

# Civil society seeks to talk river-link with Indian CJ

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Civil society members in a letter yesterday sought an audience with Indian Chief Justice VN Khare and eight other Supreme Court judges to convey Bangladesh's concern over the giant neighbour's mega river-link project.

The move came following Indian Supreme Court's endorsement of the project and insistence on adding pace to the scheme, which Bangladesh fears will bring ecological ruin to it.

In a press release, Bahreen Khan, senior staff lawyer of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA), said copies of the letter were also sent to Bangladesh's Chief Justice KM Hasan, Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vina Sikri, Bangladesh's Water Resources Minister M Hafizuddin Ahmed and his Indian counterpart Arjun Charan Sethi.

Several other ministers and opposition leaders of both nations received the letter, he added.

Signatories to the letter are: Bela Director Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Dhaka University teacher Dr Asif Nazrul, Chairperson of Coalition of Environmental NGOs (CEN) Atiq Rahman, journalists Enayetullah Khan, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and Mostafa Kamal Majumder, NGO activists Farhad Mazhar, Khushi Kabir, Mahfuz Ullah and Masood Alam Ragib Ahsan and Chairman of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh Quamrul Islam Siddique.

The letter reads: "We hereby express our deep concern about the move taken by the government

of India to implement a multi-million dollar river-linking project to divert vast quantities of water from the rivers of Brahmaputra and Ganges, the two major river systems shared, among others, by India and Bangladesh.

"We are distressed to note that such a mega project is being undertaken by India unilaterally without any consultation with lower riparian Bangladesh, a country created and sustained by the waters of these shared resources upon which such project shall have devastating effects."

The letter is a follow-up to a previous one given by the same group on September 8, requesting the Indian chief justice to review the October 31 Supreme Court order that virtually endorsed the project.

The new letter was mailed in view of non-response to the earlier one and Indian Supreme Court's further intervention in the writ petition that brought the earlier order.

The press release quoted reports that the Indian Supreme Court in November gave New Delhi six weeks' time to file an affidavit, giving details of progress made under the second action plan of the project.

The signatories to the letter declined to accept Indian official position that the river-link project was in a mere conceptual stage, saying New Delhi had carried out feasibility studies on six links under the scheme.

# US envoy hammers on gas export

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Ambassador Harry K Thomas yesterday reiterated Bangladesh should export natural gas, suggesting that it will bracket the country in the world's medium income group.

"I believe the country should export gas. As per our (US) survey, there are unexplored gas reserves in the country," he told the press following his meeting with State Minister for Energy Mosharraf Hossain at the Secretariat yesterday.

"Bangladesh can become a country of the middle-income group through deciding to export gas right now."

Mosharraf also maintained the same line, saying, "We have untapped gas reserves. There are prospects of (gas) export although the government has not taken any decision yet."

The theory is contrary to the observation of Petrobangla, which foresees a gas crisis in future.

However, the minister was of the opinion that crisis in future could be tackled through "importing" gas. He cited the example of Norway that had gas deficit but eventually became an exporting country after striking huge untapped resources.

The two also discussed the Petrobangla report on the gas supply and demand with forecasts up to 2020.

Thomas meanwhile urged the minister to expedite the payment of outstanding bills of US oil companies in Bangladesh.

Petrobangla owes US company Unocal three-month's outstanding bills. The billing status is normal, sources said.

To the south of Bangladesh, only Myanmar exports gas using pipeline from the gas field that involves Unocal. However, years of the gas export to Thailand failed to improve the economy of Myanmar, which is limping with acute energy shortage and low foreign currency reserve for the last several years.

# Pallabi murder Family files case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Wife of Fakhruddin Ahmed lodged a case with Pallabi Police Station Sunday at the killing of her husband and teenage son Saturday morning.

Chan Mian alias Kala Chan, Ashik, Murad, Sagar and two unidentified youths stormed into their residence at Rahmat Camp in Mirpur and killed her husband and 14-year-old son, alleged Sahida Khatun, wife of salt trader Fakhruddin, in her complaint.

Chan fired point blank to my husband's head and Ashik shot him in the chest," the complainant said.

Local criminals led by Chan and Ashik have carried out the grisly murders at the behest of Mohammad Ali, Nano, Noore and Bulu, she further alleged.

