

Project to check erosion in C'nawabganj threatened

Delay in releasing funds blamed

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

The Tk 75-crore project to check erosion by the Padma in Chapainawabganj may face setbacks in monsoon due to a delay in fund release.

A portion of the under-construction structure has already gone under water due to a sudden surge in the water level.

The allocated funds crucial in finishing the project before the onset of the rainy season was not released in time.

Of the eight under-construction spars, the spar No. 1 went under water more than two weeks ago, forcing the authorities to stop working on the spar after about 50 per cent work was completed.

The contractor fears that the strong water currents may wash away the spar. Spars Nos. 3 and 4 are also at a risk of being washed away.

Besides, a makeshift road built on the dried up the Pagla River to transport construction materials to the project site has also been submerged.

These facts were revealed by officials of the quality control cell of the project and Water Development Board in Rajshahi.

Launched towards the end of the AL rule, the project involves 12 categories of work, including construction of eight spars, two closers, 20-km flood control dam and a small canal.

Pressed by contractors and the locals, the government in the last week of May released the much-needed Tk 29 crore withheld for unknown reasons, while the work worth about Tk 50 crore was completed.

"The release of the fund was too late, as one of the spars was submerged and some others are at a risk," said a contractor on condition of anonymity.

Contractors could not advance their work to a safe mark because of the delay in fund release, threatening the entire project.

"If the money had been released at least a month earlier, we would not have been so worried as the water level at that time was low

enough for the work to continue," Abdul Baten, chief engineer of the WDB in Rajshahi told The Daily Star.

"Still, we hope to end the rest of the work (excluding the work of the submerged spar) by this June," Baten added.

Md Shahjahan, project director and superintendent engineer of the WDB in Rajshahi, said that after the release of funds last week, the work on the project was going on in earnest and additional manpower had been employed.

Yet, the work will remain at a risk till next week of this month. If the water level rises one or two metres more, the situation will spiral out of control, Shahjahan cautioned.

If the project suffers damage, a wide range of areas in Chapainawabganj town and Shibganj Upazila will go under water, some WDB officials apprehend.

Shahjahan, however, said that if the current water level does not scale up, the rest of the work would not face any setback.

Bush to lay out plan for Palestinian state

REUTERS, Washington

US President George W Bush has decided to lay out a proposal for Palestinian statehood to help contain Middle East violence and give some immediate hope to Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, a newspaper reported yesterday.

In a White House meeting Thursday with Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, Bush indicated he had decided to propose the plan, probably next week, according to a New York Times report citing officials familiar with the talks.

The two men discussed how nations could grant legitimacy to a Palestinian state by recognizing it, the officials said.

The US president did not provide all the details of his plan in the 20-minute meeting with the Saudi minister, but indicated it was designed to help quell violence and hold Palestinian leaders to a high standard of accountability, according to the officials.

The decision comes after much debate within the Bush administration over whether such a step could pacify the region. Bush adopted a two-state solution last year but has never said how or when Israel should end its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

The talks with Prince Saud included discussions on how to refer to the as-yet-undefined borders of a Palestinian state in any declaration, how to set a timeline for negotiations and how to arrange for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank so Palestinian institutions can be rebuilt, the newspaper said in an article on its Web site.

The Saudi minister told reporters, "I was very pleased with what I heard from the president" and said he would answer more questions soon.

AFF adds: Most members of the UN Security Council and non-members taking part in an open council session on Thursday voiced support for an international peace conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Ireland's ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Ryan, said "a virtual consensus has emerged in the international community" on the way forward.

It was based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which called on Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab land in exchange for recognition and secure borders, and on the recent Saudi initiative building on them, he said.

Countering Israeli objections, Ryan said "there is no room for delay or preconditions" in calling an international conference.

"The three problems identified by the secretary general (Kofi Annan) -- occupation, violence and economic misery -- have to be addressed, and addressed urgently, in parallel," Ryan said.

For his part, the Israeli ambassador, Yehuda Lancyr, made no direct mention of an international conference, although he said that, "ultimately, Israelis and Palestinians must find a way to live together in peace."

JCD central council

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a change in the JCD leadership through the convening of the council was thwarted when armed activists of JCD captured two residential halls of the Dhaka University by ousting the activists of BCL from the university campus on November 13.

