

Rabab Fatima new UN under-secretary general

UNB, Dhaka

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Thursday appointed Bangladesh's Rabab Fatima as high representative for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (UNOHRLS).

Through the appointment of Ambassador Fatima, a female diplomat from the Bangladesh Foreign Service, for the first time, has been appointed as UN under-secretary general.

She will be the highest ranking person in the UN system as a Bangladeshi citizen.

Ambassador Fatima replaces Courtenay Rattray of Jamaica, who was appointed as chief de

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Within just two years of an expensive re-excavation, Bhadra finds itself filled with silt once again. Before excavation, the river was recovered from encroachers, but it is gradually being grabbed just like before. Once a wide river, Bhadra now has only a thin stream left.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



REMARKS ON PROPHET

Nationwide protest against suspended BJP leader

STAR REPORT

Thousands of protesters brought out several processions yesterday in Dhaka and other parts of the country, condemning suspended Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Nupur Sharma's remarks on the prophet of Islam.

Multiple processions were brought out after Jumma prayers from Dhaka's Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, in presence of an additional police force.

The protesters demanded maximum punishment for the suspended BJP leader and called for a boycott of Indian goods.

Leaders of Islami Andolon Bangladesh, which led the protest in front of Baitul Mukarram, called for a parliament motion condemning the controversial remarks.

After the rally, Islami Andolon announced

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Money spent on dredging gone to waste

Bhadra river silts up within 2 years of re-excavation

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

Only two years after the Tk 46.25 crore re-excavation project was taken for Bhadra river in Khulna's Dumuria upazila, it has once again been filled with silt. According to Water Development Board (WDB) officials, the amount of silt deposited on the riverbed is higher in the southwestern region, Dumuria being one.

The project was supposed to have two sluice gates on both sides of the river. However, the plan was scrapped following instructions from Prime Minister's Office, said Ashraf Islam, executive engineer of BWDB.

"The project was supposed to build two sluice gates at Dighalia and Teligati at a cost of Tk 30 crore, but they were not constructed," he said. During excavation, Teligati and Tiabunia embankments in Kharnia were cut off, while silt came through the two points to Bhadra and Saltha rivers.

According to WDB sources, a project worth Tk 76.25 crore was approved at an Ecnc meeting in September 2016 to dredge 30 kilometres of Saltha and Bhadra. Later, other expenses were cut, and the cost was Tk 46.25 crore.

The 2018-2019 fiscal was set as the implementation period.

Twenty-one kilometres of Bhadra were excavated, which was completed in June

2019. The project also included connecting the rivers to different areas.

Around 563 small and large installations on Bhadra, including three brick fields, were demolished before the excavation.

"Bhadra used to be over 500 feet wide, but encroachers began to fill it up in the 80s. Within a few years, the water stopped



Bhadra used to be over 500 feet wide, but encroachers began to fill it up in the 80s. The place was cleared during excavation. But within a year the river began to fill up.

INTAZ SHEIKH
Resident of Shobhana village

flowing," said Intaz Sheikh (72), a resident of Shobhana village.

"However, the place was cleared during excavation. But within a year the river began to fill up."

Robiul Islam, a resident of Bamundia village, said after excavation, the soil removed from the river was kept on the banks, which later got washed away in the rain and found its way back into the river.

"This whole issue has led to the permanent closure of the area's drainage system. Now, even a drizzle triggers waterlogging. We also find ourselves faced with a lack of water for irrigation," said Sayed Ahmed of Gonal village.

"The river was vibrant even 20 years ago. Many people depended on the river for their livelihoods. It played an important role in the economic development process, contributing to transportation of goods and fishing," he said.

Visiting the area on Saturday, this correspondent saw a long field in the area where the river ran, with cattle grazing.

At present, the canals in the area measure only 10-15 feet wide. The tide does not facilitate the flow of water like it used to. The marks left on the field suggest that paddy was planted last year on the flooded land on both sides. It has now turned into a plain land. Locals have started to grab the area again.

