

Teesta water

FROM PAGE 1

Teesta water flow means Indian authorities have opened the sluice gates of their Gazoldoba barrage," said Mir Sazzad Hossain, a member of Bangladesh JRC.

On Saturday and Sunday, the water flow was 688 and 789 and cusecs respectively, he added.

Only 416 to 650 cusecs of water flow in the trans-boundary river in February and March and absence of rain have caused problems for Boro farmers in northern districts.

Against this backdrop, Teesta Bachao Andolon, a citizens platform, and several left political parties have been staging programmes, including rally, procession, long march and human chain, for the last two months, demanding due share of Teesta water.

The opposition BNP also launched a two-day long march

towards the Teesta barrage yesterday morning.

Asked whether the government made any special effort to get a fare share of Teesta water, Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud said the issue is under negotiation between Dhaka and New Delhi.

"On Monday, India released the water which reached the Teesta barrage point today [yesterday]," he said and hoped Bangladesh would continuously get water from the Indian side.

Bangladesh and India were set to ink a deal on the Teesta water share during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Dhaka visit in September 2011. But the signing had to be cancelled following last-minute objections raised by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

2 kids killed

FROM PAGE 16

Both groups exchanged several gunshots during the clash that left Shimul dead on the spot and 10 people injured, five of them bullet-hit.

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, said Rakib Ul Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station.

The injured were admitted to

Laxmipur Sadar Hospital where Farhad succumbed to his injuries around 11:30pm.

Later, activists of Nasir group set fire to the houses of BNP leaders Ali Karim and Tofael Ahmed in the locality. Firefighters put out the blaze after an hour of hectic effort.

Additional police forces have been deployed in the area to keep the situation under control.

Survived, only to suffer

FROM PAGE 1

"My daughter was the main breadwinner of our family. Her death has left us in a tough situation," said 45-year old Hena Begum, mother of missing worker Akhi Akhter.

Akhi's family got Tk 79,000 as immediate assistance from British retailer Primark, local institutions and individuals. The family has already spent 70 percent of the money on basic needs in one year.

Before the Rana Plaza collapse, Akhi and her mother used to work at garment units housed in the building and earn together Tk 17,500 per month.

Akhi's father, Nanna Sheikh, is a hawker but often fails to work as he is an asthma patient.

The family now runs of a mere Tk

5,500 that Hena earns from work at a knitwear factory.

"We have cut our expenditure on food; before Akhi's death, we bought food with cash. Now we buy food on credit," said Hena, who shifted to a low-rent house.

Seventeen-year old Shefali has survived the building crash after being buried in rubble for three days, but her family is finding it hard to bear the economic strains that have followed.

She is now so traumatised that she would rather be unemployed than return to work at a garment factory.

"We were a happy family when Shefali and her father used to work. But it has now become tough, as the family income has halved," said Morium Begum, her mother.



The water flow of the Teesta has increased at Teesta barrage point in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat. The photo was taken around 5:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

WAR CRIMES TRIAL

Sister defends Mir Quasem

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Momtaj Nuruddin, younger sister of Jamaat-e-Islami leader Mir Quasem Ali, yesterday defended her brother from the charges brought against him as she gave testimony before a war crimes tribunal.

Speaking as the first defence witness, the 59-year-old housewife told the International Crimes Tribunal-2 that her brother had stayed at her house in Dhaka from the first week of November 1971 till March 1972.

Fourteen charges are framed against Quasem, the alleged chief of Al-Badr force in Chittagong, and those crimes were committed in between November and December 16, 1971 at the port district.

During her 11-minute testimony, Momtaj, now living in Dhaka, said she was 15-16 and had been living with her husband and a child at Old Dhaka during the Liberation War.

"Mir Quasem is my elder brother and he had come to my house [in Dhaka] in the first week of November in 1971," said Momtaj, adding, they had left Dhaka for Comilla in March 1972 as her husband joined a college there.

"My brother Mir Quasem Ali had stayed at my rented house till March 1972 when we left Dhaka for Comilla," she said.

After her brief testimony, prosecutor Zead Al Malum completed cross-examining Momtaj suggesting that she

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

3 months for further probe

FROM PAGE 1

the further probe concludes," he argued in presence of Ershad.

Earlier, the same court on February 27 gave the order for the additional investigation but the CID could not make any headway in around last two months.

Yesterday, investigation officer Abdul Kahar Akond, special superintendent of the CID, submitted a petition seeking three months' additional time to complete the further probe.

Kahar said he needed the time as he could not trace the whereabouts of Gen Manzur's wife to record her statement.

Judge Khondker Hasan Md Firoz then

granted 83 days for completion of the task and asked the CID to come up with the probe report on or before July 15.