Shortly thereafter on November 17, BNP suspended activities of the JCD's central committee. The central committee of Nasiruddin Laltu as president and general secretary respectively was formed in December 1999.

The BNP also warned of sterner action against leaders of its student body unless its cadres refrained from committing crimes. A section in the ruling party also demanded of the BNP's decision-making body to ban student politics.

Later in an address to the Parliament, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia hinted that her government might ban student politics if student bodies continued to engage in criminal activities. But JCD activists across the country ignored the threat and continued to commit crimes.

The leaders of Saturday's two warring JCD factions on the BUET campus were from the suspended JCD central committee -- one led by assistant organising secretary Mokammel Hayat Muki based in BUET and the other by joint secretary Benazir Titu based in DU.

Talking to this correspondent, a number of JCD leaders and workers expressed their grievances over the BUET incident, which they said pushed the JCD into the worst situation in recent times.

"The fate of most leaders and workers of JCD depend on the few criminals," said Monir Hossain, DU unit president of JCD. He said some central leaders have long been involved in crimes but no action could be taken against them due to suspension of the central committee. "It now depends on the government as to how long the criminals will be dominating the JCD."

JCD leader Selimuzzaman Selim also expressed similar sentiments saying that the future of the big student body is now at stake. "JCD must not be destroyed for these few criminals," he said and demanded immediate steps from BNP high-ups in this regard.

Sources in the JCD said the only thing that can save JCD from destruction is a new leadership with dedicated and honest student leaders.

'Trafficked person must be repatriated within 60 days'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A two-day workshop on "cross border consultation on repatriation and prosecution between India and Bangladesh" ended yesterday with the formulation of a plan of action to help ensure quick repatriation of trafficked persons and prosecution of the offenders.

Participants at the workshop stressed that the process of repatriation of a trafficked person must be completed in less than 60 days, instead of about a year needed now.

Implementation of the action plan would help expedite repatriation of trafficked persons as well as prosecution of perpetrators of the crime.

The workshop held at Rajendrapur in Gazipur district was attended by delegates from Bangladesh and India.

The existing legal procedures and related formalities for repatriation of a victim of trafficking and prosecution of the offender take about a year, the delegates noted.

They suggested that identification of trafficked persons and the offenders, investigation to determine their nationality, obtaining

permission from the relevant ministries and certificate about nationality of the missions concerned should take place in a coordinated manner.

A manual for repatriation of trafficked persons, prepared by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), was discussed at the workshop.

The delegates from India included Rajeev Awathi, lawyer of Delhi High Court; Uday Sahay, a police official from New Delhi; Dr Hiranmay Shaha, chairman of Juvenile Board, West Bengal; Roma Debrabrata, Manabendra Mandal and Indrani Sinha.

From Bangladesh, Assistant Inspector General of police AB Barua, Judge of labour court Zinat Ara, Executive Director of BNWLA Advocate Salma Ali, officials and NGO representatives attended the workshop.

There is no bilateral agreement between the two countries on repatriation of trafficked persons and prosecution of the offenders.

JCD leader

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Hospital (DMCH) at 1.00am and the on-duty doctor declared Arif dead at 9.00am.

They were admitted to the DMCH as victims of a road accident. The incident of beating was revealed when family members and party workers visited the hospital yesterday afternoon, said the local people.

The attack was a sequel to a row between two groups of the JCD. The gang beat them with iron rods and sticks, they added.

Son of Abdul Hamid Jawder, Arif was a resident of the Bangladesh Bank Colony at IG Gate.

Golam Kibria Rubel, 25, son of Golam Mostafa, was beaten unconscious.

Sources said Arif and Rubel came under attacks, when they were going to the Shyampur Police Station to have some of their party workers released from police custody.

No case was filed with the police station till writing of the report last night, police said.

Abdul Kalam

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Army (INA) which had fought against the colonial British rule in India.

The Congress finally came round to extending support to Kalam, considered the father of Indian missile programme, after two days of "intensive and extensive" consultations by Sonia Gandhi with her senior party leaders, party spokesman S Jaipal Reddy said.

But the Congress decision came under fire from the Left parties and put their relations between them under strain.

CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yehcari said the Congress decision to back Kalam shows that it is neither the ruling nor the opposition party. Senior RSP leader Abani Roy said "we had a suspicion that Congress will take such a decision. The party has failed to lead the entire opposition."

