

# Dhaka proposes new concept

**FROM PAGE 1**  
connected with its east and south-east areas such as Visakhapatnam, Paradip of Orissa and Haldia of West Bengal.

Bangladesh will consider foreign exchange earnings and employment of crews in allowing the transshipment, it said.

Shipping Secretary Abdul Mannan Hawlader said yesterday the proposal to introduce coastal shipping between the two countries was demanded by the trade body of coastal ship owners in Bangladesh. According to ship owners, almost half of the inland and coastal vessels are unused.

"The cost will be very high if we carry goods from India by truck. But if we carry goods through the sea, the cost as well as travel time will be significantly reduced. Both countries can be benefited if coastal shipping is introduced."

Hawlader said 98 percent of vessels engaged in carrying goods under the water protocol are Bangladeshi although it has provision for a 50-50 use of Bangladeshi and Indian vessels.

Sources said the decision to introduce coastal shipping in the next few months has almost been finalised. However, the issue of customs fees and service charges were not discussed at the meeting.

There is also no mention in the proposal as to whether Indian ships will be engaged in carrying goods.

Officials said it had been decided that standing committees under the water protocol will look into the legal and technical matters of coastal shipping.

The committees will also submit reports regarding amendment of the protocol and introduction of coastal shipping within the next three months.

Indian Shipping Secretary Pradeep Kumar Sinha, who led an eight-member delegation at the meeting, told reporters that his country had welcomed the Bangladesh proposal and a joint committee had been formed to prepare reports in this regard.

A body led by the director general of shipping department and comprising representatives from the shipping ministry, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, Chittagong Port Authority and Mongla Port Authority will soon visit Visakhapatnam and Paradip ports and Haldia. They will also talk to the Indian authorities.

The Indian side will also have a committee and prepare a report in this respect. Both the committees will submit their reports to their governments for a higher level decision.

Abdul Mannan Hawlader told journalists that the committee headed by the shipping department DG would submit the report within the next three to six months. The next steps would be taken if the committee found the proposal economically viable and feasible.

He said the coastal shipping would cover import, export and carrying of transit goods between the two countries.

Replying to a question, the shipping secretary said, "There has to be an agreement for the use of Chittagong and Mongla seaports to make coastal shipping operative."

However, officials said it was yet to be decided whether the proposal of coastal shipping operation would be implemented through a new agreement/protocol or under the existing Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade that Bangladesh and India signed in 1972.

But competent sources said transshipment facilities would be provided to India under the existing protocol through necessary amendments.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has also agreed to consider transit and transshipment of 35,000 tonnes of Indian food items to the northeastern states of the neighbouring country through Ashuganj-Akhaura.

"India proposed transporting 35,000 tonnes of food as relief materials and we said Bangladesh might consider this as a special case if relief materials are carried,"

Hawladersaid.

At the meeting, the Indian side placed eight proposals, including long-term validity of water protocol, transit operation and transshipment at Ashuganj for movement of cargo to its northeastern states, movement of truck and trailers through Akhaura-Agartala and a land customs station at Mongla port and a new port of call.

Dhaka's agenda was the operation of coastal vessels between Bangladesh and India, enhancement of charges for maintenance of routes (Sherpur-Zakiganj and Sirajganj-Daikhawa) and safety of navigation.

Meeting sources said India laid top importance on using Ashuganj river port for movement of cargo to its northeastern states, but regretted that Ashuganj had a shortage of necessary facilities, including infrastructure.

In response, the Bangladesh side said the government had taken up development projects to make the port fully operational at a cost of \$62 million and also urged New Delhi to improve the port with Indian grants.

The Indian shipping secretary said his government would soon carry out a feasibility study on Ashuganj at its own cost and it was very much keen to take up a development project for the port.

**CUSTOMS FEES**  
The Bangladesh side proposed increasing customs fees and imposition of service charges and bank guarantees on Indian vessels.

But the Indian delegation questioned the logic behind the imposition of service charges as the goods were not being unloaded inside Bangladesh.

Dhaka said as customs officials oversaw the transportation of Indian goods through river routes, India must pay fees and service charges.

In this regard, a decision has been left to the revenue boards of the two countries. However, the fees and charges will be reasonable and honourable for both the

countries.

