

## US moves

FROM PAGE 16

lawmakers during a late-Thursday caucus meeting to vote for the bill because they would lose much of their leverage on future spending bills, lawmakers at the meeting said.

Democratic Rep John Larson of Connecticut said the lobbying from the President had helped move things along with the caucus.

"Obviously, I think the President also getting on the phone -- some working the respective caucuses -- was influential," he told CNN.

But many progressives were outraged at the bill's passage and suggested it would undermine Democrats' effectiveness down the line.

"What I see is our Democratic Party -- in a weakened position and trying to protect our constituents and the people. And at the same time having to make some terrible choices," said California Rep Maxine Waters, a key Democratic opponent of the bill, after the vote.

She said the vote was an example of "the old politics of fixing things around the edges so that you can feel better, rather than putting up a strong fight" and standing against Republican attempts to insert unpalatable policies into bills, which she suggested is more likely next year when Republicans take full control of Congress.

Other Democrats, however, saw the bill's passage as a triumph of cooperation between the two parties, and a signal that they can move past the gridlock and dysfunction that's plagued Washington for years.

"It's an economic message of, we can get something done. We're not going to always be dysfunctional, and I think that's a welcome message for voters," said Rep Gerry Connolly, a Virginia Democrat. "They want to see that. And we don't lose a thing."

The vote capped a day of drama in the House. The chamber recessed for nearly seven hours as leaders scrambled to find votes to move the bill across the finish line. The chaos was fitting for a Congress that has already gone through one government shutdown and has been generally characterised by turmoil and inertia.

## A torchbearer

FROM PAGE 1

smile on his face, teach them Bangla, English and mathematics.

They are students at different local schools. Coming of poor families, many of them tend to drop out even before finishing their primary education while some fail in exams as they cannot afford private tuition. In addition to providing free tuition, Uttam buys them pens and writing pads when necessary. At times, he even pays their exam fees so that their dream of receiving the minimum education will not shatter midway.

However, it all started when Uttam felt the need for reviving the dying Rakhaine language. He brought some books on Rakhaine language from Myanmar and started his mission with only 15 Rakhaine children.

"When I saw that Rakhaine children can only speak their mother tongue but do not know how to read or write it, I decided on taking up this mission," said Uttam.

"Later on I noticed that poor children of other communities cannot afford education, leave alone private tuition. So they fail in exams and at one stage many of them drop out from schools and engage in earning activities like fishing, pulling rickshaws and vans etc."

"I took such children from poor families to my temple and started teaching them free of charge," he said.

At present, there are 47 children being tutored at the Buddhist temple which is about 5 kilometres north-east from Kuakata zero point. Of them, 15 belong to the Buddhist (Rakhaine) community, 5 to the Hindu and the rest to the Muslim community.

Uttam teaches them six days a week in two shifts: from 7:00 am to 8:00 am and 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm. His students range from pre-primary kids to those reading in class nine and ten.

But carrying on such an altruistic mission comes with some expense. So Uttam set up the Loka Sukha Buddha Bihar Poor Student Development Foundation. As the large statue of Buddha attracts a lot of tourists to the more than 100-year-old temple, he requests them to donate to the foundation. This is how he meets the expense for the hapless children's education.

Uttam, however, is not content with what he calls "the meagre foundation fund". He believes some substantial donation from the government or any non-government organisation will go a long way to take this mission forward.

"Their education is often hampered due to the religious rituals that I have to perform every day. If I had a separate place, I would be able to take more students," he said. "Some of them come all the way on foot from far-off places. With a little donation from some charity, it'd be possible to buy a few rickshaws to spare them those tiring walks."



Children collect furnace oil spilt from a drowned tanker in the river Shela and transport it to sell to a Padma Oil Company agent. Top right, banner of a centre to buy oil collected by locals. The photos were taken yesterday.



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH/PINAKI ROY

## Experts against chemical use

FROM PAGE 1

Glycol Ether.

"We have environmental clearance for using this chemical," he told The Daily Star on the deck of Kandari-10, claiming to have used it earlier after an oil container sank in the Karnaphuli last year.

In the morning, a team of experts and high officials visited the ship to enquire about the chemical.

One of the experts, Prof Dilip Dutta of Khulna University environmental science, told this correspondent that it would be better if the disaster could be managed without spraying the chemical.

