

## DREDGING IGNORES TASKFORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

# Balu to be widened up to 37 metres in place of 100

PINAKI ROY

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) prepares to dredge the Balu river, the major channel to drain floodwaters out of the city, without adhering to the recommendations of the government taskforce on rivers flowing through and around the capital.

Comprising government officials, experts and environmentalists, the taskforce had recom-

mended widening up the river for at least 100 metres. The recommendations unveiled on December 26, 2002 were based on the Cadastral Survey (CS), the means to define or re-establish boundaries of public and/or private land.

But the BIWTA are now going to dredge the river only for up to 37 metres in width, almost one third of the recommended width.

Environmentalists fear once the river is dredged without scrupu-

lously following the recommendations it would not be possible to increase the width in future leading to massive environmental problem for the capital with an ever-growing population.

According to the Cadastral Survey (CS) conducted for the period from 1888 through 1940, the Balu River was more than 100 metres wide. At some points it was 200 to 250 metres. Even the recently published government documents describe the river to be 100 metres

wide and 45 kilometres long.

But the water transport authorities plan to dredge the channel only for 37 metres (120 feet) wide as locals have already encroached on either bank of the river and managed to have land documents, said BIWTA Secretary Monowar Hossain.

He added, "If the government should dredge the river as wide as 300 feet, it would be a project requiring a massive land acquisition."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

An aerial shot of the river Balu, an important means of draining out floodwater from the capital.

## A noble move to save Sidr-hit children

SHAMIM ASHRAF, from Patuakhali

Among many good Samaritans who came forward with aid for the Sidr victims in Kuakata, Shibli Mostafa definitely stands out.

Around 150 local children, shocked by the devastation of Sidr, gather every day at Shibli's Children Debate Training Centre beside the sea dyke and spend three hours of educational activities followed by a welcome evening meal which remains a big worry for the Sidr-hit low income group locals.

The programme was launched by a group of friends under the banner of "Mamar Bari" immediately after the cyclone devastated the region.

\*Following Sidr's attack, I

noticed that the children were left traumatised and unattended by their parents who were busy rebuilding their houses," Shibli, executive director of an NGO, Working for Better Life, told The Daily Star.

Children in this part of the country are often victims of malnourishment and early marriage and the school dropout rate is also quite high, he said, adding, "Sidr has left them more vulnerable to diseases."

Shibli said he feared many children who have lost their textbooks and whose schools were damaged in the cyclone might consequently lose interest in education. Many families may marry off their teenage girls during this

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## 30,000 fishermen have lone usable pond

HASAN JAHD TUSHER, from Meher Alir Char, Sundarban

Around 30,000 fishermen at different Sidr-affected chars adjacent to the Sundarbans are facing an acute crisis of drinking water as the November 15 cyclone left badly polluted all the four ponds which used to be the source of potable water for them.

Of the four ponds, three located at Office Kellar Char, Narikelbariar Char and Sholar Char still contain highly contaminated water with no steps as yet for its purification.

Water in the other pond, at Meher Alir Char, has been purified to some extent with individual initiative. And several thousand fishermen from nine chars now collect water from this pond every

day. Fishermen at these chars have demanded that the authorities take immediate steps to clean these ponds as diarrhoea has broken out in different areas due to crisis of drinkable water. And any delay in this regard might lead to an epidemic, they feared.

Meanwhile, the administration is providing purified water received as US relief at Maron Char. But fishermen hardly take this water following a rumour that it causes diarrhoea.

At Meher Alir Char Thursday morning, it was found that hundreds of fishermen had already gathered around the eight acre-pond to collect water.

Many of them had come from

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Fishermen collect "drinking" water for their days at sea from a large pond in Sidr-hit Meherchar of Bagerhat as this pond is the only source of sweet water in the area.

## 18 ancient clay seals found at Bhasu Bihar

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

Archaeologists have discovered 18 ancient clay seals, mostly from the Pala dynasty, and two brick-built structures at Bhasu Bihar archaeological site in Shibganj upazila of Bogra during an excavation.

One of the clay seals bears the first "Dharmachakra" message of Gautam Buddha inscribed on it, said Nahid Sultana, custodian and a member of the excavation team.

A seven-member team of the Archaeology Department headed by Regional Director Abdul Khaleque started the excavation work on 22 November.

Nahid Sultana said most of the 18 seals are 1,000 years old.

A few small pieces of bronze and two ancient brick structures were also found in separate excavations in the site.

