

# Hand-written

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**BASINS OF MAJOR RIVERS TO BE DEVELOPED**

The India-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) has decided to go for the development of major river basins common to both the countries. The JRC is now considering the framework for preparation of such long-term plans. The commission has requested both the governments of Bangladesh and India to share with each other the data relating to flood control and water resources development projects and also of future programmes for taking coordinated action.

**JAPAN KEEN TO BUILD BRIDGE OVER JAMUNA**

The Ambassador of Japan in Bangladesh Takash Yamuda discloses today that his government is keen to help Bangladesh government in building of a bridge over the river Jamuna. The ambassador presents to Bangladesh Communication Minister M Mansoor Ali the survey report conducted by a six-member Japanese team of experts on the rehabilitation, modernisation and long-term development projects of Bangladesh Railway. The Japanese team suggests measures for safe transportation of passengers and cargoes in its report.

**MONI SINGH CALLS ON PM**

Moni Singh, leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Gono Bhaban today. They discuss various national and international issues.

*SOURCES: December 14, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.*

# Cold, fog cause

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Chattogram airport after it was diverted due to the fog.

The flight carrying 200 passengers was scheduled to land in Chattogram at 8:30am, said Manager of Shah Amanat International Airport Squadron Leader Sarwar Alam.

After visibility improved, the flight landed in Chattogram around 11:00am, he said.

Besides, three flights of US-Bangla, Regent Airways, and Biman reached the airport around two hours late.

In the north, people of Lalmonirhat and Kurigram has been enduring bone-chilling cold and fog for the last few days with people in the chars taking the brunt.

"We don't have enough warm clothes. But we have to go to our fields early in the morning amid this cold," said Mobarak Ali, 52, a farmer of Sardob village in Kurigram Sadar upazila.

"We can't stay home. If we don't go to work, how will we earn livelihood," said Rahman, 55, a farmer of Char Kalmati in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

Officials of local administrations claimed that they started giving blankets and other types of aids to the affected people.

Meanwhile, a weather bulletin of Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) said, "Weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky in the country, with chances of light rain at one or two places in Rangpur, Rajshahi and Mymensingh divisions."

Moderate to thick fog may occur over the country between midnight and noon, said the bulletin released at 6:00pm yesterday.

"Night and day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country," it added.

[Our correspondents from Chattogram and Lalmonirhat contributed to the story]

# Amar Ekushey

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committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The committee had requested publishers planning to participate in the fair to submit a letter of interest by September 30. Five hundred publishers had shown intent. But only 120 institutions confirmed through the paid registration process by early December.

"It seemed not many organisations would be participating in the book fair given the circumstances. This was one of the reasons behind our decision in addition to the health risks involved," the secretary said.

Some publishers, however, have expressed concern. "We are not sure what a virtual book fair is, but it will definitely spell trouble. We have invested so much money, so many books have been published and printed. How will our publishing house survive the coming year?" Dibya Prakash publishers shared in a Facebook post yesterday.

Jalal said the logistical aspects and special features of the virtual fair will be finalised after the decision is officially communicated to the ministry. A press briefing will follow.

The announcement comes at a time when local publishers usually begin preparing for the biggest literary event in the country, which accounts for the largest bulk of book publication and sales each year.

Since 1972, when Chittaranjan Saha laid a mat under a mango tree to display 33 books published by Muktohdara Publishing, the month of February has gathered readers, writers, artists and publishers at the Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan in commemoration of the 1952 Language Movement.



Students hold placards as they shout slogans in support of farmers during a protest against the recent agricultural reforms in Amritsar, Punjab, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# ‘She’s abducted, converted, murdered’

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They, however, did not hand him over her body saying the girl was married to one of her abductors who managed a birth certificate that says she was 18.

"My daughter was abducted, converted and later murdered and now they are not giving us her body even," lamented Lala Aung Chakma of Shilkhali Chakma para in Teknaf of Cox's Bazar.

"On January 5, a few unidentified men picked up my daughter from our house. We went to Teknaf Police

Station to file a case, but then OC Pradeep Kumar Das, now accused of killing Maj (ret'd) Sinha, didn't record our case. Following his suggestion, we filed a general diary but the police didn't take any action. Rather, they helped the abductors," said the father.

He mentioned the names of a few of the suspects but this paper could not reach them for comments.

"As the police did not take any action, I filed a case with Cox's Bazar Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal on January 17,"

said Lala Aung Chakma.

The case was transferred to PBI, sources said.

"I demand exemplary punishment for the killers who brutally murdered my daughter after abduction," the father said urging her body be returned.

Sheikh Monirul Gias, officer-in-charge of Cox's Bazar Police Station, said, "We didn't hand the victim's body to her father as she was married. We are waiting for a decision from the court."

