

## Presidential clemency political

### Says Asian HR Commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President Zillur Rahman is exercising his power of clemency to fit the requirements of the ruling political regime, said Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in a statement yesterday.

"Awarding clemency in Bangladesh has no other standard other than political considerations and the incumbent president is no exception," it said referring to the president's mercy for the second time to convicted killer AHM Biplob, son of Awami League leader and Mayor of Laxmipur municipality Abu Taher.

The rights body published the statement on its website "www.humanrights.asia" under the headline "Bangladesh: Clemency must not be a political game" days after Zillur Rahman exercised his official prerogative.

The AHRC statement said Zillur Rahman as the president of the country is just playing the same cards as his predecessors had and his successors would, with no sense of justice or humanity, to help the associates of his political party.

"The president misusing the constitutional texts is a scandal. A prime minister, who requires a president to do so, is equally responsible for the consequences," it added.

The president has recently reduced Biplob's life sentence in each of two murder cases to 10-year imprisonment. In July last year, Zillur Rahman pardoned the capital punishment of the same person in advocate Nurul Islam murder case.

"In a practical sense, it demoralises not only the judiciary but also the other professionals associated with the criminal justice process, including the investigation organs of the state like the police and lawyers, including prosecutors," said the AHRC statement.

It concluded saying that the direct casualty of this despicable situation in Bangladesh is the very notion of justice, the foundation upon which the concept of democracy is built on.

## Israel troops raid W Bank TV stations

AFP, Ramallah

Israeli troops raided two Palestinian television stations in the West Bank city of Ramallah overnight, seizing computers and broadcasting equipment, employees told AFP yesterday.

The Israeli military confirmed the raids, saying the stations targeted had been broadcasting illegally, a charge rejected by the Palestinian telecommunications minister.

The two stations affected were Watan Television, a local private station, and Quds Educational Television, affiliated with the Palestinian Al-Quds University.

"They came at 2:00 am and took around 30 computers and all the transmitters. The station is totally shut down," Watan's editor in chief, Ali Daraghme, told AFP.

"One of our guards tried to stop the army, but they told him they had official orders to close the station."

Haroun Abu Arra, director of Quds Educational TV, said troops raided his station shortly afterwards.

"At 3:00 am, the Israeli army entered the television station's office and took all the transmitters, and the station is now unable to broadcast," he said.

Moammer Orabi, Watan's director general, said there were no warnings before the raid took place.

"It was a surprise. We still don't know why they confiscated the equipment and shut down the station, even though we work in areas belonging to the Palestinian Authority and we have a licence from them," he said.

## Issue bilateral

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Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, in his publication titled "Dams in NE India Implications for Bangladesh" published in 2006, mentions that India has built dams on at least 30 common rivers.

The dams and barrages India has built are causing problems in Bangladesh as its agriculture and environment is largely dependent on those rivers especially the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, experts said. The two rivers are threatened by India's controversial project, they said.

"If they divert water from the Brahmaputra, even Dhaka would be affected by salinity," said Ainun Nishat, vice-chancellor of Brac University. "Now the most important thing is to think about what we should do if India really implements the project," he said.

According to Ainun Nishat, it would be disastrous if India made barrages on the Brahmaputra and diverted water of the river, which is known as Jamuna in Bangladesh.

Interestingly, India continues to build dams putting Bangladesh in difficulty but objects to China's dam building on the Brahmaputra.

Experts said India has been building dams which it would have built anyway during implementation of its river-linking project. They said the river-linking project would not work if those dams were not in place and that the building of these dams was part of the mega project.

India has been constructing a barrage on the Mechi river in Bihar state for the last few years to divert the water of the Teesta towards the west to Fulhar through Mahananda-Mechi, which is visible with Google Earth.

Retired hydrologist M Inamul Haq, chairman of environment organisation Water and Environment, said, "India has been running a hydroelectric plant near Fanshedeowa using diverted water of the Teesta."

He said the water used in the plant is diverted from the Teesta before it enters Bangladesh.

