

## Forget bitter memories for regional peace: Hasina

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday said that the old, bitter memories of the past must be forgotten to pave the way for regional peace.

She was addressing the inaugural session of the three-day meet on 'Prospects of Peace, Development and Harmony in South Asia' at the Central Public Library auditorium yesterday afternoon.

Organised by the Asian Regional Centre of the World Peace Council (WPC), Bangladesh, the seminar was attended by delegates from Japan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Palestine, Iraq, DPR Korea and host Bangladesh. Poet Begum Sufia Kamal was in the chair.

In her speech, Sheikh Hasina called for mutual cooperation to attain regional peace.

"We must be honest and sincere to keep pace with the revolutionary progress in the Asia-Pacific region," Hasina said while referring to national economic development.

She observed that mutual hatred and suspicions were hindering the process of peace in this region.

Most of the speakers, however, said the absence of war does not mean that there is peace in the world. To achieve real peace, poverty, communalism, exploitation, social and sex discrimination and nuclear arms race must be eliminated.

"Do not let your (respective) governments to increase the military budget," urged Tahira

Mashar Khan, vice president of Pakistan WPC.

She stressed that a country's budget should aim only at national development, noting that military power can no longer defend us.

"Why should there be a treaty to reduce nuclear arms and why should there be nuclear tests under the banner of 'comprehensive test ban,' particularly when we do not need nuclear arms at all," pointed out Ramesh Chandra, president of WPC.

He called upon all to unite against communalism, which he identified as a threat to the peace process.

"Do not align with the communal forces," the ageing Ramesh Chandra said and added, "If you do, you will never win."

Branding the communalists as fascist forces, he said, "The Babri Mosque was not demolished by the Indians but by these fascists."

Another Indian delegate, representing the All Indian Minority Group, underscored the need for people-to-people dialogue for mutual benefits.

Iraq's delegate Abbas Bashir, who conveyed a message from the Arab world, regretted how his country was suffering in the name of economic sanctions.

"We are not allowed to import pencils, lest our children build nuclear bombs," he commented sarcastically, saying his country could be a subject of the peace talks.



Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina addressing a seminar on 'Prospect of Peace, Development and Harmony in South Asia' at the Public Library auditorium in the city yesterday.

— Star photo

## The Gorai ... a river in its death throes

By Masud Hasan Khan back from Kushtia

Anyone who has never seen a river dying may visit the Gorai in Kushtia district and take a stroll on its dried-out bed.

Choked up by sand dunes at the point where it takes off from the Padma, the 175-kilometer-long Gorai is now having its last, dying hiccups because of acute shortage of water at its source.

The Padma itself has been heavily silted up near the Gorai off-take due to water diversion by the Farakka Barrage in the Indian state of West Bengal.

The lives of millions of people living in seven southwest districts of the country would be drastically changed if the Gorai is cut off from its origin, warned water experts and environmentalists.

The Gorai is the major fresh water source for all the small rivers, waterbodies and marshlands of those districts, they pointed out.

Originating from the Padma in Kushtia district, the Gorai meanders through Faridpur, Rajbari, Jhenidah, Magura, Narail and Khulna districts before emptying into the Bay of Bengal at Halfax Cut.

The river is known by different names in different districts on its sea-bound course.

"The Gorai is doomed... its death is only a matter of time," commented Sheikh Abdul Monin, a Water Development Board (WDB) engineer based in Kushtia.

During a trip to the two-kilometre-wide off-take of the Gorai, this correspondent found the bed of the river had risen higher than its original level.

Huge sand dunes, stretching 61 kilometres towards the course, have formed on the river bed, blocking water supply from the Padma.

Innumerable pools with stagnant water have also been created along its course.

Country boats are moored there, no longer able to enter the river from the Padma.

People were seen crossing

the once mighty river on foot. Horse-drawn carriages, bullock carts and trucks are now able to ford at ease.

"Shoal formation, rise in the river bed and severe bank erosion — all these are the unmistakable symptoms of a dying river," said Monin. "And all these marks are clearly visible in the Gorai."

