

Bruised BBC faces change after hard-fought inquiry

REUTERS, London

Emerging from a damaging inquiry that has gripped Britain, the BBC can be sure of one thing as it surveys the wreckage -- it will never be the same again.

The British broadcaster, lauded around the world for its gold-standard reporting, has spent the summer defending its reputation in a high-profile investigation into the death of a weapons expert. Insiders say it will not survive untouched.

A verdict is not expected for several weeks but Auntie, as the BBC is fondly referred to in Britain, is plotting a wide-ranging shake-up to defuse criticism that might be meted out by Lord Hutton, the judge leading the inquiry.

"Neither the BBC nor the government will come out of the Hutton washing machine whiter than white," said Jamie Cowling, a research fellow at the Institute of Public Policy Research.

"There is no question the BBC will have to change."

That change could include sacrificial lambs, others said.

At the very least, Andrew Gilligan -- the journalist behind the report at the center of the inquiry -- is expected to be axed from the BBC's agenda-setting Today radio pro-

gram. Gilligan sparked a furor by accusing Tony Blair's government of embellishing the case for war on Iraq. Gilligan's source, weapons expert David Kelly, subsequently killed himself.

The 81-year-old institution argues the broad thrust of its report was accurate but admits it made mistakes and is now under pressure to tighten editorial guidelines and management lines.

The BBC, publicly funded and overseen by a chairman appointed by the state, is no stranger to political spats and has gone to great lengths to prove its independence and take on a more aggressive edge in an increasingly competitive market.

But insiders say it is time for a culture change.

The inquiry comes at a key time as the broadcaster gears up for a battle over its future, with its charter up for renewal.

Less clear cut is the future of the BBC's straight-talking Director General Greg Dyke and Chairman Gavyn Davies.

The executives -- both had been labeled "Tony's Cronies" for their backing of Blair -- have been knocked for fueling the row in a rush to show their independence from the government.

"There are clearly questions

about whether they rushed too quickly to defend Gilligan. However, you have to see this in the context of what was a pretty ferocious onslaught by the government," said Steven Barnett, professor of communications at London's University of Westminster.

Critics say the BBC's top positions should be reviewed.

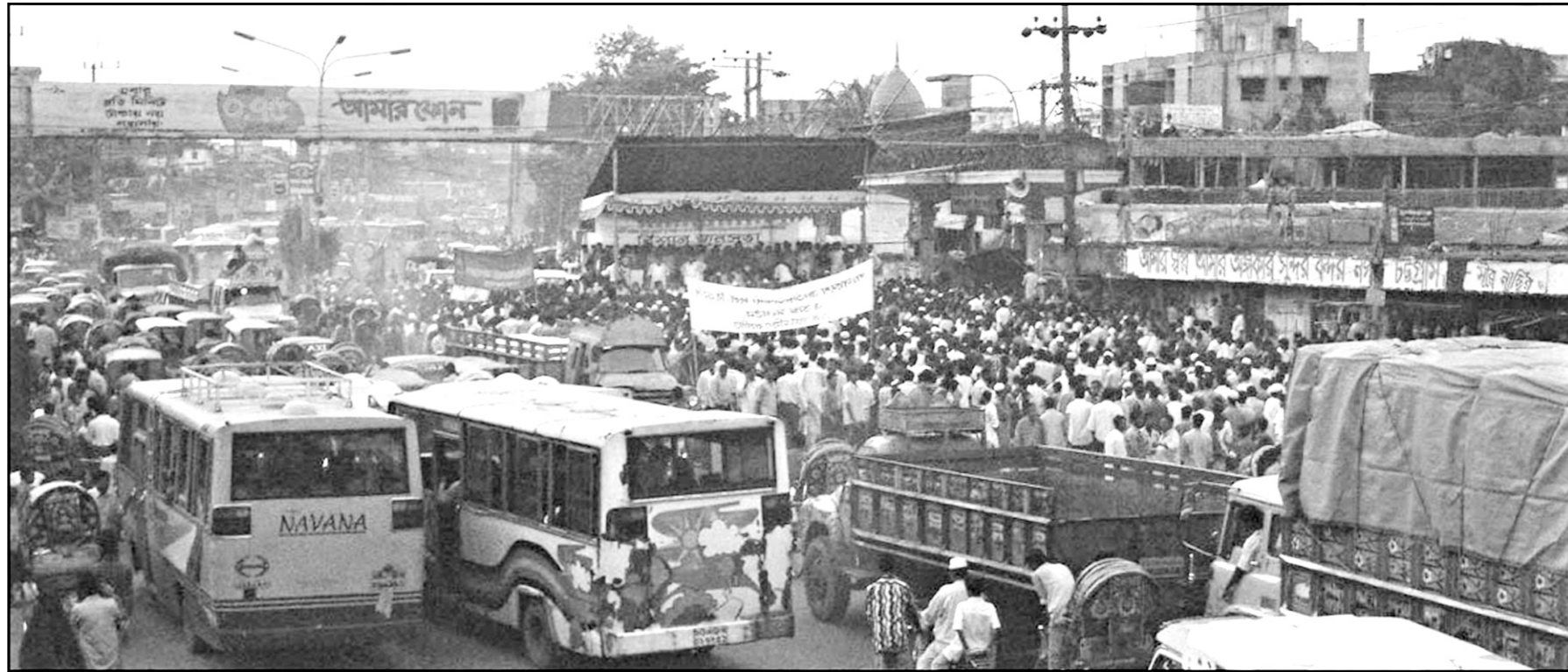
For Dyke, that means a debate over whether the director general should both lead the BBC and act as editor-in-chief. For Davies, that means a debate over whether the governors should have a dual role as defender and regulator of the BBC.