Sahida hinted that some locals and traders, who owe her husband huge amount of money, might have masterminded the murders.

Meanwhile, the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka yesterday granted Raja, Shakil, Ejaj, Hasen, Mustak Hossain and Rubi, all arrested in connection with the murder, two-day remand each.

Raju and Shakil are brothers of prime suspect Chan, an accused in 12 criminal cases including three for murders, police said.

Chan and his accomplices might have killed the 50-year-old trader and his son as he refused to pay them toll, police suspect.

A row over business and ownership of land could also have led to the murders, police added.

However, police failed to nab Chan and his close associate Ashik till the writing of this report at 8:30 last night.

# Lalmonirhat AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

District AL leaders held his rivals in the local units of ruling coalition leader Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) responsible for the killing and called the dawn-to-dusk hartal in Lalmonirhat district for today in protest.

The BNP leaders dismissed the allegation and said internal feud in the main opposition party was the cause for his death.

The AL leaders and activists staged a demonstration in the district headquarters yesterday and demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the killers.

Halima Khatun, wife of Suruj, blamed a local gang for his killing and demanded exemplary punishment to the killers.

Faruk, 18, elder son of Suruj and a student of Lalmonirhat Govt College, said his father told the family on many occasions that a gang was trying to kill him.

Suruj's minor children Sumi, 13, and Shisti, 8, repeated the same words in between sobs.

Enayetunnesa, mother of the victim, wailed beside them and demanded trial of the killers fitfully.

Local deputy commissioner and police superintendent visited the scene and assured locals of justice.

A case was filed with Aditmari Police Station, but no-one was arrested until filing of this report last night.

# Academic deadlock

FROM PAGE 1

that injured six people, two of them students.

They snapped telephone connections to the building and burnt an effigy of Vice-chancellor Professor Jasim Uddin Ahmad at around 5:00pm.

The demonstration came after the JU Teachers Association (Juta) went on an indefinite strike, leading to suspension of classes and examinations and session logjam -- an issue the students have been calling on the VC to resolve since November 6.

Amid frayed tempers, the students brought out a procession from the social science faculty and paraded down campus roads before they locked Professor Enamel Huq Khan, pro-VC, ABM Enayet Hossain, treasurer, and Dr Moshir Rahman Khan, proctor, in the administrative building from 11:00am to 5:00pm.

The demonstrators will be fasting unto death on the campus from today in a desperate bid to force the JU authorities to bring a quick solution to the stalemate.

"We feel cheated. The VC assured us on November 10 of breaking the deadlock during Eid vacation. But it is still going on," said an angry student, asking not to be named.

Slogans like "Quit, quit, failed VC" against Professor Jasim Uddin reverberated through the campus.

During the siege, the students issued a 30-minute ultimatum to the authorities to meet them by talks over the issue, but none of

them showed up prompting the demonstrators to go on the rampage and vandalise the administrative building.

One of the injured students is Ahad, while the other could not be identified immediately.

The injured employees -- Abdul Kalim, Abul Hossain, Kafil Uddin and Ramzan Ali -- were taken to the JU medical centre.

The agitators also locked the Agrami Bank (JU branch), examinations office and transport office from 12:00pm to 5:00pm, leaving officials stranded inside.

JU bus services from the campus to Dhaka were off because of the movement and the students also threatened to keep the vehicles out of service until the deadlock ends.

Teachers have been skipping classes since Jute went on the strike on October 15 to press elections to the VC panel that took centre stage in the charter of demands.

"The date for the elections to the VC panel will be declared by December-end. Students may back track until then," the pro-VC said.

Juta's other demands include punishment to an activist of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the student chapter of the ruling BNP, who locked in the authorities of Shaheed Salam Barkat Hall on August 10.

Juta scheduled a meeting for January 1 to launch a tougher programme to push ahead with their demands.

# AL calls hartal

FROM PAGE 12

party's Dhanmondi office with party President Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The hartal is also to protest the deterioration of law and order and price hike of essentials.

As per a previous decision, the AL was to observe a 'demand day' on January 3.

But it took the hartal decision just a day after ruling BNP men attacked and foiled Munshiganj AL's triennial council and left at least 50 injured.

