

## Indian president backs river-linking project

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, *New Delhi*

Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam on Wednesday favoured going ahead with the ambitious river-linking project to avoid simultaneous recurrence of drought and flood in the country.

Addressing the legislative assembly of the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, he said transfer of water from one river basin system to another is necessary for development of the country and he will talk to the federal government on the issue.

The fate of the inter-linking project, highly favoured by the previous BJP-led government, has become uncertain following installation of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) dispensation, which is not very enthusiastic about it.

The UPA has not yet declared

abandonment of the project but says techno-economic viability of the inter-linking of rivers has to be done before taking a decision.

Indian water resources ministry headed by Priya Ranjan Dasgupta has meanwhile reportedly recommended winding up of the Task Force set up by the previous government for the project. The recommendation is now with the Prime Minister's Office. The Task Force had suggested linking of 30 rivers.

As the Task Force headed by Shiv Sena leader Suresh Prabhu with the rank of a cabinet minister has submitted its reports, its closure is on the cards. Prabhu stepped down to contest the parliamentary elections in April-May this year.

The project, first conceived by the Congress government two decades back, has been met with opposition by a number of Indian states and several NGOs.

## Banned Islamist group leader gets bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

Sayed Kawsar Hussain Siddiki, self-proclaimed commander of the country's only banned Islamist outfit Shahadat-e-Al-Hiqma, was released on bail in a sedition case Tuesday after he surrendered to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court.

CMM Abul Hossain passed the order while none from the state opposed the petition. Advocate Abul Hossain pleaded the bail petition. The court sub-inspector was absent.

Kawsar, the key accused in the sedition case, had been absconding since he was out on bail in a cheating case last August.

Sub-inspector Shamsuddin of Detective Branch of police lodged the sedition case with Boalia Police Station on March 25, 2003 following a home ministry clearance. At least nine people including Kawsar were accused in the case filed under Sections 123 (Ka) and 124 (Ka) of Bangladesh Penal Code for hatching anti-state plot. The other accused are - Shamim Uddin, Rahmat Ali Sarkar, Nizam Uddin, Azhar Ali Mridha, Abdus Subhan, Rabul Islam, Abdul Hannan and Mojibur Rahman.

Home ministry banned Al-Hiqma on February 9 after the Rajshahi-based organisation in a press conference the previous day declared for an armed struggle to turn the country into an Islamic state.

Police earlier arrested five Al-Hiqma members and gathered the organisation's constitution, declaration paper and other documents that allegedly suggested its subversive motives. The arrestees were remanded and interrogated at the joint interrogation cell in Dhaka, but the High Court later released them on bail.

## Egyptian

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for auditing. Rahman Rahman and Huq, a chartered accounting firm of Bangladesh, is working as a co-auditor.

Sheba sources said they are expecting a new management in a month or two. Sheba is the smallest of the country's four cellphone operators with 195 staffs.

Although the Malaysia-Bangladesh joint venture had high potentials when it obtained licence in 1996 and launched operation in the last quarter of 1997, the relationship between the two parties turned bitter from the beginning. As a result, when companies like GrameenPhone exceeded a client base of one million, Sheba could create a base of only 59,000 users, of whom 49,000 are regular. Only 28,000 Sheba cellphone service users were recorded to be online yesterday.

Established in 1998, Orascom is the largest and most diversified GSM network operator in Egypt, Iraq, Middle East, Africa and Pakistan under nine licences covering the region.

TRI which too had been the largest mobile telecom company of Malaysia was bought by Malaysian Telecom last year, after a 50-percent fall in its annual turnover, company officials said.

## German

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tomorrow. He will pay a courtesy call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia afterwards.

He will also meet the press after talks with his counterpart at the foreign ministry.

Fischer is also scheduled to call on Main Opposition Leader in Parliament and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina at her parliament office in the afternoon before visiting a German initiative styled German Doctors in the city.

"The two foreign ministers are expected to review the entire gamut of bilateral relations between the countries and exchange views on development in regional and international arena," says a foreign ministry announcement.

