

Massive withdrawal of groundwater may cause earthquake in capital

Prime minister tells parliament

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina forewarned that earthquake could strike the capital city as the groundwater table here is going down 2-3 meters gradually due to massive withdrawal of the water.

In reply to a question from Nasimul Alam Chowdhury (Comilla-8), she said the subsiding of the underground water level is causing serious damage to geological environment and its balance. Prime Minister's questions and answers were tabled to facilitate discussion on the President's New Year address to the parliament. "If water level continues to go down, there is apprehension about natural calamity

like earthquake," she said, apparently referring to the presentment coming from experts.

She said the environmental damage inside the ground has come to government's notice and it has taken various plans to increase surface water and its use.

She also told the lawmakers that her government is committed to ensuring pure drinking water for all by the year 2011. Hasina informed the House about the projects taken up jointly by the government and donor agencies to remove crisis of drinking water in the country.

She said implementation of Syedabad Water Treatment Construction Project (Phase-2) with

the capacity of 22.50 crore litres of water a day in collaboration with Danida has been started. Its construction is expected to be completed by June 2012. Another major plant under Pagla/Keraniganj Water Treatment Construction Project involving Tk 2200 crore and having a capacity of 45 crore litres of water daily will be set up by June 2014, which will purify Padma river waters, the PM said. Besides, a survey is underway to set up a water plant in the city's Khilkhet area with a target of supplying 50 crore litres of water to the city dwellers a day.

Hasina said the government has also taken steps to bring navigability in the rivers surrounding the capital by dredging and cleaning up the

riverbeds.

Another scheme called Buriganga River Restoration Project is under process of approval.

About water crisis in the port city of Chittagong, she said the government has taken Mohra Water Supply Project and Madunaghat Water Supply Project and Karnaphuli Water supply project to solve the problem.

Besides, several projects to use surface water have been taken up and, in this regard, Halda and Karnaphuli rivers are being considered as sources of water, Hasina said.

"If these projects can be implemented fully, crisis of pure drinking water in the divisional headquarters will be gone gradually," she hoped.

28 Bangladeshis return from Thailand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 28 Bangladeshis, detained along with some 200 Rohingyas from the sea by Thailand authorities over a year ago, returned home yesterday.

"They arrived at the airport at 5:45pm today by a flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines," an official of Hazrat Shahjalal (R) International Airport told The Daily Star yesterday.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) gave them Tk 2,000 each so they could travel to their homes at Teknaf in Cox's Bazar, he said.

A Thai charity has borne the airfare for the 28 Bangladeshis while IOM through its Bangkok and Dhaka offices have provided the logistic supports for their safe return.

Thai coastguards detained them on their way to Malaysia by engine boats through Thai waters from Cox's Bazar in search of jobs in January last year.

As the authorities got to know that some of the detainees were Bangladeshis, they approached Bangladesh mission in Bangkok, which then confirmed their identities through foreign office and home ministry in Dhaka, said Saida Muna Tasneem, director general for external publicity of the foreign ministry.

An earlier investigation of The Daily Star found that a strong syndicate in Cox's Bazar promises poor Rohingyas and Bangladeshis lucrative jobs in Malaysia for cheap charges.

The jobseekers start on engine boats from certain points of the beaches or islands in Cox's Bazar at night, especially during winter when the sea is comparatively calm.

Some can arrive in Malaysia while some fail and get caught either by the Thai Navy or the Andaman Islands coastguards. Cases of starvation and deaths in the boats are also common.

Those arriving in Malaysia also face detention or are extorted by the syndicate members in Malaysia for their undocumented status.

Multi-tier security system on Feb 21

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A multi-tier security system will be in place to ensure fool-proof security on February 21.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner AKM Shahidul Huq yesterday told The Daily Star that they would deploy 8,000 uniformed and plain-clothes policemen in and around the Central Shaheed Minar area.

"We will set up archways, search the participants and dog squad will be also deployed in the area," added the DMP commissioner.

Meanwhile, Rab official sources said they will deploy over 500 men to help the policemen deployed in the Central Shaheed Minar area.

Besides, several CCTVs will be installed.



