

TEESTA EROSION

Part of dam caves in 10 months after repair

150 families fear losing homes

S DILIP ROY

Some 150 families are in fear of losing their homesteads in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila as part of a flood protection dam across the Teesta collapsed.

Residents of Khuniagachh village said the dam was repaired by the Water Development Board (WDB) only 10 months ago.

If the repair had been done properly, part of the dam would not have caved in so soon, they said.

Aslam Mia, a local resident, said the WDB readied 5,000 sand-filled geo-bags for the dam last year. However, it dumped only 4,000 in a hurry. The remaining 1,000 geo-bags are now lying on an island.

A 40-metre stretch of the 300-metre dam has collapsed, locals said.

Another villager Nizam Uddin said they were worried as their homesteads could be devoured by the Teesta any time due to erosion.

Villagers are trying to save the dam from further damages by dumping sandbags themselves, he added.

Kamruzzaman Sujan, chairman of Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazila Parishad, said he inspected the dam with the executive engineer of WDB.

He said the dam would be repaired before any flood hit the region.

Mizanur Rahman, executive engineer of Lalmonirhat WDB, said a letter was sent to the higher authorities seeking fund for repair after an inspection of the damaged dam.

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TRADER'S MURDER IN JASHORE
No arrests yet

Police say victim's family has not filed any case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

No one was arrested over the killing of a timber trader in Jashore's Abhaynagar till yesterday evening.

Unidentified criminals shot Rakibul Islam, 35, dead on Thursday night.

"As no case has been filed yet, no arrest has been made," said Milon Kumar Mandol, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Abhaynagar Police Station.

Police said Rakibul, a resident of MA College Para in Khulna's Fultola upazila, was accused in five cases lodged with Fultola and Abhaynagar police stations.

Locals said he was the sports affairs secretary of Fultola Bazar Banik Kalyan Samity.

Ilias Talukder, OC of Fultola Police Station, said Rakibul along with his wife on a motorbike was going to his father-in-law's house in Abhaynagar on Thursday night.

When they reached near Duttagati Primary School area around 8:00pm, two youths intercepted Rakibul and opened fire on him, he added.

Locals rushed him to Fultola Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead, said the OC.



Traders have set up temporary shops occupying part of the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Siddhirganj's Shimrail area. Such occupation of roads adds to traffic woes of commuters. The photo was taken on Thursday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

G7 allies vow to support Ukraine ‘until victory’

EU pledges extra 500m euros in military aid for Kyiv; Swedish security review paves way for Nato bid

AGENCIES

Leading democracies yesterday pledged unwavering support for Ukraine in its war with Russia while the European Union promised to hike military support for Kyiv by more than half a billion dollars.

Foreign ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) met on the second day of a three-day meeting in the Germany resort of Wangels, joined by their counterparts from Ukraine and Moldova.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the G7 were "very strongly united" in their will to "continue in the long term to support Ukraine's fight for its sovereignty until Ukraine's victory."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc was pledging an extra 500 million euros (\$520 million) in military aid.

The cash will raise the EU's total military aid for Ukraine to two billion euros, he said.

"The recipe is clear — more of the same," Borrell said.

"More pressure on Russia, with economic sanctions. Continue working on international

isolation of Russia. Countering the disinformation about the consequences of the war... And presenting a united front to continue supporting Ukraine."

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss also called for further support for Ukraine.

"It is very important at this time that we keep up the pressure on Vladimir Putin by supplying more weapons to Ukraine, by increasing the sanctions."

"It is very important at this time that we keep up the pressure on Vladimir Putin by supplying more weapons to Ukraine, by increasing the sanctions," she said.

They were joined by their Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba, who praised their resolve to help Kyiv but also urged them to go further, reports AFP.

"Today I asked G7 countries to adopt legislation and put in place all necessary procedures needed to seize

Russian sovereign assets and give them to Ukraine to use this money to rebuild our country," he said.

Kuleba also urged the EU to ensure that an embargo is placed on Russian oil, warning that an omission of the ban on the bloc's next package would mean its unity was "broken".

Britain yesterday sanctioned 12 members of Putin's "inner circle" accused of hiding corrupt riches in return for influential state positions.

They included his ex-wife Lyudmila Ocheretnaya and Alina Kabaeva, a former Olympic gymnast who the UK government said was "alleged to have a close personal relationship with Putin".

Meanwhile, Sweden yesterday inched closer to a reversal of its decades-long policy of military non-alignment, as a security policy review concluded that joining Nato would reduce the risk of conflict in northern Europe.

The report, compiled by the parties in parliament, paves the way for Sweden to announce a bid for Nato membership together with neighbouring Finland in the coming days.

Fire guts electronic items at Chattogram port

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A container loaded with imported electronic goods was gutted when a fire broke out inside a yard of Chattogram port yesterday morning.

