

## HC hears hurdles

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Ahmed at their court chamber. They had a two-hour long meeting with the judges in the presence of Additional Attorney General Enayetullah Rahim, petitioner of a river encroachment case advocate Manzill Murshid, and chief of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers' Association (BELA) Rezwana Hasan.

On Wednesday, the HC bench asked these officials to apprise the court of government actions against encroachment and the latest condition of the rivers.

The government officials and Bela chief pointed out that one of the major hurdles in recovering rivers from encroachers is that there is no clear demarcation of the rivers. Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star last night.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) Chairman Abdul Mannan Hawladar, Environment Directorate Acting Director General Bellal Hossain, and Land Survey Directorate DG Dr Aslam Alam pointed out that if the deputy commissioners clearly demarcate river boundaries, the anti-encroachment drives will become easy.

When government officials lead anti-encroachment drives, they must have documents to prove that the target land belongs to the state. But this is often not the case as the DCs do not provide the anti-encroachment force with those documents, they said.

Immediately after the meeting, the petitioner's lawyer at an open court suggested that the HC bench ask the DCs of Dhaka, Gazipur, Munshiganj and Narayanganj to give their views on the matter.

The judges accordingly asked the DCs, chairman of Wasa and chief executive officer of Dhaka City Corporation to meet them at the same court chamber on Monday.

During the hearing on injunctions and stay orders, they told the government officials that the court may issue such injunctions or stay orders on occasions, but the authorities should promptly come back to the court with arguments against such orders.

## Pintu being quizzed at TFI cell

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
Investigators have started interrogating detained BNP politician Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu at the Taskforce for Interrogation (TFI) cell yesterday regarding his alleged involvement in instigating BDR mutineers, organising processions and helping mutineers flee.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in a probe into the bloodbath at the BDR Headquarters, earlier found indications about the former BNP lawmaker's involvement in the mutiny.

Sources said a team of investigators led by the investigation officer (IO) of the case began questioning Pintu, now on a five-day remand in the mutiny case, yesterday morning.

The investigators asked the ex-BNP lawmaker about his role during the mutiny, sources said, adding that Pintu denied any involvement.

"We have started interrogating Pintu," IO of the case, CID's Senior Assistant Superintendent Abdul Kahar Akand, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said they asked Pintu about his involvement in instigating the mutineers, organising processions around the Pikhana headquarters and also helping mutineers flee the scene.

The IO declined to reveal any more details of the interrogation.

Earlier on Wednesday, CID officials told a Dhaka court that Pintu instigated the BDR mutineers, encouraging the mutiny by bringing out processions by his followers and helping BDR jangas flee across the Buriganga by arranging engine boats from Keraniganj ferry ghat.

Pintu was rounded up from the High Court premises on Tuesday as an accused in the case initially filed with Lalbagh police station, but later shifted to New Market police station.

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## Sincerity the answer

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Over the years, the government failed to enforce the existing laws regarding rivers and other natural water resources, apparently encouraging rampant encroachment on the rivers and canals.

The first law in this regard was the Bengal Canal Act, 1864, the mother law about rivers and canals.

All the laws that followed up to the recent Open Space and Water Body Conservation Act, 2000 restrict changing the characteristics of the rivers, riverbanks and other the waterbodies.

But successive governments have so far failed to protect these natural resources. Though the government had launched two environmental courts - one in the capital and another in Chittagong -- those became ineffectual in course of time.

Members of the civil society, environmental activists and experts have all put emphasis on strict enforcement of the laws and amendment of the laws, if necessary.

Speaking on the issue, Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said the government should maintain the rivers according to the cadastral survey (CS).

"If we consult the CS survey we'll get the original width of the rivers and should demarcate the riverbanks accordingly. If the government needs to acquire land for that, it should do that," he observed.

The government may also constitute a single river authority if it works better in that way, but "the government has to be very strict about that," he added.

Earlier, a taskforce about the rivers recommended several steps to recover the encroached land and excavate those again, but those recommendations were not implemented properly.

