

Row over water

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Some of these initiatives have worked well.

They include the 1960 Indo-Pakistani treaty on sharing the water of the Indus, which has survived two wars between the two neighbours; the Mekong Committee, which has functioned since 1957 and swapped data throughout the Vietnam War; and the Nile Basin Initiative, launched in 1999 gathering all 10 riparian, or river-bank, states along the world's longest river.

But there are also treaties that remain a dead letter, especially in Africa, which has nearly a quarter of the world's cross-border river basins.

The risk of bloodshed over the stuff of life is a scenario taken seriously by many specialists.

Global warming may already be causing changes in rainfall and snowfall patterns, affecting river flow and groundwater recharge, and amplifying water shortages in countries that are already under stress, says scientists.

One of the feared trigger points is the Middle East, where Israel's policies of drawing water from the River Jordan and coastal aquifers are bitterly resented in the West Bank and Gaza.

In a message to the World Water Forum on Thursday, Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas accused Israel of flouting international law.

Palestinians had four times less water per capita than Israelis living in Israel, a consumption level that fell far below the World Health Organisation's guidelines for minimum daily access to water, he said.

"Palestinians should not be forced to wait until a peace agreement is reached before (they are) allowed (their) rightful share of the transboundary water resources," he said.

BANGLADESH CALLS FOR COOPERATION

Water Resources Minister Ramesh Chandra Sen yesterday said that the cooperation among co-riparian countries is a must for integrated management of water resources from common rivers in South Asia, reports BSS.

"We look forward for integrated water resources from the international rivers during monsoon and dry season," he

said at a special session of the World Water Forum (WWF) in Istanbul here.

World Water Council organises the WWF after every three years to keep the world informed about the plight of nearly one billion people who have no access to water and more than 2.5 billion having non-access to sanitation across the globe.

Senior government officials of different ministries, water experts, NGO representatives and other delegations from Bangladesh were present on the session titled 'Asia-Pacific Regional session'.

Ramesh, who arrived here Thursday, said almost all of Bangladesh's 57 transboundary rivers are originated in India, but agreements on water sharing from these rivers are not existent. Bangladesh and India have signed only one agreement on Ganges water sharing for 30 years of time.

Steps have been taken to negotiate water from other rivers with special focus on the Teesta river, the minister said adding that benefit-sharing from common rivers could solve the major problems like electricity, food and disasters, especially floods and droughts in the region.

Ramesh said the heavy flow from the upstream causes floods in downstream Bangladesh during monsoon, while water flow in the lean period in these rivers comes down to almost nil which put Bangladesh to almost disastrous situation round the year.

He said the flow during monsoon causes massive river erosion along the banks, forcing thousands each year to get internally displaced and migrate to urban areas, where almost a third live in slums in poor sanitation and water-sully conditions.

The river erosion has made Bangladesh densely populated due to loss of lands, the minister said.

"We seek technical and financial support from the international community to train our rivers so that the environmental flow in the rivers could be maintained and new lands can be reclaimed to accommodate growing population," he said referring to country's population size which is likely to cross 18 crore by 2025.

FBI smells

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in this regard," an FBI agent was quoted by a CID officer as saying at the three-hour meeting held at the CID headquarters from 9:00 am.

The meeting evaluated the latest outcome of the investigation into the tragic incident and discussed the scope of further cooperation. The FBI team told the meeting that they would prepare a report and submit it to Bangladesh government upon their return to the US.

Senior ASP of CID Abdul Kahar Akond, who was present at the meeting, told The Daily Star that they discussed the problems they are facing during investigation and what they will work in the future. He said the investigation has made quite a progress.

Akond said 60 CID officials are working in eight groups to probe the BDR carnage.

He refused to make any comment on the FBI's comment that the BDR incident was a "conspiracy".

This is the second FBI team, comprised of experts, which arrived in Dhaka Tuesday night to help probe into the BDR incident at Pilkhana. The FBI team is supposed to leave the country in a day or two.

Meanwhile, Commerce Minister Faruk Khan yesterday said the government needed more time for fair investigation into the BDR carnage.

"Justice hurried, justice buried," the minister who is coordinating the probe said, adding that a fair investigation report on the incident would come out within "a very short time".

"We probably need a few more days to coordinate all investigations," he told reporters after attending a children's programme organised by Bangladesh Children Theatre Federation at Shishu Academy to mark the World Children's Theatre Day.

