

Amasia

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will mark the next coming together of the Earth's land masses.

The continents are last thought to have come together 300 million years ago into a supercontinent called Pangaea.

Details are published in the journal Nature.

The land masses of the Earth are constantly moving as the Earth's tectonic activity occurs. This generates areas such as the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, where Iceland has formed, and areas such as that off the coast of Japan, where one plate rides over another.

Geologists believe that, over billions of years, these shifting plates have driven the continents together periodically, creating the hypothesised supercontinents of Nuna 1.8 billion years ago, Rodinia a billion years ago, and then Pangaea 300 million years ago.

The next supercontinent has already been given the working title of Amasia, as it is expected to involve the convergence of the Americas and Asia.

What the researchers have set out to do is predict when and where it will form by looking back at where its predecessors emerged.

"We're all pretty familiar with the concept of Pangaea, but there hasn't been much convincing data to suggest how the supercontinents take shape," Ross Mitchell of Yale University told BBC News.

"In our model, we actually have North America and South America joining by closing the Caribbean Sea and the Arctic Sea closing and connecting the Americas and Asia."

BETTER INSIGHT

The model puts the repositioned Americas within what is known as the Pacific "ring of fire". Europe, part of the Eurasian land mass, Africa and Australia are predicted to join the merging continent, with only Antarctica left out.

The prediction is based on analysis of magnetic data locked into rocks around the world which betray the magnetic orientation of those rocks in past ages.

"Ancient rocks when they form, whether it's lava cooling or sedimentary rock solidifying, will lock in the magnetic orientation," explained Mitchell. "But while this indicates latitude very accurately, historically we haven't had indicators of longitude."

"We found that after each historical supercontinent had assembled, this whole supercontinent would undergo a series of back-and-forth rotations about a stable axis on the equator."

This led them to the view that that each successive supercontinent forms 90 degrees away from its predecessor. Previous studies have suggested supercontinents would form either in the same part of the globe or on alternating sides of the globe.

Commenting on the paper, Dr David Rothery, a geologist with the Open University, said the new research offered us a better insight into the history of our planet.

"We can understand past environments better if we know exactly where they were," he told BBC News. "I don't think as a European I care whether continents are going to converge over the North Pole or whether Britain crashes into America in the far future. Predicting into the future is of far less concern than what happened in the past."

Politics

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Wednesday night.

Talking to The Daily Star, Proctor Mahbubul Arfin said the ban was imposed so that the IU unit Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) could not create tension over the disappearance of its two leaders reportedly picked up by law enforcers from a bus on Saturday.

President of the pro-jamaat body's IU unit, Tareq Manwar, claimed at a press conference on Tuesday that a team of Rab-4 stopped a bus of Hanif Enterprise at Nabinagar in Savar around 12:30pm on February 4 in the name of checking.

After checking the bus, the Rab men "picked up" Al Mukaddas, cultural affairs secretary, and Waliullah, finance secretary, of the IU unit of ICS from the bus. They were returning from Dhaka.

However, Lt Col Abdulla Ibne Zaid, commanding officer of Rab-4 unit, denied the allegation.

Shibir men

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city during the 6:00am to 12:00noon hartal.

Pro-hartal activists burnt tyres at several points and smashed vehicles at Bahaddarhat intersection, Andarkilla, Chandanpur and Chwak Bazar. The hartal was otherwise peaceful and traffic movement was normal except for a few points.

On Wednesday, Masud bin Habib of English department and Mujahidul Islam of Zoology department at CU were killed in a bloody violence between BCL and Shibir men.

While Shibir said both the victims were its members, BCL claimed one of them to be its activist. Campus sources said Masud was the general secretary of Shibir's Suhrawardy Hall unit while Mujahidul an activist.

At least 40 others, including CU Proctor Nasim Hasan, were injured during the clashes.

Fearing further tension on the campus, the CU authorities shut the university till February 16 and ordered all resident students to vacate the halls by 11:00am yesterday. The halls were duly vacated, reports our CU correspondent.

Meanwhile, the university syndicate at a meeting last night extended the shut down till March 1.

Resident students can return to their halls on

March 2, but that being a Friday, academic activities will resume on March 3, said Md Kamrul Huda, a syndicate member.

