

Muggers loot Tk 24 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

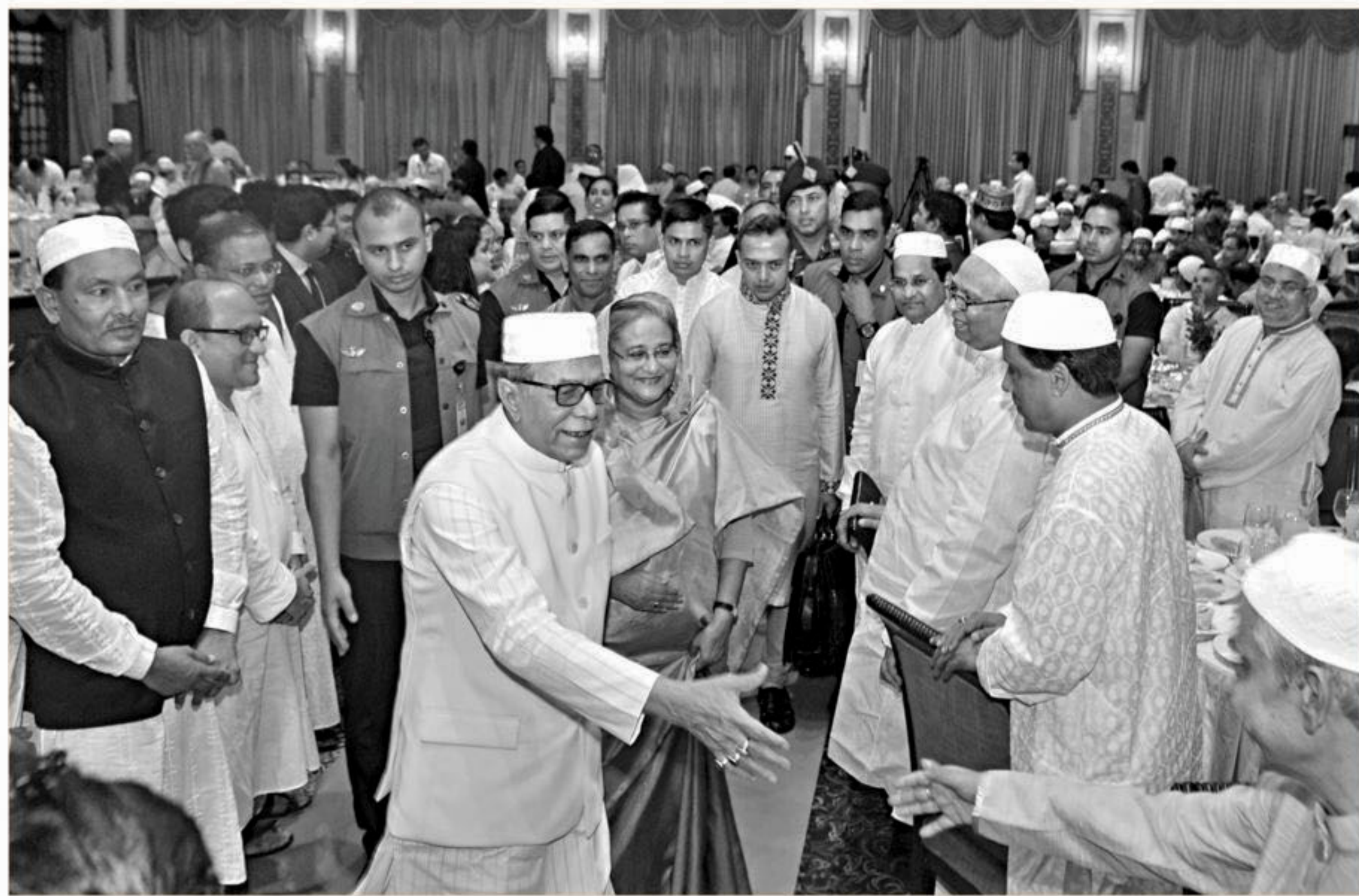
Armed muggers ran away with Tk 24 lakh after shooting a sales representative of bKash, a mobile money transfer provider, in Narayanganj yesterday.

