

Sinking of tubewells going on despite arsenic contamination

Speakers at a function yesterday expressed grave concern over the sinking of shallow tube-wells in the country despite detection of arsenic in the ground water and media campaign against it since 1993, reports BSS.

They were addressing a day-long seminar on 'Health effects of geochemistry of arsenic and lead,' sponsored by the Columbia University of the United States together with its local chapter, at Sheraton Hotel with Prof. Abdul Wadud Khan of NIPSON in the chair.

More than 50 per cent of the 5,000 tube-wells of Aralshahar in Narayanjan district sampled in a study last year were found to be arsenic-contaminated. Dr Habibur Ahsan of Columbia University said. He said the five-year study launched last year, would cover a total of 10,000 people. The interesting aspect of the findings of Aralshahar, he said, is that of the tube-wells in the upazila, 80 per cent were sunk during the last five years.

The total number of shallow tube-wells in the country, according to official estimate is about 45 lakh while unofficial estimate is double of that figure. Of the total tube-wells, about 40 to 50 per cent are arsenic contaminated, he observed.

He said during the study period 5,000 couples or 10,000 people would be covered by the researchers who would try to get



Lawyers of Supreme Court held a meeting protesting the appointment of judges to the Appellate Division yesterday at the High Court building. President of Supreme Court Bar Association Barrister Moinul Hossain addressing the meeting. —Star photo

Politicisation of judiciary

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and Mujibur Rahman Sarwar MP. Chiefs and top-ranking leaders from Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote attended the gathering on special invitation from the BNP chairperson.

At the meeting, the opposition leader announced a joint mass procession of the four-party alliance in Dhaka on January 18 to press home the demand for cancellation of the PSA.

The opposition alliance would launch a militant movement and announce hartal, blockade and other sorts of action programmes, if the government refused to abolish the 'anti-humanitarian and unconstitutional' act immediately, Khaleda warned.

"If the Awami League government does not repeal the black law," she said, "we, after assuming power through the next election, will try its corrupt and terrorist leaders and activists under the PSA."

The BNP apprehension that the PSA would be used to harass opposition leaders and activists has been proved right in less than a year, she said.

The government has not ever applied the act against the AL terrorists who have forcibly occupied people's properties," she said. "People will never accept the law as it is not being applied impartially."

The BNP chief said BNP would definitely put the corrupt Awami League ministers and leaders in the dock because they have looted thousands of crores of taka. No crime committed by them will go unpunished, she added.

"The AL doesn't have the slightest chance of returning to power," Khaleda said. "We will soon topple the government through mass movement and form a nationalist government with people who believe in Islamic values."

Referring to arrest of BNP leaders and activists, she said the government arrested thousands of opposition leaders and activists under false cases to suppress the movement as well as to rig the upcoming polls.

She demanded immediate release of all leaders and workers, including BNP Standing Committee members KM Obaidur Rahman and Nurul Islam Manju.

About arrest of JP Chairman HM Ershad, she alleged that the government was not allowing the law to take its own course and obstructing for proper functioning of the court. She hoped that Ershad would be released through legal procedures.

About eviction of hawkers, she said the AL men collected money and tolls from the hawkers regularly and were evicting them without making arrangement for their rehabilitation. She asked the government to halt eviction of hawkers right now.

President tells JS Criminal activities Declining since Enactment of PSA

By Staff Correspondent

President Shahabuddin Ahmed has observed that criminal activities such as terrorism, vandalism and arson started declining since the Public Safety Act came into force.

The Jatiya Sangsad passed the PSA nearly a year ago amidst widespread protest.

President's comment came at a time when an opposition lawmaker had challenged the controversial law in the High Court, saying that the law curtails people's fundamental rights.

The president, who earlier gave assent to the law on condition of certain changes in it, made the observation in his address to the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday. Conventionally, the president delivers a cabinet-approved speech in the House in line with the practice of parliamentary democracy.

In his set speech, the president also lauded the government's steps in curbing terrorism and its success in restoring peace in the south-western region through a special drive.

Linguistic riddle

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Inappropriate use of words and missing punctuation in many parts made the speech horrible. Even words were sometimes missing from the text of the speech. Grammatical blunders also featured high throughout the 50-page printed speech.

The word 'emphases' was repeatedly spelled as 'emphases', while 'million' was spelled 'mellion'. Prepositions like 'to' and 'of', and the article 'the' were frequently missing from many sentences. Hyphens were also absent from where they were needed.

