

Save the Buriganga

By Morshed Ali Khan

As you take the Dhaka flood protection embankment at Rayerbazar point, you will gasp for fresh air in vain. The entire area inside the embankment is flooded with toxic waste from the Hazaribagh tannery filling the air with an acrid smell. The sluice gate nearby keeps pouring the waste into the canal that directly flows into the river Buriganga a quarter kilometre in the Southwest.

From this point, downstream the water of the river Buriganga gets more toxic. During the dry season schools of fishes arriving from upstream die and float in the river. In the villages, complaints of skin disorder and other waterborne diseases are common. Over the years hundreds of local fishermen have become jobless as the river has been almost devoid of any aquatic life throughout its stretch up to Fatulla in Narayanganj and beyond.

Kamrangirchar, a three-kilometer long shoal, is slowly but surely becoming a part of mainland Dhaka. Encroachment and wastes are rapidly filling the shoal. In the last 15 years, the island has turned into a home for thousands of the city's poor. Structures, workshops and industries have been set up illegally on the island. Local people claimed that it was not necessary to obtain any permission to build these

things as the area is out of Rajuk jurisdiction.

Rajuk chairman M. Azizul Haque, however, said although Rajuk did not acquire any land on the shoal but Kamrangirchar is under Rajuk's jurisdiction. Any one building a permanent structure there must seek Rajuk's approval, he added.

Near the Hagbul Ebad steel bridge, two distinctive structures housing a match factory and a flour mill have been built on the river. The Hafiz Flour Mill's new project aims to fur-

ther extend its boundary into the river. A concrete boundary wall runs into the river covering more than 100 feet from its old premises.

The bridge connects the mainland with Kamrangirchar. Heaps of rubbish are stacked all around the place. A dry cell recycling hut dumps its wastes into the river and has filled the river by 20 feet. Women working at the hut said the owner has instructed them to dump the wastes into the river.

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An Appeal

The Daily Star appeals to the Prime Minister and to the citizens of Dhaka to save the river - Buriganga - that gives the city its water, its environment and its very life. We urge all that we take the following steps:

1. The Prime Minister should form an inter-ministerial committee to evict all illegal occupants from the river banks, prepare and execute a renovation and rehabilitation plan that will turn the two sides of the river into environment friendly commercial and public space.
2. The citizens of Dhaka should form a high profile citizens' body that will include all stakeholders to advise and monitor the government's work. This body should also initiate citizens' voluntary initiative -- with full community participation -- to beautify and renovate the river banks.
3. The business community should form its own body to look into possible investment opportunities, both to beautify and utilize the commercial potentials of the river banks.

We think the mass media, especially the print media, can play a vital role in saving our dear Buriganga. Let's all take up, collectively, the issue of saving the mother river, by consistently focusing on the issue to force both the government and the citizens to take action.

