

TEESTA WATER SHARING

Dhaka expects interim accord

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh awaits an interim agreement on the sharing of Teesta water soon as New Delhi has assured considering Dhaka's proposal on the provisional arrangement among other fast-track measures for boosting bilateral cooperation.

"I am expecting very positively an interim agreement on the Teesta water sharing until the study of water flow of other common rivers completes," Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan told the news agency yesterday on the outcome of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to India.

He said the Indian water resources minister will come to Bangladesh immediately after West Bengal elections and visit the sites of both Teesta and Tipaimukh with the Bangladesh water resources minister.

After the visit, the Joint River Commission (JRC) will look into the interim arrangement positively, Morshed said.

On Dhaka's concern over the huge trade deficit with New Delhi, he said India assured that it would take positive actions after identification of para-tariff and non-tariff barriers by the business communities.

"After submission of the list of barriers by the business communities, both the governments will take appropriate steps for removal of the barriers," the foreign minister said.

He informed the commerce ministers of the two countries will also meet soon on bilateral FTA, which India feels will be much more favourable for Bangladesh in reducing the trade gap than Safta.

The foreign minister said New Delhi also assured that land ports on the Indian side will be developed for uninterrupted trading between Bangladesh and Nepal and Bangladesh and Bhutan.

Asked about cross-border train service between Sealdah and Joydebpur, he said a joint technical committee will study the pros and cons, including condition of rail tracks and capacity of sustaining load, before commissioning of the service.

Disagreeing with a notion that the prime minister's visit yielded naught,

BNP yet to decide

FROM PAGE 16 clarification of a number of specific aspects. Earlier on March 20, Bhuiyan in his letter sought names for a committee to discuss the opposition's proposals.

Bhuiyan suggested that the committee could be formed solely with members of parliament. But the members of the 14-party alliance who do not have representatives in parliament are publicly demanding their participation in the committee.

BNP policymakers believe a small committee formed with lawmakers will function better and smoothly as the issue will have to be finally settled in parliament.

A senior minister who declined to be named said if non-MPs are incorporated in the committee, its size will be huge and it may very well turn into a seminar instead of a committee.

"It will be very difficult to reach a consensus on such a crucial matter at the meeting of a huge committee," he explained.

BNP sources said the party is not going to include its coalition partners in the committee. But the party top brass are considering inclusion of some of the AL's non-MP allies, they added.

Bhuiyan told The Daily Star the BNP wants to discuss the reform proposals with the opposition leaders. "We'll write back to the main opposition very shortly after holding talks with the prime minister," he said.

"It's quite plausible," he told The Associated Press.

Thais rally

FROM PAGE 16 Thaksin that he resigns and allows the king to appoint an interim government. Then the parties could call another election, which Thaksin "is welcome" to join, Abhisit told supporters Friday.

Aekkaporn Rakkhamsuk, a spokesman for the ruling Thai Rak Thai party, said the appointment of an interim government would violate the constitution and the country's "political tradition."

In a sign that the elections are likely to go ahead, the king's chief adviser, Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda, cast his ballot Saturday. Those registered can vote this weekend ahead of the ballot, which Thaksin hopes will give him a fresh mandate.

Prem did not comment after leaving the polling station.

Protest leader Chamlong Srimuang said he would ensure Saturday's rally was peaceful but that demonstrators would continue to hound Thaksin until he steps down. He said demonstrators would march on Sunday to Thaksin's house and hold rallies outside shopping malls in Bangkok.

"We will not march to the palace or any place that disturbs the royal family but will go wherever Thaksin goes to pressure him to resign and appeal to the king to appoint the interim government," Chamlong said.

Large numbers of people from southern Thailand where a Muslim insurgency has left more than 1,300 dead in the past two years were heading to the Thai capital for the rally, said Gen. Jompol Manmai, head of the National Intelligence Agency.

Khulna power plant goes out of order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The 110-megawatt power plant at Khalishpur in Khulna remains out of order due to major mechanical problems since Friday night.

It will take at least three days to carry out repairs on the boilers of the plant. Because of technical glitches, the largest power plant in the south could barely generate around 70 megawatts power.

The demand for electricity in Khulna Zone is 550 MW a day, whereas the supply never exceeds 200 MW mark.

A source in Power Development Board (PDB) said the power situation in 21 districts of Khulna and Barisal divisions and greater Faridpur worsened after the Khalishpur plant had come to a halt.

The national grid is unable to cope with such a huge shortfall. Its interconnection system can harness only about 50 MW power, the source added.