Asked about the procedure of punishing the killers, he said the government will take pro-people decision to ensure justice. "The government is checking all probable motives behind the BDR incident and within a short time the investigation committee will complete a fair investigation report," Faruk said.

Malaysia

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government told its Southeast Asian counterpart that those who had already arrived there should be let in on humanitarian grounds.

Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) President Ghulam Mostafa said most of the employers have received their workers. Only a few have yet to collect theirs still stranded in the airport.

The Malaysian immigration followed a strict procedure though while allowing the workers. Before handing over the visa holders, it interviewed the employers to be sure if they really have the capacity to recruit them.

Meanwhile, at least 92 workers yesterday returned home from abroad with special travel passes.

Of them, 30 returned from Malaysia, 50 from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), six from Singapore and six from Pakistan.

The returnees from Malaysia were unemployed and could not renew work permits while those from the UAE were either undocumented workers or had lost jobs of late.

The workers who got back from Pakistan had overstayed their visas there, said an official at the Zia International Airport.

Tk 300cr

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textile and steel producers, is launching the logistics yard raising the private off-dock service providers tally to 14 who together operate a huge business worth between Tk 1,000 crore and Tk 1,500 crore.

"KDS Logistics, having enough space for handling both empty and loaded containers with additional parking, aims to provide hassle-free as well as prompt, efficient and international standard operational services in order to meet the increasing needs of shipping trades and support the Chittagong Port in quick handling of containerised cargoes and container vessels," said KDS Group Chairman Khalilur Rahman.

The group chairman is looking forward to get to the break-even point in only five years with an expected annual turnover of Tk 80 crore from KDS Logistics.

Sources said Bangladesh handles 25,000 TEUs a month in export business while in import the private off-dock operators handle 10,000 TEUs out of 50,000 TEUs per month.

Global economy

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to a G20 summit in London on April 2 to play a bigger role in reviving global demand by doing more to prop up their own faltering economies.

In France, more than a million angry French workers took to the streets in a nationwide strike to force President Nicolas Sarkozy to boost wages and protect jobs as the economic crisis deepens.

"Sarkozy has to take from the billionaires and give a bit back to the poor," said teacher Jean-Baptiste Voltuain, echoing mounting calls for the right-wing government to boost social spending by hiking taxes on the rich.

Voltuain was one of the marchers at a rally in Paris which was fronted by the leaders of France's eight main unions as it snaked its way through the east of the city in warm spring sunshine.

The CGT union said three million people took part in protests across the country, but police put the number at 1.2 million.

A million civil servants went on strike, officials said, while protestors from both public and private sectors marched in the capital and in Marseille, Lyon, Strasbourg and around 200 other towns.

Japan said on Thursday it would spend some 15 billion dollars to help the unemployed and South Korea pledged 3.5 billion dollars to create 550,000 jobs.

WORLD ECONOMY TO SHRINK IN 2009

The world economy is likely to shrink in 2009 despite growth in Asian powerhouses China and India, the head of the OECD Angel Gurría said yesterday, warning of a first global contraction in 60 years.

"Now we are probably seeing a world which will go negative because even the positive growth of India and China is not going to be enough to offset the negative growth in (developed countries)," he told reporters in Beijing.

Gurría was replying to a question about his expectations for growth in 2009.

His remark came after the International Monetary Fund said it also believed the global economy could contract in 2009.

IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn said earlier this month that 2009's

world economy would see the "worst performance in most of our lifetimes."

Gurría, secretary general of the OECD, also said in Friday's briefing that growth in China's economy this year would slow to 6-7 percent.

The World Bank earlier this week published a new forecast for the Chinese economy, reducing its growth prediction for 2009 to 6.5 percent from 7.5 percent.

China's economy grew 9.0 percent in 2008, according to the government, down from 13.0 percent in 2007.

Gurría said there would be "very negative" growth in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, adding that firm estimates would be released soon.

The OECD groups 30 industrialised, democratic nations and serves as a policy adviser and forum for debate on economic and political issues.

Gurría expressed hope that a 586-billion-dollar Chinese economic stimulus package announced late last year could spur domestic demand, helping China act as a world growth engine.

"I would like this (package) to be as successful as possible because we need a few locomotives. Our traditional locomotives are all in the repair shop," he said.

"We need the aggregate demand of China and countries like India."

Gurría spoke at a briefing held to release an OECD report on China's rural development.

The global crisis has left millions of China's migrant labourers jobless, raising official fears of social instability.

China this month vowed a massive boost in spending on social welfare services aimed in large part at meeting the needs of such migrants.