The WDB engineers informed this correspondent that the Gorai off-take was first closed on January 7 last year and re-opened briefly before closing again on January 2 this year.

"What a mighty river it was," recalled Abul Hossain, a sand quarry owner near the Gorai off-take. "The current of the river was so swift and scary that we used to think twice before bathing or washing our cattle," he recalled.

Hossain, however, is a person to whom the impending death of the Gorai seems to have brought better luck.

A former village sardar with no specific job, he is now a flourishing sand trader who sells each truck-load for Tk 300. Yet, he is not happy with the present condition of the river.

The 'mara' (dead) Gorai has also brought devastation to the poor along its course," he said. "Look at the agricultural plots along the banks... all are barren."

Now, the people can walk on the riverbed along its course until Renwick's ghat, he said. Renwick's ghat is about four kilometres from the Gorai off-take, and nearer to Kushtia town.

People living in the villages along the Gorai's banks said that farming, fisheries and navigation have been endangered due to the drying up of the river.

Heavy use of fertiliser on the farming lands no longer produced good yields, they said; irrigation by low-lift pumps has also become expensive.

Zahurul Malatia, a resident of

Mirpur thana of Kushtia, said all the fishing folks belonging to the Hindu 'Hawladar' caste have either moved elsewhere in the district or have migrated to India. "They have simply vanished from the neighbourhood," he added.

Villagers said the price of fish has also gone up. Now, the Hilsa sells at Tk 50 to 60 per kilo at the rural 'hats', and the Rohit or carp at Tk 120 a kg.

The villagers would never have believed that fish would become so scarce in the Padma, once replete with different tasty species.

In addition to these, localised effects, salinity has increased manifold in the coastal districts because of water scarcity in the Gorai.

According to Irrigation Ministry officials, salinity in the coastal districts has moved 200 kilometres inland.

The sea-bound waters of the Gorai earlier flushed out the brackish waters of the Bay of Bengal, preventing seepage towards the mainland.

Besides inland capture fisheries, forest resources and navigation in the coastal district have also been affected.

The only solution to the problem lies in augmenting the flow of the Gorai with at least 10,000 cusecs of water, WDB engineers pointed out.

The present flow of the Gorai is less than 150 cusec during the dry season (March through June).

A Flood Action Plan (FAP-4) study on the south-west of Bangladesh also pointed out the urgent need for augmenting the Gorai's flow.

However, a WDB 'attempt' to augment the flow by dredging a channel from the Padma has been aborted after an expenditure of Taka one crore.

To a visitor to the Gorai off-take, the narrow dredged out water strip amid the vast expanse of sand dunes stretching towards the horizon looks mindlessly optimistic and simply inadequate.

## Two banking accords with Russia signed

Two banking agreements between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation have been signed paving the way for utilisation of a 25 million US dollar deferred payment facility provided by Dhaka for boosting export, reports UNB.

An official announcement here yesterday said a breakthrough had been achieved in establishing the first-ever banking relations between Dhaka and Moscow through the accords signed Friday at a reception to leading Russian bankers at the Bangladesh embassy in the Russian capital.

The signing of the two credit agreements between Sonali Bank and Sberbank and Tiko Bank, two prime banks of the Russian Federation, establishing correspondence relationship and agency arrangement for LC facilities for Russian importers of Bangladeshi goods capped a month-long vigorous negotiation conducted by the embassy.

It was concluded during a three-day visit of the Sonali Bank Managing Director.

Absence of credit agreements, correspondence relationship/agency arrangements/LC facilities so far were the biggest impediments to utilisation of the deferred payment credit facility provided by the Bangladesh government to the Russian importers.

The visit was possible due to prompt coordination and decision by the ministries involved, which is appreciable, the announcement said.

## The Midnight File

### Goa Chief Minister dismissed

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: The Governor of India's western state of Goa dismissed its Chief Minister today and reinstated his predecessor, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. It said the Governor Bhanu Prakash Singh replaced Wilfred De Souza of the Congress Party with his party rival, former chief minister Ravi Naik. Naik stepped down in May last year after a court disqualified him as a member of the state legislative assembly. PTI did not say why Naik was disqualified but India's Supreme Court restored his membership in February, reports Reuter.

