

Shantu Larma in city to meet PM

By Special Correspondent

Jyotirindriyo Bodhipriyo Larma, chairman of the Regional Council for the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), is in the capital, seeking an appointment with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He reached Dhaka Tuesday on a three-day visit, officials said. However, till yesterday he didn't get an appointment to meet the prime minister. The meeting between the two is deemed crucial at a time when the government and Larma are at odds over a number of issues.

Larma is also scheduled to meet some ministers and officials during his stay in the capital. Secretary of the CHT Affairs Ministry Mahfuzul Islam called on him yesterday morning. Sources said that Larma had also failed in his earlier attempt to meet Hasina as she was preoccupied with her visits abroad.

The government is highly likely to take up the issue of resumption of meeting of the CHT treaty implementation committee and the taskforce on refugees, law and order.

It could also take up Larma's failure to send his opinion on a draft amendment to enhance the authority of the Land Commission to start a cadastral survey in the 14,200 square-kilometre region. As a result, the govern

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Plan to re-excavate 1127 rivers, canals in next 5 years

Star Report

The government has planned to re-excavate 1,127 rivers and canals in the country in next five years to control "common flood" and ensure optimum utilisation of water resources.

In line with recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Water Resources, the government has identified the rivers and canals to be re-excavated under Food for Work Programme.

Some five lakh tonnes of food grains have been allocated for this, a meeting of the JS body was informed yesterday.

Presided over by Abdul Momen, the meeting received a list of rivers and canals to be dug, but decided to have a discussion on it after a revised list is submitted to the committee in its next meeting.

Col. (Retd) Oli Ahmed of BNP objected to the list, saying it was not prepared properly. He said that two rivers were listed from one district and 50 from another, meeting sources said.

Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak finally directed the officials concerned to make a balanced list, giving equal importance to different regions. It also focused on building embankments in different strategic points of some big rivers.

The committee in its next

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 4		5.25 pm
Jan 5	6-42 am	

Prayer Timings

January 4		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-14	5-20
Zuhr	12-45	1-20
Asr	3-55	4-10
Maghrib	5-23	5-30
Esha	7-00	7-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

PM tells President's Parade in Ctg

Build up a strong Naval force for balance of power in Indian Ocean

CHITTAGONG, Jan 3: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said today that her government will continue its efforts to build up a strong and self-reliant naval force capable of maintaining balance of power in the Indian Ocean, reports BSS.

"Our Navy has incorporated missile technology in its arsenal and we want to turn it into a strategically important wing of our balanced defence forces," she said.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the President's Parade marking the commissioning of 98-B Batch Midshipmen of the Bangladesh Navy at the Naval Academy Parade ground at Patenga here this morning.

UNB adds, the Prime Minister said that Bangladesh has a huge reserve of gas in its maritime area and there is a great possibility of finding oil in the Bay of Bengal. Already natural gas is being extracted from the Bay by installing gas rigs.

Bangladesh has a big maritime area, about 45,000 square miles of sea, having a huge reserve of living and nonliving marine resources, she said adding that the responsibility of navy has increased with the possibility of finding oil.

She said the government has taken steps for increasing strength of the navy by inducting frig-

ate, survey ships and maritime patrol aircraft into the fleet.

The Prime Minister said her government has kept the armed forces above any kind of party politics and enhanced prestige and honour of the defence forces.

"We are continuing our efforts for modernising and strengthening the armed forces and to build up a professionally skilled defence," she said.

Despite limitations, she said, the government is taking necessary steps for modernising the armed forces and for raising its qualitative standard.

Hasina said with their service and effort the members of the armed forces have earned the faith and confidence of the people and asked them to maintain this confidence and love of the people for their professional cause.

She said the image of the armed forces has also increased abroad for their efficiency and skill shown at the UN peacekeeping missions. "We feel proud of you."

Addressing the new officers, the Prime Minister said attaining professional skill is very important for the professionals, for which continued training a

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Speaker's fourth attempt to resolve impasse

Khaleda urged to join JS to resolve 2 major issues

By Nazrul Islam

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury has once again initiated a process to bring back the boycotting opposition parties to the next parliament session to resolve two important national issues retention of reserved women's seats in parliament and establishment of voting rights of expatriate Bangladeshis.