The OECD report said, however, the crisis will strain China's ability to shield migrants and the rural regions that depend on their remittances from the impact of the crisis.

"The economic crisis threatens every aspect of every country in the world and therefore China and therefore the rural population of China," Gurría said.

Kitchen markets

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concerned to ensure funding of the project before placing it at the Enec meeting for final approval.

Project director Abdus Salam said the DCC sent a revised development project proposal in July 2008 to the Planning Commission but due to the fund shortage, the Commission on October 14, 2008 asked DCC to stop construction of the Mohakhali kitchen market and suggested to shift it to Tongi although Tk 57.29 crore had already been spent by that time.

Later the Planning Commission gave its approval for all of the kitchen markets and asked that additional money be ensured by the LGD ministry before placing it before the Enec meeting, he said.

Salam said any decision to stop any of the four kitchen markets will hamper the main objectives of the project which is decentralising the Karwan Bazar kitchen market and bringing the dwellers of Dhaka city under the facility of wholesale kitchen market within short distance.

Of the estimated cost of the approved plan, only Tk 27.5 crore was allocated for land acquisition, which was spent for the Jatrabari kitchen market.

An additional Tk 85 crore will have to be given to different government agencies for getting their land to construct other three markets, he said.

The DCC received land from the Roads and Highway Department in Mohakhali, the BADCA at Ghabtali and khas land at Jatrabari, he said adding that they did not estimate the land prices in the original project proposal as they thought they would get it for free.

The kitchen markets are being constructed at Mohakhali on 7.16 acres of land, in Jatrabari on 5.27 acres, in Amin Bazar on 13 acres and in Lablagon on 9.7 acres.

The construction cost which was estimated according to the market rate of 2006 also rose to Tk 314 crore from Tk 179 crore by this time due to price hike of material costs, said the official. The government has given the DCC Tk 206 crore for the project as an

interest-free loan.

Nearly 70 percent of the land development for Mohakhali Kitchen market, which started in June 2007, has been done so far while 87 percent in the case of Ghabtali kitchen market, said another DCC official.

Work at the Jatrabari kitchen market is proceeding while land acquisition for the Jatrabari kitchen market is still going on, he said.

Among the components of the project cold storage units will be set up at the sites, involving buildings with six-storey foundation including basement, and the markets will house about 2,500 shops. The corporation in the first phase will construct only a one storey market and keep the provision for cold storage, said the official.

Decentralisation of the Karwan Bazar wholesale market will help stop syndication as the markets will be constructed at different parts of the city, said Salam.

Appreciating the initiative of shifting Karwan Bazar market, Ripon Kumar Das, an official of Bengal Group, and Aminur Rahman, commercial officer of Chaity Group, said the environment of the area has been spoiled due to the wholesale market and shifting it will not only save them from dirty smell but also ease traffic congestion in the area.

A shop owner at Karwan Bazar said having a wholesale market in one place has made the area become a criminal's den and they are forced to pay extortion money on a regular basis. Shifting the market would also increase opportunities for them as their income suffers due to the arthodars (warehouse operators).

The retailers who come from faraway areas welcomed the DCC plan saying it would greatly cut their transportation costs.

On the other hand, Mohammad Harun-ur-Rahsid of Karwan Bazar Khudra Arothdar Baboshaye Bahumukhi Samobay Samity, said it would affect the quality of goods.

Mohammad Tofazzal Hossain, a wholesaler (bepari), said they would certainly go out of business if the market was moved.

Ctg arms

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at that time or how the deadly consignment was offloaded at the jetty under their authority, said the CID Investigation Officer (IO) Muniruzzaman Chowdhury.

"They continued to say they informed the higher authorities at Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) headquarters in Dhaka on the offloading. But, they did not mention any specific names of the higher authorities they informed," said the IO.

The CID officials concerned with the interrogation said despite being informed of the offloading of deadly weapons, the former MD and GM apparently did nothing to obstruct it. They neither visited the spot at night nor the next day. Moreover, when the security officer informed the MD of the matter in writing he redirected it to the higher authorities in BCIC as if to shirk responsibility, they said.

The three-day remand of the former CUF officials would end today at CID Chittagong divisional headquarters at Dampara Police Lines, sources said.

Probe ahead

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Sircar is running as a BNP candidate in the upcoming by-election to Bogra-6 constituency.

The BNP secretary general said his party and Sircar demanded enquiry into allegations against all speakers since 1972 but the present speaker said only audit would be done against all speakers.