The syndicate also formed a five-member committee headed by Prof Md Nurool Anwar, dean of Biology department, to probe the violence.

The committee will submit its report within 14 days, Kamrul Huda added.

Also yesterday, police sued more than 300 people last night in connection with the violence.

Hathazari Police Station Sub-inspector Chintu Miah filed the case on charges of preventing police from discharging their duties.

The 12 Shibir men, including Shibir's CU unit secretary Imrul Hasan, who were arrested on Wednesday night were made accused in the case. The rest of the accused are unknown.

In another development, BCL's Dhaka University unit yesterday announced a two-day programme protesting the "violence by Shibir cadres" on CU campus, reports UNB.

BCL activists also brought out a procession on DU campus and held a meeting in front of Aparajeyo Bangla where BCL president Badiuzzaman Sohag and its secretary Nazmul Alam also spoke.

Ceat coming

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groundwork and aims to have tyres rolling out of its Bangladesh plant by the end of the year 2013," he said.

If the plan of Ceat, an RP Goenka Group company and fourth biggest tyre maker of India, materialises, it would be one of the biggest manufacturing investments by an Indian company in Bangladesh and the first by an Indian tyre manufacturer.

The plant will make cross-ply tyres for trucks, light and small commercial vehicles and two-wheelers for the local market, which is currently around Rs 1,000 crore, said Goenka who expects this market to grow to around Rs 1,200 crore by 2015.

He said exports from the Bangladesh plant to neighbouring Nepal and Myanmar are a possibility.

The firm aims to capture 40 percent of the projected demand of cross-ply tyres in the region by 2015.

Bangladesh imports at least 1.5 million tyres annually. Of this, around 60 percent come from India and the rest from China, Indonesia, Japan and Thailand.

Goenka said nearly 80 percent of the raw material for the Bangladesh plant will be imported from India and Southeast Asia.

Although Bangladesh does not have enough raw materials such as carbon, rubber, chemical and yarn for making tyres, it still might be a good strategy to have a manufacturing unit in Bangladesh as the country has a growing market for cross-ply tyres, Indian tyre industry sources said.

New EC to be govt's puppet

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will continue their movement against it.

"It [newly formed commission] would be a puppet of the government, so we don't accept the new Election Commission. People will also not accept this commission," she said while speaking at the annual council of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists at the Jatiya Press Club.

Reiterating the demand for caretaker government, Khaleda, also BNP chairperson, said next election must be held under a neutral and non-party government. Otherwise, BNP and its allies will not contest the elections, and the polls won't be acceptable to anyone at home and abroad, she added.

She said the EC must be acceptable to all and the caretaker government must be constituted before the election. "The Election Commission has to be formed through discussion with all after formation of the caretaker government. Even we can talk to find out the head and advisers to the caretaker government."

The BNP chairperson urged all to make the March 12 rally a success, saying they will give a warning to the government that they have still time to restore the caretaker government system. "They will have nothing in their hand if they fail to take a

decision in time."

She warned that any attempt to thwart the March 12 rally or announce counter-programmes would be a "grave mistake" and said the government would have to bear the responsibilities if unwanted situations arise.

It is Awami League that had earlier waged movement for caretaker government and Election Commission. The BNP will also do so now, Khaleda said, adding that the BNP's movement will be like the mass upsurge of 1969 and 1990.

"We all will hold an election together by ousting you through a movement and then we will accept whatever verdict the people give," she said pointing to the government. "Present government has to resign 90 days before the next election. They will have to hand over power to a non-party government."

Blaming the government for curbing press freedom, she said the government is now suffering from people phobia just like people suffer from rabies when dog bites them. That is why they fear any political programme of the opposition, she commented.

Everyone has to wake up to resist this government but the movement will be peaceful, she added.

"Awami League wants to destroy political environment deliberately. Even

people were gunned down on instructions of the government. The prime minister herself is responsible for it. Police cannot fire without orders from the proper authorities," she added.

The previous Awami League was little bit better in terms of "destroying" the country, she observed.

Khaleda said the media including newspapers is not enjoying freedom now due to the government's pressure. "It is not that everything written is true. Despite this fact, we believe in press freedom."

