

## Ship breaking

FROM PAGE 20

Aulia under the upazila. This was the third accident this year where three workers have met tragic ends at ship breaking yards.

Babu was carrying the iron plate with other workers at about 6:30pm when he suddenly slipped and fell with the iron plate falling on top of him, said the victim's co-workers.

Critically injured Babu was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where he was declared dead.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Nur Mohammad of Sitakunda Police Station confirmed the death of a worker at the yard owned by Mohammad Shahin, an expatriate in Canada.

While talking to The Daily Star, Md Mohiuddin, who supervises the yard, however said that while working Babu fell on an iron plate and was injured.

He was not carrying the plate, Mohiuddin added.

He said they would bear all necessary expenses to send the body to the victim's home village for burial.

Safar Ali, president of Ship Breaking Yard Sramik Karmachari Federation, said workers are falling victim to accidents at ship breaking yards due to lack of adequate safety measures.

No fewer than 11 workers died in different accidents in the ship breaking yards here last year, he claimed.

At least 38 workers were killed and many others injured in accidents at ship breaking yards in the last 44 months.

## 3 killed

FROM PAGE 20

of three khats of land at Chakgopal village.

Dalim along with 20/25 ethnic "goons" hired from Niamatpur upazila went to harvest paddy on the disputed land in the morning.

The clash ensued around 9:00am when the followers of Anwar tried to resist them from harvesting the paddy.

A chase and counter chase took place during the two-hour long melee that left two indigenous dead on the spot and injuring 11 people.

The injured were rushed to different hospitals. Of them, Maharam succumbed to his injuries at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Naogaon Police Super YM Belalur Rahman, Additional Police Super Ahmar-uz Zaman, Assistant Police Super (Manda) Sharif Uddin and UNO Kawsar Zahan visited the spot.

## Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

The meeting is scheduled for 8:30pm at Khaleda Zia's Gulshan residence in Dhaka.

During the discussion, Khaleda will tell the US secretary of state that opposition parties will not accept the next general election under the Awami League administration, BNP insiders say.

Khaleda may seek the US support for restoration of the caretaker system to oversee the polls due in early 2014, they add.

The system was abolished in June last year.

BNP sources said the issue of Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus might also come on the table.

Talking to The Daily Star, the party's Vice-president Shamser Mobin Chowdhury said his party chief would not "complain" but would inform Hillary about the human rights violation and repression on the opposition if the US delegate wants to know.

Asked if the BNP would raise the issue of Yunus and Grameen Bank, Shamser said, "We want that all those who are in good position contribute to the country's development."

Maruf Kamal Khan Sohel, press secretary of the opposition leader, said the US already knew the human rights situation in Bangladesh.

"The US is the biggest development partner of Bangladesh. So issues related to the country's interest may come up for discussion," he told this correspondent yesterday.

On Prof Yunus, he said the Nobel laureate was a highly respected Bangladeshi in the world community, but unfortunately he fell victim to personal vendetta of the government high-ups.

"We will give this opinion if the US delegate raises the issue at the meeting," he said.

## Friendship

FROM PAGE 1

Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus.

The US Secretary of State will arrive in Dhaka today.

During her less-than-24-hour stay, Hillary would hold talks with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia, said official sources.

She is also expected to meet Yunus whose removal as the managing director of Grameen Bank prompted Washington to warn that the government move might affect the bilateral relations unless he was allowed to have a respectable exit from the bank he founded to pull millions of poor rural women out of poverty.

Since then Dhaka and Washington worked patiently to overcome the tension spawned from the Yunus issue and took some significant steps to warm up the relations.

Hillary's visit, which is seen here as a major diplomatic triumph for Sheikh Hasina's government, follows a series of high-level visits by US officials in recent months.

Last month, the US and Bangladesh held their first-ever security cooperation talks in Dhaka. It signified that Washington was keen on moving forward despite concerns over the Grameen Bank without Yunus' leadership and the state of human rights in Bangladesh.

Hillary is due to arrive from Beijing at 4:10pm leading the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue for her country. Foreign Minister Dipu Moni will receive her at the VVIP Lounge of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. After Bangladesh, the US secretary of state will go to New Delhi.