### 8 killed in Kashmir violence

SRINAGAR, Apr 2: At least eight people were killed in India's troubled northern state of Jammu and Kashmir today, three in a battle between Muslim separatists and troops, officials said. They said at least three separatists were killed and several houses gutted after soldiers of the Indian army launched a major mopping operation against Muslim rebels in the mountains north of Handwara town, close to the border with Pakistan, reports Reuter.

## Foundation of country's biggest hospital laid

President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday laid the foundation stone of a 1000-bed modern hospital at Uttara Model Town, about 20 kilometers north of the city centre, reports BSS.

The hospital has been named 'Mia Amanullah Hospital' after the donor who has committed to contribute the entire cost of the hospital and also to maintain the institution in the initial stages. Mia Amanullah is one of the top established industrialists and bankers of the country.

The Bangladesh Medical Studies and Research Institute (BMSRI), a non-profit society, will run the hospital through

its private limited company — Uttara Adhunik Hospital (UAH) (Private) Limited — on a non-profit but self-sustainable basis.

Total cost of the hospital has been estimated at Tk 1000 million. Situated on five bighas of land, the 16-storied hospital building will have a floor area of half a million square feet.

Speaking on the occasion, President Biswas called upon the sponsors of the hospital to make provisions so that the poor people of the country could have access to the treatment facilities of this largest hospital in the country, which would be equipped with most modern equipment and state-of-the-art technology in medicine and surgery.

He said establishment of this hospital with philanthropic contribution would inspire many others to come forward for public welfare activities and service to humanity.

The foundation-laying ceremony was also addressed by Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, donor of the hospital Al-Haji Mia Amanullah, co-chairman of BMSRI and Managing Director of UAH M Mahbub-uz-Zaman, Project Director of BMSRI Prof Abu Ahmed Chowdhury and Chairman, Executive Council, BMSRI and UAH Prof M Yusuf Ali.

### Flood worsens in Sunamganj

From Our Correspondent  
SYLHET, Apr 2: The flood situation in Sunamganj district has deteriorated further with continued rainfall and onrush of hilly water from across the border today.

Water-level in the river Surma in Sunamganj town was flowing 112 CM above danger-level this afternoon, an official source said.

More than two-third of the 113 haors in ten thanas of the district had already gone under water damaging the standing boro crops, the source added.

### PM's visit

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and the people of Japan.

The Foreign Minister, who also accompanied the Prime Minister, informed newsmen that Japanese leaders have been briefed about the political stability, the open market economy and the democratic institutions that are taking a firm roots in Bangladesh.

Mostafiz, however, pointed out that the frequent hartals and gheraos indulged in by political parties needed to be curbed to provide a more enabling atmosphere.

The Foreign Minister stated that the redeeming significance of the visit lay in the fact that the Bangladesh Prime Minister was the first South Asian leader to visit Japan after Morihiro Hosokawa became premier.

The Japanese government has also been briefed about the adverse effects of the Farakka barrage on the country's agriculture, environment and power sectors, he said.

Tokyo, he said, has shown full appreciation of Dhaka's hardships regarding the water-sharing problem and also Dhaka's endeavour in reaching a bilateral solution of the long outstanding issue.

Responding to a question, Mostafiz said that although Bangladesh had highlighted the matter in international forums, Dhaka was looking forward to an early settlement through bilateral talks between Delhi and Dhaka.

The Foreign Minister also expressed the hope that the Indian Prime Minister would visit Dhaka shortly.

Mostafiz said that Bangladesh felt the Asian representation in the Security Council should be increased and said that Dhaka would support Japan's bid to get a seat in the UN Security Council.

Foreign Secretary M R Osmany was present during the briefing.

## People to be involved in dev plans: Moyeen

By Staff Correspondent

The government is to formulate its next development plan through 'participatory perspective planning exercise' reflecting the needs and demands of the people at the grassroots level.

