

Donors find CHT calm, ready to inject funds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A joint assessment mission report on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) yesterday revealed that the prevailing law and order situation in the majority of areas in the region is sufficient for resumption of development assistance.

The 78-page report said donors are now ready to provide financial and institutional support to economic and infrastructural development in the CHT.

The mission comprising representatives of the government and donor agencies under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported that the level of donor assistance stopped in the CHT following the abduction of three international road engineers on February 16 last year.

The foreigners working for DANIDA were abducted from Rangamati. The victims, however, were rescued unharmed after a

month of hostage.

"The incident prompted many development organisations and donor countries to cease their development work in the CHT," Michael Heyn, leader of the mission, told reporters at a function in the city yesterday.

The report said kidnappings and extortion of development workers have continued, though on a reduced scale, mostly due to regional party conflicts and fundraising through illegal toll-taking.

Tribal and non-tribal differences, unresolved issues relating to land, elections and the law and order situation continue to create tension and the potential for conflicts.

However, the mission recommended an immediate restart of development activities under all but one of the 27 police stations of the CHT.

The mission carried out an 11-day assessment from June 1 and talked with a wide spectrum of

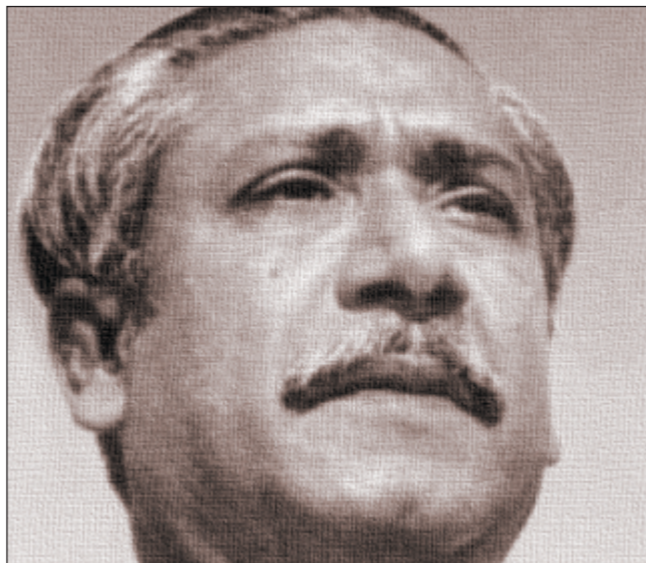
people, including administrative officials, in all the three hill-districts to prepare the report.

The objective was to assess and provide an overview of risks and physical safety and security of staff - Bangladeshi or expatriates - who may visit or be stationed in the CHT for development work.

Earlier, the government and the UNDP agreed in May to review the safety and security of local people and foreigners and the possibilities of renewed development assistance after the donor community recently showed interest in resuming development assistance to the CHT.

"The reason for the mission stems from the fact that many of the Bangladesh's development partners are ready to resume and, in some cases, increase their socio-economic development assistance to the

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Death anniversary of Bangabandhu today AL calls half-day hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition Awami League (AL) is determined to keep the national flag half-mast today in defiance of the recent government ban and observe the day as a national mourning day, the 27th death anniversary of the country's founding father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The AL will also enforce a six-hour hartal from 6am across the country today to protest rescinding of state mourning on the day and press

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Bappi's body found

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nine days after Rubayet Ahmed Bappi's killing, his decomposed body of was found floating at the Kutubpur Gudara Ghat on the bank of Shitalakhya River yesterday morning.

Some devotees who went to the riverbank after the fazr azan found the body floating among hyacinth with one leg missing from the knee. Police collected the body and informed Bappi's father.

Alfu Miah father of the eight-year-old boy went to the spot and identified his son. At the sight of his

son, he broke down in tears. Later, the body was sent to the Narayanganj General Hospital for autopsy.

