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GROUNDWATER

Dipping Dhaka table rings alarm

PINAKI ROY

Groundwater table in the capital dropped to 46.24 metres below the surface marking a steep fall of 20 metres in six years till 2003 as the water level in the rivers around it are declining fast.

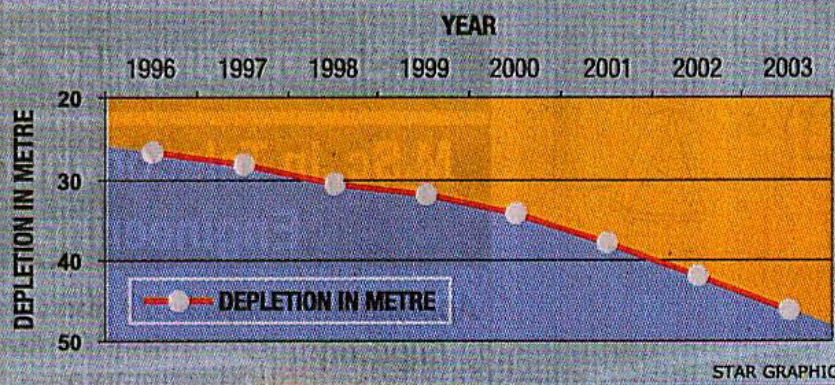
Water level of the Buriganga, the lifeline of the capital city, has gone down to 6.65 metres this year while the normal level was 7.23 metres in 1998 and 7.68 metres in 1988. Water level of the Turag has dropped to 7.29 metres, Tongi khal 7.01 metres and Balu river 6.98 metres this year.

As an increasing number of city people cannot use surface water from rivers, canals, lakes and other water bodies due to the fall in water level and consequent pollution, the pressure on groundwater has increased resulting in the decline of water table.

These were revealed at the 'Consultation Workshop on Dhaka City State of Environment Report-2003' jointly

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YEAR-WISE DEPLETION OF GROUNDWATER



STAR GRAPHICS

ACC SECRETARY

Joined or not that is the question

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While the anti-corruption commissioners said the newly appointed secretary to the ACC had not joined his office until yesterday evening, a government handout last night said Reza-e-Rabbi took over the charge yesterday afternoon.

However, reporters on their daylong vigil at the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday did not find any official who knew anything about Reza's joining the commission. But, none of them ventured to explain why he did not join despite the government instruction to do that immediately.

ACC Commissioner Moniruddin Ahmed told The Daily Star over telephone yesterday evening that Reza was yet to join his new office.

A couple of hours later, Prof Moniruzzaman Mia, the other commissioner, told BBC Bangla Service that the ACC had asked Reza

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Draft 3-yr antipovertry plan eyes 6pc growth

Committee hands in report to Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The national steering committee on poverty reduction yesterday submitted to the finance minister the draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for the financial years 2004-05 to 2006-07 projecting a conservative GDP growth target of 6 percent for FY07.

The paper that lays out a three-year rolling plan for poverty alleviation also offers a 10-year perspective on national achievements in seven areas: employment, nutrition, mothers' health, raising standard of education, sanitation and safe water supply, crime control and good local governance.

For speedy poverty alleviation, the PRSP in its three-year term employs four strategic blocks: accel-

erating poor-friendly economic growth, developing the sectors that fight poverty the best, take measures to protect the ultra-poor and safety net programmes for them and overall social development.

"We shall outline specific timeframes to achieve the goals of the PRSP," said Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday upon receiving the draft document at the Planning Commission.

"We also will prioritise the schemes to achieve these goals, because our resources are limited," he added.

While handing in the draft strategy paper, the chief of the steering committee and principal secretary to the prime minister, Kamal Siddique, told newsmen, "The

government will finalise this draft report within the next eight weeks."

During this two months, Saifur will discuss the draft PRSP with politicians and parliamentarians, while the steering committee will consult the donors and the civil society about it.

A member of the steering committee, economist Hossain Zillur Rahman, said, "We have not set any ambitious GDP target considering the country's realities. We always face obstacles one after another. This year our GDP will be limited to 5 to 5.25 percent due to the floods. So, we envisage a step-by-step GDP growth."