India plans to divert a large portion of water from the Brahmaputra and the Ganges rivers through 30 canals, depriving and ignoring outcries of Bangladesh and some of its own states.

The drafts of the proposed National Water Policy 2012 says that with the current strategy of India, it can only use about 1,123 billion

## Ship captain pleads guilty over N Zealand oil spill

AFP, Wellington

The captain and second officer of a ship that caused New Zealand's biggest sea pollution disaster pleaded guilty to criminal charges yesterday and could face lengthy jail terms, officials said.

The officers were in charge of the Liberian-flagged Rena when it ploughed into a reef last year, releasing an oil slick that killed thousands of sea birds and fouled beaches in the North Island's pristine Bay of Plenty.

The men, both Filipinos, pleaded guilty to operating a ship in a dangerous manner and attempting to pervert the course of justice by altering navigation records after the accident, Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) said.

At a hearing in the Tauranga District Court, the captain also admitted discharging harmful substances from the cargo vessel, MNZ said.

It said the men, whose names have been suppressed since they were released on bail last year over fears for their safety, could face lengthy jail terms. They will be sentenced on May 25.

The Rena hit the Astrolabe Reef 22 kilometres (14 miles) offshore in clear conditions as it steamed at full speed towards Tauranga, New Zealand's largest container port, becoming stuck fast on the submerged rocks.

cubic metres of water out of 1,869 billion cubic metres available, if large inter-basin transfers are not made. It emphasises India's need for inter-basin water transfer, which could put Bangladesh in serious trouble.

The river-linking project was commissioned in 1982. Bangladesh has been opposing the plan since 2002 when the then Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee formed a taskforce to get the project going.

The Indian Supreme Court has recently cleared the path for the implementation of the mega project. The court in its order said the central Indian government and the states concerned should participate for its "effective" implementation "in a time-bound manner".

Prior to the assurance of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last year, an Indian delegation in 2010 assured Bangladesh of not making any unilateral decisions on the Tipaimukh Dam and river-linking project during the Joint River Commission talks on the Teesta water-sharing deal.

Also in 2006 and 2005 India assured Bangladesh that it would not implement the river-linking project without discussion with Bangladesh.

**KERALA OPPOSES RIVER LINKING**  
The Congress-led coalition government and CPI-M led opposition in southern Indian state of Kerala yesterday came out against the Supreme Court directive to the Indian central government for implementing the river-linking project, our correspondent in New Delhi reports.

Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said Kerala would not agree to the river-linking scheme as it was "harmful" for the state.

He, however, said the Indian apex court order was not applicable to Kerala and it was relevant only to those states that had agreed on the river-linking scheme.

**FARAKKA BARRAGE**

## One sluice gate repaired

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

One of the two sluice gates of the Farakka barrage, which had collapsed allowing excess flow of the Ganges water to Bangladesh, was restored yesterday.

"The good news today [yesterday] is one gate has been put in place," Indian Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal said in New Delhi.

By March 15, a team of the Central Water Commission (CWC) will be able to install the second broken sluice gate, he added.

Bansal will visit the barrage on Friday for an on-the-spot assessment of the repair along with his West Bengal counterpart Manish Gupta.

On February 23, the Indian government had ordered a probe into the circumstances leading to the collapse of the two sluice gates.

CWC Chairman RC Jha will look into the reasons behind the collapse of gates 13 and 16 and suggest corrective measures.

Jha was asked to submit the report within 15 days to the ministry. Till the time the gates are not put in place, a member of the CWC will remain at the barrage site over the Ganges.

The probe was ordered on the day West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and flagged her serious concern over the broken gates.

She said that excess water flow to Bangladesh had brought down the water level in Bhagirathi and posed a threat to navigability of Kolkata and Haldia ports in the state.

The Farakka barrage has 108 gates and the two that collapsed were erected in 1975.

The probe will also ascertain whether the collapse could have been anticipated and the reasons of delay in repair of the gates.

It is learnt that Jha will also probe whether the collapse was an accident or done "purposefully".