Capital letters were unnecessarily used, and there was no uniformity of style in using numbers in many areas. Sequence of tense and the use of number were not properly maintained.

For example, one sentence reads: "Of the proposed 12 Science and Technology Universities, construction of 6 universities in the first phase have began ... Another such sentence goes as: 'This has also arose interest among the prospective buyers of those industrial units.'"

Auxiliary verbs required for plural number were used in the case of singular number and vice versa. The pronoun 'who' was used for the country.

The word 'attracting' replaced the right word 'attaching' while 'law' was spelled 'low'. That particular sentence containing the two wrongly used words also did not make any sense -- "Attracting (topmost importance) to the low and order of the country."

Duplication of words like 'the' and 'of' often appeared in the phrasing of sentences.

One bizarre sentence reads: "The religious harmony fraternity and understanding prevailing among on the citizens of Bangladesh belonging to different faiths, is a model for other countries."

Another such sentence was worded as: "To remove this weakness, expand export market and exportable goods and strengthen export trade an ambitious project for diversification of export has been taken up."

The written copy, too, was made available to foreign diplomats, who attended the session, more than an hour after President Shahabuddin Ahmed began his speech. The journalists also had to go through a lot of trouble to get copies of the English translation, as those did not reach the press gallery despite repeated requests.

A parliament secretariat official put down the delay in distribution of the English version to late delivery of those from the printing press. However, the Bangla version was made available as soon as the President began his address.

Beximco trio

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books and compel students and guardians to buy textbooks against purchasing textbooks," a source said.

According to government rules, the selling of textbooks is banned up to class eight to ensure quality education.

No Beximco officials could be contacted for comments on the selling of allotment letters. Managing Director of Beximco Media Iqbal Ahmed was not available for comments despite repeated efforts over three days.

However, Salahuddin Ahmed, press manager of Beximco Media said, "I know nothing about the issue."

Meanwhile, the leaders of the printing and publishing industry yesterday demanded a free market of the textbooks to put an end to the ongoing crisis.

"If the NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) allows us to print and distribute textbook as in 1996, then we hope the crisis will end within three days,"

said a leader of the print and publishing industry.

He said the then government had opened up the printing and distribution of textbooks by sacrificing royalty to end the textbook crisis in 1996.

The government protects publication and distribution of textbooks to have control over the printing and distribution process and earns a 10 per cent royalty.

The NCTB allegedly awarded the huge printing job to the inexperienced Beximco concerns, ignoring 750 experienced printers. It reasoned that the job was awarded to the lowest bidder.

The NCTB extended the deadline twice to the Beximco concerns despite widespread criticism from the various quarters and did not take any punitive measures against the Beximco concerns.

The NCTB even spent Tk 23 lakh in the form of advertisement bill to publish its statement to conceal the worst-case scenario, the sources said.

Rule nisi issued against PSA

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looting of shop that was carried out by the accused. He opposed granting of any stay order.

But he came in for hard questions from the court. Justice Abu Saeed Ahmed asked the Additional Attorney General to clarify whether the country was under Martial Law or being governed under civil law. His observation came on the issue of denial of bail to an accused under the PSA.

But the state attorney simply opposed the argument by the petitioners' lawyers and defended the PSA. However, he concentrated on the case against Morshed Khan. He wanted to know why the petitioners are only citing the case filed in Chittagong.

At this stage, the court asked the Additional Attorney General if he was representing only the government or the 13 crore people of the country. He contended the court, must see that the law does not go against the public interest.

Dr Kamal Hossain pointed out that under the PSA a mugger could be sentenced to ten years rigorous imprisonment. But under penal code the same offender could be sentenced less than the period. It leaves plenty of room for the government to apply the PSA indiscriminately on political grounds to victimise its opponents, added Dr Kamal.

The court asked the lawyers for the petitioners to state the grounds of their prayer for declaring the PSA ultra vires of constitution. He also wanted to know if they are challenging the entire PSA or any particular section.

Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed in his reply to the query said that there was no guideline in this act as to how the law will be applied. Citing the case of one Nurul Islam, the senior constitutional counsel said that Foreign Exchange Regulation Act was declared ultra vires as there was no guideline.

