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The prodigal axe
As many as 11,000 trees in front of the Nagar Bhaban and adjacent to the Osmany Memorial Hall face annihilation to make room for the NAM conference centre. This is despite the fact that there are other deforested potential building sites at the government's disposal.
Star Photo: AKM Moshin

An elegy in advance

By Special Correspondent

Thousands of trees face annihilation as authorities appear hell-bent on getting on with their plan to build the Bangabandhu Convention Centre in the Osmany Udyan for the Non-aligned Movement Summit in 2001.

In a last ditch attempt to save the wooded park, the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA) has served notice upon government officials concerned and the Mayor, seeking to halt construction.

Describing the proposed construction of the centre as unlawful, BELA, in a statement Wednesday, said it would take legal action if the authorities concerned failed to come up with a satisfactory answer within a week.

The notice, served on Wednesday, was sent to the Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works, the Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor, the PWD, the DG, Department of Environment, Chairman of RAJUK and Executive Engineer of City PWD division.

The notice said air pollution in the adjoining area would worsen if the greenery was replaced by the concrete compound. It will not only rob city-dwellers of a much-needed breathing space, but also increase congestion in the already over-burdened traffic system.

Such a decision, according to the notice, would violate a directive issued by the Prime Minister's Secretariat that attaches great importance to the necessity of open space in maintaining the city's eco-balance.

Authorities concerned were urged to immediately halt all activities related to the proposed construction and take measures necessary for proper maintenance of the greenery for public interest.

No comments were available yesterday from the people concerned.

Sources concerned said that at least 130 acre of khas land is readily available on the south-eastern side of the Gulshan Rifle Club for this purpose. While it would not pose any security or traffic problems for the NAM Summit, construction of the centre there would certainly help develop the area.

There are other alternative sites as well. The open space by the Bijoy Sarani is one of them. Besides, a few places are also available on the northern and north-western corner of the Osmany Udyan.

On the right side of the Osmany Auditorium there is a police control room for the Secretariat. On its right, Bangladesh Railway has its headquarters. Further to its right is an old colonial red brick bungalow that houses offices for the law ministry.

Behind these establishments, a few colonial-era bungalows belonging to the Railway authorities occupy a huge space. Beside the bungalows there is a huge slum that harbours some of the city's drug traders and ruffians. On the western side of the slum, there is

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Cops face extortion charge

Biman pursuer sues 6 including a police AC

By Staff Correspondent

The Chief Purser of a Biman flight lodged a case against six persons including three police officials with the CMM's Court Wednesday alleging that they assaulted him and forced him to sign five cheques for Tk 50 lakh.

The accused six are -- AC of Motijheel Zone Chanda Kumar Chakma, OC of Motijheel thana Mohammad Hanif, SI Ismail Hossain, Biman's Junior Purser Samsul Akbar, his wife Anita and one Ahkam.

In the case, Khursid Alam alleged that Hanif, Ismail, Akbar, Anita, Ahkam and some armed men got inside his residence Tuesday night and demanded Tk 50 lakh.

They forced Alam to sign five cheques for Tk 10 lakh each. Then they took Alam and his wife to Motijheel thana. They were forced to sign a bon and then released Alam alleged.

When contacted last night, the accused AC told The Daily Star that he read about the case in newspapers. He denied his involvement in any such incident.

SI Ismail, when contacted, said that a team of Motijheel police led by him had gone to the residence of Alam following filing of a case (No: 12) by Ahkam on Monday.

Ahkan alleged in the FIR that Alam had borrowed Tk 40 lakh from him in 1997 saying that he would invest the money in land business. A deed was also signed between them. Alam

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Energy ministry's 'erratic' move

By Sharier Khan

BAPEX told to tie up with a 'disqualified' Canadian company

In a surprise move, the Energy Ministry has asked BAPEX, the lone exploration unit in the country under Petrobangla, to sign a contract with an earlier disqualified Canadian firm to study and develop the reserved gas fields.

Sources said the directive negates the joint venture proposals given earlier by Malaysian company Petronas. "It will also negate bigger joint venture prospects involving BAPEX in future," said an official. He said the only chance for revamping BAPEX is to involve it in joint ventures with financially sound companies in competitive deals. "This decision may cripple BAPEX further."

BAPEX has been neglected by the government for over a decade now. As a result, it has become almost inactive.

The resource-constrained

BAPEX is facing a hard time with a very tight budget this year.

