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## River-filling easier now

City's unsuccessful circular waterway clicks for grabbers; over 10,000 sand cargo boats make transportation cheap

PINAKI ROY

Dredging of the rivers under the 'Circular Waterway' project facilitated encroachment on the rivers, riverbanks, floodplains, canals and other wetland as the grabbers could easily bring sand on cargo boats.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) dredged some rivers for developing the circular waterway. Now around 10,000 cargo boats are operating in and around the capital and most of them are serving the purpose of land developers.

The sand and soil carrying cargo boats, locally known as 'bolget', are the main transports operating on these river routes.

The housing companies used to fill up the southern and eastern side of the capital a few years ago. But now they are filling up the wetland and rivers in the northern parts. The 'bolgets' could not reach the northern parts as it was impossible for them to ply in the Turag then.

"But the government excavated the rivers for the Circular Water Way and now these boats can easily ply in there. So the riverbanks and other wetland are being filled up very quickly," says a BIWTA official speaking anonymously.

The private housing companies and earth fillers prefer 'bolgets' as each boat carries 5,000 to 10,000 cubic feet of sand at a time.

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

As dredgers, in the back, are being used to restore navigability of the Turag river near Kamarpara, land grabbers fill up its main navigation channel, almost entirely blocking ways for boats to ply.

## Lawmakers pull for rivers

Decision to take steps to save rivers across the country.

Committee formed to save rivers especially Buriganga, Turag, Shitalakhya and Balu from pollution and grabbing

Lawmakers to visit rivers and see the sorry state

Report with recommendations in two months

If need be, changes to the existing law will be recommended to mete out punishment to river polluters and grabbers

---JS body

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'ENCROACHMENT IN FRAME'  
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## 18 killed as Cyclone Aila lashes coast

Over 500 missing; livestock washed away; crops damaged; 19 killed in West Bengal

STAR REPORT

Cyclone Aila hit the country's south-western coast yesterday afternoon, killing at least 18 people and washing away several thousand homes, as wind-driven tidal surge inundated vast tracts of land.

Four people in Bhola, three each in Khulna, Patuakhali, Noakhali, Laxmipur, one in Barguna and a child in Barisal died, while a few hundred thousand people were marooned in the affected areas.

Over 500 people were reported missing, mostly fishermen who were yet to return from the sea.

In the Indian state of West Bengal, at least 19

people died as Aila lashed Kolkata and five adjoining districts. The cyclone affected around one lakh people in West Bengal and paralysed normal life, reports our correspondent Pallab Bhattacharya from India.

Packing winds of up to 90km an hour, the storm roared into Khulna, Satkhira, Patuakhali, Bagerhat, Barisal, Barguna, Pirojpur, Jhalakathi, Laxmipur, Jessore and Bhola around 2:00pm yesterday.

Thousands of people were made homeless as tidal waves leaping up to 13 feet high rolled onto those coastal districts. The waves damaged river and flood-control embankments and dykes, sub-

merging many villages in Khulna, Satkhira, Patuakhali and Barisal.

A large number of domestic animals and standing crops on farmland were lost in the surge.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzak officially confirmed five deaths in Bhola and Patuakhali.

Speaking at a hurriedly called press briefing at his ministry, he however could not give more details on casualties and losses as Bangladesh Navy and Coastguard ships could not go to the offshore islands from Chittagong due to the turbulent sea, reports UNB.

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### Satkhira struck badly

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Apprehending that rough weather might turn worse, 35-year-old Aatur Rahman was having early lunch at 12noon with his 60-year-old mother Fatima Khatun at her house in Patakhali village in Satkhira. Halfway through the lunch, they noticed water was rushing in the house and ran for safety immediately.

Patakhali along with around a dozen more villages in number 11 Padmapukur union under Shyamnagar upazila, situated between the Kapotakha and Kholpetua rivers, was swept by a four to five feet high tide since noon.

