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800 acres grabbed from 6 rivers

Tk 444cr gobbled up during 2001-06 from water resources ministry, reveals TIB study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 800 acres of land in the Buriganga, Shitalakhya, Karnaphuli, Dakatia, Betna and Surma rivers was grabbed by 1,200 encroachers violating the Wetland Protection Act, 2000.

This was revealed by a keynote paper of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) at a roundtable yesterday mentioning the name of a high-powered inter-ministerial committee, which identified it.

Hatirjheel, Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake and adjoining Buriganga river were also came under encroachment committed by a section of dishonest people from both government and non-

government sides, says the keynote paper.

The paper adds investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission is going on into alleged corruption in different projects of the water resources ministry involving around Tk 444 crore between 2001 and 2006.

The roundtable styled "Good Governance in Water Sector: Want Transparency and Accountability" was organised by TIB at the National Press Club.

TIB Trustee Board Chairman Prof Muzaffer Ahmad chaired the roundtable, while Executive Director Iftekhazuzaman moderated the programme. Md Rafiqul Islam,

programme officer of TIB, presented the keynote paper.

The paper made some recommendations to ensure safe and quality water for all. The recommendations include implementing the water policy, 1999 fast for proper use of water resources, stopping different kinds of irregularities and corruption, especially neglect of duty, encroachment on property, abuse of power, extortion and influence, and giving punishment to them who are involved in irregularities of encroachment on different water bodies including rivers, canals and lakes.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said around 1,000 ponds, which were in the city, have

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Hajj policy amended

Each pilgrim has to spend Tk 2.20 lakh

UNB, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday amended the National Hajj Policy and adopted a new hajj package to comply with new rules introduced by the Saudi government.

"The total cost of hajj will be Tk 2,20,550 per person under the new package," Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told newsmen after the hour-long cabinet meeting held with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

According to the new rules introduced by the Saudi government, the pilgrims must have international passports instead of 'pilgrim passes'.

The size of each residence to be rented in Makkah will have to be of 4 sq metres

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EC slips on updating voter list

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Many prospective voters will be deprived of their franchise rights in April 2 by-polls as the Election Commission (EC) failed to update the voter roll according to the stipulated deadline of January 31.

As per the electoral roll law, it was mandatory for the EC to update the voter list across the country from January 2 to 31 this year.

People who turned 18 on January 1 and eligible people who were not listed earlier should have been enlisted on the roll. Similarly, those who had died by the date should have been excluded from the list.

But the EC failed to begin the task within the specified timeframe incorporated in the law according to EC's own proposal.

Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain told The Daily Star over phone yesterday that the commission could not begin the task within the stipulated timeframe as it was busy with the upazila election in January.

"We shall ask the government to amend the electoral laws so that the commission can begin the task of updating the voter list at an

appropriate time of this year," Sohul said.

The new electoral laws, made by the immediate-past caretaker government through promulgation of an ordinance and ratified by the present government in February last, did not have any provision for the EC to withhold updating the voter list within the timeframe.

The previous Electoral Roll Ordinance 1982, which was repealed through the enactment of the new one, contained a provision allowing the EC to make decision, if necessary, for not updating the voter list in a specific year.

However, now the EC plans to begin the massive task of updating the voter list across the country from next June or July without help of the armed forces that worked actively for preparing the current roll with photographs, said EC Secretariat sources.

But to hold elections to a large number of local government bodies -- around 4,500 union parishads, 303 municipalities and Dhaka City Corporation -- the EC might be compelled to suspend the plan, EC Secretariat officials said.

If the EC begins updating the voter list as per its plan, it might have to shelve the plan for

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PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

More than a hundred BDR men are being taken to the CMM court in Dhaka yesterday after they were arrested in connection with BDR mutiny.

KL's job-cut style a great injustice

50 civil society groups of South, South-east Asia decry premature termination of foreign workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fifty civil society groups from South and South-east Asia have said it would be a great injustice if Malaysian employers are allowed to prematurely terminate foreign workers' employment contracts and send them back home without adequate compensation.

In a joint statement, they said foreign workers are unlikely to obtain refund from the agents if their visas are cancelled, reported Inter-Press Service, a Rome-based news agency, from Malaysian city Penang yesterday.