CROSSFIRE KILLING Outlaws threaten to blow up Khulna police headquarters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) has allegedly threatened to blow up the police headquarters in retaliation for the recent 'crossfire.'

On Thursday midnight, a caller identifying himself as a PBCP operative threatened to blow up the Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) Headquarters over cellphone to take revenge for the recent killings of the PBCP men by DB police on the pretext of crossfire incidents.

The DB police arrested Shafiqul Islam, 25, from Morolpara under Phultala upazila of Khulna on Friday afternoon in this connection and seized from his possession the cellphone from which the threat call was made.

During interrogation, Shafiqul told the police that he had given the cellphone to a man named Shohag to sell off the set, but Shohag returned the cellphone a few days ago saying that he could not find a buyer.

Police suspect Shohag to be another cadre of PBCP and a close associate of Mukul Bhuiyan, who was killed in 'crossfire' on March 18 in the city. The seized cellphone contains contact numbers of many other outlaws, police said.

Police could not arrest Shohag up to 4:30pm yesterday.

Following the threat, KMP police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) have been asked to remain on high alert.

The law enforcers are also raiding different areas in the city to nab the criminals.

3 Kushtia BCL men

FROM PAGE 1 upazila. They joined Toshiba Rangs factory in March last year due to economic hardship.

During home visits, they took part in party activities. Organising local youths in the area, they raised voice against low quality of the Tk 2.22 crore construction work of the road from Amla to Halsha, which started a month ago.

The contractor of the work, Nuruzzaman alias Hablu Mollah is the general secretary of Daulatpur Jubo Dal and a relative of ruling party lawmaker in Kushtia-1 constituency Reaz Ahmed Bachhu Mollah.

Following protests of the BCL men, vested interest groups threatened them of dire consequences, family sources said.

Blaming the ruling party cadres for the murders, local Awami League demanded immediate arrest of the killers.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1 Minister Morshed Khan said yesterday.

The prime minister will also attend the D8 summit to be held in Indonesia in May.

Two killed

FROM PAGE 16 Police said criminals yesterday morning killed Doulatur Rahman, 60, allegedly over a dispute concerning a piece of land with his relatives in Ichhapur of Hathazari upazila.

Quoting witnesses and family sources police said unknown criminals swooped on Doulatur after he had an altercation with his relatives over the piece of land. He died on the spot after receiving repeated blows to his body.

Police however arrested three women in this connection but could not ascertain their identity. They suspect the relatives to have been involved in the killing.

In another incident Deen Mohammad, 27, was allegedly killed by his neighbour at a cluster village in Jamijuri of Chandanaihs upazila on Friday night.

Sources said Deen had a dispute with his neighbour over chopping a tree down. None was arrested in this connection.

Road march ends

FROM PAGE 16

to adopt open-pit method in mining for coal in the area, the speakers told the rally.

Environmental experts at the rally demanded immediate cancellation of the Phulbari Coal Project contract signed with AEC.

The affected area might lose natural vegetation and falling water level might harm agriculture, leading to food shortage. The plant might even harm the fish resources of the area as the marshlands would fall within the folds of the mining area, the speakers observed. Though the damage caused by the plant might not be visible in the short-run, the long-term harms could be irreparable, the speakers alleged.

Terming the contract as 'against the interest of the country,' they said extraction of coal in open-pit system would cause damage to the environment of the whole area and will also hinder economic activities in the area.

The speakers also said according to the agreement, AEC would extract coal for 30 years in an open-pit system and would export two thirds of the quantity. The company would have ownership of the mine during the mining period and Bangladesh would receive only a six percent royalty as well as taxes and duties, they said.

The rally was presided over by Engr Sheikh Muhammad Shahidullah where Prof Anu Muhammad, Manjurul Ahsan Khan, Haidar Akbar Khan Rano, Roni Hossain Prince, Moshrefa Mishu, Advocate Abdus Salam and Abdul Moteen Khan spoke.

Ahsan Habib Deepu, an official of AEC, however, dispelled such concerns and said the project would maintain the world's highest environmental standards, and any negative impact on the environment would be managed with high priority.

Local people fear that more than 4,70,000 people of Phulbari,

Nababganj, Birampur and Parbatipur upazilas, including 8,000 of the indigenous communities, would be displaced. AEC however, predicts the number to be around 50,000.

Agitation has already begun in the area with the Phulbari Raksha (Protection) Committee leading the movement. Members of the committee believe the project would be 'suicidal' for Bangladesh.