Arif Hossain was returning to his office on a motorbike after collecting the amount from several bKash agents in Siddhirganj when seven muggers intercepted him near Shimrail Bus Stand area.

They snatched the money from him after firing in his right leg and drove away, said Parvez Reza, a witness who is the manager of a bKash agent named Zamal and Company.

Arif was treated at a local hospital. Later the bKash office was shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for better treatment.

Police are investigating the matter, said Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Siddhirganj Police Station.



President Abdul Hamid along with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina exchanges pleasantries with guests during an iftar at the Bangabhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

No decision

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protesting the education ministry's recommendations to hold exams without any interval.

On July 2, the education minister hinted that the authorities were considering a probe committee's suggestion for changing the system of holding public exams over a long period with significant gaps between two exams to check question paper leaks.

The minister formed the committee on April 10 to investigate the leaks of English Second Paper at this year's Higher Secondary Certificate examinations.

The probe body had suggested holding two exams a day or at least one without any interval, Nahid said yesterday.

"But we've not taken any decision about the examination routine," he said, adding that a vested quarter was trying to provoke students to take to the streets by running a smear campaign in this regard.

"Our students are accustomed to sitting for exams in gaps and we will consider this before preparing the routine," Nahid added.

Oil spill takes

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the Bay of Bengal.

Environmental activist Muhammad Idris Ali, also an associate professor of chemistry department of Chittagong College, told The Daily Star that furnace oil contains 30-35 types of organic pollutants which are harmful to the ecosystem and also consumes the oxygen in the water.

The oil spill in the canal has adversely affected the fish-food chain and ecosystem of the canal, causing the fish to float up to the surface, he added.

On Wednesday morning, the engine and six furnace oil-laden tankers of Area Shuttle, an oil-carrier train of Bangladesh Railway's East Zone, derailed when its driver tried to enter Faujdharhat Railway Station ignoring the signal.

Each tank contained around 26,821 litres of oil. Over 53,000 litres of furnace oil was lost in the incident and most of this oil spread to the nearby canal, locally known as Cadet Colleger Chhara.

Ban on marriage

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With the passports, Rohingyas went to different countries, including Saudi Arabia, and committed crimes there tarnishing the image of the country. The government even faced many problems because of them, Abdul Mannan added.

About the government's move, human rights activist and jurist Shahdeen Malik told The Daily Star the right of two adult persons to marry each other is recognised by all international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights.

The prohibition on the marriages between Rohingyas and Bangladeshis is certainly an unconstitutional restriction and discrimination against the right to life, he added.

Repair roads

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yesterday afternoon.

Kafil Uddin Ahmed, general secretary of the Inter-District Bus Owners' Association, said during the meeting they had expressed their fear of more accidents on the battered roads.

The roads in Satkania, Patiya, Hathazari upazila and the stretch between Sitakunda and Mirsarai on Dhaka-Chittagong highway have become risky as numerous potholes have recently appeared.

Vehicles often meet accidents on the appalling roads and break down, he said, adding that it was costing vehicle owners a large amount of money in repairs.

"Apart from the fact that passengers have to sit idle gridlocked for hours, the vehicles consume a lot of fuel too. So these roads need to be repaired immediately," said Kafil.

Modi govt serious about river linking

Rs 100cr allocated in new budget for study on project

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Reflecting India's Hindu nationalist BJP-led government's seriousness to pursue the ambitious river interlinking project, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley yesterday called for a serious effort in this regard and allocated Rs100 crore in his maiden budget to expedite preparations for the Detailed Project Report.

In his budget speech in the Lok Sabha, he noted the interlinking of rivers can pay "rich dividends" and pointed out that rivers form the lifeline for the country as they provide water not only for producing food for the multitudes but also drinking water.

"Unfortunately, the country is not uniformly blessed with perennial rivers. Therefore, an effort to link the rivers can give rich dividends to the country," he said.

"It is time that we make a serious effort to move in this direction. To expedite the preparation for the Detailed Project Report, I propose setting aside a sum of Rs100 crore," he added.