The Speaker wrote a letter to Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia on Tuesday requesting her to resolve the two issues in the interest of the nation.

But there was no reaction from the Opposition till yesterday.

This is the fourth such attempt by the Speaker to bring the boycotting opposition to the House.

All the previous attempts by the Speaker went in vain as the Opposition said there was no "congenial atmosphere" in the House to attend its sitting.

In his last attempt, the Speaker had invited the Opposition Leader to the Millennium Session of the

Parliament last year.

Opposition BNP and its two allies Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami have been abstaining from attending sittings since the 13th session of the current parliament. They blamed the Speaker for making the parliament ineffective through his partisan role in running it.

In his latest letter the Speaker drew the attention of the Leader of the Opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution Bill 2000 and voting rights of expatriate Bangladeshis nationals. The bill was placed before the House in its last session.

For passage of the Constitutional Amendment Bill for retention of the women's reserved seats, two-thirds majority is mandatory. The expatriate voters' issue needs a detailed discussion before enactment of a law in this regard.

"I think, the issues are very much important and

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The footbridge over Mirpur Road near Gausia Market is just a few paces off; however, shoppers prefer the risky business of zigzagging through the busy traffic.

-- Star photo by

BNP to discuss Speaker's letter today

BNP's highest policy making body will sit today to discuss some important issues including the Speaker's letter to opposition leader Khaleda Zia urging her to return to Parliament, reports UNB.

Party sources said Khaleda had convened the Standing Committee meeting at her Banani Secretariat at 8 pm.

On Tuesday, Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury sent a letter to Khaleda asking her to join the coming parliament session beginning January 11 specially for bringing an amendment to the Constitution to restore the provision for 30 reserved seats for women and for discussing the right to franchise of Bangladeshi nationals living abroad.

The provision for women's

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'PSA will prove AL's bane'

BY Staff Correspondent

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday asked the government to place a bill in the Jatiya Sangsad seeking cancellation of the Public Safety Act on the first day of the upcoming session.

"Otherwise, the black law would prove Awami League's bane, as the party has no chance to return to power through the next general elections," he said while addressing a rally at Mukhtangan in the city. "We will try the corrupt and terrorist Awami League leaders and activists under this law."

The rally to protest filing of a "false" case under the PSA against BNP lawmaker M Morshed Khan MP, his son Faisal Morshed Khan and several other party leaders in Chittagong was organised by the party's city unit, with its president Sadek Hossain Khoka MP in the chair.

In less than a year since the enactment of PSA, it has been

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Evaluation of 5 bidders by next week

Non-Japanese elbowed out of Rupsha Bridge project

By Sharier Khan

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) is likely to finalise next week the technical evaluation of the five bidders for the proposed Tk 650 crore Rupsha Bridge project, sources concerned said.

The project is funded by the Japan Bank of Industrial Cooperation (JBIC).

The sources said the Japanese consultant for the project has already disqualified two non-Japanese bidders, keeping the competition limited to three Japanese companies only.

The consultant will submit its evaluation report to the RHD today.

The sources said, the authorities are speeding up the project work so that the Prime Minister can lay foundation of the bridge by February because Awami League, during its 1996 election campaign, had pledged to build a bridge on Rupsha near Khulna to connect Mongla port by road.

Eighteen foreign companies had submitted pre-qualification applications for the bridge work. Thirty-eight companies had purchased tender documents.

JBIC and the RHD pre-selected the bidders from these applicants with the help of a Japanese consultant, PCI and JOC.

Three Japanese companies Simuju, Obayasi and Taisu and two Chinese companies were short-listed in October for technical evaluation. The Chinese companies are China State Engineers (with Hyundai) and China National Overseas Engineering Corporation (with Hunan Road and Bridge Corporation). The sources claimed that though the project is being financed under a grant, the Japanese lobbies are trying to make sure that a Japanese company

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Rail, transit & port use to top talks during Nepal FM's trip

By M Anwarul Haq

Opening of Rohanpur rail transit route at Chapainawabganj, improvement of two existing surface transit links and easier access to Mongla port are expected to feature prominently in the Dhaka-Kathmandu talks during Nepalese Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastula's four-day official visit to Bangladesh. Bastula arrives in the capital on January 8.

