

RIVER WATER SHARING Hope appears after 12 years

PINAKI ROY

The minister-level meeting of the Bangladesh-India Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) will be held in New Delhi on August 25, raising hopes of progress in water-sharing treaties of the Teesta and six other rivers.

The decision-making meeting, last held 12 years ago, is taking place just ahead of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to New Delhi on September 5-6 at the invitation of her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

This meeting will be held two days after the secretary-level talks on August 23, said sources at the water resources ministry.

"There is nothing new in the Teesta water-sharing issue as we have already finalised the deal in 2011 and are awaiting its signing," said a top official of the ministry seeking anonymity.

In 2011, water-sharing agreements of the Teesta and Feni rivers were finalised, but not signed.

During the Indian PM's Dhaka visit on March 26-27 last year, Hasina and Modi directed their respective water resources ministries to work towards an early conclusion of the Framework of Interim Agreement on sharing waters of six common rivers.

Apart from the Teesta deal, this time the main focus of JRC talks would be sharing water of six common rivers — the Muhuri, Monu, Dharla, Khawai, Gumi and Dudhkumar — said an official working with the JRC, Bangladesh.

Also, the Ganges water-sharing issue will dominate the talks, said officials.

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Rushdie 'off ventilator, talking' Say sources; suspect pleads not guilty to attempted murder

AGENCIES

Salman Rushdie, the acclaimed author who was hospitalized on Friday with serious injuries after being repeatedly stabbed at a public appearance in New York state, is off a ventilator and his condition is improving, his agent said yesterday.

Rushdie, 75, remained hospitalized with serious injuries on Saturday, but fellow author Aatish Taseer tweeted in the evening that he was "off the ventilator and talking (and joking)".

"He's off the ventilator, so the road to recovery has begun," his agent, Andrew Wylie, wrote in an email to Reuters. "It will be long; the injuries are severe, but his condition is headed in the right direction."

Rushdie, 75, was set to deliver a lecture on artistic freedom at Chautauqua Institution in western New York when police say a 24-year-old man rushed the stage and stabbed the Indian-born writer, who has lived with a bounty on his head since his 1988 novel "The Satanic Verses" prompted Iran to urge Muslims to kill him.

The suspect, Hadi Matar of Fairview, New Jersey, pleaded not guilty to charges of attempted murder and assault at a court appearance on Saturday, his court-appointed lawyer, Nathaniel Barone, told Reuters.

Following hours of surgery, Rushdie had been put on a ventilator and was unable to speak as of Friday evening, Wylie said in a prior update on the novelist's condition, adding that he was likely to lose an eye and had nerve damage in his arm and wounds to his liver.

A grief they can never forget

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somewhat sense something terrible had happened to their father.

The house in Karlsruhe suddenly wore a pall of sadness, said Shaheed Hossain, who happened to stay with the family in the German city for several days in August 1975.

On July 30, Hasina, along with her sister and children Sajeeb Wazed Joy and Saima Wazed Putul, went to visit her husband MA Wazed Miah, a nuclear scientist. They stayed there till August 9 before moving to Bonn, another German city.

Wazed had gone to West Germany in March that year for his postdoctoral research at the Karlsruhe Nuclear Research Centre.

Shaheed said he and Wazed had become close friends in Germany.

"Rehana would often cry.... Joy and Putul were too young to fully understand what was going on. Wazed Bhai was traumatised and in constant fear. He even asked me to stay with them. At night, he would check whether all doors were locked properly," Shaheed told The Daily Star last week.

According to him, Hasina was different and appeared fearless. She took care of everyone and everything, said Shaheed, currently an engineer at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria.

He also recalled the striking contrast in the manner and appearance of Hasina during her second visit there, only days after the first visit to Karlsruhe.

"When they returned on August 18, they were in shock and totally devastated.... Hasina Apa and Rehana were quite cheerful during the first part of their stay at Karlsruhe," he said.

Hasina and the others stayed at a guest house allocated for Wazed at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology until August 24.

Shaheed said that he and Wazed informed the local police about the tragic incident in Bangladesh and the police assured them that patrols would keep an eye on their house. Wazed was still apprehensive.

In his book, German-based Bangladeshi journalist Sharaf Ahmed

gives a glimpse of Hasina and Rehana's visit to Europe in July-August 1975, and the ordeals they had been through after the August 15 bloodbath.

The book titled "15 August Hottakando: Probashe Bangabandhu Dui Konnar Dushshaha Din" is based on recently recovered documents and as yet unpublished letters, as well as press clippings.

Hasina and Rehana went to Brussels in Belgium on August 12. From there, they went to Amsterdam in the Netherlands on August 14, and returned to Brussels for an overnight stay on August 14. They were scheduled to visit Paris on August 15, according to the book.