The idea of river interlinking had received an impetus during the previ-

ous NDA regime (1999-2004) as the then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had pushed for the interlinking projects.

The Ministry of Water Resources had formulated a National Perspective Plan for water resources development in 1980, envisaging inter-basin transfer of water from surplus basins to deficit basins. These are areas which comprise two components -- Himalayan Rivers Development Component and Peninsular Rivers Development Component.

The National Water Development Agency has already identified 14 links under the Himalayan Rivers Development Component and 16 links under the Peninsular Rivers Development Component.

Five Peninsular links -- Ken-Betwa, Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal, Damanganga-Pinjal, Par-Tapi-Narmada and Godavari (Polavaram)-Krishna (Vijayawada) -- have been identified as priority links for taking up their detailed project report.

The UPA government had said river interlinking in Himalayan Component was not practical.

Failed company

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highway and started demanding higher payment. Till date, the company has completed less than 50 percent of work that was supposed to be completed by December 2013.

Its delay strategy has now doubled the project cost from Tk 1,655 crore.

But its pitiable performance in the highway project had never been penalised by blacklisting. At times, Communication Minister Obaidul Quader blasted the company for delaying the work, but in general the government is persuading the company to finish the job.

Sinohydro is being backed by Sahco, the family-owned company of former communication minister Syed Abul Hossain, who had given the firm the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway job. Hossain, who lost his job due to the World Bank's allegation of corruption conspiracy in the Padma Bridge tender, is now allegedly exerting his influence to bag the river training job.

On June 30 and July 1, Hyundai and Jan De Nul informed the authorities that Sinohydro was under early temporary suspension of the World Bank and was not eligible to continue with the bidding process.

The two bidders quoted the tender document that states, "A firm or an individual may be declared ineligible to be awarded a Bank-financed contract upon completion of the Bank's sanctions proceedings as per its sanctions procedures, including inter alia: (i) temporary suspension in connection with an ongoing sanction proceedings."

They noted that the temporary suspension process is confidential. "However, this can be verified and validated by the Government of Bangladesh by officially writing to Ms Elizabeth Lin Forder, Secretary to the Sanctions Board of the World Bank...", wrote Hyundai that also gave several other tips to the government to crosscheck its allegation.

River training is the second costly component of the \$3 billion Padma Bridge project. This component deals with stopping river erosion, maintaining navigability and dredging more than 11 km area near Jajira and 3 km area in Maowa.

The contractor will need to use nearly 22 million geo-textile bags and filters, one million tonnes of concrete aggregates, 0.25 million tonnes cement and 0.8 million tonne sand as part of the training works. Besides, this job needs excavators, bulldozers, concrete pumps, dump trucks, mobile and crawler cranes, wheel loaders, etc.

Despite the complexity of the work that demands the right price, not just the lowest one, the government might fall for the lowest offer, the official said.

Liao Libing, deputy representative of Sinohydro in Bangladesh, said his company had no problem with bidding for the river training since it was not blacklisted by the World Bank.

He said Hyundai and Jan De Nul had complained against his company only after knowing that none of them would get the job. "They are desperate to brand us as a blacklisted firm," he told The Daily Star over phone.

Liao refuted the allegation that Sahco, a company owned by former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain, is lobbying for Sinohydro so that it got the river training job. "I don't have any contact with the company," he claimed.

Project Director of Padma Bridge Shafiqul Islam said, "There is an evaluation committee that is looking into everything. Evaluation into the financial offers of the bidders is going on."

Shafiqul, who is also a member of the evaluation committee, said the usual practice was that the evaluation committee would take any complaint into consideration with a view to resolving it.

'Advantage Germany'

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inside half an hour could be crucial, Sabella said.

"Some of our players are sore, beaten, tired -- the results of a war, so to speak," said Sabella.

"We have a final to play, with one day less to prepare and against a team like Germany, but with work, humility and seriousness, we'll do all we can to make it all the way to the top.

Sabella spoke admiringly of German football, saying they often produced players with a "South American touch."

"Germany throughout their entire history have always shown physical might, tactical, mental prowess, and have always had players with a certain South American touch," he said.

