

"Bangladesh getting excess water"

Claims Mamata in letter to Indian PM

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Paschim Banga Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has recently written to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressing concern that "excess water" was flowing into Bangladesh due to break-down of two sluice gates of Farakka Barrage.

Gate-13 of the barrage broke down on June 16 last year and gate-16 on December 9, Mamata said in her letter, adding that excess water was therefore flowing into Bangladesh.

Yesterday she told reporters in Kolkata that the prime minister has replied to her letter.

Officials said the issue had been discussed with Indian Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal. He assured of action, they added.

State government sources said Bangladesh was supposed to get 35,000 cusecs during the dry season as per the India-Bangladesh water treaty but it was getting 82,801 cusecs due to the water drainage from Farakka Barrage.

The sources said the barrage's water level had fallen from 72 feet to 65.8 feet. "This will cause serious problem for the Bhagiriathi (river that flows into Paschim Banga) in the coming months."

The feeder canal, which supplied water to the Bhagiriathi, should get 40,000 cusecs, as against the present 20,000 cusecs, the sources said, adding, "If this trend continues, it will be difficult for Paschim Banga to manage the water flow."

Indian village relocated to protect tigers

BBC ONLINE

An entire village has been relocated in the northern Indian state of Rajasthan to protect tigers, officials say.

More than 350 people from 82 families in Umri village, in the Sariska tiger reserve, moved to a new location.

The number of tigers in Sariska had dwindled to zero before growing to five over the last three years.

Umri is the second village in Sariska to be relocated to help secure a proper habitat for tigers to increase their numbers. The villagers moved last week.

There are 11 villages with a population of nearly 2,500 people located in the heart of the tiger reserve which need to be relocated to improve the habitat. Rajasthan's chief conservator of forests, P S Somasekar, told the BBC.

Somasekar said efforts were being made to relocate four more villages over the next few years.

"It is a long-drawn process because the villagers have to agree to move out. We can't force them to leave. We can only persuade," he said.

The villagers are compensated with land, cash and livestock worth up to 1 million rupees (\$20,000) and relocated to the nearest cultivable plots outside the reserve. Rajasthan's chief wildlife warden AC Chaubey told the BBC.

"To maintain a reserve of this size, we need a minimum of 20 female tigers to help with the breeding and a viable population of 80 to 100 tigers," Somasekar said.

There have been a number of incidents involving conflicts between local villagers and tigers in the reserve - a few years ago, the villagers allegedly poisoned a tiger after it attacked one of their buffaloes.

Tiger numbers have shrunk alarmingly in India in recent decades. A 2011 census counted about 1,700 tigers in the wild.

A century ago there were estimated to be 1,00,000 tigers in India.

Lawmaker's debut

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In doing so, Bappi, elected in December last year to one of the reserved seats for women, was not hesitant at all about breaching the rules of procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad, which did not allow an MP to speak of anybody in the House in his/her absence.

She was delivering the speech on the thanksgiving motion on the president's address.

Deputy Speaker Col (ret'd) Shawkat Ali was presiding over the sitting. He did not interrupt the Awami League MP, nor did he warn her not to use indecent words in the speech.

Instead, Bappi, who

AL, BNP

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discussions to ensure a free, fair and participatory election.

"The discussion between the two parties can be held in or outside the parliament," he said after a meeting with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night.

Blake hoped that AL and BNP will work together. The United States wants to see a fair, credible and participatory election in Bangladesh, he said at a press briefing after the meeting with Khaleda.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Zam Mozena and BNP Vice-Chairman Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury were present in the briefing.

The US is not the mediator and it is not also its policy to interfere in any internal issue of another country, said Blake when asked whether the US has any plan to play a role if the two major parties fail to reach a consensus.

Asked about his country's position regarding the Padma Bridge project and the World Bank stance, he said, "I hope Bangladesh and World Bank will work together so that the project work can proceed in a transparent way."

On the meeting with Khaleda, Blake said a number of issues like terrorism, trade, climate change, and Bangladesh's relationship with India and Myanmar also came up in the discussion.