The statement comes following Malaysia's cancellation of 55,000 work visas to Bangladeshis, and application of the principle that employers terminate foreign workers before the locals. Bangladeshi workers pay around Tk 2 lakh to go to Malaysia for jobs.

Malaysian labour department recorded that in January this year, 4,325 workers were retrenched -- 2,153 of them local and 2,172 foreigners. The retrenchment was made in the wake of a decline in economic growth and export.

Malaysia has reportedly slashed its work permit approvals by over 70 percent this year.

Meanwhile, 100 to 150 Bangladeshi workers are returning from Malaysia every day for joblessness. Yesterday, 110 workers returned home without any compensation.

Besides, at least 45 workers came back from Saudi Arabia and 18 from Dubai.

Most foreign workers in Malaysia are from Indonesia,

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BNP to meet EC for halt to Sircar probe

Fears outcome may influence by-polls results

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP will today appeal to the Election Commission (EC) to make sure that the upcoming by-election is not influenced by the parliamentary probe into the alleged financial anomalies of former speaker

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Ship-breakers get SC lifeline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday stayed for three weeks a part of the High Court (HC) verdict that directed the government to close within two weeks the operation of all ship-breaking yards running without environmental clearance.

Upon a petition filed by Bangladesh Ship Breakers' Association (BSBA), chamber judge of the SC Justice Md

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POLL DEBACLE Losers blame local BNP leaders in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former BNP candidates of Chittagong division, who were defeated in the ninth parliamentary elections, blamed the party's local leaders for BNP's massive defeat.

They said non-cooperation of local leaders was one of major reasons behind their defeat.

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GOING ABROAD Shafique defends govt authority to bar anyone

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said the government has the authority to impose restrictions on persons leaving the country if there is any specific allegation against them.

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Prayer Timing		
March 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-55	5-30
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-16	6-20
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Vital Pac given small space

No meeting convened yet as office not ready

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Public Accounts Committee (Pac) for scrutiny of government expenditure is yet to start functioning more than a month into its formation as an office allocated to its chief is not ready for use.

The office of Pac chief in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban during the tenure of all previous parliaments, which consisted of two large rooms because of its volume of work, has been allocated this time to the chairman of a parliamentary standing committee on a ministry.

The incumbent Pac chief has been allocated a smaller office at the Ministers' Hostel near the parliament building. During a visit to the office on Sunday, it was found that work was going on to ready it for use.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Journos in S Asia face 'severe risks'

Says Committee to Protect Journalists

AFP, Manila

Journalists in South Asia face "severe risks" amid escalating violence in the region, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said in a report released in the Philippines yesterday.

Attacks on media workers in Sri Lanka and Pakistan have increased and four other countries in the region -- Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and India -- also qualified for the CPJ's "impunity index."

The index, launched last year, lists countries where journalists are routinely killed or attacked and where governments have failed to solve the crimes.

"South Asian journalists face particularly severe risks. The

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Mumbai mayhem trial opens

Accused admits he is a Pak national

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Mumbai

Captured terrorist Mohammed Ajmal Amir, alias Kasab, yesterday admitted that he is from Faridkot in Pakistan and demanded that he be provided a lawyer by the Maharashtra government.

Appearing in a video-conference before special judge MI Tahilyani on the first day of trial by the special court trying the Nov 26, 2008 Mumbai terror attackers, Kasab said he received a copy of the 11,000-plus pages chargesheet.

"Do you know who I am? I am your judge in this case," Tahilyani informed Kasab. At this, Kasab immediately responded with "Namaste", which the judge reciprocated.

When asked by Tahilyani whether he had a lawyer, Kasab replied in the negative. To a question: "Do you want to engage a lawyer?" Kasab replied that he wanted to appoint a lawyer and asked for the same lawyer who defended him earlier.

When Special Public Prosecutor Ujwal Nikam pointed out that no lawyer has appeared

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FIRE RUMOUR 20 injured in stampede in washing plant

CU CORRESPONDENT

Stampede at a garment washing plant in city's Kalurghat area left at least 20 female workers injured following a rumour of fire yesterday afternoon.

Sixteen of the injured -- Hosne Ara, Marium, Autima, Razia, Selina, Selima, Marufa, Anjuman, Kahinur, Rahima,

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PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDAR

Children and slum dwellers in CRB area are taking unhygienic drinks of street vendor as hot spell started in Chittagong. They are getting affected with various water-borne diseases like diarrhoea.