## No decision

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WB in this regard has to be cancelled first before accepting the Malaysian proposal, he told newsmen at his secretariat office in the city.

The government is in discussion with the WB, he mentioned. "We are not sitting idle, but there is nothing worth telling as yet. We will tell you about the development in due time."

On the Malaysian offer, the minister said they have sent the proposal to the Bridges Division.

The division has been examining the technical aspects of the proposal, while the finance ministry will evaluate the financial details.

Regarding the WB's allegations of graft, Muhith said it was the WB that first recommended a firm which itself had been accused of corruption.

The work on the Padma bridge project was going on smoothly, but all of a sudden the WB raised the graft complaint against a Canadian company and suspended its funding in the scheme, he maintained.

## Death

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monitor fruit depots across the country to prevent storage or sale of contaminated fruits.

The HRPB filed a petition as public interest litigation on May 10, 2010, seeking court directives on the government to take steps to stop the use of chemicals in fruits as well as theirsale.

The HC the same day issued a ruling on the government to explain why it should not be directed to take effective measures to protect public health by stopping the use of chemicals in fruits.

The court had also asked the commerce, food and home secretaries to form a committee to make recommendations to the government to stop the use of chemicals in fruits and submit a report to the court within 15 days.

But the respondents did not make any reply to the ruling and order, petitioner's counsel Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star.

During yesterday's hearing, the lawyer told the court that the respondents had failed to take necessary steps to stop the use of harmful chemicals in fruits, though they are legally bound to take measures to prevent it.

Some unscrupulous traders have been using chemicals such as carbide to ripen fruits, and also formalin to elongate their shelf life, he said.

Assistant Attorney General Yeadia Zaman stood for the government.

## Pak national

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Sajid on a two-day remand, a day after the Bangladesh Cricket Board authorities handed him over to Mirpur police in connection with suspicious activities around Mirpur Outdoor Stadium. A cricket board official also filed a case with Mirpur Police Station in this connection.

A senior police official yesterday told The Daily Star that during the remand 35-year-old Sajid admitted that he had contacted several players of different teams to fix matches.

The official said they were preparing to seek the help of Interpol to get the details of Sajid's account with Silk Bank in Pakistan.

Police sources said Sajid came to Dhaka on February 10 posing as an import-export businessman but since his arrival he had always been around some players.

"When the players stayed in a Dhaka hotel, he stayed at a nearby hotel; when the players went to Chittagong, he went there. When the players returned to Dhaka, he also returned," said a police official.

Hailing from Gulshan Zahur in Karachi, Sajid himself was once a player in the domestic cricket league and he is a close friend of a Pakistani player playing in BPL, sources said. They said Sajid developed connections with other players of the league by using his "friend".

According to sources, another Pakistani national had also come to Bangladesh for match fixing but he left the country on Friday.



A toll booth of the Bangabandhu Bridge.

PHOTO: STAR

## Tolls being gobbled up

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company's high-ups. Only a few collectors alone will not dare to do it."

In November 2010, a joint venture of Shamim Enterprise Ltd, United Development Corporation of Bangladesh and Goangxi Scientific Institute of Communications, China, was assigned to collect tolls for five years. The company will get Tk 14 crore for its service during the period.

Built on the river Jamuna at a cost of Tk 3,700 crore, the country's largest bridge was opened to public in 1998. The average daily traffic on the bridge is between 10,000 and 11,000 from which the BBA earns around Tk 90 lakh.

The toll for a large vehicle is Tk 1,400, a medium truck Tk 1,100, a small truck Tk 850, a large bus Tk 900, a small bus Tk 650, a car or jeep Tk 500 and a motorbike Tk 40.

The BBA checked images, data and money receipts, and found that toll collectors Arifat Hossain, Jubair Alam, Rajib Hossain and Emanul Kabir misappropriated tolls by hiding the real number of trucks on December 7 and 16.

On December 7, they submitted tolls for 152

trucks crossing the bridge while the actual number was 202. On December 16, they showed 212 trucks instead of 262.

The company then sacked its four toll collectors and filed a case against them with the Jamuna Bridge West Police Station on January 4.

