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## Teesta plan with China gains pace

PINAKI ROY AND S DILIP ROY

After years of delays and uncertainty, the long-awaited Teesta River project has finally resumed its initial work, bringing renewed hope to communities along its banks. The project, if implemented, will curb bank erosion, reclaim land, and store floodwater for use during the dry season.

On January 29, the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and Chinese state-owned POWERCHINA signed an extension to a memorandum of understanding, pushing the Teesta Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project forward.

Under the deal, POWERCHINA will prepare a concept paper by December and conduct a feasibility study in 2026. After that, the Teesta project will be finalised, according to Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan.

"We have agreed to give China two years to complete the two tasks under the project," Rizwana told The Daily Star.

While the project's financing remains uncertain, Rizwana said the final cost will depend on the feasibility study. "We certainly expect support from our development partners, and we hope China will step forward," she said.

Early estimates suggest the project could cost \$1 billion. A FRUSTRATING HISTORY OF NEGOTIATIONS

Bangladesh has struggled for years to secure an agreement with neighboring India on the sharing of Teesta River waters. An initial deal was finalised during the tenure

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LAMA ABDUCTION  
25 plantation workers freed after two days

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Bandarban

Twenty-five workers, who were abducted from rubber plantations in Bandarban's Lama upazila on Sunday, were released yesterday after paying a ransom of around Tk 10 lakh, said a plantation owner.

They were freed in the Murung Jhiri Para area, near the Fasiakhali border, said Shahadat Hossain, officer-in-charge of Lama Police Station.

The workers are residents of Ramu and Eidgah upazilas in Cox's Bazar and Naikhongchhari upazila in Bandarban.

On Sunday, 26 workers were kidnapped by unknown people from various plantations in the Goyalmara area of Fasiakhali around 10:00am. According to locals, one of them managed to escape on Monday.

Md Forkan Uddin, owner of the rubber plantation from where 12 workers were abducted, said that the 25 workers were freed after paying ransom.

Quoting the workers, he said that they were

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Army personnel standing guard in front of the main gate of Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (Kuet) yesterday afternoon following clashes between the activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. At least 40 people were injured in the clashes over the banning of student politics on the campus.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## DIALOGUE IN SAUDI ARABIA Russia, US hold talks to end Ukraine war

REUTERS, Riyadh

US President Donald Trump's administration yesterday said it agreed to hold more talks with Russia on ending the war in Ukraine after an initial meeting that excluded Kyiv, a departure from Washington's previous approach that rallied US allies to isolate Russian President Vladimir Putin.

As the 4 1/2-hour meeting in the Saudi capital was under way, Russia hardened its demands, notably insisting it would not tolerate the Nato alliance granting membership for Kyiv.

It was the first time US and Russian officials have sat down together to discuss ways to halt the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two. Ukraine has said it will not accept any deal imposed without its consent, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz reiterated "there must be no decision over the heads of Ukraine."

Even before the talks took place, some European politicians accused Trump's administration of handing free concessions to Moscow last week by ruling out Nato membership for Ukraine and saying it was an illusion for Kyiv to believe it could win back the 20% of its territory now under Russian control.

US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz told reporters in Riyadh that the war must come to a permanent end, and this would involve negotiations over territory.

"Just a practical reality is that there is going to be some discussion of territory and there's going to be discussion of security guarantees," he said.

High-level teams would begin talks on ending the conflict and would separately work to restore the countries' respective diplomatic missions in Washington and Moscow to ease the talks going forward, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said.

Rubio said he came away from the initial talks convinced that Russia was "willing to begin to engage in a serious process" but that reaching peace would involve concessions from all sides.

Addressing Ukrainian and European concerns, Rubio said no one was being sidelined, the European Union needed to be involved at some point, and any solution must be acceptable to all parties.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said he had postponed a visit to Saudi Arabia planned for Wednesday until next month. Sources familiar with the matter said the decision was made to avoid giving

"legitimacy" to the US-Russia talks.