After he left the press briefing, Shamsur Mobin said the US assistant secretary of state wanted to know what will get the priority if BNP is voted to power and in reply Khaleda Zia said they will fix that in consultation with AL.

"In response to Blake's expectation of a free, fair and participatory election, our chairperson said BNP is always ready for discussion. We want a non-party administration and a neutral and participatory election," added Shamsur Mobin.

BNP acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, advisers to the opposition leader Reaz Rahman and Sabihuddin Ahmed accompanied Khaleda in her meeting with Blake.

Uncertainties

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obligation that the MoU must be signed on that day.

The communications minister's remarks came a day after Finance Minister AMA Muhith had said that the government would have to withdraw or cancel its agreement with WB-led donors before signing a deal with Malaysia. Muhith also said the financing issue was still undecided.

Asked if Bangladesh's ties with the donors would be jeopardised if the government move ahead with the project without them, Quader said there are many projects funded by WB and the government is not going into any conflict with the donors.

He said the government does not have the time to waste since the Padma Bridge is a dream project for the countrymen.

The Malaysian government on January 30 formally offered to finance the bridge construction and it was welcomed by Bangladesh.

On February 4, Malaysian official news agency Bernama reported that a consortium comprised of experienced construction companies of that country will be set up to undertake the \$2.19 billion (around RM 6.6 billion) project after the Bangladesh government accepts Malaysia's technical and financial proposals on the project.

It also said that a MoU will be signed with Bangladesh in Dhaka on February 21.

On February 5, Obaidul Quader also said the government would sign a MoU if complexities with WB were not resolved.

resigned from the position of assistant attorney general after becoming a lawmaker, was given an additional five minutes to continue her tirade against the BNP chairperson when the allotted 10 minutes' time for her was running out.

[The Daily Star refrains from publishing the words which Bappi used, considering those as very unpleasant.]

When she was blasting the opposition leader, even by using some unspeakable words about her personal life, many treasury bench MPs welcomed Bappi by thumping their desks. Prime Minister and Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina was also present there at that time.

It has been a trend that when MPs launch verbal attacks against the opposition in the House, they get additional time to speak.

Immediately after Bappi, AL MP Mir Shawkat Ali Badsha, who got the floor to speak on the thanksgiving motion, said, "I don't know how much you [MPs] will be eager to listen to me. Yet, I will try to speak in line with Bappi."

He blasted Khaleda Zia as well for her government's "misrule" between 2001 and 2006.

Ringleader

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The gang was involved in snatching, robbery and abduction using an isolated hill of Central Railway Building (CRB) area in the city as their den, police said.

Noticing movement of the gang numbering five to six criminals at the hill at around 3.00pm, locals informed police and encircled the hill.

As police started raiding the criminals' den, they started firing to the police and fired around six rounds of bullets, said officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station Abdul Kalam Azad.

Assistant Commissioner of Kotwali zone Abdullah Al Mahmud who led the raid told The Daily Star that ASI Md Humayun shot Alamgir to catch him.

Injured Alamgir was rushed to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital where the on duty doctor declared him dead, said the medical college sources.

Police later raided the hill and recovered two light guns, several lethal weapons and five rounds of bullets while other criminals managed to flee.

Detention

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exception rather than a rule.

"The tribunal has detained seven of the eight detainees for over a year without framing charges against them," Abdur Razzak, chief counsel of the defence team at the tribunal, said at a press conference at the Supreme Court Bar Association auditorium.

"As pointed out by the UN Working Group, this is a violation of Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," he said in a written statement.

According to the defence counsels, the UN group also found "significant restrictions" on the detainees' access to legal assistance and their "unimpeded access to evidence".

The UN group also noted that the government did not submit any information justifying the refusal to release the detainees on bail, said Abdur Razzak, adding it (working group) termed this a violation of international laws.

"We hope the government will remedy the situation and ensure compliance with all recognised norms of international law," Razzak said.

