



Outgoing British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Stephen Evans calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office in the city yesterday.

## Drive to free Shitalakkhya from earth-filling continues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The joint team of water transport authority and Narayanganj district administration yesterday continued removing earth deposits from the filled-up portion of the river Shitalakkhya at Kanchpur.

The move, however, was criticised as there are allegations against the authorities on giving the illegal sand-traders a chance to take away their huge stockpiles conveniently.

The three-day drive to free the river from massive earth-filling at the very foot of Kanchpur Bridge and its adjacent areas began on Tuesday following a news report in The Daily Star.

It was aimed at removing earth from an area 200 feet wide and 700 feet long stretching from the BIWTA's Kanchpur Landing Station towards north in Shimrail mouja.

The unlicensed traders not only destroyed the river ecology and its navigable channel but also deprived the government of huge revenue by unloading and stacking construction materials illegally.

Locals alleged that instead of confiscating and auctioning the piles of sand and boulders as a penalty to the offenders, the authorities gave them the opportunity to safely take away their stocks from the excavation site.

Traders of construction materials have encroached on the river and reduced its width

almost by half in Shimrail mouja in Shiddhirganj near the bridge.

Responding to a question, Md Saiful Islam, senior deputy director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), said the decision for auction of construction materials lies with the executive magistrate, who led the drive.

"If any party expresses interest in buying sand through auction, the encroachers threaten them," he said.

That is why the authorities could not arrange the auction, he added.

Md Jahirul Islam, executive magistrate, however, said that he would arrange an auction next week.

He also said that excavation work had priority over penalising the offenders.

The authorities conducted similar drives at the site ten to twelve times in the past and seized sand piles. At least three auctions were arranged with the seized materials, said official sources.

A powerful excavator and a small dredger were used with the existing excavator during yesterday's drive, said Saiful of BIWTA.

The earth deposits were loaded in bulkhead vessels and trucks to carry them away.

Members of Rapid Action Battalion and armed and regular police were on hand to maintain law and order.

The three-day drive ends today.

## ROW OVER TRANSPORTING COAL

# Mongla port, power div at loggerheads

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Mongla Port Authority and Power Division are yet to resolve the differences over transporting coal from the port to the planned 1321MW coal-based power plant site in Rampal of Bagerhat district. Rampal is 10 km north of the port.

The port authority earlier gave verbal assurance to use two jetties (jetty 10 and 11) for coal transportation, but is now reluctant to do so, on ground of the port's limited capacity and an adverse impact on export and import due to dust from coal in the port area, said officials concerned.

The port authority insisted that out of 13 jetties outlined in the Mongla Port Master Plan, five jetties (5 to 9 jetties) have been constructed and are now operational. It informed

the Power Division that jetty 1 to jetty 4 could not be built due to low depth of water while jetty 10 and jetty 11 will be needed in future for container handling.

"If two jetties are given for coal transportation the extension of the port may be hampered, but the two jetties will be needed for transit facilities to India, Nepal and Bhutan," the port authority informed the Power Division in a letter recently.

In this context, the Power Division sent a summary to the prime minister last month for her approval. The premier gave the approval to use the two jetties.

Meanwhile, an inter-ministerial meeting held at the shipping ministry to resolve the problems ended

inconclusively. Chaired by Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, the meeting was attended by Prime Minister's Economic Affairs Adviser Moshir Rahman, Energy Adviser Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury and senior officials of the shipping ministry and Power Division.

Another meeting will be convened soon to find ways to resolve the problems, meeting sources said.

Apart from that, about Tk 100 crore will be required for capital dredging of 10 km river from Mongla port to Rampal. Another Tk 15 crore will be needed annually for maintenance of the low depth route, said Power Division sources.

Chairman of Mongla Port commodore MAK Azad said they have no problem with handing over two

jetties for coal transportation after the PM's approval. He said everything in this regard will be resolved soon.

Bangladesh and India have signed an agreement to build the power plant under a joint venture initiative. It will formally be announced during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in September.

Bangladesh's Power Development Board (PDB) and India's state-owned National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) are designated to implement the project by 2016.

NTPC has already prepared a draft feasibility study of the power plant, but it could not be finalised due to the coal transportation-related problems, said shipping ministry officials.



Newly appointed Cyprus High Commissioner Nafsika Chor Krousti presents credentials to President Zillur Rahman at Bangabhaban yesterday.

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