

# Meghna water for Dhaka

Govt okays Tk 5,248cr purification project

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday approved a project to increase the supply of purified water to the city dwellers at a cost of Tk 5,248 crore.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) granted the approval at a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Under the "Dhaka environmentally sustainable water supply project", a water treatment plant will be set up at Gondharbapur in Narayanganj.

Once the project is completed, water from the Meghna would be brought into the plant for treatment.

Some 50 crore litres of treated water will be supplied in the capital from the plant every-day, sources at the planning ministry said.

People residing in Old Dhaka, Motijheel, Paltan, Fakirerpool, Uttara, Gulshan, Banani, Nikunja, Khilkhet, Badda and Mirpur areas will get sufficient water after the completion of the project.

Development partners including ADB, AFD (France) and EIB will provide Tk 3,499 crore for the project.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Planning Secretary Bhuiyan Shafiqul Islam said a total of 11 development projects involving Tk 16,265 crore of expenditure had been approved.

"Of the total project costs, Tk 9,851 crore will come from the government exchequer while Tk 6,414 crore as project assistance (from development partners)," he said.

The Ecne meeting also gave nod to the third revised Primary Education Stipend (2nd phase) project raising its cost to Tk 5,687 crore.

Under the project, the poor students studying in primary schools across the country are being provided Tk 100-stipend per month.

The other projects, approved in the meeting, include Extension of National Institute of Traumatology & Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Tk 336 crore), Increase of crop production through improved water management technology at farm level (Tk 35 crore), Water supply, sanitation, and drainage project in Sylhet and Barisal metropolis (Tk 282 crore), and Construction of four textile institutes project (1st revised, Tk 227 crore).



A recent photo shows the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) dredging the river Kirtankhola around Barisal river port to ensure smooth and safe navigation of vessels. The work started on Saturday.

PHOTO: ARIFUR RAHMAN

## ALIM'S WAR CRIMES

# Trial likely to end Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The trial proceedings of the war crimes case against BNP leader Abdul Alim are likely to conclude on Sunday, as both the prosecution and the defence already completed their closing arguments yesterday.

International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday asked the prosecution to reply to the defence arguments within an hour on Sunday. As per the relevant law, the court will then either designate the case as awaiting a verdict or fix a date for delivering it.

Earlier in the day, the defence completed their arguments claiming that the prosecution "could not prove any charges" brought against Alim and that their client was "absolutely innocent".

Having completed their arguments on September 11, the prosecution, on the other hand, claimed that they had proved 15 charges and sought his capital punishment.

Alim, a former BNP lawmaker and member of late president Ziaur Rahman's cabinet, is facing 17 charges for alleged involvement in crimes against humanity and genocide committed in Joypurhat during the Liberation War in 1971.

Of the 17 charges, 15 were framed in connection with Alim's alleged involvement in the killing of at least

585 people in 15 incidents. The other two charges were in connection with looting, arson, deportation and detention of unarmed civilians.

The prosecution has produced 35 witnesses to prove the charges while the defence produced three, including Alim's son, to prove that the accused had been hiding in 1971.

The prosecution, however, did not place any arguments on the fourth and fifth charges, both related to mass killings and looting, as they could not produce any witnesses in support of those.

During their fifth-day arguments yesterday, Ahsanul Huq Hena, one of the counsels for the 83-year-old politician, said his client had gone into hiding on April 20, 1971, and was not in Joypurhat during the war.

However, the prosecution produced documents during their arguments to show that Alim had taken part in public programmes and he was elected a member of East Pakistan Provincial Assembly through the so-called "by-polls" during the war.

Hena claimed all the prosecution witnesses were "dubious in character" and their versions "varied" from each other's.

"Their [the prosecution's] evidence does not support their case [charges] and they could not prove

any episodes or charges," said Hena, adding, "The accused is absolutely innocent and may be acquitted."

The prosecution had earlier observed, "Mr Abdul Alim was the crime compass of 1971 that provided navigational services to the Pakistani Army, members of the Peace Committee and members of Razakar and Biharis so that they could commit the alleged crimes."