The AL is also scheduled to hold a mass rally at Paltan Maidan on January 10 and Sheikh Hasina, also the leader of the opposition in parliament, will announce from the rally 'final agitation programmes' to dislodge the government.

"The hartal is to protest autocratic activities of the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance regime... If the government wants to resist it or any other programmes, we will go for indefinite hartal across the country," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told reporters after the presidium meeting.

The meeting accused the government of trying to thwart AL's reorganisation efforts by foiling council programmes at places, Jalil said. "The rulers are afraid of the planned anti-government movement by the Awami League and they are out to foil it through atrocities on opposition leaders and activists."

# Behind bars sans trial

FROM PAGE 1

robbery, abduction, smuggling and possession of illegal firearms and explosives are currently pending with the Court of Dhaka District and Sessions Judge, the Sessions Judge and the Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka, court sources said.

Preferring anonymity, an official of Dhaka Central Jail said a large number of such accused continue to languish in other prisons across the country without trial due to the same problem.

"Why should I have to spend year after year in jail without trial. What if I'm acquitted of the charges or given a prison sentence less than 11 years. How can I get back those years lost in jail," said Jahangir while standing in the dock on October 21.

The 151 other inmates of Dhaka Central Jail have similar stories.

Despite repeated reminders, the prosecution failed to produce their witnesses. These witnesses have constantly avoided giving deposition ignoring court orders mailed to their addresses, said a lawyer on condition of anonymity.

He said the courts concerned refused to grant bail to the accused despite a Supreme Court (SC) decision that undue delay in holding trial due to the prosecution's failure will constitute valid grounds for bail.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed said the situation is being monitored and the ministry 'would take measures' for the deserving accused to get bail after assessment of their cases.

He however said nothing could be done by way of compensation for those acquitted or sentenced to a term lesser than their period of incarceration as there is no such law addressing the issue.

Metropolitan Public Prosecutor (PP) Abdullah Mahmud Hassan defended the prosecution's side saying it is the police's responsibility to produce witnesses before the court.

He alleged, "The government has created a situation where the opposition party cannot hold political programmes and even a peaceful council."

Blaming a local BNP lawmaker for foiling the Munshiganj AL council, Jalil said his party took permission from the authorities for holding the council. "The local deputy commissioner in an interview with BBC Radio admitted that he knew nothing about the protest rally of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (BNP's student wing) at the same venue same time," he added.

The AL presidium termed Sunday's incident at Munshiganj a threat to democracy, Jalil said.

While the BNP chief and prime minister is calling for opposition cooperation, her party men are foiling AL's peaceful programmes, Jalil said and asked, "Is it democracy?"

On the recent death of Amar Das (a suspect in Chittagong business magnate Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury abduction case), he said the AL presidium felt that Amar Das was tortured to death just to save BNP men involved in the crime.

He also mentioned that a union parishad chairman in Lalmonirhat was killed on orders from local BNP leader and 24 minority families of Singra in Natore came under attacks by ruling alliance men recently.

# 2 gunned down

FROM PAGE 12

business in Daulatpur and lived in Shewarpara in Dhaka.

Police linked the killing to Montu, son of Hazi Nur Mohammad of Agargaon, saying he was behind the gangland turf war-motivated killings.

Police could not give details about the killings until 10:00pm.

Mohammadpur police recovered Tk 4,500 and a mobile phone from Rezaul and another mobile phone from Anwar.

The proposed 91-km cross-border highway would be built from Ramu of Chittagong to Buchidang in Yangon at an estimated cost of about Tk 400 crore, sources added.

Among others, Syed Rezaul Hayat, communications secretary, and Sheikh Babul Islam, chief engineer of Roads and Highways Department, were present at the meeting.

# Merchant shot dead in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Abdul Majid Shaikh, 50, timber merchant and a Jatiya Party member, was gunned down by unidentified assailants near his house at Mechaghona village under Dumuria upazila at 7:45pm Sunday.

The attackers shot into his chest, abdomen and ears from close range, leaving him dead on the spot.

Police recovered two used shells of rifle bullets from the place. None was arrested till the time of writing this report yesterday evening.

Eyewitnesses said the murder was committed right in front of his neighbours. His wife alleged the killers were firing blank shots and shouting slogans in favour of outlawed New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP) while leaving the place.

