

# PROTESTS MOUNTING AGAINST INDIA'S TIPAIMUKH PROJECT

## 'Long march' towards Indian border starts tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Protests by different political parties and socio-cultural organisations are mounting in Sylhet against India's planned Tipaimukh embankment and hydro-electric project on Barak river in Manipur.

The planned project will obstruct flows of the Surma and the Kushiara in Bangladesh, threatening the eco-system greater Sylhet region and in the entire Meghna basin, the protesters and environmentalists say.

The meandering Barak river flowing through Manipur, Mizoram and Assam in India enters Bangladesh at Amolish in Jakiganj and meets the Surma and the Kushiara.

Several organisations have announced programmes for Long March to the Indian border to protest the move.

The Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) will begin its Long March from the capital on March 1 and reach Sylhet on the following day,

the party announced at a rally in Sylhet on Friday.

It (Tipaimukh embankment) will be another Farakka and we have to resist the move at any cost, speakers at the rally said.

A desertification process will start in the entire Meghna basin because of withdrawal of water, speakers at the rally said. It was presided over by BSD leader Badal Roy.

They said the project has been opposed even by people of Manipur.

They called upon the people irrespective of political opinions to join the protest and resist the move. BSD is now holding meetings with different socio-cultural organisations and professional groups to make its programme a success, party sources said yesterday.

The Aggression Resistance Committee, a newly formed body to resist the move, will start its 'long march' to Indian border in Sylhet on March 9 from Dhaka. It is now holding wayside rallies and processions and distributing posters and leaflets

in Sylhet city and in other areas of the district.

Moulana Muhiuddin Khan, Convener of the committee, attended the programmes in Sylhet.

Jamat-e-Islami, a component of the four-party ruling alliance, also protested the Indian move and will announce a programme after its Sylhet divisional council scheduled for March 4, local leaders of the party said yesterday.

Another partner of the ruling alliance -- Khelafat Majlish -- has also planned protest programmes. Its chief Moulana Azizul Haque at several meetings in Sylhet last week said it will launch protest programmes soon.

Central leaders of main opposition party Awami League in its grand rally held in Sylhet on February 19 strongly protested the Indian move.

Former foreign minister Abdus Samad Azad MP in his speech at the rally said implementation of the Tipaimukh embankment and hydro-electric project will create a disaster in greater Sylhet region as well as in

the whole of Meghna basin. "We will have to raise a united protest against the move".

He also criticised the Bangladesh government, saying it could not handle the matter because of its wrong foreign policy.

"There should be a united protest irrespective of political affiliations", he had said.

When contacted yesterday, Sylhet district Awami League President ANM Shafique said, "We are observing the situation. Steps will be finalised by central leaders."

The move by the Indian central government is also being protested by people in Manipur, Assam and Mizoram, earlier press reports said.

At least 40,000 aborigines and the ecology will be affected in the three Indian states.

The project was planned about a decade ago but could not be implemented in the face of protests by people under the banner of

Tipaimukh Embankment Resistance Committee in Manipur.

## 2 Jama'atul Mujahidin men held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Two Jama'atul Mujahidin Bangladesh members were arrested by Shibganj police in Chapainawabganj on Friday.

They are Quari Nazrul Islam, 40, a teacher of Hazardighi Islamia Madrasa and Nurul Islam, 28, a teacher of Chandpur Dakhil Madrasa. Both of them hailed from Palpara at Patnitola in Naogaon.

They were caught from Nazrul's house at around 1.30am at Kagmari village in Shibganj upazila following confessional statements of the militants who had been arrested in other districts.

## Bomb attack on newsmen: ASP Mofazzel brought back to Khulna jail

BSS, Khulna

Additional SP Mofazzel Hussain who was allegedly involved in a bomb attack on Khulna bureau chief of the Jugantor, Dip Azad was brought to Khulna jail on Saturday.

Police sources said a team of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) brought Mofazzel from Dhaka Central Jail by prison van. He was kept in Cell No-4 of Khulna jail.