Disclosing this at a press conference at the Planning Commission office here yesterday, State Minister for Planning Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan, however, said the conventional type of planning would still exist alongside to complement the planning process.

In order to identify the needs of the people at the grassroots level, the government will hold a series of meetings in all the districts with the representatives of the local people, NGOs, farmers, labourers, teachers and other professionals.

The first such meeting begins on April 5 at Thakurgaon, to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

The needs of the local people will be analysed and then

### JU classes resume today

The classes of the Jahangirnagar University (JU) resume today after a 50-day long unscheduled closure.

### Positivism

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Begum Zia said in the past a rather negative image of Bangladesh had been projected among the Japanese by negative publicity, and that her visit had contributed to improving Japan's idea about Bangladesh, she added.

After the correct picture of Bangladesh was given to them the Prime Minister said, the Japanese frankly admitted that they did not know all this.

Emperor Akihito, she said, showed keen interest in Bangladesh's economy and even enquired about its golden fibre — jute.

Replying to a question, she said Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa was very much in favour of private sector Japanese investment in Bangladesh.

Japan, she said, even favours import of rice from Bangladesh.

The visit, Begum Zia said, created a new and positive interest in Bangladesh.

Materialisation of Japanese investment in Bangladesh, she said, will need follow up both at the government and private sector levels.

The Japanese government, will support the social sector, she added.

Begum Zia said that at the investment seminars held in both Tokyo and Osaka the Japanese private sector had shown interest in Bangladesh.

Turning to Bangladesh, she said that although the other parties were also speaking of a similar economic system, she cannot quite understand why some of them continued to take a negative attitude.

How can the country go ahead Begum Zia posed, if at every step impediments are created even after restoration of democracy.

Begum Zia, however, said that she was optimistic about brighter days ahead.

## News analysis

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able goodwill. This opened up lots of doors that may have been otherwise closed, for us. The fact that the PM would make such a public gesture was conveyed to the Japanese earlier, and it no doubt contributed to the high profile treatment that was given to the visit.

The second audience of the Prime Minister's visit was the Japanese business community. The two investment seminars, organised by the Tokyo and Osaka Chambers, and participated by almost all important business houses of Japan, gave the visit the requisite business-like air, which such visits are usually devoid of.

However, the most significant thing about the dialogue with the Japanese business community is the individualised interviews with top level executives, in the person of the chairman or the president, of such business corporations as Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Marubeni, Chioda, Mitsui, and construction giants like Taisai, Semazu, Toyoda, Obayashi, etc. Not that they came with investment portfolios in hand. But the fact that they came, met the PM, and expressed interest in Bangladesh, transmitted the right type of signals throughout the Japanese

business community. As is well known, when big corporations express interest, the whole community looks up and takes a closer interest. And that is exactly what Begum Zia's visit was able to achieve for Bangladesh. The Japanese business community has been persuaded to look at our country as a serious alternative for investment prospects.

Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman expressed his cautious optimism and said, "The PM was able to project Bangladesh in the right perspective. This will help to overcome many of the negative images of our country. The Finance Minister went one step further, saying 'The Japanese people now understand the real situation. Begum Zia has won the hearts and minds of the Japanese people.'"

I will definitely not venture so far. But surely, a major breakthrough has been achieved in the communication between our two countries. As I had said in the beginning, relations with Japan, be it political, or economic, have to be seen as a process. How we carry forward that process, will determine the real outcome of this trip.

Tomorrow: Investment seminar and prospects for Bangladesh.

## Moudud for JS polls under caretaker govt

Jatiya Party Parliamentary Party leader Barrister Maudud Ahmed has put up a strong plea for holding all elections to Parliament under interim caretaker government for next 20 years or so.

Talking to UNB yesterday he said the demand for election under a caretaker government, which is based on national consensus, is reinforced by widespread popular belief that it is not possible to have free and fair elections in this country under political governments.

Referring to painful experiences of pourashabha elections at Savar and Feni, and to the alleged blatant rigging in by-elections in Mirpur and Magura-2 constituencies, the former Vice-President under the Ershad administration observed the flagrant violations of all norms of democratic conduct during these polls confirmed people's faith that political parties are unable to hold free and fair elections in this country. "Nor it is possible for the Election Commission to act independently and effectively under a political government."