Among other key players, media experts say the future of the head of news Richard Sambrook will depend on Hutton's findings.

"The BBC might not fire anyone immediately but they could end up shunting people to one side," said one analyst.

Dyke has said he is reviewing guidelines for producers, use of anonymous sources, "two-way" broadcasts and freelancing.

"It should accept criticism, change its procedures but press full steam ahead with its efforts to set the news agenda," former BBC journalist John Kampfner wrote in Britain's Guardian.



Hundreds of vehicles including buses and trucks are caught in a traffic jam caused by a four-party alliance rally at Bahaddarhat crossing in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Powerful quakes

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on the street, officials said. Public broadcaster NHK said 479 people were injured in the area, which is sparsely populated.

Police said two men fishing by a riverbank at the time of the quake were missing, and added that they might have been swept away by tidal waves.

The airport in the eastern town of Kushiro had to be closed for three hours after the ceiling of the control tower collapsed. Part of the ceiling of the passenger terminal also fell in, exposing the metal beams.

Elsewhere, roads and buildings cracked, roof tiles fell and grave-stones tumbled. A storage tank at an oil refinery caught fire and the plant had to be closed.

Quake-generated waves measuring about one metre (three feet) in height struck the eastern Hokkaido coast, washing away some empty cars, but no major wave damage was reported.

More than 40,000 people had left their homes in response to the tidal wave threat, Kyodo news agency said, but the warnings were lifted on Friday evening.

The focus of the first quake -- felt in Tokyo about 975 km to the south -- was 42 km below the seabed in the Pacific Ocean near the port of Erimo.

A second quake measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale jolted Hokkaido about an hour later, followed by another measuring 7.1.

The first quake struck at 4.50am (1950 GMT) while most people were sleeping. Many said they were shocked by its power.

Roads were closed and rail services halted in many areas after one person was injured when a passenger train derailed.

Officials at Hokkaido Electric Power Co were quoted by Kyodo as

saying that 24,300 homes near Kushiro lost power. NHK said Hokkaido Electric's Tomari nuclear power station was unaffected.

A fire broke out in a storage tank at an oil refinery owned by Idemitsu Kosan Co Ltd in Tomakomai, a coastal city in southern Hokkaido, sending flames and black smoke spewing into the sky.