Dhaka has taken unprecedented security measures centring the visit. Hillary will be hosted like a head of state with Special Security Force deployed the whole time of her stay.

Her visit will coincide the visit of Indian Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who is due to arrive in Dhaka from Manila today at 9:00pm. Mukherjee will be given the same status of reception as of Hillary.

The US secretary of state will lead a 38-member delegation, including 14 media personalities.

## Teesta, boundary

FROM PAGE 1

share treaty, diplomatic sources said.

He will convey to Dhaka that New Delhi is hopeful to overcome political complexities that have clouded the implementation of two key decisions including a deal signing on the water share, they added.

The other issue is the ratification of an agreement on exchange of adversely possessed land, enclaves and demarcation of 6.5-kilometre boundary.

Pranab's visit comes seven months after the setback in striking the Teesta agreement.

He will arrive at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 9:00pm and Foreign Minister Dipu Moni will receive him there, official sources said.

The visit coincides with the first official tour to Bangladesh by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who will land in Dhaka this afternoon.

Dhaka will give foolproof security to Pranab Mukherjee and status like head of state/government with SSF deployment. He will arrive and depart through the VVIP terminal of Shahjalal International Airport.

The veteran politician is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Leader of Opposition Khaleda Zia and Dipu Moni.

Pranab starts off attending the closing ceremony of Tagore's 150th birth anniversary celebration, an Indo-Bangla initiative, at the capital's Bangabandhu International Convention Centre at 10:00am tomorrow.

An Indian cultural delegation, including Sharmila Tagore, Pabitra Bhushan Sircar and a dance drama group from the Sangeet Natak Academy, will participate in the function.

Sources said the Indian finance minister will then

As per the programme schedule, Hillary will first join the bilateral talks with her Bangladesh counterpart Dipu Moni at 6:00pm at the Prime Minister's Office.

Dhaka is expected to request for duty- and quota-free access of readymade garments, Bangladesh's inclusion in the Millennium Challenge Account, development assistance and economic cooperation, and reiterate the long-standing demand for the deportation of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's condemned killer Rashed Chowdhury from the USA.

The US side will raise the issues of political stalemate, human rights situation, governance and killing of labour leader Aminul Islam at the talks. Besides, it will push for inking the Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement (Ticfa), engagement and cooperation between the two militaries, strategic collaboration to tackle militancy in South Asia and elsewhere, regional counterterrorism, energy cooperation and security in the Bay of Bengal.

The two countries are expected to strike a joint document styled "Declaration of Bangladesh-US Partnership Cooperation", which will work as a platform to discuss all bilateral issues and cooperation.

After the meeting, Hillary and Dipu Moni will address a joint press briefing at 7:00pm on the outcome of the talks.

The US secretary will then call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for half-an-hour at her office which will be followed by about an hour's meet with Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office.

Hillary and Khaleda will discuss different bilateral issues, the country's political stalemate over the mechanism of holding the next general election, human rights situation, disappearances of BNP leaders, including that of Ilias Ali's, repression on the opposition activists etc.

Bangladesh foreign minister will host a dinner in honour of the US secretary.

Hillary is expected to meet the representatives of the civil society and Prof Yunus tomorrow.

She will leave for New Delhi Sunday around noon.

## Five crushed

FROM PAGE 1

Abdul Latif of the same village. They got down from a bus at Salla in Kaihati from Bogra around 9:30pm Thursday.

Finding no transportation due to stormy weather, they started walking on the rail tracks to reach the destination, some two kilometres off the bus stop, he said.

"At one stage, a Dhaka-bound train from Ishwardi hit six of them from behind near Hatia village leaving five of them dead on the spot and injuring another," Lebu Miah said.

When contacted, Mohammad Yunus Ali, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu Bridge (East) Police Station, told this correspondent that he knew nothing about the accident.

"Being informed by local journalists, I sent a police team to Hatia village and the relatives of the victims confirmed police about the accident," he added.

However, Sub-Inspector Mokter Hossain of GRP Police Station in Kamalapur in Dhaka said they did not receive information of any such accident.

Shamim-al-Mamun Pramanik, chairman of Salla Union Parishad (UP), confirmed the accident. He also said relatives of the victims took away the bodies the same night to avoid legal complexities.

