

Siraj decries India's water link plan

It will turn Bangladesh into desert, seminar says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Environment and Forest Minister Shahjahan Siraj said yesterday Bangladeshis at home and abroad must protest the water diversion project of India through inter-linking rivers, as it would 'turn Bangladesh into a desert.'

"It's a question of life and death for us, as the river-linking project, if implemented, will turn our country into a desert," the minister said. He was speaking at a seminar titled 'National Security of Bangladesh: Education and Environment in Perspective,' organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) at its auditorium in the city.

Shahjahan blamed what he said was unilateral withdrawal of water by India for the increasing salinity in southwestern Bangladesh including the Sundarbans.

He also told the seminar that the government was determined to achieve a 20 percent tree-coverage in the country by 2020.

In his keynote paper styled 'Environmental Security: The Context of Bangladesh,' North South Univer-sity Department of Environmental Studies Chairman Mizan R Khan said the Indian river-linking project would turn Bangladesh's northern area into a desert and accelerate siltation in its southern region.

"India has ignored the regional consequences of its river-linking project, which will affect not only Bangladesh but also Bhutan and

Nepal," Dr Khan alleged.

He suggested that the government adopt a foreign policy so that Bangladesh could resolve environmental issues through diplomacy.

Taking part in the discussion, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Bangladesh Country Representative Ainun Nishat criticised the political parties for their lack of commitment to environmental causes.

He said, "In order to check environmental degradation, environmental issues have to be closely incorporated into the government's planning process."

BISS Chairman Ambassador Mufleh R Osmani presided over the session, where Major General (Rtd) Abdul Mubeen Chowdhury delivered the address of welcome and South East University Vice-Chancellor (VC) Shamsheer Ali presented the keynote paper on education, the second theme of the seminar.

Shamsheer Ali underscored education in English as a second language to enable Bangladeshis secure more foreign jobs.

Labelling the recruitment process of teachers in the public universities as politically biased, he said, "The authorities are choosing voters rather than teachers causing major hindrance to proper higher education."

Ali also suggested for changing the election process of deans and VCs in the public universities.

One criminal lynched, five injured in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mob yesterday lynched a criminal and injured five others of a gang at Kanchannagar in Fatikchhari yesterday.

Mohammad Shahidullah, 25, allegedly a cadre of notorious 'Kashem Bahini', died at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) at around 11:30am, while Mohammad Ilias is receiving treatment there under custody.

Police said Shahidullah was accused of eight criminal charges, including three of murders.

Witnesses said angry people of Kanchannagar village wrenched six criminals away from police and beat up them in the early morning. The cops, arresting the gang from the same village, were going to nab another criminal, Doulat.

However, police claimed they rescued the six from the mob beating, arrested them and sent the two critically injured to the CMCH.

The other arrestees are Abdur Rahim, Md Selim, Mafizur Rahman and Abul Kashem, all operatives of local Union Parishad Chairman and BNP leader Abul Kashem Chowdhury. Kashem is the prime suspect in the abduction case of BNP leader and business magnate Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury.

AL observes dawn to dusk hartal in Chuadanga

Protests bomb attack at its local office

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtha

Local Awami League (AL) yesterday observed a peaceful dawn to dusk hartal in Chuadanga in protest against Saturday's bomb attack on its district office.

No vehicles plied the town's major roads while most educational institutes and business establishments remained closed during the shutdown.

Local AL and its front organisations brought out processions from different parts of the town demanding immediate arrest of the attackers.

On Saturday, miscreants hurled two bombs inside the local AL's Kabari Road office during a power outage at about 9:00pm when a meeting was being held there with Solaiman Huij Joardar, general secretary of Chuadanga AL, in the chair, sources said.

According to AL leaders, 25 of its leaders and activists including district Chhatra League President Al-Imran Shuvo and Tabu were injured in blasts.

Imran was admitted to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital and later sent to Dhaka, sources added.

Later, police clubbed AL supporters, injuring 25 of them, the same night when they took out a procession to protest the bomb attack, sources added.

Meanwhile, AL leaders blamed the alliance government for the attack while local BNP denied the allegation.

Khurshid Hasan, superintendent of police, Chuadanga, said they were probing the incident.

Toll-takers keep

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also sprayed bullets and blasted crackers in front of their houses yesterday to panic the families into paying the money.