"It is discriminatory to conduct enquiry into the allegations against one speaker and audit against others," Delwarsaid.

Speaker Abdul Hamid on Thursday formed an all-party parliamentary probe committee headed by Awami League lawmaker Fazole Rabbi Mia to investigate the corruption charges against Sircar.

BNP move

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The BNP Standing Committee had formed the six central teams for six divisions and those teams held meetings with the grassroots level leaders as part of the party's plan to reorganise itself from the field level.

Central party leaders including Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain expressed hope that the five other teams would submit their reports within a day or two.

Goyeswar yesterday told The Daily Star that the chairperson may give her decision on the district committees in Chittagong division after discussing the report.

Meanwhile, insiders said party men are extremely frustrated at the central leadership for its inaction and a few controversial decisions recently made by the party high-up.

Asked about the inactivity of party leadership, Goyeswar said they will soon resurface the initiative to reorganise the party that became stalled following incidents like the BDR carnage.

Sources also said the apprehension that some leaders, who became controversial for corruption, might return to the party fold has caused dissatisfaction among the party rank and file. After her release from jail Khaleda Zia declared that leaders with good image would be picked up to run the party.

Air quality

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of a year and divided it by three to get the annual average concentration.

The environment ministry shut down the AQMP in December 2008 but will start the Clean Air Project from July this year.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) figures reveal that 1.26 lakh vehicles were registered in Dhaka between 1999 and 2007.

Large number of unfit, old and diesel-run vehicles continue to ply Dhaka streets worsening the pollution levels. At least 25 percent of vehicles in Dhaka are over 20 years old.

Jobair Bin Alam, a professor of the civil engineering department of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, cited the creation of 1,000 new brick kilns and factories without effluent treatment plants as other contributors to the rising pollution levels.

The rise in air pollution has also increased the number of people suffering from bronchial diseases like asthma, according to Saifuddin Ben Noor, assistant professor of the National Institute of Diseases of Chest and Hospital (NIDC&H).

Afghanistan fighting

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intense fighting against the al-Qaeda-linked Taliban after the winter months.

On January 7, the US said coalition soldiers killed 32 insurgents in an operation against a Taliban cell near the capital Kabul.

On Thursday, the Afghan army led a joint patrol into an area of Gereskh district where gunmen were known to operate, the US military said.

"The patrol was attacked by numerous armed militants with heavy small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire," it said in a statement.

The "combined element returned fire with small-arms and close air support, killing 30 militants," it added.

There was no independent confirmation of the toll. One Afghan soldier was slightly injured, according to the military.

"This engagement was yet another blow to the militants, who are quickly losing their ability to operate in Helmand Province," a coalition spokesman said in the statement.

The province is one of Afghanistan's most dangerous, with Taliban militants tied into a lucrative illegal opium trade holding large swaths of territory.

On Thursday, lawmaker Dad Mohammad Khan was killed with three of his bodyguards and a senior policeman when a bomb tore through their vehicle in Gereskh. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the blast.

In another clash, Afghan and US-led troops killed seven Taliban fighters who gathered

7 killed

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four-story building. A thick mist shrouded the neighbourhood at the time of the crash, though its cause was still unknown.

"It was horrible. I heard the plane flying very low, then I heard the explosion," neighbour Camille Avfert told The Associated Press. "We ran out onto the street and saw fire."

Emergency crews recovered victims' badly burned bodies, while rescuers evacuated an unspecified number of injured people in stable condition. Quito fire chief Atahualpa Sanchez said AP journalists at the scene saw rescuers carry away a girl whose head was bloodied.

An army statement said three soldiers on the plane had died: the pilot, a major; the co-pilot, a lieutenant; and the mechanic. The pilot's wife and son were also killed.

Two other people on the ground died, including a woman identified as Elena Reasco, the mother of a 9-year-old boy, the Red Cross reported.

Obama urges

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officials regularly refer to Washington as the "Great Satan."

"We welcome the wish of the president of the United States to put away past differences," the Iranian president's press advisor Ali Akbar Javanfekr told AFP in Tehran.

But he added: "The American administration has to recognise its past mistakes and repair them as a way to put away the differences."

"If Obama shows willingness to take action, the Iranian government will not show its back to him," Javanfekr said, while condemning what he called the "hostile, aggressive and colonialist attitude of the American government."

Iran's Energy Minister Parviz Fattah said: "Absolutely this message is positive ... although it might also have negative points in itself as well."