The authorities concerned at a meeting on Tuesday slashed down BAPEX's budget to Tk 8 crore from Tk 18 crore in the Salda gas field, the only area under it to groom up the country's geologists and drilling technicians.

Canadian firm Nico Resources, disqualified both financially and technically in the Second Round Bidding, submitted a proposal to study the "ring fenced" or reserved gas fields in collaboration with BAPEX.

The Ministry responded with "over-enthusiasm" by suggesting BAPEX to sign joint venture agreement with Nico Resources for development of the ring fenced gas field, the sources said.

"Nico Resource itself lack resources. It suggested that it would pursue the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for 100,000 Canadian dollars to initiate work in the reserved gas fields. If that is the case, then why do we need a joint venture?" one source said.

BAPEX has been verbally instructed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Nico Resources. See page 11

Year-long DU silence shattered

By DU Correspondent

Breaking nearly a year of interval in deadly violence, two factions of pro-Awami League Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) were engaged in a gunfight at two halls of Dhaka University yesterday evening hurting at least three persons.

The bullet-hit were identified as Sahera Begum, 55, wife of a university staff and Salahuddin, 25, and Ali Akbar, 28, both DU students. Sahera Begum and Ali Akbar was admitted to Dhaka Medical College

Hospital. Salahuddin is an MA final year student of Social Welfare while Ali Akbar is an M Phil student of the university.

Eyewitnesses said the clash ensued when a group of BCL activists led by Shamim Ahmed attacked rival activists of Mainuddin Babu group at the extension building of Mohsin Hall at about 6 pm. The Babu group had ousted Shamim group from Sergeant Zahurul Huq hall only a month back.

Activists of Shamim group

went to the extension building of Mohsin Hall by a microbus and fired at least 10 gunshots, the witnesses said. Members of Babu group who were staying at the extension retaliated with several gunshots.

Then activists of Shamim group led by Tokai Mizan left Mohsin Hall extension and rushed to Zahurul Haq Hall to recapture it from Babu group.

They tried to fire their way into the hall from Palashi area. See page 11

Sitting on filthy, fatal explosives

'Vast city areas may be under 2-3 feet untreated sewage any time'

By Morshed Ali Khan

The city's sewerage system may collapse any time inundating vast city areas with two to three feet of untreated sewage, Dhaka WASA engineers warn.

The risk of such overflow is very high during the coming rainy season and in case of natural flooding, they said.

Dhaka WASA Chief Engineer Kazi Mohammad Sheesh told The Daily Star that the 500-kilometre network of the city's sewerage system had numerous leaks. The network covers small parts of old town and

central Dhaka and is serving 50,000 households, roughly 15 lakh people of the city. The system was built just after the independence and there has been virtually no maintenance, repair or rehabilitation to date, the chief engineer said.

The sewerage lines are mingled with surface drains and storm sewerage which bring down tonnes of solid wastes including discarded polythene bags into the crumbling system. At places sewer lines overlap the city's 1,893-kilometre net-

work of water pipes contaminating piped water.

Lack of maintenance and repair coupled with a constant flow of undesired wastes have caused the existing sewerage lines to crack and overflow. At numerous places the manholes have been blocked. About 50 per cent of the network's capacity to dump the sewage into Pagla Sewage Treatment Plant is lost on the way. The chief engineer said a huge volume of sewage simply leaks into open areas and eventually flows into the

rivers or low-lying areas and hence the loss.

For the remaining eight million inhabitants of the city, the sewerage system is most "rudimentary and unacceptable", WASA sources said. Thousands of houses have their own septic tanks where the household sewage piles up. Once full, these septic tanks are cleared by a special section of sweepers for a fee. After collecting the waste in a bull-cart mounted with a tank, the sweepers unload their stock

into nearby storm sewerage, surface drains or low-lying areas according to their convenience. The work is usually done in the middle of the night and goes undetected. Eventually the Balu, the Turag and the Buriganga are the recipients of this huge volume of human excreta.

There are also hundreds of instances where the residents have illegally connected their sewerage lines to nearby storm sewerage or surface drain. The

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DCC polls deferred till Oct 29

The Election Commission yesterday deferred the Dhaka City Corporation election till October 29, reports UNB. Election to the DCC was due within May 3 following the passage of the City Corporation Bill.

The EC yesterday said measures for direct elections for reserved women seats had been taken by amending the Dhaka City Corporation Ordinance 1983, and for that work for ward demarcation and revising voter lists was under way.

Besides, it said, there are court injunctions on holding elections in some wards following writ petitions on ward demarcation.