Mofazzel was arrested from his office on February 17 following confessional statements of two outlaws, Hasan and Iqbal Hossain Sadrin, who were arrested by the members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) earlier.

Meanwhile, Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) brought Hasan to Khulna Police Station on four-day remand.

## ASI among 50 hurt in Magura BNP factional clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

At least 50 people including a police officer were injured in a BNP factional clash here on Saturday.

The clash ensued following an altercation over realisation of fine at an arbitration meeting at Binodpur bazaar.

After a while both the groups equipped with lethal weapons swooped on each other that continued for about two hours.

A faction was led by BNP Mohammadpur thana unit organising secretary Nazrul Islam while the other faction was led by Binodpur union unit president Golam Azam Sabu.

Two houses including that of Mohammadpur thana unit BNP organising secretary Nazrul Islam had been destroyed during the clash, according to police.

The injured police officer is Abul Hasnat, an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) of Mohammadpur Police Station. However, police from Magura and Mohammadpur police stations rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control after baton charge and firing 10 tear gas shells.

The injured persons were admitted to Mohammadpur Upazila Health Complex, local clinics and Magura Sadar Hospital.

# Govt's fall is imminent

## Zillur and Tofael says at meetings in Brahmanbaria and Manikganj

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Awami League front ranking leaders Zillur Rahman and Tofael Ahmed has said the fall of the government is imminent as it has lost people's support and is sheltering criminals and terrorists to cling to power.

They called upon the people to intensify the on-going agitation to hasten its fall.

Our Brahmanbaria Correspondent reports: Awami League Presidium member Zillur Rahman has alleged that most of the incidents of grenade and bomb blast in the country were done by criminals and terrorists sheltered by ruling party men.

They are habouring the evil forces to cling to power after losing people's confidence.

He was addressing a big public meeting at the municipal park in the town on Saturday.

Presided over by Brahmanbaria AL President Lutfal-hi-Salchu, the meeting was addressed by, among others, its central leaders Mukul Bush, Ali Ahnaf, Capt (Retd) AB Tajul Islam, Mustafa Kamal Lutus and district leaders Amanul Haque, Kamruzzaman Ansary, former lawmaker Delara Haroon and former chairman of Brahmanbaria municipality Md Helal Uddin.

Zillur Rahman said the country has become a 'hell' for the people under the alliance government because of incidents of crime and violence. Law and order has deteriorated because none of the incidents of grenade and bomb blasts has been tried, he said.

The people remain panicked always, apprehending grenade attacks. Political parties and even cultural organisations hesitate to hold programmes because of fear.

He urged the government to ban all extremist religious outfits to

contain rise of fundamentalists in the country.

They are out to capture power in the name of religion, which will turn Bangladesh into another Afghanistan, he said.

Mere banning JMB (Jamaatul Mujahidin) and JMB (Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh) will not serve the purpose, he said.

Our Manikganj Correspondent reports:

Awami League Presidium member and former minister Tofael Ahmed said the alliance government will fall within a short time and a 'people's government' will be formed.

He said people's life and property are not safe under the rule of the alliance government.

Fanatics have raised their heads again under the patronisation of the government. They are sheltering criminals and hopes to capture state power, he told a party workers meeting at the Town Hall auditorium on Saturday.

Tofael urged the party workers and all pro-liberation forces to unite and launch intensify the on-going agitation to topple the government.

He urged the people to protest the government's misrule and corruption.

With Manikganj district AL President Golam Mohiuddin in the chair, the meeting was addressed by,

among others, AL central leaders Alamgir Kumkum, Dewan Shafiqul Arefin Tutul, Manikganj district AL leaders Gazi Kamrul Huda Selim, Abdus Salam, Abdul Mazial, Arshad Ali Chowdhury, Mazed Khan, Hasib Uddin Ahammed Selim, Juba League leader Nazrul Islam, Chhatra League leader Mahabubul Alam Khaled and Manikganj Bar Association President Meher Uddin.

"Popular Awami League leaders, journalists and intellectuals are

being killed as part of a blue print to eliminate them only to stay in power", Tofael alleged.