Bangladesh exported goods worth \$1,019 million, mainly in the RMG (ready made garments) and leather goods sector, to Germany last year.

Fischer is entertaining an official invitation extended to him by Moshed Khan during the latter's visit to Germany last November.

The German minister will leave at 7:05pm tomorrow evening on board a German airforce Airbus.

## PC becomes

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schooling were up to par.

Emphasising the importance of learning English, he said students need English to succeed in trade and commerce as well as excel in communications and information technology.

British Council Bangladesh Acting Director Charles Nuttall, American Centre Deputy Director Michelle Jones, British Council Teaching Centres Manager Mark Bartholomew and Belta President Arifa Rahman also spoke at the session.

Arifa underscored the need for training and developing English language teachers for improving the standard of English.

She questioned the wisdom of the government's decision to set up language laboratories in the regions and suggested setting up an accreditation body to monitor the private teacher training colleges.

## Marginal savers hit

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necessary to reduce lending rates. If savings certificates offer high interest rates, people tend not to deposit money with banks," he said.

But the government move is now being taken with a pinch of salt by economists.

"The move is not so much for reducing cost of fund for the private sector but for the government itself," said Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue. "It is an effort to back a dysfunctional banking system by taxing the marginal savers."

Explaining, he said the government needs funds to foot the bill for its own expenditure. Last fiscal year, in the face of low off-take of foreign financing and shortfall in aggregate revenue target, the government had to rely more on domestic sources for underwriting fiscal deficit. Within the domestic sources, it resorted to borrowing from non-bank sources more than the banking system. Non-bank fund is low inflationary but high cost. Now the government is trying to reduce that cost.

But this is happening at the cost of marginal savers, he pointed out. "If one looks at the annual nominal rate of the savings instrument, which is only 7 percent, it becomes

clear that the savers are very little benefited after adjusting with above 5 percent inflation rate. The rate cut was justified only when rates were high years ago," Dr Debapriya said.

He said the new instrument for the retired is not going to cover all the disadvantaged groups like the widows and single-head families in saving. Moreover, socio-economic institutions that rely on interest income to carry out their activities will also be increasingly handicapped.

He further added that evidences show reduction in cost of fund for the private sector has limited impact in terms of investment promotion in the backdrop of high infrastructure costs.

Since the BNP-led coalition took power, interest rates on savings instruments have been lowered four times with the latest round, making the schemes unattractive by 5 percent.

But given the little scope for investment, the reduction did not affect the demand for the savings instruments.

In 11 months till May of last fiscal year, the government sold savings schemes worth Tk 8,884 crore compared with Tk 8,691 crore of the previous fiscal year.

## Holding tax

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area of Dhaka municipality into four categories - residential, residential-commercial, commercial and industrial. Eight lawmakers yesterday launched the programme in their constituencies that fall under the DCC jurisdiction.

The DCC has deployed around 45,000 volunteers from students and Bangladesh National Cadet Corps (BNCC) members to distribute the new tax assessment forms and collect it. They are to finish their task in the next 15 days, the sources said.

"We want to be very much clear in our new tax system. The owners themselves will fill out the form and assess their holding tax. The volunteers will help them out and we will just supervise the process," said Shakhawat Ullah, chief revenue officer of the DCC.

Under the new procedure, the DCC will also re-evaluate the rental values of the establishments in terms of how much income they will have after 15 years. The last evaluation of the house rent and income from the houses was done way back in 1989.

The DCC expected to collect Tk 170 crore in holding tax in the last

financial year, but Tk 15 crore could not be collected from the government holdings and Tk 10 crore due to legal tangles.

"We hardly can collect as much as 85 percent of the total expected holding tax," said the chief revenue officer.

## Self-assessment process

The process and tax rate is same for all the four categories of holdings - residential, commercial, residential-commercial and industrial.

The owners will give detailed description of their holdings including the present tax rate and acknowledge the annual value or income of the holdings.

Value of two months' income will be deducted from the annual income as maintenance cost and a 12 percent flat tax will be fixed on the rest of the income.