## NEWPORTS OF CALL

A joint technical committee has been formed to study the feasibility of the Indian proposal for inclusion of the river Surma on the route under the protocol. The Indian side also proposed setting up new ports of call at Chhatak in Bangladesh and Dhubri in India.

India agreed as Bangladesh proposed that Badarpur could be declared an extension of Karimganj port of call. From now on Bangladesh flag carrier vessels will be allowed to anchor at Badarpur.

The Indian side also agreed to remove navigational problems for Bangladeshi vessels operating in the country and cooperate with Dhaka in fighting pirates.

## Floodwater receding

Many affected by diarrhoea

STAR REPORT

An outbreak of diarrhoea is likely to affect the marooned people in the country's flood-affected north and north-eastern regions as flood water has started to recede in most of the areas that remained inundated during the last few days.

Meanwhile, a low has been formed in the north-western Bay and its adjacent areas that could cause ghastly wind along the coast, according to a statement of the Disaster Management and Relief Division.

Our correspondent in Sylhet reports that around 800 people in 12 upazilas of the district have been affected with diarrhoeal diseases in the last few days.

Dr Quamrul Islam, civil surgeon of Sylhet, however, told The Daily Star that diarrhoea is common among the marooned people in the aftermath of the flood, but the present situation would not turn into an epidemic.

He said there are adequate supplies of oral saline packets, water purifying tablets and antibiotics, and those are being distributed among the affected people.

The authorities have formed 717 medical teams to serve the flood-affected people, Abdul Wazed, in-charge of the National Disaster Response Coordination Centre, said adding that many of the teams are now working at some flood-ravaged districts.

He said the Department of Public Health and Engineering is repairing tube-wells that were submerged by flood water.

Wazed said as floodwater has started to recede, erosion along the Padma, Brahmaputra and Jamuna basins took an alarming turn in the last few days.

"There are reports that houses are being eroded by the Padma near Dohar of Dhaka," he said yesterday.

Our correspondent in Pabna reports that over 50 houses were destroyed while some five hundred acres of cropland washed away due to erosion in the Jamuna and Padma.

Rafiqul Islam, president of Nagarbari Port Traders' Association, said the Jamuna devoured at least 30 houses in the areas adjacent to Nagarbari Port yesterday.

## 'Dakat' Shahid

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Apparently relieved at Shahid's death, locals in Laxmibazar brought out a procession.

Rab sources said Shahid came to old Dhaka from abroad a few days ago.

Dakat Shahid's gang, which operates in the old city and in Keraniganj across the Buriganga river, is one of the largest in the capital. Over the last few years, his gang was allegedly involved in many killings and extortions.

His gang was also infamous for land grabbing. Shahid had long been absconding and was suspected to have been leading his group from India, police sources said.



Locals yesterday dismantle and take away the brass used in the old boat, the wreckage of which emerged at the Kuakata beach in Patuakhali a few days ago.

PHOTO: STAR

## Locals looting antique boat

MORSHED ALI KHAN and SOHRAB HOSSAIN

A group of local people are looting precious brass sheets from joints of the ancient boat that has recently surfaced from beneath the sandy beach of Kuakata.

The wooden boat, believed to be belonging to the first Rakhaine settlers from Arakan province in Myanmar over 200 years ago, is now attracting hundreds of visitors.

This historic boat must be protected at any cost, villagers said.

While the Department of Archaeology is yet to send any official to the spot, Dedary Alom Maksud Chowdhury, upazila executive officer of Kalapara and administrator for Kuakata municipality, has formally asked the Kuakata police to keep an eye on the wooden boat so none can dismantle it.

But residents of the area said thieves were slowly dismantling the boat by stealing the joints which were made of brass. The boat was found last Friday on the beach near the tamarisk garden during the low tide.

The boat is 72 feet long and 22.5 feet wide and only two feet of its upper portion has emerged from the sandy beach. Salim Akon, 42, of Kuakata, said a similar boat was found on the beach 25 years ago and a gang looted everything, including its timber.

Uchasi Matubar, 70, a leader of the Rakhaine community in Kuakata, said that over 150 Rakhaine families had come to the area, fleeing atrocities in Myanmar in 1784.

