

Matia seeks Danish help for dredging of rivers

UNB, Dhaka

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury yesterday sought Danish assistance in water resources management, especially dredging of rivers, so vital for the country's agriculture.

The minister sought the assistance when Danish ambassador to Bangladesh Einar Heibogaard Jensen paid a courtesy call on her at the Secretariat yesterday, an agriculture ministry official said.

During the meeting, Matia said water resources management is closely related to agriculture and asked for assistance in dredging, increase of sweet water supply and development activities in char areas for boosting agriculture.

The Danish envoy assured the minister of having a look at areas on which assistance was sought.

Ambassador Jensen apprised the minister of the second phase of the Agriculture Sector Programme Support (ASPS II) for the period of 2006-2011. The overall objective of the programme is improved living conditions of poor marginal and small farmer households through enhanced, integrated and sustainable agricultural productivity.

The major features of ASPS II are focus on reducing poverty in special poor areas, training of millions of farmers, promoting local government and decentralisation in crops, fisheries and livestock development, promotion of farmers' organisations and capacity building of partner organisations.

The combined budget for the programme stands at 610 million Danish Kroner (approximately Tk 725.25 crore).

Of this, government's contribution is Tk 93.94 crore while remaining Tk 631.46 crore will be funded by Demark.

Under ASPS II, 200,000 poor households will be trained on integrated crop management while 500,000 others to be trained on improved aquaculture and livestock technology, and some 250 kilometer rural roads will be constructed and 2.3 million labour days will be created to the benefit of 15,000 rural women.

Under the first phase of ASPS I for 2005-2009 period, around 440,000 farmers were trained on improved crop production technology, about 600,000 farmers trained on improved aquaculture and livestock technology, and 465 kilometer of rural roads constructed creating 3.3 million labour days to the benefit of 28,000 rural women.

JU admission tests begin Feb 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The admission test for first year honours courses under the 2008-09 session of Jahangirnagar University (JU) will be held from February 3 to 14, says a press release.

The Ka unit admission tests for the departments of physics, statistics and chemistry will be held on February 3 and for the departments of environmental science, mathematics, computer science and engineering and geology on February 4.

The Gha unit admission tests for the departments of pharmacy and biochemistry and molecular science will be held on February 5; for the departments of botany and microbiology on February 7; and for the department of zoology on February 8.

Under Kha unit, admission test for the department of economics will be held on February 8; for the departments of public administration, urban planning, and business administration on February 9; and for the departments of anthropology, geography and environment, and government and politics on February 10.

Under Ga unit, admission tests for the departments of archaeology and English will be held on February 11; for the departments of international relations and history will be held on February 12; and for the departments of Bangla, philosophy and drama and documentaries on February 14.

Detailed schedule of the tests is also available on the website of the university -- www.juniv.edu.



President Iajuddin Ahmed administers the oath of office to Speaker Md Abdul Hamid Advocate at a simple ceremony at Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan in the city yesterday, while Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina looks on.

Repeal Vested Property Return (Amend) Ordinance

Human rights activists urge law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A delegation of human rights activists yesterday demanded of the government to repeal the Vested Property Return (Amendment) Ordinance 2008 comes into force.

The memorandum said Pakistan government in 1965 passed the Enemy Property Act by which the property of minorities was declared 'Enemy Property'.

Taking the war with India as a pretext, then Pakistan government enacted the law to seize property of the Hindus declaring them as enemy.

According to the memorandum, the Vested Property Return (Amendment) Ordinance 2008 is a violation of the verdict of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court,

which on March 23, 1974 declared the Enemy Property Act dead.

President of Vested Property Resistance Movement Kamal Lohani, General Secretary of Sammilita Samajik Andolon Advocate Tabarak Hossain, Chief Executive of Nijera Kori Khushi Kabir, Supreme Court lawyer Advocate Subrata Chowdhury and Executive Director of the Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) Shamsul Huda were present at the meeting.

The signatories to the memorandum included Justice Gholam Rabbani, Justice Gour Gopal Saha, Advocate Sultana Kamal, Dr Abul Barakat and Barrister Sara Hossain.



Eminent citizens raise their hands to say 'no' to corruption at a programme at Sultana Kamal Sports Complex in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 2)

'Vow to build 'Sonar Bangla'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The six newly appointed state ministers yesterday placed wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Bangabandhu Bhavan at Dhanmondi and National Mausoleum at Savar.