Congress, however, expects its ties with the Left would not be soured over the choice of Presidential candidate. "Our relations with the Left have always been ideologically-oriented," said Jaipal Reddy.

This is the third time the Left parties have fielded a Presidential candidate. They had done so in 1974 and 1992. This is also the first time a woman nominee has been put up for the top post.

The Presidential elections are scheduled for July 15 and the term of the incumbent K R Narayanan expires on July 24.

Forex seized

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to Tk 30 lakh were recovered from their possession.

The three were handed over to Airport Police Station. They were sent to the CMM's court yesterday.

Separate cases were filed with Airport Police Station in connection with the cases.

River Plain

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Plain River Flood Control Project. The project concept paper (PCP) was made showing an estimated expenditure of Tk 46.24 crore.

But the project hit snag, the sources said. The government incurred a huge loss of revenues. On the other hand, the people are suffering for the delay in implementation.

Contacted, a WDB official said the project was prepared several times, but it could not be implemented due to shortage of funds.

He, however, said the revised project was included in the national de-siltation programme two years ago, which covers some important rivers of the country.

Some experts of the consultancy on the project conducted a survey on the project area in Companyganj. The feasibility study has been completed, the official said.

DPHE gets aid

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Chudanga, 0.08 to 0.06 mg/L in Kusthia, 0.09 to 0.15 mg/L in Moheshpur and 0.08mg/L in Chapainawabganj.

Water of all the deep tubewells in the four municipalities were found to be arsenic-contaminated.

The levels of contamination were detected when water sample collected by BAMWSP were tested at the laboratory of Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) in August-November last year.

But the DPHE neither took any measure to remove the toxic chemical nor shut down the wells, sources in the DPHE said.

The meeting on Thursday was attended by four WB officials; Abdul Quadir, BAMWSP Project Director; Abu Muzim, DPHE Chief Engineer; A K Firoz Ahmed of BUET and high officials of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and Geological Survey of Bangladesh (GSB).

Rumsfeld

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infiltration, it would bring the process of easing some of the lingering hostilities," he said.

Rumsfeld would not say whether he urged the leaders of India and Pakistan to adopt that approach, but a senior defense official said they did discuss it.

Also were discussed was the possible use of US ground sensors on the Line of Control to prevent infiltrations. Rumsfeld suggested that US, British, Indian and Pakistani experts explore technological options.

Meanwhile, about 20 Indian warships deployed off the coast of Pakistan have returned to Bombay in a de-escalation of the six-month stand off between the nuclear-armed arch-rivals, Indian officials said yesterday.

The warships include the country's sole aircraft carrier, the INS Virat, destroyers, frigates and corvettes.

"All the warships deployed in the north Arabian Sea for this particular mission have returned back to the base," defence spokesman Pranav Parashar said.

The ships were deployed in early May after 35 people died in an attack by suspected Muslim rebels on a civilian bus and an Indian army camp in Kashmir.

Orders for their withdrawal from the Arabian Sea were issued Monday. They will be docked in Bombay and engage in regular exercises, the spokesman said.

Hasina: More hartals

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tect the commonman's interests", the AL chief said her party would go for tough programmes if needed.

AL called the hartal on Tuesday to protest the proposed budget for fiscal 2002-03 and other political issues.

The AL chief inaugurated the programme by planting three saplings of different species.

She said tree plantation had turned into a social movement during her government's rule.

"But after the October 1 election, terrorists belonging to the BNP-led ruling coalition did not spare even trees and plantations," Hasina. "They turned the country into a hell by unleashing terrorist activities. They even destroyed orchards of AL workers and felled trees, she alleged.

"The people are facing hellish sufferings now". The tax-laden budget, along with corruption and terrorist activities, will add to their sufferings, she said.

The government of Khaleda Zia has turned Bangladesh into a "country of corrupts and criminals" and imposed additional taxes on the commonman to maintain the huge 73-member cabinet.

Condemning arrest of opposition workers, the AL chief said these are being done to harass the opposition.

The government is preventing AL from exercising its democratic right of holding rallies and processions

but facilitating some particular quarters in organising such programmes, she claimed.

"These can not be tolerated. People will give the government a bitter reply in the coming days".

AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman, Presidium Member Abdur Razzak, Agriculture Secretary Motia Chowdhury and party leader Rahmat Ali also addressed the programme, among others.

