

Foundation of "controversial" Eco-park to be laid today

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

Amidst strong protests, the government has decided to go ahead with the Tk 11-crore 'Eco-park' project in Moulvibazar allegedly evicting hundreds of tribal families in the process.

Minister for Forest and Environment Sajeda Choudhury will lay the foundation stones of the two separate Eco-parks in Madhabkunda and Muraichhari, both in Moulvibazar district at 11am today.

At least ten 'Khasi punjis' (villages) will be affected by the planned development project of the government as more than one thousand families who have been living in the hills for centuries will be evicted.

There are allegations that Forest Department, the implementing authority of the project, has not taken any steps yet to rehabilitate the affected families.

Even worse, the decision to go ahead with the project was taken without any discussion with the tribals living in the hills, threatening the very existence of the resident Khasia and Garo tribes that depend mostly on betel leaf plantations in the area for their livelihood.

The Forest Department however does not acknowledge that Khasia tribals own any land in the forest.

The decision came as a cruel surprise to many as some of the tribal leaders who had recently met high officials in the Prime Minister's office were assured that the project would not be implemented without prior discussion with the 'residents' in the hills.

The government plans to develop a tourist garden or better known as 'Eco-park' centring the waterfalls at Madhabkunda and Muraichhari in the deep forests of the Moulvibazar district threatening not only the human habitation but also natural forests.

A total of 1500 acres of land would be utilised for the park including 667 acres in Madhabkunda and 833 acres in Muraichhari forest lands.

The government claims that the

project is a part of the 'plan' for economic development as well as preserving the environment by protecting the precious forest habitat including rare animals and birds of the area.

The Tk 11-crore project of the Ministry of Forest and Environment would be completed by the end of year 2004. The cabinet approved the 'bio-diversity conservation' project last July following the Prime Minister's approval on March 6 last year.

The project, Madhabkunda-Muraichhari Eco-park, would involve clearing more than 1500 acres of forest including Khasi lands probably by cutting off trees and levelling hills. Roads meandering through the hills will be constructed for passage of motor vehicles.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Christian Association strongly condemned the decision yesterday and protested the planned foundation-laying ceremony of the government.

In a press release issued in the city it said the project would lead to the eviction of hundreds of tribal Khasia and Garo families living in the hills since long. It also said that the event coincides with the Easter Sunday, one of the biggest Christian festivals. Most of the tribals in the hills are Christians.

"We are very worried by the decision which will also affect the day's celebration," said one of the association leaders.

22 AL men sued

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The complainant alleged in the FIR that the accused looted seven shops at PTI crossing and Footpara central road on Wednesday, the last day of 72-hour hartal and assaulted several activists of BNP and JCD without any provocation.

The accused include Jubo League leaders Farid, Saiful and Kamruzzaman and AL leaders Biren Ghose and Nixon.

The case was filed with a court as Khulna thana refused to record it, said the complainant.

Shrimp cultivation

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Sundarbans area and in villages located inside Polder No 22, Harinkhola and Paikgachha in Khulna to record their experiences.

The delegation in its report recommended immediate halt to expansion of shrimp farming, protecting the rights of citizens to be secure from misdeeds of shrimp farmers and their employees such as murders, rape, arson and beatings. Police must act fairly to protect their rights, conduct a full and fair inquiry into the crimes and drop false charges, the report said. It stressed proper review of the Sundarbans Bio-diversity Project to ensure participation of local communities.

The report also recommended a public and independent impact assessment of the Shell Oil Project prior to exploration in the Sundarbans.

The findings of the delegation included incidents of murder and rape, false charges, arrest and harassment of shrimp farmers, loss of livelihood, conflicts over land, lack of food security and malnutrition, displacement of women from their traditional livelihood, violence against women, destruction of

social and cultural fabric of the village society, migration to cities, children catching shrimp fries, loss of bio-diversity, declining fish resources, livestock, poultry, fuel and fodder for cattle. The team also found that drinking water crisis due to salinity and pollution was affecting people's livelihood. It said investments from profits earned are not reinvested in the local economy and gross inequity existed as regards on who receives the benefits from shrimp farming and who suffers the consequences.