Iran's leaders "will precisely assess this message. We believe that we need that in addition to messages we need positive action from Mr. Obama as well as from his government," the minister said in Islamabad.

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana described the Obama video as "a very constructive message" that could "open a new chapter" in international relations with Tehran.

"I hope very much that the Iranians will take good attention" to Obama's message, he told reporters in Brussels.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov also welcomed the statement. "The start of substantive dialogue will facilitate the revival of trust in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme," he said.

Without restating accusations of Iran's support for terrorism or its nuclear programme, Obama said "the

in the southwest province of Farah to attack the provincial governor's house, the governor told AFP.

Intelligence officials were tipped off about the planned assault and called troops to the scene, governor Rohul Amin told AFP.

The US military said three more militants were killed Friday in a raid against a cell involved in making bombs to attack the capital Kabul.

Afghan and coalition troops raided a compound where the insurgents were reported to be holed up in the neighbouring province of Logar, it said.

Faulty buildings

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Desa, Wasa and Titas respectively will begin to snap electricity, water, and gas supply lines of a deviant building as identified by Rajuk while DCC will cancel trade licence and other documents required for clearance.

The central bank and other financial institutions too will deny loan or other financial support to such building owners.

"If anything like that is decided with government nod we can disconnect water supply of a building identified by Rajukas deviant," he said.

Rajuk has marked over two thousand buildings in the capital for demolition for flouting building rules including those which are using their car parking space for commercial purposes, he added.

Absence of a required car parking space and its abuse are foremost deviations from the approved design, said Rajuk officials.

Most of the errant-building owners have converted their existing parking facility into commercial uses, they said.

Absence and abuse of car parking facility particularly at commercial multi-storey buildings contributed mostly to the perennial traffic congestion, said experts.

Rajuk's much-hyped drive against building deviations during the caretaker government failed to yield any lasting result, they added.

Authorities have failed to set it right, as most of the owners are influential, said Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, chairman of the Transparency International Bangladesh.

Long tailback

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become normal by the evening," said Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) Assistant General Manager Bidyut Kumar Saha.

Several hundred goods-laden trucks and passenger vehicles remained stranded for hours at Paturia and Daulatdia ghats.

AL to revamp

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licts worsened centring party nominations in the upazila polls. But since then none of the party high-ups including the general secretary, who is also the party's spokesperson, looked into the organisational problems, said some of the district unit leaders preferring not to be named.

"Our Central Working Committee will sit on March 28 where we will discuss, among other things, organisational matters such as national council," said AL presidium member and Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury.

The agenda of the meeting to be held at the AL president's political office at Dhanmondi will include the prevailing political situation.

AL sources noted that it is mandatory to hold the party council within six months [January 25 to June 25] of the first sitting of ninth parliament to ratify the provisional changes in the party constitution. This is required under the amended Representation of the People Order.

They however said preparations for holding the council are yet to be made.

Like all other parliamentary political parties, AL also got registered with the Election Commission before the 9 December polls by bringing provisional changes to its constitution to meet the criteria for registration.

Meanwhile, party sources said that in the next council, the AL high command might go for radical changes in the central committee by taking in relatively young and dedicated leaders. And for this, most of the incumbent members of the Presidium, the highest policy making body of the party, and some other central leaders might be dropped from the central committee.

Earlier, the ALCWC met on February 9 but did not take any decision on holding the council. The party had a plan to hold its council within April but it is not being possible due to the changed situation in the country centring the BDR mutiny on February 25, party insiders said.

The last council of AL was held on December 26, 2002, where Sheikh Hasina was re-elected president of the party for the sixth time since 1981. The next two triennial councils were supposed to be held on December 26, 2005 and 2008 according to the party constitution.

AL has 73 organisational districts with 25 councillors each and 25 more selected by the party president, who are entitled to attending the party council. The total number of councillors stands at 1,850 excluding the 73-member central committee and 166-member national committee of the party.

According to AL constitution, the party has to hold councils of all organisational district units prior to the national council.

Liberation War

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children and teenagers at fine arts faculty on Dhaka University campus.

Joy Bangla Sangskritik Oikya Jote, a cultural organisation, has been arranging the competition for the last 18 years. DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, former lawmaker Makbul Hossain and president of the cultural organisation Salauddin Badal, among others, spoke on the occasion.

Earlier in the morning, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid formally inaugurated the competition. Children from three to 16 years took part in the competition in three groups. Participants from three to six years competed in group A while those from seven to