



# Star Chittagong

DHAKA WEDNESDAY APRIL 9, 2003

## Unfinished even after 7 years



Construction of the bridge over the river Karnaphuli to link Rangunia headquarters and Sarafbhata could not be completed even in seven years. Construction of only two spans could have materialised the dream of the people living on both sides of the bridges.

## Illegals rule Balimahals

**ABDULLAH -AL MAHMUD**

A lawlessness prevails over the potential sand business in the port city of Chittagong as a section of unscrupulous syndicates extract it defying rules.

The illegal sand collectors control most of the *Balimahals* (sand field) of the district. They dominate over the lessees.

Conscious circles think that it is the high time to take measures for collecting sand in a planned and legal way. Lack of rules and regulation prompts illegal extraction of sand resulting in river erosions.

Unplanned and illegal collection of sand made the fate of several thousand people involved in this business uncertain, despite the rate of sand went up by around three times in the last two years.

The planned collection of sand would save the potential business of ever-growing demand from the grip of unscrupulous elements and ensure the livelihood of several thousand workers, they said.

At the same time it would not only stop river erosion but also increase navigability of the rivers as well, they added.

Around 50 lakh square-foot of sand are extracted from over 200 spots of three rivers and two canals of Chittagong district daily. Over 10,000 people including boatmen and collection workers are involved in it, sources said.

Due to geographical location most of the rivers here carry huge quantity of eroded and ground rocks from the upstreams with the help of strong currents, sources said. These are deposited in the form of sand at different points of the river known as *"Balimahal"* (sand field).

Around 30 lakh square-foot of sand is collected from different *"Balimahals"* of the river Karnaphuli while the rest are collected from the Halda and Shankha rivers and canals of the district.

Workers collect sands from Shilok, Kodala, Kadurkhil, Madunaghat, Kalurghat, Chowdhuryghat, Halda and Sharta areas.

Over five lakh square-foot of sand is collected at Kalurghat area daily.

Boat-loads of sands collected from different *"Balimahals"* of the Karnaphuli are usually carried through Bangshal canal and heaped at a place called Balurtal (heap of sand) in front of Ibrahim Match Factory under Chandgaon thana in the city for sale.

But in most of the cases, syndicates of unscrupulous elements collect the sands defying rules and dominate over the legal lessees.

Sand collection from river bed started here in the early fifties.

One Bhandari Shafi and Mahbulul Alam of Kalurghat area under Chandgaon thana first started collecting sands from the riverbed of Karnaphuli. Since then mainly the successors of the two are identifying the *"Balimahals"* and collecting sands from there.

Huge irregularities are reportedly being practised at Kalurghat area. Eleven brothers of the same family control most of the *"Balimahals"*.

Besides, sands are being collected illegally at different areas including at Raozan, Fatikchhari, Rangunia, Dohazari and Satkania. Most of the lessees are now captive at the hands of miscreants of the illegal sand collectors in those areas.

The rate has been raised remarkably. A truckload of sand (200 square feet) is sold at Tk. 1200 to Tk. 1400 as against of Tk. 400 to Tk. 600 only two years back. The profiteers are neither the hard working labourers nor the legal lessees but the unscrupulous syndicates.

There was the practice of leasing out *"Balimahals"* at the Karnaphuli, Halda and Shankha for long.

The *"Balimahals"* at the stretch of the Karnaphuli in between Shah Amanat Bridge and Kalurghat bridge were being leased out by the deputy commissioner.

The responsibility of leasing out the *"Balimahals"* and collecting revenue from there was vested to the ministry for mineral resources in 1995. Since 1997 these are being leased out as per the joint decision of energy and mineral resources ministries.

## Tale of Ctg-Kolkata BG Flight

**MOHIT UL ALAM**

Our pilots are very reliable. They take off a plane and land it too without a hitch. Their on air controlling of the carrier is also smooth, not allowing much of bumping and rolling.

So, depending on it you board a Biman plane (flight code is BG) from Chittagong Shah Amanat International Airport (previously called M. A. Hannan International Airport) on either a Tuesday or a Friday morning for a journey to Kolkata.