PHOTO: PID
Suman Hafiz Rahman, director general, South Asia Department of Asian Development Bank, calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her official residence Jamuna in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

New tech transfer urgent to face climatic events

Experts tell conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Developing new technologies and sharing of knowledge among the countries vulnerable to climate change are an urgent need to face the impacts of today's climatic phenomena, experts from home and abroad said yesterday.

"In Bangladesh, half of the farmers are not literate, but they are wise. They produce food for us. But today, their knowledge is not enough in a changing climate. So, they should have new knowledge, technologies to produce food," said Dr Atiq Rahman, executive director of Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS).

The remarks came at the two-day conference titled 'Climate change and extreme cyclones: Regional conference on disaster risk reduction and emergency response in a rapidly changing world'.

which is impacting the world faster than what was forecasted earlier, would continue for decades.

The velocity of climatic events like cyclones is going up, he said, adding that theoretically the cyclones like Sidr, Aila and Nargis were supposed to happen once in 20 years, but today's scenario is much different from that.

With preparedness programmes, the rate of mortality could be reduced, but not the morbidity, he said, adding that mainstreaming the climate change into all development programmes, therefore, is very important.

Dr Atiq said, "We must look at pro-poor policies and smart development...strong local government is a must."

Dr Bichit Rattakul, executive director of Bangkok-based regional organisation ADPC, said Bangladesh, which faced a number of cyclones and developed a strong mechanism to fight the disasters, could be a school for others in disaster management.

Body to conduct Muktijoddha Sangsad elections

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A five-member election commission has been formed to conduct the election of Bangladesh Muktijoddha Sangsad Central Command Council and its district and upazila units.

The election commission, led by Cabinet Secretary M Abdul Aziz, has been formed on approval by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is also the chief adviser and patron of Bangladesh Muktijoddha Sangsad, said a press

release of the Liberation War Affairs ministry.

The election commission has decided to gather opinions of the freedom fighters with a view to ensuring a free and fair election.

To this end, the freedom fighters have been asked to submit name, address, telephone or mobile numbers in writing to Joint Secretary Md Zakir Hossain at Room No. 603 of the Liberation War Affairs Ministry by February 22. They can send names in a group, but the number of group members should not be over three.

RMP DC made OSD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Deputy Commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Sarder Nurul Amin, who was the Security-in-charge during the Rajshahi University violence, was made officer-on-special-duty and was transferred to police headquarters yesterday.

Twenty eight other senior police personnel -- ranking between deputy inspectors general and additional deputy commissioner -- were also transferred to different places, said a source in police headquarters.

Sources said the government will take departmental actions against DC Sarder Nurul Amin for negligence in duties during the violence that deteriorated the law and order situation on RU campus and the city.

Strictly follow rules in recruitment

President asks NU authorities

UNB, Dhaka

President Zillur Rahman yesterday directed the National University authorities to strictly go by the rules in recruitment of employees and student admission, without harbouring irregularities.

"No irregularities will be tolerated," the president warned when a three-member delegation of the National University (NU) called on him at Bangabhaban and reported malpractice of the past.

During the meeting, the delegation led by NU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Qazi Shahidullah, submitted a detailed report on the irregularities in the university and the NU-affiliated university colleges during the previous government.

Zillur told the delegation

that stern action would be taken against those who would be found guilty and involved in wrongdoing.

The delegation informed the president that irregularities were found in recruitment of some 1,200 staffs during the previous government. Of them, 72 were the teachers of the university without having relevance with their subjects, they alleged.

The team also apprised him that 1.01 lakh students have already got admitted to the National University against 180,000 seats and the remaining 79,000 are now under process to get admitted for higher education.

They said the authorities published results of the admission tests within 10 days of the examinations using digital technology.

FORCED RETIREMENT Senior asst secy can now sign order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Officials from senior assistant secretary to secretary can now sign the orders sending the government officials and employees into forced retirement. Earlier, only joint secretary and above officials had the authority to sign such orders.

According to Public Servants (Retirement) Act 1974, the authority of sending an officer or employee into forced retirement was under the jurisdiction of the ministers. Joint secretary or above officials signed the order following recommendation of the ministers.

