

German firm to be sued

WASA incurs loss of Tk two crore

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (WASA) is going to sue a German firm for violating an agreement causing it financial losses, official sources said Thursday.

The German firm G K W Consult violated a number of clauses of the six-crore Taka 'Leak detection and waste prevention programme' agreement which forced WASA to incur a loss of about Taka two crore.

A major part of the Taka two crore was paid to the consulting firms as running bills after they assured WASA that relevant document would be submitted at the time of the final billing, the sources added.

The agreement was signed between WASA and G K W and its associate firms Avanti Engineers and Associates of Bangladesh and Seba Messtechnik GmbH of Austria in July 1989. They submitted the report in October 1991. The detailed report was not available.

The consultants firms submitted all the bills for their work in which the WASA authorities found that bills amounting to Taka two crore were not supported with adequate documentary evidences and were not in conformity with the terms and conditions of the agreement, the source added.

The firms did not maintain the master register properly and failed to hand over the project vehicles to the WASA authorities, according to the agreement.

Since September 1991 the firms have been pressing WASA to pay the remaining bills but WASA demanded necessary documents in support of the same.

The WASA on its part also repeatedly kept the firms informed about the matter asking them to submit necessary documents for payment, sources added.

WASA later engaged an audit firm that found the anomalies true.

A WASA source alleged that the consultant firms were still pressing to realise the outstanding bills with the help of some influential persons and so the WASA was planning to go to court to settle the matter.

Officials of the local agents of the consultant Avanti Engineers and Associates were not available for comment.

PM to visit India

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the outstanding issues like the water-sharing of the Ganges, return of the tribals refugee in the Indian state of Tripura.

They suggest that the visit will "generate new expectations" for the improvement of the bilateral ties and "pave the way for dialogue at different levels to resolve the issues."

Last month, the two countries held ministerial level talks on water-sharing in the backdrop of an all-time low flow of the Ganges but failed to produce results, leading to speculations that the Prime Ministerial trip has become uncertain.

At the talks where Agriculture, Water Development and Flood Control Minister M M Jid-ul-Haq led the Bangladesh delegation, a source said, Dhaka tabled "a new proposal". The source, who declined to be identified, refused to elaborate.

"We're confident that India understands the magnitude of the problem," says a senior Foreign Ministry official adding that "we believe they'll come forward in a spirit of good neighbourliness" to solve the issues.

The official, however, says, "It is not that the Prime Minister's visit will solve all the outstanding issues but it will certainly give political direction to the officials of both sides dealing with the things."

Dhaka officials say that a long-standing problem has been resolved with the agreement on the transfer of Tin Bigha. They point out that a date has been set for the handing over of the corridor and add that India should also respond positively on the water-sharing.

On March 26, senior officials of the two countries signed a memorandum that the corridor would be handed over on June 26.

Foreign Minister A S M Mustafizur Rahman during his visit to India insisted that the Tin Bigha transfer would restore the credibility of India to the people of Bangladesh.

The 'good will' visit of the Prime Minister, first as the head of the government to the country, will also take her to the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, sources said.

In May last year, the Prime Minister had been to New Delhi to attend the funeral of the late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

India's Interim Prime Minister Chandrasekhar came to Bangladesh to sympathise with the victims of the April 29 elemental swoop last year.

The two Prime Ministers will also deliberate on the future of the SAARC. Dhaka hosts the summit of the fledgling regional body in December this year.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Farooq Sobhan, now an Additional Foreign Secretary, has been appointed Dhaka's envoy to New Delhi and will leave for the Indian capital shortly.

Last Wednesday, the new Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, K Raghunath, presented his credentials.

May Day observed

The nation Friday celebrated the historic May Day amidst renewed promise to uphold the dignity of labour and ensure the well-being of the working people, reports UNB.

Thousands of trade union workers from different organisations staged separate rallies and joined colourful processions in the capital as elsewhere in the country to mark the day.