A river ravaged sends Buriganga dying

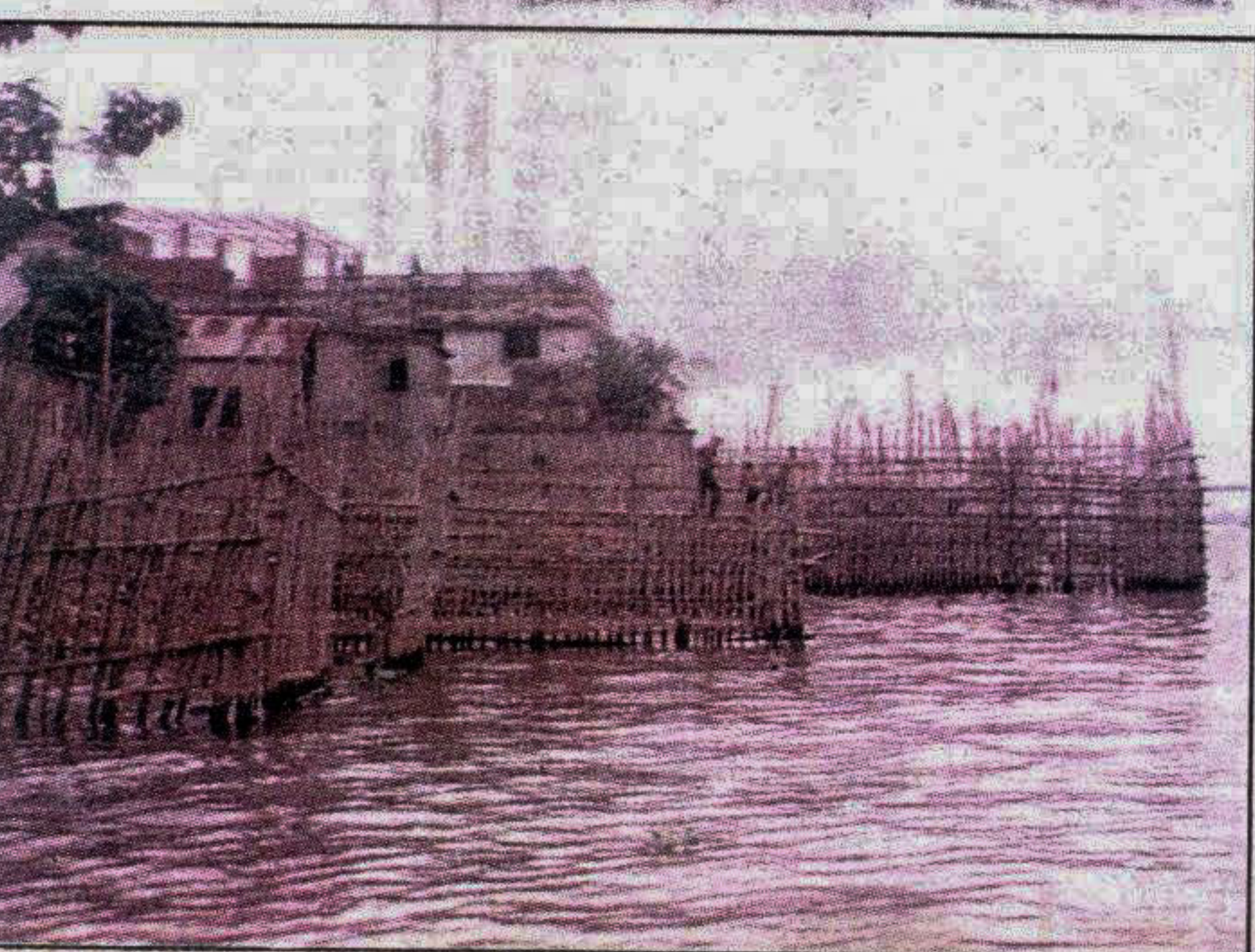
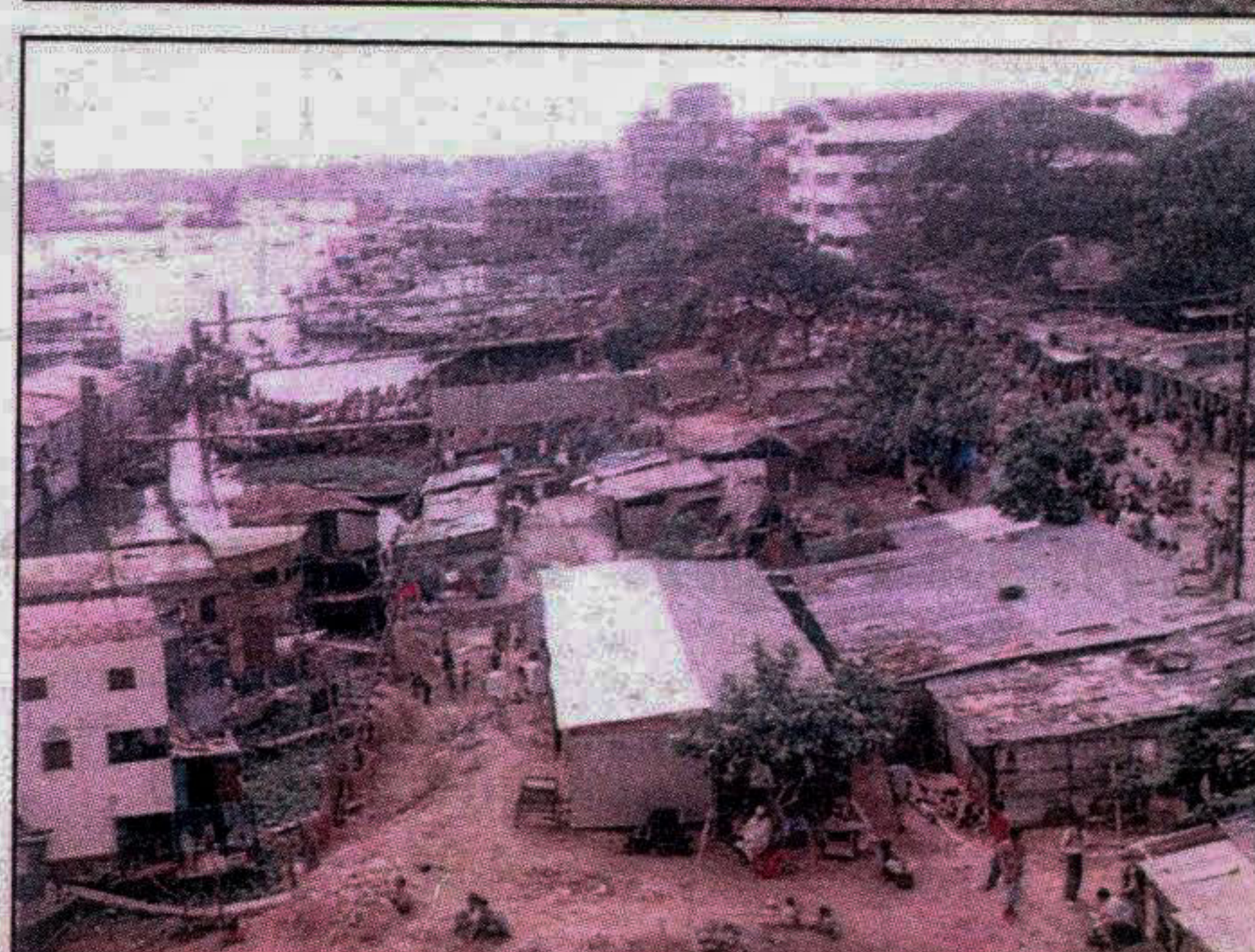