This correspondent while visiting the house of Latif at Nordohi village Friday noon found the family members off to Sherpur to join the funeral of the deceased.

Contacted, Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sherpur Police Station, confirmed The Daily Star about the deaths of five in a train accident.

## BNP leader

FROM PAGE 20

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Abhoynagar Police Station Ahsan Habib said Rafiqul was returning home from Noapara Bazar around 8:30pm. Some unidentified criminals hurled bomb at him as he reached near the factory.

He died on the spot, said the OC adding that the body has been sent to Jessore Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

## Buet teachers

FROM PAGE 1

Chowdhury after the meeting told reporters the prime minister gave a patient hearing to the Buet teachers and assured them of solving their problems and meeting their demands.

Voicing her worries over the deadlock at Buet since April 7, she said the strike enforced by the teachers put into uncertainty the academic life of thousands of students.

Naser said the prime minister assured them of looking into the anomalies at the reputed university and urged the agitating teachers to return to the classes for the sake of their students.

Replying to a question, he said the president would intervene to resolve the crisis if any policy decision is required as he is the chancellor of Buet.

Naser said the Buet Syndicate has formed a committee to investigate the irregularities at the university. The Buet authorities would take action in this regard as it is an autonomous institution.

Talking to reporters, the association president said they decided in principle to withdraw the strike.

He, however, said the final decision in this regard will be taken at a general meeting of the teachers tomorrow, expressing the hope that no one will ignore the assurance of the premier. "We hope we could call off the strike and return to classes."

Mujibur Rahman said the prime minister assured them of taking necessary steps to meet their demands after discussing with the education minister and the secretary.

LGRD Minister and Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, Food Minister Abdur Razzak, State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Capt (ret'd) AB Tajul Islam, and PM's Advisers HT Imam and Moshirur Rahman were present.

## Mindless extraction

FROM PAGE 20

broke down twice this week since it could not suck in enough water from underground."

Rafiqul blamed the three commercial drinking water suppliers for the depletion of the groundwater level.

He said the three private water plants pump out a massive amount of water.

Dr Mohammad Mosharruf Hossain, associate professor of the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences at the University of Chittagong, said the short term effect of wholesale extraction of groundwater in the area would be receding level of groundwater which already started, so people using shallow tubewells would not get water.

Around three years ago two private companies named RM Pure Drinking Water, and Drop Pure Drinking Water started selling jars of water using deep tubewells to extract groundwater from the area.

As the business proved profitable, another nameless private company also started the business by setting up another deep tubewell in Jafar Khan Para in 2010.

Local residents alleged that all three companies run their pumps for most part of the day, 7 days a week, resulting in a drop of groundwater level. Now the residents of the area are not getting water at their shallow tubewells.

The quality of these companies' "pure drinking water" is also disputable.

Several buyers are suspicious about whether the plants properly treat the extracted water for drinking.

Nasir Uddin, a former client of RM said, "I found moss in RM water, so I stopped buying." Some other buyers echoed Nasir.

Although RM and Drop water plants have labs and some equipment, no chemist was found at the plants when The Daily Star visited those.

Staff of the two plants said chemists visit the plants occasionally, but they themselves know what chemicals to use.

About extracting large amount of groundwater, Sajal Kumar Roy, owner of RM, said they only extract 7,000 litres daily while Md Arif, a staff of Drop, said they only extract 3,000 litres daily.

But two distributors said each of the companies give the distributors about 1,200 to 1,300 jars of water daily to sell, amounting to about 25,000 litres.

The nameless water plant was found closed during the day, and the staff said they extract water at night. It does not have any lab, chemist, and legal document.

When contacted, Kamrul, the director of the nameless plant, said, "I have applied for all the documents but yet to get them. That is why I am running the plant experimentally without any branding."

Habibur Rahman, assistant director of Bangladesh

Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) in Chittagong told The Daily Star that a water plant needs approval to set up deep tubewells from Wasa, a specific trade license from Chittagong City Corporation (CCC), an approval from BSTI, an approval from the Department of Environment (DoE), a certificate of premises' sanitation from the Directorate General of Health Services, and a health certificate of workers from the civil surgeon.