Prof Muzaffer recommends engaging local people in the management process of the rivers. He fears that the entire river system will collapse if the campaign launched against encroachment and pollution fails.

"If we fail to bring any success through this campaign, not only Dhaka but the entire river system of the country will be destroyed," he observed.

"The initiative is undoubtedly a good one for the country. Though late, it has always been very necessary for the country. I hope the initiative would gain huge success," he added.

Muzaffer also recollected the launch of a movement to save the Buriganga 12 years ago and how it ended in vain.

"The Buriganga is the symbol of our total river system. The Daily Star and Channel i have advanced the movement I lost 12 years back," he said.

Member of the parliamentary standing committee on the environment ministry and Awami League lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury said, "The existing laws to safeguard the rivers are not coming in any help as there is weakness and flaws in those."

"We have to save our rivers by identifying the sources of pollution at first

removing BNP lawmaker Shah Mofazzol Hossain Kaikobad to the second row.

The speaker had to remove Civil Aviation Minister GM Quader to the second row of the treasury bench from his earlier position in the front row to give one more seat to the opposition lawmaker.

Jatiya Party chief HM Ershad was brought together with his wife Raushan Ershad, who was elected in the April by-election, in the front row by replacing two senior AL lawmakers, Dewan Farid Gazi and advocate Rahmat Ali. The two AL lawmakers, however, retained the front row seats next to the prime minister's.

On the first sitting of the second session, the House passed obituary references at the death of former Indian president R Venkataraman, Jatiya Party lawmaker Moutaz Iqbal of Sunamganj-4, eminent nuclear scientist Dr Wazed Mia and 13 others.

The House also expressed deep condolence at the death of people by cyclone Aila.

After holding a brief discussion on the obituary motion, the House passed it and the speaker adjourned the sitting until 4:00pm on Sunday, suspending other scheduled businesses because of the death of Jatiya Party lawmaker Moutaz Iqbal.

He said the BNP Parliamentary Party would sit next week to decide on the speaker's offer.

Two newly elected BNP lawmakers -- Jamiruddin Sircar and Moudud Ahmed -- were given seats in the front bench by allocating one more seat for the opposition and

## Grassroots

**FROM PAGE 16**  
According to the party decision, district convening committees will be announced at any time and these committees will conduct a month long member recruitment programme before holding the council.

Gani also said convening committees will find new members and hold council simultaneously.

But district level leaders said it would be very tough to hold council in all organisational units of a district within two months.

Walullah Rabbani, general secretary of Kishoreganj district BNP said it would be difficult for a large district like Kishoreganj to hold council from ward unit to district level within two months but they will work as per the directive of the central body.

There are 109 union units, 13 upazila and eight municipality units of the party in the district.

Echoing the same voice, Nazrul Islam Rajan, general secretary of Barisal district BNP said it is impossible to reorganise the party by two months but they would try their level best.

"We will follow the instructions of the party high command," he said.

Barisal district convening committee will have to hold council in 81 unions, 10 upazilas and four municipality units.

While talking to The Daily Star, Abdullah Al Noman, joint secretary general of the party, also said two months is not enough for completing everything but the party leaders must have to act as per the directives of the standing committee.

"Time could be extended later if the district convening committees feel it necessary," he said, adding that the task would get easier if the ward committees are formed quickly.

World T20

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of the game is earning acceptance amongst the cricketing elite.

The World Twenty20 is being played at three grounds - Lord's, The Oval and Trent Bridge with the final to be staged at Lord's on June 21.

The format of the game leaves very little chance to identify clear favourites but defending champions India remains the best bet to pull off an encore.

Last edition runner-up Pakistan have been starved of cricket and may struggle to replicate their success. However, Australia's domination of all forms of cricket is challenged in this format as both Sri Lanka, South Africa and New Zealand regularly punch above their weight.

Bangladesh have flirted with glory in their big warm-up games so far and the signs look good for the Tigers to at least emulate their 2007 success -- when they entered the Super Eight's.

Sohel Taj

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home ministry were relieved to see him in his office, which he reached late at 11:37am.