The miscreants left the scene on assurance from the families that they would be paid Tk 50,000. However, they threatened the families that they would burn down their houses if the money were not given by March 23.

JS body invites

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meeting, to be held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhawan at 5:30pm today.

"I sent a letter requesting her to attend the meeting and also nominate two Awami League lawmakers to participate in the discussion on the bill," Khandakar Mahubub told The Daily Star yesterday.

The letter was sent to the residence of the opposition leader, he added.

However, Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil termed the committee's decision 'an eyewash' and said his party would not join the meeting to discuss the bill.

The committee also invited Rawshan Ershad of Jatiya Party (Ershad), Abdul Kader Siddiqui of Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata League, Anwar Hossain Manju of Jatiya Party (Manju) and independent lawmaker MMS Shahin.

The committee on Saturday decided to invite opposition lawmakers to seek their opinion on the constitution amendment bill. The bill proposed a set of amendment to the constitution including 45 reserved seats for women, mandatory display of the president and prime minister's portrait at the offices of government, semi-government and autonomous bodies. The bill was placed before parliament on March 17 and sent to the standing committee for scrutiny.

The House gave the committee two weeks to submit its report on scrutiny.

The Jatiya Sangsad is likely to pass the bill in the session ongoing and the session might be extended again until April 4 instead of March 30, sources said.

BNP MPs ask PM

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development efforts and anti-government agitation by the opposition.

Meeting sources said Khaleda blamed rising prices in international markets and a section of unscrupulous traders for the price hike.

She declined to comment on the outcome of the meeting and asked newsmen to contact the chief whip for information.

Delwar said the prime minister observed that the BNP would not be affected by the desertion of some people. "The party is being organised," he said.

On the main opposition Awami League's 30 April deadline for 'unseating' the government, Khaleda told the meeting that she would hold a grand rally on May 1 to prove her support.

Meeting sources said M Ilias Ali suggested downsizing the cabinet from 53 to 30 on the basis of annual confidential report of ministers and reminded Khaleda of her pledge to reshuffle the cabinet to ensure efficiency and transparency.

Young lawmaker Nasir Uddin Ahmed Pintu asked Khaleda to take stern action against corrupt and inefficient party leaders, including ministers.

"Don't worry to drop corrupt

persons from the party and cabinet. They would not be able to do any harm to the party as nobody could do in the past," he said.

Shahid Uddin Chowdhury alleged inaction of senior ministers to organise the party.

"Allegations of siphoning off money abroad was raised against Tarique Rahman, but senior ministers only gave routine statements without staging political protests,"

Without naming Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain, Abu Taher, a lawmaker for his home district Comilla, said a foreign country withdrew grants raising allegations against a minister, but he still remained in the cabinet.

Referring to the formation of the alternative political platform by Badruddoza, Abdul Hye, a lawmaker for the physician-turned politician's home district Munshiganj, said local people were not with the former president.

Advocate Majibbar Rahman Sarwar demanded introduction of a law banning hartal.

The meeting was adjourned for an indefinite period.

Yesterday's meeting was the resumption of the third meeting of the key ruling party's parliamentary party after the last general elections which was adjourned on January 21.

Vietnamese president

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Ninety-eight high-profile delegates including Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien, senior government officials, 42 business representatives and journalists will accompany him, foreign ministry sources said.

Luong is scheduled to meet the PM in the afternoon. They are expected to discuss trade, culture, agriculture and other issues, sources added.

The visiting Vietnamese president will also attend a banquet hosted by Khaleda at Bangladesh-China Conference Centre tonight.

Luong will visit Export Processing Zone in Savar and Square Pharmaceuticals industrial unit Tuesday.

He will also pay homage to the martyrs of liberation war at Savar National Mausoleum, lay wreath at the mazar of late president Ziaur Rahman and attend a lunch hosted

by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry at Hotel Sheraton the same day.

On Tuesday, he will meet Foreign Minister M Moshed Khan, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and Leader of the Opposition and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at his hotel suit in the evening and later attend a dinner hosted by President Iajuddin at Bangabhaban.

Diplomatic ties between the two countries mostly remained suspended for 22 years until the far-eastern country re-opened its embassy in Dhaka last year.