"Those people on 50 boats fled the torture of Bodpaya who had defeated the king of Arakan province Thamada and had taken over power. This boat might be one of those," said Uchasi. The government must take immediate steps to protect and preserve it in a museum, he added.

Afroza Khan Mita, assistant director of the archaeology department, told The Daily Star that one from the department's Khulna office would soon go to Kuakata to assess whether or not it was a matter of ethnic antiquity.

"Meanwhile, we are asking the local authorities to protect the boat," said Mita.

The boat seems very old and is made of timber of Gorjon tree. The wooden body is covered by brass plates. Rumours have abounded in Kuakata that the plates are made of gold, spurring thieves to steal those.

Abu Bakor Siddique, additional superintendent of police in Patuakhali, said they would protect the boat until the archaeologists arrived.

According to Mostafa Majid, author of "Bangladesher Rakhaine", Rakhaine families had sailed 50 wooden boats through the treacherous sea and reached Rangabali island under Patuakhali district. They were the first settlers in the region covered at the time by thick mangrove forests and wild animals.

## Cylinder blast kills 2 in N'ganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Two workers were killed and two others injured in an oxygen cylinder explosion at a steel mill in Kanchpur of Narayanganj early yesterday.

Ratan Mia, 32, of Jamalpur and Zahangir Hossain, 30, of Narayanganj died on the spot. They worked as cleaners at Rahim Steel Mills Limited of Sonargaon upazila.

The identity of the injured, who only needed first aid, could not be known immediately.

Quoting other workers, Ajoy Kumar Pal, sub-inspector of Sonargaon Police Station said a gas cylinder used for cutting iron exploded with a big bang around 12:30am when the workers were busy inside the mill. The workers of the mill claimed that the use of expired and low-quality cylinder caused the explosion.

On information, police rushed to the spot and

## Public interest sacrificed

FROM PAGE 1

negotiation process, it was the last three conditions of the WB upon which final agreement or non-agreement depended. These conditions, as mentioned in the WB's press statement of June 29, 2012, were "(1) place all public officials suspected of involvement in the corruption scheme on leave from Government employment until the investigation is completed; (ii) appoint a special inquiry team within the ACC to handle the investigation, and (iii) agree to provide full and adequate access to all investigative information to a panel appointed by the World Bank comprised of internationally recognised experts so that the panel can give guidance to the leaders on the progress, adequacy, and fairness of the investigation."

Let us examine the finance minister's statement in parliament on Monday on these "conditions". About the second, he termed it "redundant" (in paragraph 16 of the official English text). About the third, he claimed it was "in contradiction with the existing laws of the ACC...." But later he said in the same paragraph that given the practice that prior approval of development partners is obtained in all matters of foreign aided projects "the ACC, giving due regard to this reality, worked out a mechanism in consultation with the expert group of the World Bank. They agreed to send a letter to the WB detailing the manner in which they would circulate information, consider/act on advice and ensure the involvement of the development partners (DPs). What they basically meant was that they would receive advice from the DPs and share all information with them," Muhith told parliament.

He said the Department of Public Health and Engineering is repairing tube-wells that were submerged by flood water. Wazed said as floodwater has started to recede, erosion along the Padma, Brahmaputra and Jamuna basins took an alarming turn in the last few days.

"There are reports that houses are being eroded by the Padma near Dohar of Dhaka," he said yesterday. Our correspondent in Pabna reports that over 50 houses were destroyed while some five hundred acres of cropland washed away due to erosion in the Jamuna and Padma.

Rafiqul Islam, president of Nagarbari Port Traders' Association, said the Jamuna devoured at least 30 houses in the areas adjacent to Nagarbari Port yesterday. Apparently relieved at Shahid's death, locals in Laxmibazar brought out a procession. Rab sources said Shahid came to old Dhaka from abroad a few days ago. Dakat Shahid's gang, which operates in the old city and in Keraniganj across the Buriganga river, is one of the largest in the capital. Over the last few years, his gang was allegedly involved in many killings and extortions.

His gang was also infamous for land grabbing. Shahid had long been absconding and was suspected to have been leading his group from India, police sources said.