"I never resigned," Sohel Taj said when asked about reports that he quit his post. He also said he would not be going on leave since parliament was set to begin its budget session.

According to reliable sources, the junior member in the Sheikh Hasina-led cabinet tendered his resignation to the PM on Monday out of frustration over not being able to perform his duties properly. But the prime minister did not accept his resignation and asked him to go on leave instead from June 6 to 23.

As Sohel was firm on his decision to quit, Hasina asked LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam to persuade him to return but the minister failed to change Sohel's mind, the sources added.

Before meeting the premier, Syed Ashrafur and Home Minister Sahara Khatun met Sohel at his official residence. Failing to induce him to resume office, the two ministers took him to the prime minister's Jamuna residence where deputy leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury was also present, the sources said.

Sohel Taj changed his mind after meeting Sheikh Hasina and several ministers at Jamuna Wednesday night.

"If I feel better, I shall attend office tomorrow," Sohel Taj, son of the country's first premier Tajuddin Ahmed, had told The Daily Star Wednesday night.

More encroachments

**FROM PAGE 16**  
orders to the on-duty officials preventing them from dismantling its structures.

Three more people whose tin-shed houses were built on the Turag also got stay orders from the HC.

"We will have to settle these stay order issues soon to complete the eviction drive," said Mahabubul.

As for the temple he said as soon as religious materials from the temple to the north of the Turag were removed we would pull down the parts of the temple that were built on the river.

Some parts of the Masjid Market, kitchen market and another building in between the two on the eastern part of the Turag Bridge have almost been demolished, said BIWTA Deputy Director Saiful Islam.

A tin-shed building on the western side of the Tongi Bridge has also been flattened, he added.

Walls of Yam Merchant, a textile factory at Pagar, and Courtbari area on the Turag's southern bank have also been pulled down, he said.

"Besides, we demolished around 20 makeshift houses," Saiful said.

BIWTA was not able to use their ships for the demolition of some huge structures, as the spaces under the bridges on the Turag were narrow.

"It is time-consuming to demolish concrete structures manually. If we could bring our big ships, our demolition work would have been much faster," said BIWTA Senior Deputy Director Shahjal Haque.

Meanwhile, environmentalists said the encroached areas on the Turag River are actually a lot more than what have been demarcated by the district administration.

"Two years back when we organised a boat race it was the part of Turag where the Masjid Market is now located. But today only a small portion of the market is being demolished."

"I think the CS record is seriously erroneous," said Save

## Obama reaches

**FROM PAGE 1**  
The White House said Obama's speech contained no new policy proposals on the Middle East. He said American ties with Israel are unbreakable, yet issued a firm, even-handed call to the Jewish state and Palestinians alike to live up to their international obligations.

In a gesture to the Islamic world, Obama conceded at the beginning of his remarks that tension "has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations."

"And I consider it part of my responsibility as president of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear," said the president, who recalled hearing prayer calls of "Azaan" at dawn and dusk while living in Indonesia as a boy.

At the same time, he said the same principle must apply in reverse. "Just as Muslims do not fit a crude stereotype, America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire."

Talking about women's rights, Obama said, "Issues of women's equality are by no means simply an issue for Islam. In Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, we've seen Muslim-majority countries elect a woman to lead."

Contradicting with some westerners he continued, "I reject the view of some in the West that a woman who chooses to cover her hair is somehow less equal. But I do believe that a woman who is denied an education is denied equality. And it is no coincidence that countries where women are well educated are far more likely to be prosperous."

Obama in his speech highlighted the struggle for women's equality in many aspects of American life and in countries around the world. However, his confidence on women flashed when he said, "I am convinced that our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons."

The AP report says Obama spoke at Cairo University after meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the second stop of a four-nation trip to the Middle East and Europe.

The speech was the centerpiece of his journey, and while its tone was striking, the president also covered the Middle East peace process, Iran, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the violent struggle waged by al-Qaeda.

