

'Protect Mehendiganj from erosion'

BSS, Dhaka

Mehendiganj Rakkha Committee yesterday called upon the caretaker government to take immediate steps to protect the inhabitants of the nearby vanished Mehendiganj upazila from the erosion of the Meghna, the Tentulia and the Mashkata rivers.

The committee members at a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) said the river erosion has taken a serious turn and vast area of the upazila has already been devoured by those rivers.

During the last two months 9,480 people of 1,343 families have become homeless due to erosion.

Besides, the rivers have gobbled up 10,501 acres of land, 17 schools and colleges, three madrasas, 22 mosques and temples, 1,222 ponds, 18 kilometer roads, 42 business establishments, three big hats and 500 acres of betel nut groves.

Committee Secretary Mohammad Abdur Rob read out a paper at the press conference while its President Fakhru Islam Chowdhury, joint secretaries Azizul Islam Bhuiyan and Fuad Chowdhury, poet Asad Chowdhury, Advocate Nasirul Haq Chowdhury and Syed Altaf Hossain also spoke on the occasion.

The speakers said Mehendiganj has a history of its own in education

and culture, trade and commerce, agriculture and artistry. Its contribution to the national achievement and growth is immense, they said.

But the Meghna, the Tentulia and the Mashkata have become the 'fait accompli' of three lakh people of the upazila. They said the mighty rivers have already swallow the hearths and homes and everything of most of the areas of several unions including Gubindapur, Jagalia, Darirchar-Khajuria, Bashanchar and Andermanik.

They said immediate assistance is needed for the erosion-hit people. The committee leaders called upon the caretaker government to make an accurate list of the affected people who have no place to take refuge.

They demanded implementation of the Krug Mission Plan taken in 1953 to protect the people of this part of the country from the grip of the river erosion.

They also called upon the well-to-do section of the society to come forward in aid of the erosion-stricken people of Mehendiganj.

The press conference was followed by a video-presentation on the river erosion.



Brac Bank Managing Director and CEO Imran Rahman hands over a cheque for Tk 13.5 lakh to Brac Chairperson Fazle Hasan Abed at the Brac Centre in the city yesterday to distribute relief among the flood-affected people.

Two killed in Satkhira road crashes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Two people were killed in separate road accidents in Shyamnagar and Tala upazilas yesterday.

The dead were identified as Wazed Ali, 48 son of Hakim Moral of village Khagraghat in Shyamnagar upazila and Tariqul Islam, 22 son of Abdus Sattar of village Tailkupi in Tala upazila.

Quoting local police said the accident occurred when a motorcycle hit Wazed Ali while he was crossing the road in front of Iswaripur union parishad office in Shyamnagar upazila, leaving him injured seriously.

He succumbed to his injuries on the way to Shyamnagar Hospital, police said.

Meanwhile, a Satkhira-bound truck knocked down Tariqul Islam while he was crossing the road in front of M/s Majumdar filling station at Patkelghata in Tala upazila on Satkhira-Khulna road, leaving him injured seriously.

He succumbed to his injuries on the way to Satkhira Hospital.

Laid-off, labourers try their hands

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survive. It is feared crimes would spread fast at the hands of the almost starving community if they are not paid back or rehabilitated.

Locals who have undergone fearsome experiences of outlawed Sarbarahas fear in absence of political activities, extremists might take advantage of the situation by inducing the jobless and foodless people into their operations.

Sociologists fear if living in such uncertainty persists it may leave serious impacts especially on the mindset of children who are dropping out of schools as a consequence of non-payment of labourers' wages.

The present situation would put them into a state of uncertainty that might lead them to live by unfair means, particularly involving in crimes.

Locals said a week ago Rapid Action Battalion caught two snatchers in the area.

The incidence of stealing electric wire has also increased and I found a power connection to our factory was snapped yesterday morning," said Mamun, a guard of Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills Ltd.

The owner of Bhai Bhai Ghosh Bhandar in front of the main entrance to PJML also found head of his tube-well missing about a month ago.

"I'm not in a position to borrow money as I already owe Tk 25,000 to my brother, Tk 8,000 to a mortgage agency and Tk 2,000 to shopkeepers," said Jailli, a retrenched worker of PJML, who did not get his last six months' salary.

