

Water project to mitigate arsenic poison may get new term

NAIMUL HAQ

The Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply Project (BAMWSP) may be extended for another three years, officials said yesterday.

The World Bank (WB) credit for the US\$ 44 million project is closing on June 30. Earlier, it was extended for nine months after its expiry in September 2002.

A team of experts from the WB headquarters in Washington, US, left the city last week after examining different aspects of the four-year project.

Officials said a three-member team of the WB reviewed recent progress of the project and expressed satisfaction but the officials are still unhappy with the pace of the project, which is supposed to provide alternative source of safe drinking water to arsenic affected areas. However, mitigation activities are still very limited and only a few upazila have been provided with mitigation services. Tubewell testing has been completed in 147 out of 268 upazila.

According to sources, the WB and its co-financiers have placed two conditions for lending further credit.

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Video camera in HSC exam centres to curb cheating

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi education board has identified about 42 Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination centres this year as 'most trouble prone', and decided to set up secret video camera to check widespread cheating.

Chairman of the board Professor Nazrul Islam revealed this to journalists yesterday ahead of the exams scheduled to start on Thursday.

"The video camera checking system will be in place during examinations of the first five compulsory subjects, and all concerned have already been notified about the decision," he said.

"The district administration concerned would bear all the expenses to set up the video cameras," he added.

Eight special teams, each of five government officials, will launch a drive to the trouble-prone centres, while 250 other vigilance teams will be on regular visit to all the centres.

The chairman also said instant

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BELA gets UN award

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) has received the United Nations Environment Award 2003.

Yesterday, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced that BELA has been elected as Global 500 Roll of Honour for its outstanding contribution in protecting the environment. BELA is one of eight individual organisations to receive such honour.

BELA was established in 1991 by a group of young lawyers, who felt the urgency to form an advocacy group to monitor and implement laws and regulations to protect the environment.

The organisation has filed 38 environmental cases, of which 12 decisions went in favor and the rest are yet to be solved.

UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer will present the award to the Director of BELA, Rizwana Hasan, in Beirut, Lebanon, at World Environment Day ceremony on June 5, said a press release yesterday.

Table with 3 columns: Sun Rises, Sun Sets, and dates (May 28, May 29).

Table with 3 columns: Azan, Jamaat, and times for prayer (Fajr, Zohr, Asr, Maghrib, Esha).

4 US soldiers killed in Iraqi guerilla attacks

AFP, Baghdad

Four US soldiers were killed in a flare-up of guerilla attacks in Iraq that continued for a second day yesterday, marring the US-led administration's claim that post-war reconstruction is steaming ahead.

Eleven soldiers were also wounded in the four incidents.

A soldier was killed early yesterday and seven others wounded when they came under attack in the flashpoint town of Fallujah from a "hostile force of unknown size."

US Central Command said the army unit responded "decisively

with concentrated fire," killing two of the attackers and capturing six others.

Initial reports are that the attackers fired from a mosque in the city, Centcom said.

On Monday before sundown, an attack targeted the main highway between the massive US military camp at Baghdad airport and the occupation headquarters in the city centre.

An explosion destroyed the lead armoured car in a three-vehicle convoy and shook surrounding homes.

US commanders told an AFP correspondent on the scene that an

unknown attacker had thrown a bag packed with an explosive device.

The "satchel charged munition" had detonated the rounds inside the armoured vehicle, which was "turned into ash," said Lieutenant Colonel Scott Rutter of the 3rd Infantry Division.

The three soldiers in the lead vehicle were wounded, along with a fourth who went to the rescue and was wounded by the secondary blast, Rutter said Monday night. One of the soldiers later died.

"The second vehicle engaged the individual but the individual got away. He was shot and wounded and ran away across the

highway," Rutter added.

Six or seven black-clad Saddam Fedayeen guerrillas, two brandishing large portraits of the ousted strongman, were seen celebrating their spectacular daylight attack on the US military convoy, witnesses told AFP yesterday.

"They were waving their Kalashnikovs and Saddam pictures in the air," one witness said, adding that there were tunnel networks on either side of the road that had been formerly used by Iraqi security services.

Rutter put a brave face on the raid, which coincided with

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A corridor, left, of the administrative building of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University looks deserted after suspension of a teachers' association election yesterday. At least ten doctors and teachers were assaulted and ballot papers snatched from the university's polling centre allegedly by a group of pro-BNP doctors. Police, right, stand guard at the medical university after the incident.



PHOTO: STAR

Civil society decries WTO duplicity

STAR REPORT

A civil society forum yesterday criticised the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for its "unequal, immoral" regulations that further marginalised the least developed countries (LDCs).

The Dhaka Civil Society Forum (DCSF) also blamed the WTO for non-implementation of the pledges it made to the LDCs in its different ministerial declarations.

The concerns were aired at a press briefing at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), attended by CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Regional

Media and Advocacy Coordinator for South Asia Mona Lazo and Dr Zafar Ullah Chowdhury of Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), among others.

"The WTO has not yet implemented the LDC agenda, adopted in the Doha declaration. But it implemented those taken in favour of developed countries," said the CPD executive director.

Mona Lazo said the WTO trade rules were crafted to favour rich countries.

The DCSF, formed mainly to help the LDCs, said

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M.Phil. students lose session to DU laxity

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Sixty students who qualified for admission to M.Phil. (Master of Philosophy) course in the current academic session (2001-2002) at Dhaka University have missed the session due to negligence of their respective departments.

Campus sources said 25 students of sociology, 12 of law and 10 of management could not get admission as the departments concerned did not send necessary papers to the registrar's office in time.

Meanwhile, four students of Arabic, three of political science, two of public administration, two

of applied chemistry and chemical technology, one of modern languages and one of economics could not also get admission as the departments delayed sending their papers to the registrar's office.