Nahid said the department

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



PHOTO: HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU

An ancient brick-built structure at a dig at Bhasu Bihar of Shibganj upazila in Bogra. Archaeologists also discovered clay seals, inset left, dating back to the Pala dynasty and one "Dharmachakra" message seal of Gautam Buddha.

## Dhaka offers to host Saarc climate meet

UNB, New Delhi

Bangladesh yesterday offered to host a Saarc ministerial conference on climate change in line with the informal consultations during the last UN General Assembly session.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury made the offer at the meeting of the Saarc Council of Ministers in New Delhi.

The adviser stressed the importance of climate change and urged that the Saarc members states issue a strongly worded document, to be transmitted to the ongoing Bali Conference on Environment, emphasising a common position and pointing to the vulnerabilities of countries with long and low-lying coastlines.

He said Bangladesh sees the Saarc region as a zone of peace and development, emphasising that

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

## FAREWELL TO US MARINES

# US starts planning rehabilitation in cyclone-hit areas

UNB, Dhaka

The United States has started planning to help with the rehabilitation of the cyclone-devastated areas as well as preparing measures to mitigate losses in future crises, US Charge d' Affaires Geeta Pasi said yesterday.

"We were here before the cyclone, we were here during the initial emergency relief and we will be here to assist with recovery and rehabilitation," she said while addressing a group of government and military officials, NGO repre-

sentatives and diplomats at a function arranged at the Armed Forces Division (AFD) to bid farewell to US marines.

Pasi said the US military currently assisting Bangladesh will now hand over their immediate relief mission to the US Mission in Dhaka.

The immediate response by the Bangladesh government and US civilian and military personnel was truly impressive, she said.

The envoy said she is proud of US military's rapid reaction in a

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

## Saifur's unity move yet to see success

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

The initiatives taken by acting BNP Chairman Saifur Rahman to bring unity in the party have apparently failed due to the rigid stance of pro-Khaleda leaders.

The leaders of the Saifur-led faction are blaming a few party leaders close to BNP Secretary General Khondaker Delwar Hossain for creating obstacles to bringing unity in the party.

"Personal ego of certain people has been hampering the process of bringing unity," Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, member of the party's standing committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Commenting on Delwar's remark about holding talks between Saifur and Chairperson Khaleda Zia to settle the dispute, Mahbubur said, "I think they [Delwar-led leaders] should try to hold talks with the chairperson. If necessary, our leaders will also talk to her."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

## Mob lynches 2 fleeing killers of young man

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mob beat to death two unidentified young assailants on the River Burigunga when they were trying to flee after gunning down an alleged criminal in suburban South Keraniganj yesterday afternoon.

Police suspect that the slain gunmen killed the alleged criminal following an earlier feud among them.

The gunned down man was identified as Mohammad Mamun, 33, of Khetpar of Pargandaria village under South Keraniganj police station. Mamun was also the owner of a grocery shop.

One of the two slain gunmen was 30-year old wearing black pants and an olive coloured shirt while the other was 25-year old wearing a pair of jeans.

Witnesses said the gunmen shot Mamun to death while he was coming out of his residence around 2:45pm. Killing Mamun, they tried

to flee the scene with the local people chasing them. The two young assailants tried to cross the River Burigunga on a boat at Char Meererbagh. But the mob on board several other boats surrounded the fleeing boat and beat to death the gunmen with bamboos and wooden sticks on the river.

Nurul Huq, the boatman who was forced by the two gunmen to ferry them, said, "The two criminals compelled me to ferry them on my boat at gunpoint. But the people on other boats encircled mine and beat the criminals to death."

Sazzad Selim, officer-in-charge (OC) of South Keraniganj police station, told The Daily Star, "The mob beat the two criminals to death with bamboos and wooden sticks on the river, when they were trying to flee after killing Mamun, who himself had been accused of killing a powerful man of the locality, Shamsul Islam, in 2004."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

## HAJJ FLIGHTS

# Biman gets four extra slots from Saudi Arabia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd received four extra slots (prescribed timing for arriving and departure of flights) from the Civil Aviation Authority of Saudi Arabia, which apparently would remove the uncertainty of 1,600 people making the pilgrimage in Makkah.

"Uncertainty of carrying about 1,600 of the remaining hajj pilgrims to Jeddah is over as we got extra four slots from the Saudi Civil Aviation Authority," told Abdul Mumud Khan, general manager, flight operations (central control), of Biman, to The Daily Star last night.

"It was not possible for Biman to carry all the aspirant pilgrims who are now in Dhaka, unless Biman got permission for more slots from the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

## Efforts on to free Brac employee, says Afghan FM

UNB, New Delhi

Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Spanta informed Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury that they were continuing efforts to seek the release of abducted Brac employee Nurul Islam.