The flight time is 40 odd minutes, and it takes exactly that. The journey is most over the Bay of Bengal, at 18000 feet high, though you can still see the waves reeling in ripples, and the south coast of Bangladesh is never lost from sight.

Inside the plane though, it is not very comfortable, as the space is too tight, two by two seats, with the aisle in the middle. The carrier is a small F-28, very old and shabby, much to your surprise that it is being used as an international flight. Suddenly, because of an impact in the air, the door to the cockpit jerks open, and you have a glimpse of the backs of the two pilots intently guiding the plane. One of whom, however, without even looking back bashes the door closed, as if he is used to doing that in every flight.

As you begin to feel that probably this is the most neglected route for the Biman Bangladesh network, and as if just to confirm that you are rightly disappointed. One of the stewardesses brings for you a readymade plastic box in which you find a couple of very ordinary sandwiches, a piece of cake, and a Virgin can. You can hear your co-passenger muttering a curse to himself, such poor food in an international flight!

The seat covers made of a tasteless coloured drapery has become so worn out and colourless that you feel that that is not helping the image of your nation. After all it is an international flight, and the aircraft making it must carry a believably good image of the country outside.

In other flights the crew show you the basics of the safety measures, how to unhitch the oxygen bag in time of emergency, or how to crack open the emergency exit door. But here they show you how to fasten or unfasten the seat belt, and not only that but one of the crew walks through the aisle and shouts loudly instructing all the passengers to do so. Perhaps it is necessary in view of the fact that many people from Chittagong travel to Kolkata just for treatment who may not have boarded a plane before.

But then there are foreigners including Indians too among the passengers for whom all these rudimentary instructions may sound inane.

Yet then the point is to be conceded that whatever the flight crew conceive rightly to be done in the best interest of each individual passenger, that step should be recommended.

Shah Amanat International Airport may easily pass as the best airport of the country.

The massive structure built in the most fashionable manner, availability of very modern facilities, spacious lounges, long corridors, and glass-paneled porticos, elevators, and well-disciplined security system and personnel will impress you very much. What the authority needs to be careful about is to keep it absolutely alabaster clean.

Let us hope that it does.

## Police on highest alert

**NURUL ALAM**

With the US-led war on Iraq underway, security has been beefed up at CEPZ, Chittagong port and oil terminals to ward off any threat of attack and to protect the foreign nationals.

The police force is now on highest alert and surveillance squad has been formed to maintain law and order in the port city, CMP Commissioner Shahidullah Khan told The Daily Star.

Replying to a question he said that vulnerable areas outside the city especially crime prone Raozan, Fatikchhari and Rangunia, had become not only a threat to CMP but also a cause of regular concern.

"The criminals mostly come from those areas to commit crime in the city and return to their hideouts there," he added.

"That is why, we have set up check-posts at the entry points of the city and stepped up patrol," he said.

He said the sensational Principal Muhuri murder at Jamal Khan was committed in 2001 by the criminals of Fatikchhari and Raozan.

CMP personnel later detected it and arrested the accused with arms, he said. Another sensational murder of Buddhist monk committed in Raozan, was also detected by his policemen in the city.

"The criminals who have hideouts in Fatikchhari and Raozan are involved in most of the major crimes both in the city and its suburb," he added.

The CMP commissioner said that a list of 933 identified criminals in the city was updated. Of them, 644 have been arrested so far and the rest 289 absconding, he said. "Our hunt for them is on," he added.

The CMP commissioner said a list of 11 'godfathers' of criminals was also prepared here, the first of its kind in the country.

The godfathers are active both in the city and its adjacent areas, he said. Records are being collected to arrest them in phases, he added.

"We are also examining the evidences so far we received from different sources against the godfathers," he said.



Police guard American Express Bank at the city centre of Agrabad.