"We express our concern on the serious threat of destruction of the Sundarbans by shrimp farming in the buffer zones due to over-extraction of resources and increase in salinity. The development is made inevitable by the government's unqualified promotion of the rapid and uncontrolled expansion of the shrimp industry. During our discussion with the state minister for planning, he admitted the serious consequences emerging from shrimp farming but conceded that he had no system in place to monitor, prevent or mitigate them", the report said.

TIB: Law enforcers

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There were large-scale abuse of power, bribery, negligence of duty and extortion by police. The city's Ramna and Motijheel police stations are the most corrupt among the police stations in the country. Corruption is there in 285 police stations, the report added.

The report is based on the incidents of corruption reported in 21 national and local dailies of the country during the period.

However, corruption in the education sector was responsible for maximum financial loss to the government, which stood at Tk. 291.03 crore followed by Tk 116.95 crore of the local government.

As many as 1,948 incidents of corruption have inflicted a loss to the tune of Tk 5657.60 crore on the government during the second half of the year 2000, the TIB said in a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Muzaffar Ahmed, who is a member of the TIB Trustee Board, presented the report at a press conference. TIB Executive Director Manzoor Hasan and Taslima Akther Hena were, among others, also present. Mohammad Abdul Alim presented the keynote address.

A total of 38 sectors, divisions, departments and directorates were covered under the report. Education, local government and health sectors were identified as the second, third and fourth most corrupt sectors.

Political parties ranked 18th, the judiciary 23rd and the defence 38th as regards corruption. TIB, however, said very few incidents of corruption in the defence sector were reported during the period.

The report also said that high government officials were more corrupted than their juniors were.

Incidents of corruption were the highest in Dhaka district followed by Chittagong and Patuakhali.

AL govt won't quit

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ments by opposition leader Khaleda Zia to conclude that she had exposed her contradictory position as regards the election. Explaining, he said the opposition leader at a recent press conference termed the president's proposal to settle her party's dispute with the government over election as unconstitutional, although she had earlier demanded that the president arrange election by May. Furthermore, he added, Khaleda has also spoken against polls before the rainy season.

"We offered them dialogue to settle all election-related issues before transferring power. But they preferred to take up such issues only with the caretaker government," he said. "If a caretaker government is to settle everything then why should we leave office early?"

"They must now wait till the last day of AL government to have their grievances addressed by a caretaker administration."

Tofail brushed aside opposition allegation that the prime minister's

formula of early election was designed to benefit in the election from the "pro-AL administrative setup."

"We also participated in the 1996 election with an administration set up by BNP," he said.

Recent remarks of top BNP leaders show that they don't want election, but fall of the AL government only to claim victory in their so-called movement, he said. "But their dream will never come true."

Referring to a recent meeting of the prime minister-led delegation with the president, he said the ruling party has made it clear that it would not stay in power for the constitutionally mandated 15 days after dissolution of the parliament. "That's why, we wanted to resolve all election-related issues before the power-transfer."

When told that the AL formula provides for only 55 days against the mandated 90 days for the caretaker government to hold the election, Tofail argued, "If everything is settled before the caretaker govern-

ment takes over, the time is enough to hold the polls smoothly."

About fears of uncertainty over holding of the next polls, he said, "None can foil the election, which will definitely be held despite conspiracies by the opposition. It's now up to BNP to contest the polls or not. There are many other parties to participate in the vote."

The AL leader ruled out chances of street confrontation in the days to come.

"We will be in the field and they (opposition) will stay back home," a confident Tofail said. "BNP needs 50 years to create a situation like the one we did against the BNP government. In fact, the opposition party wants to take revenge on the people for pulling it down in 1996."

Tofail ridiculed Khaleda's call to the civil servants to defy the AL government. "Her call has been totally ignored. The government staff serving her rather stopped working, but we asked them to continue."

Death anniversary of five of a family



Fazlur Rahman, Hosne Akhter, Moznu, Hiron, Babu

The 30th death anniversary of five members of a family will be observed tomorrow. They were killed by the Pakistani occupation forces and their collaborators at the Railway's quarters in Saidpur under Nilphamari district during the Liberation War in 1971, says a press release.

The martyrs are engineer Fazlur Rahman, his wife Hosne Akhter and their three sons -- Mostafizur

Rahman (Moznu), Hasinur Rahman (Hiron) and Azizur Rahman (Babu). A quarkhwani and 'feeding of the destitute' programme have been arranged on the occasion.

