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 transhipment, it

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 countries. 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.

Indian ships will be engaged Officials said it had been

decided that standing committees under the water protocol will look into the legal and technical matters of coastal shipping.

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

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

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 transhipment facilities would be provided to India under the existing protocol through necessary amend-

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has also agreed to consider transit and transhipment 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 transhipment 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 newport 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 fullyoperational 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 Ashugani at its own cost and it was very much keen to take up a development project for the

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. NEW PORTS 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.

according to a statement o and Relief Division.

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

tion would not turn into an epidemic.

quate supplies of orsaline packets, water purifying tables and antibiotics, and those are being distributed among the affected people.

formed 717 medical teams to serve the flood-affected people, Abdul Wazed, incharge of the National Disaster Response Coordination Centre, said adding that many of the teams are now working at some flood-ravaged dis-

of Public Health and Engineering is repairing tube-wells that were sub-

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

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

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 | referral.

came to old Dhaka from abroad a few days ago.

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



wreckage of which emerged at the Kuakata beach in Patuakhali a few days ago.

Public interest sacrificed

tion."

ment partners." It is obvious from the above text that both parties, our government and the WB, were able to thrash out an agreement on the second and the third conditions. That leaves us with the first, in which the WB demands that suspected "public officials" be sent on leave till the investigation is over. This is where, as we understand, the negotiations broke

A letter written by senior secretary Iqbal Mahmood is very revealing on this score.

sion of guilt.

faced from beneath the sandy beach of Kuakata. The wooden boat, believed to be belonging to

> 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 describes as one "on which

> 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.

> 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 Matubbar, 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

asking the local authorities to

The boat seems very old

Abu Bakor Siddique,

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

Cylinder

as we do not have sufficient equipment and police

magistrate of DSCC, said they would launch a fourday drive to clean footpaths in some areas, including Motijheel, Fakirerpool and New Market from today.

Billal Hossain, another they conducted drives the high-ups for the next

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

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 sur-

Locals looting

antique boat

the first Rakhaine settlers from Arakan province in

administrator for Kuakata municipality, has formally asked the Kuakata police to keep an eye on the wooden boat so none can dismantle But residents of the area

The boat is 72 feet long

matter of ethnic antiquity.

"Meanwhile, we are protect the boat," said Mita.

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.

additional superintendent of police in Patuakhali, said they would protect the boat until the archaeologists arrived. According to Mostafa

animals.

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, subinspector 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 explo-

On information, police rushed to the spot and

started investigating the

There is also no mention in the proposal as to whether in carrying goods.

The committees will also

Indian Shipping Secretary

reluctant to take actions against the high-level public officials without actionable evidence, but in the larger interest of the country and in order not to jeopardise her electoral commitment she used her routine cabinet reshuffle to adjust the portfo-

lios to meet the Bank's demands," says the letter. However, the change of the said minister's portfolio did not satisfy the WB. The issue came up again in early June when the two parties gave the

issue a final try. In another letter on June 26, the finance ministry senior secretary noted, "In deference to your [WB] request for immediate action against the 'officials' for the duration of inquiry, the Government of Bangladesh agreed to take immediate actions against the officials named in your

referral. "However, there appears to have been a genuine miscommunication. Your letter on June 5, 2012 referred clearly to 'officials' and not 'ministers'. Our reading of the letter was confirmed by the advice we got from our colleagues in Washington DC and therefore agreed to the actions only against the 'officials'. The actions against the 'ministers' would essentially await preliminary findings of the BACC (Bangladesh Anti-Corruption

Commission)." This letter reconfirmed that the said minister would not be removed. This was reconfirmed by a third letter issued on June 29, the very day the WB cancelled the loan

But sources said although the letter talked about a misunderstanding over the definition of 'officials', the WB had categorically named the minister during talks since October last year. The WB had been very

serious about the minister's

removal as it believed a

person accused of corruption cannot and should not lead such a large project, the sources added. They said the WB integrity vice-presidency (INT) had

bridge project tender late in 2010, even before signing the loan contract in April 2011. As part of it, the INT interviewed all the bidders that had project construction supervi-

sory consultant in 2010. The investigation was triggered by an allegation sent to the WB in September-October of 2010 stating that certain men of the minister in charge had been approaching

the bidders.