On this day in 1986, workers in Chicago city of America spilled their blood to establish the dignity of labour by fixing an eight-hour working day instead of 12 hours.

The day was a public holiday.

Ruling BNP's labour front Jatiyatabadi Samik Dal organised a huge rally at Gazipur, which was addressed by party chairperson Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

Jatiya Samik League backed by Awami League held a huge rally at Tejgaon industrial area on Friday afternoon. Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina addressed the workers' rally.

Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samik Federation held a rally at Fulbaria bus terminal, Biplobi Sarak Paribahan Samik Federation at Saidabad bus terminal, SKOP at national press club, Jatiya Samik Party at Munnujan Textile Mills and Jatiya Garments Samik Federation in front of National Press Club.

The Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) held a cultural programme at TSC on the occasion.

Newspaper offices remained closed. Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television put up programmes and national dailies carried articles highlighting the significance of the day.

Samik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) at its May Day rally warned it would go into a greater movement if the government does not withdraw its decision to retrench over one lakh workers.

BSS adds: Journalist leaders at a discussion meeting in observance of the May Day extended their firm support to the movement of the working class in protecting their rights.

Meanwhile: Trade unions and other organisations observed the historic May Day in the city in a befitting manner.

Discussions and May Day rallies were held at different places where speakers recalled the struggle and sacrifices of the working people in 1886 to establish their legitimate rights.

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the second conference of the South Asian Working Journalists at Hotel Sonargaon yesterday. —PID photo

Khaleda : Press

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growth," she added.

Hosted by Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), the inaugural function was also addressed by Information Minister Nazmul Huda, president and secretary general of BFUJ Reazuddin Ahmed and Amanullah Kabir, Aidan White, general secretary of International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Dietmar Kneitschel of Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany, Gias Kamal Chowdhury, K N Gupta and Rajendra Prabhoo of India, Nissar Ahmed Osman of Pakistan and B S H Jayawardena of Sri Lanka.

The conference aims at strengthening cooperation among the journalists' organisations of the region for greater freedom of press, editorial independence within newspaper organisations and ensuring safety and better working conditions for journalists.

The conference is being attended by journalists from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and host country Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister paid tributes to the journalist community saying "a conscious segment of society and as seekers of truth they have set laudable examples of rising to the occasion at the hours of the nation's need."

She said the journalists in Bangladesh as the vanguards of Language Movement and standard-bearers of glorious War of Independence had never compromised with autocracy, falsehood and injustice.

Describing freedom of the press as the best safeguard of democracy, she said, "Our avowed policy is to help bloom hundred flowers and blossom a hundred schools of thought."

Terming newspapers as the mirrors of society, Begum Zia said journalists could justifiably be termed as social engineers. She said development of mass media had turned the world into a global village.

Nazmul Huda expressed the hope that the three-day conference would further promote the cause of the journalists of the region and formulate a policy to help exchange ideas and experiences for the benefit of the people of the region.

White said that the IFJ confirmed 84 killings of journalists last year, which is the highest death toll on record. Besides, the journalists were regularly victimised, harassed and attacked and sometimes brutally murdered, he pointed out.

K N Gupta stressed the need for holding a meeting of Information Ministers of the South Asian region to solve problems being faced by the journalists.

Gias Kamal Chowdhury said the journalists of Bangladesh were committed to the betterment of the people.

Reazuddin Ahmed said the conference of the representatives of the working journalists of South Asian countries would give an opportunity to exchange views regarding their challenging profession and devising ways and means to face the new challenges in upholding the freedom of the press.

Ministers, members of parliament, diplomats, political leaders and editors of national dailies and news agencies were also present on the occasion.

Logang : Sense of security shattered

By Farid Hossain

Most tribespeople believe the death toll in the April 10 attack on the Logang cluster village is not as high as some groups have claimed.

They consider the alleged toll of 1,200 as highly exaggerated. But few would accept the casualties at 13 dead and 13 injured as the government has put it.

The debate also persists on why and how the attack on the hilltop village occurred.