Shaheen Md Abdur Rahman

Chawdhury, resident medical officer of the Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, said they conducted the autopsy on Thursday.

"It is the responsibility of the police to handover the body to her relatives. But police is not receiving the body" he said.

He did not say anything about the cause of the victim's death.

However, sources in the locality where the girl was kept claimed that she had been tortured and poisoned to death.

Teknaf police refused to comment.

# 5 Sylhet city councillors eat exotic, wild birds

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A waiter and several councillors were heard saying that it was the cooked meat of white-breasted waterhen, locally known as Dahuk.

Although poaching, selling, and consuming meat of wild birds are prohibited and punishable offences under the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act 2012, sale of meat of wild and migratory birds continues unabated at several restaurants in the area, said local environmentalists.

However, all five councillors denied having wild birds at Puran Driver Hotel on Sylhet-Tamabil highway.

The councillors are: Mohammad Taufiq Baksh of ward-26, also a panel mayor of Sylhet City Corporation, Rokibul Islam Jholok of ward-11,

Eliasur Rahman of ward-8, Abdul Muhit Javed of ward-16, and Tareq Uddin Taz of ward-10.

The other person who had dinner with them is Parvez Mahmud Opu, a businessman from Sylhet. The Facebook Live video was posted by Rayhan Ahmed, a USA expatriate.

Speaking to The Daily Star over the phone, the six people yesterday said they went to Haripur area to join an arbitration to settle a matter. They said they had five different curries for dinner – cooked meat of goose, duck, mutton, fish, and chicken.

Councillor Tareq said they found cooked meat of wild birds being sold at the restaurant. Councillor Eliasur said he was not aware of laws regarding conservation of wildlife.

Asked about the footage, Rayhan hung up the phone. He, however, deleted the footage from his Facebook account around noon yesterday.

This newspaper has a copy of the footage and screenshots of Rayhan's Facebook account.

ASM Jahir Uddin Akon, director of Wildlife Crime Control Unit of the forest department, said they take actions for crimes against wildlife based on information. "We had no information about the meat of wild birds being sold at restaurants in Haripur area. We will look into the matter."

He said councillors, who are representatives of the people, must abide by laws. "No one is above the law. If they are found guilty of having

meat of wild birds, necessary actions will be taken against them."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), said the video clip is a proof of why sale of wild birds at those restaurants is not being stopped.

The owners of this type of restaurants cannot be made aware of such illegal activity if people associated with laws go there, she added.

"This is not just showing disregard for laws, but also showing insensitivity. Based on this footage, the forest department must take legal actions against the restaurants. The councillors should apologise so that no-one becomes interested in going there," Rizwana said.

# 6 Mro villages will be gone

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For the 5-star hotel, two dams have been proposed. One to create a reservoir for swimming and boating, while another will provide water for the operations, speakers claimed.

The speakers circulated a map of the project site at "Chandrapahar" to provide evidence about the far-reaching consequences of the project.

The committee showed that the swimming and boating site will be right adjacent to three indigenous Mro villages, and 4 sacred sites, while the reservoir for water supply is adjacent to one Mro village, a primary school and a Chengraong or cemetery.

In addition, these sites overlap with trekking trails and cable carways proposed under the project, presented the committee.

The reservoir for swimming and boating and the trekking trails will also overlap with the Kapru Para Village Common Forest used by 6 villages, showed the committee.

Raja Devasish Roy Wangza, head of the Chakma circle, said that if the project is implemented, the Mro people will be forced to leave their homes.

"The population of Mru has decreased over time, instead of increasing. There will be dams to be used by this hotel that will inundate lands," he said.

Gautam Dewan, President of CHT Land Rights and Protection Committee, pointed out that as it is, the Mro are an endangered

community.

"In the 1970's the Mro indigenous community could be found from Rangamati to Sangu Reserve Forest, but currently they only live in Alekhu-dong (Alikadam), Thanchi, Lama, Chimbuk and Naitong hills," he said.

The major resort existing in the area caused the eviction of 200 Mro and Marma families during the time of construction, he said.

The hotel will also have far-reaching consequences for the privacy of those who are dependent on the resources of the forest, speakers stated.

"The indigenous men and women use the natural water sources to bathe. We already observe tourists coming in from outside, and taking photos of them without their permission," alleged Raja Debasish.

"This project must be cancelled immediately. This work is completely inhumane and illegal. They have grabbed the land illegally," stated Dr Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Prof Emeritus at University of Dhaka.

Shaheen Anam, head of Manusher Jonno Foundation stated, "This project is against the CHT Peace Accord and I believe the state will not let this happen."

Anu Muhammad, professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University said, "This development stream is only for profit. This is not for people. The people in our tourism sector think that a 5 star hotel is needed for tourism. They think that

eco-tourism is not possible. The local people are being threatened to give their permission."