Before a debate ensued over the prayer for a stay on the proceedings, Dr Kamal Hossain asked for a stay on the proceedings of the case against the BNP lawmaker and his son. But Mahub-e-Alam strongly opposed, saying it would effect hundreds of cases. The court observed that in that case, all such cases should come up before the court for review.

Justice Abu Saeed Ahmed told the lawyers for the plaintiffs that he had seen a newspaper report that the plaintiffs were granted anticipatory bail in the case. Khandaker Mahubuddin pointed out that no anticipatory bail was granted by the vacation bench; it only asked the police not to disturb the petitioners before a substantive hearing in a regular bench is held within seven days after reopening of the court on January 7.

Unless the court stays the proceedings, the petitioners would not be left with much time for hearing, he said while seeking the stay.

But the court asked him if there had been a prayer for bail in the petition. The counsels for the petitioners said that they were challenging the validity of the act

36-hour hartal in Ctg ends

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 11: The 36-hour hartal enforced by All Party Action Committee (APAC) in the port city ended at 6 pm today.

APAC called the hartal demanding withdrawal of case filed against BNP central leader M Morshed Khan, MP and release of the opposition activists arrested during a hartal on January 7.

Morshed Khan and his son Faisal Morshed Khan were sued under Public Safety Act (PSA) for 'ransacking a shop at GEC crossing in the city on December 26.'

The supporters of APAC organised rallies and processions at different parts of the city during hartal hours today. The ruling party activists also took out anti-hartal processions in the city.

Police and paramilitary BDR were deployed in the city to avert any untoward incidents.

However, business activities in city were badly affected due to the hartal, sources concerned said.

Delivery of goods to and from Chittagong port was suspended during the hartal, causing a severe dislocation in port operation, port sources said.

Chittagong Port Authority has decided to ensure round the clock operation on weekly holidays tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, port sources said.

All kinds of vehicles except rickshaws stayed off the roads while shops and markets were closed.

At Bahaddarhat crossing police chased some opposition activists at around 10 am today.

Train service to and from Chittagong was as usual, railway sources said.

New Year session

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Conventionally, the presidential address comes first in the first session of a year.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed addressed the House after a 40-minute recess following adoption of the obituary reference on ruling party MP from Sakhrir-1 Syed Kamal Bakh Saki and four others.

Most of the ruling party MPs including Narayan Chandra Chandu, who won the Khulna-5 by-election on December 20, attended the session.

Lawmakers of Jatiya Party faction led by Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju also attended the sitting.

Diplomats and dignitaries were present at the VIP gallery while the visitors' gallery was nearly empty during the President's address, which lasted for more than two hours.

Members of the opposition BNP, Jatiya Party (Ershad) and Jamaat-e-Islami did not attend the sitting. The Speaker had earlier invited Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia to come back to parliament.

Since the 13th session of pres-

ent parliament, the opposition parties have been abstaining from attending its sessions, except on one day to fulfill constitutional obligation to protect their membership. They blamed the Speaker for 'partisan attitude' in conducting the business of the House.

The sitting selected a five-member panel for running the House during absence of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker. The five are Abdul Latif Siddique, Abul Kalam Azad, Syed Masud Reza, Golam Hossain and Saheen Monwara Haque.

Speaking on the obituary reference, Leader of the House Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, condoled the death of Syed Kamal Bakh Saki. She recalled his contribution to the country's Liberation War.

The House adopted the obituary reference on former Speaker and BNP leader Mirza Golam Hafiz, former MP Dr Abdul Awal, former member of the then provincial assembly Sikander Ali and Jatiya Sangsad official Mohammad Shahidul Islam.

Soon after the presidential address was over, the Speaker adjourned the sitting till 10 am on January 10.

Industrial sector

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per cent against the projected rate of 6.15 per cent," he said.

In the third year of the plan, 1999-2000, the GDP growth rate reached 6.68 per cent which was fairly close to its target of 6.80 per cent. This achievement rate exceeded all previous years' growth rate since mid '70s,' Alamgir added.

The review noted that more than 90 per cent of the investment target was achieved during the first two years of the plan. Investment stood at Tk 547.32 billion against the target of Tk 607.03 billion. The rate of achievement in investment in private sector and public sector stood at 95 per cent and 48 per cent respectively.

The actual investment-GDP ratio was 18 per cent against the targeted 19.88 per cent.

The achievement in investment target both in absolute amount and the rate has surpassed all the previous records. Specially, the steady growth in investment in the private sector has been noted with encouragement," it said.

