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Peacekeepers earn global respect, help improve ties Says Prime Minister

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the services of heroic army and police personnel of Bangladesh would continue in the UN peacekeeping missions and in other diplomatic endeavours to ensure a peaceful and prosperous world for the next generations.

"Inshallah, we will take all necessary measures to send more army and police to the peacekeeping missions for this purpose. The present government will do its best..." she said while addressing a function marking the International Day of UN Peacekeepers-2009 at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre this afternoon.

"We want peace, not conflict," Sheikh Hasina said explaining the foreign policy of Bangladesh that speaks of friendship to all. Bangladesh peacekeeping activities have been playing an important role in achieving this goal, she added.

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Cabinet likely to approve child labour eradication

BSS, Dhaka

The cabinet is expected to approve in its next meeting the much-awaited Child Labour Eradication Policy for welfare and protection of working children, said Labour and Employment Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain.

"The cabinet is expected to review (draft) policy in the next cabinet meeting for approval," an official said quoting the minister as Secretary General of Save the Children Sweden-Denmark Mimi Jakobsen called on him at his secretariat office yesterday.

The official added that the government was committed to take all possible steps for millions of working children and thanked Save the Children for its initiatives for the betterment of underprivileged children.

Jakobsen, a Danish politician and former minister of her country, thanked the minister for his commitment to work in collaboration with

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, entrusted with the protection of all rivers around Dhaka City, set up business sheds on Buriganga land filled up by encroachers at Sadarghat in the capital.

Rally for rivers

Industrial waste has polluted Dhaka's rivers beyond purification. Even the groundwater in Hazaribagh is polluted. The putrid stench of Wasa water now seems trivial compared to its lethal health effects. Dhaka dwellers face the disturbing prospect of importing bottled water from abroad in a country known as the Land of Rivers. Meanwhile, the arteries of Dhaka's four rivers - Buriganga, Shitalakhya, Turag and Balu - are being choked by the infinite greed of encroachers. Ruthless in approach and powerful in practice, these encroachers continue their mindless destruction with impunity by maneuvering the legal system and pocketing the police. The seemingly invincible encroachers and polluters now threaten the future of rivers and our city. Lend your hands and together we can win a war.

... The Daily Star

River authorities guilty too

BIWTA itself makes market on riverbank; Buckland embankment turns into narrow lane; river-filling continues beside its office

PINAKI ROY

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), the organisation responsible to protect the rivers from encroachers, has set up structures on the filled-up land and rented out those, apparently encouraging these greedy people to violate the laws.

In a recent visit to Sadarghat, it was seen encroachment on the Buriganga continues on both sides of the BIWTA office.

The Buckland embankment constructed along the riverbank in Sadarghat has now become a narrow lane. Every day the embankment faces huge traffic congestion as the BIWTA authorities have built several markets on it in two rows.

Asked about construction of commercial installations on the filled-up land and riverbanks, BIWTA Chairman Abdul Mannan

Chowdhury during a recent visit to The Daily Star said, "It stopped since I took office."

"At the moment BIWTA is not making any business sheds," he said.

However, recent visits to the embankment revealed that filling up of the river continues on both sides of the BIWTA office.

Local vegetable grocers have long been dumping rubbish, rotten vegetables and fruits, and coconut shells on the riverbank in Shyambazar and Badamtali around the BIWTA office, contributing to pollution and filling up of the Buriganga.

An area stretching up to 50 feet in the river from the embankment has already been filled up where BIWTA and other religious and private organisations have set up establishments.

Under the Port Act, 1908, BIWTA was made the regulatory body of the rivers flow-

ing around the capital in a gazette notification in 1960. But the authorities were not given magistracy power to stop encroachment and river filling activities.

Under the laws, BIWTA is responsible for protection and use of riverbanks.

As many as 27 mosques and madrasas have been built over the years on the bank of the Buriganga encroaching riverbed, revealed a government-formed taskforce report in 2003.

On the other side of the river more than 50 dockyards have been set up in Char Mirerbagh.

Intriguingly, other government agencies also take part in abusing river land instead of helping BIWTA.

In the taskforce report, it was also mentioned that the district administration of Dhaka and Narayanganj have set up some

markets and business sheds in the river land which BIWTA could not recover.

The district administration also allocated 27 acres of land to the Armed Forces Division in Alibaharchar in Shyampur and BIWTA failed to recover the land as well.

