

Tall talks but no action to check land grabbing

SHAKHAWAT LITON

In one and a half years since identifying land grabbing as a national concern the government has not initiated any drive but on paper only to recover at least 20 lakh acres of encroached land.

In October 2003, a meeting of secretaries chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia identified land grabbing as a major issue of concern and formed a secretariat committee to address it. The committee came up with a comprehensive report in three months in which it made a set of recommendations, including

legal amendments to provide for sterner penalty to stem land grabbing.

But nothing concrete has happened since then; the administration has just been sitting on the recommendations. And, while the government failed to act out its own agenda, grabbers continued gobbling up forest and Khas land and Waqf and vested property across the country.

It also appears the government even knows not exactly how much land and property it owns or wards. It also has no specific figures on how much of that land and property it

actually controls and how much it has lost to grabbers, encroachers and squatters.

A persistent lack of co-ordination among the government, municipal and other organisations and agen-

cies makes it difficult for the land ministry to detect and recover the grabbed lands, officials said.

However, the scattered data available with various government

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CONFUSION OVER GRABBED LAND

- Govt says 4.45 lakh-acre vested property gobbled up
- Study says grabbers occupy 90pc of 21 lakh-acre vested property
- No tough action against grabbing since 2004
- DCs blame ruling coalition men for encroachment

Morshed phones Natwar, discusses summit dates

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday telephoned his counterparts in New Delhi and Islamabad to discuss the dates for holding the stalled Saarc summit in Dhaka.

Khan has proposed two sets of dates, September 4-5 or November 13-14, for holding the 13th summit, which was postponed twice.

Diplomatic sources told the private news agency that in his tele-talk with Indian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh, Khan said Dhaka sent the proposed dates to Islamabad, the current chair of the Saarc, for securing confirmation of the member states.

Singh assured Khan that he would confirm the dates in a day or two.

The two foreign ministers agreed to resolve all bilateral issues through dialogue. They also agreed to take necessary steps to keep the border peaceful.

This is the second direct contact between the two foreign ministers after their meeting in Jakarta on the sidelines of Afro-Asian Summit last month.

Khan has also invited Singh to visit Dhaka, preferably before the Saarc summit, and a formal invitation was sent to him yesterday

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Media doesn't taint image, rather helps better governance

Observes World Press Freedom Day seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Media plays a vital role in improving the governance system instead of "damaging" the country's image, speakers at a seminar in Dhaka observed yesterday.

"It is the government's wrong activities rather than writing about the social irregularities that damage the country's image," said noted jurist and constitution expert Dr Kamal Hossain.

He was speaking at the inaugural session of the seminar co-organised by the South Asia Free Media Association (Safma) and the Massline Media Centre (MMC) to mark the World Press Freedom Day-2005 in the LGED auditorium.

Dr Kamal, also the president of Gono Forum, said it is the duty of the media to point out the irregularities in society in order to make the government aware of those. He also said concealing information on corruption and criminal activities would

rather constitute a false image of the country.

Referring to the recent remarks by some ministers on media's role, he said, "The image of the country would automatically brighten if you follow the constitution in running the state affairs and check corruption."

Dr Kamal said freedom of the press and independence of the judiciary are complementary to each other. He demanded punishment of the criminals for the killings of journalists in recent years.

Noted journalist ABM Musa observed that journalism is now facing multifarious problems that are difficult to overcome. "With a few exceptions, by and large some big business houses are now controlling the media which has repressed the freedom of journalists," he noted.

Eminent educationist Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury said there

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US Asst Secy Rocca due on May 11

UNB, Dhaka

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca is expected to arrive in Dhaka on May 11 on a two-day visit.

Rocca will hold meetings with Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and other high officials of the foreign ministry on May 11. She will call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on May 12.

Diplomatic sources said Dhaka and Washington will review the entire gamut of bilateral relations during the official talks. Regional and Middle East issues will also come up for discussion, they added.

Rocca's visit will be the first high-level tour from America after President Bush was inaugurated for a second term in the White House. She had come to Dhaka months before the US presidential election last year.

Outlaws kill cop, police source

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Underground operatives killed a police constable and a police informant in separate incidents in Chuadanga Monday night.