Defence counsels Zainul Abedin and Tajul Islam echoed what he said.

Meanwhile, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said yesterday it is not right to think that the accused are being detained without any reason.

There are no violations of human rights in the ongoing trial of crimes against humanity, and questions of human rights violation are being raised simply to create confusion, he told journalists after a meeting with a 23-member team from Sweden's Haryda College at the law ministry.

Shafique said history saw the worst violations of human rights during the Liberation War in 1971, and the ongoing trial seeks to do justice to the victims of those.

Ctg gets

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termed the discovery, in Block-16 of the Bay of Bengal, 'small'.

"We are yet to complete calculation of the reserve but we expect that 20-30 million cubic feet gas could be supplied to Chittagong's industrial clients every day for two years," he said.

Chambers said they believe there is much possibility of gas in the Bay and emphasised the need for more gas exploration at both onshore and offshore spots in Bangladesh by foreign companies.

At present, the country's gas shortage is more than 400 million cubic feet per day, according to Petrobangla chairman Hussain Mansur.

Aiming at increasing gas supply to Chittagong, Santos last year took a \$126 million drilling project in three new wells -- South Sangu-4, Sangu-11 and Sangu North East -- situated in Block 16.

ABA Siraj Uddowah, vice president (government and public affairs) of Santos Bangladesh, said they first found gas reserve in South Sangu-4 but abandoned the well in November last year after facing huge water pressure.

"Later we drilled Sangu North East but failed to get any reserve," he added.

EU team

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seven-member delegation will take stock of Bangladesh's current political situation and will report to the European Union (EU).

The foreign ministry sources said the major purpose of the visit is to discuss the political, social and economic issues with the country's key decision-makers and stakeholders.

Ministry sources said the delegation will meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Abdul Hamid, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, along with representatives of media and civil society.

They will also visit Jessore, Khulna and the Sundarbans to inspect various EU-funded development projects.

The other delegates are: Thomas Mann, vice-chairperson of European People's Party, Niccolò Rinaldi, vice-president of Alliance of Democrats and Liberals, Salvador Sedo i Alabart, member of European People's Party, Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar, member of Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, Nirj Deva MEP of Conservatives and Reformists and Slavi Binev a non-attached MEP.

Disclose

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money was looted from the share market. We want to know about the real source of this money," he said.

Fakhrul made the remarks while inaugurating a political workshop at party's central office at Nayapaltan in the capital.

The BNP leader accused the government of showing lack of co-ordination for the bridge project and criticised it for seeking the fund from Malaysia.

He also sought co-operation from the government for making the party's March 12 rally a success.

"Do not destroy democracy by obstructing the scheduled programme. Our programme will be peaceful. We will raise our demands to the people. Do not try to halt it. Please co-operate with us," the BNP leader told the government.

On January 9, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia from a Chittagong rally declared the March 12 rally titled "Cholo cholo, Dhaka cholo" (Let's march towards Dhaka) in efforts to mount pressure on the government to restore the caretaker government system.

Fakhrul also said that the ruling party has become afraid after seeing the participation of so many people in the recent programmes of the opposition.

For this, the government has taken a policy of repression to foil the opposition's ongoing anti-government movement, he alleged.

The BNP leader also said that people are getting killed at border due to sub-servient foreign policy of the government.

The curious case

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around last October. But then the World Bank's vice-president made a sudden trip to Dhaka and met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to convey that the bank has evidence of corruption in appointing a Canadian consulting firm. A month later the bank wrote to the government about corruption in selecting pre-qualified bidders for the bridge construction. Then former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain's name came up in the scam.

After some initial defensive statements, the government asked the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) to probe the alleged corruption. The commission, not unexpectedly, gave a clean chit to Abul. Now the government has a paper to wave claiming its innocence. And in the middle of it, the Canadian connection was forgotten, or rather deliberately set aside.

Only from time to time, the bank has been saying its funding decision has been suspended pending an investigation by the Canadian police of the alleged corruption relating to the consulting agency.