The PRSP bears the legacy of the three-year Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP)

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PHOTO: AFP

Khaled Mashud sweeps one to the boundary on his way to cracking an unbeaten half-century during the first one-day international against India at MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

Tigers go down fighting

SHAHIDUL ISLAM, from Ctg

A courageous late assault launched by wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud almost made it a day to remember for Bangladesh before they went down by 11 runs in the first one day international against India at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

Chasing a stiff target of 245 for eight on a two-paced wicket, the Tigers had laboured for most of the overs before Mashud and Khaled Mahmud brought them back in the game.

Mashud blasted 50 not out off just 39 deliveries to send the full house at the MA Aziz into a frenzy. The 28-year-old came in with Bangladesh needing 103 off the last 12 overs and added 40 off 33 balls with Mahmud and then featured in a blistering 34 off just 16 deliveries with Tapash Baisya. However, the charge came a little too late for the home team who ended on 234 for eight.

Before Mashud's knock, Bangladesh were kept in the game by captain Habibul Bashar who had repaired the innings which threatened to fall apart at 44 for three inside 15 overs.

Gone were opener Mohammad Rafique to the catch of the year by Yuvraj Singh, local favourite Nafees Iqbal for a painstaking nine off 52 balls and Mohammad Ashraful (2).

Rafique's dismissal came in sensational style after the makeshift opener had just blasted a six off

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Diesel for irrigation may be subsidised

Price increased by Tk 3 a litre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is considering subsidising diesel prices to facilitate irrigation after it hiked diesel and kerosene prices by Tk 3 to Tk 23 a litre from midnight Wednesday.

"We will ask the Department of Agriculture Extension to identify and make a list of the country's deep tube-wells used for irrigation," Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday told The Daily Star after a meeting at the Planning Commission.

"Once this list is prepared, we will issue cards for the farmers so that they get the subsidy," he added. Farmers presently get 25 percent subsidy for electricity-driven

pumps. We can do the same for diesel-run ones."

On concerns of economists that the price hike of diesel and kerosene will hurt the poor and push up the inflation, Saifur said, "I have thought about these concerns beforehand and I have thought about subsidy."

"We have subsidised electricity prices, but giving subsidy to diesel prices for irrigation is a difficult issue. Diesel is used in shallow boats, transport and other machines and we don't want to subsidise those. We want to give it to farmers," Saifur maintained.

About 83 percent of the country's irrigation are powered by diesel and

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FUEL PRICE HIKE AL fronts call daylong hartal for Dec 26

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition Awami League's (AL) front organisations Bangladesh Krishak League and Awami Jubo League will enforce a dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country on December 26 in protest at the price hike of diesel and kerosene.

The price hike will hit hard the country's agricultural sector as thousands of farmers are dependent on these fuel for cultivation, leaders of the organisations yesterday said while making separate calls for the 6:00am-6:00pm shutdown.

They demanded immediate cancellation of the decision in the greater interest of country's agricultural sector.

Leaders of Bangladesh Krishak

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SEVEN DAYS TO MFA PHASEOUT

Int'l agencies sceptical about Bangladesh's RMG future

STAR REPORT

International bodies have come up with predictions that the impact of quota elimination on Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) exports is likely to be negative though exporters and buyers are making positive notes at least for the next one year.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has said Bangladesh may lose up to 50 percent of its US market. The International Monetary Fund has warned that a quarter of Bangladesh's garment exports and lakhs of jobs in the sector could be lost next year.

Most of these studies however rely on estimates for the mid-late 1990s. Conclusions of these studies are broadly consistent with the observed effects of quota removal on Bangladesh exports under the third phase of WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC).

The WTO thinks China will eventually grab half of all US clothing imports, up from 15 percent in 2002.

India, which employs nearly 35 million textile workers, also expects to gain handsomely from the end of quotas.

"Simulation results confirm the consensus that Bangladesh is likely to be adversely affected by the phase-out of textile and clothing quotas," the IMF said in a study titled 'The End of Textiles Quotas: A Case Study of the Impact on Bangladesh'.

The study said, "Intuitively, the greater the substitutability between the products of Bangladesh and its competitors, the larger is the impact on Bangladesh's exports when quotas are removed."

Bangladesh faces a serious challenge in maintaining its competitiveness in the free market era. This challenge should serve as a wake-up call for policymakers, it mentioned.

With its vast labour resources, Bangladesh has great potential to expand its exports of RMG s and other labour-intensive products if its key structural weaknesses can be

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