## the week that was

### Anti-war art competition

An anti-war art competition protesting attack on Iraq was held at Saint Placid's School hall here on Friday. A good number of children from five art schools Special Art Class, Sun Shine Art Class, Karnaphuli Art Class, Jamal Khan Sunday Art Class and SOS Harman Minor Art Class, took part in the competition organised by artist Shawkat Jahan. Later, an anti-war procession was brought out

### Sitakunda embankment

Minister for Water Resources LK Siddiqui directed to complete the ongoing construction work of the coastal embankment of Uttar (north) Salimpur and Banshabaria under Sitakunda upazila before the rainy season. While visiting the embankment on Friday the minister advised the officials concerned to implement the Tk. 3 crore project of Water Development Board (WDB) maintaining quality and discharge duty sincerely.

### USTC campus at Cox's Bazar

The University of Science and Technology, Chittagong (USTC) is setting up a new campus in Cox's Bazar. The plaque of the new campus at the campus site near Niribibi Hatchery at Kolatoli Sea-beach area was unveiled on Thursday. Addressing the ceremony as the chief guest the USTC chairman and national professor Dr. Nurul Islam said with the unveiling of the plaque the process for setting up a full-fledged medical college and hospital in Cox's Bazar has started. The campus would offer students the opportunity to undergo courses on forestry, fisheries and environmental science as well as MBBS amid the natural resources of Cox's Bazar, he said.

### Vow to uphold tradition

The sixth Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Adibashi Sangskriti Mela 2003 (cultural fair) ended in Rangamati with a vow to uphold the value and tradition of native culture of the hill people on Sunday. Renowned actress Nanda Rani Chakma inaugurated the fair lighting earthen lamp on the Rangamati Tribal Cultural Institute premises. The artistes of Jumm Esthetic Council rendered the inaugural song of the fair where tribal children and youths performed colourful dances amid great enthusiasm and festivity. In the fair the coming Bengali year 1410 was declared as "the Khumi Year". Khumi is the most disadvantaged of the 11 tribal races living in the CHT. Separate stalls were opened in the fair to display traditional and cultural heritage and evidences along with indigenous items of eight tribal races. The stalls belonged to Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tongchonga, Mro, Bom, Pankho and Khumi. The rest tribal races of Khyang, Lusai and Chak could not participate in the fair. Besides, there were thirteen other stalls arrayed with tribal cakes and foods by Jum Esthetic Council and Hill Esthetic Group and others. There was also a separate Khumi centre, while a Jumghar and a Tongghar were erected in the design of Khumi structure.

### Pilot projects for tourism dev

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin said pilot projects would be taken soon to develop infra-structure and roads leading to different tourist spots in Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Bandarban and Kuakata in Khulna. Process was also underway to set up a tourism institute of international standard in Chittagong, Mir Nasir said. He was addressing a seminar on tourism as the chief guest here on Saturday organised by the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries. He said the private sector would be provided with all sorts of assistance for developing internal tourism. Cox's Bazar would be developed for tourism in three phases within the next one year and six cottages would be developed by next six months, he added. The land ministry was already allocating plots for construction of private hotels and motels at the Hotel-motel zone of Cox's Bazar, he added. He said a foreign firm was invited for construction of a five-star hotel beside Shah Amanat International Airport, Chittagong, on BOT (build, operate and transfer) basis. A food village would be set up in Dhaka and a sea-food village in Cox's Bazar, he added.

### Hindu Foundation AGM

The annual general meeting of Bangladesh Hindu Foundation ended here on Friday with a call for strengthening its education and welfare services and establishing world peace putting a stop to anti-humanitarian Anglo-American war on Iraq. A total annual welfare fund of Tk. 3.66 lakh was collected for the poor at the meeting at the Maitree Bhaban at Momin Road. The meeting chaired by the Foundation chairman and elderly revolutionist Binod Bihari Chowdhury called for immediate end to US-led war on Iraq. It called for establishing world peace and friendly ties among all nations.

### Judicial deptt confce

Officials working at judicial department under Chittagong Judgeship held a conference here on Friday. The convention discussed problems including increasing number of under-trial cases due to shortage of judges at the judicial department here. The convention called for strengthen-

Tribal girls perform at the Adibashi Sangskriti Mela at Rangamati on Sunday.