And then a curious statement was made by the prime minister who said the government will not accept any fund from the World Bank if it cannot prove corruption in the bridge project. The statement is perplexing because it can only mean that we will accept fund from the bank only if corruption is proven. There lies the hilarity of the prime minister's proposition. A pertinent question can be: will the bank provide fund if

corruption is proven? Or more fundamentally, is the bank eager to give us the fund, and we are the ones who are being picky? Or is the government just setting the escape route in case the Canadian police unearth something fishy?

The other actions by the government also make the Padma Bridge case curious. While the government kept on denying foul play in the bridge affair, it looked for alternative sources of fund. And Malaysia came to the rescue, offering to build the bridge. The government touted the Malaysian offer as a triumph over the World Bank. Very curiously, it was propagated that the work of the bridge will begin in April although there was no clear cut idea where the money was coming from. And even plans for restaurants, shops and entertainment facilities were laid out. And now we know the Malaysian deal is not on track, and the work is not starting in April. So who the government is trying to fool? The government itself is losing face, again and again, by its own actions.

But even if the Malaysian deal could be pulled off, what would be the cost? The World Bank's fund would come with an interest rate of 0.85 percent. And nobody knows how costly would the Malaysian fund be. It is now clear that Malaysian firms have no financial muscle (interestingly the firms which are supposed to do the job have not been selected yet). They want to raise funds from financiers in Dubai. So it would be a commercial loan at a high interest rate not less than 8 percent or may be even

The dilemma

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Action was held at the Awami Muslim League office on Nawabpur Road. The focal point of the discussions there was whether Section 144 should be broken and the strike should go ahead. Badruddin Umar notes that a majority of those present were opposed to a violation of Section 144 and only a handful, among whom was Oli Ahad, convenor of the Dhaka University State Language Committee, advocated a violation of the restrictions imposed by the authorities.

Earlier in the afternoon, the East Bengal Legislative Assembly convened in session. Of the 123 members of the assembly, 80 were present in the House. At the beginning of the session, Khairat Hossain asked for a

discussion on the ban imposed on the Pakistan Observer. His statement was opposed by Chief Minister Nurul Amin, who nevertheless went on to inform the legislators that the step had been necessitated in the public interest and if the ban had not been clamped, disorder would be the result. Khairat Hossain's motion was not allowed by the speaker. Consequently, no discussion took place.

On the same day, orders for an imposition of Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code were issued by the District Magistrate of Dhaka, SH Qureshi. A government press note made it clear that the restrictions would stay in force for thirty days. Meanwhile, government officials became busy trying to justify Section 144.

Honduras prison

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reporters, showing the fingers he fractured in his escape from the fire. "We had to push up the roof panels to get out."

Worried and angry relatives surrounded the prison on Wednesday morning with some throwing rocks at police and trying to force their way into the prison. Police responded by firing shots into the air and tear gas at the protesters, who were mostly women.

There was confusion over the death toll, with some reports that the 357 figure included more than 100 inmates who escaped during the fire and others that the dead and missing totaled 402 people - almost half the prison's inmates.

Lucy Marder, head of forensic services in Comayagua, said police reported that one of the dead was a woman who stayed overnight and the rest were prisoners, but she said some of the presumed dead could have escaped. Local media reported that the Comayagua fire department chief also died in the blaze.

Honduras has the highest murder rate in the world, according to the United Nations, and there are frequent riots and clashes between members of rival street gangs in its overcrowded prisons. But it was not yet clear if the fire was started during a riot or if it was accident.

The gangs, known as 'maras', started in the United

higher because of the high inflation regime. So for whose fault would we, the taxpayers, bear that huge extra cost for the bridge? Or rather why should we pay so much extra money for the actions of the government?

The whole Padma Bridge affair now needs transparency as public money is involved here. First we need to know from the World Bank what exactly its findings are. The bank itself is acting funny by keeping things under the rug. The government said there cannot be any corruption because contracts were not signed. True. Then what proof does the bank have? Abul Hossain's alleged involvement in the alleged corruption has been well publicised. But what about the Canadian firm? Why so little has been said about it?