Hundreds of people gathered at the spot to have a look at Bappi's body. They burst into anger at the sight of the decomposed body and demanded exemplary punishment to the killers.

"What can I say? I can only thank Allah that he has given me the last chance to have a last glance at my son," Alfu Miah said in broken voice.

"We had planned to hold the janaza of my son, but an Imam asked me to wait. Thanks to Allah

that I finally found him". The Kotwali police said the recovery of the body will help them submit the charge sheet immediately.

Meantime, a police inquest said the body might have been tied up with a rope before being thrown into the river.

Bappi's janaja was held at the Armentola Govt. High School premises and later he was buried at the Azimpur graveyard.

Bappi, a class III student of the Armentola Govt High School, was abducted by his first cousin Shipon

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PHOTO STAR

Adieu to dear son... Bappi's mother is overcome with grief as she sees the coffin of her only son whose body was found yesterday on the Shitalakhya river. Bappi was killed on August 5.

Ministry probe buys 10 more days

REAZ AHMAD, ANWAR ALI and BINDU SAHA

Burdened with 160 different wheat samples collected from granaries across the country, the Ministry of Food committee, now investigating the procurement scam, could not submit its report yesterday and has sought ten more days to complete the task.

Chemical tests of the samples at the laboratory of the Directorate of Food would take some time, forcing the committee to ask for extension, Yakub Ali, who heads the four-man probe body, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Over the last two weeks, the committee has visited granaries at Mymensingh, Bogra, Pabna and Satkhira and collected wheat samples for quality testing.

Besides, food officials from several other district- and thana-level silos also sent wheat samples for testing during the same period, amidst reports of gross irregularities in wheat procurement.

Yakub refused to share the probe findings at this stage, saying the media would have to wait till the committee submitted its report to the food ministry.

Meanwhile, the one-man secretarial probe body returned to the capital last night on completion of a two-district tour.

Secretary-in-charge to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism Shafiqul Islam, who heads the committee, yesterday visited godowns in Pabna and collected some wheat samples.

According to sources, both committees have reached the conclusion that late procurement of wheat allowed imported wheat to sneak into government silos as home-grown wheat was no more available in the market.

The secretarial committee is likely to recommend that the government should not allow any wheat procurement after the May-June period when possibility of getting local wheat is low.

The committee might also recommend that rules and regulations for internal wheat procurement be

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WHEATGATE SCAM

Some truth in reports on wheat scam

Noman tells *The Daily Star*

REAZ AHMAD

Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman has acknowledged that there is some truth in media reports over the last two weeks on the wheat procurement scam.

"I cannot claim that there is no basis for the reports," he told The Daily Star at his office yesterday.

However, the minister refused to say anything more on the issue lest it be interpreted as interference in the ongoing investigations.

When asked about his recent visit to a silo at Pabna and his subsequent claim that the wheat stocked there was of good quality, Noman said, "No interference was meant. I just said the wheat in that particular Pabna godown was not poultry feed and consumable. I did not certify all wheat stocked in public granaries across the country."

Noman said he had not received the report from the food ministry investigation committee, led by Joint Secretary Yakub Ali. Yesterday was the deadline for the committee to submit its report.

Yakub, meanwhile, told The Daily Star that his committee had sought ten

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Abdullah Al Noman

Too 'embarrassed' to try

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Some Supreme Court judges' being apathetic and embarrassed to hear the proceedings and the government's dilly-dallying over clearing off legal tangles have left the trial of killers of nation's architect Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman staggering all the way.

Mind-boggling it may appear when one considers the fact that the trial court took two years to deliver a verdict in the Bangabandhu Murder Case. And yet, it's going to take the Supreme Court no less than, and it may well be longer, five years to do away with it.

Plainly, the case stands no chance of finding its way to the cause list before February 2004 unless a judge is appointed to the Appellate Division on an ad-hoc basis. Five of the seven-men Appellate Division are unable to hear the case when at least three judges

of the division are required. Two former chief justices have reportedly said the judges felt embarrassed to hear the case without assigning any specific understandable reason and they should be more bold.