"Luong's visit after the re-opening of Vietnamese embassy signals a closer business and diplomatic ties between the two countries," said a foreign ministry official on condition of anonymity.

He will leave for Pakistan Wednesday morning.

Business leaders

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propose a guideline for solving those.

"We'll hold a national convention of businessmen in mid-April to seek their opinion on the agenda and the guideline. We expect about 7,000 business delegates from upazila and district levels at the convention," Mintoo said.

Through the convention, the FBCCI hopes to arrive at a unanimous agenda and a guideline for improving business, law and order and political climate. From then on, the country's business community will pursue the agenda and put pressure on the political parties to incorporate those in their respective constitutions and election manifestoes.

"If the parties fail to adopt the agenda, they'll lose support of the business community," the FBCCI chief forewarned.

On the content of the agenda, the president of the country's apex business body said it would urge opposition political parties to refrain from calling hartals and the government to crack down on terrorists and protect businesses from violence.

"Every political party has to take specific stand on the issue of hartal.

Jamuna Group chief

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gang of up to 12 allegedly led by Amir Hossain and Ripon barged into the dredger and fire at the workers at will. A fatally injured Alam was taken to Suhrawardy Heart Diseases Hospital where he died.

A supplementary FIR Monirul filed on September 7, 2003 with the CMM's court quoted Alam as telling his colleagues before dying that Amir and Ripon shot him in line with a blueprint of Babul and his son Shamim Islam. Alam also named two other attackers as Saidur Rahman and Dewan Ali, the supplementary FIR says.

All arrestees except for Babul are now on bail.

Defence lawyers submitted a bail petition before the court. Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud, moving the petition, said Babul was not named in the FIR and was added to the list of accused in the supplementary FIR as part of a conspiracy.

Jealous of his success in business, an unnamed group implicated Babul in the case to ruin his image and police arrested him without a warrant, Rokonuddin said.

Court Inspector Alfa Zaman Nokib and Advocate Abdur Rahman Hawlader opposed the bail petition and prayed for sending Babul to jail.

Magistrate Abdur Rab Khan fixed March 28 for further hearing on the bail petition and issued an order sending him to Dhaka Central Jail. The defence lawyers placed another petition to reconsider the judgement that the magistrate rejected.

On April 25 last year, police arrested Babul two days after an alleged death threat to Mahmudur Rahman, executive chairman of the Board of Investment. But police then said Babul was arrested on charge of grabbing a water-body in Savar and was freed on bail.

The business community won't support any party that doesn't clearly state its position on hartal in its election manifesto," Mintoo said.

After the farmers, the business community is the largest contributor to the national economy and today's businesspeople do not want the political parties to continue with such 'politics of prejudice and vengeance,' said the FBCCI president, whom the meeting entrusted with formulating the agenda.

Responding to a question, Mintoo said the business community would not support any bid for unconstitutional change of power. Observing that the opposition parties start out-government movement two years after a party is elected to power, Mintoo described the practice as alarming and boding ill for democratic future of the country.

Alluding to the freezing of Mannan's bank accounts and denying bonded warehouse facilities to his firms, Mintoo said such use of public agencies against political foes was a bad culture.

The business community will take legal action against any office, like National Board of Revenue, if it unlawfully harasses businessmen, he added.

AL MP escapes bomb attack in Magura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Awami League (AL) lawmaker of Magura-1 constituency Dr M Serajul Akbar survived an assassination attempt in Magura town Saturday night when a bomb went off at a place where he was sitting along with some of his party associates just five minutes before the explosion occurred.

The incident occurred at around 9:30pm in front of his house located some 100 yards from the deputy commissioner's office and opposite Magura Mohila College. The lawmaker escaped unhurt.

Akbar, also joint-convenor of the district unit of AL, told newsmen that the bomb was thrown to kill him, but did not blame anyone in particular for the incident.

Police recovered splinters of the bomb from the spot.

Magura AL leaders condemned the bomb attack. A general diary was filed with Magura Sadar Police Station.

Officer-in-charge of the police station who visited the spot and talked to Dr Akbar, but could not get any clue to the identities of the attackers.

MAHALCHHARI ARSON Germany to give 40,000 euro to victims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The German government will provide 40,000 euro as humanitarian aid for the indigenous people of Mahalchhari in the hills district of Khagrachhari to help them meet their urgent needs.