If the owners have a bank loan against the holdings, the annual interest will be cut from the 10 months' income before the holding tax is fixed. Owners living in their holdings will get a 40 percent rebate on the 10 months' income.

## Rokan's statement

FROM PAGE 1

panicking the justices through such derogatory remarks and asked him to stop interfering with affairs of the chief justice and the judiciary as a whole.

Rokan told The Daily Star last night he would comment on Huda's remarks after seeing the statement.

The Bar members across the political divide at a general requisition meeting on Wednesday, presided over by Rokan, asked the chief justice to appoint efficient judges to the High Court or stop appointing judges if he does not find competent people.

Huda said Rokan's 'vicious' remarks threatening the High Court judges amount to contempt of court and is a punishable offence. He has to answer to general lawyers for his actions.

"Who has given him (Rokan) the right to raise an accusing finger at the judges? As a citizen of the country he has the responsibility to show respect to the judiciary and the judges, and he is not above the law," he observed.

"The judiciary of our country is free and sovereign, and nobody has the right to make such derogatory remarks."

"The remarks of Rokanuddin is a threat to the country's free and sovereign judiciary and the judges," said the former Bar president.

"Barrister Rokan has forgotten that he is the president of the Bar, not the country. How dare he interferes with the jurisdiction of the chief justice in constituting benches and gives him two weeks' ultimatum," Huda said, adding no-one would be allowed to tarnish the image of the judicial system and the judges.

The former Bar president alleged Rokan is ripping hapless justice seekers off millions every day through his publicity stunt to attract clients and asked income tax authorities to look into it.

## MOUDUD SAYS RESOLUTION UNFORTUNATE

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed termed Wednesday's resolution unfortunate and said it goes against the lawyers' ethics. He said the Supreme Court Bar Association could have discussed the matter with the chief justice instead of going public over such a sensitive issue.

Such an incident makes people think that undue pressure is being put on the judiciary and its functioning.

## DHAKA-10 BY-POLLS BDB submits affidavits on vote rigging to EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The counsel for Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) yesterday submitted to the acting chief election commissioner (CEC) a set of affidavits containing what the plaintiff terms, evidences of ballot rigging at the Dhaka-10 by-polls on July 1 and ouster of BDB candidate's polling agents from the polling stations.

BDB candidate Abdul Mannan's counsel MK Rahman submitted the 57-page affidavits to Acting CEC Safiur Rahman in accordance with an Election Commission (EC) directive, and claimed those prove the by-election was not held in a free and fair manner.

The affidavits assert that ruling BNP candidate in the by-election Mossadak Ali Falu rigged votes at a minimum of 89 out of the 103 polling centres, after driving away BDB polling agents.

The BNP candidate's counsel was asked to submit its affidavit by July 18 and the EC will then fix the date of delivering its verdict.

The EC on July 8 heard both sides' lawyers on a petition filed by Abdul Mannan challenging the validity of the by-election held in violation of a High Court order to deploy army personnel at each of the polling centres.

## 10 Mymensingh

FROM PAGE 12

have already been made.

Journalists who received death threats are: Habibur Rahman Sheikh of Dainik Jahan, Ataul Karim Khokon of Jugantar, Sultan Uddin Khan, local reporters' Unity chief, Abul Kasher of Aiker Kagoj, Zillur Rahman Khan of Sangbad, Golam Mostafa of Ittefaq, Mosharraf Hossain of The New Nation, Nawab Ali of the Independent, Anwarul Hasan Rumi of ATN Bangla, and Badol Acharja of Banglar Bani.

Besides, the outlaws also threatened to gouge out the eyes of 10 other journalists who are Matin, Pranab, Jagadish, Hashim, Mozammel, Matul, Mahiuddin, MA Motaleb, Ayub Ali and Ujjal.

Journalist leaders met Superintendent of Police (SP) Kohinor Mia Wednesday and handed over a copy of the letters that carried the threats.

SP brought the matter to the deputy inspector general's notice.

Meanwhile in Chudanga, criminals who earlier threatened to kill two local journalists,

yesterday ransacked their offices and issued further death threats.