Alim, the alleged chairman of Joypurhat Peace Committee and Razakar Commander in 1971, was arrested on March 27, 2011, and he has been on conditional bail since March 31 that year due to poor health.

Meanwhile, the court recorded the cross-examination of Ataur Rahman, the 25th and last prosecution witness in the case against alleged Al-Badr leaders Chowdhury Mueen Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman Khan.

State-appointed defence counsel Salma Hai Tuny cross-examined Ataur, also one of the two investigation officers of the case, before the court adjourned the proceedings until Sunday, when he faces further cross-examination.

Mueen and Ashraf, who are now on the run, are facing 11 charges for alleged involvement in the abduction and killing of 18 intellectuals in the last week of nine-month-long war.

## It's not worth taking the risk

FROM PAGE 1

He was describing how 60 percent of the mercury produced by burning coal would be captured and the rest would thinly disperse into air and how sulphur would be kept at a minimum.

Then he came to that indisputable argument that the Sundarbans is vanishing anyway as dirt poor people will always harness the forest resources. The only chance to save it is by setting up the power plants to generate jobs and to have the multiplier effect of mushrooming industries.

However, he put an asterisk there. We need a strong monitoring team in place to ensure that everything works as it should be. And then if you just sit back and have a long look, that small asterisk turns out to be a big question mark, probably the most important one for the Rampal power plant.

Let's look at what the Sundarbans is. It is a unique mangrove representing an ecosystem found nowhere else in the world. It is the only mangrove system that supports a large cat species -- the Bengal tiger. It is home to some endangered species

like the masked finfoot. Its beauty is breathtaking and found nowhere else in the world. In other words, we have a place that no other country has. So if this forest is gone, it will be a loss to the world in general.

This land was left comparatively undisturbed until a plan was hatched to set up the power plant.

The environment management plan that we are talking about is fine -- until you look at who will ensure its execution. And also how these plans are drawn up.

Paul Fishers of International Rivers has bared his soul this way: "As someone with more than 15 years in the field of development cooperation and as a consultant on ESIA projects for some of the major international banks, I have found myself becoming increasingly disillusioned with the process. I entered the field seeing ESIA as a tool that could help bring environmental concerns and local people's perspectives to the forefront of decision-making for infrastructure projects, but over time, have begun to believe the task is often little more than an art of smoothing the way for projects."

Does the same thing apply to the Rampal plant too? Can we recall one single project in Bangladesh that was cancelled because of an adverse environmental impact report? When a project is conceived and area selected, the impact analysis always finds a way of mitigating any bad outcome, as in the case of Rampal.

But the dreaded reality is like in most developing countries the agencies in charge of protecting the environment in Bangladesh are not the most powerful institutions and cannot always guarantee the application of national laws.

We have thousands of examples before us. We have textile factories that are spewing tonnes of toxic waste into our river system. The environment department is helpless to check it. We have formalin invading our foods. The agencies cannot check it. We have forests logged away everyday. The forest department is powerless. And we have seen the dismal level of environmental standards of our national projects.

So what if the Rampal plant does not keep the promise it makes on environment safety? What if we

find an environmental disaster happening? Can they just switch off the plant? The answer is No. A power plant is an essential installation that just cannot be switched off because a few hundred tigers are in peril.

So why are we playing truant with the most unique ecosystem of the world? Why have we to put the forest at potential risks? In the shadow of the Rampal plant, other industries are already invading the Sundarbans, flouting all laws -- shipyards, a smaller private power plant, cement factories and what not -- and nothing could be done about them just as nothing can be done if something goes wrong with Rampal.

These private entities in all likelihood will then follow the Gazipur forest encroachment model. They will slowly and gradually make incursions into the forest, squeezing the Sundarbans.

We understand that the Rampal plant can be operated soundly without any environmental hazard. But it is not worth taking the risk with the world's unique heritage site.