The fund is to support the ongoing aid efforts for the Mahalchhari people who were subjected to brutal attacks by local Bangalee settlers on August 26, 2003. During the attacks, their houses were burnt down, fields devastated, seeds looted and cattle and poultry killed.

As many as 433 tribal families saw their shelters razed to the ground, belongings robbed and livelihood destroyed in the gruesome attack.

The German aid will be used to replace looted and destroyed household goods of the indigenous families, said a press release. CARITAS Bangladesh will take the implementing organisation.

BDR resists BSF's barbed wire fence in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) yesterday resisted Indian Border Security Force's (BSF) move to put a barbed wire fence between Bhomra and Shojadanga in India, as it was a violation of international norms.

The BSF started to put the fence 150 yards beyond Shojadanga border at around 8:30am but suspended the work following the BDR's protest.

When contacted, Major Ashraf, second-in-command of 12 Rifles Battalion, said both sides later decided to measure to justify the fence. Till then, the work will remain suspended, he added.

However, the BDR and BSF are positioned face to face and a tense situation is prevailing.

AL, left parties

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condition of anonymity.

He said the AL, Workers Party of Bangladesh (WPB), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Jatiya Samaj-tantrik Dal (JSD-Inu), Samyabadi Dal and Gano Azadi League will observe March 30 as 'end of autocratic rule' day marking the ouster of the then BNP government in 1996.

The parties are very much likely to sit in a meeting within a couple of days to finalise simultaneous programmes, he added.

On March 6, the parties observed a dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country simultaneously but staged separate demonstrations on March 9.

The AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday told The Daily Star, "We are working to forge a greater unity among pro-liberation and democratic forces, and as part of the effort we will sit with like-minded parties soon."

He, however, declined to disclose the venue and date of the meeting.

As the 30-day ultimatum for meeting its 15-point demand expired on February 10, the AL spearheaded an alliance-seeking campaign aiming at forging an all-opposition unity to press the government to relinquish power much ahead of the schedule.

Pre-paid electricity

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agreement with a company to launch 2,600 pre-paid meters in Sylhet by using its own fund and is negotiating for installation of another 7,000 meters in Sirajganj and Bogra.

"If the pilot installations prove a success, the PDB will gradually replace most meters with pre-paid ones. It'll be better for both the organisation and its genuine consumers," said an official.

Govt to buy four subs

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Bangladesh Navy and the remaining two were expected to arrive by May.

Besides, a large patrol vessel will be constructed at Khulna Shipyard and process is on to procure six patrol crafts and four missile corvettes. A plan is also there to replace three old frigates with new ones bought from friendly countries, the minister in charge said.

The purchase list for the navy also includes surface to air missiles with base facilities, one helicopter and helicopter handling system and one torpedo-counter measure system for DW 2000 H frigate and a combat data link for the BN Osman.

Hafiz also informed the House that a patrol craft, a hydrographic survey ship and two speedy gunboats bought from South Korea had already been commissioned in the naval fleet.

He said there was also a plan to procure 16 multi-role fighters, 12 fighter trainer planes and three MI-

17 helicopters for the Air Force within the current fiscal year.

The cost for arms, fighter planes and other necessary equipment to be purchased for army and air force could not be ascertained as final agreement for the deals are yet to be signed, he added.

Replying to a question, Hafiz admitted the inadequacy of manpower in the armed forces and explained that financial constraints barred them from going for more recruitment. "We don't believe in quantity, but in quality," he said, claiming that the personnel in the armed forces were getting good training from different military institutions.

Answering to another supplementary question from Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury, the minister said investigation had proved corruption by the previous Awami League government in purchasing frigate and MIG-29 fighter planes and charge sheets were framed accusing former prime minister Sheikh Hasina for her involvement in the deals.

2 GLs killed in Iraq

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central Baghdad on Sunday morning," a US army spokesman said.

He said one rocket landed in the Green Zone, one of Saddam's former palace complexes west of the Tigris river, where the US-led administration is based, and two outside.

"We have reports of two Iraqi civilians killed and five injured. One US soldier was slightly injured," the spokesman said. The rocket that hit the Green Zone landed in "Freedom Rest," a 1st Armored Division rest and recreation area. The missiles used were probably 127-mm rockets, he said.

