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KHALEDA'S HOUSE SC bar for out-of-court settlement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) yesterday demanded that the government immediately go for an out-of-court settlement over the issue of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's cantonment house.

Describing the issue sensitive, the SCBA threatened to wage a movement to oust the government if the demand is not met.

"The court is a sensitive place and so is the field of politics. The government should not take politics to the court. It should consider the matter politically and settle it outside the court," said SCBA President Khandker Mahub Hossain at a press conference at his office yesterday morning.

Replying to a question

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A death trap over Turag

Experts see absence of crash barriers, raised walkways on Salehpur bridge as reasons for Sunday's bus plunge

MUKHLESUR RAHMAN

Absence of crash barriers on the approach to Salehpur bridge in Amin Bazar caused Sunday's bus plunge in the Turag river, killing at least 13 people.

The same engineering flaw of the bridge was responsible for another serious bus accident five years back, which too left 13 people dead.

Experts of Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology have come to this conclusion after inspecting the scene of the latest accident.

ARI chief Prof Shamsul Hoque said, "When we visited the place after the accident five years ago, we saw no crash barriers. And we found no crash barriers again after Sunday's accident."

The design and safety wing of the Roads and

Highways Department, which is responsible for finding and repairing defects on roads and bridges, did nothing to prevent repeat of the accident.

Prof Hoque said the bridge is around 35 feet high from the ground, yet its approach and exit have no crash barriers, which prevent vehicles from leaving the roadway and thus improve road safety.

Like crash barriers, he added, another essential part of a safe bridge is raised walkways on either side of the approach road, which act as non-mounted crash barriers.

Salehpur bridge has no such walkways either.

Hoque said during Sunday's accident the bus fell into the river from the approach to the

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Salehpur bridge over the Turag river at Amin Bazar in Savar. Many people were killed in road accidents on and near the bridge in the last few years. On Sunday, a bus plunged into the river from the approach to the bridge, killing at least 13 persons. Experts say engineering flaws of the bridge are responsible for such accidents.

FILE PHOTO

Food security faces stiff challenge

Climate change badly affecting harvest, making it difficult to feed rising population

PORIMOL PALMA

A rising population amid declining agricultural land has put the country's future food security at risk, especially when salinity in the coastal belt, and droughts and depleting underground water level in the north have become constant realities.

According to a projection of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the country's population will be 16.69 crore by 2020, while unofficial estimates suggest that the current population is already approaching 16 crore. The National Population Council of Bangladesh says the number will reach 17 crore by 2020.

Bangladesh had to import nearly 20 lakh tonnes of food grains in the last fiscal year on top of around 3 crore tonnes of rice and wheat produced domestically, while BBS's projected food security requirement was for 2.49 crore tonnes.

Economists and agriculturists told The Daily Star yesterday, on the eve of World Food Day, that these disparities suggest either the population is increasing more than the projected rate, or food consumption patterns are changing.

Bangladesh currently has 84.4 lakh hectares of cultivable land, according to the Ministry of Agriculture. With 1 percent decrease of arable land due to building of new houses, industrialisation, and urbanisation -- the cultivable land area will come down to a little more than 70 lakh hectares in 2020.

"Though presently the situation of food security appears quite satisfactory, its future does not look the same. There are two major factors -- increasing population and climatic changes," said Prof Quazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmad, a noted economist.

These factors could lead to a decrease in

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4 workers killed in wall collapse

UNB, Naogaon

Four construction workers were killed and three others injured while a wall of an under-construction building crashed down on them at Chargourihat village in Mohadebpur upazila yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Emdadul Haque, 25, Munsur Ali, 22, Rubel, 22, and Rasel, 25, while the injured Hossain Ali, 22, Babu, 27 and Shahidul Islam, 30.