The committee has been agitating adopting different programmes such as hartals, processions and rallies. Last December, black flags were hoisted all over the area protesting the project.

AEC sources said the affected people would be relocated locally in other villages and in parts of the Phulbari Township.

Around 50,000 people would have to be rehabilitated throughout the mining period, the source added.

AEC is now awaiting an agreement with the government to develop an open-pit coal mine in Phulbari at a cost of US\$ 1.6 billion. The mining plant would extract nearly 572 million tons of coal over a period of 30 years, creating about 10,000 jobs.

If the government signs the deal, the company would go into production in 2008, and it believes it would exploit 15 million tons of coal a year for export and for use in domestic coal-fired power plants.

Asia Energy Corporation (Bangladesh) Private Limited would also build a river port at a cost of \$40 million near the Khulna port to handle shipments of up to eight million tons of coal.

The area has a reserve of about 572 million tons of coal, an AEC source said.

No political party

FROM PAGE 1

as correct and complete by the party secretary, showing the expenditure balance of its funds on the date of declaring the election schedule, the closing balance of the funds on the date of completion of election in all constituencies, and the total amount received by the party, as donation or otherwise, during the period.

Violation of these laws will be punishable with fines up to Tk 10 lakh.

According to the electoral laws, no political party is allowed to spend more than a fixed amount of money during the election period for election purposes, including the expenses for its candidates.

If any political party nominates more than 200 candidates, it can spend up to Tk 1.5 crore. If the number of candidates is between 100 and 200, the expenditure limit is up to Tk 1 crore, and if the number is not more than 100, the limit is Tk 75 lakh.

Former adviser to the caretaker government M Hafizuddin Khan said there is no shortage of electoral laws, but lack of enforcement of these laws has made them ineffective.

"The Election Commission should enforce the laws strictly. Otherwise, no electoral reform will bring good result," he told The Daily Star.

Experts observed that in absence of strict enforcement of the electoral laws, political parties enjoy a kind of liberty regarding their expenditure during election. Use of black money will dominate the next polls, they anticipated.

The EC's bid to ensure transparency in the political parties by introducing a registration system for them in 2001 has also proved futile as the major political parties, including BNP and AL, have been ignoring the system since its inception. A few small political parties, however, have shown

interest in getting registered.

It is interesting that the main opposition AL, which in 2001 had opposed the registration system that aimed at ensuring financial transparency and democracy in the parties, has proposed in its reform proposals to ensure practice of democracy in the political parties.

"The parties that contest in the polls will have to be run based on democratic norms and regulations and regular election of party officials and submit the financial statements to the [Election] Commission," the AL said in its proposal.

The ruling BNP also opposed the registration system in 2001 and now remains silent over the issue.

Experts said that the political parties are preparing for the next parliamentary election and collecting funds to use in the polls amid this situation. The major political parties will again spend crores of taka for their win but will not submit any report regarding their income and expenditure, they fear.

"The major political parties take donations from businessmen and nomination-seekers. But there is no transparency in the process as nobody except the party high commands and donors knows about the amount of the money. This black money is used in the election and encourages corruption in the government," a former adviser to the caretaker government said.

"The businessmen believe in the give-and-take policy. When they donate money to the election fund they expect return and take benefits in illegal ways," he observed.

Tigers complete

FROM PAGE 16

third Bangladeshi batsman to score a century after former national opener Mehrab Hossain (101) and Mohammad Ashraful (100).

Along the way the pocket-side right-hander also featured in a record 175-run partnership for any wicket with captain Habibul Bashar, who played the best supporting actor's role with a superb unbeaten 64. Their fourth wicket stand surpassed the previous mark of 170 for the first wicket between Shahriar Hossain and Mehrab Hossain which was done on the same day in the 1999 tri-nation Men's Cup against Zimbabwe.

However it did not look so easy after Bangladesh were reduced to 62-3, with Shahriar Nafees (20), Mohammad Ashraful (11) and Aftab Ahmed (9) already back in the dressing room. But in a series of records, the home side reserved their best for the last with Rajin and Bashrah showing the maturity that one can expect of a Test playing nation.

Rajin, whose previous best was 82 against India in December 2004, played every shot almost to perfection in his 113-ball knock that featured 16 glorious boundaries. He reached the magical three-figure mark with a sweetly timed four to the mid-wicket boundary off paceman Toni Suji amidst applause from a capacity 16,000 crowd at the fourth purpose-built cricket venue of the country.