"Fresh encroachment is going on behind every structure along the Buriganga by filling up the river. Once a significant portion is filled up, either the BIWTA or local influential people build structures on it. Land is very expensive here," says a businessman who rented a room under a market shed in Shyambazar.

Moreover, locals are encroaching on the river in Chan Mia Ghat area. The Shyambazar mosque was also built long ago on a filled-up portion of the river.

The BIWTA authorities have rented out its

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MANY AILA-HIT AREAS STILL UNDER WATER Diarrhoea takes alarming turn, cry for food, water

STAR REPORT

Diarrhoea spreads fast in some upazilas of Satkhira, Khulna and Barisal districts as thousands of cyclone-affected people there are forced to drink contaminated and salty water.

With almost all tube-wells, ponds and other waterbodies under saline water, people of Shyamnagar and Assasuni upazilas in Satkhira and Dakop and Koira in Khulna are left with no sources of safe drinking water.

Meanwhile, thousands of people marooned in remote char areas have been starving even five days into Cyclone Aila that ripped through

the south-western coast on Monday.

As of yesterday evening, the death toll from the storm was 183. Official sources however put it at 155.

"Supply of clean water cannot even meet one-fourth of the need," said a diarrhoea victim.

In Shyamnagar of Satkhira, around 600 people are down with diarrhoea every day, Dr Mohammad Ebadullah, district's civil surgeon, told The Daily Star.

The locals, however, said the number is much higher than what the civil surgeon claims.

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300 CRIMINAL GANGS IN CITY Businesses worried as extortionists active again

KAILASH SARKAR and M ABUL KALAM AZAD

Around 300 gangs have struck panic into the hearts of Dhaka's businesses since extortion-related crimes have spiralled out of control, with two people dead and around 50 people shot in connection with extortion in the last two months.

According to police, extortionists have been targeted businessmen and affluent families for extortion and kidnappings and have already shot employees and relatives in connection with extortion demands.

"We are really worried about the developments, especially for not being able to contain extortion," said a police officer, seeking anonymity.

With the police struggling to curb rampant extortion, nervy businessmen have been left helpless.

"Someone called me on Saturday and demanded Tk 20,000. The caller identified himself as an associate of Shahadat and threatened to kidnap my child if I don't meet his demand," said

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4 shot in 3 attacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four people, including two contractors and a physician, were shot and wounded in three separate incidents of gun attacks in the city's Mohammadpur and Pallabi yesterday.

The injured are contractors Osman Gani, 45, and Abdus Sobhan, 38, physician Dr Mojibul Haque and Mostafa Kalu, 30, a Benarashi sari worker.

Witnesses said two armed men opened fire on Sobhan and Osman from a running motorbike while they were getting into a car on Salimullah Road in Mohammadpur around 12:30pm.

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BDR report made public in full: Home minister

BSS, Chittagong

Home Minister Sahara Khatun yesterday brushed aside BNP secretary general's allegation about partial release of the government probe body report on BDR carnage and said the authorities had made the report public in full.

"The government has not played hide and seek or applied any tricks over publishing the government probe committee report on Peelkhan tragedy," she said while talking to journalists on the podium of a public meeting organised by Chittagong Awami League at Laidighi Maidan.

Turning down the BNP secretary general's allegation, the home minister said the government has published the full-length report submitted by the probe committee on the February 25 carnage at BDR headquarters in Dhaka.

"You have seen the report but the fact is that committee chief Asaduzzaman briefed the media on the salient features of the inquiry report," she told the journalists in replying to a query.

On the remark of Commerce Minister Faruk Khan in this regard, the home minister said she was not informed or aware of what the commerce minister had said.

Killing in 'crossfire' causing concern

Death of two students raises questions: Probe begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite repeated protests at home and abroad, extra-judicial killings by the law enforcers continue unabated, causing concern among the people.

Apart from constituting human rights violation, killings in the name of 'crossfire' or 'encounter' raise questions over the law enforcers' training and skills in handling firearms.

Sources said around 800 people were killed in 'crossfire' or 'encounter' across the country since 2004. Of them, 570 were killed by the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and the rest by the police.

Some 70 people were shot during 'gunfight' with police and Rab in last one month.

Rab sources said 458 people were killed in 'crossfire' between December 31, 2004, and December 31, 2007, while over a hundred others were killed in 2008 and another 24 in the last four months.

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