The government has so far filed false cases against one lakh Awami League leaders and workers in the country, he claimed.

Other speakers called upon the people to intensify the ongoing agitation to topple the 'corrupt and failed government' as it could not provide security to people's life and property.

They also criticised the government for price hike of essentials, fertiliser and fuel during the current IRR1-Boro Season.

## Jhenidah 'crossfire' kills 8 in 42 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Eight alleged outlaws were killed in 'crossfire' with police in Jhenidah district from January 11 to February 22 this year, according to official sources and newspaper reports.

Though law enforcers claimed that the deaths were during exchange of fire with outlaws and recovery of arms, other sources alleged that those were custodial deaths.

The latest victim of such 'crossfire' is 'regional leader' of Biplabi-Communist Party (BCP) Moazzem Ali alias Kasai Moazzem of Badpukuria village in Jhenidah Sadar upazila. He was killed in a field in Dakhalpur village in Harina-kundu upazila in the early hours of February 22.

'Regional leader' of Janajuddho faction of Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Shajahan was killed in an encounter with police on February 9 at Laxmipur village in Kotchandpur upazila.

**SNAPS**

### 8-day computer show begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An eight-day computer show began here on Sunday. The fair was jointly organised by Bangladesh Computer Society (BCS) and Chittagong Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Forum. Fifty-five stalls, 15 pavilions and four galleries of the sponsors were set up at the VIP Tower of Kazir Deury. Various firms related with computer, software, hardware, e-commerce, m-commerce, Internet, multi-media, animation, games, ISP and IT are participating in the fair. The fair remains open from 10AM to 8PM every day. School students are encouraged to visit the fair for free.

### Basanta Utasab held at Ctg

CU CORRESPONDENT

A colourful spring festival was held at Government Fine Arts College here on Friday. Chittagong Fine Arts Council (CFAC) organised the Basanta Utasab. Salahuddin Santanu opened the festival by playing flute. Other programmes include group song, group dance, recitation, folk song, playing of guitar and Baul song. Different cultural organisations including Sangeet Bhaban, Prama, Bodhon Abritti Parisad and individuals like Shankar Dey, Hamzadur Rahman, Shahrier Khaled, Dolon Kanungo, Irin Saha, Mustafa Kamal, Suvra Sengupta, Runa Chowdhury, Manindra Roy and Anima Murfi enthralled the audience.



PHOTO: STAR

A partial view of the Uttara Housing Project in Syedpur.

## UTTARA HOUSING PROJECT Inauguration today amid Bangalee-Bihari stand-off

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Haq Milon is scheduled to inaugurate the Uttara Housing Project at Saidpur today, mid tension between Bangalees and Biharis over share of the housing units.

This would be the third time that the programme has been scheduled.

Earlier, inauguration was scheduled twice but cancelled fearing unrest over the allotment.

Meanwhile a leaflet has been circulated in the town to "foil any attempt to allot houses to the Biharis who killed Bangalees and commit-

ted other crimes during the Liberation War".

In the leaflet, it has also been alleged that a local lawmaker belonging to a ruling party is trying to get allotment of houses in favour of Biharis with the help of "muscle-men".

Uttara Housing Project has been constructed by the government at a cost of Tk four crore to rehabilitate distressed people including, victims of river erosion, divorced women, landless people and poor freedom fighters.

But violating a government notification, the Saidpur upazila administration decided to allot houses to Biharis only.

This angered Bangalees, who on several occasions staged demonstrations and clashed with police.

On March 21 last year, at least 60 people including Syedpur UNO and ASP were injured in one such clash.

After that police filed a case accusing 3000 people for attacking police and snatching arms.

Finally, the upazila administration said 30 per cent of the houses would be given to Bangalees and 70 per cent to Biharis. But Bangalees rejected it, claiming all the houses.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was scheduled to inaugurate the project on March 14 last year. But the programme was cancelled fearing local trouble.

