

## Hasina calls for unity to bargain better with India over Tipaimukh dam

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called for political unity to be able to 'bargain better with India' over the contentious Tipaimukh dam issue between the South Asian neighbours.

'Tipaimukh issue is a national problem. The nation should not be divided for political reasons,' Hasina told her Awami League (AL) colleagues.

'We will be unable to protect our national interests if we are divided. Unity will strengthen our bargaining capacity,' AL spokesperson Syed Ashraf Islam quoted Hasina as saying.

Hasina 'urged all including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party' to be united to protect the country's interests, the New Age newspaper said Sunday.

'The Indian prime minister [Manmohan Singh] has assured me that they would not do anything harmful to Bangladesh and that next steps would be taken on the basis of an understanding between the two countries,' Hasina said.

'We will not allow anything that will cause the slightest harm to the country,' she said

While Hasina was addressing her party workers, former prime minister and her bitter political rival Khaleda Zia was at a seminar called to oppose India's plans to construct a dam over the Barak river, the paper said.

Zia asked the government 'not to bend before India' while discussing the proposed project.

Zia offered full cooperation to the government on the issue even as she withheld nomination of two lawmakers on a team of parliamentarians and water resource experts that is scheduled to visit India July 29.

New Delhi proposed the visit to the dam's site in Manipur state in northeastern India in May and Dhaka agreed.

However, there have been delays in constituting the team as its composition has become a bone of contention between the government and the Bangladesh National Party.

Meanwhile, protest rallies were staged where anti-India slogans were raised. Protestors say the dam would deny Bangladesh its share of water and affect its environment.

Nirvik, an NGO, began a six-day march Friday from Dhaka to Sylhet on the Indian border.

The dam is to be located 200 km away from the border, upstream on Barak river that flows into Bangladesh to divide into two rivers Surma and Kushiara which eventually merge into the larger Meghna river system.

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