The fire was put out around midday but the refinery remained closed for safety checks, Idemitsu said.

Chances of Arifa's return home still remote

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Administrative bottlenecks crop up again to make the chances of return of Bangladeshi child Arifa to her parents remote.

Two-year-old Arifa was taken to the Coochbihar district court and with hopes for return to Bangladesh after the court's decision.

But the court said that no legal papers were sent from the West Bengal government regarding her handing over to her parents, the BBC Bangla Service reported.

Officials of Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata were present at the court to receive the child on behalf of her parents.

The court asked the district administration to produce the child before the court again on September 30, the BBC said. Till then she shall be in care of the Coochbihar police.

Meanwhile, Arifa's parents and Kurigram district administration yesterday prepared to receive her.

Arifa, a child of Kurigram, was abducted on August 25 by an Indian national, Jamal.

PSC sub-registrar exam held despite question leakage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Public Service Commission (PSC) yesterday held the written test for the sub-registrar's post despite leakage of question papers Thursday night.

A handwritten list of questions faxed to newspaper offices late Thursday night was identical to most questions in the written test.

Dhanmandi Police arrested two people -- Kabir Hossain and Zahurul Islam -- from the Teachers' Training College (TTC) in Dhaka in connection with the leakage of questions. The arrested were produced before the court and then sent to the Dhaka Central Jail, police said.

A total of 2,300 candidates sat for the test against 34 posts of sub-registrar under the PSC.

Senior PSC officials declined to comment on the issue. One official however said the handwritten documents sent to newspaper offices did not constitute a valid allegation.

This is the third incident of question leakage for examinations under the PSC, the two other cases had to do with BCS examinations.

50 injured as villagers clash in B'baria

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

At least 50 people were injured, 15 of them seriously, in a clash between two groups of villagers at Bogdagar village in Nabinagar upazila yesterday morning, witnesses said some eight houses were damaged and valuables looted during the clash that continued for an hour.

The clash was a sequel to past enmity between the two groups of villagers, they said.

Fifteen of the injured were admitted to Nabinagar Health Complex. Later, four of them -- Shahanoor, 45, Rabban Mia, 48, Gulzar Hossain, 20, and Habibur Rahman, 45 -- were sent to Dhaka in critical condition.

On information, Nabinagar police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Madrassah

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not decide yet which organisation -- the Islamic University or the National University -- would oversee madrassah higher education, officials said.

However, the education secretary said, "It will not be difficult for the National University to oversee the curriculum and examinations of Fazil and Kamil students."

The Islamic University will not be much effective in regulating all examinations because of its location in Kushtia, a faraway district, he said.

Desa

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Subscribers alleged Desa officials of filing cases at random for 'extorting money on various pretexts.

Md Shajahan and Zahangir Kabir of Goran said a Desa team visited their houses, but came to know cases against them only when they got court summons.

"We did not know anything about the faults in our meters. Desa officials never told us anything," said Shajahan.

"I gave Tk 2,000 to a court official who promised to ensure me a bail," he said.

Zahangir said he knew the fault in his meter but could not replace it as the Desa office in Basabo demanded Tk 6,000 for a new one priced at Tk 1,300.

"They filed a case against me and when I came to attend a court hearing the officials said they would ensure me bail if I gave them Tk 5,000."

"Non-compliance will land you in jail, they threatened me."

The parliamentary standing committee on public undertakings last month observed that losses of the organisation were growing because of reasons that include widespread corruption.

Corruption in Desa has increased three folds in the last six years, the committee said.

Kelly findings

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"This was a cynical abuse of power which deserves the strongest possible condemnation," the lawyer said.

"No wonder Dr Kelly felt betrayed after giving his life to the service of his country. No wonder he was broken-hearted."

Kelly, 59, a Ministry of Defence expert on Iraq's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and a former UN inspector in Iraq, was the anonymous source of the BBC report which alleged that Downing Street had "sexed up" intelligence in the run-up to the Iraq war.

In particular, the report challenged the most sensational claim in a September 2002 dossier on Iraq that Blair put before parliament -- that Iraq could deploy chemical or biological weapons in as little as 45 minutes.