Chattogram Port Authority Secretary Md Omar Faruk said the fire broke out suddenly in a container stored at the yard around 6:30am. Firefighters from Bandar Fire Station rushed to the spot, he said.

"The container was immediately shifted elsewhere so that the fire could not spread to other containers and we managed to extinguish the fire by 8:30am."

Electronic items, including mobile phone batteries, were inside the container, he said, adding that the fire might have originated from the batteries.

A port authority official said losses from the fire could amount to Tk 40 lakh.

A three-member committee has been formed to investigate the incident.

Three members of doping gang held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Rab arrested three members of a doping gang from Tangail bus terminal yesterday morning.

The arrestees are Sanwar Hossain, 53, of Bagtipara of Natore, Abdur Razzak, 50, of Madhupur in Tangail, and Mohammad Apel, 45, of Dewanganj in Jamalpur.

Mohammad Anisuzzaman, commander of Crime Prevention Company-3 of Rab-12, said acting on a tip-off, a Rab team held the three in front of Nirala bus counter.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that they used to get on buses and become close with the targeted passengers through friendly conversations, he said.

They then fed the passengers food laced with sedatives and after the targets lost consciousness, the gang stole their valuables, the Rab official added.

A case was filed against the trio with Tangail Sadar Police Station.

Road crash claims life of pickup driver

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A pickup driver was killed and another staffer injured as the vehicle collided head-on with a bus in Joypurhat's Panchbibhi upazila yesterday.

The deceased was Sharif Rahman Sagar, 35, of Nilphamari's Saidpur upazila.

Palash Chandra Deb, officer-in-charge of Panchbibhi Police Station, said the accident took place when the mango-loaded pickup collided with the bus in Bagzana area around 9:30am.

The pickup driver died on the spot while the injured was hospitalised, he said.

Police seized the bus, the OC added.

UAE President

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"The Ministry of Presidential Affairs has mourned to the UAE people, Arab and Islamic nations and the world the death of President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan," the official WAM news agency tweeted.

The ministry announced 40 days of mourning, with flags at half-mast from Friday and work suspended in the public and private sector for the first three days.

In a notification issued last night, Bangladesh said it would observe one-day state mourning today at the death of Sheikh Khalifa.

The national flag will be kept at half-mast at all government, semi-government, autonomous, educational institutions as well as public and private buildings.

Sheikh Khalifa took over as the UAE's second president in November 2004, succeeding his father as the 16th ruler of Abu Dhabi, the richest of the federation's seven emirates.

He has rarely been seen in public since 2014, when he had surgery following a stroke, although he has continued to issue rulings. The cause of death was not immediately released.

The UAE, a former British protectorate that was founded in 1971, has gone from desert outpost to booming state in its short history, fuelled by its oil wealth and Dubai's rise as a trading and financial centre.

The Arab world's second-biggest economy behind Saudi Arabia

has also begun to wield growing political influence, filling a space ceded by traditional powers such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria.

The country of 10 million also joined military campaigns in Libya and Yemen and broke ranks with much of the Arab world to establish ties with Israel in 2020.

The bearded Sheikh Khalifa had cut a frail figure on his occasional public appearances, while his brother Mohammed bin Zayed hosted world leaders and led diplomatic forays abroad.

"The Emirates has lost its virtuous son and leader of the 'stage of empowerment' and the trustee of its blessed journey," Mohammed bin Zayed tweeted yesterday.

"His stances, achievements, wisdom, generosity and initiatives are in every corner of the nation... Khalifa bin Zayed, my brother... may God have mercy on you and grant you access to paradise."

Record subsidy, but will it be enough?

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amount is a 57.9 percent increase from fiscal 2021-22's original budget and 25 percent from the revised budget.

Subsidies for liquefied natural gas and oil imports as well as for the government's interest obligations and payroll fall under the miscellaneous overhead, whose share will increase about 68 percent from this year's original budget to Tk 17,300 crore.

And yet, it might not be sufficient to rein in inflation and lessen the sufferings of the common people.

Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, deems the subsidy allocation to not be enough to fully absorb the higher prices of oil, fertiliser, gas and electricity and the impact of inflation.

"This means there will be some adjustments in the electricity and gas tariffs. And both the

BPDB (Bangladesh Power Development Board) and BERC (Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission) have been soliciting for a hike."

The prices of oil, gas and fertilisers will not come down easily but the chances of those going up further are not much.

"If the existing uncertainty continues, the government cannot continue to absorb the prices. There has to be price adjustment and there will be inflationary pressure."

The government could have avoided the scenario had it retracted the export subsidy and 2.5 percent cash incentive for remittance and redirected those to taming inflationary pressure, Hussain said, while calling for a restructuring of subsidy components.

Some Tk 14,500 crore has been assigned for the two ends, up 33.9 percent from this year's original budget.

"Cash subsidy for

remittance is not necessary at all."

The reason being the dollar's official exchange rate and the kerb market rate has diverged by as much as Tk 5, which is more than the amount of the cash incentive being offered for sending money in through the official channel.