The state ministers, who took oath on Saturday, also vowed to work together for building a 'Sonar Bangla', the dream of Bangabandhu, reports Focus Bangla News.

The new state ministers are Shahjahan Miah (religious affairs ministry), Abdul Mannan Khan (housing and public works ministry), Kamrul Islam (law, justice and parliament affairs ministry), Shamsul Haq Tuku (energy and power ministry), Jahangir Kabir Nanak (LGRD ministry) and Mostahar Hossain (primary and mass education ministry).

'Form nat'l advisory council for disaster management'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Vice-chancellor of Brac University Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury yesterday called for forming a national advisory council where an expert team will work on disaster management and provide technical support to the government whenever it needs.

At a daylong workshop titled 'National Consultation on the progress of implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) in Bangladesh' in the city he also placed some recommendations to reduce the damage caused by disasters that often shakes the country.

The workshop was organised jointly by Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to finalise the yearly progress report of the country that would be sent to the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) on the 30th of this month.

Prof Jamilur stressed the need for initiating

insurance system for the people of disaster-prone areas, creating disaster management fund at the national level, strengthening the disaster management bureau and a contingency plan for earthquake management in risk areas.

He said under the comprehensive disaster management programme a contingency plan is being prepared for Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet.

"But it is also important to identify all the disaster-prone areas and prepare distinct plans for those areas," he said, adding that the revised early warning signals approved by the caretaker government should be disseminated soon and cell phone might be used for early warning dissemination.

UNDP Deputy Country Director (programme) Robert Jukham appreciated Bangladesh's advancement in disaster management.

Director General of Disaster Management Bureau KH Masud Siddiqui presided over the inaugural session of the workshop which was attended by experts and stakeholders.



Palestine-Iraq Solidarity Council stages a demonstration at Muktangan in the city yesterday demanding trial of Israeli forces for war crimes in Gaza.

GRAFT CASE AGAINST SAIFUR'S SON

Verdict today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A court in Dhaka has set today for delivering the judgement of a graft case against Shafiu Rahman Babu, younger son of former finance minister M Saifur Rahman.

Meanwhile, another Dhaka court will decide on February 25 whether the charge sheet of a graft case against former state minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Ziaul Haq Zia and his son Mashfiul Haq Joy will be accepted or not.

CASE AGAINST BABU Judge Jesmin Anwar of the Special Judge's Court-4 yesterday set the date for delivering the verdict in the case.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed the case against him for amassing wealth worth Tk 13.85 crore through illegal means and concealing information in the wealth statement.

The court earlier recorded statements of 21 prosecution witnesses, including complainant of the case.

The court also issued an arrest warrant against Shafiu and an order to attach his properties, as he has been absconding since the case was filed.

On November 2 of last year, ACC Assistant Director Farid Ahmed Patwary, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court in Dhaka.

ACC Deputy Director Sharmin Ferdousy filed the case against Shafiu with Ramna Police Station on April 29 of last year.

CASE AGAINST ZIA After scrutinising the case docket and other relevant documents, Judge ANM Bashir Ullah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court set the date for the acceptance of the charge sheet.

The ACC filed the case against Zia and his son Joy in connection with a case filed for the embezzlement of Tk 12.97 lakh from the public coffers.

On January 14 this year, ACC Assistant Director Monzur Alam, also the IO of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the CMM's Court of Dhaka showing 12 people as prosecution witnesses.

The IO prayed for issuance of arrest warrants against Zia and his son Joy and the order to attach their properties as they have been absconding since the case was filed.

According to the prosecution, it was alleged that Zia had forced all car drivers of the Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) to buy oil from his son Joy's (MD) M/S Royal Filling Station at Mahakhali in the city that made a dent in the public money amounting to Tk 12.97,178 and swelled the pockets of Zia and his son.

On February 14 of last year, the ACC filed the case against them with Tejgaon Police Station on charge of misappropriation of the money.

Release of Ranglai demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nagorik Uddyog, a human rights organisation, yesterday demanded immediate release of Ranglai Mro, an indigenous leader in Bandarban district.

In a statement, the organisation said Ranglai Mro is now undergoing treatment at a city hospital in handcuffs and he is tied to hospital bed, which are violations of human rights.

Nagorik Uddyog strongly protested such act of human rights violation and demanded action against those responsible for it.

PALESTINE SOLIDARITY DAY OBSERVED

Call for trial of Israeli forces for war crimes in Gaza

DU CORRESPONDENT

People from all walks of life took to the streets in observance of 'Palestine Solidarity Day' yesterday with a call for an independent and sovereign Palestinian state and trial of Israeli forces for their war crimes in Gaza.