Wazed Miah himself wrote a book on those fateful days titled "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Ke Ghire Kichhui Ghotona O Bangladeshi".

At around 6:30am on August 15 (German time), which is a few hours after the killing of Bangabandhu, the phone at the residence of Sanaul Haq started ringing. It was the Bangladesh Ambassador to Belgium.

Wazed was woken up by Sanaul's wife, who said Bangladesh Ambassador to West Germany Humayun Rashid Chowdhury was waiting on the line.

Wazed sent Hasina to receive the call instead. An anxious Hasina returned to tell her husband that the ambassador would like to talk to him directly.

As soon as Wazed picked up the receiver, he heard Humayun Rashid say: There was a coup d'état in Bangladesh. Don't go to Paris. Don't tell this to Hasina and Rehana. Come to Bonn, the capital of West Germany, immediately.

Pressed by Wazed for more details, Humayun said he had no other details.

Wazed then went back to their room where a tense Hasina asked him what the phone call was about. Wazed simply said Humayun wanted them to cancel their Paris trip and go back to Bonn.

Following Hasina and Rehana's insistence, Wazed finally told them that something very bad happened in Bangladesh. As a result, it would not be a good idea for them to go to Paris.

The two sisters burst into tears.

"Sanaul was appointed on political consideration...when he learned about

the brutal killing of Bangabandhu, he considered Hasina and Rehana a liability. He told Humayun: "You have created this problem for me, so resolve this quickly," said Sharaf Ahmed.

Hasina and others left Brussels within a few hours and reached Humayun Rashid's residence in Bonn in the afternoon.

The then Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Dr Kamal Hossain, on his way back to Bangladesh after his visit to Yugoslavia, stopped at Frankfurt and went to Humayun's house. Hasina

and others reached there about half an hour earlier.

There, on the insistence of Wazed Miah, ambassador Humayun revealed everything, on condition that he kept it from Hasina and Rehana until they were in a safe place.

"According to a BBC report, nobody is alive except Russell and Begum Mujib, and the report circulated by the British Mission in Dhaka says that none of Bangabandhu's family is alive," Humayun said.

When Wazed asked where they could find a safe shelter, Humayun said, "No country is safe for you except India."

The next day Kamal left for London without attending a planned press conference in Bonn.

A rumour was already circulating in the media that Hasina and Rehana had been detained at the Bangladesh ambassador's house in Bonn. To prove that Hasina and Rehana had not been taken prisoners, the ambassador presented the two sisters before journalists at his residence. A German newspaper also ran a report that Hasina and Rehana were free, according to Sharaf's book.

Around 11:00pm on August 16, Humayun drove Wazed to a place to

meet an Indian official and he left the place immediately. The Indian official took Wazed to the house of the Indian ambassador who was a Muslim journalist.

During the discussion, the Indian ambassador asked Wazed to put it in writing what exactly they wanted from the Indian government.

"I seek political asylum from the Government of India to protect my sister-in-law Rehana, wife Hasina, baby son Joy, baby girl Putul, and my own personal safety and life," Wazed Miah journalist.

Sharaf Ahmed recalled that at that time Mohammad Aitar Rahman was the Indian ambassador to West Germany. Humayun contacted him regarding Hasina and others' possible shelter in India.

"Aitar contacted Indian leader Indira Gandhi and the latter gave the green signal on the condition that the matter be kept secret," he said.

Against this backdrop, Hasina and the rest of the family went to Karlsruhe on August 18.

Recalling those days, Shaheed said there were only a few Bangladeshis in Karlsruhe. Amirul Islam Bablu, a junior colleague of Wazed, was one of them. He used to keep close contact with Wazed's family. Two other colleagues of Wazed who were in the city were "indifferent".

"At that time Hasina Apa once told me that Marshal Titu Josip Broz, widely known as Tito, and President of Yugoslavia is a good friend of ours and had asked us to go there. But we will not go there," Shaheed said.

On August 22, Humayun contacted Wazed and enquired whether anyone from the Indian embassy had contacted them.

The next day an Indian embassy official met Wazed and said that they would be taken to Frankfurt airport on August 24 morning.

In the morning they reached the airport and boarded an Air India flight for India.

"I was not officially informed that they were going to India, but I could guess, having seen the Indian officials. Their destination was kept secret and

that is why no one shared it with me," said Shaheed, who went to the airport to see Hasina and the others off.

They arrived in Delhi on August 25 morning, and were taken to a safe house. Later, they were shifted to a house in Defense Colony. They were advised not to go out of the house, not to disclose their identity to anyone, and not to keep in touch with anyone in Delhi, according to the aforesaid books.