It was only after Hoon launched the inquiry, on Blair's instructions, on August 1 that it emerged that that claim referred to weapons fired from artillery or mortars, and not missiles that could hit distant lands.

Downing Street insisted the BBC retract the story. It refused. In the row that ensued, Kelly was exposed as its source and forced to face aggressive questioning before a parliamentary committee.

Within days, a despondent Kelly left his home in Oxfordshire for a

walk, slit his wrist and bled to death, leaving no suicide note.

The discovery of his body on July 18 hurled Blair, then embarking on a tour of East Asia, into the most serious crisis of his six years in office.

Blair, one of the witnesses who passed before Hutton, was Friday reported to be hunkering down in the country hideaway of Chequers, drafting his address to the annual conference of his governing Labour Party next week.

With the Hutton report not expected before November, the prime minister is expected to use his speech in Bournemouth, southern England to refocus the nation on his domestic reform agenda.

But the inquiry has personally cost Blair dearly, with an opinion poll in the Guardian newspaper this week indicating that 61 per cent of voters now are unhappy with his performance.

In his closing statement to the inquiry Thursday, government lawyer Jonathan Sumption said the government had no obligation to protect Kelly's identity, and that he had no right to expect as much.

There was "no constitutional principle" that civil servants were entitled to anonymity, he said, adding: "The government neither should, nor could, have tried to keep this information indefinitely concealed."

The BBC's lawyer Andrew Caldecott preferred to focus on the 45-minute claim in the September dossier, in a closing statement meant to prove that the public broadcaster had been right all along.

"The best government minds took close consideration as to the outing of Dr Kelly, but in this fundamental misrepresentation to the public and this wholly unprecedented context (in this) there was nothing," he said.

"Humble pie, it seems, was not on the menu," he said.

Lawyers

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ing pro-government lawyers attacking other lawyers at the Dhaka Bar Association on September 6 was screened at the press conference.

Earlier in the day, an extended meeting of the BBC presided over by Amir-ul-Islam was held at the council's auditorium. Presidents and secretaries of the country's 65 bar associations attended the meeting. Barrister Shafiq Ahmed, chairman of the executive committee of BBC, Abdul Baset Majumder, chairman of enrolment committee and Abdus Salam Talukdar, chairman of the human rights committee were also present.

Speakers at the meeting said the amendments of the Civil Procedure Code and bar council rules and order amount to direct interference in the freedom of lawyers and will adversely affect litigants.

At noon, the lawyers formed a human chain in front of the Supreme Court premises.

Progressive Lawyers Front (PLF), another lawyers' forum, also held a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity yesterday to press home their 18-point demand, which also includes the six-point demand of the bar council.

Tripura CM

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Manik Sarkar felt that other border related problems should also be identified and solved together. Such a proposal was given to the BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) by the BSF (Indian Border Security Force), but the BDR did not agree, he said.

"I don't believe this problem can be resolved at the official level, because it a policy matter," he said.

Manik Sarkar, who visited Dhaka before the inauguration of the Dhaka-Agartala bus service on September 19, said he would welcome any decision or agreement for business and trade between Bangladesh and the seven north-eastern Indian States.

He said he received such a proposal from the FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry), which he called "a good proposal."

The Tripura chief minister said he would discuss these things with six other State governments, but those governments cannot do anything as international trade needs a nod from the central government.

Showing his interest in the use of the Chittagong Port and the Ashuganj River Port, Sarkar said he had raised the issue with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and others concerned during his Dhaka visit, saying that he received a positive response from the Bangladesh side.

A significant number of young entrepreneurs, who are members of the JCB, took part in the question-and-answer session moderated by Rumi Saifulah, JCB vice-president for 2003.

Infighting in BCL

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different district, metropolitan and university committees and held back the formation of about 24 out of 84 such units across the country.

At least four factions are active in the student organisation's DU unit, the one-year tenure of which expired in July this year.