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PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

Tidal waves batter the Patenga beach in Chittagong City yesterday destroying makeshift shops on the shore as cyclone Aila makes landfall. Scores of people were reported missing.

## No internal conflict, it's competition

Khaleda says about party's leadership row

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said there is no internal conflict in her party but only competition and contest over the leadership as a big political party.

A conspiracy is going on against Bangladesh as well as nationalist forces but it could be resisted if everyone gets united, she said while addressing a discussion meeting at

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## Tk 12,600cr of railway stuck in audit objection

PAC forms sub-committees on 1,742 audit objections

SHAKHAWAT LITON and SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday formed four sub-committees in an effort to expedite actions regarding 1,742 unresolved audit objections involving Tk 14, 848 crore since FY 2000-2001.

Of the huge amount, audit objections against Bangladesh Railway (BR) alone involve Tk 12,600 crore, said the office of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in

a report placed before the PAC yesterday. Officials at the office of CAG told The Daily Star yesterday that the objections were raised against the BR due to its failure in collecting Tk 12, 535 as transport fares from various public and private organisations for the last few decades.

During the tenure of the last parliament, the PAC at a meeting on April 25, 2006, discussed one of 18 sections of the audit objections against BR, reported by the office of CAG in FY 2000-01. It asked the state-run organisation to sort out

those that did not pay the fares.

The then PAC also asked the BR to submit a report to the committee but the BR did not come up with the report, said officials of the office of CAG.

However, BR Director General Belayet Hossain told The Daily Star that an effort was made in 2005 to realise the arrears. A committee was formed and letters were sent to secretaries of the ministries concerned asking them to take steps in this regard. But nothing has been done

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## DEATH OF MIGRANT WORKERS

## Compensation up, but families in dark

PORIMOL PALMA

The government has increased the compensation money to Tk 2 lakh from Tk 1 lakh for the families of the expatriate Bangladeshi workers who die aboard.

The decision came at a time when the number of deaths of migrant workers abroad has been increasing in recent days.

"We raised the compensation money around two months ago considering the fact that prices of essentials have gone up," Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain said.

Though the decision has been taken two months back and no public announcement made in this regard, families of the deceased workers still claim Tk 1 lakh.

Talking to The Daily Star on Sunday, the minister said, "It does not matter. We will give

them Tk 2 lakh."

Families of the deceased migrant workers, who do not get any compensation from the employers of the labour receiving countries, are being provided with the compensation money.

Mosharraf said the matter of the families that spend a lot of money for migration of their family members and depend much on them must be taken care of. "This was behind the increase in compensation."

Meanwhile, 1,034 bodies of Bangladeshi expatriates were brought back home from different countries during January 1 to May 23 this year, according to the sources at Zia International Airport (ZIA).

Of them, around 44 percent died of cardiac arrest, which has become a matter of concern and it raised questions about the working conditions of the workers abroad.

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## GOVT EMPLOYEES Review body formed on pay hike proposals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday constituted a high-powered seven-member committee to review the recommendations of the National Pay Commission on salary hikes of government employees.

Headed by the cabinet secretary the committee was comprised of secretaries of prime minister's office (PMO), defence, law, establishment, finance and planning ministries.

The committee was asked to submit its report within 45 days after reviewing the pay commission report thoroughly, Prime Minister's (PM) Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told reporters after the

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## Block allocation for war crime trial

Muhith tells of next budget

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will create a fund for the war criminals' trial expected to begin next month through formation of a tribunal and appointment of an investigation agency and public prosecutors.

Meanwhile, the government has asked the foreign ministry to take necessary steps to bring back the alleged war criminals hiding abroad and collect documents, films and video footages on war crimes from various countries and organisations.

"We shall have block allocation in the next budget to meet the expenses of the trial of war criminals," Finance and Planning Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith told journalists after an inter-ministerial meeting at his ministry yesterday.

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