Photo: A K M Mohsin

Capital casualty

The city of Dhaka grew on the banks of the river Buriganga. A half millennium later the metropolis is grotesquely turning on to what was once its life-line

The old river gasping for life



Design: Towfik Eiah

Legal hassle

Speaker may seek review of SC verdict on 'deviant' BNP MPs

By Staff Correspondent

The speaker of Jatiya Sangsad might submit to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court to 'review' its order that upheld the High Court verdict on the dispute over the two BNP legislators who joined the Awami League government, sources in the JS secretariat and the government said.

"The Speaker would, however, make a final decision about it only after studying the full judgement of the SC," a highly placed source told The

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Jail killing trial Indictment on Aug 22

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court yesterday fixed August 22 for pronouncing its decision on indicting the accused in the 1975 Jail Killing Case after police submitted a supplementary charge sheet as ordered earlier, reports BSS.

"The court is adjourned till August 22," Judge Sheikh Rezaul Karim said after the chief special public prosecutor informed the court that the CID had submitted the supplementary charge sheet after a reinvestigation in compliance with the last month's court order.

"I want to ensure all fairness

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Inefficiency, corruption unmasked

DESA managers fail to collect Tk 999 cr and state executives eat up Tk 1601 cr, say auditors

Arrear electricity bills of Tk 999 crore in the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority could not be realised for administrative mismanagement, says a special auditor report, reports UNB.

It also shows that more than Tk 208 crore was not adjusted in the Department of Roads and Highways during the period from 1993-94 to 1996-97.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed received the report from outgoing Comptroller and Auditor General M Hafizuddin Khan at Bangabhaban yesterday.

He submitted 21 audit reports to the President -- nine special audit reports, eight annual audit reports, three appropriation accounts and one financial statement of the government.

The Auditor General apprised the President of the irregularities and lack of initia-



Comptroller and Auditor General M Hafizuddin Khan on his last day in office submitted 21 audit reports to the President yesterday.

tive in taking corrective measures by the authorities concerned, said an official hand-out.

He also apprised the President that irregularities involving Tk 1601.25 crore were detected by auditors. He said special audit reports contain 109 audit observations on financial irregularities committed by the executives involving Tk 1245.29 crore and yearly audit reports contain 342 audit observations pointing out irregularities involving Tk 355.96 crore.

Khan, who went on retirement on the day, also submitted to the President the annual report highlighting the activities of the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General for the year 1998 and summary of the audit findings for the year

1996-97.