The groups are led by unit President Delwar Hossain, General Secretary Hemayet Uddin Khan, former Mohsin Hall unit president Shafiqur Rahman Shafique and expelled leader Abdul Wadud Khokon.

The conflict in the DU unit and hall units has gathered pace in the wake of the expiry of their tenure, sources said.

Because of factional fighting, the BCL failed to launch a movement against the four-party alliance government, a top BCL leader admitted.

Liaquat shrugged off the existence of rival factions in the student front, but admitted competition among leaders to rise through organisational ranks.

He said some leaders were not active in politics and seven were relieved of their posts on the grounds.

The conflict in the DU committee is a spillover from the central committee, some BCL leaders said.

They said a conflict between the central committee president and the DU unit chief intensified following formation of the full-fledged DU unit committee last year and left a domino effect on the campus.

BCL central committee leaders now rarely visit the Dhaka University campus due to internal hostility that has made the unit virtually listless.

Internal factions are also ripe in the student body's DU hall units that play a vital role in campus politics.

Obaidul Kader, joint secretary of the AL, told the Daily Star that he sat with the BCL leaders and discussed the problems.

"We will overcome the problem soon and bring back an environment of cooperation and cohesion in the BCL politics," he said.

Ctg port

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Seeking anonymity, a senior navy official said, "No plan to shift the naval base was taken up as it would cost a huge amount of money. We don't have funds for this now."

A senior port official said, "Pilots and ship operators find it difficult to manoeuvre vessels at the 'cutting bend' near the naval base, fearing accidents". Another bend known as 'gupta bend' is also a risky point for ship movement. Many merchant vessels narrowly escaped accidents or collisions there, the official said, declining to be named.

Ship operators need to take extra caution in manoeuvring vessels in the 20-kilometre-long port channel because of its varying depth and breadth at different points, he pointed out.

Harbour Master of Chittagong Port Captain Kamrul Hossain told The Daily Star, "Ship movement in the port channel has greatly increased as over 1500 vessels now arrive at the port a year. Ten years ago, about 1100 ships used to call at the port annually."

Some sources said several accidents occurred due to improper manoeuvring of vessels by pilots, in which port jetties were damaged.



PHOTO: STAR

Dancers perform at the launch of a drama festival organised by a cultural group at Shawkat Osman Memorial Auditorium at the public library in Dhaka yesterday.

Vanishing splendour

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government bureaucrats, government ministers and MPs in power, and other rich professionals.

In these areas, particularly in Gulshan and Baridhara, specific diplomatic zones were set aside for foreign embassies. Residents of diplomats of these foreign missions were also located in the same areas. As a result, these areas came to be regarded as very important and the value of land there began to rise exponentially. This led to a commercial stimulus that influenced the development pattern of these areas, significantly reducing their residential aspects.

This attracted the real estate developers who began buying up residential plots for construction of high-rise apartment and commercial complexes. For commercial projects, the developers initially chose sites on the main roads that conveniently served commercial purposes. Their apartment projects, though equally prized, had a somewhat lower priority as compared with the commercial projects due to highly profitable returns from such enterprises.

In about 30 years, the price of land in these areas has reportedly shot up at least 25 times. In 1970, the price of land per bigha was Tk 5 lakh. Now the price for the same land has skyrocketed to crores of taka in the open market, which indicates how attractive this may be to real estate developers for commercial projects.

The fallout of such wanton commercialisation has been many. Among other things, it has contributed to the defilement of the once pristine Gulshan-Banani and the Gulshan-Baridhara Lakes. Besides large-scale encroachments, which Rajuk has so far failed to remove due to legal complications, the two lakes have undergone widespread pollution. No effective measures have yet taken by the authorities concerned to remedy the critical pollution situation.

Thus, Dhaka's residential areas are fast losing their splendour under the current development spree and evolving into commercial areas, merging into the vast concrete jungle that the rest of the city is becoming.

6 top cops

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at Dumuria. Mrinal presented a diamond ring on the occasion of wedding of the only son of a former SP, who retired in 1996.