DB men

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Sources said Titon sustained a fracture in his head following torture by the DB men during interrogation.

Detectives arrested Titon from the Dhaka Cantonment area Wednesday morning. He was produced before the CMM's Court, Dhaka in the same evening and placed on a four-day police remand. Titon claimed to be suffering from kidney ailment.

The duty officer of the Detective Branch office told The Daily Star at 10:10pm yesterday that nothing had happened to Titon and that he was fine.

Since 1998, a university student, a police source and a notorious criminal Tikka of the 'seven star' group were allegedly tortured to death by the DB in custody.

Portugal's ROK funeral

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Park produced a wonderful piece of skill before slamming a low drive past Portuguese keeper Vitor Baia 20 minutes from the end.

Having beaten Poland and drawn with the United States the South Koreans only needed a point to finish above the Portuguese and qualify for the second phase for the first time in their history.

Their opponents had to pull off a win to make up for a surprise 3-2 loss to the USA but they followed France and Argentina in crashing out altogether.

They almost saved their skins when Sergio Conceicao's last-gasp drive hit the post and bounced out.

The same player still had time to force a brilliant stop from South Korean keeper Lee Woon-Jae, who had earlier heroically stretched to tip away a Pauleta header.

Park was denied a second goal in the final seconds at the other end as Baia raced out to smother the ball.

The packed 50,000 crowd shrieked with approval almost every time the hosts touched the ball as South Korea made a bright start, spraying the ball around quickly and neatly.

Portugal, highly-favoured at the start of the event, crashed out in disgrace in a stormy encounter with two men dismissed as emotions boiled over.

After a bright start by the Koreans the match turned ugly after 27

minutes when Joao Pinto launched into a two-footed tackle from behind on Park and received a red card.

Portugal's players angrily surrounded Argentine referee Angel Sanchez in an ugly echo of their Euro 2000 semi-final loss to France when Abel Xavier was dismissed and several teammates jostled the referee following a controversial penalty.

Three minutes later Seol Ki-Hyeon bundled the ball home but the effort was ruled out for a shove on Baia.

But Portugal, who needed a win after losing to the United States in their first match, dug their own grave when defender Beto picked up a second card for taking the legs of Lee Young-Pyo.

Park's goal followed three minutes later. He controlled a long ball from the left, sidestepped Conceicao with a neat touch from his right boot and then buried a ferocious effort under Baia with his left.

The goal was just reward for Guus Hiddink's Korean side as they had dominated even before the two dismissals, leaving the Portuguese defence at sixes and sevens with the speed of their breaks.

Mercurial Portuguese midfielder Luis Figo almost rescued his colleagues with 16 minutes remaining but a trademark curling free-kick flashed inches wide.

Portuguese coach Antonio

US shuts missions

FROM PAGE 1

that killed 11 French nationals traveling in a minibus.

Police officers at the scene said the vehicle used in the attack was a small, high-roofed Suzuki van which had been traveling along the same road that the consulate is situated on.

The device was detonated when the truck reached the corner of the compound, and the huge explosion that followed destroyed part of the perimeter wall of the consulate but left the main gate intact.

A deep crater was blasted into the road immediately next to the perimeter wall, and the vehicle exploded into pieces, some of which were thrown onto the other side of the road and into a park facing the consulate.

Shock waves from the car bomb damaged property in a one-kilometre radius of the area, blowing out shop windows and car windshields and leaving shards of glass carpeting the ground.

Some 18 cars in the immediate vicinity were badly damaged.

Sindh province police chief Syed Kamal Shah played down links

between yesterday's blast and the May car bombing at the Sheraton Hotel which is believed to have been carried out by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terror network.

However, a Western diplomat in Islamabad said it seemed obvious the incidents were connected.

Shah said that two policemen posted outside the consulate were killed, and other police sources said that the bomber and a female victim were among the dead.

He said 40 people had been injured, and staff at Karachi's Jinnah Hospital reported admitting 26 people in serious condition.

Tensions among the expatriate community, sparked by the abduction and murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl in January as he investigated Islamic militants in Karachi, are on the rise in Pakistan.

The US embassy ordered non-essential staff and families to leave Pakistan shortly after a March 17 grenade attack on a church in the diplomatic enclave of Islamabad which left five dead, including two Americans.