One Naitul with his accomplices stormed the offices of the journalists at Anwar Palli area. They hunted for the journalists who at that time were not in the office. The gang then ransacked the office.

Earlier some activists of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) reportedly threatened to kill Sarif Uddin, Darshana correspondent of Aiker Kagoj and Azad Hossain, a staff correspondent of regional daily, Loksamaj, sources said.

"They received threats after their reports on alleged irregularities in the tender process of Darshana Sugar Mill angered some BNP leaders, sources said.

## Robbers loot

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Locals alleged an organised clique of criminals and outlaws is committing abduction in the district. Allegations also were made against police that they do not pursue abduction cases vigorously and often ask victims' families to pay the captors.

The investigation officer of the case submitted the charge sheet naming Ershad as the lone accused on December 19 this year.

The court framed charges against Ershad on January 26, 1994 and the trial began on June 26, 2003.

Ershad was present at the court during the argument yesterday. Additional police forces were deployed on the court premises to avoid any untoward incident.

"We know that a win tomorrow will not only be the first for us in five Asia Cups, but it will also take us into the second round," Bashar told reporters after practice.

"Batting in the morning is always difficult at the SSC. We will play safe but if conditions suit us, we will definitely bat first. I think a 230-240 total will be good enough to defend against any team here," said the top batsman of the country.

Left-arm spinner Abdur Razak is likely to make his one-day debut against Hong Kong, who have never won a single match against Bangladesh.

Hong Kong captain Rahul Sharma however sounded optimistic ahead of their big match.

"In cricket, anything can happen. As Robin (Singh) once said, if seven players out of 11 perform, then you have a winning formula," quoted Sharma.

"We are expected to lose against Bangladesh and Pakistan but they have to win the games from us. So, the pressure will be on them," said the veteran, who played nearly ten games against Bangladesh at ICC associate level.

Sharma, who played first-class cricket in India, is excited to make one-day debut at the age of 43.

## Hasina trashes

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new day begins after the midnight. Bangabandhu was arrested after the midnight of March 25 and prior to his arrest he announced the independence, and every one counts March 26 as the day independence was declared".

The AL chief was addressing the newly elected office bearers of Supreme Court Bar Association at the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh auditorium in the city, where president of the association, Rokonuddin Mahmud, also spoke.

Hasina said Khaleda once again proved her ignorance about the country's struggle for independence by asking how did people publicise Bangabandhu's proclamation of independence over loudspeakers after March-25 crackdown by Pakistani forces.

"She [Khaleda] should know that different places of the then East Pakistan remained free for months even after the crackdown, as liberation fighters and the masses put up resistance and barricades against Pakistani Army's movement," the eldest daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said making a contrast on Khaleda's remark.

"If Khaleda Zia's argument is true, then how did her husband Ziaur Rahman announced independence on March 27, two days after the crackdown?" Hasina countered.

Refuting the prime minister's comments that "The leader of the opposition initially had not recognised Zia as a freedom fighter, but

they set tubewells although waterborne diseases are breaking out. A medical team was providing primary treatment for the villagers and asked them not to drink floodwater without giving them pure drinking water.

Buchi of Colleaguepara village, who took refuge on the road with seven of her family, died from want of food, her grand daughter Swarna said.

Khatemun Bawa, 70, of Guadubi village said she was without food for the last two days. "The government should provide food at least for the elderly and children," Ramzan, a Chuniapara villager, said.

"Give us at least polythene sheeting so that we can protect the elderly and children from rain."

Hungry villagers surrounded local lawmaker Golam Mohammad Siraj asking for relief, medicine and shelter when he visited Titulapara.

People living close to the embankment blamed the sabotage on Bhandarbari Union Parishad Chairman and BNP leader Belal Hossain Babu and another BNP leader Jahurul Islam Nannu who feuded over the repair of the embankment that stretched 262 kilometres from the northern district of Kurigram to Pabna.

But the lawmaker in his instant reaction said the feud did not lead to the sabotage but delayed the repair. In a contradictory statement, he told local reporters: "The sabotage would not have taken place if the WDB (Water Development Board) had allowed Babu to do the work."