His view was echoed at the joint meeting participated by Buet experts and top officials from the ministries of environment and forest and shipping.

"We sought technical datasheet of the chemical from the Mongla port authorities," said a participant of the meeting.

"On Thursday night, they sent us some information on the chemical. Yesterday, they sent us another set of information discarding Thursday's data," the official added.

"So we got confused. We need to examine further."

Also yesterday, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan told the BBC Bangla that a London-based team offered its assistance for the clean-up.

Without going into details, the minister said the team will arrive in the capital by tomorrow and sit with the government officials.

The ministry of environment and

forest, meanwhile, decided to examine the water of the Shela collecting samples from 15 points every day.

The slick started on Tuesday morning, after Southern Star-7, carrying 3.58 lakh litres of furnace oil and eight crew members sank near Mongla around 5:00am. It went down after being hit by a cargo vessel from behind. Seven crews managed to swim ashore.

Four compartments out of six were damaged in the accident, said officials after the salvage of the tanker.

After the spill, only 400 litres of furnace oil was left in the two compartments that survived the accident, said Giasuddin, manager of Harun & Co told The Daily Star yesterday.

Replying to a query, Giasuddin said

they had the all the necessary documents, which have been handed over to the government inquiry committee.

After the accident, a few thousand people, mostly fishermen, living along the Pashur and Shela have become worried about their living.

"My livelihood is at stake as I cannot go fishing. So I am collecting furnace oil to sell it to the Padma Oil Company," said Md Mostakim, a fisherman from Jaymunigol yesterday, showing a dead crab which apparently died due to the reaction of the oil spillage.

The authorities earlier had asked locals to collect the furnace oil and sell it to the Padma Oil Company agents. People have been advised to use fishing nets, sponges or any other manual means to collect the oil.

## BIWTA to revive original route

FROM PAGE 1

about operating commercial vessels inside the Sundarbans since the beginning.

However, following the accident, the authorities have banned all vessels on the Shela river until further notice.

"Hopefully, the dredging work of the Mongla-Ghasiakhali channel will be finished in the next four to five months," Shamsuddoha Khandakar, chairman of the BIWTA, told The Daily

Star yesterday.

However, officials from the departments of forest and environment expressed doubt about the dredging being done in four to five months. They, seeking anonymity, claimed that the BIWTA had only managed to do 18 percent of the job since June this year.

The BIWTA chairman said there was a budget of Tk 200 crore for dredging and removal of 100 lakh tonnes of silt.

On June 2, dredging of the channel began and work on about five to six kilometres out of the total 31km was done, the chairman said.

A Chinese company was given the job of removing 32 lakh cubic metres of silt from the channel at a cost of Tk 88 crore, he said.

The BIWTA has also given permission to the Raampal power plant to collect soil from the channel. The plant would dredge and collect soil itself, the

chairman added.

The Mongla-Ghasiakhali channel is vital for Bangladesh and India as ships to and from Kolkata use the route. In 2013-14 financial year, over 1.11 crore tonnes of goods were carried on this route.

Since, the government has stopped operation of commercial vessels through the Shela, commercial vessels would now operate on the Pashur river, which is a 70-80km detour.

## Oil spill takes toll on baby crocodiles

FROM PAGE 1

couldn't change the water of the reservoirs in the last four days due to the oil slick in the river. Oil spread in the river after a tanker carrying 3.58 lakh litres of furnace oil had sunk in the Shela River on Tuesday. The oil has spread to around 34,000 hectares in three days.

Abdur Rab, forest ranger at the wildlife reproduction centre, yesterday said: "We changed the water of the reservoirs on Tuesday afternoon when

tidal water reached the Pashur. There might have been some oil in the water."

Usually, the water of the reservoirs is changed every day. But it has been stopped since Tuesday due to the oil spill in the river.

"The crocodile babies are eliminating their wastes in the reservoirs. If we can't change the water for a longer period, we will have to move the animals to somewhere else," added Rab.

Md Amir Hossain Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of the Sundarbans (east), said there are 255 saltwater crocodiles in 18 reservoirs of the country's only crocodile reproduction centre. They are aged between four and six months.

The Karamjal Wildlife Reproduction Centre was set up in 2002 on eight acres of land at a cost of Tk 32 lakh. The facility was developed under the Sundarbans Biodiversity

Conservation project.