Gold smugglers

FROM PAGE 1

These CAAB employees -- mostly cleaners, conveyer belt operators and security guards -- are termed 'carriers' in the smuggling ring. They have links with high officials in connection with the smuggling of contraband items, sources at the airport said.

The customs hall is out of bounds for all including journalists but the members of the smuggling gang have access to these areas and move about freely inside the hall even beyond their duty hours in order to provide services to the racketeers.

Bulbul, a CAAB sweeper, was sent to jail after he was caught re-handled last June by customs at ZIA with 10.7 kg of gold hidden inside his clothes. The case remains pending. However, an insider said a move was now on to tamper with the case and get the sweeper acquitted. "If this move succeeds, the evidences would be altered to show that the sweeper was mistakenly arrested, that he had found the gold at ZIA and was actually on his way to hand it over to the authorities," the source said.

There are scores of similar instances of such clandestine moves to help smugglers slip off.

Customs records show that during the 2000-2001 fiscal, the authorities seized 200.819 kg of gold bars and ornaments worth about Tk 8.5 crore along with 114 kg of silver ornaments worth about Tk 11.65 lakh.

In 1999-2000, they also seized 115.512 kg of gold bars and ornaments worth about Tk 4.97 lakh and 229 kg of silver worth about Tk 21.5 lakh. In 1998-1999, the figure was 213.380 kg of gold bars and ornaments worth about Tk 9.60 crore and 121 kg of silver worth about Tk 11.34 lakh.

Such hauls however reportedly account for only a small fraction of the actual amount of these precious metals smuggled through customs at ZIA.

Apart from the 'lack of evidence', smugglers also benefit from the existing bureaucratic tangles and lack of co-ordination among the agencies concerned.

Abdur Rahman, a lounge room attendant (LRA) of CAAB, was arrested in the customs hall along with Saudi rials and Tk 95,000 on August 17, 2000. But he was later released without any punishment whatsoever.

On September 25, 2001, customs officials seized smuggled gold worth Tk 2 crore from two Biman flights. One hundred gold bars worth nearly Tk 65 lakh were recovered from the toilet of one of Biman's aircraft at the hanger. But none was arrested or accused in such an obvious case suggesting

involvement of the cabin crew, the sources added. The police had asked Biman to cooperate with the investigators and allow them to interrogate the plane's captain, crew members and others. But the whole issue was buried at the preliminary stage and neither the police nor the Biman authorities showed any further interest in it.

On the same day, customs recovered another 200 gold bars worth about Tk 1.30 crore from another Biman flight bound for Kuwait. After the seizure, the Biman authorities stopped the aircraft from being seized by giving the police confusing information about the aircraft's location, police officials claimed. Also, Biman did not provide any crew list to the police though it was part of regular investigation routines.

The gold bars were concealed inside the body of the aircraft, which would not have been possible without the help of the aircraft engineers. Such hard cases have also been swept under the carpet.

A Bangladeshi Biman employee, Bahlu Haq, was arrested with foreign currencies equivalent to Tk 2.32 crore at the Biman Flight Catering Centre (BFCC) on April 3, 2002. This was the second major incident of foreign currency bootlegging in the recent past preceded by an earlier recovery of foreign currency equivalent to Tk 10 crore.

Following the recovery, customs officials filed a case with the Airport Police Station accusing Bahlu. But there has been no further progress in the case, a customs official said. This case is also considered dead.

Such is the fate of most cases, they are forgotten with the passage of time, the sources added.

According to the same sources, the 'seven syndicate' and another strong crime cartel called "G-5" are active at the airport, smuggling nearly 3800 kg of gold bars and ornaments into the country every year. The smuggled goods pass through the nineteen agencies present at Zia International Airport.

Tree plantation

FROM PAGE 12
people putting the bio-diversity at stake.

She called upon all to sincerely work for tree plantation and preservation of forestlands.

In her message, Sheikh Hasina said tree gives us oxygen as well as food, firewood, housing materials and medicine. "Tree is an inseparable part of our life and livelihood," she added.

Tree plantation is inevitable for protection of environment and human civilisation, she said urging all to take part in the tree plantation movement.

Japan jet into history

FROM PAGE 1

being the first host side to fail to reach the second round.

But after a draw with Belgium and a win over