



PHOTO: STAR

Stinking reality... A resident in the city's Hazaribagh area covers his face as he looks at the vast toxic trash that has accumulated inside the flood protection embankment.

## In toxic trap

### Thousands exposed to stagnant tannery waste

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Highly toxic tannery waste is now accumulating over a vast, densely populated area inside the flood protection embankment, with rising floodwater outside preventing the water from draining out into the Buriganga.

More than 17,000 cubic metres of toxic waste from about 700 tanneries in Hazaribagh flow into Rayer Bazar, Hazaribagh, Katashur, Mohammadpur, Nawabganj and Alirghat every day.

Thousands of people living there are exposed to one of the worst land, air and water pollution in the city, as the liquid toxic is threatening to enter their

houses.

In many poor neighbourhoods, tannery waste is causing various illnesses as people are forced to wade through the toxic effluent now rapidly spreading. Experts fear that the groundwater of the entire area is also contaminated.

Experts at the Drainage Circle of the Dhaka WASA said similar water logging is prevalent 'everywhere' in the city. The flood protection embankment has blocked the city's water outlets and there is no adequate arrangement to pump the accumulated water out.

They said millions of gallons of toxic industrial wastes have mixed with

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## Viqarunnisa closed for three days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has asked the Viqarunnisa Noon School and College to remain closed for three days to defuse tension arising from further extension of Hamida Ali's tenure as principal.

"The director-general of the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Directorate has directed the school authorities to close the institution for three days to avoid any untoward incident," Education Secretary Mohammad Shahidul Alam told The Daily Star yesterday.

Some guardians were trying to mar the congenial atmosphere of the school, he alleged.

The government hopes the school's newly elected governing body will select the principal from its senior staff. "We hope the institution will be able to restore the congenial atmosphere when the school reopens," the secretary added.

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## JS session prorogued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The budget session of the Jatiya Sangsad was prorogued last night with the main opposition Awami League (AL) staying off the House.

The AL made its maiden appearance in the eighth parliament late last month, ending the boycott of it since the very beginning.

"Joining of the main opposition party added a different dimension to the session... But unfortunately, members from the party are absent on the day of prorogation." Acting Speaker Akther Hamid Siddiqui told the House before reading out the presidential order of prorogation at 10:30 pm.

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## Harried to watery grave

### 8 drown after police chase, no case accepted

SHAIKH NAZRUL ISLAM

At least eight innocent youths, chased by police, drowned over the last two and a half years, but none of the victims' families was allowed to file any case against them.

In all cases, the victims plunged into ponds, lakes or deep water-bodies to escape police arrest.

Worse, the police did not even think of calling the fire brigade to rescue them. One or two days later, the bloated bodies were found floating in the water.

In at least two cases, the victims' family members alleged that the police did not heed the pleas of the victims for rescue and just saw them drowning. Later, they came up with made-up stories on their deaths.

No formal charges could be brought against those responsible for the tragic deaths either for threats to the family members or for the tagging of the cases as 'unnatural deaths', sources said.

Human-rights organisations described the incidents as deaths by torture. The police produced the final reports on the cases, having failed to prove charges against the accused -- the procedure that leads to disposal of the cases.

The latest such incident took place in the suburban Siddhirganj area. Monir Hossain, 35, chased by five plainclothes policemen, drowned in a pond Thursday night.

When Monir cried for help, the team leader Sub-Inspector Moinul said, "Go down in water and we will take your body tomorrow morning."

Jamal Uddin Fakir, an activist of the Kapasia unit of the Bangladesh Chhatra League and president of the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Smriti Library, was allegedly tortured in custody at the Kapasia Police Station.

On the morning of April 19, Jamal fled the custody and jumped into the Shitalakhya River. Police chased him down and poked him with a bamboo until he drowned.

To cover up the incident, police claimed that Jamal had jumped into the river, having fled the police station. Amid public outcries, the fire brigade divers on April 20 recovered the body with marks of injury.

Ramiza Begum, Jamal's mother, filed a petition with the Kapasia Magistrate's Court on May 2, this year, accusing the officer-in-charge and two policemen of the station of the murder.

Twenty-year-old Jainal drowned in a lake in the city's Sutrapur area to escape arrest by a police-BDR joint team on October 22, 2001. The incident took place when the team raided the Minto Club and nearby areas in the morning to arrest drug peddlers and addicts.

A Jubo League leader, Munir Hossain Munir, 26, drowned in a pond to escape a police chase in the early

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## Perks for NRBs mulled to up remittance

RAFIQ HASAN

For the first time, the government will declare some expatriates as Important Non-Resident Bangladeshis (INRBs) to encourage them to remit more funds to the country.

The government formed a four-member high-powered committee headed by the State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam to determine what privileges the selected INRBs would receive.

Foreign Secretary Shomsher Mobin Chowdhury, Commerce Secretary Sohel Ahmed Chowdhury and Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment (BOI) Mahmudur Rahman are the other members of the committee.

The committee already held its first meeting and will meet again next week, sources said. The INRBs would get various facilities when they come home and moral support from the government during their stay abroad.

The government is giving high priority to over two million NRBs so that they can contribute to the overall development of the country, a high official said.

Only Bangladeshis who remain abroad and earn a handsome amount of foreign currency would be given the INRB status, sources added.

Depending on their earnings and position abroad, some of them might be given Commercially Important Persons (CIP) status and some would be provided a Regular Remitters Card (RRC) to use the facilities, the source added.

Prior to the formulation of the committee, the NRBs did not get any attention or special facilities from the government regardless of the amount they

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## Govt orders ministries to fill up vacant posts

UNB, Dhaka

The government has asked authorities concerned to fill all vacant posts under 47 ministries on a priority basis for effective functioning of various government departments.

Official sources said the directive came from a regular meeting of the Cabinet held yesterday with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The meeting was told that there are some 1.21 lakh vacancies against 9.30 lakh government-sanctioned posts in 244 departments and directorates of the 47 ministries.

The meeting underlined quick recruitment to vacant posts of doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, law-enforcement officers and technicians, particularly computer operators, in specialised organisations "in the interest of common people".

Of the situations vacant, there are some 13,807 vacancies under Health and Family Welfare Ministry, 11,263 under Primary and Mass Education, 9,346 under Home

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## 4.5 lakh AL activists in false cases

### Hasina claims at press briefing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition leader and the Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday alleged that some 4.50 lakh leaders and workers of her party have been implicated in 'false' cases since Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government took office.

On the contrary, she said, nearly 35,000 identified killers, rapists, illegal gunrunners and criminals were acquitted of various charges under the directive of the law ministry.

Hasina was briefing newsmen at her Sangsad Bhaban chamber last night. The AL boycotted the last sitting of the budget session of the parliament

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## Pearl killer to be hanged



Daniel Pearl

REUTERS, Hyderabad, Pakistan

A court in Pakistan sentenced British-born Islamic militant Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh to death Monday for the kidnapping and murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl.

Lawyers said Sheikh Omar, as he

is better known, and three accomplices, who were also found guilty of the killing and were jailed for life, showed no emotion as each verdict and sentence was read.

There was no immediate reaction from Pearl's family and widow Mariane, who gave birth to their son in Paris on May 28.

Lawyers for the defence, who described the verdict as unjust and argued their clients' innocence throughout the closed-door trial, said they would appeal.

Omar and his accomplices - Fahad Naseem, Salman Saqib and Sheikh Adil - were made to stand, one by one, as Judge Ashraf Ali Shah read each verdict and sentence.

The four, all bearded and wearing traditional Pajama-like Shalwar

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