"The match is extremely difficult and I repeat the fact they haven't played extra time and we've played two, and played one day after Germany.

"Germany is always a very difficult hurdle to overcome.

"We'll see if it's a minor issue, the fact we played after and the Germany game was decided in the first 45

minutes, so they could ease off in the second half, whereas we had to spend all the effort, and every last drop of sweat to reach the World Cup final."

Argentina goalkeeper Sergio Romero repelled penalties from Ron Vlaar and Wesley Sneijder in the penalty shootout after a cagey stalemate finished 0-0 following extra time at the Corinthians Arena.

Argentina, chasing their third World Cup title, last reached the final in Italy in 1990, when they lost 1-0 to West Germany.

Sabella meanwhile praised defensive midfielder Javier Mascherano, who pulled off a sensational block to deny Arjen Robben.

"Mascherano is a symbol, an emblem. We were able to move onto the semifinals and he took this huge weight of his shoulders," Sabella said.

"He's an outstanding player. Other clubs wanted to take him.

"I don't need to make any other comments. [Pep] Guardiola, [Rafa] Benitez, these coaches wanted to take him with them.

"He's an emblem for the national squad on the field of play and off it."

PM invites Khaleda

FROM PAGE 16
Chairperson and former premier Khaleda Zia.

This Ramadan too neither of them forgot the courtesy to send iftar invitation to each other. But with Hasina having already skipped Khaleda's July 2 iftar, chances are thin to see the two most powerful ladies of the country sit across the table this time as well.

Nevertheless, the PM yesterday invited Khaleda to an Iftar on July 17 at the Gono Bhavan knowing that Khaleda is most likely to skip the programme.

Most political observers see this iftar invitation as a mere social ritual which sees no thaw in relation.

The history of this ritual dates back to 1991 when the then premier Khaleda Zia sent an official invitation to then opposition chief

Hasina. And Hasina immediately reciprocated as she did not want Khaleda to gain a political advantage.

Initially, people were enthusiastic at the prospect of seeing the two leaders sitting together, a rare sight for the nation, on the pretext of iftar. But their hopes evaporated soon.

Interestingly, though the leaders skip each other's invitations, they have attended iftar and few other programmes of Bangladesh Armed Forces. However, Khaleda have been skipping such programmes too since 2010 when she was evicted from her cantonment residence.

The last time the nation saw Hasina and Khaleda sharing pleasantries was during an iftar party in Dhaka Cantonment on September 10, 2009.

OBSTACLES FROM COPS, LOCAL REPS

DCs' complaints not that louder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The annual conference of the deputy commissioners concluded yesterday, where the field administrators intentionally avoided speaking against the police and elected representatives.

Over the past few years, the DCs were vocal against the cops and elected representatives -- MPs and upazila and union parishad chairmen and members.

They complained of facing problems in discharging their duties due to interference of the MPs and other elected representatives. They also complained of not getting cooperation from the police department.

"This does not mean that the problems with the police and the elected representatives are gone. Rather, the gap between the two sides has widened in many cases," said a DC, requesting not to be named.

Without giving any specific reason, a number of DCs said the situation under the new government was completely different.

"Now the deputy commissioners do not feel comfortable taking any stance against them," said another DC, also speaking on condition of anonymity.

For this, the conference ended in a way that suggested there is no conflict between the district administrations, the police and elected representatives, he added.

Briefing reporters after the conference, Cabinet Secretary Mosharruf Hossain Bhuiyan said, "Our impression is that the overall cooperation between different tiers in the districts has increased in recent years. The

conference discussed how to further increase this cooperation and coordination."

He, however, said there would be differences of opinion but there was no conflict. He also claimed that the DCs spoke openly at the conference.

But talking to The Daily Star last night, one DC said many of their demands were not even discussed at this year's conference.

Revival of a controversial provision of the Printing Presses and Publication Act 1973, special police wing under the DCs, empowering them with authority to sack local elected representatives are some of those, he added.

The cabinet secretary said all the proposals could not be executed.

However, demands like expanding jurisdiction of the mobile cops and making the DC post grade-1 are being considered by the government.

Unlike last year, hardly any policy instruction was given to the DCs.