Establishment Ministry issued a gazette notification on February 7 in this regard as officials below joint secretary rank signed the orders in many cases violating rules.

In most cases, such orders were declared illegal in the higher court due to the fault, sources said.

Many alleged that the government brought changes regarding signing of forced retirement orders with an intention to remove anti-liberation elements from different government institutions and professional bodies.

"As per new provision, the chance of declaring the order of forced retirement in the court will be reduced," observed an official.

The forth section of the gazette notification mentioned that any officials would have the authority to issue order of the forced retirement.

According to subsection 9(2) of the Act, the government can send an officer/employee into forced retirement upon completion of his or her 25 years in service. They can also go for retirement on completion of their 25 years in service.

Sources said the rules regarding forced retirement are being misused by the political governments for about two decades.

HC asks Jamaat MP, 31 others to surrender before trial courts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday directed 32 Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and activists, including its lawmaker Shamsul Islam, to surrender before the trial courts within eight weeks in connection with two separate cases.

The cases were filed against them in Chittagong and Sylhet on charges of preventing the police from discharging their duties on February 12.

An HC bench of Justice MA Wahhab Miah and Justice Md Abdur Razzaque also asked the law enforcers not to harass or arrest them within this period in connection with the cases.

Shamsul Islam, also Ameer of Chittagong city Jamaat-e-Islami, its Sylhet district unit Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, and 30 others recently filed two bail petitions. They appeared before the HC for bail yesterday.

Fresh proposal by China to set up power plant

UNB, Dhaka

A state-owned Chinese power company -- China National Machinery and Equipment Import and Export Corporation (CMEC) -- has again offered to set up a 300MW thermal power plant in Khulna with its own credit. Despite signing the second MoU, the project was again stalled for several years for reasons not known.

A re-tender was called in June 2008 during the caretaker government, but no result came out of the re-tendering as the state-owned Power Development Board and CMEC failed to reach an understanding on the financial arrangement of the project.

Sources said CMEC has again become active to move ahead with the project. It submitted a fresh proposal to Power and Energy Ministry expressing its keen interest in implementing the project with Chinese credit.

became the substantially qualified bidder with the lowest financial offer.

When former Chinese premier Zhu Rongji visited Bangladesh in 2002, another MoU was signed between Dhaka and Beijing on the implementation of the project. Despite signing the second MoU, the project was again stalled for several years for reasons not known.

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Journalist falls victim to muggers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A gang of muggers posing as members of the Detective Branch of Police took away a motorcyclist of a journalist after injuring him in front of Dhaka Polytechnic Institute at Tejgaon in the city last night.

The victim, Rezwan Biswas, a staff reporter of the Kaler Kantha, was rushed to the Holy Family Hospital with head injury.

A gang of six criminals in a private car intercepted Rezwan when he was going to a filling station in the area at about 10:00pm, said Officer-in-charge (OC) of Tejgaon Industrial Police Station Md Omar Faruk.

When the gang members identified themselves as detectives, Rezwan told them that he is a journalist. The criminals then started beating him with iron rods, leaving him injured. The attackers were wearing DB jackets, the OC said.

At one point, when Rezwan ran away, the gang members sped away in their car and one of them by motorcycle. They also took away his mobile phone and wallet.

Later, locals rushed the victim to the Holy family Hospital at Maghbazar.

Criminals take away truck

Driver, helper drugged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A gang of criminals took away a truck carrying drums of edible oil after drugging the driver and his helper at Shabbagh in the city in the early hours of yesterday.

The victims, Sharif Bepari, 28, and his helper Hasan, were found lying unconscious by the road at Langabandh in Narayanganj in the morning. The police sent them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The criminals equipped with sharp weapons first tied up the two and gave them the option of taking sedatives or being killed, driver Sharif told reporters in the hospital.

"We chose the first option and took sedatives," he added.

Sharif said the gang of 15 or 16 robbers put up a barricade with an empty truck on the road in front of Aziz Super Market at Shabbagh at about 3:00am while he was heading towards Savar from Khatunganj in Chittagong.

The criminals then dragged Sharif and his helper out of their truck and forced them to get on the empty truck and tied up their hands and legs.