Thirty-five students of Bangla also lost one academic year due to negligence of the department last year and the students got admission this year.

"The time limit for submission of papers was extended more than once and those were to be placed before the Board of Advanced Studies on October 27 and Academic Council on October 30

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Vajpayee for more steps to resume Indo-Pak talks

Delhi-Lahore bus service to reopen, 130 Pakistanis freed

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee yesterday said some more steps would be taken to help build an atmosphere of trust to resume dialogue with Pakistan.

"Some steps have already been taken and some more will be taken to create an atmosphere of trust so that dialogue could start," he told reporters at the airport here shortly before leaving for a tour of Germany, France and Russia where he will interact with world leaders including American

President George W Bush. Vajpayee said that halt to terrorism and dismantling of terrorist infrastructure by Pakistan was essential to help resumption of dialogue.

Vajpayee's remarks came less than 24 hours after the Indian government announced

Monday night its decision to restore the bus service between New Delhi and Lahore, signaling restoration of road link between India and Pakistan snapped by New Delhi following the

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Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Vegetable exporters may stop shipment from June 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Export of perishables may stop if the government does not withdraw a 15 percent freight charge hike, supposed to come into effect from June 1.

Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Exporters Association at a meeting in the city yesterday observed that they could not bear the additional charge.

"We would stop exporting vegetables and other perishables from June 1, since we cannot afford to pay the additional charge," said Mohammad Monsur, vice president of the association.

However, the exporters did not have any communication with the government till yesterday.

The government announced the freight hike for export of perishable goods by Biman flights on May 8, citing a rise in costs.

Exporters claimed that the uni

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Meet on 'road map' to ME peace delayed

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel and the Palestinians yesterday delayed a meeting of their prime ministers on the US-backed 'road map' to peace that had been planned for today, officials on both sides said.

Palestinian Information Minister Nabil Amr said in a statement that the meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas had been put off for "technical reasons."

He said he still expected the talks to go ahead at some stage in the next 48 hours. Other Palestinian officials said they hoped the meeting would be held tomorrow.

An Israeli political source also said a meeting had been planned today but that the Palestinians had sought a postponement because of a visit to the West Bank city of Ramallah by Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio.

"No new date was set," the Israeli source said.

They made their statements after Palestinian Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath said in Greece that the meeting would go ahead today. It appeared Shaath had not been informed of the change of plans.

Sharon and Abbas are expected

also to meet next week at a summit with US President George W Bush, probably in Jordan's Red Sea port city of Aqaba.

Today's meeting had been expected to help prepare for the three-way summit following Israel's endorsement of the road map on Sunday, despite its reservations.

Contractor shot dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A contractor was gunned down allegedly by extortionists at East Kazi para in the city's Kafur area yesterday.

A gang of five armed men shot Kazi Hasibuddin Ahmad, 45, when he was getting into his car. The

gang fled the spot in another car.

His brother came out of his plastic factory nearby and took him to the National Heart Institute, where doctors declared him dead.

Family sources said Hasibuddin was also shot by extortionists about one and a half years back.

Kafur police said he was an accused in a murder case filed with the Tejgaon Police Station in 1994.

No case was filed till the writing of this report last night.

Hundreds of Asian women sex slaves in Australia

AFP, Sydney

Australia's top crime agency yesterday revealed it was examining allegations that hundreds of young women were being lured from Asia with promises of work and then forced to work as sex slaves.

The Australian Crime Commission (ACC) said trafficking in sex slaves was probably linked to the people smuggling operations run by organised crime syndicates that have been the focus of border control efforts in recent years.

ACC chief executive officer Alastair Milroy told a parliamentary committee that his agency

began gathering intelligence on sex slavery in the last month and planned to report its findings in September.

The investigation comes as the Australian government faces rising pressure to stamp out sex slavery. There have been reports that children as young as 12 are being forced into prostitution.

New South Wales state minister for Women Sandra Nori said last week that many Asian prostitutes were offered well-paid work in Sydney and then held in brothels and forced to "pay off" debts of up to 50,000 dollars (32,500 dollars US).

"These women and children are literally being held hostage by

predators who take their passports and enslave them into prostitution," Nori told the NSW parliament.

The women are believed to come from across Asia, including Thailand, Cambodia, China, Korea and Vietnam.

Australia passed laws designed to outlaw the trade in sex slaves in 1998 but critics question why there have been no charges or prosecutions in almost five years.

Kathleen Maltzahan, a spokeswoman for welfare agency Project Respect, said at any one time there

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7 get life term for killing AL leader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A court here yesterday sentenced seven people to life imprisonment for murdering AL leader Sardar Harunur Rashid in 2001.

Additional District and Sessions Judge (First Court) Didar Ali Fakir also fined the convicts Tk 5,000 each, in default of which they would have to serve an additional six-month jail term.

The convicted seven are Abdus Salam alias Salam Majhi, Moniruzzaman, Abdur Rashid Tapu, Abdur Rashid Tapan, Mahfuzur Rahman alias Nasim, Rony Matubbar alias Tariq and Alam. The last five men, all cadres of the Purbo Banglar Communist

Party, were tried in absentia.

Six other accused in the case -- Tauhidul Islam, Humayun Kabir, Kamal alias Abul Kalam, Kajol alias Khalil, Kuddus and Imam Jamaddar -- were acquitted.

The prosecution story in brief is that the accused gunned down the Awami League leader at about 6am on February 23, 2001 in front of his house at Gagan Babu road under Khulna thana as he was on his way back home from the nearby mosque after Fajr prayers. The killers exploded bombs and fired blank shots as they left the scene.

On the following day, Razia Khatoon, wife of the victim lodged an FIR with Khulna thana in this

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