A rocket attack on Saturday night killed two US soldiers and wounded seven near the flashpoint town of Falluja.

Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, deputy director of US army operations in Iraq, said three rockets hit a base near the town west of Baghdad and two landed outside. The wounded comprised six from the army and one from the navy.

Feni River

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Chief Engineer of Water Development Board Mohammad Monwar Hossain Mia, told the Indian delegates that additional withdrawal of water upstream cannot be agreed upon without survey and assessment on the needs of Bangladesh.

In July last year, India tried for unilateral withdrawal of water from the Feni river at Olinagar, opposite Chhagalnaiya, but it was aborted in the face of strong objection by BDR.

Led by Tripura PWD Chief Engineer G K Malakar the 18-member Indian team included Eng AK Hosh, Eng Nani and BSF Commandant KK Gulia.

Mild tremor jolts Ctg

BSS, Chittagong

A mild tremor shook the port city and its adjoining areas early yesterday.

The earthquake, measuring 4.83 on the Richter scale, jolted the south-eastern part of the country at 12:26am and had its epicentre about 327 km from the port city, Chittagong Geophysical Observatory Centre sources said.

However, no casualty or damage was reported during the 34 seconds long tremor, another source said.

Yesterday's quake was the fourth of such tremors in the country's commercial capital.

Oil spills killing

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German-based organisation, and involved a team of 13 scientists and conservationists.

Brian D Smith, a conservation zoologist of the WCS, led the team that included six scientists from Bangladesh, three from India, two from Sri Lanka and one from Myanmar.

Dr Shyamal Saha, a scientist based in Cox's Bazar town, was with the survey team on board a trawler. "We saw a large number of whales and dolphins in the Bay. We also used sophisticated search equipment to locate them underwater. We are now documenting our findings to be processed and compiled later at the WCS office in Thailand," he said.

The second phase of the survey will be launched next month in Sri Lankan part of the Bay while the third phase in the Indian and Myanmar parts is scheduled for January-February next year, sources said.

"The study team will identify the causes threatening extinction of the marine mammals. Based on that information, we want to formulate a set of measures necessary to protect them and draw up a proper strategy for their conservation," said Prof Benazir Ahmed of Chittagong University, who is working with the WCS as a member of Asia Region Whales and Dolphins Conservation Committee.

"The project study is also aimed at strengthening international cooperation for developing a regional agreement for the conservation of marine mammals in South Asia," he said.

"I have been monitoring the

The deaths brought to 395 the number of US troops killed in action since the Iraq conflict began a year ago. US political and military efforts now focus on preparations for a handover of sovereignty to Iraqis at the end of June.

In other attacks on Sunday, a bomb exploded at a police station in Khalis, north of Baghdad, killing a policeman and wounding two. A roadside bomb intended for a US convoy hurt a municipal worker in the northern city of Mosul, police said.

Over 100 killed after Afghan minister dies

REUTERS, Kabul

More than 100 people were killed in fighting in the western Afghan city of Herat yesterday after the death of the civil aviation minister, a government commander blamed for the minister's killings said.

Zahir Nayebyzada, the government commander in Herat, accused forces of the provincial governor Ismail Khan of provoking the fighting by trying to take command of his division.

He said Khan's son, Civil Aviation Minister Mirwais Sadiq, was killed after breaking into his residence.

PBCP

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the launch of special police-BDR drive in the southwestern region.

An official of the DB said Litu is accused of 14 criminal charges, including those for murders, filed with Dumuria Police Station in Khulna. Police said Litu has already confessed to his involvement in five murder cases.

A police official asking not to be named said more than 20 operatives of the underground outfit are hiding in the city, most of them at Banasri in Khilgaon and Defence Officers Housing Society (DOHS) in Gulshan.

Police quizzing Litu said their agents collect about Tk 1 crore as toll every month mainly from the shrimp farms in Khulna and Satkhira and send it to their bosses in Dhaka to run organisational activities.

Many of the PBCP operatives are hiding in the Sundarbans or have crossed the border with India after the police-BDR (Bangladesh Rifles)-led joint operation started in the area, another police officer said quoting Litu.

launching of the survey. So far, the findings have been very encouraging -- six species of dolphins and two species of whales were sighted," Ahmed added.