

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 University 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 silting 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 Aminul 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 Mufleth R Osmann presided over the session, where Major General (Rtd) Abdul Mubeen Chowdhury delivered the address of welcome and South East University Vice-Chancellor (VC) Shamsher Ali presented the keynote paper on education, the second theme of the seminar.

Shamsher Ali underscored education in English as a second language to enable Bangladeshis to 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.

Maoists storm

FROM PAGE 12
from three sides, local journalists said.

The rebels freed a number of prisoners including Maoists from Bedi jail, looted a state-owned bank, and blew up the district administrative office before soldiers, who were caught by surprise, mobilised to fight them.

A local television reporter, Ramesh Paudel, said army officials told him three soldiers and two Maoists were killed in the gunbattle, which was raging into Sunday afternoon.

"All the government buildings in town are badly damaged except for the army barracks," Paudel told AFP by telephone.

The Kathmandu government had no immediate details on the violence due to disruptions in communication, home ministry spokesman Gopendra Bahadur Pandey said.

In a second attack Sunday morning, suspected Maoists set off bombs at the Meghalai airport in the southern Chitwan district which is visited by thousands of tourists each year who go on jungle safaris, police said.

EU diplomats

FROM PAGE 1

Embassy of Germany Hermann Nicolai, First Secretary, European Commission Anne Marchal, and Second Secretary, British High Commission Alan Shaw.

The visit is facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the agency's newly established Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility (CHTDF) office in Rangamati. UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Jorgen Lissner will also join the delegation.

Initially, the high-level EU delegation will visit the Mahalchhari villages, where the European Union has been providing funds for some ongoing humanitarian assistance projects. The projects are being implemented by UNDP together with other UN agencies to restore family and community livelihoods in the village.

Following the visit to Mahalchhari, the EU diplomats will attend the first-ever 'Khagrachari leadership meeting' on the theme of partnership for development in

DCC

FROM PAGE 12

fund.

The DCC wrote to the local government, rural development and cooperatives ministry, seeking a fund of Tk 27.5 crore, but the authorities are yet to reply, he said.

Patwari said the DCC was continuing a low-key mosquito control drive six days a week except for Friday despite shortage of chemicals, staff and equipment.

The DCC has 45,000 litres of reserved adjuvite to go 25 days and an order was issued to buy 50,000 litres more, he said. It has 9,000 litres of reserved larvicide to scrape through a month and is awaiting an order for 7,000 litres of a new and more effective brand.

The meeting with DCC Chief Executive Officer Habibur Rahman in the chair decided that the DCC would clean the dirty places, owned by Desa (Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority), Wasa (Water and Sewerage Authority) and Rajuk, city developer, and seek clean-up charges from the utility services.

One criminal lynched, five injured in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mob yesterday lynched a criminal and injured five others at Kanchannagar in Faltikchhari 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 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 Kasem, all operatives of local Union Parishad Chairman and BNP leader Abul Kasem Chowdhury. Kasem is the prime suspect in the abduction case of BNP leader and business magnate Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury.

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AL observes dawn to dusk hartal in Chuadanga

Protests bomb attack at its local office

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

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.

It was the most coordinated attack in months by the Maoists, who have been fighting since 1996 to overthrow the monarchy and establish a communist state. The insurgency has claimed more than 9,000 lives.

The rebels ended an eight-month ceasefire with the government in August and said last week they wanted any new talks to be coordinated by the United Nations.

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 Salimuddin Huda Joardar, general secretary of Chuadanga AL, in the chair, sources said.

According to AL leaders, 25 of its leaders and activists including district Chhatria 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

FROM PAGE 1

The EU diplomats will then visit some of the 120 communities of Rangamati, who are participating in the UNDP programme for the "promotion of development and confidence building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts".

They will also have meeting with the Rangamati deputy commissioners, the chairman of the Hill District Council and the chairman of CHT Regional Council.

On reasons for such a visit, UNDP spokeswoman Lisa Hiller said UNDP has invited the diplomats to come and look into the development activities they have funded for. The diplomats should know the progress of development and other humanitarian activities in the hills region.

Japan waives

FROM PAGE 1

Matsushiro Horiguchi and ERD Secretary Mirza Tasadduq Hussain Beg signing an exchange of notes.

The new debt cancellation system replaces the earlier Debt Relief Grant Assistance of Japan under which the government would take grants to repay loans. Under the DRGA, Bangladesh received \$3.8 billion between 1978 and 2003. Bangladesh still owes \$2.83 billion to Japan as debt liabilities.

"The newsystem is much easier. The advantage of the debt cancellation mechanism is that the Bangladesh will no longer be required to make budget provision for servicing these loans and as such it will not be necessary to repay these loans. It will reduce Bangladesh's debt burden," Beg told journalists after the signing ceremony. "We will sit together later and decide the projects to spend the money on."

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

FROM PAGE 1

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 'uniting' 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 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.

"Don't worry to drop corrupt

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

On Tuesday, he will meet Foreign Minister M Morsud 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.

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 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 oust-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.

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.

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

FROM PAGE 1

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 Mahbub 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 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 MM 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.

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 said he visited the spot and talked to Dr Akbar, but could not get any clue to the identities of the attackers.

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