The only blemish of Rajin's innings was when he missed an attempted lofted drive against Kenyan captain Steve Tikolo at 40. But wicketkeeper Morris Ouma, who had a miserable day behind the stumps, also missed the chance to effect an easy stumping.

Bashrah on the other hand lived up to his growing reputation as a motivator when the chips are down. The Bangladesh captain, who was involved

Maoist rebels kill 13 in India

AFP, New Delhi

Thirteen civilians were killed in eastern India when their vehicle hit a landmine believed to have been planted by Maoist rebels and intended for security forces, police said yesterday.

"Thirteen people were killed and four were injured in the attack on Friday night," a police superintendent, who did not wish to be named, told AFP by phone from Raipur, capital of Chattisgarh state.

He said the rebels probably mistook the jeep for a police vehicle, as security forces have been the main target of Maoist violence in the state.

The incident took place attack in Kanker district, about 135 kilometres (85 miles) from Raipur.

In a separate incident, rebels also killed three policemen in an attack on a jail in neighbouring Orissa state and set free all 40 prisoners, police said.

The Maoists, who have bases in 11 of India's 29 states, say they are fighting to restore the rights of neglected tribespeople and landless farmers.

BGMEA

FROM PAGE 1

A top BGMEA official said 43 of the 53 industrial units are in operation while the remaining 10 remained shut for the last three years. He said the inspection team identified 169 garment factories vulnerable to fire.

Stung by the Chittagong KTS garment factory fire on February 25, the apex body in apparel sector took the initiative. At least 59 workers were killed and 150 others injured in the RMG factory fire.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) has also planned to launch similar drive to ensure safety of workers.

The association has already instructed its nearly 1000 members to keep the exits of the factories open.

Pvt land phones

FROM PAGE 16

WorldTel obtained a licence in July 2001 to provide 3,00,000 land phones in Dhaka at an investment of about \$300 million on a build-operate-own basis with four years of co-exclusive right with Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) but it went to court when the telecoms regulator cancelled the right terming it anti-competitive and violative of Bangladesh Telecommunications Act, 2001.

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on August 23 last year dismissed WorldTel's petition for retaining its co-exclusive right to provide landlines in Dhaka, paving the way for private land phone companies to operate.

The central zone accounts for about 60 per cent of the total demand for fixed phones in the country. The demand for fixed phones in the capital is estimated to be around 10 lakh while the registered demand with the BTB is about two lakh, sources said.

The BTB does not have the capability to meet the growing demand for land phones due to infrastructural inadequacy, the sources mentioned.

25 MLAs resign

FROM PAGE 16

Earlier yesterday the Congress' Madhya Pradesh unit submitted a memorandum to Governor Balam Jakhra, accusing Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, ten of his ministerial colleagues and three MLAs of occupying more than one office of profit and demanding their dismissal.

"By virtue of being an MP (representing Vidisha) Chouhan is distributing finances under MPLADS and also utilising state government funds," the memorandum said.

The memo alleged that ministers Himmat Kothari, Babulal Gaur, Gopal Bhargava, Yashodhara Rajee Scindia, Jagdish Deora, Tukojirao Pawar, Ramakant Tiwari, Rustam Singh, Vijay Shah and Ch Chandrabhan Singh were also chairpersons of various bodies.

Others named were MP Krishna Murari Moghe and legislators Lal Singh Arya, Shivraj Shah and Lakshman Singh.

The delegation included Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Jamuna Devi, senior MLAs Harvansh Singh, Indrajit Kumar, Ajay Singh and Dr Govind Singh Rajput.

Clarification

Team Leader of the Jamuna-Meghna River Erosion Mitigation Project (JUREMP) Knut Oberhagemann sent a clarification to a report published in The Daily Star on March 18 with the headline "No river training plan yet to check erosion."

Knut asserted that he did not say, "It takes around one to five years to get the proposals approved." Rather, he had said, "Government approval of proposals for riverbank protection commonly takes one to two years after preparing designs based on the site's condition. Subsequently it takes one or two years to implement work on major rivers. Hence the implementation time from planning to completion of construction could be up to five years."

Other groups

FROM PAGE 1

They have not got clues also to Sylhet cinema blast in 2004, and the poisoning of fish at a Sylhet shrine in 2003 and at a Chittagong shrine in 2004. No groups have claimed responsibility for any of those attacks.

Other militant groups including now banned Harkatul Jihad al Islami (HuJI) that were active in the late 90s might have had hands in the attacks and their role needs to be investigated, an intelligence official told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

Mufti Hannan, the detained operations commander of HuJI, has only admitted planting the 86kg bomb at the meeting venue of the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina at Kotalipara in Gopalganj.