## Assad to give up chemical arms

FROM PAGE 20

today by the world's chemical weapons watchdog, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday urged China to play a "positive, constructive" role at the United Nations on a resolution to rein in Syria's chemical weapons.

Assad insisted in the television interview that his forces had not been behind an August 21 gas attack on the Damascus suburbs that killed hundreds of civilians, but vowed nevertheless to hand over his deadly arsenal.

It was his second interview this month with US television, and one of a series of meetings with Western journalists to counter mounting political pressure from Western capitals.

After last month's barrage of sarin-loaded rockets, which the West says was clearly launched by the regime, US President Barack Obama called for US-led punitive military strikes.

But with US lawmakers and the Western public not sold on the virtues of another Middle East military adventure, Assad's ally Russia seized the opportunity to propose a diplomatic solution.

Pushed by President Vladimir Putin, the White House agreed to hold fire while Russia and the international community -- with Assad's agreement -- draws up a disarmament plan.

Assad reiterated his pledge to cooperate, but insisted he had not been forced to do so by US threats of US action.

"I think it's a very complicated operation, technically. And it needs a lot of money,

about a billion," he told Fox.

"So it depends, you have to ask the experts what they mean by quickly. It has a certain schedule. It needs a year, or maybe a little bit more."

Asked why he had used force to repress a popular uprising and triggered a two-and-a-half year war that has claimed 110,000 lives, Assad insisted Syria was a victim of terrorism.

"What we have is not civil war. What we have is war. It's a new kind of war," he said, alleging that Islamist guerrillas from more than 80 countries had joined the fight.

And Putin yesterday backed his good intentions.

"Will we manage to carry it through? I can't say 100 percent, but all that we have seen recently, in the last few days, inspires confidence that it is possible and that it will be done," Putin said at a

meeting of the Valdai international discussion club with Western politicians and journalists in the north-western Novgorod region.

Putin said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime was already putting into practice the proposals announced by US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Geneva on Saturday.

The framework agreement agreed by the two countries calls for Syria to hand over all its chemical weapons for destruction by mid-2014.

"Will we manage to convince Assad or not? I don't know," Putin said. "But so far everything looks as if Syria has fully agreed with our proposal and is ready to act according to the plan that is being developed by the international community at the United Nations."

## The clock is ticking

FROM PAGE 20

University of East Anglia's School of Environmental Sciences analysed other planets outside our galaxy in an attempt to work out how long it will be before our planet becomes uninhabitable.

The study, published yesterday in the journal Astrobiology, examined seven planets, including Earth, to determine how their "habitable zones" will change as their stars get hotter and brighter over time.

"Within around 1.75 billion years conditions for human life will become impossible as the sun grows in size, temperatures soar and the world's oceans evaporate," Andrew Rushby, who led the study, told The Independent.

The research didn't specifically account for man-made climate change or the "possibility that we'll all be wiped out by an asteroid or a nuclear war", he said.

Climate change may well decimate humanity before

the concept of habitable zones become relevant.

"Of course, conditions for humans and other complex life will become impossible much sooner -- and this is being accelerated by anthropogenic climate change," he said.

Even if some humans did manage to survive for another 1.75 billion years, the end would not come instantly.

"Life isn't going to be extinguished at the flick of a switch," Rushby said.

Instead, as the sun gets

older, it will get hotter and temperatures on Earth will soar over the course of "perhaps one million years" as we enter a "hot zone".

The study has also allowed Rushby and his team to make predictions about what stage life might be at in other parts of the galaxy.

In particular, the report points to the examples of Kepler-22b and Gliese-581d which have been habitable for up to 6 and 54.7 billion years respectively.

**International COASTAL CLEANUP DAY 2013**

**banglalink**

**let's keep the beach of Cox's Bazar real by keeping it clean**

**special cleanup program**  
**venue:** Labonee Point, Cox's Bazar Sea Beach  
**date:** September 21, 2013

**in partnership with:**

carol.com/banglalink/29-13