The dolphin sanctuary lies in the rivers Shela and Pashur, covering an area stretching 31 sq-km along the Sundarbans. But no dolphins were seen jumping in the water on Wednesday and Thursday, said forest ranger Abdur Rab.

Wildlife experts have expressed grave concern over the fate of the rare Irrawaddy dolphins due to the impact of the pollution from the oil spill.

## Protect mangroves to cut disaster risks

FROM PAGE 16

being lost, the experts said.

As mangroves are cleared at a rate three to five times faster than other forests, according to UNEP estimates, those losses are particularly felt in developing countries where most mangroves are located, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Senegal, West Bengal, Vietnam and Sumatra.

A joint report by UNEP and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), launched in Lima, estimates the economic cost of the destruction of carbon-rich mangroves worldwide at \$42 billion annually.

Tim Christophersen, a forest and climate change expert with UNEP, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that protecting and

conserving mangroves is crucial for the climate resilience of the world's coastlines as they face threats such as rising sea level, increasingly frequent and powerful storms and saltwater intrusion into drinking water.

The UNEP report argues that while policymakers and financial markets are beginning to take action, more needs to be done to hammer out methodologies for carbon accounting for mangroves and other coastal wetland ecosystems.

That would help conserve mangroves and increase their profile in the UN-led REDD+ program and within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the report said.

"The management of coastal wetlands is replete with numerous benefits including fisheries produc-

tion and shoreline protection which promote adaptation in coastal communities," said Stephen Crook, climate change director at the California-based environmental science and planning firm ESA, and a lead author of the IPCC's 2013 wetlands supplement.

UNEP's Christophersen shared success stories of coastal wetlands carbon projects launched in India's West Bengal state, as well as in Kenya, Senegal and Indonesia's Sumatra island.

For instance, a Gazi Bay community-led carbon finance project in Kenya, which has helped conserve, manage and restore 117 hectares of mangroves by late 2014, has been able to certify it is sequestering 3,000 tonnes of carbon and sold carbon credits based on that.

The funds have then been allocated to community protects and additional mangrove activities overseen by the village leaders themselves, Christophersen said.

"One of the many successes of the project is a significant cut in illegal harvesting of mangroves," he said. The project also has included planting of fast-growing forest species on nearby land to serve as alternate wood sources, and has ensured that communities have ownership of the mangroves, he said.

Crook said that such community-based mangroves protection initiatives could be replicated in countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, and scaled up to help reduce the impacts of tropical cyclones, typhoons and sea level rise.

## Bus helpers

FROM PAGE 1

conductor over the fare which turned into a scuffle. Then, he talked to someone over the phone and asked someone to come to Shapla Chattar area," said Kamal Hossain, who was on the bus.

"Sensing there could be problems ahead, the bus driver deviated from the route at Ittefaq intersection and went on a side road which led to Dainik Bangla intersection. As soon as the bus reached near Jiban Bima Bhaban, Akbar asked to be dropped off there."

"The driver slowed the bus a little bit. The conductor and the helper of the bus then pushed him out when he was trying to get off. Losing balance, he fell on the road and was run over," Kamal said.

Akbar was declared dead at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The incident happened around 8:30am when Akbar was going to work from his home at Konapara in Jatrabari.

The driver of the Jatrabari-Gabtolli bus then got all the passengers off nearby and drove off.

Witness Kamal then contacted police about the matter.

At the hospital, Akbar's wife Lutfunnesa Lata could not believe what had happened. She just kept crying at the morgue.

The couple had gone out of their home together around 7:00am. He for work and she for a morning walk.

Their only son 12-year-old Mehedi Hasan was speechless.

Lata later filed a murder case with Motijheel Police Station.

Police could not catch the bus, the driver, conductor or the helper, said Sub-Inspector Amanullah of Motijheel Police Station.

"We received the registration number of the bus from witnesses. We are investigating," he said.

Mohammad Alauddin, a driver and co-worker of Akbar, told The Daily Star that he and Akbar were supposed to go to Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the afternoon to pick up an official of the company they work for.

Alauddin had called Akbar at 8:03am when Akbar told him that he was on a busto Motijheel.