Sajal Kumar Roy of RM showed some documents claiming those to be approvals from BSTI, CCC, and Chittagong Wasa.

When asked whether he has approval from DoE, he said, a team from DoE visited his plant, and did not object to anything.

Md Shahed, manager of Drop, claimed that their business is legal and they have approvals from Wasa, CCC, BSTI, and DoE. He also said the owner of the company lives in the US.

About the allegation of the local people, he said some people are jealous of their business success, that is why they are complaining.

Md Golam Sarwar, chief revenue officer of Chittagong Wasa, said among the three water plants Drop and RM have licences from Wasa to install deep tubewells. He however could not ascertain whether the third one has a licence.

He said Wasa gave the two plants the licences because the agency currently does not supply water to that area. He also said Wasa now cannot do anything to stop the plants from extracting groundwater because the agency already gave them the licences.

About the sufferings of the residents of that area, he said, "If people of that area place complaints about the crisis we will let the higher authorities know and then they will decide whether to shut down the plants."

Director of DoE Zafar Alam said it is mandatory to obtain a clearance from DoE to operate a drinking water plant.

Local residents said they sent letters to Wasa and DoE complaining against the plants, the authorities also sent inspection teams, but those teams just visited the spots and went away without taking any action. Some also alleged that the inspection teams were bribed by the companies.

Zafar Alam acknowledged that an inspection was conducted in that area, but he did not know what action was taken.

When told about the allegation of the locals, he instantly phoned his subordinate to know what actually had happened and told The Daily Star that he will look into the matter and take necessary actions against the companies.

He said, "When we conduct any inspection and find faults, we take one of three steps: send a notice to the organisation, or fine the organisation, or we shut down that organisation."

However, he could not say why none of these had happened to any of the three companies.

Habibur Rahman of BSTI said none of the three water plants have the institute's approval.

They might have applied for it but none of them have been given the approval, he said.

Approvals for private water plants are given from Dhaka and it is strictly monitored under ISO/IEC guideline which is very difficult to maintain, so a very few water plants of Chittagong got that approval, he added.

Dipak Chakraborty, chief revenue officer of CCC, said, "We don't issue any trade licence for selling groundwater as it is a natural resource. The three plants were issued general trade licences."

"I've already directed the tax officer of Halishahar zone to look into the matter. And if the companies are found to be selling groundwater then we will cancel their trade licences," he added.

Dr Md Abu Tayab, civil surgeon of Chittagong, said none of the three companies applied to him for any certificate.

Some local residents, preferring anonymity, said the authorities of the three water plants provide free jars of water regularly to the ward councillor and other influential people of the area so that they do not take any action against the plants.

Admitting to getting free jars of water, Hasan Murad, councillor of ward 37, told The Daily Star, "The business owners provide water to the ward council office, but that doesn't mean I don't have the ability of purchasing water."

About the crisis of water in the area he said, "You can't blame the three water plants for the problem as there are many areas in Bangladesh where the same crisis exist without having any water plant."

He said, "Water is a natural resource you can't refrain anyone from procuring water from underground." "Besides our area is near the sea, a vast source of water, so we will never face water crisis," he added.

When asked why he is not taking any initiative to mitigate the sufferings of the local people, he said, "So far I've got some allegations, but none of those is significant."

He said he believes those allegations are from personal rivalry and jealousy.

Those who are doing the business are not doing any crime, rather they are earning money, being self-employed instead of being unemployed, he added.

If there was anything wrong then Wasa, DoE and other authorities would take actions, the councillor said.

Dr Mosharruf Hossain said the long term effect of wholesale groundwater extraction in the area will be more dangerous.

If water extraction continues at the current rate, groundwater of that area will soon become saline, he said.

As the groundwater level of that area gets water from the sea belt, when a vacant space is created under ground by extraction of huge amount of water, it is filled by saline water from the sea, he explained adding, and then the water loses its drinkability.

Besides, trees with long roots will be affected and might die altogether, he said.

Mosharruf, who also conducted research on ground and surface water of CCC area, further said some areas might face land subsidence as a result of huge empty space underground created by water extraction.

The total area might eventually face subsidence, he added.

## 97-yr-old

FROM PAGE 20

older had graduated since.