Similar irregularities were detected in last year's toll records of January and February.

On February 12, the company told local journalists that it had sacked 11 staff. But The Daily Star found that they were actually transferred to toll booths at Lalanshah, Rupsha and Kanchan bridges.

One of them talked to The Daily Star and maintained his innocence. The employee, now posted at Lalanshah bridge, said the company had asked them to return the "embezzled money," but they refused.

Two others said the company had told them "not to worry".

The company's manager Safat Quader said he was unaware that the toll collectors had been transferred to other bridges. Earlier, he had claimed before the media that the guilty staff had been sacked.

He said the company would return the misappropriated money to the BBA.

Quader refuted allegations of senior officials' involvement in corruption, and said, "We sack staff whenever we find their involvement in corruption."

**HOW IT HAPPENED**  
On condition of anonymity, a toll collector told The Daily Star how the irregularities had taken place.

"After the company got the job, some of its senior officers sent dozens of their men to toll booths at the bridge for so-called training. After a few days, these officers asked the regular collectors to leave the booths in the middle of their shifts, and let the trainees do the job. That was how it started to happen."

These recruits in collusion with their superiors then started misappropriating tolls, said sources at the BBA and the company.

"We were given 10 percent of the tolls we misappropriated," an accused toll collector told The Daily Star. "If I stole Tk 20,000, I would get Tk 2,000. But we eventually started cheating our superiors and hid the actual amount we misappropriated."

## AL plans big for March 7

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Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the rally at 3:00pm at Shikha Chirantan in the historic Suhrawardy Udyan. Following the rally, the party will bring out a procession that will end near Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi.

"It will be the biggest ever mass rally in the history of Bangladesh," said AL acting general secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif yesterday at a meeting at the party's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue with party presidium member Abdul Latif Siddique in the chair.

Leaders of the party and its all associated bodies of Dhaka city and Dhaka, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Manikganj and Munshiganj districts, district council administrators, ministers, and lawmakers of greater Dhaka attended the meeting.

AL senior leaders at the meeting said Dhaka would turn into a human sea on the day that coincides with

the historic March 7 programmes. On the day back in 1971, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a powerful speech at Dhaka's Race Course Maidan (now Suhrawardy Udyan) declared the battle against the then repressive Pakistani forces.

The party is planning to gather at Suhrawardy Udyan a few lakh people wearing green and red t-shirts which according to party leaders will portray the symbol of the national flag and the Liberation War.

Senior leaders of AL and its different associated bodies, including Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Matia Chowdhury, Mahbubul Alam Hanif and Qamrul Islam, spoke at the meeting that discussed the preparations for the programme.

Tofail called upon party leaders and activists to remain alert throughout the month of March so the main opposition BNP cannot create any chaos in the

name of holding rally.

Agriculture Minister Matia said Dhaka city would be teeming with people on March 7.

Hanif, a special assistant to the prime minister, said BNP's March 12 grand rally is aimed at foiling the trial of war criminals and saving BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's two sons Tarique Rahman and Arifat Rahman Koko from corruption charges.

If BNP tries to disrupt law and order on the day, law enforcers will take necessary actions, he added.

State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam said no one would be allowed to take control of the city in March.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the AL-led 14-party alliance will be convened today at Hasina's political office in Dhanmondi to discuss the country's latest political situation. The meeting will start at 11:00am with 14-party coordinator Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury in the chair.

## Matia feels bad

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products decline, farmers face losses and when prices go high, those are beyond the consumers' reach," Matia said.

The minister was speaking at a seminar on the Awami League-led alliance government's successes in agriculture and food sectors, and in building social safety net in the last three years of its tenure.

Organised by the AL, it was held at the National Museum in the capital.

AL leaders and agriculturists appreciated the government steps for farm sector which include introducing agricultural input cards, creating scope for farmers to open bank

accounts only with Tk 10, raising farm subsidies and loans. All this contributed to increased farm production despite the declining farm land. Besides, scientists went for more research activities in developing stress-tolerant crop varieties, jute genome etc, they said.