According to military officials at Khagrachari outlawed Shantibahini rebels first killed an 11-year-old boy in an attack on four Bengali settlers tending cows in a field outside Logang, protected by a security ring.

The killing angered the Bengali villagers who, joined by some VDP and Ansar members, attacked the cluster of tribal huts.

When BDR members from an adjoining post rushed to control the mob, the rebels fired on them. At one stage in the crossfire a blaze occurred that, fanned by summer winds, swept the bamboo huts, a BDR post and barracks.

Hills Student Council and Hills People's Council as well as survivors say the Bengali boy, identified as Kabir Ahmed, was injured and killed when three tribal girls attacked four youths to defend themselves from attempted rape.

Even if the government version is correct, the incident appears to have jolted the sense of security among the tribespeople. The Logang victims are the tribespeople who have returned home during the past few years ending their refugee lives in India.

More than two weeks after the attack the government, is rebuilding the huts. But many survivors who have fled into the jungles are reluctant to return to the cluster village.

"I don't think I will ever return to this village. They brought us here in the name of providing security. But where is the security for us?" said Sunil Moy.

Sunil, who said he returned from India in 1989, told visiting journalists that though he and his wife survived unhurt, his 3-year-old daughter and a sister-in-law were wounded by bullets.

Opposition politicians who visited the scene agreed with the survivors.

"It's no more important if 13 or 1,200 people have died. The incident will strengthen the sense of insecurity among the tribespeople," said Suranjit Sengupta MP, who accompanied Sheikh Hasina during her tour of Logang April 27.

Logang, a hilly Union, is about 13 miles northwest of Khagrachari town and about three miles from the Indian border. It has three cluster villages — one each for Chakma, Tripura and Bengali people, all protected by security forces.

The cluster villages stem from government's desire to protect both tribals and non-tribals from Shantibahini atrocities. The Bengali population is 732, while the number of tribals is 3441, most of them Chakmas.

Sheikh Hasina, the first opposition politician to visit the scene, listened to survivors briefings, talked to survivors and spoke at a series of rallies.

"I've no words to condemn the brutality and the bloodshed. This is a violation of human rights," she told a big public meeting at Khagrachari on her way back from Logang.

She denounced the Shantibahini activity and a military solution to the Hill Tracts problem.

"All citizens, without distinction, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians will have to live like brothers and share each other's happiness and sorrows," said the Leader of Opposition in Parliament.

Hasina said, "conflicts and bloodshed in the area will not help its inhabitants. There must be peace for development of the area and welfare of its people. And peace may come through dialogue and a desire for a political solution to the problem."

According to Hasina the peace responsibility lies first with the government. There is no reason why the government should disagree. The money the government is spending for the hill tracts must win the trust of the tribespeople in addition to development. And there must not be a repeat of the Logang-like incident because it spawns hatred and mistrust more than anything else.

SAARC committee suggests cooperation with other world bodies

The first special session of the Standing Committee of the SAARC at Colombo has suggested a new orientation for the seven-nation forum that would place it in a qualitatively new level of cooperation.

The three-day meeting that ended last Thursday took a number of important decisions, aimed at adopting a more beneficial functional approach in the conduct of the SAARC and rationalising its activities. Foreign Office sources told BSS in Dhaka Saturday.

Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman led the Bangladesh delegation to the meeting of the Standing Committee, whose report at the three-day deliberations recommended specific mechanism to explore cooperation between the SAARC and the United Nations, ASEAN, EC and the Asian Development Bank.

This means a new orientation for the forum by enlarging its role in international arenas for mutually acceptable cooperation in different fields.

"This is a new approach for the SAARC," said the sources adding that measures to promote consultations among SAARC nations at various international conferences were also recommended to harmonise the positions of the SAARC on important global issues.

Clash in Gazipur

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Badre Alam College a university college, a demand put forward by the State Minister for Religious Affairs Alhaj M A Mannan and supported by the local people.

During the speech, the Prime Minister declared the setting up of a modern hospital at Gazipur. She also announced that the open university would also be set up there.