They also demanded complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza immediately and sufficient relief for the civilians.

As part of the countrywide protest against Israeli invasion of Gaza, the Palestine-Iraq Solidarity Council held a rally at Muktangan in the city and also took out a procession that paraded different city streets.

Carrying placards with slogans and cartoons, several hundred leaders and workers of political parties, student

organisations and professional bodies joined the rally and the procession.

Addressing the rally, convenor of the Council Prof KAM Saduddin said the recent genocide in Gaza by the Israeli forces was not new. The Israeli forces backed by the US have been doing such crimes for the last 60 years.

He strongly condemned the US for blatantly supporting the barbaric act of Israeli forces in Gaza and backing Israel with regard to the issue of an independent Palestinian state.

Prof Saduddin said the rights of workers and common people across the globe would not be established unless imperialist forces are eliminated from the world.

He called on the progressive forces to continue their

movement against war and imperialism.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) leader Mujahidul Islam Selim, Workers' Party leader Bimal Biswas, Gono Forum leader Mostafa Hossain, Prof Akmal Hossain, Robayet Ferdous, Ganotantrik Majdur Party leader Advocate Abdus Salam and water resources expert Enamul Haq also spoke.

Later, members of Udichi Shilpi Gosthi rendered protest songs.

Organisers of the rally said processions, rallies and other programmes protesting the Israeli aggression were held in at least 30 points in the city.

Leaders and workers of different progressive organisations also arranged protest programmes in almost all the districts, they added.



Renowned singers drop a memorandum addressed to the UN secretary general into a post box on the Dhaka University campus yesterday demanding an end to war across the world. Earlier, they sang 'anti-war' songs at a programme on the campus.

CHEVRON TO REEVALUATE BIBIYANA GAS FIELD Petrobrangla approval by this week likely

UNB, Dhaka

Chevron will conduct a reevaluation of the Bibiyana gas field to delineate its latest reserve position.

According to state-owned hydrocarbon corporation Petrobrangla, an approval will be given in this regard to the US-based international oil company (IOC) within this week.

The move for reevaluation came amid a debate over the level of gas extraction from the country's second largest gas field, where reserve was initially estimated at about 2.4 trillion cubic feet (TCF) after the discovery of the field in 2000.

A group of energy experts in Petrobrangla opposed gas production of more than 500 million cubic feet a day (MMCFD) arguing that this might lead to an early death to the gas field. On the other hand, another group of Petrobrangla experts favour increasing the production level to more than 500 MMCFD.

Petrobrangla Director Mukhtar Ali, however, said the move to reevaluate the reserve was undertaken as part of the gas purchase and sales agreement (GPSA) signed with the IOC.

He mentioned that there is a provision in the GPSA that

after commissioning of gas production in the field, a reevaluation has to be conducted every two years to update the reserve position.

"The joint management committee of the field recently decided to go for a reevaluation and we're likely to give the approval to the move within this week," Mukhtar Ali told UNB.

The gas production at the Bibiyana gas field began in February 2007 with a daily production of 200 MMCFD. There was a plan that production would be enhanced to 600 MMCFD within few years to meet the growing demand.

But with two years, when the production level was increased to 500 MMCFD to meet the gas demand, some experts started opposing the production enhancement idea.

Mukhtar Ali said at present the gas production from the field is between 470-480 MMCFD. Sources said that after the commissioning of gas production at the Bibiyana gas field, a total of 12 wells were drilled so far for production and exploration purpose.

They said a reevaluation now would give a better picture of the gas reserve at the field and would ultimately help in taking a proper deci-

sion about the production increase.

Chevron Bangladesh President Steve Wilson said his company is working closely with Petrobrangla to increase production at Bibiyana field in order to safely handle additional gas production for the nation in these challenging, energy-starved times.

He said, "Bibiyana has proven to be one of Bangladesh's largest and most robust fields, capable of safely producing beyond original estimates. In addition, both Petrobrangla and the Ministry of Energy regularly monitor and comment on daily production levels at all three gas fields out of which Chevron produces."

The country has been facing huge gas shortage to meet the growing demand in the power plants, fertiliser factories and also in industries.

But the government has very limited option to enhance the gas production before 2011.

Sources said if the reevaluation of the Bibiyana field shows a better reserve position, the government will have a good option to enhance the production to meet the growing gas demand.