"What should I do for my family? I cannot see them die without food so I went out one night with one of my friends and stole electric wire during load shedding," said Monir [not his real name] who confessed to having involved in theft once.

"My father sent me to Dhaka to

earn for the family several weeks ago. I lived there for two weeks and could not manage a job. I don't know what should I do for my family in the arrived situation," said Hemayet, a student of class eight at PJM High School, who deserted education after PJML was closed.

"The situation may bring down a disaster for the society if proper rehabilitation measures are not taken on time," said Prof ASM Atikur Rahman of Institute of Social Welfare and Research Institute, Dhaka University.

"The uncertainty over fundamental human demands may lead anyone to anywhere and consequences in the society might go beyond imagination," he noted.

US Embassy scholarships for madrasa students

UNB, Dhaka

US Chargé d' Affaires Geeta Pasi awarded micro-scholarships to 60 madrasa students for the study of English.

The access programme provides micro-scholarships for the study of English to competitively selected students from six madrasas.

The programme was launched in the fall of 2004 and this is the third group to participate in the programme.

The scholarship winning students are divided into smaller classes which meet three times a week for a period of 18 months at the Language Proficiency Center (LPC) at Banani on the city at times that do not conflict with their regular class schedules.

BNP leaders' canal grabbing causes waterlogging

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violated their lease agreements are Purbanchal Fuels CNG Ltd, CabExpress BD Ltd and Hightec CNG refuelling station -- owned by former BNP MPs Monirul Haque Chowdhury, GM Siraj, former commerce adviser Barkatullah Bulu and detained MP Salauddin's S Ahmad Foundation.

Liaquat-al-Faruque, additional chief engineer of Water Development Board (WDB), told The Daily Star, "On the one hand, the link road from the middle of Jatrabari-Kanchpur road to Narayanganj was constructed without proper drainage facilities. On the other hand, the CNG stations and other illegal structures are creating waterlogging in this area."

RHD's Superintendent Engineer Delwar Hossain said chief engineer of RHD has issued a letter regarding this issue to all its field offices asking them to cancel contracts of those who violated the

lease agreements.

Moreover, Mozammel Haque, additional chief engineer of RHD and in charge of the DND area told The Daily Star, "In fact we are trying to work together with WDB and we will recover the canals." He, however, declined to make any comment when asked why they did not take any action against the encroachers earlier.

Although the authorities have been negligent over the issue, waterlogging victims living at Jatrabari, Dholaipar, Shekdi, Donia, Nayanagar, Kajla, Chhontek, Della, Dogair, and Matuail had clashed with the influential land grabbers on several occasions.

After locals requested the Purbanchal CNG authorities to comply with the approved design while constructing a box culvert, M Nazrul Islam, a Jatiya Chhatra Samaj leader, filed extortion cases against them with Jatrabari Police Station on behalf of the CNG sta-

tion.

A few of Jatrabari residents on condition of anonymity said, "After 1/11, joint forces with the assistance from the locals demolished some parts of the boundary wall surrounding CabEx CNG station, but only a month later, they rebuilt the wall and resumed their operation."

Suffers in the DND project area are losing their patience and are willing to put up resistance against the illegal land grabbers.

Moslem Uddin Sardar, president of Jolaboddhota Niroshan O Poribesh Unnayan Committee, said, "For the last few years, RHD and WDB kept on saying that influential people had grabbed the land and the canals... but we will not keep quiet over the issue any longer. We know how to fight."

After the local residents suffered from waterlogging for about a month, the WDB finally decided to reclaim the encroached land and water bodies. WDB has claimed to

have recovered 30 kilometres of the 60 kilometre-long canal.

However, this correspondent during a visit in the area found all CNG stations still standing in full glory over the encroached land.

The RHD on July 10 and 11 served official notices, signed by Sanaul Haque, executive engineer of RHD, to establishments that grabbed land illegally. In the notices, the business establishment heads were asked to surrender the land that had been taken over illegally. They were also asked to build 10-foot-wide box culverts for proper drainage.

During an investigation, it was found that field level engineers of RHD hardly visit the sites to monitor the ongoing excavation work. They never even bother to warn the lessees when any violation is detected.