This allegation landed in the INT's report that was handed over to the government on September 21 last year. It states, "One confidential witness told INT that the company s/he worked for received a visit from an individual claiming to work for Sahco who said he was taking instructions directly from Minister Hossain. According to this confidential witness, the Sahco representative said that, in exchange for a specified percentage of the contract value, Minister Hossain would help the company in the PQ (prequalifying) process for the Padma Main Bridge

Contract. On June 29, the WB cancelled its \$ 1.2 billion loan stating high-level corruption in the bridge project.

The proposed 6.2kilometre (3.8 miles) bridge over the Padma River would connect the capital with the country's 16 south-western districts. The \$2.9 billion project also had finances from the Asian Development Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica).

Finance Minister Muhith at a press conference on July 1 gave two points where the two parties fell apart. One point was that the government had found it insulting to sign a memorandum of understanding (Mou) over possible corruption and the other was that it had found unacceptable the WB proposed Terms of Reference (ToR) with a foreign panel with the ACC.

However, in his speech in parliament the next day, the finance minister said the ACC had legal limitations for signing the ToR. That's why the ACC through discussion

Minister biggest reason with the WB had devised a way

to meet the bank's demands. "They [ACC] agreed to send a letter to the WB detailing the manner in which participated in the tender for 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 parlia-"Therefore, a panel can work on behalf of the development partners but the instructions must come from all the development partners

> or from their coordinator," he This implies that the government actually agreed

to the WB proposal over the ACC with slight modification. Sources said the final talks were held between WB officials and government high officials and an adviser to the prime minister and the ACC during June 23 to 26. For the first three days, they talked over removing concerned officials. During the dialogue, Bangladesh initially agreed to both the burning issues on ACC and removing the

officials and minister. But on June 26, Bangladesh declined to remove the minister. The government also suddenly became hesitant about signing the

ACC. The talks ended unfruit-FROM PAGE 20 and drink before being sent back to Myanmar around 4:00pm.

All of them were from

Maungdaw of Rakhine state

of Myanmar. "We arrested 26 Myanmar nationals after conducting drives in Hoaikhang, Jhimongkhali, Unsiprang and Shah Porir Dweep under Teknaf upazila," Lt Col Zahid Hasan, commanding officer (CO) of BGB 42 Battalion

day held four more Rohingyas for intruding into the country. Around 982 people were

Meanwhile, police yester-

sent back to Myanmar due to the sectarian violence that broke out there on June 8.

Meanwhile, a low has been formed in the northwestern Bay and its adjacent areas that could cause ghastly wind along the coast the Disaster Management

Our correspondent in

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 situa-

He said there are ade-

The authorities have

He said the Department

merged by flood water. Wazed said as floodwater

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

Padma.

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

sources said.

city

Locals yesterday dismantle and take away the brass used in the old boat, the

FROM PAGE 1 negotiation process, it was the last three conditions of the WB upon which final agreement or nonagreement 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 lenders on the progress, adequacy, and fairness of the investiga-

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 develop-

Let us examine the

down.

The letter addressed to Isabel Guerrero, WB vice president for South Asia, dated June 26, 2012, said, and we quote, "The government of Bangladesh is fully committed to taking actions against all officials and ministers on the recommendation of the BACC (Bangladesh Anti-Corruption Commission). In deference to your request for immediate action against the 'officials' for the duration of inquiry, the Government of Bangladesh agreed to take immediate actions against

the 'officials' named in your "However, there appears to have been a genuine miscommunication. Your letter of June 05, 2012 referred clearly to 'officials' and not 'ministers'. Our reading of the letter was confirmed by the advice we got from our colleagues in Washington DC and therefore agreed to the actions only against the 'officials'. The actions against the 'ministers' would essentially await preliminary findings of the BACC," unquote.

our government thought the WB was only talking about people of Bangladesh?" some government officials and not any minister, and that the government was taken aback now that the WB was also referring to a ministhis "miscommunication" argument genuine? It is interesting to note that the WB press statement dated June 30 (we

From the above we get the

impression that all the while

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 govern-

ment 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

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 admis-

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

hangs the prosperity and wellbeing of 60 million 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 didconsciously, 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 inno-

his country, his party and especially his Prime Minister this shameful predicament.

cence", 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

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

force," he added. Anando Kumar Biswas, a

magistrate of DSCC, said Monday night and were waiting for instructions from course of action.

sion. massive drive.