AKM Tahmidul Islam, additional chief engineer of WDB's south-western zone, said Bhadra was supposed to have two sluice gates at both ends, which was later scrapped. As a consequence, the river has silted up within two years of the excavation.

"A new project worth Tk 1,819 crore has been sent to the department concerned for the excavation of small rivers and canals in the vicinity."



Habiganj currently has 101 brick kilns, most of which are unauthorised. The smoke, ashes and heat emitted from the kilns have been severely harming the environment and cultivable lands of the surrounding area. Every year, a large part of arable lands in the district is being destroyed, owing to the existence of these illegal kilns.

PHOTO: STAR

Croplands pushed toward ruin

Arable Habiganj land destroyed every year by illegal brick kilns

MINTU DESHWARA

In the last few years, 31 illegal brick kilns have been built within just 1.5 kilometres on both sides of Dhuliakhali-Mirpur regional road in Habiganj. Of them, only 15 are authorised, according to local union parishad chairman Saifuddin.

The same picture can be seen in other places in the district, including Habiganj Sadar, Bahubal, Shayestaganj, Chunarughat and Madhabpur upazilas. Government records suggest that there are 101 brickfields in the district, most of which are unauthorised.

These illegal kilns emit smoke, ashes and heat waves that adversely affect crops and the environment. Besides, the ashes gather on the surface of croplands, affecting soil fertility, said locals.

Moreover, the brickfield traders are digging up surface soil of croplands and using it to produce bricks. The area of croplands is shrinking because of the digging, they alleged.

Tamiz Uddin Khan, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Habiganj, told this correspondent that 10 hectares of arable lands in the district are being destroyed every year due to these brick kilns.

Brickfields have been set up on

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2 teams inspect Sitakunda fire-ravaged depot

98 fighting for life

STAR REPORT

Two government teams yesterday inspected the fire-ravaged BM Container Depot in Sitakunda, where a deadly fire claimed 46 lives and left over 200 people injured on the night of June.

Of them, a team of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) collected samples from the spot to assess the accident's impact on public health.

Another team of police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) collected samples to find out the reasons of behind the fire and subsequent blasts.

The DGHS team, led by its director Prof Nazmul Islam, also comprised representatives from Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC).

"The samples, which we have collected from the spot, will be tested in the laboratory to assess what kind of impact it may put on the people living in and around the accident area," said Dr Ilias Chowdhury, civil surgeon of Chattogram, who accompanied the team.

The team will also analyse the samples to know whether people will suffer from illness for long time, he added.

Besides, the DGHS team will chalk out a guideline, if necessary, to minimise health hazards in the area, the civil surgeon said.

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LAND-RELATED FEUD

26 cases against a retired teacher

ABU BAKAR SIDDIQUE AKAND, *Gazipur*

Twenty-six cases of extortion, vandalism, cheque forgery and looting.

The accused are a school teacher and his family members, who claim the charges are baseless and brought against them for a land-related dispute.

The cases were filed against retired government primary school teacher Kafil Uddin (85), a resident of Purbo Baghbari area in Gazipur, by Muhammad Imtiaz Karim, a businessman and resident of Dhaka's Gulshan area.

These 26 cases were filed in the last seven years. The last one was filed on May 16 this year with Kashimpur Police Station; a total of 11 named and 20 unnamed individuals were made accused in the case.

According to the latest case statement, the accused persons demanded Tk 20 lakh and looted chickens and trees from a cattle farm in Baghbari area on May 15.

On May 20, Kafil Uddin and his nephew Jahurul Islam were arrested in the case. Two days later, Kafil was released on bail.

However, this correspondent visited the area on May 23 and found no existence of a cattle farm there. Locals said they have not seen any such farm in the last few years.

Police are currently investigating the case. Barkatullah Khan, additional commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police, is leading the probe.

According to Kafil Uddin's daughter Quamrunnahar Shova, they have an ancestral land in Baghbari, where one Imtiaz Karim has been for quite some years.

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