From the above we get the impression that all the while our government thought the WB was only talking about some government officials and not any minister, and that the government was taken aback now that the WB was also referring to a minister.

Is this "miscommunication" argument genuine? It is interesting to note that the WB press statement dated June 30 (we have not been given copies of the WB letters to the government) uses the term "public officials", whereas the government letters to the WB uses "officials", which was also the term used by the finance minister in his speech to parliament. Did the WB use the term "public officials" in its letters? Only copies of their letters can prove it, which we do not possess at the moment. But if they did, then why did our government keep on using the term "officials" and not "public officials"? This one word now becomes important to understand if there were any genuine grounds for the "miscommunication".

The government's position becomes quite untenable if we consider another letter by the same correspondent dated June 28. In it he says and we quote, "In early October, the Vice President South Asia (VPSA) and Vice President INT visited Dhaka and provided a verbal report (but no evidence) of 'pay to play' in the consultancy prequalification. The VPSA suggested in a private conversation with the Honorable Finance Minister, that if the two officers and the ministers in charge were moved out, the Bank would resume the project," unquote. (Emphasis ours).

At this stage, only three individuals stood between our dream of a bridge over the Padma and the national humiliation that we are now suffering under. Out of these three, the government later agrees about the two. And then we are stuck with the third as we see below.

In his last letter, dated June 29, Iqbal Mahmood writes, among other things, and we quote, "One officer mentioned in your referral will proceed on leave, while the other one has already been retired from Government Service. Action against the remaining person will take more time as explained in the previous letter," unquote. (Emphasis ours)

It is amply clear from the above letters by the government that it had agreed to all the latest three conditions of the WB except removing one minister. The argument that to remove the minister was to admit guilt is facile at best. There are numerous cases where a person accused of wrongdoing is temporarily removed to facilitate investigation, and reinstated with honour if exonerated. Wasn't that what the WB was asking for? Recently, the German president, when accused of wrongdoing immediately resigned, saying he was doing it for the sake of proper investigation. Nobody took it for admission of guilt.

Was it worth jeopardising the Padma bridge project that the government itself

describes as one "on which hangs the prosperity and wellbeing of 60 million people of Bangladesh?" How could an elected government choose to protect one individual against the interest of 60 million people? Can a people's government, in its wildest of errors, make such a choice? But ours did - consciously, deliberately and over a long period.

The finance minister said that the WB statement has "humiliated the whole country." Yes, it did, and we all feel humiliated and outraged. And we also feel that the government chose to insult us only to protect a minister.

Throughout our piece and the accompanying reports, we have chosen to keep the minister unnamed. We do so to underscore the point that we hold the government far more guilty for protecting him against the interest of the whole nation than we hold the minister guilty for bringing us all to such disrepute.

I have wondered about the minister in question. When he saw how a major national project was being jeopardised because of him, how the very government of which he was a part was moving towards a head-on clash with the WB, how his country would face international stigma of corruption and how the 60 million people would feel let down, why didn't he have the simple decency to remove himself from the scene by resigning? Would it have meant admission of guilt? Isn't the public holding him guilty now? If he had left with an appeal to the PM, whom he claims to respect, saying "I am resigning to spare the government any embarrassment, and in the greater interest of the country and the people and I demand an independent inquiry in my absence to prove my innocence", his stature would have been heightened tenfold than it is now. Recently, he called a few media outlets and wrote to a few saying how honest, pious and innocent he was. All his piety did not give him the moral courage to spare his country, his party and especially his Prime Minister this shameful predicament.

**Drive to free**  
FROM PAGE 20  
Sheikh Kamal Hossain, a magistrate of DNCC, said they had conducted drives on both sides of the footpaths from Gulshan-2 to Gulshan-1.

"But we have limitations as we do not have sufficient equipment and police force," he added.

Anando Kumar Biswas, a magistrate of DSCC, said they would launch a four-day drive to clean footpaths in some areas, including Motijheel, Fakirerpool and New Market from today.

Billal Hossain, another magistrate of DSCC, said they conducted drives Monday night and were waiting for instructions from the high-ups for the next course of action.

Some footpath hawkers in Farmgate area claimed that they had sought time from the local ruling party leaders and received a positive response from the city corporation, which was why there was no sign of any massive drive.