Voting for the three other city corporations -- Rajshahi, Chittagong and Khulna -- will have to be arranged by September as per provision of the amended laws.



Misleading order

This picture of peaceful HSC examinees has been a rare one this year. Violence broke loose on the first day of exams in test centres all over the country.

— Star Photo

Violent first day of HSC exams

2808 expelled, teachers assaulted

Some 2808 candidates were expelled for adopting unfair means on the first day of HSC examinations yesterday, reports UNB.

Examinees and outsiders also assaulted teachers, ransacked examination halls at many centres.

At least 50 people, including policemen, were injured during clashes throughout the country. Police opened fire and lobbed tear gas shells in Chandpur and Sirajganj.

Some 545,062 candidates are appearing in the examination at 863 centres under the five Education Boards. English First Paper examination was held yesterday.

Following is the district-wise breakup of expelled candidates: Narayanganj-24, Sherpur-82, Netrakona-157, Gopalganj-47, Shariatpur-31, Narsingdi-99, Munshiganj-34, Manikganj-21, Tangail-297, Mymensingh-132, Jessore-109, Jhenidah-111, Narail-17, Magura-41, Kushtia-156, Chuadanga-40, Sakthira-36, Bagerhat-67, Khulna-81, Pirojpur-104, Patuakhali-41, Barisal-86, Bhola-46, Barguna-11, Joypurhat-47, Sirajganj-205, Parbatipur-66, Brahmanbaria-135, Comilla-150, Feni-133, Laxmipur-46, Chandpur-153 and Sylhet-3. In Chandpur, sporadic clashes with the examinees, outsiders and police left at least 10 people, including a college principal and a police, injured. Examinees and outsiders ransacked Matlab Degree College, Shaharshi Degree College, Hajiganj Model College and Haimchar College and set fire to a teen-shed house of Matlab Degree College. See page 11

BNP gets tough on truant leaders

300 top leaders must take part in the May 16 road march

By Nazmul Ashraf and Rezaul Karim

BNP has made it binding on more than 300 top leaders of the party and its front organisations to participate in the nearly 500-km "road march" to Panchagarh from the capital on May 16.

Members of the party's national standing committee, council of advisors, national executive committee, MPs, and presidents and general secretaries of front organisations have been listed for the three-day journey.

Party chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia will lead the extra-

ordinary campaign designed to protest power-water crisis, deteriorating law and order, price-spiral of essentials and the government's "failures" in various sectors. The "road march" also aims at increasing public support to the Opposition causes.

Similar marches are also due to be organised by BNP's partners -- Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote -- the same day. But those parties will go to different destinations.

Besides those in the list, others leaders and supporters of

the main opposition party can also participate in the road march, according to a circular issued by BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday.

It is binding on the listed BNP men to remain in the march until it is over, the circular said.

The participants in the campaign have been instructed to arrange their food and transport. They have to enlist their names with Abdullah Al Noman, a joint secretary general of the party, and give registra-

tion numbers of their vehicles to him by May 10.

The march is scheduled to start from the capital at 9 am on May 16 and reach Tentulia, the north-western tip of the country in Panchagarh district, on May 18. The opposition leader lists due to address public gatherings at around 25 places. Local units of the party have been asked to drum up public support for the programme.

A seven-member committee headed by Mannan Bhuiyan and comprising Noman, Mirza Abbas, Mir Shawqat Ali, Fazlur Rahman Patil, Za Khan and

Mosaddek Ali, is coordinating preparations for the three-day march. The committee at a meeting last night formed a four-member sub-committee to assist it.

The national executive committee is also due to meet today at 5.30 pm to discuss preparations for the "road march".

Mayor of Rajshahi Mizanur Rahman Minu has been assigned to coordinate party programmes before and during the march through Rajshahi Division.

SEC gets down to business

By M Shamsur Rahman

In the wake of widespread allegations of manipulation in the stock market, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) went into action yesterday, amending two important stock market regulations.

The SEC amended the Securities and Exchange Rules 1987 and the Settlement of Stock Exchange Transaction Regulations 1998 and directed the DSE to "immediately remove the counter party identification facility" from its automated trading system.

The move by the capital market watchdog came in the wake of widespread allegations that the option was used by a section of brokers to form an unholy syndicate and manipulate the market by trading shares among themselves.

The withdrawal of the option from computer screen will prevent a buyer or seller from identifying the person offering to sell or buy a share.

Following amendment to the settlement regulation, if a cheque issued by a defaulting member now returns dishon-

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