The land grabbers are taking advantage of the lax situation. For instance, CabEx was found building

a four-foot-wide box culvert ignoring RHD's instructions to build a 10-foot one.

A disappointed local businessman, Nasimul Haidar Pintu, said, "Look, these people have already grabbed 300 decimals of land against the approved 27-30 decimals. Now they are digging the canal any way they please. The 10-foot space [in the approved box culvert] is not even wide enough to drain out the liquid waste and sewage. ...How would this four-foot culvert drain out the water?"

To resolve the drainage crisis in the area, the WDB has forwarded a project proposal worth Tk 233 crore to the government. The project proposes to reclaim canals in the DND area and install new pumps to pump out stagnated water.

The DND project area developed in 1968 as an agricultural pocket on 56.79 square kilometres of land in Fatullah and Siddhirganj thana of Narayanganj and Demra and

Shyampur thana of Dhaka district. It was considered to be one of the most successful projects of the then government.

Institute of Water Modelling (IWM) in 2006 pointed out that serious water congestion inside the DND area has been caused due to absence of adequate drainage passage through Dhaka-Narayanganj link road. The affected points are Raghunathpur, (over DL-1 canal), Bhuiyanagar (over Drainage 1/ Pagla khal), Shibub market (Nol Khal/ Fatullah Khal), Chanmani (Fatullah branch khal) and Ishdair (NR-2 khal).

Furthermore, widening of Dhaka-Chittagong highway also created water pockets at three places -- Shonir Akhra (DL-4 canal), Shanarpur (Drainage-2) and Mouchak (Drainage 2).

CA firm on holding polls by 2008-end

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working to hold election to local government bodies before holding the general election.

He said the interim government's objective is to create a "level playing field" before elections so that all political parties can take part in the polls.

The CA mentioned that there have been sweeping reforms in the country, including a purge of out-worn politics as well as legal actions against corruption and abuse of power.

"The government is providing all necessary support to the Election Commission, particularly in preparing a flawless voter list with voters' photographs, so that it can arrange general election within the announced timeline," he told the meet.

Fakhruddin said preparation of voter list with photographs is being made in Rajshahi city. The voter listing will start in Rangpur municipality on August 19.

He also mentioned Election Commission's move to hold dialogue with political parties on various matters, including political party registration.

The government would do its responsibility, if required, regarding reform of rules and regulations as well as the EC carry out its responsi-

bility where necessary, he added.

The head of caretaker government called upon all sections of people to build social resistance against corruption. "Raise your voice against corruption to build a corruption-free society...Do not practise, indulge in or harbour corruption," he said.

Fakhruddin noted that application of law is imperative to curb corruption and, similarly, social resistance is also necessary to check corruption.

He expressed his optimism that it would be possible to build up resistance against corruption if people and government work together.

On floods, Fakhruddin said government and private initiatives would have to be strengthened to prevent post-flood waterborne diseases like diarrhoea. If adequate preventive measures can be taken, the outbreak of waterborne diseases can be checked.

About post-flood rehabilitation, he said the main job would be to agricultural rehabilitation through supplying seeds and credits to farmers timely.

In this regard, he directed the authorities concerned, particularly Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank, to provide necessary loan to farmers in time.

Fakhruddin also asked for need

assessment for other rehabilitation works like roads, bridges and embankments and educational institutions

While talking on Monga, a perennial problem of some northern areas, earlier in a separate programme at the same venue, the chief adviser said if all are determined to work unitedly, such lean-time penalty would be gone forever.

He asked the field-level government officials to involve people in various government projects to deliver the fruits of development to the people.

On local demands, Fakhruddin said Shyamasunder canal in Rangpur town would be re-excavated but stressed the need for its maintenance.

He said recovery operation of illegally possessed canals has started in Dhaka and the drive would continue through this month. "Filling up of canals is one of the main reasons for floods in the country," he added.

LGRD Adviser M Anwarul Iqbal and Agriculture Adviser CS Karim also spoke at the meeting.

National Security Council under process

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Institute (BEI) in association with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at the BEI auditorium in the capital.

Diplomats and representatives of the development partners and NGOs were present at the function, which will be followed by six lectures on anti-corruption efforts, energy and power crisis, human rights, corporate governance and public-private partnerships, in next few weeks.