Kyiv says talks on how to end the war should not be held behind Ukraine's back.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharchova told reporters in Moscow it was "not enough" for Nato not to admit Ukraine as a member. She said the alliance must go further by disavowing a promise it made at a summit in Bucharest in 2008 that Kyiv would join at a future, unspecified date.

- US says both countries will name high-level teams
- Ukraine not at the talks, rejects deals without its consent
- Nato must cancel 2008 promise of Ukraine membership: Russia

## JULY UPRISING Disputes over credit now out on social media

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

The July uprising activists have lately been embroiled in a virtual battle over credit for their achievements, amid disputes about the member secretary position in a political party they are about to launch.

Former Islami Chhatra Shibir leaders have taken to Facebook to claim they were "major stakeholders" in the uprising that led to the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina regime on August 5 last year.

However, leaders of the now-dissolved Ganatantrik Chhatra Shakti maintain that Shibir leaders and activists participated like everyone else.

Many former and current Shibir leaders described on Facebook how they provided shelter to coordinators of the anti discrimination student movement; coordinated domestic and international communications; planned the protests; and mobilised activists on the ground.

In response, Abdul Kader, a former coordinator of Students Against Discrimination, wrote that the coordinators were the ones who formulated the nine-point demand, and Shibir merely disseminated it.

Asif Mahmud, a key organiser of the July uprising and adviser to the ministries of youth and sports, and local government, also weighed in.

"... Do not distort the history of the July uprising. We will not tolerate any lies about the July uprising, which was achieved through the blood of this generation. Even if I remain silent on everything else, I cannot remain silent on this. Stop the dirty game of hijacking history," he wrote.

Amid tussles on social media over the issue, Shibir President Jahidul Islam in a statement said, "It is essential to know the true history. Those trying to disrupt national unity by taking credit and creating opportunities for third parties will not be forgiven by future generations."

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TEESTA PROJECT  
Beijing ready to support Dhaka  
Says Chinese envoy  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh, Yao Wen, has said that his country is ready to assist Bangladesh in implementing the Teesta river water management project if Dhaka wants.

The envoy made the remarks in response to a journalist's query at a press briefing on Bangladesh-China relations held at the Chinese Embassy yesterday.

He said that the Teesta project should be implemented as soon as possible for the benefit and welfare of thousands of people living along the river.

However, as a sovereign nation, it is up to Bangladesh to make decisions on the implementation of the project, he added.

Wen said Bangladesh sought the Chinese

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This year marks the 73rd anniversary of the 1952 Language Movement.

Drawing on research based on various published books, this 21-part series tells the story of the historic struggle for our mother tongue.

## 10th grader takes down Pakistan flag

AHMAD ISTIAK

Since the British rule, Brahmanbaria had been regarded as the cultural hub of East Bengal. So, it was no surprise that when the news of the language movement reached the district, Brahmanbaria became heavily involved and played a pivotal role.

According to Ahmed Rafique's "Bhasha Andolon Teknaf theke Tentulia", the movement in Brahmanbaria actually began in 1947, when,

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Hundreds of villagers with "polos", a traditional fishing instrument, take part in a centuries-old fishing festival known as the "Polo Bawa" in Sylhet's Jaintapur upazila yesterday. The festival was earlier held in the Bangla month of Bhadra. However, due to the banning of fishing in that month, it is now held in Falgun.

## Scientists make 'super diamond' 40pc harder than real thing

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Chinese scientists have created an artificial "super diamond" much greater in hardness than real ones, an advance that could lead to breakthroughs across several key industries that rely on the material.

Natural diamonds mostly have a cubic lattice – or arrangement of their carbon atoms – but a hexagonal crystal structure is known to provide a much stronger material.

However, researchers say, the applications of such a hexagonal diamond (HD), known as lonsdaleite, have been "largely unexplored" due to the low purity and minuscule size of most samples obtained.

Previously, the hardest diamonds known have been found only in asteroid and meteoroid impact craters. The synthesis of this material in labs has also remained unverified beyond a few studies.

Now, a new study, published in the journal Nature Materials, reports the synthesis of "well-crystallised, nearly pure HD" by heating highly compressed graphite.



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