In response to a question, Maudud Ahmed noted with confidence that the demand for elections under caretaker government was more a political than a constitutional issue. "Therefore, it should be looked into from a broader perspective and in the greater interest of the nation. It should not be viewed from a partisan point of view."

Referring to the constitu-

### Prokrichi to observe strike Tuesday

By Staff Correspondent

Some 70 thousand professionals of the country will observe a day-long strike on Tuesday to press for realisation of their 17-point charter of demands.

They will also hold a rally at the Engineers Institution in Dhaka and bring out a procession on the day.

A fresh action programme will be announced at the rally, the leaders of the Prokrichi-BCS Central Action Council, a platform of doctors, engineers, agriculturists and general cadre officials, told a press conference in the capital Saturday.

They called upon the government to implement its earlier announcement on restructuring the present bureaucracy of the country.

They alleged that the present bureaucracy had "grabbed the political power."

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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### Zahir murder

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A case was lodged with the Dhanmondi police accusing an Awami League leader and member of Parliament Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury alias Babu of masterminding the murder.

Zahir's wife believed that the murder was due to a business feud among the directors of the UCBL and the Janata Insurance Company Limited where Zahir was the chief legal adviser. Akhtaruzzaman was once Zahir's business partner and a former UCBL director.

The Investigating Officer (IO) Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman Bhuiyan, an Assistant Commissioner of the DB, said: "I have made the charge-sheet after a thorough investigation into the murder.... I found Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury, MP involved in the murder."

The IO placed the charge-sheet before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate yesterday.

Among the seven accused, the MP and two others — Hedayetul Islam and Moshir Rahman — are absconding. Babu having jumped his anticipatory bail.

Four other accused — Fazlur Rahman Tonmoy, Abdul Matin alias Moti, Mohammad Kawasir and Mohammad Alam — have been arrested so far and sent to jail.

### 32 die in Chinese boat fire

TAIPEI, Taiwan, Apr 2: A fire on a sightseeing boat in eastern China killed all 32 people on board, including 24 Taiwanese tourists, official news reports said Saturday, reports AP.

The manager of a Taiwanese tourist agency said he believed Friday's fire was set by gangsters who had robbed the passengers.

## Major cabinet reshuffle

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tional standing committee, the party's policy planning body.

The changes in the party leadership may be immediately followed by a major reshuffle of Begum Zia's 40-plus cabinet, either just before or after her programme in Thakurgaon on April 5. The PM is to go to the northern district to inaugurate a seminar organised under the aegis of the Planning Ministry.

According to the source, State Minister for Planning Dr. Abdul Moyeen Khan may be elevated to the rank of a full minister.

### 6 killed in Ctg

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twenty other people were injured and two of them were admitted to the Chittagong Medical Hospital with serious injuries.

Besides, four persons died after being struck by a lightning yesterday afternoon in a remote village of Patiya, 30 miles from here, police said.

Meanwhile, fire brigade personnel started an operation to recover the missing bodies.

Mayor of the Chittagong City Corporation A B Mohiuddin Chowdhury, and other officials visited the affected area this morning where hundreds of people gathered after the news of the tragic landslide spread in the city.

The Met Office recorded 58 mm of rainfall in 24 hours till 6 this afternoon while the speed of gusty wind was 78 km per hour. Most of the low-lying areas of the port city and its suburbs were submerged by flood water caused by incessant rainfall last night.

Thousands of people got stranded at the Bahaddarhat, Bakalia and Sholakbar area because of the rain and consequent water logging.

### 50 hurt as tornado hits Bandarban

COX'S BAZAR, Apr 2: A tornado swept over Balishari sadar thana in Bandarban district this morning leaving about 50 people injured and some 200 houses destroyed, reports UNB.

Unofficial reports reaching from Bandarban said the tornado at about 7 am lasted for a couple of minutes.

Houses razed to the ground included primary schools, madrasahs, union parishad, Krishna Bank.