

Save link canals to save Buriganga

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The authorities are dredging a 17-kilometre stretch of the Buriganga unmindful of the need for saving at least a dozen dying canals connecting the capital's peripheral townships and villages with the river.

Experts at the Water Development Board (WDB) said the city is expanding so rapidly that

in near future these townships and villages are likely to form part of it. These natural canals are vital not only for transporting people and merchandise to and from the capital but also for providing a 'fantastic drainage system' and reducing water logging in those areas.

"Remember Dhaka city once boasted 22 natural canals none of which is being saved and the conse-

quences can be felt in the rainy season causing massive water logging. Unless we act now to save them, we will face an environmental disaster," one expert said.

Some of these canals, serving mainly farmers, traders and commuters for decades, are fast being filled up by land-hungry city dwellers, who bought them and have proper documents.

About half the stretch of one such canal -- Atir Khal -- originating from the Buriganga at Waispur and rejoining it about 10 km downstream at Kholamora, has been sold off to individuals.

All over the canal, signboards have been hung to claim ownership. The canal was dredged in the late seventies under the orders of the

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Boats are moored off the bank of a canal west of Rayer Bazar sluice gate where the water has almost dried up due to lack of dredging.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Sharon says Israel may kill Arafat

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon yesterday threatened his long-time foe Yasser Arafat with assassination in barbed comments in which he called the veteran Palestinian president a poor insurance risk.

Sharon, who is under fire in Israel over his plan for a Gaza pullout and over a bribery scandal, also included Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Lebanon's Hizbollah guerrilla group, in threats issued in a series of newspaper interviews.

"I wouldn't suggest either one of them should feel secure. I wouldn't propose that any insurance

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Chuadanga BNP leader murdered

UNB, Chuadanga

A local leader of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was killed by unidentified miscreants in Damurhuda upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

Witnesses said Kader Molla, 55, president of the BNP Natipota Union unit, came under attack by a gang of 12 near a temple at village Durgapur while he was returning home from Natudah Madrassah in the upazila at about 1:30am. Molla attended a religious function at the madrassah.

The miscreant hit the BNP leader with sharp weapons, slit his throat and left the spot exploding crackers.

Police recovered the body yesterday morning and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy.

No-one was arrested in connection with the murder till 6:00pm yesterday.

THE STRENGTH WITHIN



PHOTO: STAR

A doctor checks a patient at the community clinic set up by the Centre for Advanced Research and Social Action (Carsa) in Madaripur.

A clinic closer to community

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

Tuberculosis flares up every other week, but it does not perturb Shaheda Begum. The reality of having no money in the little money-chest she keeps under bed does not unsettle the 50-year-old. She lives on to feed three hungry children at home.

Shaheda's empty money chest did not hamper her chance of suppressing the TB scare -- she did not have to borrow money from local loan sharks at high interest rates. No laborious path for her to tread for an hour or take a boat even longer to visit the health complex at Kalkini Sadar Upazila in Madaripur.

Now on her way back from working on the fields owned by a well-off villager, Shaheda visits a tin-roofed concrete building near the village market, which serves as the community clinic. Shaheda gets to keep tabs on her health.

Four years ago, the long affliction of TB was treated at Kalkini Upazila health complex, an hour away in winter and over two hours in the monsoon

because of flooded roads.

"Sometimes I would cough for two straight days, but I could not afford to travel to Kalkini," Shaheda recalls.

These days, with free treatment of TB -- just 10 minutes from home -- at Alinagar union health centre, Shaheda takes a more laid-back view towards her illness and poverty.

"The disease does not bother me as much as before, since the doctor and nurses take care of me, as I go to the health centre every day -- sometimes only to talk to them. If my condition shows signs of deterioration they always sort it out," Shaheda said.

Shaheda was found chatting with the nurses and the lone doctor at the clinic run by a committee of the local union parishad chairman, NGO workers and community leaders. The clinic provides health service for over 650 members from 12 villages and medical insurance for its members, health awareness for local households and free medical treatment for about 100 ultra-poor

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New Nato members vow to stay in Iraq

AFP, Brussels

Ex-communist countries newly enrolled in Nato vowed yesterday to keep their troops in Iraq, while calling for greater international involvement to restore stability to the shattered nation.

Romanian Foreign Minister Mircea Geoana said it was high time for transatlantic divisions over the war in Iraq, which last year plunged the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) into its worst-ever crisis, to be put aside.

"We have a fundamental interest... to have Iraq become as soon as possible a self-governing, democratic, more prosperous and gradually more stable nation," he told a news conference after a ceremony here for the seven new Nato states.

"All of us, the countries that have suffered under communist dictatorship, have not only a strategic necessity to stabilise Iraq for the sake of the broader region, but also a moral obligation to assist this nation," he added.

Of the seven new Nato members -- Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia -- all except Slovenia have deployed troops to support the US-led occupation of Iraq.

Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passi said: "I strongly support what my Romanian friend and colleague said."

"Indeed we are for much stronger international support in Iraq -- we would support a much stronger Nato commitment in Iraq, we would support a much stronger UN com-

mitment in Iraq," he said.

Slovak Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan, asked whether his own country would stay the course in Iraq, replied emphatically: "Yes, sir."

Following yesterday morning's welcome ceremony, US Secretary of State Colin Powell and other Nato foreign ministers were expected to discuss giving the alliance a formal peacekeeping role in Iraq.

Eighteen of the 26 Nato nations have, individually, already deployed troops.

But countries such as France and Germany, which opposed the US-led war, have stressed that another resolution at the United Nations Security Council will be needed before they can consider joining a Nato mission in Iraq.

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Tendulkar robbed!

AFP, New Delhi

India skipper Sourav Ganguly said yesterday his team made a "mistake" by denying star batsman Sachin Tendulkar a double-century in the opening Test against Pakistan at Multan.

Tendulkar was taken by surprise when stand-in captain Rahul Dravid declared the first innings closed at 675-5 as he was just six runs short of his second successive double-century.

"It's a mistake made by the team," Ganguly was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India news agency.

"There is no point making it an issue," said the Indian skipper, who returned home Thursday for treatment after missing the opening Test

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High turnout in Lankan polls

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankans turned out in large numbers yesterday for parliamentary elections called to resolve a power struggle between the president and the prime minister that has cast a shadow over faltering attempts to end ethnic bloodshed.

The main contenders, President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Freedom Alliance and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party, said they were generally satisfied with the vote, while police said it went off peacefully.

Election officials said the final turnout figures were yet to be worked out, but initial reports suggested about 75 percent of the electorate had cast ballots, maintaining the island's reputation for high voting.

The first results are expected at around midnight, but the final party positions are not expected to be known before midday today.

Wickremesinghe, who was one of the first to vote, expressed hopes of returning to power to pursue his internationally-backed negotiations with Tamil Tiger rebels.

"I am certain people will vote for peace," he said at a voting booth near his home. "I am confident of securing a majority of seats."

However, most opinion polls have pointed to a hung parliament with neither Wickremesinghe's UNP nor Kumaratunga's Alliance winning an outright majority.

Kumaratunga called the election after she clashed with Wickremesinghe, accusing him of conceding too much in talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas.

Police said there were no reports of major violence in the island.

"We have only a few minor

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Prayer Timings		
April 3		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-40	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-21	6-24
Esha	7-45	8-15
Source: Islamic Foundation		