Police said a wall of an under-construction building of Bhai Bhai Rice Mill collapsed on seven workers leaving them critically injured yesterday evening. Among them six workers were rushed to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. Of the six, Emdadul and Munsur died on way to the hospital and Rubel succumbed

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Bureaucracy never let local bodies rise

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The civil bureaucracy has been holding back the local government bodies for over 125 years now.

Their opposition to local government system dates back to the British period. It was them who had frustrated Viceroy Lord Ripon's landmark move to strengthen local government bodies, say studies on local governance.

In 1882, Ripon adopted a resolution to give people of Bengal a sustainable interest in and responsibility for administration of their own affairs through establishing local self-government.

In the light of that resolution, the Bengal Council passed Bengal Local Self-Government Act in 1885.

The legislation provided for a three-tier system for rural areas -- a district board in each district, a local board in sub-division of a district, and a union committee for a group of villages.

The objective of Ripon's resolution was to establish a network of local bodies and prepare them for local administration.

Accordingly, the civil administration was asked to sacrifice efficiency for the time being in favour of political education of the rural people through newly-created local bodies.

The creation of truly responsible local self-government was seen as the only way the crushing burden of administering countryside could be shared.

"However, this philosophy of local administration was not acceptable to the officials and the spirit of the resolution was defeated," Prof AHM Aminur Rahman observes in his study titled "Politics of Rural Local Self-Government in Bangladesh".

Giving in to growing pressure from the officials, the British rulers brought a number of changes to the act over the years till 1919.

"Local Government in Bangladesh", a study edited by former principal secretary Kamal Siddiqui, says the then officials opposed the Bengal local self-government act as they felt the system was inadequate to meet the requirements of the administration.

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6 firearms seized in Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Security forces recovered six firearms and 81 rounds of ammunitions from the dense forest of Kathaltala area in Rangamati in a raid Thursday night.

The arms and ammunitions are: one 303 rifle with 30 rounds of live bullets, one light gun with 14 rounds of ammunition, two single-barrel guns with 37 rounds of ammunitions, one pipe gun and a sawed-off rifle.

Acting on a tip off, Longudu zone army led by the zone commander Lt Col Usuf conducted the raid in the forest under Longudu upazila around 10:30pm.

However, none could be captured, as the "criminals" fled the scene sensing army presence, Usuf said.

The recovered firearms and ammunitions were handed over to the Longudu police, reports our Khagrachhari correspondent.



The town protection embankment at Kheturtala in Patenga of the port city lies in dilapidated state as the recent high tides breached a section of the dam. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

SIRAJGANJ 2 killed as train hits microbus

A CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

At least two people were killed and five others injured, one critically, when a train hit a microbus at a level crossing under Jhaoil bridge in Kamarkhand upazila of Sirajganj yesterday afternoon.

Bimol Chaki, officer-in-charge of Government Railway Police (GRP) Station at Sirajganj, said the accident occurred as there was no rail gate at the level crossing.

The deceased were identified as Yousuf Ali, 30, of Bhola, and Kulsum, 16, of Noakhali sadar upazila.

All the deceased and injured were returning to Dhaka by the microbus after

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Train stopped by 'pulling chain'

Says injured driver of Drutajan Express, claims he slowed down the train after seeing crowd

STAR REPORT

Asiruddin, the head driver of Drutajan Express that ran over six participants of an opposition rally in Sirajganj on Monday, said yesterday that the train was torched after it stopped due to chain pulling by someone among passengers.

"I was driving the train at a speed of 30-32 km per hour since I left Jamtoli Station. About eight to ten minutes later, I took a turn and slowed down the speed to 5 or 6 kmph when I noticed a crowd on the railway track," he said.

Asiruddin was talking to media for the first time at Parbatipur Railway Hospital yesterday.

On the day of the incident, assistant loco master Raj Govinda Das was with Asiruddin on the engine. They were not aware of any rally on or near rail line.

"I talked to the gateman near the gathering and he told me to run slowly whistling. Some 30 to 40 seconds later the train stopped, and

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