During a meeting on the sidelines of the Saarc ministerial meeting, Spanta said a task force composed of the ministries concerned and security officials regularly meets at the foreign ministry in Kabul to examine the developments.

He said currently Islam is being kept in an unidentified place in Kharwan district of Logon Province, and "the security authorities have detained the brother and several other close relatives of the mastermind."

Spanta said the Afghan government is abstaining from taking the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

## The huge tidal surge and the lone castaway

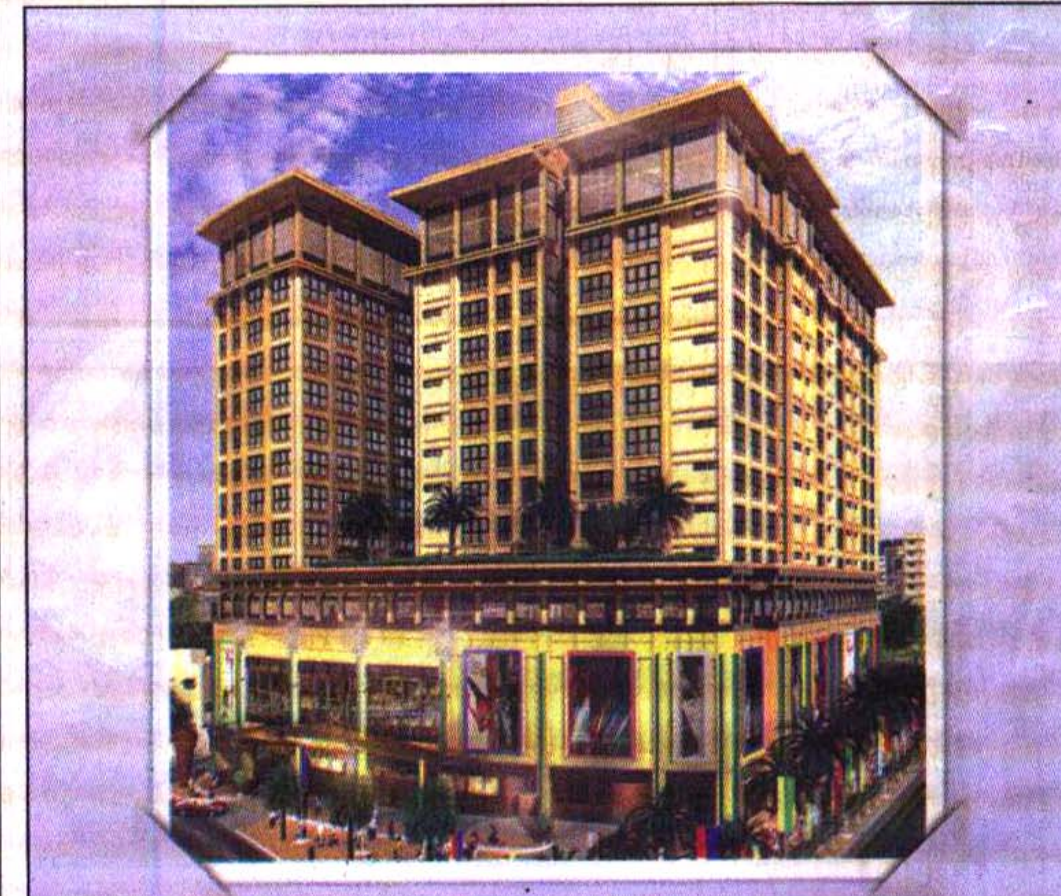
HASAN JAHD TUSHER, back from the Sundarbans

"Bhaiya [brother] I'll die. You try to live. Please don't let go of the bamboo pole. Tell mom to pray for me and you also pray for me," these were the last words of a young man to his eldest brother before being washed away by a heavy tidal wave in the Bay of Bengal in the fateful evening of November 14, when Cyclone Sidr hit the country's coastal areas with its deadly wrath.

Mohammad Nazrul Islam, 20, survived the cyclone but his brother Mohammad Abul Kalam, 15 could not. Hailing from Shekherkhil under Bashkhali upazila in Chittagong, they went fishing for a fish trader deep in the Bay of Bengal, a week after the Eid-ul-Fitr, to work their way out of a loan of Tk 45,000 they had taken from Rashid Miah for their sister Taslima's wedding.

"Before our fishing boat

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



In Gulshan...

(Coming soon!)