The DCs mainly came up with problem related to development programmes, man power recruitment and other small issues.

Although some DCs said political influence in the local administration was on the rise, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and some other ministers asked the DCs to work remaining above their influence.

The field administrators have put forward 307 recommendations to the Cabinet Division for placing in the sessions in presence of the ministers and secretaries concerned.

Most of those were discussed briefly, and the ministers concerned will decide on them later.

Act now to save rivers

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Political leaders of ruling, opposition and other parties have been grabbing rivers not only in Dhaka but in other districts as well, environmentalists say.

The greens have been demanding that the government show political will to end this situation and save the rivers.

During the last tenure of the Awami League-led government, former water resources minister Ramesh Chandra Sen had told parliament that 98 rivers had died over the years.

A publication of the government mentioned that there were around 400 rivers in the country, which used to be over 700.

Anisul Islam Mahmud yesterday told the DCs that the lessees of land on the river shores fill up the rivers and raise structures, which is one of the main reasons for rivers dying.

The lessees are not allowed to construct any structures on the river, said the minister, asking the DCs to evict all illegal structures that had mushroomed on the banks.

"Cancel the lease contracts if they violate any clause... If you find any political interference while conducting your tasks, immediately inform the ministry about the matter. We will then intervene from Dhaka and deal with it," the ministers said.

The High Court in a verdict in 2009 asked the government to protect all rivers in the country from land grabbers and pollution. The court asked the government to demarcate river banks within a stipulated time, evict all grabbers and stop pollution.

The minister yesterday reminded the deputy commissioners about the

High Court verdict and asked them to abide by it.

With rivers around the capital becoming severely polluted with a dissolved oxygen level of zero, the government is struggling to clean them up even after implementing multiple projects.

"If we do not become conscious now, we will not be able to save other rivers flowing outside Dhaka," he said.

The minister asked the deputy commissioners to watch out for corruption in the work of the Water Development Board.

A DC who was present at the conference said the government had actually decided to have zero tolerance against river grabbers and polluters around two weeks ago.

"All the deputy commissioners of all districts with major rivers were asked to attend a meeting at the Prime Minister's Office two weeks ago. We were asked to do it in that meeting too," the DC said, not wanting to be named.

Another DC said several districts with rivers flowing through them had asked for dredging as the rivers were losing navigability.

Over the years, the total length of river routes has shrunk to around 3,000 kilometres. It used to be 24,000 kilometres four decades ago.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan was at the conference. He told the DCs that the government had already bought some dredgers and was set to buy some more. All rivers would be dredged eventually if the DCs asked for it.

He asked the DCs not to allow any launch or other water vessels take in passengers beyond their capacity during the Eid holidays.

Unemployment

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to observe the World Population Day today with the theme "Invest in youth for a good future for all."

"Bangladesh enjoys a very youthful population," said Argentina Matavel Piccin, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative in Bangladesh.

"If equipped with the knowledge, skills and opportunities to take informed actions at the individual, household, community and national levels, the young people of today could spearhead unprecedented, inclusive and sustainable development," she added.

According to the World Population Prospects, 2012 Revision by the UN Population Division, the youth population of Bangladesh [the then East Pakistan] was 24.8 percent in 1970, 28.4 percent in 1990 and it would be 28.7 percent in 2015.

However, the proportion of youths will go down to 18.1 percent in 2055, according to the UNFPA's prediction.

According to the 2011 census of population and housing, 32 percent of youths in the potential labour force are

either unemployed or underemployed.

Of all groups in the labour force, youths aged 15-19 years have the highest rate of unemployment, more than four times the rate of unemployed people aged 35 and over, as per the census. While Bangladesh's total unemployment rate is 4.53 percent, youth unemployment rate for males is 6.8 percent and the female 8.5 percent.

Rushidan Islam Rahman, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said mostly school dropouts remained unemployed.

"Various types of skilled training can be useful to utilise these young people who have dropped out of school and are not employed.

"This can be done through investment in public-private partnership programmes and in collaboration with prospective employers, who will generate demand," she said, adding that investment in skills training can be made targeting young people who aspire to get jobs overseas.