A glance at the headway the case has made to date should present one with the agonising tale of trial so

far. Of relevance, it has been twenty-seven years since the nation's independence leader was slain along with much of his family while holding the highest executive office.

The trial court delivered a verdict on November 8, 1998, only two years after the case was filed. The judgement ruled that fifteen former army men are to die for the carnage

in a military putsch on August 15, 1975.

The killers remained immune to prosecution for twenty-three years, thanks to the infamous Indemnity Ordinance legalised through a constitutional amendment in 1979.

Appalling yet is the fact that as many as six justices have expressed their embarrassment to hear the case in no more than two years. The first precedent in this case was set when a High Court Division judge felt embarrassed to hear the death reference confirming the verdict of the trial court. Later, two more judges followed suit. Earlier, the case was refused by benches five times. However, the High Court disposed of the case in April 2001, convicting 12 of the 15 accused to death.

And as the case came to the Appellate Division, this time a Supreme Court judge felt embar-

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Official security for Hasina restored

UNB, Dhaka

The official security for Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina was restored yesterday, four days after it was withdrawn.

Special Branch (SB) withdrew four of its men on August 10, out of eight, who were engaged in the security of the former Prime Minister.

The SB car, which was in the motorcade of Sheikh Hasina went to her residence at Dhanmondi yesterday morning, an SB official said.

The withdrawal of security people along with the vehicle, immediately after her arrival from abroad, evoked protest and criticism among party followers and well-wishers.

Senior Awami League leaders Tuesday filed a general diary with Dhanmondi police on behalf of the party president seeking security of her life.

Magurchhara blowout Petrobangla asks Unocal to explain its claim

UNB, Dhaka

Petrobangla yesterday asked Unocal to explain on what grounds the US oil giant claimed the compensation issue on the Magurchhara gas blowout to have been settled. "We sent a letter to Unocal asking for their explanations on Magurchhara blowout compensation issue," Petrobangla Chairman Syed Sajedul Karim told the news agency over phone.

State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Mosharrif Hossain also confirmed that he was informed that Petrobangla had sent

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DENGUE ALERT

123 more infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Platelet crisis still runs high as more and more dengue patients poured into hospitals in the city yesterday.

Some 123 more people infected with dengue have been admitted to hospitals. The official figure however put the number at 87. The total number of infected people since January this year stands at 1950 with 25 deaths so far.

At the Red Crescent Blood Centre at Mohammadpur, 55 people collected platelet while 30 more were on the waiting list till 7pm yesterday.

But according to the centre officials, the figure was feared to exceed 160 by midnight.

"I was referred from the Dhaka Medical College Hospital to collect one bag of platelet. My niece has been diagnosed with dengue haemorrhagic fever and her condition is stated to be quite critical," said Sufia Begum.

Md Didarul Alam, an attendant of a patient at Nibedita Children's Hospital, said his nephew's platelet count had reached 20,000.

Meanwhile, the government has not yet taken any move to arrange separation of blood cells in most of the hospitals where a large number of dengue patients have been admitted.

Many patients complained to The Daily Star that simple diagnostic tests like blood tests and platelet count had to be done from outside.

"The government does not reckon dengue outbreak as a problem," said

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Shazneen case Trial resumes

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Cross-examination of Latifur Rahman, second prosecution witness in the Shazneen Rape Case and father of the victim, 'closed' seven days back resumed yesterday in the Second Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka.

Judge Kazi Rahamat Ullah had 'closed' on August 7 cross-examination of Latifur Rahman by the lawyer of main accused Shahidul Islam alias Shahid following his (lawyer) 'indecent behaviour' with him (the judge).

The court yesterday accepted the defence lawyer's petition seeking permission to cross-examine Latifur Rahman as he (lawyer) told the court he would not ask questions on irrelevant matters.

Latifur Rahman was then cross-examined for about two hours and

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