The dead were identified as Isbak Ali 42, a constable at Koira Police Station in Khulna and Safauyat Laskar, 32, of village Jadabpur of Sadar upazila in Chuadanga.

Ishak who came to his home at Santipara of Sadar upazila in Chuadanga on Monday noon, was killed at village Binnadi on the night.

As Ishak reached Binnadi field on the way to his father-in-law's house, the gang stopped him. They slaughtered him with a sharp knife and threw his body into a roadside ditch, police said.

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ORDER VIOLATION Real estate MD gets 3-month imprisonment

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court has sentenced the managing director (MD) of Hirajheel Property Development (Pvt) Company Ltd to three months' jail for violating its order.

Judge Mohammad Rezaul Karim of the Court of Third Joint District Judge on Monday handed down the verdict at a packed courtroom following a case filed by Fatema Rahman and five others for violating the court order that asked the real estate firm to maintain status quo regarding the sale of a piece of land.

The court also ordered the

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Hazari plans to surrender in a month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expelled Awami League leader Joyal Hazari wants to come back to the country and surrender in the court within a month, he said in a statement faxed yesterday to newspaper offices.

Hazari termed the party decision to expel him an outcome of a conspiracy against him. He however said he would welcome the decision if it brings in good for the party.

In the four-page statement, the former AL lawmaker, who has been

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INSURGENT GROUPS Indian defence report criticises Dhaka

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Indian defence ministry in its annual report has accused Bangladesh of "being insensitive and unresponsive to the presence of Indian insurgent groups from the northeast and the ISI on its soil, illegal immigration and criminalisation of the border".

The report says there has still been no explanation for the large cache of arms and ammunition bound for the northeastern India and detected in Chittagong in April 2004.

Bangladesh has remained "indifferent" to the rising influence of political parties and organisations of "fundamentalist and radical

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ACC to probe actions against corrupt officials

Will seek records of departmental cases against govt staff

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) will probe corruption of government officials getting away with minor punishment on the pretext of departmental action.

The Commission will call for records of departmental cases filed against government officials on graft charges to see if adequate actions had been taken against them.

The anti-graft watchdog observed that many government

officials got away with minor punishment for big corruption, according to Commission sources.

"In many cases, respective departments withhold two increments or stop promotion or suspend (officials) for a few months although the officials indulge in huge corruption for which they should face criminal charges," an ACC official told The Daily Star yesterday, seeking anonymity.

The minor punishment that their departments slap on them allows them to ultimately avert criminal

charges, he added.

The Commission has decided to send letters to all the ministries, departments, directorates, offices and autonomous organisations for sending records and documents of departmental cases filed against their officers and employees.

"We'll ask the government for these," Commission's Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan said yesterday, acknowledging their move.

"We are discussing whether we

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Aurora passes away

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian army legend Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Aurora, who oversaw the surrender of about 93,000 Pakistani troops in Dhaka in 1971, died in New Delhi yesterday at 89.

Aurora, who had been ailing for sometime, died of heart failure in sleep at a private hospital.

Born on February 13, 1917 in Kalagujan village of Jhelum district, now in Pakistan, Aurora was commissioned into the Indian Army in the first battalion of the 2nd Punjab Regiment in 1939.

His participating in action came during the World War II in Burma. In the 1948 Kashmir operations, he led the same battalion in Pir Kalewa region of Rajouri district. Later, he

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Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Aurora, left, then chief of Bangladesh-India joint command, looks on as Lt Gen AAK Niazi, commander of Pakistan occupation forces, signs the surrender treaty on December 16, 1971 at Race Course, Dhaka.

Bangladesh loses a friend

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the demise of Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Aurora, Bangladesh has lost a friend who was closely linked to its independence, leading Liberation War commanders yesterday said fondly recalling the memories of his contribution in the war.

"He was a great friend of Bangladesh and sincerely played his role during its Liberation War," said AK Khondoker, then deputy chief of staff of Bangladesh Armed Forces.

AK Khondoker represented Bangladesh Mukti Bahinee (liberation forces) when Gen Aurora, chief of Bangladesh-India joint command, signed Pakistan's surrender treaty at the Race Course in Dhaka on December 16, 1971.

"Since my acquaintance with

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