She requested the journalists to establish a 'journalist torture stage' where people who faced torture and repression during this government will get the chance to speak about their experiences.

News Today editor Reazuddin Ahmed, Sangram editor Abul Asad, Amar Desh acting editor Mahmudur Rahman, Jatiya Press Club President Kamal Uddin Sabuj and General Secretary Syed Abdal Ahmed, DUJ President Abdus Shahid, among others, spoke.

BFUJ President Ruhul Amin Gazi presided over the meeting and General Secretary Shawkat Mahmud gave the welcome speech at the programme attended by over four thousand guests and delegates from across the country.

Israel hit by nationwide strike

BBC ONLINE

Israel's main trade union federation yesterday launched a national strike intended to shut down government offices, banks, airports, ports and rail services.

Histadrut said it was in protest at the government's use of contract workers, who often earn less and receive fewer benefits than permanent employees.

Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz said the strike was unnecessary and would harm the country's economy.

The Israeli Chambers of Commerce put the cost at about \$100m (£63m) a day.

The high court rejected a petition against the strike by the chambers of commerce on Tuesday, saying it did not see a reason to intervene.

Pankaj Saran

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The Indian High Commission as a young diplomat in the late 1980s, will succeed Rajeev Mitter, who left office in November last year.

Saran was the second secretary at Indian High Commission in Dhaka from February 1989 to June 1992 and later promoted to the status of the first secretary.

Born on November 22, 1958, Saran has worked at the Indian missions in Dhaka, Moscow, Washington DC, Cairo and Geneva as well as the India's Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi.

HC summons

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The court order was in response to a contempt of court petition filed by Humayun Kabir, owner of the demolished building.

The HC bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim also asked them to explain why they should not be directed to rebuild the structure and pay compensation to the owner.

Instructed by the magistrate, a DCC team on Tuesday knocked down the building, though the owner had informed the team about an HC order for maintaining a status quo.

Following a writ petition, the HC on August 25 last year imposed the status quo and also issued a rule upon the government authorities concerned to explain why the acquisition of the building's land should not be declared illegal.

The DCC has built a market in the area and carried out the demolition drive to extend it.

Petitioner's counsel Manzill Murshid said the magistrate and his team did not comply with the HC order, which amounts to contempt of court.

Deputy Attorney General ABM Altaf Hossain represented the government.

Army asked

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The army briefed the committee about the "foiled attempt" to topple the government. Chiefs of the three services were present at the meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban with Idris in the chair.

At a press conference on January 19, the army announced that it had foiled a "coup attempt to overthrow the present democratic government" by a band of religious fanatics, comprising mid-ranking army officers and their retired colleagues.

Idris, also former defence secretary, said the House body members thanked the army for foiling the attempt. "We also stressed the need for fair probe into the incident. The investigation should be carried out without leaving any loophole," he added.

Asked if there was any "political motive" behind the "foiled coup", Idris said, "Of course. A political quarter instigated the incident to use the army for its political gain."

The meeting was also informed that steps were taken to increase ration benefits for the armed forces personnel as per the committee's recommendations, said a press release of the parliament secretary.

Killing by BSF

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House in Chandpur after exchanging views with a cross section of people, reports UNB.

Dipu Moni also said both the governments are working to bring incidents of killing or torture to zero.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Chief Maj Gen Anwar Hossain also echoed the foreign minister's stance that killing at the border under any circumstances is not acceptable.

"We condemn killing wherever it takes place including at the border," he told UNB over the telephone responding to Indian BSF Chief U K Bansal's remark that firing at the border will not stop as they need to prevent the offenders.

"Our standpoint is very clear: We do not shoot. We do not shoot at Indian trespassers; we arrest them and try under the laws of our land. We strictly follow the International Human Rights convention," he added.

The BGB director general also said if any Bangladeshi national illegally crosses the international boundary, he may be arrested and tried under the law of that country.

Replying to a question, Maj Gen Anwar said the BGB remains alert all the time. "We are constantly advising the frontier people not to cross the border illegally."

Asked about the coordinated border management with Indian BSF, he said it has already started and so far 900 joint patrols have been carried out, improving the situation along the common border.