"Taka has depreciated much — let your exchange rate become flexible."

In that way, remittance through the official channel will soar and imports can be reined in. Exporters will be benefited too as they would get a higher amount in taka against their dollar invoices.

"Export subsidy is not necessary too. The whole point of the export subsidy was to encourage product and country diversification. But that has not happened at all. This shows the subsidy policy has not been effective. Why are we not getting to the root of the problem?"

The amount could have

been re-routed as cash transfer to the neediest members of the society to help them manage the impacts of inflation.

"Everyone benefits from subsidy but a price hike does not affect everyone equally. The rich can take the hit but the poor cannot."

Instead of giving subsidies to artificially keep the prices down, Hussain recommended the government spend the amount on income support for the poor and the vulnerable.

"That must be done through MFS transfer as that has proven to be the most effective channel yet in taking the government's aid to the true beneficiaries. There are too many irregularities in food transfers and open market sales. Those who need it do not always get it," he added.

Some Tk 6,745 crore has been allocated for food transfer, up 22.6 percent from this year.

AL picks Arfanul

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AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif confirmed this to The Daily Star.

Arfanul, a businessman by profession, is known as a follower of Cumilla-6 lawmaker AKM Bahauddin, also the president of Cumilla city AL. Yesterday, he was picked as the ruling party nominee from a list of 14 mayor hopefuls.

Meanwhile, supporters of Arfanul brought out a procession in Cumilla city after the news of his

candidacy broke.

On April 13, Cumilla city AL during an extended meeting selected Arfanul as the party's lone mayoral candidate and proposed his name to the AL central committee, said party sources.

The Cumilla City Corporation was established on July 10, 2011. The two previous polls to the city corporation were held on January 5, 2012, and March 30, 2017. The AL's mayoral nominees lost both the elections.

New PM

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De Silva is a member of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), the largest single opposition grouping in parliament, which had appeared ready to split over the question of whether to support Wickremesinghe.

But the head of the possible splinter faction, Harin Fernando, said yesterday he had returned to the fold. "I will not support Wickremesinghe's government," Fernando told AFP.

Three smaller parties have also signalled they will not join any unity government, with the leftist People's Liberation Front (JVP) demanding fresh elections.

However, the cash-strapped government is unlikely to be able to afford polls, or even print ballots, at a time when a national paper shortage forced schools to postpone exams.

Parliamentary elections are not due until August 2025.

P a i k i a s o t h y

Saravanamuttu of the Colombo-based Centre for Policy Alternatives think tank said Wickremesinghe would still likely be able to govern with the support of Rajapaksa-allied lawmakers.

"He'll appoint a cabinet and get on with the job," Saravanamuttu told AFP.

A Sri Lankan lawmaker who shot dead an anti-government protester this week was later lynched by a mob, a forensic report showed yesterday, contradicting a police report that he died by suicide.

The MP's death was due to multiple injuries, fractures and internal bleeding, but he had no gunshot wounds," the Lankadeepa newspaper said, quoting the autopsy report.

Troops have largely restored order and a nationwide curfew has been in effect for most of the week.

Fresh hike adds to plight of low-income people

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yesterday, said, "We thought price of essentials would go down after the Eid. Now traders are saying it will continue to rise.

"If everything becomes costlier, what will we eat?"

"Only God knows what awaits people like us. We don't see any respite," he said out of frustration.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the overall food inflation rate rose to 6.34

percent in March from 5.60 percent in January.

The food inflation rate in rural areas was 6.71 percent and 5.49 percent in urban areas in March.

Humayun Ahmed, who works at a private firm in the capital, buys commodities every month from the same shop in Jatrabari.

"My monthly budget was Tk 1,500. With that I could buy oil, flour, spices, tissues, noodles, tea leaves,

sugar and powdered milk. Now, most of the money is spent on oil and milk.

"I've curtailed consumption, yet I have to spend Tk 200 extra," he said.

CNG auto-rickshaw driver Ahmed Ali, who took a loan to maintain his family's expenditure during the Covid period, is now struggling to pay off the debt and make ends meet.

"I used to be able have breakfast for Tk 25, which

has now almost doubled," he said, adding that the cost of meals at the mess he lives in has also gone up considerably.

The price of flour also shot up to Tk 48 per kg from Tk 40 in January this year. The increase in price of eggs, flour and edible oil has had an impact on the price of baked items in restaurants.

Sheikh Wazed Ali, owner of Lakkhya Flour Mill, said Ukraine and Russia are

the biggest exporters of wheat in the world. Now, businessmen have to import wheat from other countries at higher costs.

"Import cost of per maund [37kg approximately] wheat from Canada has shot up to Tk 2,000 from Tk 950. On the other hand, the price of Indian wheat is Tk 1,450 per maund. It was Tk 800 earlier. As a result, the price of flour has shot up," he said.