Manzur, a sector commander of the Liberation War, was killed at Chittagong Cantonment on June 1, 1981, just two days into the assassination of the then president Ziaur Rahman.

Earlier, February 10 had been fixed for delivering the verdict of the case. However, the judge, who fixed the date, was transferred just a few days before the day. The case has so far seen 22 judges since it was filed on August 28, 1995.

Besides Ershad, two other accused Maj (ret'd) Kazi Emdadul Haque and Lt Col (ret'd) Mostafa Kamaluddin Bhuiyan

A real cause for concern

FROM PAGE 16

Locals said a seven-year-old boy named Rizvi first spotted some SIM cards on the banks of the pond when he went there looking for leafy vegetables around 7:30am.

As he returned home with around 60 SIMs, other got to know of this and a few other children started scuttling the pond in search of more SIM cards.

As the news spread, several hundred villagers joined the frenzy.

People were found checking the SIM cards inserting them in their cell phones.

Masud Rana of the village said that many people got at least 20 to 30 SIM cards and most of the SIM cards were active and carried balances between Tk

100 to Tk 300.

The SIMs were even sold at prices between Tk 10 and Tk 15, said the villagers.

After a massive search, the villagers left the area around 11:00am and police reached the spot around half an hour later.

Police seized 243 SIM cards from some villagers, said Iqbal Anwarul Haque, officer-in-charge of Khetlal Police Station.

However, all these SIMs were damaged and their numbers could not be known, the OC told The Daily Star.

"We have started looking into the incident and trying to identify the SIM owners," he said.

Hamidul Alam, superintendent of Joypurhat police, said the SIMs might have been dumped by some criminal or militant gang.

When contacted, the local customer care officials of the telecom operators said they suspected that the SIM cards might have been used for criminal purposes.

Sarwar Alam, director media and IT of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, said the regulator and different government agencies are clamping down on illegal VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) operators recently. So, they might have thrown away the SIM cards to avert possible legal complications.

Ershad 'ordered' Manzur killing

FROM PAGE 1

Ershad's directive, enquired about it. "General Ershad, what is that plan you are talking about? May we also know about it?"

Ershad became annoyed and replied: "Air chief, you don't understand anything."

"I don't have to know from you what I understand and what I do not," the air-chief retorted.

Within moments, the air chief told the acting president: "Sir, please make sure that nothing happens to Manzur and that he is given a trial. If anything happens to Manzur, we will be answerable to the nation."

Sattar, who had been acting as president from the day Zia was killed, assured that Manzur, GOC of 24th Infantry Division and Area Commander of Chittagong, who was branded by the army authorities in Dhaka as the leader of the mutiny in which Zia was killed, would be given a trial.

That afternoon, Home Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman, who was informed by the IGP about Manzur's arrest, also talked to Sattar over the telephone and recommended keeping Manzur in police custody.

The home minister had wanted to ensure that Manzur was in no way replaced under army custody. He was afraid that the masterminds behind the conspiracy would not keep him alive. Mostafiz also argued that Manzur had been sacked from the army after the assassination of the president and so he must be kept under police custody.

The IGP also had hectic efforts to convince Justice Sattar to keep Manzur under police custody. He even engaged in altercations with Ershad on the

issue.

But all such efforts went in vain. Finally, the president, the head of state and government, could not keep to his assurance and succumbed to the army chief's pressure within hours.

Ershad had won his game. His plan was executed. Manzur was taken from police custody by some army officials and was killed inside Chittagong cantonment hours after the Bangabhaban meeting from where the IGP had been compelled to order Chittagong police to hand Manzur over to the army.

Manzur and some army officers, who had fled Chittagong cantonment following a series of events after the killing of Zia, were captured by the police at around 4:00pm on June 1 at Fatikchhari in Chittagong.

They were then brought to Hathazari police station.

The IGP ordered the CMP commissioner to ask the DIG, Chittagong Range, to rush to Hathazari police station with adequate force. He also ordered that the armed police battalion be deployed to beef up security.

In the evening, Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Saifuddin called Kibria over telephone and requested him to pursue the acting president about the need to lodge Manzur in jail, and if the situation demanded, to airlift him to Dhaka.

When Kibria telephonically informed the acting president in the afternoon about Manzur's arrest, Sattar asked the police chief to meet him at the Bangabhaban.

At around 7:30 in the evening, Kibria entered the Bangabhaban. He found Ershad and other armed forces officers sitting there and talking to Sattar. As he came in, Ershad wel-

comed him with a broad smile and told him that he had secured the reward money declared by the acting president for the capture of Manzur.

Kibria was annoyed at Ershad's remarks and told him the reward money had a bad odour and he [Ershad] could keep it for himself. [Sattar had earlier declared a reward of Tk5 lakh for the capture of Manzur]

Noticing Kibria's annoyance, the acting president tried to pacify him by appreciating the police efforts in capturing Manzur and others.