**RECKLESS BUS KILLS**

**SCHOOL BOY**

A fourteen-year-old boy died after being hit by a speedy bus in the capital's Jatrabari area yesterday.

The deceased is Akbar Hossain, a class six student of Blue Bird High School at Jatrabari.

Akbar was heading home on a bicycle along the Dhaka-Chittagong highway around 3:30pm when a bus of Ovilash Transport hit him from behind, leaving him critically injured, said Abani Sanker Kar, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

## Three guards

FROM PAGE 16

Meanwhile, the investigation team, formed by the railway West Zone after the accident, yesterday visited the spot in Panchbibi upazila and some of the injured at Joypurhat Modern Hospital.

During the spot visit, the six-member team, led by Shah Alam Talukder, railway's area operating manager in Parbatipur, talked to the witnesses to the crash.

The team will submit its report to the high officials of Bangladesh Railway in three days, Shah Alam added.

Meanwhile, Khorshed Alam, additional deputy commissioner (general) of Joypurhat, head of another probe body formed by the Joypurhat DC office, told reporters that they had already started their investigation.

The accident happened around 5:00pm on Thursday when the oil carrying train was hit by its separated wagons, which got delinked from the rear of the train near Shimultoli, from behind.

On impact, the people, who were sitting on couplers of the 12-wagon train from Khulna bound for Parbatipur, fell down. A coupler keeps two train carriages together.

The accident left five people killed and 20 others hurt.

The injured are undergoing treatment at Joypurhat Modern Hospital and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogra.

## SC questions HC bail order

FROM PAGE 1

discretion. This being the position of law settled by this Division, the High Court Division cannot exercise its discretion whimsically at its sweet will," said an Appellate Division bench in its full order released on December 4.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the order.

In the order, the apex court said, "The High Court Division exercised its discretionary power without assigning any reason whatsoever. It [HC] simply said that it found prima-facie case in favour of the accused-respondent [Jasmine]. This is not a legal ground for exercising the power."

"We have given a cursory glance to the application for pre-arrest bail. The grounds are also not relevant for the purpose of exercising discretion in the

case. More so, the case having been filed by the Durnity Daman Commission [Anti-Corruption Commission] in exercise of its power under Act of 2004, the Durnity Daman Commission is a necessary part but the accused-respondent has not made it a party."

"Considering the above, we find that the High Court Division has not properly exercised its discretion in granting the accused-respondent an anticipatory bail," the Appellate Division said.

An HC bench on January 19 this year granted anticipatory bail for a month to Jasmine Islam, chairman of controversial Hall Mark Group, in the case filed by the ACC on December 12 last year with Ramna Police Station for not submitting her wealth statement.

But a five-member bench of the

Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain, scrapped the HC order on February 10, following an appeal by the commission.

Four other judges of the bench are Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah, Justice Hasan Foez Siddique and Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik.

Earlier in February this year, the Appellate Division had expressed disappointment at the same HC bench for "failure to follow its guidelines" in granting anticipatory bail to BNP leader Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain in a money laundering case.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that Jasmine was not on bail or in jail in connection with the corruption case following the SC order.

Jasmine is now a fugitive in the eye of law, since she did not surrender to the lower court after the SC cancelled the HC order that granted anticipatory bail to her, he said, adding that the ACC and law enforcers can now arrest her in connection with this case.

Hall-Mark is one of the six companies which have taken Tk 3,547 crore in loan from the state-run Sonali Bank's Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch in connivance with its officials, using forged documents.

Previously a little known group, Hall-Mark alone has taken around Tk 2,600 crore, says a Bangladesh Bank investigation report.

On November 13 last year, the ACC served a notice on Jasmine, asking her to submit her wealth statement within seven working days. Instead of submit-

ting the statement, she sought three months' time from the commission on November 24.

Before that, a Dhaka court in August granted bail to Jasmine in 11 loan scam cases after she had pledged to pay Tk 100 crore every month to return the Tk 2,600 crore her company owed to the Sonali Bank.

On January 27 this year, the HC upheld her bail in these cases but declared illegal the condition on which the Dhaka court had ordered the bail.

The ACC filed the 11 cases against 27 top officials of the Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark on October 4, 2012 on charge of their involvement in the biggest financial scam in the country.

Tanvir Mahmud, managing director of the group and the suspected mastermind, is now behind bars.