"I think I can hang up my mortar board and academic robes after this one -- although I said that after my last degree and then I got bored," said Stewart, from Port Stephens, north of Sydney, ahead of his graduation ceremony.

"I have so much time on my hands these days and I like to keep mentally active."

The clinical science masters is the fourth degree for the great-grandfather, who began his university studies in the 1930s with a degree in dentistry.

After a long career as a dentist, during which time he became a Doctor of Dental Surgery on completion of his second degree Stewart decided in his eighties to study law to help keep his mind active.

"As I approached the age of 90 I realised that time was of the essence and I had better get a wriggle on in case I didn't make my graduation," he said.

"So I attended extra summer schools and managed to complete the six-year course in four-and-a-half years, graduating in 2006. Turns out I needn't have rushed."

Stewart, who walks daily and meditates regularly, keeps his mind alert by reading medical textbooks and crime novels and playing bridge.

He enrolled in his latest course in 2009 and said while it had been a "tremendous challenge" he had enjoyed it immensely and would strongly encourage any older people to return to study.

Stewart, who had six children and now has 12 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, is modest about his achievements.

## Little progress

FROM PAGE 20

release of fund by the government and delay in shifting electric poles on the highway.

The Awami League-led government took the project in 2010 to expand the national highway using the government fund. The project is divided into four packages. The government signed deals with contractor firms in January, 2011 and issued work orders in March the same year.

Intraco (BD), a joint venture with Chinese firm Hebei Road and Bridge Group Company (HRBC) Ltd, got package 1 and 2. The two packages are upgradation of 13-kilometre Joydevpur-Rajendrapur road at a cost of Tk 126 crore, and 17-kilometre Rajendrapur-Mawna road at a cost of Tk 203.47 crore.

A joint venture of Project Builders Ltd and Major Bridge Engineer Company of China got the Tk 388-crore package-3 to upgrade 30-kilometre road from Mawna to Raimoni.

The Tk 266-crore package-4 for upgrading work of

27-km Raimoni-Mymensingh road was awarded to Shamim Enterprise Ltd (SEL) and Toma, who has joint venture with Metallurgical Construction Overseas Company of China (MCCC). The 27-km road will be made 4-lane under the package.

"The firms are not capable enough to do the job and they did not engage sufficient workforce in their works. There is also a lack of sincerity among them [contractors] to implement the project," said a communications ministry official involved in the project.

He, however, admitted that the government is failing to release the required money for the project due to fund crunch.

Representatives of the firms claimed that they received insufficient money this year.

"Last year, we got 10 percent of the total fund as mobilisation fund. We needed at least Tk 25 crore this year, but we received only Tk 4 crore," Tuhi Bid Azam, project manager of SEL and Toma, told The

Daily Star recently.

Mokhlesur Rahman, project manager of PBL, also came up with similar complaints.

Asked, Firoz Iqbal, project director of the Joydevpur-Mymensingh 4-lane project, said the government would soon release the required fund to the firms.

Iqbal, also a superintendent engineer of Roads and Highways Department (RHD), however, declined to comment on the slow implementation of the project.

Meanwhile, the communications ministry has decided to continue maintenance work on the 30-kilometre road from Joydevpur to Mawna as its upgradation has become uncertain.

BACKGROUND On January 27 last year, former chief engineer Shahab Uddin of RHD and Sheikh Babar Ali of Intraco signed a Tk 330-crore deal to upgrade the 30-km road.

The deal was signed following recommendations of a six-member

Tender Evaluation Committee (Tec) headed by the then RHD additional chief engineer Aminur Rahman Laskar.

Intraco mobilised its equipment and workforce to do their job. But in June 2011, when Syed Abul Hossain was the communications minister, his ministry cancelled the deal with Intraco (BD) Associates Ltd on charge of forging documents on the joint venture partnership with HRBC.

Later, the Tec communicated with HRBC head office in China which confirmed that the joint venture with Intraco was genuine. But the communications ministry stood by its decision.

It is widely alleged that the deal was cancelled as Intraco failed to appease former communications minister and some RHD officials.

The firm later went to the High Court challenging the ministry's decision and, kept suspended its upgrading works on the 30-km road.