Two weeks later, as Wazed wrote in his book, they went to meet Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at her official residence.

Indira Gandhi asked Wazed whether they were fully aware of everything that had happened. Wazed told her what he heard from Humayun.

Instructed by Indira Gandhi, an officer then told them that no one of Sheikh Mujib's family was alive.

Hasina broke down and Indira Gandhi took her into her arms and tried to console her.

"What you have lost cannot be replenished in any other way.... You should not break down under any circumstances," Indira told Hasina.

Several days later Hasina and others were shifted to another house in Delhi. Rehana moved to London the next year.

Hasina returned to Bangladesh in May 1981 after she was elected President of Awami League.

Later she took part in the movement that ousted military junta HM Ershad from power.

She became the leader of the opposition in parliament in 1991. Under her leadership, Awami League came back to power after 21 years, in 1996. In 2019, she became the prime minister for the fourth time.

The report has been prepared on the basis of the books "15 August Hottakando: Probashe Bangabandhu Dui Konnar Dushshaha Din" by Sharaf Ahmed, "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Ke Ghire Kishu O Bangladeshi" by Dr MA Wazed Miah and interview of Sharaf Ahmed and Shaheed Hossain.

It covered incidents of Hasina and Rehana's visits to Europe in August 1975 and the initial ordeal of the days following the assassination of Bangabandhu.

Train derails in Gazipur, disrupts rail communication

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Rail communication between the capital and the northern and south-western districts was suspended after three bogies of a train derailed in Gazipur last night.

A relief train from Dhaka reached Tongi around 12:10am today and would take another 25 minutes to reach the spot, said Muhammad Shahidullah, sub-inspector of Joydebpur Railway Police.

Twelve people, injured in the accident, were brought to Gazipur Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital, said resident doctor Rafiqul Islam. Three were admitted, eight left after primary treatment while one person was referred to Dhaka.

Three compartments of the Panchagarh-bound Drutajan Express from Dhaka veered off the tracks on the Dhaka-Joydebpur rail route in Dhirashram area around 9:15pm yesterday, said Rezaul Islam, in charge of Joydebpur Railway Junction.

Man to walk gallows for killing wife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing his wife.

Woman and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal judge Mizanur Rahman passed the order in presence of convict Sifat Ali, 42. Three others were acquitted from the case.

According to the case statement, Sifat along with his family members strangled his wife on September 26, 2013 for dowry.

The victim's father filed a case against five people with Chatmohar Police Station.

Woman dies after being hit by train

A CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A woman was killed after being hit by a train near Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bhaban in Narsingdi town yesterday.

Narsingdi Railway Police recovered the body and sent it to hospital. She, however, could not be identified immediately.

"Chattogram-bound Karnaphuli Express hit the woman around 11:00am when she was trying to cross the rail track," said Sub-inspector Mayetul Jahedi, in-charge of Narsingdi Railway Police Outpost.

The victim died on the spot, he added.

Bird hits plane in Sylhet, Biman flight rescheduled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Boeing 787 aircraft of Biman Bangladesh Airlines was damaged after a bird hit an engine of the Dreamliner during landing at Sylhet Osmani International Airport yesterday.

Pilot of the flight BG201, however, managed to land safely around 8:40am with some 85 passengers on board, Tahera Khondoker, general manager, (public relations) of Biman, said.

The flight at first departed from the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

From the Osmani International Airport, the Biman flight was scheduled to depart from Sylhet for London around 9:40am, Tahera added.

Due to the accident, time of the London flight was rescheduled at 2:00pm, said the Biman spokesperson.

Teacher's body

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suspect that it was a case of death by suicide. "The samples, collected during the autopsy, will be sent to Dhaka, and it will be clear after getting the report."

Law enforcers have taken Mamun Hossain, husband of 40-year-old assistant professor of Khubjeepur Mozammel Haque Degree College in Gurudasupur upazila, into custody for questioning, SP Liton said.

He said police have also quizzed Nizam Uddin, the security guard of the couple's home.

The guard told police that around 2:00am, Mamun left saying he was going to the hospital as he was feeling sick.

Mamun returned around 6:00am and immediately called Nizam inside, the guard told this correspondent, adding that it was then he saw the body hanging from the ceiling fan. They got the body down before Mamun called the police, Nizam said.

Nahar had been under social pressure after she married 22-year-old Mamun late last year, said SP Liton, quoting family members and relatives of the deceased.

The couple had been trolled on social media, said the police official.

"Relatives and even some college teachers had made offensive comments... the couple did not want their marriage to be in the news. But the media did not listen...," said the SP.

The SP said Mamun told police that his wife died by suicide due to the