Debu said one of the beneficiaries used to supply bullets and information about police operations to the NBCP and get handsome payment. Three OCs of Dumuria Police Station kept in touch with Mrinal.

After committing a murder Mrinal took shelter at the official residence of an OC, who paid visits to Mrinal's fish farm to satiate his appetite for sex and liquor.

An OC would get Tk 5 lakh every month during 1997 to 2002 for supplying bullets and giving shelter to the NBCP killers. All the three OCs backed the rise of the party, Debu said.

Debu's confessional statement is being checked as to the involvement of police officials, sources said.

But the outlaw is yet to disclose whereabouts of Mrinal and arms and ammunition of the party fearing reprisal against his family and relatives. "We swore an oath never to disclose party secrets," he said.

River-link project

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Bangladesh after the federal Indian government approved a budget for the construction of controversial Tipaimukh Hydroelectric Multipurpose High-dam at the confluence of the Barak and Tuivai rivers in Manipur.

Experts fear diversion of the Barak waters for power generation will harm flow to the Surma and Kushiara, the feeders to the Meghna.

The Bangladesh delegation at the JRC meeting will ask India to explain its dam project and seek a guarantee that it would not dry up the Meghna flow.

The Bangladesh delegation to the talks also includes Water Resources Secretary Mohammad Sayef Uddin, JRC Director M Azizul Haq, members Tawhidul Anwar Khan and Emaduddin Ahmed and JRC Executive Engineer M Fazlul Rahman, Director General Mokhlesuzzaman and Chief Engineer Panna Sheikh of the Water Development Board, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Tofail K Haider and Director General (South Asia) of Foreign Ministry M Fazlul Kanim are also on the delegation.

The Indian side, to be led by Water Resources Minister Arjun Charan Sethi, includes Water Resources Secretary AK Goswami and Commissioner for Eastern Rivers ML Goel, among others.

Although planned to meet at least three to four times a year, the JRC meeting remained suspended since early 2001 because of Indian reluctance.

Following letters from two successive water resources ministers in Bangladesh to their Indian counterpart, Delhi agreed to the JRC meeting.

As a last-hour preparation and consultation prior to finalising the 'Position Paper', the water resources minister held a meeting on September 25, a holiday.

Earlier on Thursday, Hafiz told newsmen that prior to going to international forums with the river interlink plan, Bangladesh would try to resolve the problem with India through all normal courses of dialogue.

During his meet with Christine Wallich, new country representative of the World Bank in Bangladesh on Monday, Hafiz requested her not to bankroll any water project that deprives the lower riparian countries of

their due share of common river waters.

Wallich assured the minister of conveying the sentiment to the World Bank headquarters.

The minister also expressed deep concern at low flow of Ganges waters to Bangladesh in the last dry season, particularly during the February-March period.

After the signing of the Ganges Water-sharing Treaty with India in 1996, expectations ran high that the two neighbours would gradually move ahead signing similar deals on 54 other common rivers.

The last JRC meet took up the Teesta water-sharing talks that ended inconclusively. Officials hope the coming meeting would focus on water sharing of seven common rivers -- the Teesta, Dharla, Dudhikumar, Khawai, Monu, Gumti and Muhur.

The JRC sources said a Joint Experts Committee (JEC) of Bangladesh and India would submit a report on the draft mechanism of sharing the Teesta waters reasonably between the two nations.

Talking to The Daily Star, water resources expert Dr Arun Nishat said sharing of common river waters was emerging as a major problem for the downstream nations.

"While China is planning to build a dam in Tibet to divert the Brahmaputra waters to drought-prone central China regions, India is going to divert the same river flows too."

"Flows to Bangladesh and Bhutan would dry up in the process," observed Nishat, a former professor at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

Dr Nishat felt that the four co-riparian countries that share the Brahmaputra should sit together and work out plans so that the river best serves all of them.

Hizbut men

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blew on their whistles to call some 35 fellow activists scattered around in the area.

The duty officer of Fatullah Police Station said last night that an officer from the police station went to the spot to investigate the matter.