Family sources alleged Majid Shaikh, an influential member of Khulna district unit of Jatiya Party, was killed for refusing to pay toll to the NBCP activists.

Police, however, said the murder was a sequel to a family feud. Majid Shaikh was having strained relations with his first wife for marrying a 21-year-old girl early this year.

# Villagers kill lame tigress

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Locals thrashed to death a tigress at Maddhya Amurbunia village under Morelgaon upazila at the edge of the Sundarbans on Sunday.

A tigress from Chandpai forest range sneaked into cattle sheds of Azizul Islam Khan and Shahjahan Malik in the early morning and feasted on five calves, a forest official sources said.

Azizul and Mallik tried to drive the tigress out of the village but it attacked them, injuring both critically. By that time, villagers in hundreds gathered and beat the animal to death, he added.

An official of Chandpai forest range told The Daily Star over phone that the tigress, of 12 to 14 years and measuring five feet 10 inches, had leg injury and entered the village to look for easy hunts.

"As forest officials do not have tranquilliser to numb wild animals, we could do nothing to save the tigress before angry villagers started beating it," he added requesting anonymity.

A general diary was lodged with Amurbunia police.

# JCD men beat up four BCL leaders on SSMC campus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal beat up four leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League on the Sir Salimullah Medical College (SSMC) campus yesterday as they tried to resume their activities there.

Two of them -- Organising Secretary of SSMC BCL Muntahir Raja, and Library Secretary Mominul Hasan Kallol -- were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The two others are Publication Secretary Sagar Kumar Sarker and Office Secretary Jahanshams Nitol.

The JCD made the attack when BCL President Shahriar M Sadeq, General Secretary Kamrul Hasan Shamim and Finance Secretary Harunur Rashid along with the four were talking with other activists in front of the academic building at around 12:00 noon.

"They attacked us as we ignored their 'order' not to come to the college campus," Rashid said.

The BCL leaders were staying off the campus since the JCD ousted them immediately after the BNP came to power in October 2001, he said, adding that "after formation of our committee on December 17, we decided to enter the campus at any cost."

# 2 gunned down

FROM PAGE 12

business in Daulatpur and lived in Shewarpara in Dhaka.

Police linked the killing to Montu, son of Hazi Nur Mohammad of Agargaon, saying he was behind the gangland turf war-motivated killings.

Police could not give details about the killings until 10:00pm.

Mohammadpur police recovered Tk 4,500 and a mobile phone from Rezaul and another mobile phone from Anwar.

# Work on road

FROM PAGE 1

construction of two bridges and two kms of new road for the project, they added.

A report on the construction site of a proposed bridge near Tangnabaro border in Myanmar was handed over to the communications minister at the meeting, sources said.

The proposed 91-km cross-border highway would be built from Ramu of Chittagong to Buchidang in Yangon at an estimated cost of about Tk 400 crore, sources added.

Among others, Syed Rezaul Hayat, communications secretary, and Sheikh Babul Islam, chief engineer of Roads and Highways Department, were present at the meeting.

# Biman flights

FROM PAGE 1

operated by pilots from Singapore -- to tackle the situation.

A Biman flight was stranded in New Delhi as pilots refused to fly to home, and flights to Hong Kong and Singapore were also delayed.

Biman operates on seven domestic points with six captains and 12 flight officers and runs 12-15 domestic and eight international flights a day.

Earlier at a special general meeting on December 16, Bapa raised the four-point demands with the December 21 deadline: increased salaries for the crew, commissioning of an alternative institution or aviation medicine experts for medical check-up, employment of cockpit crew's children in Biman and relaxing of rules to help Bapa get registered as a collective bargaining agent.

Under the present agreement, pilots should get a two-day break after a flight, but they had to operate because of pilot shortage before, the Bapa chief said.

Bapa says Biman that has 141 pilots on contract needs at least 200 for smooth operation of flights to 26 international and seven domestic destinations with 17 aircraft.

A Biman official accused Bapa office bearers of trying to cash in on the Hajj pilgrimage rush to press their demands, adding: "A group is trying to create an artificial crisis in

# Terror alert

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ordered the color-coded alert system raised to orange -- denoting "a high risk" of terrorist attacks -- from yellow, which the Department of Homeland Security defines as "a significant" or "elevated" risk of terrorist attacks.