Iftakhar Ahmed Chowdhury said it would require a national consensus to establish the National Security Council.

The government will figure out the national consensus through the ongoing debates on the formation of the Council, he said responding to a query on the mechanism of having national consensus over the issue.

Referring to revamping the foreign policy, the adviser said, "We shall have a foreign policy that ensures national interests. The ministry's role in this regard is to identify the national consensus and work accordingly."

The government is working for capacity building of the foreign missions and officials for better negotiations in multilateral and

bilateral frameworks, he noted.

Mentioning that the country witnessed ineffectiveness of parliament, widespread corruption both in private and public sectors and highly polarised politics in past years, the adviser said the present government had undertaken reform measures to bring about positive changes which include strengthening the Election Commission, Public Service Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission.

Responding to a question on how wise it is for the government to go for so many reforms within a 16-month timeframe, he said the government's goal is to establish an institutional and legal framework, which will be sustainable and help the next governments ensure better governance and rule of law.

"No agency of the government will be above laws," he said, adding that the government wants to set a parameter to make a shift in the public mindset about crimes and corruption.

When asked if the government has any cost-benefit calculation on the export of manpower and remittance, the adviser said there was no such calculation but it would be imperative to do the cost-benefit calculation.

IFC attempts to delay 2 power projects

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the idea that a 450 MW power plant may be built near the gas field.

The site for this power plant has not yet been marked or procured and there is no power infrastructure to evacuate the power to be generated by the new plant.

Yet, the IFC wants the government to have this power project set up first. It has even pushed the government to hold a "road show" for Bibiyana power project beginning on August 14 at the expense of the government. The first show will take place at Radisson Hotel on the 14th, followed by a show in Dubai on August 15 and another in Singapore on August 17.

Sources said preparations are on to hold this road show though the idea has surprised most officials.

"Road shows are meant for uncertain projects like oil and gas exploration bidding, and not power projects. Power projects have high degree of certainty. And if IFC is so enthusiastic, why doesn't it hold road show itself? Why waste government money?" said an official.

But the IFC gives its own argument. In its August 3 letter, IFC's Chief Investment Officer Denise Leonard says "Having three transactions in the market at the same time is going to create less competition. From our discussions with about 60 regional power companies, we have concluded at this point of time, only 3-6 companies are solidly to moderately

interested in Bangladesh's IPP market."

The IFC letter reinforced its argument saying that floating three tenders at the same time will confuse the market.

The letter also said that in the recent past, the country's reputation of transparency has been significantly damaged and it has to be restored. The sector's reputation will not be restored until at least one solidly transparent project is successfully done. It would be better to focus on achieving that goal with one transaction, it said.

But such a claim is contradicted by officials. "Back in 1997-98, we floated both Meghnaghat-1 and Haripur 360 MW power projects plus four barge mount power projects. There had been huge response. In fact some companies like the AES found it comfortable to submit bids in multiple projects," said an official dealing with IPPs.

"Surely if we float Bibiyana project's tender, we can't expect much bids. Bibiyana is far from being ready for tender floating now. But, if we float tenders for Sirajganj and Meghnaghat projects now, we can expect up to 20 participants," he said.

"Once we have the ADB or the IFC technically assisting us in power projects, that should automatically increase bidders' confidence about transparency," another official noted.

"We expect the IFC to assist us fairly. But this seems like the IFC is eager to help Chevron on a priority basis. Our power crisis is getting the low priority here," the official added.

Sirajganj power project would have come up by now. But the Khaleda Zia government cancelled the first successful bid of this project in early 2004 as it was going to Summit Power, which Khaleda considered a company sympathetic to the Awami League.

Follow up bids for this projects were being modified in such a way that certain over-night power companies belonging to the BNP sympathisers might bag the project.

Meghnaghat-3 power project also saw similar dealings by the Khaleda government during 2004-05. The government desperately tried to award contract for this project to an unknown company -- Cadogan-Manning which was basically a shell company of Bashundhara group through unsolicited negotiations.

As these moves failed to yield any result, both the projects were delayed. The caretaker government took a fresh initiative a few months back to place both the projects under the ADB consultancy so that proper bidding can take place where investors would really be interested to participate.