Begum Zia gave directives to nationalise the Chandana Bahumukhi High School and improve the power and water supply of Tongi and Gazipur.

When their demand was not met, the college students jumped to their feet and tried to demonstrate in the middle of the Prime Minister's speech which was, however, controlled by the district BNP leaders.

The agitating students later brought out processions in the area and chanted slogans like "We reject the PM's announcement... Bhawal Badre Alam College has to be declared a university college." Police baton charged the processions, witnesses said.

The students also stoned the dais and damaged furniture on it, they added.

Later that night, police searched the residences of some of the student leaders, including that of the Vice President of the college students' union Asaduzzaman Tarun.

The students abstained attending their classes today to protest the police action and staged demonstration on the Dhaka-Tangail highway.

Later this afternoon, they held a protest rally at Chandana Square.

Earlier the Prime Minister addressing the rally again accused "some parties" engaging themselves in conspiracy to foil the development efforts in the country.

"Some parties are conspiring to hamper the on-going development work in the country," she told a workers' rally here at Chandana Bahumukhi High School Friday.

However, the Prime Minister did not identify the organisations nor elaborate. Addressing a mammoth public meeting in the capitals Gulsitan Square on April 20, Begum Zia, also chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), urged the people to thwart any conspiracy against democracy and nation-building activities.

Gazipur district unit of Jatiyatabadi Samik Dal, the labour front of BNP, organised the rally, to mark the historic May Day.

Govt ignored

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it to deal with the kind of crisis situation created by the two deposit-taking institutions. However, modifying the rules of a statutory body like Bangladesh Bank can be a complex exercise, the source added.

Meanwhile, financial circles here yesterday expressed serious doubts about capacity of the central bank to resolve the situation within its existing rules and, as one expert put it, with its built-in sense of caution.

"In dealing with the BCI crisis," said a former banker, "the Bangladesh Bank seems to have reached a dead-end."

Unless BB has completed the audit of the accounts of all the 24 branches of BCI, there will not be a clear picture of the assets and liabilities of the ill-fated institution as a whole.

"We can be sure that it will be a most depressing picture, without showing the way how depositors who have lost their funds can be compensated," said a source.

The real hope lies with the law-enforcing authorities which have issued warrants of arrest against directors of the BCI. Much depends on how quickly they can be apprehended, brought to trial and made to pay for their alleged offences. One optimistic forecast is, a major portion of funds they have allegedly grabbed from BCI may still be in their possession, either placed with banks or invested in their other companies. Under court order, they may still be forced to comply with part of their commitments to "thoughtless depositors."

People's Court organisers, Hasina talk May 18 hartal

The "People's Court" sponsors met with Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina at her Minto Road residence Saturday evening and exchanged views on their action programmes, reports UNB.

Meeting sources said the leaders of the National Coordination Committee for Implementation of the Spirit of Liberation War and Elimination of the Killers-Collaborators of '71 exchanged views with Hasina on how to make a half-day hartal on May 18 an all-out success.

Other programmes of future agitation also came up for discussion.

Hasina

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work for the welfare of the teeming millions including the workers.

She called upon all to make the May 18 hartal called by the "Ghatik Nirmul Committee" demanding the trial of Prof Golam Azam a success.

The Awami League leader also urged the audience to ask the BNP leaders "Why they are showing weakness to Golam Azam."

Addressing the rally Begum Sajeda Chowdhury said a conspiracy was being hatched to close down the Adamjee Jute Mills.

UNB adds: Criticising Prime Minister Begum Zia's role in the Parliament, Sajeda said in a tone of humour that "Madam comes, madam smiles and madam goes."

The Midnight File

Husband visits Suu Kyi

RANGOON, May 2 : The husband of detained Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi visited her Saturday for the first time in more than two years. Myanmar military junta lifted its ban on visits last month, reports AP.