Jatiya Party Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader, MP, said the government has taken various social safety measures to ensure food security. But he urged the authorities to ensure fair distribution of food or cash under safety net programme.

There were allegations of irregularities in food distribution under this

programme.

In his keynote presentation at the seminar, columnist Shekhar Dutt said the government now has a stock of over 14 lakh tonnes of food grains. In fiscal 2010-11, production of rice stood at 335.41 lakh tonnes compared to 266 lakh tonnes in 2005-06 when BNP-Jamaat alliance was in power. Production of other crops too went up significantly.

AL leader Amir Hossain Amu chaired the seminar, also addressed by party leader Bahauddin Nasim, member of the parliamentary standing committee on agriculture ministry Abdul Mannan and agriculturists Kazi M Badruddoza and Zahurul Karim.

## Spelling Bee

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begins on March 16.

Champs21.com, which provides education material online, is organising the contest for the first time in the country.

At least 500 spellers from Dhaka, qualifying through school contest and champs21's online contest, will take part in the divisional round (second round).

The top 72 spellers from this round will be moving on to the TV Round and will be getting an opportunity to become a reality TV star. From amongst them, the top three spellers will get Tk 5,00,000 (first prize), Tk 1,00,000 (second prize) and Tk 50,000 (third prize).

Moreover, the champion will get an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington DC along with a parent and a teacher to participate in the American Spelling Bee competition.

Over the last two days, three schools -- one in and two outside Dhaka -- have held the competition.

Of them, the International Turkish Hope School in the capital held it on Tuesday.

From the school's boys' section, Arfaa Islam of class eight, Mostafizur Rahman of class six and Ragib Mostafa of class nine overcame the first round barrier. Tanzila Mostafa Momo of class eight and Nanziba Ibnat and Jenny Liu of class nine from its girls' section made it through to the second round.

From Mirzapur Cadet College in Tangail, Fatim Ishraq Faruqui and Khandaker Shadman Sakib of class eight, Sadman Showhard of class 10 and Mubtaseem Zaman and Ahnaf Asif Khan of class nine got through to the next round on Tuesday.

Feni Girls Cadet College held the competition yesterday with Fouzia Afrin Faiza and Nasrin Sultana Keya of class eight, Faaria Tabassum and Rezwana Mahfuz of class nine and Kaniz Fatema Bristy and Fatema Raisa of class 10 qualifying for the second round.

## Migratory birds

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fall in migratory birds' arrival in Pasua was caused by several things, including indiscriminate felling of Hijol and Koros trees over 400 acres of the river bank and continuous collection of Nol Khagra, a wetland herb used as cattle feed.

The felling of trees creates a series of problems in the complex ecosystem of the haor area as fish species cannot complete their breeding cycles because of the submerged roots of Koros and Hijol trees and birds do not find insects they feed on which live on these trees. On the other hand migratory ducks largely feed on the wetland herb now used by locals as cattle feed.

Enam also mentioned the potential threat of spread of avian flu when local ducks are taken to haors to save on poultry feed. This increases the risk of cross breeding with migratory birds.

Ishtiaq Uddin Ahmed, country representative of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Bangladesh said over half a crore residents around Tanguar Haor in Sunamganj now depend on the haor resources for a livelihood, which hampers its ecological balance.

He said over 56,000 people live in 88 villages on the banks of Tanguar Haor with 51 beels over a total area of 9,727 hectares. Since most of this land belongs to locals, authorities face problems in planting trees there.

Tanguar Haor was declared an Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) in 2000 and made a Ramsar site.

Other speakers at the discussion also made recommendations to preserve the haors in the country. They demanded scientific management of hoar environments, co-ordinated action plans and monitoring, land management guide lines, introduction of ecotourism and arrangement of alternative livelihoods for haor inhabitants.

Among others Prof Philip D Round of the Wetland Trust of UK, Paul M Thompson of Flood Action Research took part in the discussion while Mohammad Nasir Uddin, joint secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forest spoke as the chief guest.