## No gas from Bibiana unless supplied in Nabiganj

### All-party rally resolves

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

An all-party public meeting in Nabiganj on Friday resolved that gas supply from Bibiyana Gas Field to other areas would not be allowed unless it is supplied in Nabiganj.

The meeting, largely attended by local people, also put forward a nine-point demand including setting up of gas-based power plant and a fertilizer factory in Nabiganj, construction of a pucca road from Sherpur to Inatganj via Bibiyana and employment of local people in the gas field and other related establishments.

A tough agitation will be launched if the demands are not met, speakers from all parties said at the meeting, held at Swastipur in Dighalbak union.

The rally was organised by Bibiyana Dabi Dawa Bastobayan Parishad, a recently formed all-party forum to realise the demands.

It was presided over by its president Md Saad Uddin.

Awami League Presidium member and former minister Dewan Farid Gazi MP addressed the rally as chief guest.

It was also addressed by, among others, ex- MP Abdul Mosobbir,

Jatiya Party central Joint Secretary and ex- MP Khalilur Rahman Chowdhury, Habiganj district AL President Dr Mushfiq Hossain Chowdhury, Habiganj BNP ex-president Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury Farsu, district Bar Association President and BNP Vice-President Khaliqzaman

Chowdhury, AL acting general secretary Abul Fazal and organising secretary Alamgir Chowdhury.

Parishad laeaders Nazrul Islam Chowdhury, Azizur Rahman, Shahjahan Siraj, Mujibur Rahman Kajol, Azizul Haque Shibli, Mujibur Rahman, Moulana Nazmul Islam, Md. Alamgir, freedom fighter MA Khaliq, Hafiz

Nazrul Islam, Sheful Devnath and Shamsul Islam and Union parishad members Nurul Islam and Farid Mian also spoke at the rally. Organising secretary of the Parishad Sujat Miah conducted the meeting.

Dewan Farid Gazi said, the demands are genuine and the government must fulfil those.

"Otherwise we will not allow gas supply to other areas from Bibiana", he said and urged the people to remain united to realise those.

Former lawmaker Abdul Mosobbir said, "We will not allow gas export if we remain deprived".

Ex- MP Khalilur Rahman Chowdhury said, every house and commercial establishment in Nabiganj and surrounding areas must get gas. "We will extend all cooperation to US company Unocal if our 9-point demand is met".

District AL president Dr Mushfiq Hossain Chowdhury called upon the people to remain alert so that no one can betray and foil the movement to benefit from it.

BNP leader Shafiqur Rahman Farsu said his party leaders will remain with the people in realising the demands.

## Salinity increasing in SW districts alarmingly

### 10.2 lakh hectares of land, eco-system affected, study says

SHAMIM AHSRAH, back from Satkhira

Salinity in soil and water is increasing alarmingly in southwestern districts, affecting agriculture, fishery and the eco-system. It is displacing thousands of people.

About 10.2 lakh hectare of land is now salinity-contaminated in 19 districts against 8.33 lakh hectares in 1973, according to a study by the Bangladesh Soil Resources Development Institute. It has caused crisis of potable water also in many areas.

The problem has been caused mainly due to decreasing flow of rivers in the dry season, when saline water from the sea intrudes deep into the mainland. Unplanned shrimp cultivation in recent years has aggravated the problem.

The salinity-contaminated area in spread up to 130 kilometres in Chittagong region and 180 kilometre in southwestern region from the sea-line.

Satkhira is the worst affected area where about 1.47 lakh hectares of cultivable land are salinity-contaminated out of total 2.28 lakh hectares. In Khulna, it is 1.45 lakh hectares out of total 2.11 lakh hectares.

In Shyamnagar in Satkhira, salinity has affected 88 per cent of the cultivable lands.

Other affected districts are Khulna, Bagerhat, Patuakhali,

Barguna and Bhola followed by Cox's Bazar, Chittagong, Noakhali and Pirojpur.

The districts with less than 25,000 hectares of affected land are Laxmipur, Gopalganj, Feni, Barisal, Jhalokathi and Madaripur.