Alamgir said the highest investment took place in housing and construction sector.

The size of the Annual Development Plan (ADP), he said, has increased by two to five times over that in mid '70s. The current ADP is of Tk 17,700 crore.

The country started exporting software this year and the government plans to set an export target of two billion dollars to be achieved within five to seven years.

He said the government has also taken up a Tk 900 crore project to set up a submarine cable line up to Singapore crore to modernise data transmission.

The state mentioned that the Sixth Five-Year Plan is now being prepared and it would be announced in 2002.

President asks all to build on successes achieved so far

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tion that they won't be back until congenial atmosphere returns to the parliament that now has a short span left in its current tenure. The Mizan-Manju faction of JP however attended the session.

Foreign diplomats, top bureaucrats and chiefs of the three services were seen present in the VVIP gallery to listen to the President's speech amidst tight security.

The President said the country has maintained a stable economy with substantial progress in socioeconomic sectors following the successful implementation of welfare-oriented economic agenda by the Awami League government.

He referred to successive bumper crops in agriculture, stability in price of essentials, correct monetary policy, satisfactory inflation rate, increase in investment and production of power, new employment, industrialisation, women empowerment, rise in literacy rate and improvement of health services.

President Shahabuddin also mentioned the government's achievements in poverty alleviation, development of rural infrastructure, modernisation of the armed forces, administrative reforms and success in external affairs redeeming the nation's image.

President Ahmed told the parliament that efforts were on to bring back the eleven absconding convicts in Bangabandhu murder case through bilateral and international channels.

He said the last session of the UN Human Rights Organisation in Geneva adopted a resolution that the condemned killers should not get shelter anywhere. This resolution is a recognition by the international community of Bangladesh's relentless endeavours towards establishing human rights and values.

The President cautiously avoided the issue of political disputes prevailing in the country but called for accelerating the present pace of success keeping abreast of global advance.

"We must adopt correct steps so that as a nation we can march ahead with unity, solidarity and deep sense of patriotism," he said.

He said a new voter list was prepared for the next general elections and other elections in future. The Election Commission has taken steps to print the list.

Referring to parliamentary elections in three constituencies Rajshahi-5, Jhalakathi-2 and Khulna-5 he said these elections were free, fair and impartial. Besides, election to 13 municipalities was held peacefully. Six municipal elections could not take place following court injunctions.

Regarding law and order, the President observed that internal peace and discipline is a prerequisite for development of any country. He said the government is committed to keeping law and order under control and relieving the society of terrorism.

About the judiciary, President, also the former Chief Justice, said that a six-year programme entitled Legal and Judicial Capacity Building had been undertaken at a cost of Tk 250 crore to update the judicial system through radical reforms.

The Public Administration Reform Commission submitted its final report of the first phase recommending improvement of the level of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency in public organisations, enabling them to fulfil government's commitment to ensure socioeconomic development.

Presently the Commission is working on restructuring and rationalising of manpower of the corporations and autonomous bodies.

The President said effective measures have been taken for modernising the armed forces making it more dynamic by increasing professional efficiency. He mentioned the establishment of National Defence College, Military Institute of Science and Technology, Armed Forces Medical College and Peacekeeping Centre.

He praised the Awami League government saying that the country's socioeconomic sector recorded remarkable progress and stability by the successful implementation of people-oriented economic programmes.

He asserted that pragmatic policies of the government had helped keep inflation at a very satisfactory low level. Favourable investment climate has been created by revitalising the activities of commercial banks and the central bank.

Shahabuddin pointed out that rationalisation of the tax system and expansion of the tax-base had been done with a view to increasing investment and reducing poverty.

Highlighting recent developments in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the President said the "historic Peace Accord" signed between the government and the PCJSS in 1997 opened up opportunities for the progress of the tribal area.

He mentioned that some 35 different projects, including construction of roads, hospital, educational institutions, setting up of digital telephone exchanges, full-fledged radio station and television relay centre, are all part of the plan for development of the CHT.

Listing various projects undertaken by the Awami League government in the country's education sector, the President said Bangladesh is now considered a model in the field of primary and mass education in the Asian region.

President Shahabuddin also praised Awami League's policies and strategies for ensuring health services to the common people and listed the projects undertaken so far in this sector.