No option for BNP

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Bhuiyan said. The AL government might not recover illegal arms from the ruling party men, agree to recast the Election Commission and remove pro-AL officials from key administrative positions, he explained.

"A dialogue can only be fruitful with both the parties having equal status during the regime of a caretaker government."

The BNP secretary general blamed the prime minister for deliberately pushing the country towards violence and destruction by turning back on her commitment for early polls.

He termed Sheikh Hasina's March 30 comments at a public rally in the city "irresponsible, non-political and devoid of all political and democratic norms." At that rally, Hasina asked the opposition leader to give an undertaking that she would contest election.

In defence of continuous hartal, Bhuiyan said the opposition has resorted to it to expedite fall of a government which is harming the nation by its "misrule and corruption." The BNP has now no option

but to intensify street agitation to compel the AL government resign.

Bhuiyan claimed that the prime minister and her cabinet colleagues were making contradictory statements about election. While the PM once said she would resign after April 17, the ministers maintained that the government would not step down before July 13 when its tenure expires, he added. "This proves that either the prime minister does not have any command over the ministers or they are making such contradictory statements only to mislead the people."

Bhuiyan branded PM's offer to quit after April 17 and hold polls by June 12 as a conspiracy to not allow the caretaker government the time needed to ensure free and fair elections. With its men holding key administrative posts, the less time the caretaker administration gets, the better it is for the ruling party, he said.

The BNP leader said his party took to the streets as and when the ruling AL opted for fascist rule, resorted to politics of terrorism, killing and usurping public property, nakedly attacked the judiciary,

failed to ensure fair price of agricultural products and turned back on its election pledges.

He blamed the ruling party men, especially the ministers and MPs, and their children, relatives and arms cadres, for deterioration of law and order. "Even the prime minister herself provoked her party activists to go for violence."

The BNP secretary general claimed a 100 per cent success in the opposition's anti-government movement that "has isolated the ruling party from the people and exposed Awami League government's misdeeds."

Bhuiyan brushed aside AL claims that its agitation programmes have failed, saying it would be proved in the next general election when both sides would seek people's mandate. "If we have failed, why then is the government afraid of early election?"

The AL government would invite more trouble and further lose public support, if it continues in power, he said. "It has nothing else to give other than further law and order deterioration and acute power crisis and, therefore, should step down."

PM: Consider surroundings

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She urged the private entrepreneurs to come forward and develop this sector. In this regard, Hasina mentioned that her government had allowed tax holiday in the tourism sector.

Dwelling on the Dhaka city's terrible traffic situation, she said this has happened because of unplanned growth of business establishments.

"People set up multi-storied complexes without considering how much pressure the roads and utility services can take. The city roads are elongated in the north-south direction only and do not have any cross-roads. Whatever cross-roads were planned, these were blocked by big

business houses."

She urged the city dwellers to take the surroundings into consideration before going for multi-storied projects. Hasina also spoke in favour of building satellite towns away from the Dhaka city.

In a lighter vein, she said after her retirement in 2005 she would buy an apartment of Concord made of eco-friendly concrete blocks away from the city and live there.

Explaining the government plans to resolve traffic problem, Hasina said a move is underway to dredge the river ways around the capital and diversion roads are being planned to divert goods from other districts to the port cities instead of letting them transported through

Dhaka city. Earlier, S M Kamaluddin, Chairman of Concord Road, said facilities for entertainment, roads and modern communication are needed for the development of the tourism sector.

He said Concord Fantasy Kingdom would provide the much needed fun for the city's growing population. He mentioned that the park would open before the next Eid.

Later, Hasina was given the first life membership of the Fantasy Kingdom, and Housing, Public Works and Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Engineer Mosharraf Hossain, who was also present at the function as special guest, the second life membership.

Lawyers of Khulna Bar to go on strike from April 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Lawyers of Khulna District Bar Association have decided to go on strike from April 19 demanding removal of Md Aminul Islam, Judge of the special court trying cases against repression on women and children.

Two hundred and thirty-six lawyers have submitted a memorandum to the chief justice alleging corrupt practices and injustice being done by the judge.

The lawyers said the strike will continue till removal of the judge.

2 young men

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and Tofel from Sutrapur area immediately after the incident.