It is the fifth time the orange alert has been activated since the system was instituted in March last year.

"The information we have indicates that extremists abroad are anticipating near-term attacks that they believe will either rival or exceed the attacks that occurred in New York and the Pentagon and the fields of Pennsylvania," said Ridge, who met early on Sunday with President Bush's homeland security advisers.

They recommended the change to Bush, who immediately concurred with the decision, a White House official said.

At a hastily arranged news conference, Ridge said security would be beefed up at the nation's airports and more agents would be deployed along its borders. Coast Guard air and sea patrols will also increase to protect the nation's critical ports and shipping lanes.

"We will not broadcast our plans to the terrorists. But extensive and considerable protections have been or soon will be in place all across the country," Ridge said.

US officials singled out New York and Washington as possibly the highest-profile targets.

# Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 12

It said while the report claimed that Bangladesh did not get the second tranche of the IMF credit due to failure to fulfil the donor's conditions, "the fact is the issue of the second tranche of the PRGF credit has not been placed in the board meeting."

The rejoinder does not contradict with the report. The IMF meeting on the issue was originally scheduled for December 15, the date was shifted to December 17 and then the IMF suspended the meeting till the first week of January. The report nowhere mentions or implies the loan has been 'cancelled'. Rather it points out that the IMF has given Bangladesh some time to fulfil its conditions.

Yesterdays meeting however did not discuss landed property issues. This issue is likely to figure in the next meeting, sources said.

A report on the feasibility of converting the Adamjee mills area into a garment and textiles industrial zone will be placed before Prime Minister Khaleda Zia soon.

Meanwhile the prime minister has approved a proposal to set up an inland container terminal on 25 acres of the Adamjee Jute Mills land.

Yesterdays meeting was also participated by Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, State Minister for Jute Lutfor Rahman Khan Azad, former minister Zahuruddin Khan and chief of Transcom Ltd Latifur Rahman.

# PM blames teachers

FROM PAGE 1

reforms in the administration of universities while addressing the gold medal-awarding ceremony of Sushikha Barsha (good education year) 2003 at the Teachers-Students Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University (DU).

A total of 45 students of various departments and institutes of Dhaka University, who secured first class first position and highest grade points in honours examinations this year, were awarded gold medals.

Khaleda distributed gold medals to the recipients and mother of one of them. She also gave away MA Gani Memorial Award to a student among the recipients from the Computer Science department for securing the highest marks.

Education Minister Osman Farruk and State Minister for Education Ehsanul Huq Milan also addressed the function chaired by DU Vice-Chancellor Prof S M A Faiz.

Ministers, MPs, diplomats, academics, university teachers and students attended the function.

The prime minister lamented that the reputation of a university that was once known as the Oxford of the East -- a reference to the DU -- has, unfortunately, been blurred to a large extent.

"Lack of fair and peaceful atmosphere of education is responsible for this. Fame of the university has been damaged due to various conflicts of interest beyond education as well as political envy and violence at different times," she told the audience.

A lot of valuable time has been wasted, inflicting losses on the students as well as the country, she said.

It will be painful to say that the objective of education cannot be fulfilled if congenial environment does not prevail at the highest educational institutions of

the country. Conflicts and violence dominate over sound thinking, she observed.

The prime minister quoted Voltaire: "I differ with your opinion

# BB-Bol

FROM PAGE 12

while Bol survey puts the amount at \$168.7 million.

The BB statistics shows reinstatement during the period was \$88.3 million as against 97.9 million reported by the Bol.

Finally, as per the central bank's estimate, intra-company borrowing during the period was \$18.5 million while the amount was 21.1 million as per the Bol survey.

The BB governor recently told The Daily Star that any Bol findings on FDI should be shared with relevant authorities of the BB before they are published.

The governor has already asked Bol authorities to coordinate with the central bank in future FDI reporting.

"We need to scrutinise all figures as there could be many gaps in the information provided by companies. Therefore, we have asked the Bol to send us its company-wise FDI survey report. If our scrutiny finds the claims satisfactory, we will accept its figure," the governor said.

# DU students

FROM PAGE 12

Students Centre (TSC) on the day.

Pro-Awami League teachers of the university boycotted the function in protest against awarding students by the prime minister,