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik stated, "I urge the security forces to step back from such debated projects and get back to their primary job, which is to protect the country."

Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori said, "Our security forces have a specific job. Doing business with profit-making entities is against the nature of their job."

"I hope that we get the feeling that they made a mistake by taking this project," said Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

"This is against the Peace Accord and CHT Regulation 1990. The Land Commission must be activated and used to dispose cases regarding disputed land in the area," said Shamsul Huda Executive Director Association for Land Reform and Development.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association stated, "This should be a biodiversity hotspot because this is an eco-sensitive area. This land should not be handed over to a hotel."

Late in November, when Farid Uddin Khan, chief coordinator of Sikder Group, was contacted about the allegation of land grabbing for the project, he claimed that the Group leased the land to construct the five-star hotel, giving Bandarban Zila

Parishad (District Council) an eight-percent share.

His claim was then refuted by Mong Shwicking Chak, a member of Bandarban Zila Parishad, who told The Daily Star that the district council did not have any agreement with Sikder Group to this end.

A statement circulated separately by Raja Devasish stated that the Bandarban Hill District Council never held any legal title to the land that Sikder Group-R&R Holdings Ltd claim they have leased.

The statement pointed out that a at press briefing on last November 22, the chairman of the Bandarban Hill District Council, Kyo Sha Hla disclosed that the Council had purchased the concerned land from some 'hill people' and had then applied to the Ministry of CHT Affairs to obtain the legal title of the land, but that their prayer had been rejected.

"If it did not have any legal land, it could not have legally transferred the title to the land," said the statement.

"Firstly, according to the CHT Regulation 1900, the Council does not fall into any of the categories that may get land titles," it stated.

Secondly, the legal provision states that no lessee shall be allowed to transfer the land in any way without the consent of the deputy commissioner and Mauza Headman, said the statement.

"The holding of land by 'non-residents of district' is allowed only in exceptional circumstances," it said.

# Armenian separatists hurt in skirmish with Azerbaijan

AFP, Yerevan

Separatist officials in the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh yesterday said that three fighters were wounded in a skirmish with Azerbaijani forces, undermining a recent peace deal brokered by Russia.

The defence ministry in the ethnically Armenian province said in a statement that Azerbaijani troops attacked Friday evening and that "three Armenian servicemen were injured during the ensuing gunfight".

It added that the fighters were in a stable condition and an investigation into the incident was under way.

Six weeks of fighting between separatists backed by Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region ended last month after the two sides agreed to a peace deal that saw the Armenians cede swathes of disputed territory.

More than 5,000 people including civilians were killed during the fighting in the Caucasus between the ex-Soviet rivals, which fought a war in the 1990s over the mountainous region.

Nearly 2,000 Russian peacekeepers have deployed to the region and Baku's close ally Turkey has said it will monitor the truce from an observation centre in Azerbaijan.

# US university Johns Hopkins confronts historic links to slavery

AFP, Washington

Johns Hopkins, the celebrated philanthropist who supported the abolition of slavery and whose wealth allowed him to found the prestigious US university that bears his name, owned slaves, the Baltimore-based institution confirmed Friday.

The revelation by the university, which boasts a long tradition of inclusion, comes as the United States continues reckoning with its own history of racism after widespread protests against discrimination earlier this year.

Calls to dismantle statues of leaders from the historic slave-owning South have multiplied, and the legacies of some of America's "founding fathers" such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, also slave owners, have been reassessed.

"We have for almost 100 years communicated a story about our origins which is not correct," Johns Hopkins University president Ron Daniels said Friday in a Zoom discussion.

"The revelation of this part of Mr Hopkins' life is devastating," he added.

Hopkins came from a wealthy Maryland family and made his fortune in commerce and banking.

Raised in the Quaker faith, a Protestant movement opposed to slavery, he supported President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.

When he died in 1873, he bequeathed part of his fortune for the creation of an orphanage for Black children, a university and a hospital where all patients would be accepted regardless of gender or origin.

But according to census records discovered this summer and dating from 1840 and 1850, Hopkins owned slaves -- one in 1840, and then four a decade later.

# Pakistan accuses India of funding disinformation campaign in EU

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan accused arch-rival India of funding a long running disinformation campaign against it on Friday and said it would raise the matter in global forums.

In making its claim that India attempted to manipulate international bodies through fake news websites and organisations, Pakistan's foreign minister cited a report by European non-government organisation EU Disinfo Lab.

The report highlighted a network of hundreds of fake media outlets and organisations that it said have pushed a pro-India agenda in the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) bodies to discredit the country's rivals, in particular Pakistan.

EU DisinfoLab did not detail any direct links between the alleged network and the Indian government and Reuters has no independent evidence of them.

"Today, India is manipulating and misusing the international system for its own nefarious designs," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said at a press conference, adding that the Indian government was funding the network.