EC monitor killed in Bosnia

ZAGREB, May 2 : A European Community official in Zagreb confirmed that a Belgian EC monitor had been killed in Bosnia-Herzegovina today. "We know his name but it cannot be revealed at the moment," said the official, who could not confirm that another monitor had been injured in the same incident, reports Reuter.

Sierra Leone coup leader detained

FREETOWN, May 2 : The ruling council on Saturday named a new chairman and detained the reported leader of the coup that ousted president Joseph Momoh, sources close to the council said. The 22-member National Provisional Ruling Council, led by officers who overthrew Momoh, named Capt Valentine Strasser-King chairman, the sources said. The council includes 18 military officers and four civilians, reports AP.

Investment houses

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Limited (NCL), the Finance Minister categorically said: "These are not banks. These are simply investment houses in the private sector and they are not empowered to operate business like scheduled banks."

Talking to BSS at Zia International Airport before leaving for Hong Kong to attend the 25th annual meeting of the Board of Governors of Asian Development Bank (ADB), Rahman said: "the banking sector in the country is sound."

The Minister stated that the government was determined to protect the interest of the public who had deposited their money with banks.

Replying to a question, as to whether the Ministry of Finance had any mechanism to oversee the operations of the investment houses allowed to operate in the country since 1985, the Minister said he had already directed the banking wing and the Ministry of Law to bring amendment to the existing laws, empowering Bangladesh Bank to check irregularities and ensure strict discipline in financial transaction.

The Finance Minister said that the Bangladesh Bank had been asked to investigate the fraudulent and illegal transaction of the investment houses. The Bangladesh Bank will also have to investigate the sources of such funds, deposited with these investment houses, despite repeated warnings, he said.

Regarding the BCI the Mine sweeping

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Shatti, was present from the Kuwaiti side, senior military officials of Egyptian and Pakistani armed forces who are also engaged in similar work, member of the Bangladesh community and representatives of various organisations involved in battle field clearance operations were also present on the occasion.

The commander of the mine clearances Colonel Abdul Hafiz Malik in his address of welcome earlier hoped that his team would be able to accomplish the work successfully within the stipulated time of 20 months.

Los Angeles

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several blocks of Hollywood boulevard cordoned off. Debris littered the sidewalk in front of the blazing shops near the memento of 1950s film actress Eva Marie Saint.

AP says: Looting and arson diminished Friday as police arrested thousands and President Bush ordered soldiers to help restore order on the third day of violence that has killed at least 36 people.

Najibullah

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Mojadded said there was no benefit in putting Najibullah on trial and suggested he be granted amnesty along with others when worked in or cooperated with his government.

"If Najibullah will be punished, what will we get from this?" Mojadded said. "But if we give him amnesty and he returns to God, to religion to repent, may be he can serve in the field somewhere."

Another report from Peshawar adds: Angry Afghan refugees here called Friday for revenge against the militia forces backing the new administration in Kabul.

Forces of the former government militia general Abdul Rashid Dostam are "inhumane people," guerrilla commander Mohammad Farooq told AFP.

The red-bearded Farooq, who said he was now the number two in Jalalabad hierarchy, said the militiamen were engaged in raping women and looting in Kabul.

NCL

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essay steps in this regard. According to sources, the existing law even after amendment in 1991 was not enough for the Bangladesh Bank to take any action against institutions like the NCL or the BCI in case of such irregularities or violation of rules.

The NCL which has been facing a liquidity crisis following the BCI's has as many as 16 branches in the country with a reserve capital of Taka 152 crore.

The crisis was prevailing in the company till yesterday although it allowed the clients to withdraw their current deposits up to Taka ten thousand. However, the depositors, maintaining savings accounts with the NCL could not withdraw their money yesterday.

Meanwhile, various branches of the NCL yesterday requested their clients to be patient and not to panic confidently saying that it will soon become a scheduled bank.

According to sources at the Bangladesh Bank, the government will not compensate the depositors if the two companies become bankrupt and are unable to pay. "It was depositors' risk when they opened accounts with such unscheduled institutions," the source said requesting anonymity.