The Auditor General thanked the President for his keen interest in ensuring transparency in government expenditure.

He expressed his gratitude to the president for his guidance and said that he was happy to complete the pending audit reports since 1987-88 at his direction.

The President appreciated the performance of the auditor general in going deep into the financial irregularities and his suggestions for its remedy.

The President hoped that Khan's devotion to work would inspire others in the work.

He wished him peace and happiness in retired life and hoped that he will utilise his talent for the benefit of the people.

Sonali defies BB, its own board

Top defaulter favoured again

Star Report

Violating its board decision and the central bank's directive, Sonali Bank (SB) has decided to reschedule loans and provide fresh funds to a top defaulter, Fazlur Rahman Group.

Bangladesh Bank on several occasions advised SB to sue the company to realise the defaulted loans. But SB repeatedly ignored the directives and mysteriously granted fresh loans to the defaulter.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr M Farashuddin recently sent a letter to SB MD reminding him that the board had decided in August last year that unless the group made a one-time down payment of Tk 6 crore by

November 15 to reschedule the defaulted loans, the company would be sued.

Although the group did not make the down payment within the stipulated time, SB did not file any case against Fazlur Rahman. The governor reminded the SB MD that actions should be taken against the officials responsible for not implementing the board decision.

The governor further noted that the 'net worth' of Fazlur Rahman Group was negative and that its situation might deteriorate further over time. Under such circumstances, it is better to apply Bankruptcy Act

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Arms transshipment mustn't be allowed

Defence Committee chief Shafiullah tells The Daily Star

By Nurul Kabir

Maj Gen (retd) K M Shafiullah, the country's first Chief of Army Staff and now a ruling party MP from a Narayanganj constituency, believes that "an element of national security is definitely involved in the question of giving transit to India".

Without opposing the idea of giving transit, he said, "It is important to ensure that no Indian armament is carried through Bangladesh route".

The 65-year old former army chief, who is Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Defence, made the observation in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on Tuesday.

"As per media reports, the government is considering the question of transshipment of Indian goods from one part of that country to another part through Bangladesh and that by using Bangladesh manpower and transports", Shafiullah said. "The Indians, I believe, are not that stupid to hand over weapons to Bangladesh nationals to carry those to Assam or any other part of India."

Even then, there should be a

clear cut clause in the proposed transshipment agreement that India will not transship any armaments through Bangladesh. You have to carefully guard against the slightest possibility of threats to national security.

"The routes India has developed for movement of troops

between Calcutta and its troubled north eastern zone are very hazardous ones, passing through many big and small hills. Naturally, it takes a lot of time for troops to reach the troubled zone from West Bengal", Shafiullah said.

On the other hand, the retired general strongly believes that allowing transit or transshipment facilities to a foreign country is a matter of national importance. He, therefore, considers it important to have national level debates and discussions on the issue before entering into such an agreement with India. "I expect that the government will raise the issue in Jatiya Sangsad for discussion before signing of any such agreement. If the Sangsad refers the matter to my committee (JS body on defence ministry), we will have the scope to make necessary recommendations following scrutiny of the papers concerned."

Asked whether giving transshipment facilities to India would affect Bangladesh's economic interest visualised in the

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Ctg murder halts train, road traffic

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Aug 5: A BNP leader was killed by unidentified assailants at Sitakundu last night, police and party sources said.

The victim, Chowdhury Md Shahjahan, 47, vice president of Sitakundu unit of BNP, came under attack near his house while he was returning from his pharmacy at Baraoula Bazar by driving a car at 1:30 am last night, police said.

The assailants intercepted his private car, dragged him out and chopped him to death on the spot, police and party sources said. Shahjahan was also a former chairman of Sonachhari union under Sitakundu thana.

None was arrested in connection with the murder till writing of this report tonight. BNP leaders blamed ruling party activists for killing Shahjahan, also a leader of Chittagong North District unit of BNP. Local Awami League denied the charge.

The killing of Shahjahan sparked off violence in Sitakundu where BNP supporters staged demonstrations demanding arrest of the killers. BNP activists damaged some vehicles and put up barricades

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রাজধানী ঢাকায় মানুষের হাতে হাতে
আলোচনার কেন্দ্রবিন্দুতে প্রথম আলো

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সকল পাঠককে ধন্যবাদ ও কৃতজ্ঞতা প্রথম আলোকে গ্রহণ
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