Maj Gen Anwar said the incidents of killing at the border are on the decline, mentioning that in the past two months two people were killed at the border.

"We have very cordial relations with our counterparts. If any incident happens, we hold flag meeting or local commander level meeting to resolve the problem instantly," he said.

Meanwhile, BSF Chief U K Bansal yesterday again said that it would not be possible to put a total stop to the firing as long as there are illegal activities along the India-Bangladesh border.

"We are requesting the BGB authorities continuously to increase patrols along the border so that illegal border crossing does not happen," Bansal told the BBC Bangla service.

He, however, said that BSF members have been instructed to use minimum force while tackling any trespasser incident in the border areas.

along the India-Bangladesh border during the night hours. "So, when anyone attempts to cross the border illegally, we have to take necessary action against the trespassers."

In another development, the Indian High Commission in Dhaka in a press release yesterday said the government of India is constrained at the rise in recent border incidents in which BSF jawans are being attacked with alarming regularity, emboldened by the restraint being maintained by BSF to avoid civilian casualties.

"This restraint has also resulted in an unprecedented spurt in incidents of fence cuttings, illegal crossings, attempts of dacoities and fatal attacks on BSF personnel deployed along the India-Bangladesh border," UNB quoted the release to be reading.

A group of "miscreants" from Bangladesh had encircled a BSF party near North Dinajpur and tried to snatch their weapons.

Students

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Gulistan area yesterday.

Witnesses said traffic was halted for more than an hour on the road between the terminal and Golap Shah Mazar as the workers parked some buses there randomly.

The clash ensued around 4:30pm following an altercation between them over riding buses, said police.

Hearing the news some JnU students reached the spot on a bus and started vandalising other buses.

The transport workers chased the students to prevent them from damaging vehicles.

Among the injured, JnU students Masudur Rahman Mamun, Mominul Islam, Mohammad Tutul and Shrabon received treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), while some others at different private clinics.

Habibur Rahman, a JnU student, told newsmen at DMCH that they went to the spot on information that the workers have beaten three students and confined them after a brawl over getting on a bus.

However, Khandaker Enayet Ullah, general secretary of Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association, had a different version.

He claimed that some students tried to extort money from the transport leaders at the terminal. Failing to extort them, the students went on a rampage.

Contacted, Officer-in-Charge of Shahbag Police Station Sirajul Islam said the two sides later resolved the spat through a discussion.

No language

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Pakistan constituent assembly then in session in Karachi.

The following are excerpts from the letter:

"We, the students of Dacca University, who initiated the language movement in East Pakistan three years ago (and) who are now more determined than ever to secure for Bengali the status of state language of Pakistan, will take this opportunity, while you are assembled at Karachi, to press once more our legitimate claim..."

We refuse to believe that any language under heaven can be Islamic or Christian or heathen. If Urdu is Islamic, Bengali is equally so. Nay, it is more Islamic as a large number of Muslims speak Bangla..."

Thus the letter went on, making the point that an adoption of Urdu as the language of the state would only lead to the creation of a privileged class in the country, to the detriment of the broad majority of the population. Such a move would 'strike at the root of national integrity without which there is no future for our country.'

The closing words of the letter were striking in their forcefulness:

"We... have given a tough fight and are prepared to fight to the last. We shall never accept Urdu as the only state language. We are sworn to expose the great conspiracy which aims at reducing East Pakistan to the state of a colony. We remind... the people's representatives... that until and unless the claim of Bengali is fully established in the province as well as the Centre, the students of Dacca University shall not rest..."

Steel mill fined

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toxic smoke at Rupganj in Narayanganj.

DoE Director M Munir Chowdhury fined AK Majumder Steel Mills Ltd and ordered its closure as per the environment preservation law, says a press release.

The factory, which had been operating without environmental clearance for the last one and a half years, emitted toxic smoke containing metal elements including sulphur dioxide, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide.

The authorities did not set up any fume extraction system for smoke emission, which caused serious air pollution in the area, added the release.

The DoE said steel and re-rolling mill are increasing rapidly in various parts of the country threatening public health.

Anti-graft body

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reporters after the meeting at the secretariat.