Obama arrived in the Middle East on Wednesday, greeted by a new and threatening message from al-Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden. In an audio recording, the terrorist leader said the president inflamed the Muslim world by ordering Pakistan to crack down on militants in the Swat Valley and block Islamic law there.

But Obama said the actions of violent extremist Muslims are "irreconcilable with the rights of human beings," and quoted the Quran to make his point: "be conscious of God

and always speak the truth..."

"Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism. It is an important part of promoting peace," he said.

"Hamas must put an end to violence, recognise past agreements, and recognise Israel's right to exist," he said of the organisation the United States deems as terrorist.

"The Palestinian Authority must develop its capacity to govern, with institutions that serve the needs of its people," Obama said.

"At the same time, Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine. The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements on the West Bank and outskirts of Jerusalem," he said. "It is time for these settlements to stop."

As for Jerusalem itself, he said it should be a "secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims..."

Obama also said the Arab nations should no longer use the conflict with Israel to distract their own people from other problems.

He treaded lightly on one issue that President George W. Bush had made a centerpiece of his second term the spread of democracy.

Obama said he has a commitment to governments "that reflect the will of the people." And yet, he said, "No system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by another."

At times, there was an echo of Obama's campaign mantra of change in his remarks, and he said many are afraid it cannot occur.

"There is so much fear, so much mistrust. But if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward," he said.

The president's brief stay in Cairo included a visit to the Sultan Hassan mosque, a 600-year-old centre of Islamic worship and study. He also toured the Great Pyramids of Giza, standing in awe at the massive structures. "This thing is huge!" he yelled, his ebullient voice echoing off the stone of the largest of them.

The build-up to the speech was enormous, stoked by the White House although Obama seemed at pains to minimise hopes for immediate consequences.

"One speech is not going to solve all the problems in the Middle East," he told a French interviewer. "Expectations should be somewhat modest."

Eager to spread the president's message as widely as possible, the tech-savvy White House orchestrated a live Webcast of the speech on the White House site; remarks translated into 13 languages; a special State Department site where users could sign up for speech highlights; and distribution of excerpts to social networking giants MySpace, Twitter and Facebook.

Though the speech was co-sponsored by al-Azhar University, which has taught science and Quranic scripture here for nearly a millennium, the actual venue was the more modern and secular Cairo University.

Taliban

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Waziristan home at the start of the summer holidays, and busloads of people were abducted on Monday, officials said.

Earlier militants blew up a girls' school on the outskirts of Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar on Thursday as the military pressed on with an offensive against the Taliban, police said.

The school was heavily damaged in the attack in the Budaber area, about 10 kilometres (six miles) south of Peshawar, local police chief Abdul Ghafoor Afridi said.

At least 40 kilogrammes (88 pounds) of explosives were used to blow up the school, he said, adding that "four rooms were completely destroyed and three were damaged."

Another police official, Shakarullah Khan, said militants used a timed device to blow up the building.

There were no casualties as schools are closed for the summer, he said.

## PM directs

**FROM PAGE 16**  
people in the country's southern districts.

Army Chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed handed over a cheque for Tk 25 lakh on behalf of Trust Bank run by Bangladesh Army to the prime minister at her office in the morning.

Air Force Chief Air Marshal SM Ziaur Rahman handed over a cheque for Tk 10 lakh to the PM.

Press Secretary to the PM Kalam Azad later briefed the newsmen.

Hasina thanked the army and the air force for coming forward in helping the country's disaster affected people.

She described the donations "exemplary step" saying that such gestures would act as an inspiration for the cyclone victims to be firm in their determination and stand up on their own feet to overcome the losses.

PM mentioned that seventeen helicopters of the army took part in the relief and rescue operations immediately after the storm Aila.

Speaking on the occasion, General Moeen mentioned different welfare programmes of the Trust Bank and expressed gratitude to the premier for setting up the bank.

He also informed the PM about various welfare programs of the Bangladesh Army along with several training programs including training for the nurses.

Hasina said that she has decided to set up a 'Probashi Kalyan Bank' to provide financial support to the people intending to go abroad, who earlier used to sell their lands and other property to bear the expenditure.