Another investigator said the HuJI might also have had roles in some other bomb attacks and stressed the need for taking Hannan into further remand for interrogation in this regard.

"He may hold some significant clues to those incidents even if he maintains that his group did not make those attacks," said a well-placed source.

Sources, meantime, yesterday said the JMB kingpins have admitted in last two days to their involvement in slaughtering five people at the shrine of Khwaja Abdul Gafur Chisti at Begungram village in Kalai upazila of Joypurhat on January 20, 2003 and the attempt on life of AL leader Tarapada Poddar at Mollahat in Bagerhat on August 16, 2002.

Earlier some investigators had told the media that they would be able to unravel all the mystery behind the blasts and other militant attacks since 1999 once JMB chief Abdur Rahman and his deputy Bangla Bhai are rounded up.

But the JMB heavyweights are

yet to provide information about their links with the other attacks.

"It seems likely other militant groups might be responsible for the attacks that took place before August 17 last year," said an intelligence official.

The source, however, said different groups were behind the attacks made with grenades.

"The bomber groups and the grenade attackers are not the same," he added.

Grenades were used in attacks on British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury at Shahjalal Shrine in Sylhet, Sheikh Hasina's rally at Bangabandhu Avenue, Sylhet Mayor Badruddin Ahmed Kamran and Urs again at the Shahjalal Shrine.

Cause of jolt

FROM PAGE 16 said Soleman Ali, a resident of one of the buildings.

Mohammad Khorshed, 35, and Shahinur Begum, 21, residents of the building were injured as the debris fell upon them around midnight.

The Star reporter found a portion of the kitchen of the ground floor dislodged while the plaster and bricks around a small pipe fell in chunks from the ceiling. Besides, there are huge cracks on the walls.

"As people didn't use gas for cooking 30 years ago, pipes were set at every flat to blow the kitchen smoke out through the roof. Following setting up of gas connections, the pipes were removed and the ceilings plastered," said a resident Mohammad Selim, adding that now the plasters and bricks of that weak spots are falling down.

Constructed in 1968 to house 40 families, the buildings are now inhabited by more than 80 families, including those who have rented rooms from the allottees.

Independence Day

FROM PAGE 1

It was their determination to free the motherland and the all-out support of the people that had ultimately led to victory.

In 1971, a section of people led by Jamaat-e-Islami leaders opposed the Liberation War and helped the Pakistani forces kill freedom fighters and nation's intellectuals.

The collaborators include Golam Azam, Motiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Muzahid. Ironically, both Nizami and Muahid have been enjoying state-power as ministers forming alliance with BNP for the last four and a half years.

PROGRAMMES The day's celebrations begin with 31 gun salutes at dawn.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will lead the nation in paying tributes to the martyrs of the Liberation War by placing wreaths at the National Memorial in Savar at the sunrise.

Leaders of the ruling and opposition parties, socio-political organisations, freedom fighters and people of all walks of life will then place wreaths at the memorial.

The national flag will be hoisted atop public and private buildings. Important public buildings will be illuminated tonight to give them a dazzling look.

The day is a public holiday.

The president will take salute at a ceremonial march-past by contingents of freedom fighters, armed forces, BDR, police, BNCC and ansar-VDP at the National Parade Ground in the capital at 9:00am. The prime minister will also attend the function.

Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force bands will perform at Crescent Lake, Farmgate and Mirpur Stadium from 3:00pm to 5:00pm. They will play patriotic and popular tunes for the entertainment of the people.

Besides, a few ships of the Bangladesh Navy will be kept open to visitors from 2:00pm to 5:00pm in Sadarghat (Dhaka), Narayanganj, Chittagong, Khulna, Mongla and Barisal.

Bangladesh Navy ships will remain dressed overall during the day and will be illuminated in the night.

The day's programmes also include special manajat after Fajr prayers at all mosques of army, navy and air force across the country seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country and development of the armed forces.

MESSAGES

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in separate messages have paid deep respect to the martyrs of the Liberation War.

SECURITY

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) have beefed up security to check subversive incidents during the Independence Day celebration programmes.

Police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel will set up check-posts at different parts of the city and check randomly vehicles and the commuters on suspicion.

Adequate number of police and Rab men will be on hand at all the venues today, with more security at the key venues -- National Memorial at Savar, National Parade Square, Bangabhaban, the shrine of former president Ziaur Rahman and at all