People witnessed a tough enforcement of the ACC Act during the last caretaker regime's tenure when political figures, top government officials and businesspersons faced corruption charges.

Shafique said the government had decided to incorporate another provision in the law so that the ACC could seize properties at home and abroad even without proof if the commission feels that those properties were amassed illegally by anybody.

The seized properties cannot be sold or transferred until the cases are settled, he said, adding that the decisions of the meeting will be sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry.

"The commission will be able to work neutrally and independently if the revised act is passed in parliament

after implementing decisions taken through today's [yesterday] meeting," ACC Chairman Ghulam Rahman told The Daily Star.

The commission officials in 2009 submitted an amendment proposal for the law before the cabinet and it was discussed in a cabinet meeting. Later, "an interest group" incorporated the provision of taking permission for filing cases against government officials, he added.

The law with some proposal for amendment was then forwarded as a bill to the parliamentary standing body which after several hearings sent it to the law minister for suggestion.

Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, has welcomed the government's shift in the position on the issue.

"Continuation of the existing provision in the law will help the anti-corruption commission play its role

Traffic jam polluting air

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if things do not improve.

The ministry thinks if pollution can be reduced by 20 percent, at least 1,200 to 3,500 lives can be saved and 80 to 230 million cases of respiratory diseases can be averted each year.

A website (www.case-moef.gov.bd) of the ministry has mentioned this data. The web page is of a government project called Clean Air and Sustainable Environment (CASE), set up with the support of the World Bank to reduce the capital's smog, produced by brick kilns and vehicles, which has been steadily increasing in recent years. The World Bank and Bangladesh jointly conducted a Country Environmental Assessment and came up with the data.

The website says that if air pollution is reduced by 20 percent, it would also save \$170 to 500 million in healthcare costs and increase the productivity of city dwellers.

Department of Environment officials said faulty vehicles, smoke from brick kilns, dust from construction sites and toxic fumes from industries are the main sources of particulate matter. According to environment officials who conducted a pre-study before the joint assessment for CASE, around 60 percent of city air pollution is caused by thousands of unfit and faulty vehicles, especially those that run on diesel. They say vehicles older than 20 years could not be taken off the city streets. These

vehicles add to city traffic, congestion and air pollution.

According to sources at the Department of Environment, the density of airborne particulate matter is around 250 micrograms per cubic metre in Dhaka, which is five times the acceptable level of 50 set by the National Ambient Air Quality Standard of Bangladesh.

The CASE website notes that Dhaka air consists of common pollutants, including particulate matter, sulphur dioxide (SO2), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), ground-level ozone (O3), volatile organic compounds, hydrogen sulphide (H2S), sulphates and nitrates.

Additional air pollutants of concern include toxic metals (lead, mercury, manganese, arsenic and nickel), benzene, formaldehyde, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB), dioxins, and other persistent organic compounds, the web content add.

Dhaka is surrounded by brick kilns which have been contributing to the capital's air pollution.

The Clean Air and Sustainable Environment project has a brick kiln component which aims to usher in a new era in brick manufacturing in Bangladesh.

Under the project, the Department of Environment will work towards changing the institutional, legal and regulatory framework. To that effect, the project will provide technical support to the

newly established Brick Advisory Committee in an effort to make the industry green.

The project also aims at developing a long-term strategic policy framework for the brick industry that will include a strengthening of laws and regulations. The adoption of cleaner technologies and practices will be promoted among the brick enterprises through demonstration projects and awareness campaigns.

A study, Environmental Performance Index 2012, conducted by the US universities Yale and Columbia, found Dhaka to be the 31st most polluted city out of 132 cities across the world.

Hamas MPs call for scrapping of Fatah deal

AFP, Gaza City

Lawmakers of the Hamas majority in the Palestinian parliament called yesterday for the scrapping of a reconciliation accord with Fatah on constitutional grounds.

"After examining the question of Mahmud Abbas taking on the premiership as well as the presidency" and consultation with judicial experts, such a scenario was found to be contrary to the Basic Law, 31 MPs said in a statement.

It said after a meeting in parliament in Gaza City that the Basic Law calls for separation of the two posts, in contrast to Fatah which denies any violation of the law.