Referring to her effort during the recent visit to Saudi Arabia about the transfer of iqama (work permit) of the expatriate Bangladeshis, the premier said this has resolved a longstanding problem of over 20 lakh Bangladeshis wage earners there.

She also recalled her efforts in directing the Bangladesh missions abroad during her previous tenure to take necessary and effective steps for the Bangladeshi communities so that they can send their remittances smoothly.

As a result of the steps, the remittances of the expatriates are increasing significantly, she said.

Referring to the nurses training program of the army, Hasina emphasised on promoting the status of the nurses.

She said the present government has a plan to raise the number of skilled human resources in catering.

Hasina called upon the army to take initiative in food and fish processing so that the

## MPs asked

**FROM PAGE 1**  
counter the opposition's political activities across the country, lawmakers who attended the meeting told The Daily Star.

Some AL lawmakers also demanded they be included in the governing bodies of schools and colleges across the country removing BNP-Jamaat men who grabbed those positions during the BNP-Jamaat government of 2001-2006.

Hasina said those bodies would be neutralised and depoliticised by involving educated and respectable people of the respective areas.

The AL chief also told the meeting that the authority of the parliamentary standing committees and its chairman would be increased so that the committees could directly contribute to the development of the country.

Hasina also asked the standing committee chairmen to coordinate work with MPs of constituencies concerned and nearby ones for the development of a region.

Abdul Mannan, lawmaker of Bogra-1 constituency, told the meeting that the issue of State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmad Sohel Taj resigning tarnished the image of the government.

"Unwanted things might happen and those should be resolved through consultation with the prime minister," a source quoted him as saying.

**BRIEFING**  
A press briefing was held, after the two-hour-long meeting that started at 4:20pm, at the media centre of the parliament. Chief Whip Abdus Shahid said the ALPP chief Sheikh Hasina asked her colleagues to join the parliament session on time so that there is no quorum crisis in the House.

She also directed all MPs, especially the female and younger ones, to prepare themselves before joining the session. The prime minister directed them to read the rules and procedures of the House and attend discussions in a constructive way, Shahid said.

He said the prime minister has assured lawmakers of increasing different facilities for them.

country can export such food items in increasing volumes to different countries to meet their growing demands.

Regarding afforestation in the coastal areas, the PM directed the navy and air force to plant saplings and sow seeds in those areas including on embankments for protecting the country from natural disasters.

She also underscored the need for remaining highly alert so that the people do not cut the embankments for taking waters to their shrimp farms or for other purposes.

At the same time, the prime minister also asked them to work out ways for the permanent protection of shrimp farms in the southern belt.

Adviser to the PM Maj Gen (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddiqui, Defense Secretary Kamrul Hasan, Army Adjutant and Vice Chairman of Trust Bank Maj Gen Mujahid, Director General of SSF Maj Gen Jainul Abedin, Military Secretary to the PM Brig Gen Mohammad Salahuddin Miajee and Trust Bank Managing Director Iqbal U Ahmed were present.

Lt Gen Mubin

**FROM PAGE 1**  
role in backing the last caretaker government that lasted for two years and culminated with the general elections on December 29, 2008.

Appointed as the chief of staff on June 15, 2005, Moeen had his service extended by a year on April 6 last year after his three-year eventful tenure. He was elevated to a four-star general in 2007. Moeen will retire from service on June 14.

Hailing from Kishoreganj, Mubin was made PSO of the Armed Forces Division from major general rank on June 4, 2008. He was general commanding officer of Jessor and 24th Infantry Division in Chittagong.

Son of Major Baseth and an ex-cadet of Mirzapur Cadet College, Mubin was commissioned in November, 1977 as an infantry officer from the third Short Course of Bangladesh Military Academy.

Only three officers senior to him are still in service and two of them are now posted outside the country. They are Peace Keeping Force Commander Lt General Zahir, Quarter Master General Lt General Jahangir, and High Commissioner to Australia Lt Gen Masud Uddin.

Mubin made a televised statement on the night of Feb