WDB officials told The Daily Star that they were ready to begin the work but failed because of the 'feud' among the pro-BNP contractors.

## Bogra dam-cut

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rescuing their relatives alive.

The homeless villagers took with them whatever they could save. People taking cattle, clothes, cot, rice and wheat have streamed onto Goshairati-Dhunan Road, the only place yet to be submerged.

Witnesses said some people pitched makeshift tents with polythene sheeting and most passed two days in the open in rain.

Day-workers are looking for work in adjacent unaffected villages but found nothing, as people of other villages are also abandoning their homes for fear of flooding.

The government allocated 100 tonnes of rice, 40 sanitary pans and 20 tubewells, but the local administration distributed relief only in Titulapara village that was partly affected by the flooding.

Locals alleged officials did not distribute sanitary pans, nor did

## Ershad

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After hearing the arguments by two sides yesterday, Judge Rezaul Karim Khan of the Special Court for Dhaka Division fixed the date.

Earlier the judgment of the case had been adjourned after the defence lawyers submitted a time petition seeking an adjournment. Ershad's counsel had also filed a criminal appeal with the High Court for transferring the case to some other court. In the petition they stated that their client would not get justice from the court. The High Court, however, had directed the divisional court to dispose of the case.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption filed the corruption case accusing Ershad and three tax officials on July 27, 1992.

In the case filed with Ramna Police Station, it was alleged that Ershad, while in power, paid Tk 7,43,416 as income tax for six years (1983-1989). Later, he withdrew Tk 2,76,324 from the income tax money without submitting any documents in favour of his action.

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## Momin passes away

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The first namaj-e-janaza for the AL leader was held at Road no 7 in Dhanmondi at 10:00am. The body was then taken to the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad.

After the second namaj-e-janaza at the South Plaza, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan on behalf of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Abdul Hamid on behalf of AL President Sheikh Hasina and senior AL leader Abdus Samad Azad on behalf of the party placed wreaths on the coffin of the lawmaker.

Cabinet members, Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui and MPs were present.

Momin was buried at his family graveyard at Mohanganj in Netrakona. His qukhwanari will be held at Khan Shaheb Bari at Mohanganj on July 18.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in separate messages expressed deep shock at the death of Abdul Momin.

They also prayed for salvation of his departed soul and conveyed their heart-felt sympathy to the bereaved family.

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## Top Ctg 'criminal'

FROM PAGE 12

other Jamaat-Shibir leaders and activists with crests and bouquets.

Joint Secretary General of BNP Goyeshwar Chandra Roy was present as chief guest. South District Unit President Ahmad Khalil Khan, North District Unit General Secretary Shahjahan Siraj and Chittagong City Unit Joint Secretary Abu Sufian attended it as special guests.

Goyeshwar said the joining of Ahmad chairman would not have negative impact on the BNP in Satkania. "The law will take its own course," he said referring to the criminal cases against Ahmad.

Ahmad pledged to fight against terrorism and all social odds as a BNP activist.

## Car bomb

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(68 miles) southwest of Baghdad.

Fire erupted in an oil pipeline in northern Iraq yesterday near the country's main Kirkuk oilfields, witnesses said. The country's northern export pipeline runs through the area.

HOSTAGE CRISIS

In Manila, the Philippine military awaited orders to pull its small contingent out of Iraq in a bid to save the life of a civilian hostage as the United States piled pressure on its Asian ally not to cave in to militants' demands.

"In a time of test where enemies demand you kneel...I just ask you please don't confuse your enemies or your friends," US Ambassador Francis Riccardone said after a meeting with Philippine Defence Secretary Eduardo Ermita yesterday.

Militants have threatened to kill truck driver Angelo de la Cruz unless Manila withdraws its 51 personnel by July 20, a month ahead of schedule.

Bulgaria watched a deadline for the execution of a Bulgarian hostage pass without news on Wednesday but stood firm on its pro-US policies and refused to pull out its troops.

Reuters/ANP