Sharif also said he could not recall what happened after he took the sedatives.

Lutfur, owner of the truck, said the truck was carrying 8.3 tons of edible oil.

Officer-in-charge Rezaul Karim of Shabbagh police station said they are yet to recover the truck and the oil drums.

None was arrested in this connection.

JAMUNA FUTURE PARK Appeal remains pending with Rajuk: Babul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamuna Group yesterday said that Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) should not knock down four unauthorised floors on top of the Jamuna Future Park shopping mall, as an appeal against demolition still remains pending with Rajuk.

The High Court and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court have rejected the petitions against demolition of floors, but Rajuk has not yet disposed of the appeal, Jamuna Group Chairman Nurul Islam Babul said at a press conference yesterday.

Rajuk should wait until the disposal of the appeal, he said.

He also termed the Rajuk's move to demolish the unauthorised floors illegal, as it embarked on the demolition drive the very next day following the HC verdict without giving the Jamuna Builders time to file a petition with the SC.

Diploma nurses withdraw fast-unto-death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Diploma Unemployed Nurses' Association withdrew their fast-unto-death yesterday following assurance of the Health Minister Prof AFM Ruhul Haque.

Demanding recruitment on the basis of merit and seniority, the nurses had been demonstrating at city's Muktangan since February 10.

While talking to The Daily Star, President of the Association Taslima Begum said she along with other leaders of the association met the health minister at his office at the Parliament in the evening and the minister assured them of realising their demand.

When contacted, Health Minister Ruhul Haque told The Daily Star, "I told them that everything will be looked into seriously and they will not be deprived at all."

Meeting to review law, order today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A meeting will be held at the office of the Divisional Commissioner of Dhaka today to review the law and order situation and take coordinated efforts to curb criminal activities.

Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder will preside over the meeting.

Divisional Commissioner of Dhaka Khandaker Shamsul Hossain will conduct the meeting.

Meanwhile, yesterday's cabinet committee meeting on law and order at the home ministry was postponed.

Teachers' registration exam results

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Results of the non-government teachers' registration examinations will be published at 5:00pm today.

The results will be available on the Non-government Teachers Registration and Certification Authority's (NTRCA) official website -- www.ntrca.gov.bd.

To receive results through SMS, the candidates should go to the message option of the mobile phone and write NTRCA <space> roll number, and then send it to 2777.

No Saudi in Bangladesh jail

Says Saudi embassy

BSS, Dhaka

Saudi Arabia yesterday rejected a newspaper report saying several Saudi nationals were languishing in Bangladesh jails along with more than 300 foreign prisoners although their terms had expired.

A Saudi embassy statement said only one detained foreigner earlier claimed to be a Saudi national but verification by the Saudi authorities proved the claim to be untrue.

"In respect to the only person who claims to be a Saudi national and is still in a prison having no official documents to prove Saudi nationality, the Saudi competent authorities had been requested to verify his matter. After verification it was found that the aforesaid man is not a Saudi national," the statement said.

T O D A Y

Workshop Bangladesh Heritage Foundation and Bangladesh Research and Publications will jointly organise a workshop on 'A new era in India-Bangladesh relationship: Strategic significance of the visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India from January 10-14, 2010'. Venue: Bilia auditorium. Time: 9:00am.	Seminar Department of Life Sciences and Life Sciences Club of North South University (NSU) will jointly organise a seminar on 'DNA technology in criminal investigation'. Venue: NSU Plaza Area. Time: 4:00pm.
Trade show American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh organises US Trade Show 2010. Venue: Hotel Sheraton. Time: 11:00am.	Exhibition A solo exhibition of artist Rashid Amin will begin. Venue: Shilpangan. Time: 5:30pm.
Publication ceremony The publication ceremony of a book titled 'Of pains and panics' by Mohammad Asafudowlah will be held. Venue: Hotel Sonargaon. Time: 4:00pm.	Seminar University Grants Commission of Bangladesh organises a seminar on the use of the language Bangla at university level. Venue: UGC auditorium. Time: 3:00pm.
	Reception Jatiya Mahila Sangstha will accord a reception to the Language Movement veterans. Venue: Sangstha auditorium. Time: 3:00pm.