A murder case was filed with Sutrapur police in this connection. Body of another young man was recovered from in front of government girls' school at Sher-e-Bangla Road in the city's Tejgaon area early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Mohammad Kamal, 18, son of Milon Miah of Agargaon slum.

Police recovered the body of the young man with his right hand cut off and marks of stab injury in his left knee.

Police suspected that he might have been killed by the miscreants.

The reason behind the killing could be known till writing of this report last night.

The body was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

A case was filed with Tejgaon police station in this regard.

Khaleda's advisor

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Najmuddin Alam and Joynal Abedin Faruk were sued under the tortlaw.

In those cases High Court separately directed the government "not to arrest or harass" the leaders of the main opposition party.

Hazards

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bagge dumps. According to a knowledgeable commentator, in order to reduce hazards from the entrapped gas pockets under garbage dump sites, measures must be taken to ventilate the former rubbish pits, and monitor new dumping grounds as regular precautionary measures.

Movement

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One week after the JWG meeting in mid-February, the Indian authorities opened up the corridor for two hours at a stretch and kept it closed for an hour rotating the process thrice.

Home ministry officials who attended the New Delhi meeting said the corridor leased in perpetuity to Bangladesh will gradually be opened up for up to five hours at a stretch by June.

The Indian authorities have also agreed to allow unlettered movement in phases.

Earlier, India allowed passage every alternate hour, causing inconvenience to Bangladeshi inhabitants.

The Bangladesh delegation at the Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting in New Delhi was led by Joint Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs Janibul Haq while the Indian side was headed by GK Pillai, Joint Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Some major decisions were also made at the JWG meeting, including easing of the visa regime, which is expected to be implemented shortly.

7 DESA officials dismissed for corruption

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seven officials of Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) including its Superintendent Engineer of Postogola Circle were dismissed Thursday on charges of corruption.

Besides, show cause notices were served on 23 DESA personnel on the same day asking 'why they should not be dismissed', sources said.

"The seven were sacked after charges of severe corruption were proved against them through investigation" said a DESA high official, adding that the 23 others served with show cause notices are also suspected to have been responsible for the existing mismanagement in the power supply situation in the capital.

DESA has never earned profit since it was set up in 1991 under a World Bank prescription to reduce government's loss in the power sector. DESA's net loss per month ranges between Tk 20 crore and 30 crore, sources added.

Thursday's official order to terminate its seven officials at a time was the first such step in the history of DESA, the official added.

The sacked officials are: superintendent engineer of Postogola circle Khan Lodi Shafiqul Haq, director

(acting) of Internal Auditing Department Azizur Rahman, executive engineer Mujibur Rahman, executive engineer Shafiqur Rahman, assistant engineer Shah Alam, assistant director (accounts) Faruk Ahmed and sub-assistant engineer Howladar Giasuddin.

Crackers hurled at policemen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police man was seriously injured when a gang of unidentified miscreants hurled crackers at a police team at R K Mission Road in the city yesterday.

The injured was identified as Rodul Islam. The incident took place when Havildar Chumnu Miah and constables Rodul and Shajahan were patrolling in Gopibagh area. When they reached 70/2 R K Mission Road at around 2 am, the miscreants hurled crackers at them.

Rodul received injuries in his right knee and left leg. He was first sent to the Rajarbagh Police Lines hospital and later shifted to the Orthopaedic hospital.

A case was filed with Sutrapur thana.

Concerted move a must

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Dhaka WASA Chief Engineer Kazi Mohammad Seesh as convenor had been formed following the rally in order to identify the reasons for pollution and devise ways to check environmental degradation in the areas.

The committee in its report identified five specific reasons responsible for severe pollution in the rivers as well as at the villages.

The reasons include indiscriminate disposal of untreated industrial and chemical waste of Tejgaon and Tongi areas into storm sewer line and canals, reduction of width of canals by dumping wastes near the culverts of the canals and linkage of sewer lines to storm sewerage lines or canals.

Presenting the report, the chief engineer also admitted that poor condition of existing sewer network of Dhaka WASA is also responsible for severe pollution of the rivers.

The report put forward seven recommendations, which include rejection of housing projects along the city canals.

The Dhaka WASA managing director during his welcome speech said if the existing sewer system is

not extended and updated immediately, it will explode.

