cases against the Al-Hiqma members is underway," said Assistant Commissioner of the Detective Branch (DB) of police Wazed Ali.

"But we have decided to wait for some more time as the main man of the militant group, Kawsar, is yet to be nabbed," he said.

Other sources said the police have not been given the "green signal" from political high-ups to file the sedition case.

Police have so far arrested three Al-Hiqma members and collected the organisation's constitution, declaration and some other documents that indicate their subversive motives.

Al-Hiqma member Shamim

Uddin was arrested on February 15 with a pipe gun and a pistol at a mess at Mollahat in Rajshahi city.

Police also arrested Rahmat Ali Sarkar, treasurer of Al-Hiqma, and Nizam Uddin, a member of the group, on February 18 and February 23.

But for some unknown reasons, police deliberately did not mention in the arms case that these people are linked to Al-Hiqma. Even in the remand prayer, police omitted the name of the organisation.

DB sources said Kawsar had been organising the party for some years through an Islamic NGO with the same name.

Kawsar was also arrested on charge of cheating locals through his NGO on September 24, 2002.

Freed on bail on December 21, he started reorganising his group.