It is time we solve the curious case of the bridge.

Khoka sued

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In 2003 and 2005, tenders were invited for leasing out the market's car park. But after completion of all the procedures for awarding the work, including selection of the highest bidder, Khoka cancelled the tender, Alam said.

If convicted, the accused persons may face up to seven years in jail each or fine or both, said Khurshid Alam, a High Court lawyer.

Khoka could not be reached over the phone despite repeated attempts for comments.

He had to leave the office of the mayor in December last year following the passage of the law splitting the now-defunct DCC into two.

Aziz Ahmed, chief secretary to the government of East Pakistan, pointed out that intelligence reports had warned of plans by the protestors to storm the assembly building on February 21. As a matter of fact, though, while the protestors did plan lay siege to the assembly building, they did not have any plans of entering it and causing chaos.

At a later stage, after the tragedy, the chief minister noted that the decision of clamping Section 144 had been made at the level of officials and that he had had no knowledge of it. It was a pointer to how ill-served politicians were by bureaucrats. Aziz Ahmed ran the administration with no thought to the authority the chief minister was empowered to exercise.

Cops asked

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letterbox of his house. "I got the two threat letters and I feel a sense of insecurity. I am also receiving threats over telephone," the former industries secretary told to the court.

Ten arrestees in the case including former industries minister Motiur Rahman Nizami and former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar were produced before the court. Former general manger of CUFL Enamul Hoque was absent due to his illness.

In his statement Shoyeb said he thinks Nizami, also ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, was involved in the incident.

He told the court that being informed by Maj Gen (ret'd) Imamuzzaman, the then chairman of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), he informed the matter to Nizami.

"But Nizami told me that he was already informed about the matter and higher authorities also know about it," Shoyeb stated.

Advocate Manjural Alam Ansaree, counsel of Nizami, alleged Dr Shoyeb made false statements against Nizami and is trying to prove himself a VVIP by bringing false allegations.

In reply to queries by the defence, Shoyeb said Nizami did not need to take any step individually regarding the arms haul.

The same court would hear the statements of other witnesses today, said court sources.

Meanwhile, police detained nine activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir on charges of attempts to create anarchy on the court compound ahead of Nizami's appearance before it.

Abul Kalam Azad, officer-in-charge of Kotwali police, said they picked up the Shibir men from the court premises around 11:30am and took them to the police station for interrogation.

Capital dredging

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cabinet colleagues, particularly the water resources minister and the shipping minister, have been speaking of carrying out the capital dredging project to bring back navigability of the important rivers, control floods and ensure proper irrigation.

They also spoke about some mega projects worth over Tk 5,000 crore to carry out the works.

But the PM's statement made yesterday shows that capital dredging is unlikely to begin during the tenure of the current Awami League-led government. It is because of that the government would get maximum five months on the capital dredging after completion of the feasibility study.

Responding to queries, Hasina said her government has prepared a concept paper on capital dredging and river management while a strategy paper to implement river dredging projects in different phases - ranging from 5 to 15 years.

She said the projects are: Gorai river recovery project (second phase) involving Tk 942.15 crore, capital dredging of river system in Bangladesh (pilot) worth Tk 1,028 crore, Buriganga recovery project worth Tk 944 crore, purchasing of dredgers and ancillary equipment for dredging rivers at a cost of Tk 1,309 crore, Kalani-Kushiara River Management project of Tk. 609 crore and Chandana Barasi River re-excavation project requiring Tk 59 crore.

The premier also referred to the construction of Dhaka Elevated Expressway and the Second Padma Bridge, modernisation of Chittagong Seaport, climate change, maritime boundary, the country's progress in agriculture sector and coal-based power plants.

Moreover, Hasina also went on to elaborate the government's measures in executing the CHT Peace Accord, signed in December of 1997 during her previous term.

She, however, said a full-fledged minister is yet to be appointed in line with the peace agreement.