Then the acting president initiated a discussion as to the steps to be taken against Manzur and others.

Ershad immediately demanded a handover of Manzur and the other arrestees as well as their family members to the army.

The police chief opposed Ershad's demand. He briefed the acting president about the measures already taken to protect and defend Hathazari police station and the army officers in custody. "The armed police battalion could escort Manzur and others to Chittagong city and lodge them in jail," Kibria continued.

He also informed the acting president about Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Saifuddin's suggestion about airlifting Manzur to Dhaka.

The acting president nodded. The police chief thought the acting president approved of what he said. At that point, Ershad whispered in Sattar's ears which Kibria could not follow.

The IGP again told the acting president that the arrested army officers and their family members could be flown to Dhaka by helicopter. But Kibria could not finish speaking. Ershad interrupted him and insisted on an immediate handover of Manzur

and the others to the army.

Kibria again tried to speak. But the acting president said: "We have had enough discussions with the chief of army staff and now a decision has to be given."

He rejected the IGP's proposal but thanked him for all the efforts made towards capturing Manzur and the other officers.

He ordered Kibria to hand Manzur and the others over to the army, the appropriate authority to be designated by the army chief, in Chittagong.

Ershad was visibly pleased. He then went out of the meeting room for a while before coming back.

From the Bangabhaban, Kibria rang the CMP commissioner and informed him about the president's order. He also asked him to convey the same message to the DIG and the superintendent of police in Chittagong, who were then at Hathazari police station.

While the Kibria was pursuing Justice Sattar at the Bangabhaban, the local administration in Chittagong decided to send Manzur and his family to Dhaka for their safety. Top officials there were impatiently waiting for the acting president's permission to execute the decision.

Ziauddin M Choudhury, then deputy commissioner of Chittagong, had advised Saifuddin that he should ask for a special Biman flight to take Manzur and his family to Dhaka. The police would escort Manzur to the airport from Hathazari.

Saifuddin communicated with Justice Sattar and informed him about the decision. The acting president heard him out before telling him that he would get back to him after consultations with Home Minister Mostafizur Rahman and IGP Kibria.

In line with the suggested plan, Ziauddin himself had spoken to the managing director of Biman, Manzurul Karim, on his own initiative to alert him that there could be a need for a special flight.

The Biman official said that a special flight would not be a problem. All that he required was an order from the home ministry or the president's office.

About 30 or 40 minutes went by and during all this time the Chittagong administration did not receive any call either from the home ministry or the president's office.

Ziauddin asked Saifuddin to call the president's office again. The acting president was available, but he said he could not give the Chittagong administration permission till he had talked to army chief Ershad.

The deputy commissioner found it not only frustrating but unbelievable. He was to find out how the head of the government had succumbed to the pressure mounted on him by the army chief.

Succeeding in his efforts, Ershad that evening made a phone call from the Bangabhaban to the army headquarters and directed that Manzur be taken into army custody. The officer in charge of Chittagong cantonment was instantly notified by the army headquarters about the army chief's order.

The acting president finally issued the order at around 8:00pm that Manzur to be handed over to the army. But from the afternoon on the day, two brigadier generals-- Azizul Islam and Abdul Latif-- were working in Chittagong relentlessly to execute Ershad's plan at his directive.

So, even before Ershad had man-

aged to secure the acting president's order for the handing over of Manzur to the army, the two generals were working to form a team that would later bring Manzur to Chittagong cantonment from Hathazari police station.

While the two generals were at a meeting at Aziz's office in Chittagong cantonment, the telephone rang. Aziz picked up the phone.

"Right sir, yes sir. Work is going on as per your instructions," Aziz told Ershad over the telephone when the army chief enquired about the progress in the execution of the plan.

As Aziz was talking to Ershad, Latif was present there. "Brigadier Latif is here. Please talk to him," Aziz told Ershad at one stage of the conversation and passed the phone to Latif.

"Latif, I have given detailed instructions to Brigadier Aziz on how to handle General Manzur. He should be finished," Ershad told Latif.

Aziz and Latif despatched a group of army officials, led by Captain Emdad, to Hathazari police station that night for Manzur and the others to be taken into army custody.

Chittagong police escorted the army vehicles carrying Manzur and others to the gate of Chittagong cantonment on that fateful night.

Sometimes on the night of June 1, Sattar told Home Minister Mostafizur Rahman that he could not keep his suggestion for keeping Manzur in police custody because the army had taken Manzur under its control by putting pressure on him.

[The report was prepared on the basis of the depositions of witnesses and accused in the Manzur murder case and the book, "Assassination of Ziaur Rahman and the Aftermath" by Ziauddin M Choudhury,