

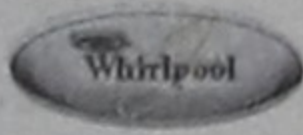


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Lawmakers pledge to save rivers

They join Star-initiative to stop river grabbing, pollution; say govt has already taken some measures

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speaker and members of parliament (MPs) yesterday made strong commitments to take every measure necessary to stop illegal grabbing and pollution of the rivers flowing through the country including those around the capital.

They said the rivers are the lifelines of the country's economy, agriculture and livelihoods and any delay or negligence to save them would have disastrous consequences like shortage of both drinking and farm water and subsidence of soil in the city.

The pledges came at the inaugural function of a programme titled "To the Prime Minister: Save rivers, save Dhaka", a joint initiative of The Daily Star and Channel i held at the South Plaza of the National Parliament. The programme was live telecast by the television channel.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury and heads of the parliamentary standing committees on the Ministries of Land, Water Resources and Environment said they have already taken initiatives to evict land grabbers on the rivers and find ways to check dumping industrial wastes into the rivers around the capital.

"We must save our rivers, which have been seriously polluted and partly grabbed. Influential people whoever they are cannot be any barrier to the justified demands of common people," said Speaker of the Parliament Abdul Hamid, who addressed the function as chief guest.

"I will take measure to pass the law as soon as the parliamentarians frame it."

"We shall do everything we can to save the soil and rivers of the country,"



A section of the dignitaries who attended the "Save rivers, save Dhaka" programme, a Channel i and The Daily Star joint initiative, at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex yesterday. Speaker Abdul Hamid, right, speaks to the audience.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said.

She mentioned that the prime minister at a cabinet meeting clearly said no road should be constructed by destroying any arable land. If necessary, soil for road should be taken from the rivers, Matia said.

Stating that the influential people time and again stand in the way to restore the

water bodies, including the canals in the capital, the agriculture minister said. "The BGMEA building, which is located in the Hatirjheel project area, is still there and maybe will remain there."

She said the then Awami League government started re-excavating the river Gorai but BNP-Jamaat alliance government after coming to power did not grant money for the next stage of re-excavation.

"The Gorai again got its old dry face causing more salinity in the southern districts and creating obstacles to cultivation during dry season," she said. However, the government again took initiative to re-excavate the Gorai, she added.

Abdur Razzak, chairman of the standing committee on the Ministry of Water Resources, said it is not the absence of

laws, but the negligence in their application that has almost killed the rivers surrounding the capital city.

Saying that Dhaka may face the fate of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa because of its haphazard developments, Razzak said stringent laws should be made against the river grabbers and polluters.

AKM Mozammel Huq, chairman of the

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People, firm legal action hold the key

Observe key personalities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent personalities yesterday said people's movement and strict legal actions are a must to save the dying rivers from the clutches of land-grabbers and polluters.

Distinguished professionals, academicians, NGO and top business leaders and others said this at the inauguration of a photography exhibition titled 'Save Rivers, Save Dhaka' held at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Private television Channel i and The Daily Star jointly organised the event as part of the ongoing campaign against the pollution and encroachment on the rivers surrounding the capital.

The speakers urged the government to enact laws to save the rivers from the powerful and ruthless river-gobblers.

"Aggression on the rivers is going to be suicidal for us unless the government and general people do not join hands," said noted academician Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid.

Dhaka's lifeline Buriganga River has almost died of pollution and encroachment during the last 20 years, he said, adding that it is an unbearable experience to see the rivers dying.

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Sohel Taj turns in 'resignation'

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Tanjim Ahmad Sohel Taj yesterday stepped down as state minister for home affairs about five months into his appointment, said government sources.

Sohel Taj, son of country's first prime minister Tajuddin Ahmed and the youngest

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French plane missing with 228 on board

AFP, Paris

An Air France jet carrying 228 people on a Rio de Janeiro-Paris flight went missing yesterday after suffering an electrical failure while flying through a fierce Atlantic storm, the airline said.

Amid mounting fears that it had crashed into the ocean, Air France said the Airbus A-330 jet was probably hit by lightning as the Brazilian and French air force joined the search for the flight.

French Ecology Minister Jean-Louis Borloo said the plane had probably had some kind of

accident as a hijacking had been ruled out. The Brazilian Air Force launched a search and rescue operation in the Atlantic.

"There's nothing on Spanish radar, nothing on Moroccan radar, nothing on French radar. We can seriously envisage the worst," Borloo said, indicating that it was extremely likely that the plane had been lost at sea.

Flight AF 447 sent an automatic error message reporting a fault in an electrical circuit at 0214 GMT, just over four hours after it left Rio, Air France said in a statement.

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Clock goes 1hr ahead June 19 midnight

Cabinet fixes daylight saving time schedule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The daylight saving time (DST) will take effect at midnight on June 19, setting the clocks an hour ahead.

The decision came at a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

Briefing reporters afterwards, the prime minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said the clocks will be put forward to 1:00am at midnight that day so people could have an extra hour

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568 children sick taking WFP biscuits

140 still hospitalised

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

At least 568 students of different primary schools in Laxmichhari upazila under Khagrachhari district fell sick after having biscuits distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP) yesterday.

Of the victims, 140 are still

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