Prof. Mozaffar Ahmed criticised the role of the city's development agency, saying that it has been very centralised. "They don't say anything until someone approaches them."

To motivate people, neighborhood groups such as Barogram Unnayan Sangstha, should be formed in all areas of the city, he said.

He informed the participants that a Dhaka Environmental Rally on the cards by June 6, which is the World Environment Day.

As regards disposal of untreated industrial waste, the participants said that environment tax should be imposed on the industries that do not have waste treatment plant. At the same time, there should be incentives for the industries disposing the waste properly.

Referring to a decision by India's Supreme Court which helped a lot to stop air pollution in the Indian capital of New Delhi, Aaur Rahman said similar cases should be filed in Bangladesh to put brakes on environmental pollution.

Fuel supply

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nel posted at these camps and outposts in different parts of the city.

The report further said hartals, sieges, road marches and public meetings have increased since 1996-97. During this period, a large number of vehicles were requisitioned to meet the needs of the police force.

According to police records, there was a total of 108 days of hartal since 1996. At least 200 buses, trucks and jeeps are required on a hartal day, costing the DMP about Tk 2.6 lakh in fuel bill.

Bills amounting to Tk 2.80 crore are now pending with the DMP as a huge quantity of fuel was consumed by the requisitioned vehicles during the hartal periods since 1996-97.

A DMP high official said that since 1996 fuel price was raised

twice but allocation of funds for fuel was not increased proportionately. The pending fuel bill would stand at around Tk 7.10 crore at the end of the current fiscal year, he added.

Fuel price was raised by 36.89 per cent on August 19, 1997 and 27.15 per cent on August 16, 2000. But allocation of funds for fuel was increased by 9.74 per cent and 1.96 per cent only in two phases. Because of this, bills remained pending, he mentioned.

When contacted, a top DMP official seeking anonymity said, "If this stalemate continues, it will badly affect normal functioning of the police. Even supply of food for more than 2,000 policemen posted at the camps and outposts would be disrupted."

Crackers explode near rally

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banning such edicts. "And here comes a new fatwa: There is no bigger enemy of Islam in this world than the Awami League," Peer Sahib of Charnonai Syed Fazlur Karim said at the huge rally.

The congregation of Islamic zealots from across the country was held at Paltan Maidan to demand immediate release of Shaikhul Hadith Azizul Haq and Mufiqul Haq Amin and other leaders of IJIC.

They were arrested early February during violent protests against court verdict proscribing fatwa as well as against NGO activities.

"Banning all kinds of fatwa means banning the Quran and Hadith," the Peer told his faithful at the rally.

Presided over by Maulana Abdul Jabbar, the rally was addressed, among others, by Maulana Mufiqul Muhammad Wakkas, Maulana Mufiqul Abdul Tayyab, Maulana Mufiqul Abdul Rahman, Maulana Harun Islamabadi, Maulana Ahmedullah Ashraf, Maulana Hussain Kasemi, Maulana Ashraf Ali Biswanathi, Maulana Abdul Mannan, Maulana Anwar Shah, Maulana Abdur Rashid, Professor Akhtar Faruk, Advocate Abdur Rakib and Maulana Giasuddin.

A letter from the imprisoned IJIC leader Mufiqul Haq Amin was

read out at the rally by Maulana Mufiqul Tayyab.

A six-point programme, including curtailing of mass arrests on June 20 for unconditional release of Shaikhul Hadith Allama Azizul Haq, Mufiqul Haq Amin, Mufiqul Israrul Islam Chowdhury and other IJIC leaders, was announced at the rally.

Other programmes of the IJIC include holding of district representatives conference in Dhaka on 21 April, mass rallies in all divisional headquarters on different dates and mass contact for implementation of Islamic law in the country.

30 houses torched as villagers clash in Jhenidah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

At least 60 houses were ransacked, 30 of them torched, during a fierce clash between two groups of villagers at Bristidevi Rajnagar in the district yesterday.

Villagers and witnesses said about 400 armed-men from adjoining four villages Ghoranagar, Chandpur, Anandanagar and Mahimnagar of Kanchhal upazila in Kushtia attacked the people of Bristidevi Rajnagar village at about 3 in the afternoon.

Banglar Bani

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League and a nephew of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was killed in the military coup of August 15, 1975 along with his wife at his residence.

His son Barrister