New areas are being affected. The intensity is also increasing alarmingly, the survey said.

The problem is increasing as saline water of rivers and canals are being mixed with groundwater.

The survey showed that waters of 56 per cent of rivers and canals in the region are 'highly saline-affected' and can not be used for agriculture. Only 34 percent have salinity to a 'bearable limit'.

The shrimp cultivators, by holding saline water in enclosures almost round the year, send saline to the groundwater and nearby cultivable lands.

The survey shows lands under shrimp cultivation has increased to 1,15 lakh hectares now from only 1300 hectares in 1975 in Bagerhat and Khulna region.

"These people (shrimp cultivators) are not only harming neighbouring lands and sending salinity to the groundwater, they are also destroying the lands for a long period," Kushal Roy, who conducted several research projects on climate change in the region, told The Daily Star.

"After a land is uses for shrimp

cultivation for 10 to 15 years, the soil can not grow any crop for a long time."

"Many farmers migrated to the town and started rickshaw-van pulling while some others have started working in shrimp enclosures," said Kushal.

The acute salinity has eliminated many sweet water crops, trees and fishes and forced people to shift to new professions. Many farmers in Satkhira now oppose unplanned shrimp cultivation as they can not grow paddy or other crops during dry season.

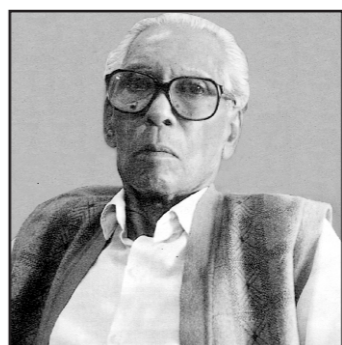
Salinity is also affecting growth of plants and vegetables. Green leaves turn yellowish and the trees wither away gradually.

According to forest department officials, about 75 lakh trees of Khulna and Satkhira have been affected with 'top dying' disease.

Indigenous species of fishes are declining in the region as saline water from the sea has reached rivers and canals.

Hit by salinity, Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest is the world, is losing its bio-diversity.

Care Bangladesh has started some experimental measures at community level in Khulna-Satkhira region to improve people's ability to cope with the change. It is working with local NGOs and civil society to create awareness.



## ABDUL LATIF'S DEATH Shock wave in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A shock wave swept Barisal when the death news of the eminent composer, musician and singer Abdul Latif reached Barisal city Saturday night.

The grief spread over the cultural arena, intellectuals and civil societies after the news about demise of and pride of Barisal was reached here.

Abdul Latif was born in Raipasha village on the outskirts of the city in 1927.

He was last seen in public in the city when he received the Mayor Padak-2005' at Barisal Central Shahid Minar on February 20, five days before his death.

Abdul Latif was among 13 eminent persons from barisal who were given the award, some posthumously. They included Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haque, Ashwini Kumar Dutta, poet Jibananda Das, freedom fighter Major MA Jalil and Birsrestho Shahid Captain Mahiuddin Jahangir.

Leaders of Barisal Reporters Unity, Sangskritik Sangothan Samanoya Parishad, Barisal District Bar Association and other socio-cultural and civil organisations expressed their deep shock at the death of Abdul Latif. This is a great loss to the nation, they said.

They also demanded steps to preserve of the works of Abdul Latif.

The body of Abdul Latif will be buried at the intellectuals' graveyard at Mirpur in Dhaka.

## 'Ban religion based politics'

RU CORRESPONDENT

The leaders of Rajshahi University (RU) units of Chhatra League (BCL) and Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) on Friday demanded immediate ban on politics based on religion.

The demand came from two separate protest meetings held on the campus.

BCL threatened a tougher out-governement agitation for non-fulfillment of demand.

Its president Ibrahim Hossain presided over the meeting. While addressing, the BCL leaders termed the announcement of ban on Jama'atul

Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB) and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) as an eyewash to befool the people and donors.

They also criticised the government for patronising the Islamic militant groups and fundamentalist forces like Bangla Bhai.

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