Practicability of a proposed Dhaka-Kathmandu direct bus service will also be examined. Besides, officials of the two SAARC nations would explore avenues to enhance economic co-operations and strengthen bilateral relations.

The landlocked Himalayan kingdom is keen on having access to Mongla port, which would make entry and exit of its goods "quicker and economically cheaper," sources say.

At present, the entire volume of Nepalese cargo, approximately one million tonnes every year, is routed through Calcutta, which is far from cost-efficient due to delays forced by huge congestion at the port.

Nepal's Ambassador to Bangladesh Madhu Raman Acharya told The Daily Star that his country was interested in use of Mongla port for bulk of its cargo on a regular basis, if it got proper incen-

tives. Nepal's access to the port, on the other hand, would mean generation of huge revenue usage charges which could be utilised in infrastructure expansion at the port, observers feel.

If direct road link up to Mongla were offered, the movement of goods would increase considerably, which, they believe, would lead to the growth of local trucking industry besides generating huge revenue.

There is a growing market in Nepal for Bangladeshi raw jute, jute goods, pharmaceuticals and several consumer items such as dry-cell batteries. The Himalayan kingdom, on its part, exports pulses, vegetables, fruits and baby food to Bangladesh.

Streamlining of the two existing transit links that connect the two countries through India would interest the business community in Nepal. It would also be beneficial to Bangladesh's economic interest.

The transit point at Banglabandh at Panchagarh in the country's north presents a dismal picture, according to people concerned. Although lengthy negotiations between Nepal and India resulted in

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River transport laws frequently flouted

Culprits in most cases go unpunished

By Naimul Haq

River transport laws are frequently and widely violated virtually without any check largely due to lack of adequate manpower and funds, sources concerned said.

While launch accidents kill hundreds of people almost every year, very few of those responsible for this are penalised by the authorities. As per official records of Shipping Directorate, only one such launch owner was fined Tk one lakh in the last 13 years. In most cases, fines amount to only around Tk 20,000.

Overloading of launches and reckless racing, plying of those without skilled personnel, proper navigation apparatus and life saving devices are the main reasons of frequent accidents, according to victims and witnesses.

But the authorities concerned have not yet taken any effective steps in this regard.

In the latest accident, at least

165 people were killed when two launches carrying passengers almost double their capacity collided head on in the Meghna near Chandpur on Thursday night.

A similar launch mishap took place in the Meghna in Bhola on December 12 in '99 claiming 63 lives with more than a hundred missing. According to the district administration the vessel --

8 more bodies recovered

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, Jan 3: The death toll from Friday's launch disaster in the river Meghna at Ekhlashpur rose to 165 today with recovery of eight more bodies.

Officials at the police control room here said the district administration has so far

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M L Falguni -- did not have route permit and was highly overloaded.

Sources said the lone Marine Court functions without adequate manpower, funds and required logistics. But the ministry concerned seems to have turned a deaf ear to repeated requests for necessary steps.

"More than 3,355 cases have been pending with the court since 1985. The cases include those concerning accidents, launch owners, masters and sailors," a court source said.

The lone magistrate in the court does not have the facility to visit the spots of accidents.

Each of the five inspectors and three surveyors under the court without any office, vehicle and communication facility has to detect violation of laws in a vast area and this is not possible, the source pointed out.

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Teenage boy beaten to death in city

By Staff Correspondent

A teenage boy was beaten to death by unidentified miscreants in the city's Pallabi area yesterday.

The victim was identified as Jahangir Hossain, 18, son of Nurunnabi of Tinsed Colony at Section-11 Pallabi.

Police recovered the body from the premises of a community center near Dakhil Madrasah at about 1:30 pm yesterday.

The miscreants took Jahangir, a shopkeeper at Baonia Bazar in the city to the premises of the community centre on Tuesday night and beat him mercilessly. He died on the spot.

Police said Jahangir might have been killed as a sequel to previous rivalry with some local youths.

The body was sent to DMCH morgue for autopsy.

A murder case was filed with Pallabi police station accusing four people.

None, however, was arrested in this connection till filing of this report at 6 pm yesterday.