The President reminded that the country's economic growth largely depends agriculture and that the government earmarked it as a priority sector. Because of qualitative changes in food management more emphasis is laid on internal procurement by the private sector rather than import of food-grain by the government.

He noted with satisfaction that the government has ensured the right to food for the poor.

After the exhaustive two-hour-ten-minute new-year speech by the President, the House was adjourned till 10 am on Sunday.

SC proceedings

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Barrister Maudud Ahmed and Barrister Najmul Huda, among others, led the anti-government lawyers while Deputy Attorney General Saifuddin, Sahara Khatun and Nurul Islam Sujon led the pro-government lawyers.

The sit-in was withdrawn and the judges were allowed to come out at 12:40 pm following intervention by senior lawyers including Barrister Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed, Dr Kamal Hossain, Barrister Moinul Huda, Barrister Najmul Huda and Mahubuddin Ahmed.

They requested the Chief Justice to suspend proceedings in Supreme Court till the issue was resolved.

Later, at a meeting of the agitating lawyers, the senior lawyers led by Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed said they would hold further consultations with the Chief Justice on the matter. They said they would attend hearings at the High Court but would stay off those in the Supreme Court.

Earlier, a meeting was held at the chamber of Barrister Ishtiaque Ahmed to resolve the issue. It was attended by, among others, Dr Kamal Hossain, Moinul Hossain, Rokonuddin Mahmud, Najmul Huda, Mahubuddin Ahmed, Amirul Islam, Additional Attorney General Mahub-e-Alam.

The agitating lawyers said they would continue their protest on Sunday.

Follower of Laden held

CHITTAGONG, Jan 11: A self-declared follower of Osama Bin Laden was arrested on Wednesday night from Halishahar area of the port city.

Muhammad Yakub, 30, was arrested from his uncle's rented house at Halishahar B-block.

Yakub was produced before the court today. He reportedly admitted having connection with Laden. He was placed on a four-day remand.

Tea shop owner stabbed to death in Jhenidah

From Our Correspondent

JHENIDAH, Jan 11: A tea shop owner was stabbed to death by some unidentified miscreants at village Mostafapur in Kaliganj upazila under Jhenidah district last night.

The miscreants also snatched away his bicycle.

The dead was identified as Gopal Chandra Bhattacharya, 28, of village Chapral under same upazila.

Family sources said, Gopal came under attack at about 7.15 pm while he was going to his shop.

He succumbed to his injuries on the way to Kaliganj Upazila Health Complex.

A case was filed with Kaliganj police station in this connection and the body was sent to Jhenidah sadar hospital for autopsy. None was arrested in this connection till filing of this report.

Jalal Murder

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Abbasuddin, son of the victim, filed a murder case with Ramna police station on March 26, 1999.

All the accused including Inspector Ziaul Ahsan, Havildar Billal, Constable Abdur Rouf and canteen manager Anwar Hossain were present in the court yesterday.

Metropolitan public prosecutor Quamrul Islam appeared for the state while Advocate ABM Sharfuddin Khan Mukul and Mahub Ahmed for the accused.

Lawyer for inspector Ziaul Ahsan told The Daily Star yesterday that victim's wife Halima Khatun was seen on the court premises on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, public prosecutor claimed in the court on Monday that witnesses in the Jalal murder case, notably Jalal's four family members, could not be traced on the basis of police report earlier submitted before the court.

Haripur plant

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tenders (bidders) for the captioned project (Haripur Power Plant Extension Project) on 26th December 2000 without having obtained our concurrence, as required under the agreement between GOB (Government of Bangladesh) and JBIC.

"We would like to inform you clearly that if BPDB goes ahead with the present move, we shall be constrained to withdraw our financing to the contract as the least possible measure."

Three Japanese companies Mitsubishi, Mitsui-Kawasaki and Marubeni participated in the bid, which had a bumpy start in late 1999 due to lack of participation at first and then due to conflicts between the Project Consultant, Mott MacDonald, and PDB.

Last month, the consultant found Kawasaki technically disqualified. Yet, PDB was influenced by an influential political lobby backing Kawasaki to announce it as a qualified bidder on December 26, bypassing JBIC, sources concerned said.

When JBIC came to know this, it sent the letter.

"Since the project involves Japanese companies only, JBIC is playing a fair role so that the most competent company gets the bid," one source noted.

Earlier in March last year, the Project Consultant tried to technically disqualify Kawasaki but the political lobby put it on the track.